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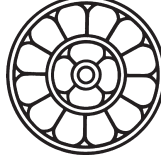
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXV

No. 4

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## DESCENT

All my cells thrill swept by a surge of splendour,  
Soul and body stir with a mighty rapture,  
Light and still more light like an ocean billows  
Over me, round me.

Rigid, stonelike, fixed like a hill or statue,  
Vast my body feels and upbears the world's weight;  
Dire the large descent of the Godhead enters  
Limbs that are mortal.

Voiceless, thronged, Infinity crowds upon me;  
Presses down a glory of power eternal;  
Mind and heart grow one with the cosmic wideness;  
Stilled are earth's murmurs.

Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces  
Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings;  
Thoughts that left the Ineffable's flaming mansions,  
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow the heart-beats' rhythm like a giant hammer's;  
Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway  
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,  
Ecstasy's chariots.

All the world is changed to a single oneness;  
Souls undying, infinite forces, meeting,  
Join in God-dance weaving a seamless Nature,  
Rhythm of the Deathless.

Mind and heart and body, one harp of being,  
Cry that anthem, finding the notes eternal, —  
Light and might and bliss and immortal wisdom  
Clasping for ever.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 578)*

## A CYCLICAL THEORY OF EVOLUTION<sup>1</sup>

[. . . ] DRIVEN from all other fields by a perception of the slow and aeonic processes of Nature, the mushroom theory of existence took refuge in this ill-explored corner of scientific theory. Thence, although later discoveries have had an enlarging effect, it still hampers the growth of more thoughtful generalisations. The time-limit allowed for the growth of civilisation is still impossibly short and in consequence an air of unreality hangs over the application of the evolutionary idea to our human development. Nor is this essential objection cured by any evidence of the modernity of human civilisation. Its great antiquity is denied merely on the absence [of] affirmative data; there are no positive indications to support the denial; but where data are scanty, such a negative basis is in the last degree unsound and precarious. We can no longer argue that no ancient civilisations can have existed of which the traces have entirely perished and that prehistoric means, necessarily, savage and undeveloped. History on the contrary abounds with instances of great societies which were within an ace of disappearing without leaving any visible memorial behind them and recent excavations have shown that such disappearances in ancient times have been even not uncommon. We cannot have exhausted all that the earth contains. There should be the remains of other civilisations yet undiscovered & there may well have been yet others which because of the manner of their disappearance or for other causes have left no traces at all whether upon the surface of the earth or under it. Indeed with regard to no object or previous existence, no silent or imperfectly documented [?scene], is it safe to argue that because there are no traces or sufficient evidence of it, therefore it never existed. Yet in many fields of generalisation modern scholarship has used substantially this argument with a prodigal freedom. It is at least possible that mighty cities and noble civilisations filled with their rumour the now silent spaces of Time for countless millenniums before Egypt and Assyria rose into their historic greatness.

Brief lapse of time is not indeed the cardinal point of the savage theory and even if larger time-spaces are allowed, the theory itself need not fall. But I have urged the question of time as of primary moment not for the overthrow of the modern explanation but for the readmission of another and more ancient synthesis. For if once we allow the existence of prehistoric civilisations older, it would seem, than the Egyptian, — such as may be argued from the deep-buried cities of Asia, — and the presence in an unknown antiquity of great national cultures where now the savage or the semi-savage swarm uncreative and unreflecting, — such as may be argued from the ruins of Mashonaland or the state of mediaeval Barbary after the

1. The opening page or pages (including the title) are missing. Doubtful readings of the manuscript have been indicated within square brackets.

ravages of Moor and Vandal or even the fate which overtook for almost a millennium the magnificent structure of Graeco-Roman culture and threatened even to blot out its remnants and ruins, — the question then arises, what was the nature of these forgotten civilisations and how was the relapse to barbarism often of an extreme form, so completely effected. These gigantic spaces of time, this worldwide rise and fall of human society, this swaying to and fro from darkness to light and light to darkness leave the ground open for another explanation which is in some respects the reverse of the savage theory, — for the Hindu explanation.

For the Hindu mind has never admitted the principle in Nature of progress in a straight line. Progress in a straight line only appears to occur and so appears only because we concentrate our scrutiny on limited sections of the curve that Nature is following. But if we stand away from this too near and detailed scrutiny and look at the world in its large masses, we perceive that its journeying forward has no straightness in it of any kind but is rather effected in a series of cycles of which the net result is progress. The image of this apparent straight line is that of the ship which seems to its crew to be journeying on the even plain of the waters but is really describing the curve of the earth in a way perceptible only to a more distant and instructed vision. Moreover even the small section of the curve which we are examining & which to our limited vision seems to be a straight line is the result of a series of zigzags and is caused by the conflict of forces arriving by a continual struggle at a continual compromise or working out by their prolonged discord a temporary harmony. The image of the actual progress in cycles is the voyaging in Space of the planets which describe always the same curve round their flaming & luminous sun, image of the perfect strength, joy, beauty, beneficence and knowledge towards which our evolution yearns. The cycle is always the same ellipse, yet by the simultaneous movement of the whole system the completed round finds the planet at a more advanced station in Space than its preceding journey. It is in this way, by an ever-swaying battle, a prodigal destruction and construction, a labouring forward in ever-progressing curves and ellipses that Nature advances to her secret consummation.

These are the conceptions we find expressed in the Puranic symbols familiar to our imagination. There is the Kalpa of a thousand ages with its term of fourteen Manwantaras dividing a sub-cycle of a hundred chaturyugas; there is the dharma, the well-harmonised law of being, perfect in the golden period of the Satya, impaired progressively in bronze Treta and copper Dwapara, collapsing in the iron Kali only to open the way by its disintegration to the manifestation in the next Satya of the old law, truth or natural principle of existence arranged in a new harmony. There is throughout this zigzag, this rhythm of rise and fall and rise again brought about by the struggle of upward, downward and stationary forces. There are the alternate triumphs of deva and daitya, helping god and opposing or too violently forward-striving Titan; — the dharmasya glani and abhyutthanam adharmasya, when harmony is denied and discord or wrong harmony established, and then the Avatara and the

dharmasya sansthapanam, eternal Light and Force descending, restoring, effecting a new temporary adjustment of the world's ways to the truth of things and of man.

Translated into more modern but not necessarily more accurate language these symbols point us to a world history not full of the continual, ideal, straightforward victory of good and truth, not progress conceived as the Europeans conceive it, a continual joyous gallop through new & ever new changes to an increasing perfection, but rather of the alternately triumphant forces of progress and regression, a toiling forward and a sliding backward, — the continual revolution of human nature upon itself which yet undoubtedly has but conceals & seems not to have its secret of definite aim and ultimate exultant victory. In certain respects the old Vedantic thinkers anticipate us; they agree with all that is essential in our modern ideas of evolution. From one side all forms of creatures are developed; some kind of physical evolution from the animal to the human body is admitted in the Aitareya. The Taittiriya suggests the psychological progress of man, and the psychological progress of race cannot be different in principle from the evolution of the individual — a proceeding from the material, the emotionally and mentally inert man upwards [?through] the mental to [?our] spiritual fulfilment. The Puranas admit the creation of animal forms before the appearance of man and in the symbol of the Ten Avatars trace the growth of our evolution from the fish through the animal, the man-animal and the developed human being to the different stages of our present incomplete evolution. But the ancient Hindu, it is clear, envisaged this progression as an enormous secular movement covering more ages than we can easily count. He believed that Nature has repeated it over & over again, as indeed it is probable that she has done, resuming briefly & in sum at each start what she had previously accomplished in detail, slowly & with labour. It is this great secular movement in cycles, perpetually self-repeating, yet perpetually progressing, which is imaged and set forth for us in the symbols of the Puranas. It is for this reason that he assigned to his civilisation those immense eras and those ancient and far backward beginnings which strike the modern as so incredible. He may have erred; recent discoveries & indications are increasingly tending to convince us that nineteenth century scholarship has erred equally in the opposite direction.

Translated again into modern language the Hindu idea of the chaturyuga, four Ages, with all the attendant Puranic circumstances persists as the tradition of a period just such as has been postulated, a period of natural and perfect poise in his knowledge, action and temper between man and his environment. The ideas, the knowledge, the temper, the spirit of this great epoch of civilisation, — but not its institutions or practices — is preserved for us in the Veda and Vedanta, and all existing human societies, civilised or barbarous, go back for the origins of their thought, character & effort to the general type of humanity that was then formed.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 382-86)

**‘MAY THY WILL BE DONE,  
IN IT TRUE HARMONY IS REALISED’**

**March 18, 1914**

THOU art perfect knowledge, absolute consciousness. He who unites with Thee is omniscient — while the union lasts. But even before attaining this stage, he who has given himself to Thee in all the sincerity of his being, with all his conscious will, he who has resolved to make every effort to help in the manifestation and triumph of Thy divine law of Love in himself and the whole field of his influence, sees all things in his life change, and all circumstances begin to express Thy law and assist his consecration; for him it is the best, the very best that always happens; and if in his intelligence there is still some obscurity, some ignorant desire which at times prevents him from becoming aware of it immediately, he recognises sooner or later that a beneficent power seemed to protect him even from himself and secure for him conditions most favourable to his blossoming and transfiguration, his integral conversion and utilisation.

As soon as one becomes conscious and convinced of this, one can no longer worry about future circumstances or the turn events take; it is with perfect serenity that one does at every moment what one thinks best, convinced that the best too is sure to come from it, even if it is not the result which we, with our limited reasoning, expected from it.

That is why, Lord, our heart is light, our thought in repose. That is why we turn to Thee in all confidence and say peacefully:

May Thy will be done, in it true harmony is realised.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Vol. 1, p. 102)*



## ON THE PSYCHIC

### ‘The seat within us of the highest truth of our existence’

[This talk is based upon the Mother’s essay “The Science of Living” (*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 3-8)]

The psychic being is formed by the inner Truth and organised around it.

\*

The vital is the dynamism of action. It is the seat of the will, of impulses, desires, revolts, etc.

\*

The physical is the concrete domain that crystallises and defines the thoughts, the movements of the vital, etc. It is a solid foundation for action.

\*

Finding one’s psychic being implies a kind of conviction, a faith in the existence of this psychic being. One must become aware of it and then allow it to take up the direction of life and action; one must refer to it and make it one’s guide. One becomes aware of the movements of one’s being by referring more and more to the psychic being.

\*

Having an aim is not sufficient. One must have the will to attain it by trying always to trace all one’s movements back to their origin.

\*

Self-mastery means being conscious of oneself and one’s movements, doing what one has decided to do and not what others want one to do.

\* \* \*

*“In various times and places many methods have been prescribed for attaining this perception [of the psychic presence in us] and ultimately achieving this identification [with it]. Some methods are psychological, some religious, some even mechanical. In reality, everyone has to find the one which suits him best, and if one has an ardent and steadfast aspiration, a persistent and dynamic will, one is sure to meet, in one way or another — outwardly through reading and study, inwardly through concentration, meditation, revelation and experience — the help one needs to reach the goal.”*

What is the difference between mechanical, religious and psychological methods? Religious methods are those adopted by the various religions. Not many religions speak of the inner Truth; for them, it is more a matter of coming into contact with their God. Heaven and hell: this is a roundabout way of saying . . .<sup>1</sup>

Psychological methods are those that deal with states of consciousness, that try to realise the inner self by withdrawing from all activity and attempting to create the conscious inner conditions of detachment, self-abstraction, concentration, higher Reality, renunciation of all the outer movements, etc. A psychological method is one which acts on the thoughts, feelings and actions.

Mechanical methods are those which are based on purely mechanical means — one can benefit from them by using them in a certain way. Take breath-control, for example: it acts more or less mechanically, but it is sometimes recommended to add to this a concentration of one’s thought, to repeat a word, as in Vivekananda’s teaching. This works up to a certain point, but then it fades away. These human attempts in various times and places have been more or less successful individually but they have never given a collective result.

The psychological method is far more difficult but far more effective: through your actions, to be in a state of inner will to express nothing in yourself but the Truth of your being, and to make everything dependent on that Truth. Of course, if you do nothing, it is easier, but it is also easier to deceive yourself. When you sit down in isolation, in complete silence and far away from everybody, and examine yourself with more or less indulgent eyes, you may imagine that you are realising something wonderful. But when you are put to the test at every minute of your life, when you have the occasion to become aware of your imperfections, your infirmities, your little movements of bad will a hundred times a day, you soon lose the illusion of being . . .<sup>1</sup> and so your efforts are more sincere.

That is why, instead of deciding that we would have an Ashram in a solitary forest where everything is very beautiful, very restful, instead of being aloof from the world and attending only to our own little selves, we are trying on the contrary to take up all the activities of life and make them as conscious as we can, and, in our

1. Words missing in the transcription.

contacts with other people, to become more clearly aware of all the inner movements.

Running away from difficulties is never a way of surmounting or overcoming them. If you flee from the enemy you won't be able to defeat him and he has every chance of defeating you. That is why we are here in Pondicherry and not on some Himalayan peak. Although I admit that a Himalayan peak would be delightful — but perhaps not so effective.

Next time I shall speak about mental discipline, for I have quite a lot of things to say on this subject. It is a terrible stumbling-block: people think they have a superior intellect and on that basis judge things which they know nothing about. This is, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest obstacles for mankind. For it so happens that mankind is, of all animals — pardon me, but we are still animals! — the only one who can make use of articulate language and turn out pages and pages of . . . He thinks he is so superior because he can write down and make others read what he thinks and feels. And from this eminence of mental greatness, of mental nobility, he dismisses as so much childishness things that are infinitely superior to him.

*Does the psychic being identify itself with the inner Truth?*

It organises itself around it and enters into contact with it. The psychic is moved by the Truth. The Truth is something eternally self-existent and dependent on nothing in time or space, whereas the psychic being is a being that grows, takes form, progresses, individualises itself more and more. In this way it becomes more and more capable of manifesting this Truth, the eternal Truth that is one and permanent. The psychic being is a progressive being, which means that the relation between the psychic being and the Truth is a progressive one. It is not possible to become aware of one's psychic being without becoming aware at the same time of the inner Truth. All those who have had this experience — not a mental experience but an integral experience of contact with the psychic being, not a contact with the idea they have constructed of it, but a truly concrete contact — all say the same thing: from the very minute this contact takes place, one is absolutely conscious of the eternal Truth within oneself and one sees that it is the purpose of life and the guide of the world. One can't have one without the other; in fact, it is this that makes you realise that you are in contact with your psychic being. It may not be a conscious contact, but something that governs your life.

Some people say there is something outside their own will that organises their whole life, that puts them in the required condition, that attracts favourable circumstances or people, that arranges everything outside them, so to say. In their outer consciousness, perhaps they wanted something and worked for it, but something else came. Well, after some years, they realise that this is what really had to happen. You may know nothing of the existence of a psychic being within you and yet be

guided by it. For, in order to become aware of something, you must first of all admit that this thing exists. Some people don't. I have known people who had a genuine contact with their psychic being without knowing at all what it was, because there was nothing in them that corresponded to the knowledge of this contact.

*Can one be in contact with the eternal Truth without having any contact with one's psychic being?*

Some beings in the universe may have this direct contact with the eternal Truth without any contact with the psychic being, because they don't have any psychic being. But in man there is always a psychic being, and it is always through it that he comes into contact with the eternal Truth. And this contact with the psychic being is usually disclosed to him in the same way, for it carries with it its own grace, its own splendour and beatitude. The psychic being is characteristic of man, and if one goes to the bottom of the matter, perhaps this is what gives man his superiority.

Many of the old philosophies did not have a complete knowledge of the classification of the being — the psychic being, the inner Truth were not known to them. These systems had very simplistic notions, such as the outer and the inner consciousness, the waking and the sleep consciousness. They had no detailed knowledge of human psychology, or if they had one, they did not think it advisable to impart it to everybody. In former times, knowledge was not given to just anyone. A person first had to demonstrate his goodwill very clearly; he had to show sufficient capacities, a sufficient degree of development before he was taught certain kinds of knowledge. But now, in modern life, this knowledge is printed and anyone can buy books and read them. And of course you meet hundreds of people who have learned a lot of words without knowing anything of what they mean. At one time we had people here who claimed to have realised the Supermind, but did not even know what it was.

With the democratic organisation of things, this popularisation of knowledge is inevitable. Perhaps there are other methods of selection, more concealed, less obvious, but more effective.

*18 January 1951*

THE MOTHER

*(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 302-07)*

## FOUR CONVERSATIONS OF THE MOTHER

### 1

*May 17, 1969*

You know that I used to see Pavitra every day, in the evening. He was in a poor state. But I had been forewarned (long ago) that his inner being was waiting for X to return before it would leave. I don't know whether he was aware of something in his outward consciousness, but at any rate he had never said anything. But I knew . . . The day X arrived, that very day [*May 31*], just before coming here, Pavitra fell down. He came here with quite a few scratches. I thought it would stop there, but the day after X's arrival (I don't remember, I never have a clear memory of dates), at any rate between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, at night, after 9 (I didn't look at the time, so I don't know precisely, but I was on my bed), Pavitra's whole individualised consciousness (but not in a form), his conscious, fully awakened consciousness, down to all that can come out of the cells, began to come and enter into me according to the ancient, the very old yogic practice of merging into the Supreme — in that way, that very process. It happened while I was lying on my bed; it began, and it was so material that there was a very strong friction in all the cells, everywhere. And it lasted for three hours. After three hours, it became . . . not exactly still, but no longer active. Then, the next morning, I saw X (it was on the 16<sup>th</sup>), I saw X at about 8:30 (naturally, Pavitra had been in bed since the day before, they had put him to bed), and in the morning, X told me that just as he was about to come here, Pavitra opened his eyes and looked at him . . . So I told him, "I don't know, but with a yogic knowledge of the process, quite an extraordinary knowledge (because he had never boasted of having it), his conscious being melted last night and entered my body, this body . . ." I told him, "We'll see." But half an hour later, they told me that just as I was talking with X, the doctor declared that he had left.

Have you seen him? I am told he looks very good.

*Oh, Yes!*

I had first said that he would be buried this morning at 10 o'clock, since the end came even before the doctors declared it was over, but I had it delayed until 4 . . . I can't say that he has remained separate [*from Mother*], not at all, but from time to time . . . there's his way of reacting to something; it's quite interesting. And he has brought with him an extraordinary sense of satisfaction! As if, "Ah, at last . . ." Like that. And it's constant, night and day. I wanted to see at night whether something of

him would still come, but it was all over, there was nothing more . . . It was done as a super-yogi might do it! He'd never boasted about it, I don't even know whether he actively knew it. He did it wonderfully. You know, the stories that are told of those who shut themselves in a cave and who would leave like that — that's it.

They didn't exactly lift him up, because he hadn't fallen down, but they found him standing, unable to move. It was after lunch (on the 15<sup>th</sup> he had lunch with X), and immediately after lunch, he asked X to leave, and wanted to go to his terrace — it took him an hour to get there! It's while coming back from there that he remained like that, standing — he nearly fell down, so he had to be carried to his bed (that is to say, in the afternoon of the 15<sup>th</sup>), and it was during the night that he did that. So then, I had said he would be buried this morning, that is on the 17<sup>th</sup>, then X came and told me he was quite intact, there was no stiffening (he had gone to see him with Y, who is a doctor, and Y said that was because Pavitra was so thin), so I said we might as well wait till this afternoon. It has been postponed till 4 o'clock. But as for me, last night I looked carefully: there's nothing. Even if there is something, a little consciousness left, to let him go.

But I wasn't expecting it, I wasn't thinking about it, didn't even know that he knew how to go out like that — it must have been something deep within in him that knew it. I didn't even know he knew how to do it. Because the evening before Pavitra left, I told X (X had told me what happened at lunch time), I told him, "Generally, I don't see Pavitra, it's very rare, very rare, it happens quite accidentally, and it's more symbolic visions than . . ." I said to him, "I don't see him, I don't know, but this night, of the 15<sup>th</sup>, that is, I'll inquire to see what it is, in what state he is, and see if he goes out of his body or comes to me . . ."

There was nothing in a form, nothing. And some time after I'd lain down, it started coming, but then with an extraordinary *science* of the process! And for *three* hours without stop, continuously, in the most *steady* manner, like that: an action. After three hours, it was as it is now; I felt as if he said, "Now it's over." Only, one never knows, isn't it, if there was some consciousness lingering in the body . . . I thought it would be better to wait till this afternoon, not to shut him up with something in his body.

It has brought to the body consciousness a sort of sense of satisfaction: the appeasement that satisfaction gives. And that quite concretely.

Did he know it from a previous life, or . . . ? I don't know. Or else, he just didn't talk about it. Because the way he spoke, he didn't seem to know the secrets of yogic processes. It was done with a rare perfection . . . Three hours, without stop, without flagging — three hours — continuous, continuous.

(*silence*)

When Sri Aurobindo left, I was standing near his bed (later on, when he was alone, when there was no one), and all the supramental force he had concentrated in his body (what was left in his body), he passed it on to me. I was standing near his bed; he had been declared “dead”, but all that supramental consciousness which was there came out of his body, slowly, and directly entered into mine. It was so material that I felt the friction of the force everywhere, all over. But it was slightly luminous. That was something different than with Pavitra. As for Sri Aurobindo, he . . . (how can I put it?), he stayed mainly . . . I found him everywhere: I found him all the way up, absolutely one with the Supreme Consciousness; I found him having spread out and being in many places to see many people and do a lot of work; and I found him (but then, in a precise form, though *not fixed* — a precise, rather supple form that looked like him, like what we knew of him, with more suppleness, without the fixity of the physical, but quite precise, a form in his likeness, absolutely in his likeness), in the subtle physical. There he has a dwelling, he is settled and he remains there permanently (which doesn’t prevent him from being at many other places and . . .), but there, there is a Sri Aurobindo whom I see almost every night, who looks after the whole work, who sees people, and who is almost constantly with me. In the subtle physical, it’s a specific place, and very large — huge, you know — he is there, seeing people, doing all kinds of things . . .

Apart from that, in Amrita’s<sup>1</sup> case, it was something different again. Amrita used to come in spite of his illness, he used to come and see me every day; he would come upstairs in the morning and sit down here, and once again in the evening (you have seen how much work it was to climb the stairs). In his case, when he left . . . The doctor had told him, “You can’t go upstairs for a month”, and it’s after that, later on that day, that he came: he didn’t accept, he left his body and came — he came straight to me. But he was *in his own form*, more subtle, but precisely defined (*Mother draws an outline showing Amrita’s form*), it was his form, in his likeness. And he remained there, now active and now at rest (he rests more than he is active, but now and then he is still active). It’s like . . . like a shadow, you understand, which is wholly in my atmosphere. And he has remained there — he remains there, rests there. But in Pavitra’s case, it was something else altogether: it’s the entire conscious being which gave up . . . (how can I put it?) its limits, the personal limit and form, so as to identify totally — he entered like that, like a stream of consciousness and force, but very material, very material: it produced a friction, I felt a friction, and for three hours. I had never seen that before, it was the first time — I had heard about it very often (it’s often mentioned), how the great yogis knew how to do it: they would go like that, deliberately.

And it has *added* something to the body consciousness. In the body’s spontaneous attitude, its way of being, I have noticed a slight change; it has added a sort

1. Amrita left his body on 31 January, 1969.



of . . . stability in the body: a satisfied stability, like that. It's not like something that comes and might go, it's not that: it's here [*in Mother*]. It has been really quite interesting — and unexpected.

I wanted to be sure that there was nothing left that could make the body suffer, but now I think it's over.

*Does it mean that his individuality has been dissolved?*

These notions of individuality, you know . . . for me, they've changed a lot, quite a lot. This whole morning again . . . But for a long time, at least for a month, it is something else.

When people speak of individuality, there's always a sort of . . . at least a background of separation, that is, something that exists independently and has its own destiny. Now, as the consciousness in the body knows it, it's almost like a pulsation of "something" which *momentarily* has a separate action, but which, deeply, essentially, is always *one*; like something projected like this (*gesture of expansion*), momentarily with a form, and then . . . (*gesture of contraction*) it can cancel that form at will. It's very hard to explain, but at any rate, the sense of the permanence of separation has completely disappeared, completely. The universe is an exteriorisation (*same gesture of pulsation*) of the Supreme Consciousness; it's our incapacity of total vision that enables us to have that sense of fixity: there is none, it's something like pulsations or . . . really a play of forms — there is only *one* being. There is only one being. There is only one, only one Consciousness, only one Being.

Separation is really . . . I don't know what happened . . . And that's what made all the mischief — all the misfortune, all the misery . . . For the last few days, this body has gone through a series of experiences (it would be much too long to tell), through all the states of consciousness one can go through, from the sense of the single reality of this (*Mother pinches the skin of her hands*), of the substance, with all the misery, all the suffering which is the consequence of seeing matter as the single reality — from that to liberation. Hour after hour, it has been a whole work. And this incident of Pavitra's departure has come as an example, as a demonstration.

But even before that, the consciousness of the cells had realised the oneness — the true, essential oneness — which *can* become total . . . if this sort of illusion disappears. You understand, the illusion which has created all this misery was lived so intensely that it became almost unbearable, with all the horrors and all the terrors it has created in the human consciousness and on the earth . . . There have been . . . dreadful things. And just after that — just after: liberation.

What remains to be lived, that is, the experience that remains to be had, is . . . the next progress of the creation, of matter — the next step to return to the true Consciousness. That's . . .



It seems to have been decided that something like a beginning, or an attempt of experience, is going to be made (*Mother touches her body*).

It's a question of intensity of faith, or of the power to bear that faith gives. All depends on the capacity to go through the necessary experiences.

In any case, all the old notions, all the old ways of understanding things, all that is quite over, it's past.

And all that is necessarily the return path; we had to go through the path and we still have to go through it (though not the same thing), but all the while progressing until we can . . . until this [*the body*] is ready to live the Truth. I don't know, the impression is that things are going as fast as they can possibly go; the Consciousness is really making us move forward as fast as possible. It's no longer the time of a drowsiness that drags on.

*(long silence)*

I can say (and it was almost like a surprise, I mean I didn't know it), I can say that the consciousness that came out of Pavitra's body was a consciousness without ego—without ego. Without the *sense* of ego. There was a clear will to merge, a will with an intensity of aspiration, it was fantastic! Fantastic.

*But by individuality, I don't mean an ego: I mean the "something" that's identical through all lives, the one thing that progresses through all lives. The "something" that remains the same and pursues its development.*

That's the Supreme.

*Yes, but there is something that . . .*

It's the Supreme conscious of Himself . . .

*Yes.*

. . . partially.

*Yes, that's it, there is something . . .*

The Supreme partially conscious of Himself.

*. . . that pursues a line of development.*

Yes, that's the process. It's the process that has been used for evolution.

*Yes, that's what I call individuality.*

That's agreed. It's the process — it has been the process of the creation.

And it's because it was the process of the creation that men have confused it with . . .

*Separation.*

With separation: the ego.

But that [*the "something" that persists*] is obvious. It's there, very strong, in this action of Pavitra's — it was very strong. And in fact, it was free from the illusion of ego and had the full force of That. But that [*the centre*] remains! It can't disappear.

*(silence)*

What's going to happen? I don't know.

Because it [*this merging of Pavitra*] is very clearly part of the work: there are no accidents, nothing, nothing of the sort (all that has vanished), everything very clearly happened exactly as it had to happen. It seems to mean that "one" is attempting something (*Mother touches her body*). But what? I don't know . . . The body isn't at all worried, it's like this (*Mother opens her hands*); always this: "What You will, Lord, what You will . . ." And with a smile and perfect joy — this way, that way, that other way . . . (*fluid gesture, as if to indicate this or that side of the world, or all kinds of other sides*) . . . Very strangely, it has been given a consciousness that no longer has anything to do with time: you understand, there isn't "when it was not", there isn't "when it will no longer be", there isn't . . . It's not like that, everything is something in motion. But it's really very interesting. And all, all those reactions, those sensations, those feelings, all that has completely changed — changed even in its appearance. It's something else.

You understand, the states one could be in when one was in the highest consciousnesses — those that were united, were automatically one with the Supreme Consciousness and were conscious of the whole — those states have become the body's natural state. Effortlessly, spontaneously: it cannot be otherwise. So what's going to happen? How is it going to take expression? I don't know . . .

It's contrary to all habits.

Does this consciousness know what needs to be done on the material level? I don't know. But the body doesn't worry about that at all, it does what it has to do from second to second, without asking any questions. No complications, no plans, nothing, nothing.

There.

We'll see, it's interesting!

## 2

*May 21, 1969*

*(Regarding some photographs that were taken just before Pavitra's coffin was closed and lowered into the ground.)*

...

I saw the photos — have you seen them? Have you been shown the photos? They took some there. I am telling you about it because there was something interesting . . . There was a photo with you there (there was X, there was the governor, there was . . .), just when you were all lowering the coffin. And then . . . (you know, this presence of Pavitra hasn't merged with the rest [*of Mother*]: it has remained there very peacefully, he is very peaceful — it hasn't merged), and then, just as I looked at the photo and saw you, there was something like this within (*gesture to the heart, like an emotion*), I don't know, it was almost like a tenderness, and he was almost happy. I can't explain what it is, he was like this: "Oh! Satprem . . ."

He was really very pleased.

It's curious. I wasn't expecting it: I was given the photos and started looking at them, when I suddenly felt something (*same gesture to the heart*) . . . It struck me very much. Because you had asked me, "Is he going to merge?" So even that, even that contact he has kept. Now and then, when someone says something regarding the work, he has his remark to make (I've noticed that), but there, it was very strong, almost like an "Oh!" of joy, you understand: "Oh! Satprem." So I thought, "It's good, since it really pleased him."

I am wondering whether the consciousness [*of Pavitra*] has been especially preserved intact because it entered here [*into Mother*], or whether it's always like that? . . . Where does someone conscious go? Does he remain here? . . . I told you, with Amrita, it's a sort of not too precise form; it's always there, now resting, now waking up, but he doesn't seem to be particularly interested in material things. While Pavitra, from what I see, seems to be conscious of them. It's something rather remarkable, I think.

I have seen cases of people who took interest and continued to take interest in what goes on [*here*], but then they have an independent form. While with Pavitra, it's something else.

It struck me because it was strong, like this (*same gesture to the heart*).

All these last few weeks, there has been a sort of constant . . . I can't call it "preoccupation", but a sort of need to know: to what extent and how do those who have left remain conscious of the things they used to do, for instance, take interest in them, look after them (supposing they have the means to do so)?

A case such as Sri Aurobindo's is quite different: it's as if he had been multiplied.

He has a constant presence in the subtle physical: he goes about, visits a number of people, and he is conscious of a lot of things, he intervenes in a lot of things, but a considerable number — it has multiplied his action. But that's exceptional.

(*silence*)

*I have often wondered about the same thing. I've often asked myself whether on the other side I'll be as unconscious of this side as I am here unconscious of the other side!*

(*Mother laughs heartily*)

Most people — the vast majority of people — go into a sort of assimilative sleep: all the experiences they had in their lives, all they learned, the consciousness seems to ruminate over that.

In the beginning . . . (Théon knew a lot of things — I don't know how he came to know them, but I verified them and found them to be correct), in the beginning, the span of time between two lives is very long, and it's a sort of assimilative sleep in which the consequences of what one has learned develop inwardly. Then, as the psychic being is formed and as one grows more conscious, rebirths take place more and more closely, until the time when rebirth becomes the result of a choice: at a precise place, for a specific length of time. And then, depending on what the psychic being wants to do, depending on the action it has to do, the new birth may be near or distant. There, we have all possible differences. But in the formative stage, that's how it is: very distant rebirths. So then, I've often wondered . . . You see, Théon says there is a psychic *state* in which those beings rest (it's true, there is such a place, I know it), but many people, especially at the beginning of their evolution, are quite tied down to the earth; I have seen quite a few people in trees, for instance. Very often I saw them in trees; often, while following someone [*with the inner vision*], I saw him enter into a tree; and often, while looking at a tree, I saw someone in it. I saw others who were . . . oh, people clinging to a place they were interested in: for instance, I saw a man who was interested in nothing but his money, which he had hidden somewhere, and as soon as he left his body, he went there, settled there, and refused to budge from there! . . . Incidentally (*laughing*), it had a curious result: it led people to discover the place! You see, it caused movements of forces, and some people felt it and thought, "Oh, there must be something here."

There was a time when I concerned myself with that a good deal, and I made a good number of discoveries (following Théon's indications); later on, it no longer interested me. And now, quite lately, I have been reviewing all kinds of things, all kinds of things . . .

But Pavitra's case, I really believe it's exceptional. It's the first time it has

happened to me — with nobody, nobody else before. I told you, when Sri Aurobindo left, for hours he passed on to me the whole supramental force and consciousness he had concentrated in his body. It was immediately after he left. I felt he had called me; I stood there, near his bed, looking at him, and . . . I saw it, you understand: he passed on to me the force, the whole supramental force he had concentrated in his body, and I felt him everywhere enter like that, with a friction. It lasted for hours. But that's quite an exceptional case, as I told you. But what took place with Pavitra is really . . . it's really . . . It's not the same thing: he simply came out of his body deliberately (and not his psychic being: it was as material as he could), and I felt him, felt it enter and enter everywhere, all over my body . . . And now, if I look within, I can't say I see a form, but . . . it's not completely fused. And for certain things — certain things that have to do with people, or the School — there's a very clear personal reaction. And then, those photos . . . I think that's quite exceptional.

I felt something in the brain. You know that since Sri Aurobindo gave me mental silence, it has been absolutely still; it never started up again as before, and the consciousness has been there (*gesture above Mother*), working from there. But then after Pavitra came here, something (*gesture to the forehead*) impelled me to ask (I asked what's here, within), "Could I get the mathematical knowledge you had?" I asked him that. And his answer was, "Of course, it would be easy if you set this in motion again!" But that I don't want to do. Anyway . . .

Anyway, that's how it is, as if I were talking to someone within! How happy he was! I think he loved you very much. He never spoke a word about all that. It has pleased him a lot.

. . .

At any rate, with this departure of Pavitra, one thing has been categorical: if there was in the body the least fear of death, or anxiety, it's completely gone. With Pavitra's case, it's completely gone, completely. The impression is: "But . . . but why do people make such a fuss about that!"

There. It's strange.

### 3

**May 28, 1969**

*They've found in Pavitra's things the record of an experience he had three years ago, just when his cancer was beginning. Would you be interested to know the text of that experience? . . .*

Is it interesting? . . .

Yes.

But anyway . . .

Pavitra has remained here, not at all mingled; now and then, wholly conscious, otherwise very tranquil. It's good — not a hindrance, you understand . . . Now and then, he manifests something, which shows he remains conscious. That's all.

As for me, I am continuing . . . it's not easy. That's all. So I can listen to this.

*(Satprem reads out)*

***Pavitra's experience***  
***Night of February 5, 1966***

*It is a night of fully conscious spiritual experience, a night of torture and glory.*

*I walked through large rooms in which beings without communication with outside were living. And other rooms where wretched beings were dragging out a wretched life. They took notice of my presence, which seemed to bring them a ray of light from outside. A few reacted well, with a smile; others fled. A few knocked against me. Then I went into other rooms. The same goal always seemed to justify my presence. For, as I went by, a few showed a sign of hope. But at the same time obstacles, sufferings, tortures of all kinds fell on me. They were not deliberately inflicted tortures, but sorts of reactions of ignorance and suffering.*

*This work progressively became more and more difficult for me. I moved about with difficulty, walked more and more slowly, as though overburdened, until it finally became difficult for me to find my way . . . to escape.*

*These experiences seemed to last for a long time. When they ended, I found myself in my physical body, surprised that it bore no marks of all that I had just undergone.*

*But I slowly began to understand the meaning of all that had taken place. An immense gratitude rose from my heart towards the Supreme, as did an entire self-giving so that His Will may be accomplished everywhere.*

*I perceived the meaning of the great promise:*

*“I shall deliver you from all evil, fear not.”*

*That promise of victory from the Divine embodied on the earth carried me away with joy.*

*I repeat that I was fully conscious for as long as those experiences lasted.*

*That is all I have to say.*

\* \* \*

Is it after this that he fell ill?

*It's about that time. That's when he started walking with two canes.*

*(after a long silence)*

It would mean that he took upon himself quite a few people's burdens . . . So that would explain what happened: on the day he left, a number of people were terribly attacked by things, as if those were coming back onto them; things that had been taken away from them and which were coming back onto them — especially women.

*(long silence)*

There was in him a being more conscious than him. That's obvious. It was that same being which absorbed [*others' suffering*].

#### 4

***September 14, 1971***

*(A disciple had gone to the Cazanove gardens, in the suburbs of Pondicherry, to see the tombstones of Pavitra and Amrita.)*

*Yesterday I went to visit Cazanove.*

Oh, why?

*To see Amrita-da and Pavitra-da. . . .*

How are they?

*They are covered with “Sri Aurobindo’s Compassion”, and near the head, there is a slightly broken pot with “New Creation”, and near the feet a pot of “Devotion”, the same for both. . . . I found that very nice, but nothing has been done.*

I’ve never heard Pavitra complain about it! (*laughter*) I see Pavitra very often, almost every night. Maybe he likes it that way. Even last night I saw him: he was in Japan. When did they leave?

*Amrita-da left on January 31, 1969 and Pavitra-da in May, May 16.*

Oh, Pavitra left after.

You know, time and me . . .

Pavitra is here, he’s very active, he stays near me, I see him very often. Amrita I don’t see that much. Pavitra was absorbed into me and I put him back into a form little by little, and when he was completely formed, I brought him out and he stays very close here.

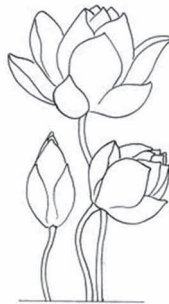
*What does he do?*

He meets people, he does all sorts of things.

*What work does he do?*

He meets people, talks, but he’s here, he hasn’t left the earth’s atmosphere. Amrita left to rest; Pavitra is here, in the subtle physical — that’s where Sri Aurobindo is and it’s a physical that has a strong tendency to materialise. We’ll see.

Note: The first three conversations were with Satprem, the fourth with Sujata.





## BEING TRUE TO ONESELF

WE are often told: “One must be true to oneself.” It is often forgotten that this formula is not quite clear or convincing. For, the first question that arises is: “What is ‘oneself’?” The correct formula is: “One must be one’s true self.” But are we always that? Do we even try to realise what that is? Don’t we take for our true self the self we ordinarily know and feel? The self we know and feel as a rule is a being that is made up of moods — moods that are a play of impulses, personal reactions, fixed mental ideas, habitual vital-physical attitudes: in one word, a play of the pampered ego. Wherever there is a dominance of moods making for the satisfaction of momentary likes and dislikes, we may be sure that our true self is not in action.

The whole movement of Yoga is a movement away from what one usually calls oneself. If the self we commonly know and feel is to be given its head on the excuse of being true to oneself, we should give up the ideal of doing Yoga. There is plenty of room in the wide world for this self of ours. Of course, even in the world of ordinary life, there will be limits and restrictions imposed by society, there will be circumstances cutting across the indulgence of the sheer ego. But, if we can somehow get round all these bars without being a direct danger to our fellows, we can justifiably indulge the ego, for we have not accepted the call to a higher reality within us. But once we have accepted such a call, we are nothing save false to ourselves if we do not recognise that to surrender to moods and to be firm in their assertion is to cover up our souls.

The soul in us is at once a sweetness and a strength, and both the sweetness and the strength are bathed in light — light that reveals God’s presence and the presence of other souls related to us and standing in need of the God in us and of all the sweetness and strength we can give them. Not to be true to oneself but to be true to the Self that is one in all and especially one in us and in those among whom the Divine has placed us in various beautiful relationships which are to be fulfilled in a common progression towards the Light of lights — this is what is asked of us as children of the Supreme Mother.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

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

*(Continued from the issue of March 2012)*

## **Chapter XI**

### **“A God descended under Curse”**

One whose attitude is the same for both the enemy and the friend, for respect and disrespect, for cold or heat, for sorrow or happiness, who is not attached to anything, whose response to both criticism and praise is silence, one who is contented with whatever is available, one who is without any fixed abode but is fixed in devotion to me is the one who is dear to me.

The Gita

WE know that the real life of Sri Aurobindo was not on the surface to be seen by anybody. Even so, what did that outward life — the ‘human’ phase of a life that contained the Mahayogi and the Avatar — look like to an eyewitness who did not have any inkling of its potential?

The world and all its affairs were not at all contemptible for Sri Aurobindo, but his personal world at Vadodara was bereft of even any run-of-the-mill worldly comfort. In fact, it was almost ascetic. Authentic records left by some of those who had personal knowledge of him make amazing and sometimes amusing reading.

One came in very close contact with him — for the gentleman, then in his late twenties, slightly older than Sri Aurobindo, lived with him in the same house at Vadodara for more than two years, from 1898 to 1900, and also accompanied him to and from Bengal a few times during the period. He was Dinendra Kumar Roy (1869-1943), the budding litterateur of the day once quoted in the previous chapter. It was Sri Aurobindo’s maternal uncle, Jogendranath Basu who had chosen him to help Sri Aurobindo to master Bengali. Roy’s memoirs were serialised in a prestigious Bengali journal, *Sahitya*, during 1911-1912. Obviously, he wrote them moved by the sensational Alipore Conspiracy trial and Sri Aurobindo’s incarceration on one hand and, on the other, the unparalleled awe and wonder Sri Aurobindo’s personality inspired. It would have been unrealistic, rather impossible, for Roy to keep his exclusive treasure of experience to himself against the tides of massive curiosity about Sri Aurobindo engulfing him. That his anguish at the treatment meted out to

Sri Aurobindo by the rulers of British India was also a motivating factor is evident from the way he began his essay.<sup>1</sup>

That Shrijut Aurobindo Ghose would become so famous within such a short time and the entire police force of India would focus its searching eye on him, that the well-known barrister Norton Sahib would swallow — more effortlessly than he drank his champagne — thousands and thousands of rupees — the blood extracted from the poor Indian subjects — was beyond my imagination before the Bomb trial began.

While still in England, Sri Aurobindo had begun learning his mother tongue from a retired English Judge from Bengal who was so competent in the lore that once when Sri Aurobindo asked him to explain a passage from a work by Bankim Chandra Chatterji, (the celebrated poet of *Bande Mataram* that was to make epoch-making history before long), he examined the text and delivered his learned judgment over it: “But this is not Bengali!” However, by the time Roy came to help him in gaining proficiency in the language, he had, through his personal effort, grasped it sufficiently well so that he could appreciate the fiction of Bankim Chandra as well as the poetry of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Roy was not required to give him regular lessons. He gave him company and “his work was rather to help him to correct and perfect his knowledge of the language and to accustom him to converse in Bengali rather than any regular teaching”.<sup>2</sup>

Roy’s feelings at his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo at the residence of the renowned patriot and journalist, Prof. Krishnakumar Mitra (1852-1936), Sri Aurobindo’s uncle (he was married to Swarnalata Devi’s sister) makes amusing reading:

The thought of my having to teach Bengali to Aurobindo scared me. He was a great scholar who had obtained such marks in Latin and Greek at the Civil Service examinations that neither any Indian nor any British candidate had ever reached that record . . . This was the picture I imagined of his appearance before seeing him: he must be of robust stature, bespectacled, bedecked with hat, coat and boots, stylish phrases flowing from his lips, eyes casting a ruthless look, a temper that was awfully stern. . . .

Needless to say I was disappointed. How to believe that this darkish lean young man in an old-fashioned pair of native shoes, clad in a thick *dhoti* with unattractive borders from the Ahmedabad mills, its upper end half-tucked, wearing a tight jacket, long flowing thin hair parted at the middle, with a face slightly pock-marked and tender dreamy eyes, was Shriman Aurobindo Ghose, a surging fountain of English, French, Latin . . . and Greek! . . .

The two journeyed from Kolkata to Deoghur, the home of Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather Rishi Raj Narain Bose, before starting for Vadodara. Sri Aurobindo spoke little and rarely about himself. Writes Roy:

In a day or two I realised that Aurobindo's heart was devoid of any earthly meanness or nastiness. His smile was as simple, as malleable and as tender as that of an infant. Though his lips revealed his resolute will, there was nothing in his heart excepting what was even rare in gods, — the determination to sacrifice himself for the eradication of humanity's sorrows. He had not the least worldly ambition or human selfishness . . .

A law contrary to the one stating 'familiarity breeds contempt' seems to be at work with Roy. He says further:

As I passed days and nights sharing his abode and came to know him more and more closely, I realised that Aurobindo was not a mortal human, but a god descended under curse. Only the Divine knew why he was made a Bengali and exiled to India.

In the sixties of the last century Nolini Kanta Gupta (1889–1984), the celebrated yogi and life-long associate and follower of Sri Aurobindo as well as the Secretary of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, used to give talks from time to time to those interested, either in the courtyard in front of the Meditation Hall of the Ashram or at the Playground. Several talks of this series were his reminiscences of his compatriots or of his early days at Puducherry (Pondicherry). This author remembers his recounting in one of them a small exchange with Sri Aurobindo that was a memorable lesson in Yoga for him — and so should it be for an aspirant on that path. Nolini Kanta and two or three other young men then attending upon the Master would cook their meagre cuisine for the night well before it was evening, lay out the dish for Sri Aurobindo and go out to play football with the local youth. By the time they came back for dinner, Sri Aurobindo would have finished his and would have shut himself up in his room, reading or writing in silence.

One day the young men, as they came back and sat down for dinner, realised that they had forgotten to add salt to the vegetables while cooking that solitary item apart from rice. Sri Aurobindo, however, had as usual emptied his bowl. They waited to be mildly reprimanded in the morning. But as nothing of the kind happened, they lost patience and asked the Master if he did not find something wrong with the food offered him the previous evening. He obviously failed to appreciate their curiosity and they had to disclose that they had prepared the vegetable curry without salt.

"Just as salt has its taste, saltlessness too has its taste," was the Master's quiet response.

But this was Sri Aurobindo the Yogi. Let us see what was the attitude of the young officer of the Baroda Raj who could have easily organised a better cooking establishment for himself, towards this vital aspect of physical life.

He was never quite lucky in his cooks. Recollects Roy:

Lunch was laid out for him before 11 a.m. He would glance through the newspapers while eating. . . . Sometimes the items were so badly cooked that it would be impossible to swallow even a morsel from any of them. But Aurobindo would gulp them down without the slightest murmur. I never heard him uttering even a word of displeasure to the cook.

At last a Bengali cook, a young man with a ‘spirit of adventure’ — that is how Roy saw him, for rarely in those days did anyone from rural Bengal venture out to a faraway place — joined them on one of their return journeys from Bengal. But Roy’s hopes were shattered in no time. The young man’s adventure was only an escape into idleness. He knew nothing of cooking. But Sri Aurobindo never grumbled and “that made the fellow more and more cheeky”. The climax came when Sri Aurobindo invited a gifted painter just back from England for dinner. Who could say if the cook did not retain in reserve his skill for churning out choice dishes like *pilau*, *kalia*, *korma* etc. though he cared not to pour much attention on ordinary items? When asked about it, he proudly announced, “Is there anything impossible for me if the necessary ingredients are placed at my disposal?” Alertness was exercised to provide him with all he demanded for that special evening. Alas, it was a complete disaster; neither the guest nor the hosts could proceed with their dinner. Writes Roy, “Any employer would have thrashed the chap, but all Aurobindo did was to burst into an uproarious laugh at his cook’s craftsmanship.”

The young man would retire to the shadow of a Chandan tree in their sprawling compound and sing, “O cuckoo! Fly to my beloved!” Sri Aurobindo heard him. He had quietly put up with his cooking, but his heart was filled with compassion for the chap now that he heard his lyrical longing, however hoarse. “Poor man is unhappy here,” he observed. Instead of depending on the cuckoo, they restored him to his native place, taking him with them when they visited Bengal next.

“Not even once did I see Aurobindo expressing any anger,” towards anybody or at any situation, writes Roy. He had a servant called Keshta, his name a colloquial version of Krishna. “Except with Sri Aurobindo, Keshta could not have lasted for more than three days with any employer. Inexhaustible would be the list of his merits.” Once he bought some lemons for a paisa and Roy had a hunch that he had misappropriated half a paisa. A few days later Roy himself bought much bigger and better lemons and more in number too at the same price. Confronted, Keshta replied nonchalantly, “But the lemons I bought were small! How can you expect them to be available cheap?”

Once again Sri Aurobindo had a hearty laugh. Once Keshta bought some mangoes that proved to be extremely sour and inedible for a price higher than at which Roy bought some deliciously sweet mangoes. Keshta's explanation was, "How on earth could one obtain sour mangoes for a lower price? Sweet mangoes are not quality fruit!"

A student of Sri Aurobindo, R. N. Patkar, recollects:

He was remarkably simple in his mode of living. He was not at all fastidious in his tastes. He did not seem to care either for his food or dress; he never attached any importance to either. Any dish served to him was welcome to him. So too about his dress. I never saw him visiting the cloth market to select cloth for his dress as he had no choice to make. . . . He never slept on a soft cotton mattress as most of us do, but on a bed made of coir on which was spread a Malabar grass-mat which served as a bed-sheet. Once I asked him why he used such a coarse, hard bed. He said with his characteristic laugh, "My boy, don't you know that I am a Brahmachari? Our Shastras enjoin that a Brahmachari should not use a soft bed." . . . I was silenced but I thought that he must be a great man . . .

It was his practice to receive his salary once in three months. In those days payment was made in coins and not in currency notes as now. He used to get the lump sum for three months in a bag which he emptied in a large tray lying on the table in his room. He never bothered to keep it in a safe box, under lock and key. . . . He never cared to keep an account of what he spent. This struck me and one day I casually asked him why he kept his money like that. He simply laughed. . . . He said, "Well, it is a proof that we are living in the midst of honest and good people." I asked him again, "But you don't keep any account which may testify to the honesty of the people around you!" Then, with a serene face he said, "It is God who keeps account for me. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

*(To be continued)*

MANOJ DAS

## References and Notes

1. Dinendra Kumar Roy became a versatile writer in Bengali as well as the editor of the most prominent Bengali weekly of the time, the *Basumati*. Apart from his several original works on rural Bengal, he became widely popular as the translator of a famous English detective fiction series, numbering 217 volumes. In his *Reminiscences* he has said that he achieved felicity in the art of translation through his efforts to explain difficult or unusual texts from Bengali into English for Sri Aurobindo. All passages and smaller quotes credited to him in this chapter are from his series in Bengali entitled *Aurobindo-Prasanga* translated by the present author.

2. Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 43–44. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, &

*Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, edited by Roshan and Apurva, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

3. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives.

### Mother India

*Disciple: When you wrote that you looked upon India not as an inert, dead mass of matter, but as the very Mother, the living Mother, I believe that you saw that Truth.*

Sri Aurobindo: My dear sir, I am not a materialist. If I had seen India as only a geographical area with a number of more or less interesting or uninteresting people in it, I would hardly have gone out of my way to do all that for the said area.

*Disciple: Is there something in what you wrote? Or was it just poetic or patriotic sentiment?*

Sri Aurobindo: Merely a poetic or patriotic sentiment — just as in yourself only your flesh, skin, bones and other things of which the senses give their evidence are real, but what you call your mind and soul do not really exist being merely psychological impressions created by the food you eat and the activity of the glands. Poetry and patriotism have of course the same origin and the things they speak of are quite unreal. Amen.

11 February 1936

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, p.17)*



# SCHOPENHAUER AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHIES

(Continued from the issue of March 2012)

## Nature of Existence and Purpose of Life in Schopenhauer's and Indian Philosophies

THE differences between Schopenhauer's philosophy and Hinduism with respect to metaphysical concepts lead to a major difference in the outlook about the meaning and purpose of life. According to Schopenhauer everything in the phenomenal world is a manifestation of Will, which is a blind force, and there is no reason why this force is manifesting. Further, as I said in an earlier Section, according to Schopenhauer human existence must contain suffering, and the primary reason for this suffering is that Will has created a fictitious 'ego sense' in individuals along with individual wills, which are competing against each other. In some contexts Schopenhauer considered this life of suffering so undesirable that he suggested that non-existence of the world is preferable to its existence. For example, in one place he suggested that we can say to a dying person, "You are ceasing to be something it would have been better for you never to have become." (Schopenhauer, 1844, p. 558) Despite his pessimism and dire view of life, Schopenhauer also presented a few positive ideas. One of these ideas is that Will is trying to manifest higher forms of life, and in his own words Will is "striving for the highest possible objectification". (Schopenhauer 1819, p. 188) This idea provides a hint of an evolutionary process, but he did not clearly say what this process could lead to. Moreover, he recognised that it is possible for one to deny Will and reach a state where suffering ceases to exist. However, he presented the attainment of will-less state of pure cognition merely as a way to end suffering and not as the true meaning and aim of existence.

Hinduism recognises and agrees with the description of phenomenal human existence that Schopenhauer presented, and it also recognises that individual ego and its desire are the root causes of suffering of human beings. However, Hinduism disagrees with the premise that suffering is a fundamental characteristic of human existence. According to Hinduism suffering is attributable to ignorance about the true Self of everything, which unites diverse individual beings of the world. Further, according to Hindu philosophy one of the fundamental attributes of Self (*Atman*) and the Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*) is delight or bliss. For example, one verse of the Taittiriya Upanishad (Verse II. 7. 1) says, "For, truly, on getting the essence, one becomes blissful. For who, indeed, could live, who breathe, if there were not this bliss in space?" In the same Upanishad another verse (III. 6. 1) says, "He knew that Brahman is bliss. For truly, beings here are born from bliss, when born, they live by bliss and into bliss, when departing, they enter." (Radhakrishnan, 1994)



This blissful characteristic of existence, of course, is not evident in everyday life of ordinary human beings; however, according to Hinduism it can be found through spiritual practice. It also can be argued that every experience in the world is not necessarily painful, and that for every case of suffering there can be found one or more cases of happiness.

With regard to the purpose of life in the manifested universe, there are different answers from different schools of thought within Hinduism. The philosophy of Mayavada believes that the world is an illusion, and so getting out of Samsara, i.e., the cycle of birth and rebirth, and merging one's individual consciousness with Brahman, the ultimate 'a-cosmic' Reality, should be the ultimate goal of human beings. For this philosophy there is no teleology or lofty purpose for the existence of this world. For the followers of dualistic Vedanta who practice devotion-oriented spiritual path (Bhakti-yoga), the world is a play of the divine, which is referred to as 'Lila' in Sanskrit. This philosophy does not consider the world to be an illusion; however, it envisions another world of eternal beauty and bliss, which lies beyond the phenomenal realm, where human beings can participate in the divine play without the suffering associated with this world. Getting out of Samsara by removing the 'veil of Maya' and reaching that other world should be the goals of this life according to this philosophy. Both of these philosophies reject this world, but there are a few other schools of philosophy within Hinduism including Sri Aurobindo's view that believe in the possibility of transformation of human nature and the establishment of a harmonious life on this earth, which will be free from suffering caused by the clash of egoistic personalities. In his book *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo explains the concept of the evolution of consciousness and transformation of human nature. According to him 'Nature' is slowly moving, or evolving, toward the establishment of divine life on earth and the goal of human life should be to participate in this process consciously. (Sri Aurobindo, 1973)

Schopenhauer's view that suffering is a fundamental characteristic of human life has strong similarity with the outlook of Buddhism although the metaphysical structure of Buddhism is different from that of Schopenhauer's philosophy. The first of the four Noble Truths of Buddhism is the Truth of Suffering (Duhkha). What this Noble Truth says is that "sooner or later, in some form or another, no matter what they do, beings are confronted by and have to deal with *duhkha*". (Gethin, p. 60) Buddhism also offers an insight to the causes of suffering and a way for the cessation of suffering. Schopenhauer too offers an explanation for suffering and a way to end it. The goal for Buddhists is to get out of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth and attain Nirvana. [Rebirth in this case means the continuation of the causal chain.] The definition of Nirvana is somewhat controversial and its meaning may vary in different contexts. Nirvana can be attained in this life or after death. In the first case, i.e., when one is living, Nirvana means the extinction of all desires and the attainment of perfect equanimity. Nirvana after death can mean either annihilation

or a peaceful pure existence, and scholars have different opinions on this issue. Schopenhauer was familiar with the concept of Nirvana, but he did not believe in rebirth either of a soul or in the sense of the continuation of the causal chain; so for him the worthy goal seems to be the attainment of a will-less non-egoistic state of consciousness in this life, which is similar to attaining Nirvana when one is alive in this world.

### Path for Salvation in Schopenhauer's and Indian Philosophies

Schopenhauer wrote in detail about a path for salvation or the ending of suffering, and his recommended approach is remarkably similar to some schools of Hindu philosophy and also of Buddhism. He devoted the Fourth Book of Volume One of his book *The World as Will and Presentation* to this subject, which he called 'affirmation and denial of the will for life'. An example of his thoughts is quoted below:

. . . when that veil of Maya, the *principium individuationis*, is so greatly lifted from the eyes of a person that he no longer makes the egoistic distinction between his own person and others, but participates as much in the suffering of other individuals as his own, and is thereby not only helpful to the highest degree but even ready to sacrifice his own individual whenever a number of others can thereby be rescued, then it follows of itself that such a person — who recognises his innermost and true self in all beings — must also regard the endless sufferings of all living things as his own, and so appropriate the entire world's pain. (p. 439)

Hinduism agrees with Schopenhauer completely that it is the sense of ego that makes a person feel separate from others. In Sri Aurobindo's words,

. . . the human or egoistic view is that of a world of innumerable separate creatures each self-existent and different from the others, each trying to get its utmost possible profit out of the others and the world . . . (Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads*, 1981, p. 48)

Hinduism also believes that the ego is a temporary construction of Nature and that a person can get release from its grip by appropriate spiritual practice. Further, when a person is able to loosen the grip of ego, he can find his true essence or self, and then he gains a different outlook and sees that there is a universal Self connecting all individuals. This realisation is an essential step toward gaining spiritual liberation. The following verse from Isha Upanishad conveys this concept:

Isha 7. When, to one who knows, all beings have, verily, become one with his own self, then what delusion and what sorrow can be to him who has seen this oneness?

The difference between Schopenhauer and Vedanta philosophy is that the unifying principle for Schopenhauer is Will, whereas for Vedanta it is spiritual consciousness (Self), and this is a major difference. Schopenhauer's philosophy does include the concept of a cosmic Subject, which is very similar to Vedanta's Self, and it seems that salvation would have to lie for Schopenhauer in one's identifying with, or becoming, that Subject and not in becoming one with some sort of undifferentiated oneness of Will. However, he does not clearly explain the role of the Subject with respect to attaining salvation. He does recognise that universalisation of one's consciousness and becoming will-less is the way to salvation.

Besides breaking through the veil of Maya and recognising that the same universal Will is functioning in each individual, Schopenhauer recommends that a person seeking salvation and the end of suffering must deny individual will to operate in himself. Schopenhauer seems to be thinking of a sincere and thorough recognition of the oneness of everything and not just in an intellectual or abstract way. He then goes on to discuss in detail the practice of asceticism as a virtue, and he gives examples of ascetic practices in Christianity and also Hinduism. He also discusses mysticism and in particular refers to the German mystic Meister Eckhart. With reference to the writings of Christian saints and mystics he writes,

These preach, besides purest love and utter renunciation, total voluntary poverty, true composure, complete indifference in the face of all worldly things, dying away from one's own will and rebirth in God, total forgetting of one's own person and becoming immersed in the perception of God. (Schopenhauer, 1819, p. 449)

Schopenhauer's idea of the denial of will raises a question about the agent that is needed to deny 'will' since it is doubtful that it makes sense to suppose that the 'will' itself will want to deny itself. Schopenhauer himself seems to have been aware of this issue, and he dealt with it in two different ways. First, he said that when a person is able to penetrate the 'veil of Maya' and "no longer makes the egoistic distinction between his own person and others", he becomes very compassionate towards others, and "his will turns around, no longer affirms its own essence, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it". (Schopenhauer, 1819, pp. 439-40) This view implies that since there is no higher will from which one can get help one must make a sincere effort which involves self-imposed renunciation of every kind. The other way that this liberation from the demands of Will is possible is linked with his metaphysical view of the universal Subject, which is not constituted by Will.

Schopenhauer's approach to salvation and the ending of suffering is similar to the Buddhist approach. Buddha emphasised that one must rely on one's own effort and not depend on receiving help from other sources. For Buddhism there is no God, or a higher divine Will, to rely on. For Vedanta too a sincere personal effort to break out of the grip of 'ego' is called for. For theistic schools of Vedanta reliance on divine guidance and grace is recommended in addition to personal effort. The giving up of ego sense and attachment to worldly things of pleasure is fundamental to both Buddhist and Hindu spiritual practices.

As discussed earlier, Hinduism makes a distinction between desire and will, and it prescribes the denial of desire and not the denial of will as a way to alleviate suffering. In both Hinduism and Buddhism the main cause of human suffering is identified as desire, which arises from a person's ego. In the Katha Upanishad it is said (Verse II.3.14) that "when all desires that dwell within the human heart are cast away, a mortal becomes immortal and (even) here he attains to Brahman". Bhagavad Gita recommends a step by step approach. Gita's first step is to act without allowing the 'fruits of action' to be the motive. (Verse II. 47) It is only in an advanced stage of spiritual practice that the denial of will is prescribed. Gita (Verse XII. 16) recommends a spiritual aspirant to be *sarvarambha parityagi* (in Sanskrit), or in other words to give up all initiative in action. In Katha Upanishad the Verse I. 2. 20 says, "the unstriving man (*a-kratu*) beholds Him (Self), and becomes freed from sorrow." There is, however, a major difference between the denial of will in Hinduism and that in Schopenhauer. In Hinduism the egoistic individual will is to be replaced by a higher will whereas in Schopenhauer's approach there is no higher will. For Schopenhauer there is only a *universal* Will, i.e., the one Will, which is manifested in multiple entities in the phenomenal world. But there is no reason, in Schopenhauer's philosophy, for considering it of "higher" nature than individual wills. If anything, it seems, what is truly "higher" can only be the state of pure will-less cognizance, which is the characteristic of the one Subject. Unfortunately, the status of the Subject is particularly unclear in his thinking.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Schopenhauer is widely known for his pessimistic view of human life. This is somewhat unfortunate because it covers up several other aspects of his philosophy, which are very attractive. He was a maverick in the group of German philosophers of his time which included eminent philosophers like Johann G. Fichte, Friedrich W. J. Schelling, and George W. F. Hegel. Schopenhauer did not receive adequate recognition during the early part of his career, and he was somewhat frustrated for that reason. It is only much later that he received accolades from other philosophers and intellectuals. Eventually he left a deep impression on several philosophers and intellectuals who followed him, and perhaps the most famous among them is Friedrich

Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche in the beginning was very impressed with Schopenhauer, but later he openly rejected some of his premises. Another great philosopher of the twentieth century who was influenced by Schopenhauer is Ludwig Wittgenstein. Carl Jung, the famous psychiatrist, also was impressed with Schopenhauer's thoughts on the 'subconscious' aspects of human psychology. In addition to philosophers and psychologists Schopenhauer's writings inspired several famous artists, musicians and literary persons. I must point out that this article is of limited scope and that I have not presented any discussion on Schopenhauer's thoughts on aesthetics, music and art.

Schopenhauer did not like speculative philosophies and he tried to develop a very realistic explanation of the phenomenal existence. His analysis of human psychology and behaviour is very realistic and his description of human behaviour deserves a lot of credit. He also introduced the concept of the cosmic Subject, which unfortunately created some incoherency in his metaphysical scheme, but it enabled him to present a way out of the grip of Will. The description of his approach to ending suffering is powerful and a great contribution not only to philosophy but also to literature. There is a mystical aspect of his philosophy, which is unfortunately overlooked.

With regard to the impact of Indian philosophies on Schopenhauer, he himself acknowledged that he was deeply influenced by the Upanishads. His writings have numerous references to the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Puranas as well as Hindu customs. He also made several references to concepts of Buddhist philosophy. There are some scholars who are of the opinion that Schopenhauer did not understand Hindu philosophy. I disagree with this view. In my assessment he had a clear understanding of the basic tenets of Hindu philosophies based on Samkhya Karika as well as the Upanishads and the Gita. During his time translations of Indian spiritual texts were rare. Despite the limited access to publications on Indian philosophies Schopenhauer made a sincere effort to read as well as collect literature on Indian philosophies. His explanation of 'tat tvam asi', or 'that thou art', which he presented in Volume One of his book *The World as Will and Presentation* is very clear and accurate. (Schopenhauer, 1819, pp. 413-14) [I presented a quotation on this earlier.] His description of the Subject as "that which is cognizant of all things and of which none is cognizant" is clearly similar to the description of Self in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Further, one of his favourite descriptions of the Subject as "the world's *one eye* that looks out from all cognizant beings" is similar to that of the universal Purusha (Conscious Being) given in the Gita — 'the Knower of the Field in all Fields'. His understanding of the concept of Maya also is fine. Some aspects of his philosophy have strong similarities with Samkhya Karika, and some others with the Upanishads; but he did not incorporate either school of thought fully in his philosophy. He made inconsistent statements about the relation of Will with the pure Subject cognition. In some places he said that the Subject is will-less,

which implies that it is a different principle from Will. This dualistic view is similar to that of Samkhya although there are differences between the two in some detailed aspects. At some other places he said that the Subject of knowledge is the same as the willing subject, which implies that Will is the thing-in-itself of everything including the pure Subject of cognition. This latter view is very materialistic. In any case, this incoherency in his own metaphysical scheme does not necessarily indicate that he did not understand Indian philosophies.

Despite his pessimistic view of life Schopenhauer presented a way to end suffering, and his approach for salvation is very similar to that of some schools of Hindu philosophy as well as Buddhism. At the core of this approach is the denial of Will, which leads to a will-less state of pure cognition combined with compassion, and this state is similar to the experience of Self (Atman) of the Upanishads and the attainment of Nirvana of Buddhism. Before concluding it would be appropriate to read a powerful description of the will-less state of pure cognition given by Schopenhauer:

But if we turn our gaze from our own neediness and involvement toward those who have overcome the world, in whom the will, having attained to full self-cognizance, recognises itself in all things and then freely denies itself, and which then only awaits sight of the vanishing of its last trace, along with the body that it animates, then instead of unresting press and drive, instead of constant passage from desire to fear and from joy to sorrow, instead of the never satisfied and never perishing hope in which the dreaming life of the willing human being consists, we are shown that peace which is higher than all reason, that complete stillness of the sea of the spirit, that deep repose, unshakeable confidence, and cheerfulness whose mere reflection in a countenance, such as Raphael and Correggio have depicted it, is an entire sure gospel: only cognizance has remained and the will has vanished.

(Schopenhauer, 1819, p. 477)

Finally I would like to add that in my humble opinion Schopenhauer's philosophy deserves more attention from the students of philosophy especially in India. One does not have to agree with everything he said, but there is a lot to learn from his writings. My study of Schopenhauer's philosophy has been a very rewarding experience, and in the future I hope to write more on some of the aspects of his philosophy that I did not cover adequately in this article.

\* \* \*



### Acknowledgement

This article would not have been possible for me to write without the encouragement and guidance of Dr. Richard E. Aquila, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA. He not only introduced me to Schopenhauer, but he read and corrected my writings many times during the preparation of this article. The primary sources of literature for this article were the two books of Schopenhauer (*The World as Will and Presentation*) that he translated from German to English. (Please refer to the list of references for these two books.) I am grateful to Dr. Aquila for his help.

(Concluded)

ARUN CHATTERJEE

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*As for the feeling from within, it depends on being able to go inside. Sometimes it comes of itself with the deepening of the consciousness by bhakti or otherwise, sometimes it comes by practice — a sort of referring the matter and listening for the answer — listening is, of course, a metaphor but it is difficult to express it otherwise — it doesn't mean that the answer comes necessarily in the shape of words, spoken or unspoken, though it does sometimes or for some; it can take any shape. The main difficulty for many is to be sure of the right answer. For that it is necessary to be able to contact the consciousness of the Guru inwardly — that comes best by bhakti. Otherwise, the attempt to get the feeling from within by practice may become a delicate and ticklish job. Obstacles: (1) normal habit of relying on outward means for everything; (2) ego, substituting its suggestions for the right answer; (3) mental activity; (4) intruder nuisances. I think you need not be eager for this, but rely on the growth of the inner consciousness. The above is only by way of general explanation.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 694)*



# ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

## Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of March 2012)

### CHAPTER XIV

#### Epilogue

*At the end of May 1954, Paul suffered another cerebral haemorrhage, much more serious than the preceding ones, and he sank into a deep coma; with the help of medical intervention, he lived on — even though not consciously — until September 25, 1954.*

*Here are the four letters which Philippe wrote to his brother Albert during their father's period of agony as well as the one which followed the announcement of his death.*

#### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
June 2, 1954

My dear Albert,

I have received your letter of May 28 and am still under the impact of the sad news which it brought me. And yet this news was not unexpected. Since a few months, Father was already feeling his age weighing on him. He was realising that his faculties were declining and that his activities were getting reduced more and more. He had no longer any interest in life and all his letters spoke of his imminent end. As you say, he never complained. On the contrary, he found that his life had been quite full and that he had passed through the catastrophes which have recently shaken the world, without having suffered from them. Above all he felt the affection which surrounded his old age and was grateful for it.

I know, my dear Albert, that you have done everything in your power to make his last years peaceful, sheltered from worries, and express our attentive and devoted affection which we owe him because of his large-heartedness, his uprightness and

for everything that he has done for us. For him you took my place, or rather you filled the role of both of us to him. He was aware of it and several times he has written to me about it. You may rest assured that I myself am sincerely grateful to you for it. Denise had indeed become his own daughter and, in the midst of all of you, surrounded by your care, he could end the last days of his long life, realising that he had achieved and, on the whole, successfully carried out the task that he had been given.

Destiny had physically separated me from him; but, curiously, for some years I have had the feeling of a very strong nearness between the two of us, in the emotional and intellectual field. I almost felt him physically present near me, and I began to dream of him. In these dreams, I took him to my heart and we embraced each other in a great surge of affection. I opened myself to him and I noticed that he too felt this closeness. It has never flagged since then, although it has become less vivid after the slowing down of Father's conscious activity.

He may survive this attack for a while, but I suppose that his faculties will be much weakened and that he will be conscious only intermittently. In any case I am with you, all of you, at his bedside. If there is still time, convey to him my filial love and my gratitude.

In a certain sense, I am glad to have received your letter before the fatal outcome. I have thus been able to think of him, pray for him, with more intensity and concentration than usual. It has also enabled me to inform the Mother, to entrust him in some way to Sri Aurobindo and to her. Their help is certainly the most effective that he can receive in the difficult passage that he is going to traverse.

To all of you, also especially to Aunt Marie, my affectionate thoughts in this ordeal.

I embrace you lovingly,  
your brother,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

## SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
June 15, 1954

My dear Albert,

Not having received anything from you since your letter of May 31, I conclude from it that Father has recovered from his attack and has decided to stay amidst you for a while longer. It is certainly not that he has regained interest in life, but may be he is awaiting something or he wants to know something or to free himself from it, before crossing over. The matters of the soul are very mysterious and we ill understand them with our intelligence, turned as it is towards the physical world. In any case I do not think that the circumstances of a life are the results of purely material causes. The soul, the profound consciousness, keeps watch over it from behind, follows it, guides it.

If Father is lucid, you will perhaps find in his words an indication of what his soul desires. Tell him, if you find that it is possible, that to turn oneself towards one's profound consciousness, and through that, towards the One Great Soul, who dwells in him as He dwells in each one of us, will give him peace, joy and light. I would like to be near him; I think I would know how to help him. Tell him that my thoughts and my affection are with him. Tell him to think of Sri Aurobindo and to look at his portrait.

Affectionately I embrace, you, Denise and yours.  
Your brother,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

## SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
July 6, 1954

My dear Albert,

I have received your letter of June 27, which brings me news of Father. I see that there is no change in his condition, and no doubt one can hardly hope for any improvement. What is essential is that he feels himself surrounded by the affection of his dear ones and that he is calm which will help him to withdraw himself without shock into that other state of consciousness which we call death of which we are afraid only because we do not know it. His case is in contrast with that of Grandfather Stumpf, who in perfect health went to sleep one evening and did not get up the next morning. His face, absolutely peaceful and even happy, clearly showed that he had not been conscious of his passage. Perhaps you too remember it. . . .

*The letter continues on a totally different note, Philippe dealing with various business matters with his brother.*

Embrace Father and tell him of my grateful and filial affection.  
I embrace you too.

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

## SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
August 14, 1954

My dear Albert,

I have received your two letters of August 6. I am constantly with you, with all of you, near Father. That he does not regain consciousness, at least at certain moments and for a certain time, is truly surprising. It is as though the soul has already abandoned the physical body. But then why does the body continue to

live? It seems to me that there must be a reason for this prolongation, something that binds the soul to this world, something that the soul has not accomplished or which it would have wished to see accomplished . . . It is difficult to be precise, because one must know the predominant concerns of the final moments of the consciousness. In any case, an affectionate and helpful thought, a prayer for the peace and light to descend on the soul can be an effective help.

I am glad of your opinion on the films. Morisset's decision to take the film personally to New York is in fact the best one. I have also received a letter from Repiton telling me of the excellent lunch he had with you. You are surely following the development of the political situation in French India. It seems that now they are close to an accord: the French will progressively pass on the sovereignty and the services, in the course of a transitory period of two or three months. India will preserve some institutions of French culture in Pondicherry. There is a talk of merging the present French College with our University Centre. Other similar possibilities are also being considered for the Hospital and the School of Medicine. I do not know which ones will be realised but we shall surely have a new field of action and lots of work.

I embrace you affectionately,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
October 6, 1954

My dear Albert,

Thank you for your two letters of September 26 and 29. What you tell me of Father's last moments confirms the impression which I had on receiving your telegram — of a liberation; you too have felt it like me. The soul had completed its terrestrial task and withdrew; the body, robust and well preserved by a life of moderation, had continued for a while before stopping the momentum which had been given to it.

You do not probably share all my ideas, but you surely have, at the core of your being, the certitude of the soul's immortality. We may therefore join together to send our affectionate and grateful thoughts to accompany Father. Perhaps we may even go further and feel that we have not "lost" him, that he is always alive in

his soul and that which is of the highest in him, and that by raising ourselves to our summit, we are sure to find him in the supreme Reality.

The signs of sympathy which you have received reflect the esteem which he enjoyed. I am happy that everything has been dignified and harmonious. I have had an echo of it from Patrouix himself who has written to me. Another letter received is from Madame Bonnaud-Diaz, whom I do not remember knowing. I hope that Aunt Marie has not been affected too much; she was very much attached to Father and is all alone now. I am sending you back the two letters which you had passed on to me.

I am glad to know that your children are growing and progressing. In their turn they are passing through the experiences, with all the nuances from the anxiety of the exams to the joy of success. I wish them good luck in their studies and their becoming aware of themselves, their *raison d'être* and their mission on the earth. Human life is not worth living unless one grasps its meaning, sees where it is leading. Send me their photos from time to time, because at their age they change fast and I shall be happy to follow them.

My brotherly regards to Denise. And for you, my dear Albert, all my affection. I embrace you.  
Your brother,

*Signed:* Philippe

P.S. I do not know if I have told you about receiving a letter last year from Aunt Louise from Algeria.

\* \* \*

*Circumstances therefore led Philippe in the preceding letters to broach his intuitive conceptions of the soul and of the passage from life to death. It is the only occasion when ontological questions were expressed if not discussed between the two brothers. Their correspondence during the fifteen following years were merely factual: births and marriages, health, political events, transfer to India of the life annuity which Philippe had inherited from his parents, and other technical and commercial matters.*

*There he appeared proud of the social and industrial achievements of the Ashram, in which he had often played a big role: press, handmade paper factory, sugar factory, stainless steel factory, school . . . in these he saw the application of Sri Aurobindo's yoga:*

. . . His yoga does not reject life, but adopts it with the intention of transforming it. At the beginning, for a long time, in the Ashram there was only an exclusive concentration on the deepening of oneself and the discovery of the inner Divine.

In 1943, we took up the education of children, with the International Centre of Education. Now, since the passing of Sri Aurobindo, little by little we have taken up business and industry, also family relations. Politics is still completely ruled out, but it will not astonish me if that stage too is quite near. . .<sup>1</sup>

*By a telegram dated May 16, 1969, Albert was informed of his brother's death, then aged 75 years. The same day André Morisset wrote to him:*

When I arrived here last Monday, I found Philippe in very bad condition and in total relapse of his illness which he had two years ago. However he was in full possession of his mental faculties and I hoped that he would rapidly get over his physical weakness. Unfortunately, from Wednesday, his condition worsened with an unusual rapidity. A blood transfusion was scheduled for this morning, but it could not be done, the fatal outcome seeming inevitable. Philippe passed away without suffering and in absolute peace.

*During the preceding years, Philippe had mentioned various tropical diseases to explain his poor health. Perhaps in this way he wanted to prepare his family and his friends for his death. In fact he had been suffering from an incurable prostate cancer since five years.*

*Philippe had kept and filed all his correspondence; he had made a folder of family letters. André asked if Albert wanted them to be returned or if he preferred to have them destroyed. Albert replied to him:*

I have in my hand the correspondence which Philippe had sent to my parents, and that is sufficient for me to see clearly into all his thoughts as well as in those of my parents. I should therefore be very grateful if you would destroy these letters.

*It is this correspondence, received by Paul and Madeleine, which I found after the death of my father, towards the end of 1980, and which you are now able to read. To understand it better and present it to you, I wished to go to Pondicherry, to the scene where Pavitra had lived for forty-four years. It happened in 1999, almost thirty years after his death; I had never had, until then, any contact with the members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. I am grateful to the French Consul General in Pondicherry and Chennai, and to Madame Philippe Barbry for the introductions which they gave me to the Ashram. I wish to thank the members of the Ashram who had known Pavitra and very specially Pourni Morisset, Mother's granddaughter,*

1. Letter dated July 24, 1967. In this very letter, he replied that he was not personally involved in the Auroville project for which the initiative came from the Mother.

*for receiving me, for talking to me about my uncle, for presenting to me the environment so well preserved of his life, and, finally for taking me to his tomb. I feel indebted to my wife Marie-Christine for her encouragement and then for her help to write this book, and to my brother and sisters for their benevolence concerning this venture. I wish to express my gratitude to Marie-Pierre, reader of my work, day after day, as well as to Régine and Philippe who organised and accompanied me on my travel to India.*

*What he had sought in Theosophy in France and in Japan, then in the lamasery of Mongolia, Pavitra certainly found it in his contact with “Sri Aurobindo, this visionary poet who, apart from ecology, has treated at great length all the subjects which are dear to the New Age: consciousness, energy, desire for synthesis, optimistic vision of a world which leads to the Divine.”<sup>2</sup>*

*(Concluded)*

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.)

2. In the Review *Festivals and Seasons* No. 475, Mai 1993, “A New Age Coming From Afar” by Yvon Le Mince, page 4.

*Let not thy virtues be such as men praise or reward, but such as make for thy perfection and God in thy nature demands of thee.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 456)*



## YAJÑA (यज्ञः) — THE BASIS OF LIFE

(A student's talk to his fellow students\*)

ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् ।  
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥

The term 'yajña' to most of us today evokes an idea of animal sacrifice or sometimes even human sacrifice. Or we might imagine Brahmins sitting around a raised platform with a fire in an 'agnikūṇḍa'. And into this fire the Brahmins pour ghee and 'samidhā' i.e. herbal powders, leaves etc. as they chant Sanskrit hymns in a manner incomprehensible to us.

Yet yajña is much more than that. Yajña is the fundamental principle of life.

I am no authority on this subject. I have only tried to put together what I have gathered from my reading. So please excuse me for any faulty understanding or misinterpretation or even a lack of understanding regarding this very important concept.

### The Enigma of Life

Life presents itself as an enigma to all. Some are baffled as to why this gift of life is given to us. But most do not consider life — this bag of miseries — as a casual gift thrown carelessly to us. They struggle through it, and somehow move on. Some take it for granted. They don't get enough time to solve their daily problems. How then can they think about their life? Even if they do give it a thought sometimes, they find no simple answer or no satisfactory answer at all to the problem. Some others do not care why life is given to them. They have it, so they enjoy it and make the most of it, never bothering about the why. To some, it still seems like a dream or an illusion and the only escape is to a reality that lies somewhere else, in some other world or outside all worlds. Some maybe, imagine a kind of Utopia. For others it could be a journey, they have a goal to reach; as in any other journey there are obstacles and difficulties also in the journey of life. Some might wonder who really is the traveller, and whether the journey ends in one single life. To some, life is a battle, a titanic clash between opposite or apparently opposite forces. Will this battle be won in the end? Or is there at all an end to it? It has to be won, but for whom? For which king? Or are we the king?

\* At the Higher Course of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

In India, from ancient times, life has been seen as a yajña that we are to perform with sincerity, through an unreserved self-surrender to That ultimate reality which is the source of all things.

In fact, life is,

the unconquerable impulse of man towards God, Light, Bliss, Freedom, Immortality.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Key to the Enigma**

The Vedas are Shrutis, the eternal word heard by the Rishis. The Rishis who lived in a higher consciousness heard the eternal and the sacred word which conveyed to them all about the Creator and his creation and the purpose of his Creation. And thus has the Word come down to us as the Vedas of which yajña is one of the important concepts. And this great concept of yajña solves the tangle of life for us and uplifts us closer to our goal of life.

### **Spirituality and the World**

We must remember that Spirituality and Indian culture were not two different things; instead there has always been an equal emphasis on the outward life as much as on the inward life. Both of these have always been two linked aspects of life. But with the passage of time, misinterpretations and distortions crept in when people took up yoga and found it difficult to detach themselves from the worldly affairs. They made the *grhastha jivana* (the worldly life) and *sannyāsa* (renunciation) two different lines. But the examples of the *rājaraṣis* like Janaka make it evident that initially these two paths were one. Even great Rishis like Yajñyavalkya revered *rājaraṣis* like Janaka and would not start their *upadeśa* without Janaka's presence.

So, from this we understand clearly that the link between the inner life and its outward expression culminated in a true and complete Yoga. There is nothing that is inside us that we do not express it in some way or the other in our life. All outer manifestations are expressions of an inner movement.

### **The Yajña in the Vedas**

The Vedas were written in a language which is no longer familiar to us, though some remnants of that language do survive today in different forms and meanings. However, there also, some words hold such vivid meaning to our culture that they continue to have an impact and importance till today. That is why words like 'go' (meaning cow) still hold their second meaning as Light. Most of the Vedic gods

1. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 3.

either lost completely or partially their associations and significance or they had altogether new associations and significances with the coming of the Puranas. But surely in the times of the Vedas they were more flexible about the associations they made and the significances they attributed to the different gods and goddesses.

The performance of yajña has been expressed in the Vedas in a cryptic, esoteric and a symbolic manner to protect the knowledge from reaching the uninitiated *adīkṣita* (अदीक्षित).

However its outer form and a literal interpretation of the symbolism also remains fruitful for the ordinary man who is yet incapable of understanding the inner meaning and is not yet ready to take up an inner life, although it was never denied that he had the possibility to lead an inner and higher life in future if he aspired and became conscious of it. The process of yajña is described in detail in the Vedas. Those who are wise and ready for it can understand the psychological and the symbolic meaning and the rest have to follow and slowly prepare themselves and rise through the physical or an incomplete yajña to a more complete one and onward to the highest yajña. The true yajña in its fullest form was primarily for those who had turned inward without discarding the life, mind, and body and taken the path to realise the supreme truth hidden behind everything.

### Forms of Yajña

This yajña is not that of an ascetic engaging in severe austerities in the jungle or the cave. It is true that at certain stages of yoga, a stern severe countering of the lower nature may be necessary. But in the path of yoga these things vary from individual to individual. Some might take longer to go beyond a certain stage of forms and outer impositions, and then gradually shift over to its inner and essential truth. In such matters the individual has to progress according to his temperament, but a constant conscious effort to go beyond all necessity and bondage to any outer expression is indispensable.

. . . the true essence of sacrifice is not self-immolation, it is self-giving; its object not self-effacement, but self-fulfilment; its method not self-mortification, but a greater life; not self-mutilation, but a transformation of our natural human parts into divine members, not self-torture, but a passage from a lesser satisfaction to a greater Ananda.<sup>2</sup>

We are all familiar with the form of yajña that continues even today with a fire at the altar and pundits reciting mantras as they pour libations into the fire. There were methods to perform different yajñas as mentioned in the Vedas and probably

2. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 101.

yajñas have been performed at fire altars since ages immemorial even by great sages and ṛṣis, but then they were also aware of its inner and psychological meaning.

### The Hidden Truth of Yajña

As the inner meaning of the yajña faded from the minds with an increasing stress on the outer expression of yajña, gradually the outer assumed greater importance, until the inner lost its meaning completely and only the ritualistic shell survived.

If we were to look into the psychological meaning that must have been ascribed to what seems only a ritualistic act, we will be amazed to see the misfortune of wrong interpretations this grand process has suffered through the ages and how it was lost to mankind.

If we look into the matter of *bali* (बलि) or the slaying of animals, one can't deny that animal sacrifice was part of yajña, such as is done during Durga Puja. But animal sacrifice is something symbolic and esoteric. The Eternal Word that was given to the Rishis couldn't have asked them to kill animals or still worse humans, to satisfy gods, or to satisfy the Transcendent. This is too crude an offering for the one who sits beyond and above, transcending his own creation. We are all familiar with certain expressions like 'lecherous goat', or associations of relating or comparing a greedy person to a pig. These are some associations that have existed everywhere in all civilisations and continue to do so till today. From here we could have a firm confirmation that the slaying of animals was symbolic. It was the slaying of one's inner enemies as Sri Aurobindo tells us —

desire, wrath, inequality, greed, attachment to outward pleasures and pains, the cohort of usurping demons that are the cause of the soul's errors and sufferings.<sup>3</sup>

The symbolism of the Veda depends upon the image of the life of man as a sacrifice, a journey and a battle. The ancient Mystics took for their theme the spiritual life of man, but, in order both to make it concrete to themselves and to veil its secrets from the unfit, they expressed it in poetical images drawn from the outward life of their age. . . . All the principal features of that outward life which they saw around them the mystic poets took and turned into significant images of the inner life. The life of man is represented as a sacrifice to the gods, a journey sometimes figured as a crossing of dangerous waters, sometimes as an ascent from level to level of the hill of being, and, thirdly, as a battle against hostile nations. But these three images are not kept separate. The sacrifice is also a journey; indeed the sacrifice itself is described as travelling, as

3. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

journeying to a divine goal; and the journey and the sacrifice are both continually spoken of as a battle against the dark powers.<sup>4</sup>

### A Few Esoteric and Symbolic Elements in the Vedas

‘*Ghr̥ta*’, an important element in yajña means ghee or clarified butter, but it could also mean light from the root ‘*ghr̥*’ which means to shine.

The *ghr̥ta* of the sacrifice is the yield of the shining Cow; it is the clarity or brightness of the solar light in the human mentality.<sup>5</sup>

If the Cow of which the *ghr̥ta* is the yield is not a physical cow but the shining Mother, then the *ghr̥ta* itself . . . is no physical offering, . . .<sup>6</sup>

The fire is an important part of yajña. In the Vedas the fire was called by many names which represented the human aspiration or the psychic being.

The Vedic deity Agni is the first of the Powers, the pristine and pre-eminent, that have issued from the vast and secret Godhead. . . . This divine Conscious Force contains all the other godheads in itself as the nave of a wheel contains its spokes. All puissance of action, strength in the being, beauty of form, splendour of light and knowledge, glory and greatness are the manifestation of Agni.<sup>7</sup>

. . . in the Vedic cosmos Agni appears first as a front of divine Force compact of burning heat and light which forms, assails, enters into, envelops, devours, rebuilds all things in Matter. He is no random fire; his is a flame of force instinct with the light of divine knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

The Will gives to the giver of sacrifice the Son born of his works who teems with the many inspirations and the many voices of the soul, the highest, the unassailable, the Master of things who opens our ears to the knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

The Son of the sacrifice is a constant image in the Veda. Here it is the godhead himself, Agni who gives himself as a son to man, a Son who delivers his

4. *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 175.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 412-13.

father. Agni is also the War-Horse and the steed of the journey, the White Horse, the mystic galloping Dadhikravan who carries us through the battle to the goal of our voyaging.<sup>10</sup>

A psychic fire within must be lit into which all is thrown with the Divine Name upon it.<sup>11</sup>

The sacrifice is the giving by man of what he possesses in his being to the higher or divine nature and its fruit is the farther enrichment of his manhood by the lavish bounty of the gods. The wealth thus gained constitutes a state of spiritual riches, prosperity, felicity which is itself a power for the journey and a force of battle. For the sacrifice is a journey, a progression; the sacrifice itself travels led by Agni up the divine path to the gods and of this journey the ascent of the Angirasa fathers to the divine world of Swar is the type. Their journey of the sacrifice is also a battle, for it is opposed by Panis, Vritras and other powers of evil and falsehood, and of this warfare the conflict of Indra and the Angirasas with the Panis is a principal episode.<sup>12</sup>

*(To be concluded)*

PRANJAL GARG

10. *Ibid.*

11. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 155.

12. *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 234.

*The vital mind is part of the vital. If mind (mental mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscious mind) does not respond to outer things, depression is impossible. The self at one end, the stone at the other never get into depression and between them the true mind, true vital, true physical consciousness never get depression because they do not give responses to things that create depression.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1350)*

## THE LUMINOUS PAST

(Continued from the issue of March 2012)

ONE day Bharati-di said, “In the next class we will discuss something about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. What do you say to that?”

I said, “All right, Bharati-di.”

After having said this I started thinking that I had made a mistake by agreeing to Bharati-di’s suggestion of talking about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and that I should have kept quiet. I was acutely aware of my own limitations. I was deeply worried about what I could do in the next class. I found the answer by remembering a short message from the Mother: Silence is golden. But in trying to give an answer to Bharati-di’s question I could not remain silent.

The next day, in the class, Bharati-di wanted to know if I had had the privilege to do *pranam* to Sri Aurobindo and to hear his voice. In answer I said, “The *pranams* were stopped in 1938 and I came in 1941. I did not have the good fortune to do *pranam* to him.”

“Did you see him from very close on *darshan* days?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Did he look at all of you?”

“Yes, he cast on us his brilliant gaze.”

“How did you feel at the time?”

“It was all very natural. It was as if I had known him from many lives, as if he was someone very close to me.”

“How? It must not have been a simple matter to stand before his dazzling look.”

“That, Bharati-di, you have to understand by yourself. I cannot speak very much about him. He revealed himself to us. He created such an atmosphere that we saw him in many different glorious aspects. We saw him as a companion of the soul, a friend of the world, liberator, creator, the epitome of the highest aristocracy.

“How did you, in such a short time, get an impression of aristocracy?”

“I got an inkling of his aristocracy from an incident. On one *darshan* day a Marathi lady was exactly in front of me. She must have been above 50 years of age. She was tall and beautiful and was wearing a dark green sari in the traditional Maharashtrian style. The *darshan* queue was moving. Suddenly the Marathi lady stopped. When the people who were in front of her had finished their *darshan*, she suddenly prostrated herself on the ground in a *sastang pranam*. Umirchand-da was the attendant. It was the Mother’s birthday. The Mother was sitting as a silent witness. Sri Aurobindo was doing everything. The Mother was in a state of meditation, smiling only from time to time from behind the border of her sari which covered her head.

The lady who was lying on the floor, her face touching the ground, was completely at rest. Sri Aurobindo lifted his right hand from the arm-rest and put it on his lap. He kept looking in front of him, his eyes full of light, in a blissful manner. Then he placed his right hand on his knee. Umirchand-da slowly stretched out his arms towards the lady who was on the floor, as if to help her to sit. Sri Aurobindo moved only two fingers of his hand and indicated that the lady on the floor was not to be touched.

“He was not even looking at Umirchand-da. He was only looking very intently at the Marathi lady. Umirchand-da was deeply embarrassed and he stood before Sri Aurobindo and looked at him with folded hands, offering his *pranam*. He was in a dilemma. The lady stood up very slowly. Sri Aurobindo was now looking at us. Then the lady went up to the offering box. She was trying to stand steadily. This time Sri Aurobindo raised all five fingers to indicate to her that it was perhaps time to leave. I offered flowers, then joining my palms did *pranam* and went to the staircase but I could not see that lady anywhere. Later I heard that she went straight back to her native place. Was she afraid because she had broken the rules?”

Bharati-di was so happy that she held me in a tight hug and asked me to tell her everything, without holding anything back. She was under the impression that I knew a lot about Sri Aurobindo. But actually I had neither the perseverance nor the education to know a great deal.

However, I had been fortunate enough to hear for a short moment Sri Aurobindo’s voice. I can’t remember the year or the date. One evening, as I was going to Nolini-da, I stood suddenly transfixed at the entrance of the Meditation Hall. On the first floor, the window of the southern verandah was open. I kept looking up again and again. Someone was speaking in a loud voice just there. Amrita-da, who was sitting in his room, noticed me. He came out and told me, “Sri Aurobindo is there now, just above our heads.”

I said, “In spite of his being there someone is speaking so loudly. Won’t it disturb his work?”

At that Amrita-da said, “What you are hearing is his own voice. At this moment he is on this side. The roof of his room is being repaired.”

I asked, “Was there enough space to put all his things in that small room?”

Amrita-da replied, “Even if he has nothing it does not bother him. However this time I noticed that there was an exception. He was calling the Mother because a picture of the Buddha had not been brought. He said, ‘Where is my picture of the Buddha?’ The Mother rushed to get the picture and put it up in his room.”

When she heard about the picture of the Buddha Bharati-di was delighted. This was the only time I had had the opportunity of hearing Sri Aurobindo’s voice and it has been a source of great joy in my life.

*(To be continued)*

PRAMILA DEVI

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



## THE KRISHNA WORLD

(Continued from the issue of March 2012)

### 8. Leading the Snake a Dance

SOME scenes in one's life get just stuck in the memory and we learn to live with them, trying to brush aside the questions that encircle them in terms of a rational discourse. Long ago, may be forty years have passed since then, Homi Wadia directed a very interesting film called *Sri Krishna Leela*. I guess he laid at rest my questioning mind even then, for I could never be reconciled to seeing Krishna as a Giacomo Casanova of the Indian clime. For Homi Wadia, Krishna was just twelve years old when he left Gokula for Dwaraka. The Brindavan days with the cowherdesses is the *joie de vivre* exhibited by a set of riotous but loveable young fellows who divert the minds of the cowherdesses engaged in the heavy domesticity of dealing with cowpens, churning and selling curds and of course, managing their (often) churlish husbands. Radha is one such cowherdess. She does not have children and her love for the sprightly Krishna was no doubt maternal. Even though Radha is not mentioned in the *Bhagavata*, there are autumnal revels in which the cowherdesses also take part. But there is nothing to suggest that Krishna is an adult in these games of hide-and-seek, anxious search for a vanished Krishna and of course the flute player charming everybody including nature. Who can overcome the magic strains of Krishna's flute, *murali kā jādu*?

In my search for the Krishna of Brindavan in the popular mythology churned out by our celluloid Brahmas, *Krishna Bhakta Sudama* (Sudama, the Devotee of Krishna, 1968) assured me that Krishna who went away from Gokula to Dwaraka was a young boy no more. It is in Dwaraka that we meet Biswajeet as Krishna and it is all in place to watch him with his eight wives in perfect domestic harmony emotionally welcoming his childhood friend. Many years had passed between the studies at Sandeepani Ashram and Dwaraka and both had become householders with plenty of children. If we get this point about Krishna's age implanted in our mind much of our difficulties in approaching Krishna vanish. The love that the cowherdesses had for Krishna shows nothing amorous about it but simply the ananda of watching a talented youngster bringing calm and Ananda to housewives lost in the humdrum activities of everyday life. Or girls who are, by nature, tuned to the Divine and have no interest in the monotonous repetitions of domesticity. This ananda is pure, unadulterated by the call of the flesh, a joy that hovers on the spiritual, basing itself on an intensely human figure of blue complexion, with a peacock feather stuck in his crown, while holding the immortal flute. Swami

Vivekananda has touched upon the subject with his inimitable directness:

Ah, the most marvellous passage of his life, the most difficult to understand, which none ought to attempt to understand until he has become perfectly chaste and pure — that most marvellous expansion of love, allegorised and expressed in that beautiful play at Brindavan, which none can comprehend but he who has become mad with, and drunk deep of the cup of love! Who can conceive the throes of the love of the Gopis . . . the very ideal of love, love that wants nothing, love that even does not care for heaven . . . the love of the Gopis, too holy to be attempted without giving up everything, too sacred to be conceived until the soul has become perfectly pure. People with ideas of sex, and of money, and of fame, bubbling up every minute in their hearts, daring to criticise or interpret the love of the Gopis!<sup>1</sup>

This is why I curl up into my own silences when I see dance performances which scream aloud about the ‘passionate’ verses of the Tamil poetess Andal (8<sup>th</sup> century) and how they spill out with unbearable ‘eroticism’. Colourful costumes and electrical lighting and gestures of hands flung akimbo with the head thrown back and eyes shut bring down the entire atmosphere of the sublime devotion of the gopis and Andal (who considered herself a cowherdess of Brindavan) raise the obnoxious fumes of third-rate movie stills. As far as I am concerned, Swami Vivekananda has said the last word. If this were not the interpretation, the Ras Lila would not have endured all these millennia.

One thing is clear. There is a strong linkage between the snake world and Krishna the little boy. The gopis, their hearts pure and poetic, adored the boy who could perform miraculous acts and could dance on a snake’s hood with as much ease as dancing on upturned pots. Living in the Srirangam temple complex which is spread over 160 acres, I am constantly reminded of this association and wonder about it. Everywhere the sculptures stare at me. Krishna is very often seen in the company of snakes, dancing at the meeting point of heads of two snakes as a helix or dancing on the head of a snake while holding its tail by one hand. After all, such worship of serpents takes us to our tribal past. One cannot escape the vague feeling that in Ranganatha temple researchers can find very rich clues to the cultural history of Tamil Nadu. For, it is a common sight to see sculpted Naga stones in village temples or beneath banyan trees in villages.

The association of the Yadava hero with the snake world has been found even in the early work, *Harivamsam*, chronologically close to the *Mahabharata* and thus lost in the folds of time beyond history. The work makes it quite clear that Krishna was a little boy when he danced on the Kaliya snake. A lovely description of the

1. Quoted in K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Krishna Geetam* (1994), p. xxv.

Yamuna river marks the episode. Krishna and other cowherd boys play on its banks, sounding flutes and lutes made of leaves. It is good to read this description of the Yamuna waters for those of us who have seen the sad spectacle of Yamuna today near Delhi: *sutīrtham svādhusalilām hṛdinīm vega gāminīm . . .* Birds everywhere, rich with fish, lotuses blooming all over the place. The river itself is visualised as a beautiful young girl.

One day Krishna and his friends had been grazing cattle nearby. Watching the flowing waters of Yamuna for a while, Krishna suddenly noted a terrifying water-hole, very vast and intimidating. Obviously it was difficult even for gods to cross it. Amidst all the loveliness of Yamuna, this was an ugly spot. The waters here were as quiet as a stilled sea and dark as a cloudy sky. The epic poet says that even fish and other living things of the waters avoided the water-hole. One could see in that depth caves with snakes in them. In fact the water-hole was bubbling with heat because of the poisonous breath of the serpents. This was no place for the cows to come and have a drink. Even birds could not fly above it, such was the heat generated below. Even the trees on the banks close to it had been burnt up.

Krishna wondered about the terrible being that had made the water-hole its residence. Then the boy remembered that in earlier times the Snake King Kaliya had left the seas and come here to escape the onslaught of Garuda. For his survival he had turned the entire area into a desert! Krishna decided to clear the river of this poisonous pest.

Just as in child's play (*śiśulilāṭayā*), I shall jump down from the Kadamba tree into the terrible water hole and destroy the serpent Kaliya. By doing this, my strength will become world-famous.

Krishna jumped into the cavernous hole and was lost to sight. The cowherd boys were aghast and they ran to the settlement. The entire clan came running but Krishna was not to be seen as he had been dragged deep into the hole by Kaliya. As in such cases, it is the mother who gets pitied most. All the ladies surrounded Yashoda and began to wail. They told themselves that they would not return to their homes without Krishna. This is a natural reaction of the maternal heart. The gopis were as shocked and sorrowful as Yashoda and they assured her they would not return home without Krishna. These were the very same gopis who had complained to her that Krishna was a terrible boy. How can they go now to Vraja where there is no Krishna?

What is the use of daytime without the sun? Night without the moon? Cows without bulls? Vraja without Krishna would be like cows without their calves!

Balarama now shouted towards the chasm where Krishna was in the grip of Kaliya. "It is time you killed the serpent-king. Our people think you are a human

being like them and are weeping.”

Krishna now decided enough was enough, pushed Kaliya away and held the snake’s head in his vice-like grip. He jumped upon the hood of Kaliya and began dancing! I have never questioned this image of Krishna leading the snake a dance with the pinprick-thrusts of rationalism. It appears such a natural phenomenon; it has been so for thousands of years! In fact, Krishna dancing on the hood of a snake is a familiar figure in temple *sancta*. Millions have believed in the occurrence and this *Harivamsam* image is the earliest report of the episode. I have been fascinated by it, especially because it is a favourite with dancers to show their expertise with rhythmic permutations.

There seems to be even a touch of medical science about this dance of Krishna. The *Harivamsam* says that with this dance Kaliya’s hood became cool and the heat of the fever that had been with it all this time was gone. What was this heat of fever which vanished with the striking of Krishna’s feet leaving behind a peaceful snake, *sānthamūrdhā bhujangamaḥ*? What kind of curative touch does the Divine bring to people suffering from the pain of earthly living? In Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, we have the line:

To heal with her feet the aching throb of life . . .<sup>2</sup>

To be seized by the Divine: that is the condition of Kaliya now. Seized and mastered. On Krishna’s command, Kaliya went away with his entourage to the vaster spaces of the sea, since he had been assured of protection by Krishna. No more need he fear Garuda. Why will Garuda not attack Kaliya? The poet has Krishna give the explanation. “When Garuda sees the imprint of my feet on your hood, he will leave you alone.” Kaliya then went away and Krishna came to the bank. All the assembled people congratulated the father Nanda for being blest with such a son. Henceforth for all the cowherds, cows and the settlement, Krishna alone is the refuge, *āpatsu śaraṇam kṛṣṇaḥ!*

The incident of Krishna’s dancing on the Kaliya snake recurs in almost all retellings of Krishna’s boyhood, including Sri Vishnu Purana and the *Bhagavata*. Though an impossibility to the Eye of Reason, it has obviously been a major image for the Eye of Faith. The Venugopalaswami temple in the Srirangam complex is a marvel of the sculptor’s art and reminds one of the embroidery on stone created by the Hoysala dynasty in Karnataka. The Lord dancing on a snake in the sanctum of this temple is a great attraction for the pilgrim. The structure has an important place in historical records. The east-facing shrine is flanked by the Ul-Andal sannidhi and the shrine of Amritakalasa Garuda. The entire area was a garden earlier, known as Ramar Thoppu, as there was an ancient temple of Rama here. Tradition speaks of

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

Sri Rama Bhattar who had come to Srirangam with the Hoysala King Narasimha II as having built the temple in 1617. Records refer to the presiding deity as Kuzhal Oothia Pillai (One Who Played the Flute). The outer walls of the temple have sculptures that remind one of Ajanta and Ellora (ex: Virgin looking at herself in the mirror, Lady who plays the lute) which has pushed back the age of the temple even to the 13<sup>th</sup> century by some scholars. However, V. N. Hari Rao has refuted the association of the temple with Hoysala influence. He says the erroneous impression has been due to a misreading by the Government Epigraphist of the inscription of Narasimha II:

. . . the epigraphist was not right as a study of the architecture and sculpture of this shrine does not show any Hoysala feature or influence, neither is there any striking resemblance with those of the Hoysaleswara temple at Kannanur which is known to have been built by Somesvara. It is a true representation of the orthodox South Indian style of temple architecture and perhaps belongs to the late Vijayanagar period.<sup>3</sup>

However, K. R. Srinivasan does not rule out the Hoysala inspiration from the Tiru-k-kulal-udina Pillai temple at Halebeid but feels that a Vijayanagar renovation of an extant Hoysala structure has given us the present “superbly built” shrine:

It is a temple unit by itself, facing east with a *dvitala vimana* that has an *aditala* built of fine grained white granite surmounted by a brickwork superstructure, *ardha-*, *maha-* and *agra-mandapas* preceding the *vimana*, in the order. The *upa-pitha* and *adhithana*, are of finely carved mouldings adorned by miniature shrine motifs or aedicules, at intervals, as in the Darasuram Mandapam. The central *bhadra* reliefs on the walls of the *vimana* and the *mandapas* have *deva-koshtas* crowned by *sala-sikharas*, the niches containing lithesome sculptures of divine-looking damsels in various poses of suffused grace and beauty. The recessed wall spaces carry fully formed *kumbha panjara* motifs, in the *vimana* part, while in similar situations on the *mandapas* there are elaborately carved *vritta sphathitas*, the so-called ‘decorative pilasters’, that is pilasters carrying on top a *panjara* crest, but devoid of the basal *kumbha* or *purna ghata*. The *pushpa potikas* are of the characteristic Vijayanagar type. These and the advanced architectural features as also the style of the extant paintings on the ceiling of the *agra-mandapa* or porch would only indicate a late Vijayanagar date (bordering on the Nayaka times that succeeded). It may perhaps be a Vijayanagar renovation of an earlier foundation during the Hoysala

3. *History of the Srirangam Temple*, p. 74.

interregnum and not a standing Hoysala example as some scholars aver in the wake of the suggestion of the epigraphist.<sup>4</sup>

Between the lofty head-shaking by the Master of Reason and the eternal uncertainties of the historian, we do flounder for a little while. But then the Anandamaya Lord playing the flute takes over, creating newer and more complicated rhythms to dance on the hood of Kaliya. I move around the Mandapam at the front of the temple that has forty-eight stone pillars, each of them six metres in height and all of them carved with gods and goddesses. Krishna is seen in several of the pillars as dancing on the snake, chiming in with the figure in the sanctum. The questions vanish as I mingle with the pilgrims speaking so many languages and expressing wonderment at this sculpted jewel. One of them is happy that the temple is in South India. I ask why in Hindi because he is obviously from North India. "Don't you like it?" He smiles that I am able to communicate with him in his mother tongue.

I like it and already love it. But if this had been built in North India five hundred years ago, it would have been destroyed by Aurangzeb as he did our grand Dera Keshav Rai at Mathura. He destroyed thousands of temples and so did other Muslim rulers. How did they have the heart to break such beautiful creations of a sculptor's imagination and bhakti?

His hand, roughened by decades of working in the fields, is stroking the smooth hood of a snake in one of the pillars. Touching the tiny feet carved on the hood, he takes his hands to his eyes. There is no anger on his face but an infinite sadness mingled with inerasable bhakti. For how can one be angry in the presence of Krishna? He is a great one to smooth down our creases, straighten our bent brows and cool our hot sighs in remembering the past, fiery as the poisonous fumes of Kaliya.

For, when the snake of power in us rises by tapasya, as the Kundalini does, and moves past one knot after another, it has to be controlled too. Smashing an atom and releasing its power is not as difficult as controlling the smashed atom from emitting its radioactive Death. We have to hold on to Krishna if we wish to control ourselves and reach out to a constructive transformation. Yes, keep his feet pressing upon our crown. Then poison is transformed into love, power is transformed to glory.

Is it all mere rhetoric born of going around temples where Krishna dances on the snake, plays the flute or smiles inscrutably, flanked by Rukmini and Satyabhama? I turn helplessly to Sri Aurobindo. Ever helpful, he says:

4. *Temples of South India* (1991 reprint), pp. 186-87.

. . . it is not possible for the tongue of human speech to tell all the utter unity and all the eternal variety of the ananda of divine love. Our higher and our lower members are both flooded with it, the mind and life no less than the soul: even the physical body takes its share of the joy, feels the touch, is filled in all its limbs, veins, nerves with the flowing of the wine of ecstasy, *amṛta*. Love and Ananda are the last word of being, the secret of secrets, the mystery of mysteries.<sup>5</sup>

Now I understand why the pilgrim from North India stroked the sculpture with his gnarled hands, why his face was full of maternal love. The turbaned rustic from Uttar Pradesh was experiencing a flow of the wine of ecstasy. I grow silent.

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

5. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 605.

*The psychic being emerges slowly in most men, even after taking up sadhana. There is so much in the mind and vital that has to change and readjust itself before the psychic can be entirely free. One has to wait till the necessary process has gone far enough before it can burst its agelong veil and come in front to control the nature. It is true that nothing can give so much inner happiness and joy — though peace can come by the mental and vital liberation or through the growth of a strong samatâ in the being.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1098)*