

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JULY 2012

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$35 or Rs. 1,400.00

For 10 years: \$350 or Rs. 14,000.00

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70 or Rs. 2,800.00

For 10 years: \$700 or Rs. 28,000.00

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. For outstation cheques kindly add Rs. 15 for annual membership and Rs. 50 for 10-year subscription.

Subscribers are requested to mention their subscription number in case of any enquiry. The correspondents should give their full address in BLOCK letters, with pin code.



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.



All Rights Reserved. No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R.N. 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXV

No. 7

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

ALL HERE IS SPIRIT (Poem)	...	489
TRUE LIVING — THE COMMENCEMENT AND THE CULMINATION	...	490

The Mother

‘... TO RUN BRISKLY TOWARDS THE ONLY GOAL WORTH ATTAINING: THE TRIUMPH OF THY DIVINE LAW!’	...	492
ON DREAMS	...	493
A TALK OF 1 FEBRUARY 1951	...	499

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

TIME	...	504
------	-----	-----

Manoj Das

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI CHAPTER XIV: “A WHITE HEAT OF INSPIRATION”	...	506
---	-----	-----

A. S. Dalal

SRI AUROBINDO ON CONSCIOUSNESS, WILL AND MOTIVATION	...	512
---	-----	-----

S. G. Neginhal

VISITS RELIVED	...	524
----------------	-----	-----

Abinash Bhattacharya

SRI AUROBINDO	...	528
---------------	-----	-----

Nirodbaran, Arabinda Basu, K. D. Sethna, Madhav Pandit, Jhumur

A MANIFOLD ACHIEVEMENT	...	540
------------------------	-----	-----

Pramila Devi

THE LUMINOUS PAST	...	546
-------------------	-----	-----

Alok Pandey

BOOK REVIEW: <i>LIFE IN SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM</i>	...	549
--	-----	-----

Prema Nandakumar

THE KRISHNA WORLD 11. AT HOME AT ALL TIMES	...	559
---	-----	-----

ALL HERE IS SPIRIT

All here is Spirit self-moved eternally
For Matter is its seeming or its form,
A finite motion of Infinity
Built up by energy's electric storm,

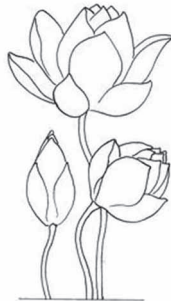
A flux of solid instability
Whirled into shape by a tremendous Force
That labours out the world's fabric endlessly,
Creates and then destroys without remorse

Titan and worm, the dew-drop and the sea,
Our fragile bodies like the aeoned star,
But through it all remains immortally
The secret spirit we for ever are.

Matter is Spirit's semblance glamorous
Self-woven for its own field and robe and house.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 597)



TRUE LIVING — THE COMMENCEMENT AND THE CULMINATION

WHEN we withdraw our gaze from its egoistic preoccupation with limited and fleeting interests and look upon the world with dispassionate and curious eyes that search only for the Truth, our first result is the perception of a boundless energy of infinite existence, infinite movement, infinite activity pouring itself out in limitless Space, in eternal Time, an existence that surpasses infinitely our ego or any ego or any collectivity of egos, in whose balance the grandiose products of aeons are but the dust of a moment and in whose incalculable sum numberless myriads count only as a petty swarm. We instinctively act and feel and weave our life thoughts as if this stupendous world movement were at work around us as centre and for our benefit, for our help or harm, or as if the justification of our egoistic cravings, emotions, ideas, standards were its proper business even as they are our own chief concern. When we begin to see, we perceive that it exists for itself, not for us, has its own gigantic aims, its own complex and boundless idea, its own vast desire or delight that it seeks to fulfil, its own immense and formidable standards which look down as if with an indulgent and ironic smile at the pettiness of ours. And yet let us not swing over to the other extreme and form too positive an idea of our own insignificance. That too would be an act of ignorance and the shutting of our eyes to the great facts of the universe.

For this boundless Movement does not regard us as unimportant to it. Science reveals to us how minute is the care, how cunning the device, how intense the absorption it bestows upon the smallest of its works even as on the largest. This mighty energy is an equal and impartial mother, *samam brahma*, in the great term of the Gita, and its intensity and force of movement is the same in the formation and upholding of a system of suns and the organisation of the life of an ant-hill. It is the illusion of size, of quantity that induces us to look on the one as great, the other as petty. If we look, on the contrary, not at mass of quantity but force of quality, we shall say that the ant is greater than the solar system it inhabits and man greater than all inanimate Nature put together. But this again is the illusion of quality. When we go behind and examine only the intensity of the movement of which quality and quantity are aspects, we realise that this Brahman dwells equally in all existences. Equally partaken of by all in its being, we are tempted to say, equally distributed to all in its energy. But this too is an illusion of quantity. Brahman dwells in all, indivisible, yet as if divided and distributed. If we look again with an observing perception not dominated by intellectual concepts, but informed by intuition and culminating in knowledge by identity, we shall see that the consciousness of this infinite Energy is other than our mental consciousness, that it is indivisible and

gives, not an equal part of itself, but its whole self at one and the same time to the solar system and to the ant-hill. To Brahman there are no whole and parts, but each thing is all itself and benefits by the whole of Brahman. Quality and quantity differ, the self is equal. The form and manner and result of the force of action vary infinitely, but the eternal, primal, infinite energy is the same in all. The force of strength that goes to make the strong man is no whit greater than the force of weakness that goes to make the weak. The energy spent is as great in repression as in expression, in negation as in affirmation, in silence as in sound.

Therefore the first reckoning we have to mend is that between this infinite Movement, this energy of existence which is the world and ourselves. At present we keep a false account. We are infinitely important to the All, but to us the All is negligible; we alone are important to ourselves. This is the sign of the original ignorance which is the root of the ego, that it can only think with itself as centre as if it were the All, and of that which is not itself accepts only so much as it is mentally disposed to acknowledge or as it is forced to recognise by the shocks of its environment. Even when it begins to philosophise, does it not assert that the world only exists in and by its consciousness? Its own state of consciousness or mental standards are to it the test of reality; all outside its orbit or view tends to become false or non-existent. This mental self-sufficiency of man creates a system of false accountantship which prevents us from drawing the right and full value from life. There is a sense in which these pretensions of the human mind and ego repose on a truth, but this truth only emerges when the mind has learned its ignorance and the ego has submitted to the All and lost in it its separate self-assertion. To recognise that we, or rather the results and appearances we call ourselves, are only a partial movement of this infinite Movement and that it is that infinite which we have to know, to be consciously and to fulfil faithfully, is the commencement of true living. To recognise that in our true selves we are one with the total movement and not minor or subordinate is the other side of the account, and its expression in the manner of our being, thought, emotion and action is necessary to the culmination of a true or divine living.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 78-80)

**‘. . . TO RUN BRISKLY TOWARDS
THE ONLY GOAL WORTH ATTAINING:
THE TRIUMPH OF THY DIVINE LAW!’**

March 21, 1914

EVERY morning my aspiration rises ardently to Thee, and in the silence of my satisfied heart I ask that Thy law of Love may be expressed, that Thy will may manifest. And in anticipation I adhere with joy and serenity to those circumstances which will express this law and this will.

Oh, why be restless and want that for oneself things should turn out in one way and not another! Why decide that a particular set of circumstances will be the expression of the best possibilities and then launch into a bitter struggle so that these possibilities may be realised! Why not use all one's energy solely to will in the calm of inner confidence that Thy law may triumph everywhere and always over all difficulties, all darkness, all egoism! How the horizon widens as soon as one learns to take this attitude; how all anxiety vanishes giving place to a constant illumination, to the omnipotence of disinterestedness! To will what Thou willest, O Lord, is to live constantly in communion with Thee, to be delivered from all contingencies, to escape all narrowness, to fill one's lungs with pure and wholesome air, to get rid of all useless weariness, be relieved of all cumbrous loads, so as to run briskly towards the only goal worth attaining: the triumph of Thy divine Law!

O Lord, with what joy and trust I greet Thee this morning! . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 105)

ON DREAMS

At first sight one might think that the subject of dreams is an altogether secondary one; this activity generally seems to have very little importance compared to the activity of our waking state.

However, if we examine the question a little more closely, we shall see that this is not at all the case.

To begin with, we should remember that more than one third of our existence is spent in sleeping and that, consequently, the time devoted to physical sleep well deserves our attention.

I say physical sleep, for it would be wrong to think that our whole being sleeps when our bodies are asleep.

A study based on certain experiments conducted according to the strictest scientific methods, was published some twenty years ago by Dr. Vaschide* in a book entitled "Sleep and Dreams".

The doctors who carried out these experiments were led to the conclusion that mental activity never really ceases; and it is this activity which is more or less confusedly transcribed in our brains by what we know as dreams. Thus, whether we are aware of it or not, we always dream.

Certainly, it is possible to suppress this activity completely and to have a total, dreamless sleep; but to be able in this way to immerse our mental being in a repose similar to the repose of our physical being, we must have achieved a perfect control over it, and this is not an easy thing to do.

In most cases, this activity is even heightened, because, as the body is asleep, the internal faculties are no longer focussed on or used by the physical life.

It is sometimes said that in a man's sleep his true nature is revealed.

Indeed, it often happens that the sensory being, which throughout the whole day has been subjected to the control of the active will, reacts all the more violently during the night when this constraint is no longer effective.

All the desires that have been repressed without being dissolved — and this dissociation can only be obtained after much sound and wide-ranging analysis — seek satisfaction while the will is dormant.

And since desires are true dynamic centres of formation, they tend to organise, within and around us, the combination of circumstances that is most favourable to their satisfaction.

In this way the fruit of many efforts made by our conscious thought during the day can be destroyed in a few hours at night.

* *Le sommeil et les rêves* by Nicolae Vaschide (1874-1907).

This is one of the main causes of the resistances which our will for progress often encounters within us, of the difficulties which sometimes appear insurmountable to us and which we are unable to explain, because our goodwill seems so integral to us.

We must therefore learn to know our dreams, and first of all to distinguish between them, for they are very varied in nature and quality. In the course of one night we may often have several dreams which belong to different categories, depending on the depth of our sleep.

As a general rule, each individual has a period of the night that is more favourable for dreams, during which his activity is more fertile, more intellectual, and the mental circumstances of the environment in which he moves are more interesting.

The great majority of dreams have no other value than that of a purely mechanical and uncontrolled activity of the physical brain, in which certain cells continue to function during sleep as generators of sensory images and impressions conforming to the pictures received from outside.

These dreams are nearly always caused by purely physical circumstances — state of health, digestion, position in bed, etc.

With a little self-observation and a few precautions, it is easy to avoid this type of dream, which is as useless as it is tiring, by eliminating its physical causes.

There are also other dreams which are nothing but futile manifestations of the erratic activities of certain mental faculties, which associate ideas, conversations and memories that come together at random.

Such dreams are already more significant, for these erratic activities reveal to us the confusion that prevails in our mental being as soon as it is no longer subject to the control of our will, and show us that this being is still not organised or ordered within us, that it is not mature enough to have an autonomous life.

Almost the same in form to these, but more important in their consequences, are the dreams which I mentioned just now, those which arise from the inner being seeking revenge when it is freed for a moment from the constraint that we impose upon it. These dreams often enable us to perceive tendencies, inclinations, impulses, desires of which we were not conscious so long as our will to realise our ideal kept them concealed in some obscure recess of our being.

You will easily understand that rather than letting them live on unknown to us, it is better to bring them boldly and courageously to the light, so as to force them to leave us for ever.

We should therefore observe our dreams attentively; they are often useful instructors who can give us a powerful help on our way towards self-conquest.

No one knows himself well who does not know the unconfined activities of his nights, and no man can call himself his own master unless he has the perfect consciousness and mastery of the numerous actions he performs during his physical sleep.

But dreams are not merely the malignant informers of our weaknesses or the malicious destroyers of our daily effort for progress.

Although there are dreams which we should contend with or transform, there are others which should on the contrary be cultivated as precious auxiliaries in our work within and around us.

There can be no doubt that from many points of view our subconscious knows more than our habitual consciousness.

Who has not had the experience of a metaphysical, moral or practical problem with which we grapple in vain in the evening, and whose solution, impossible to find then, appears clearly and accurately in the morning on waking?

The mental enquiry had been going on throughout the period of sleep and the internal faculties, freed from all material activity, were able to concentrate solely on the subject of their interest.

Very often, the work itself remains unconscious; only the result is perceived.

But at other times, by means of a dream, we participate in all the mental activity in its smallest details. Only the cerebral transcription of this activity is often so childish that we normally pay no attention to it.

From this point of view, it is interesting to note that there is nearly always a considerable disparity between what our mental activity is in fact and the way in which we perceive it, and especially the way in which we remain conscious of it. In its own medium, this activity produces vibrations which are transmitted by repercussion to the cellular system of our organic brain, but in our sleeping brain, the subtle vibrations of the suprasensible domain can affect only a very limited number of cells; the inertia of most of the organic supports of the cerebral phenomenon reduces the number of active elements, impoverishes the mental synthesis and makes it unfit to transcribe the activity of the internal states, except into images which are most often vague and inadequate.

To make this disparity more tangible to you, I shall give you an example, one among many, which has come to my knowledge.

Recently, a writer was preoccupied with a half-written chapter which he was unable to finish. His mind, particularly interested in this work of composition, continued the chapter during the night, and the more it phrased and rephrased the ideas making up the various paragraphs, it became aware that these ideas were not expressed in the most rational order and that the paragraphs had to be rearranged.

All this work was transcribed in the consciousness of our writer in the following dream: he was in his study with several armchairs which he had just brought there and was arranging and rearranging them in the room, until he found the most suitable place for each one.

In the knowledge that certain people may have had of such inadequate transcriptions, we can find the origin of the popular beliefs, the "dream-books" which are the delight of so many simple souls.

But it is easy to understand that this clumsy transcription has a particular form for each individual; each one makes his own distortion.

Consequently, an excessive generalisation of certain interpretations which may have been quite correct for the person applying them to his own case, merely gives rise to vulgar and foolish superstitions.

It is as if the writer we have just mentioned were to impart as a great secret to his friends and acquaintances that every time they saw themselves arranging armchairs in a dream, it was a sign that the next day they would at some moment reverse the order of the paragraphs in a book.

The cerebral transcription of the activities of the night is sometimes warped to such an extent that phenomena are perceived as the opposite of what they really are.

For example, when you have a bad thought against someone and when this bad thought, left to itself, gathers full force during the night, you dream that the person in question is beating you, is doing you some bad turn, or even wounding you or trying to kill you.

Moreover, as a general rule, we should take great intellectual precautions before interpreting a dream, and above all, we should review exhaustively all the subjective explanations before we assign to it the value of an objective reality.

However, especially in those who have unlearned the habit of always directing their thoughts towards themselves, there are cases where we can observe events outside ourselves, events which are not the reflection of our personal mental constructions. And if we know how to translate into intellectual language the more or less inadequate images into which the brain has translated these events, we can learn many things that our too limited physical faculties do not allow us to perceive.

Some people, by a special culture and training, are even able to become and remain conscious of the deeper activities of their inner being, independently of their own cerebral transcription, and thus to evoke them and know them in the waking state with the full range of their faculties.

Many interesting observations could be made on this topic, but perhaps it is better to allow each one to experience for himself the many possibilities which lie within man's reach in a field of activity which he too often leaves undeveloped.

Uncultivated lands produce weeds. We do not want any weeds in ourselves, so let us cultivate the vast field of our nights.

You must not think that this can be in the least harmful to the depth of your sleep and the efficacy of a repose which is not only indispensable but beneficial. On the contrary, there are many people whose nights are more tiring than their days, for reasons which often elude them; they should become conscious of these reasons so that their will can begin to act on them and remove their effects, that is, to put a stop to these activities which in such cases are nearly always useless and even harmful.

If our night has enabled us to gain some new knowledge — the solution of a

problem, a contact of our inner being with some centre of life or light, or even the accomplishment of some useful task — we shall always wake up with a feeling of strength and well-being.

The hours that are wasted in doing nothing good or useful are the most tiring.

But how can we cultivate this field of action, how can we become conscious of our nocturnal activities?

We shall find the way to do so very broadly outlined in a passage from a book devoted to the study of our inner life:

“The same discipline of concentration which enables man not to remain a stranger to the inner activities of the waking state also provides him with a way to escape from his ignorance of the even richer activities of the various states of sleep.

“These activities usually leave behind them only a few rare and confused memories.

“However, it is noteworthy that a chance circumstance, an impression received, a word pronounced, is sometimes enough to bring suddenly back to the consciousness a whole long dream of which we had no recollection a moment before.

“We can infer from this simple fact that the conscious activity has taken only a very minor part in the phenomena of the sleeping state, since in the normal state of things they would have remained lost for ever in the subconscious memory.

“In this domain, the practice of concentration should therefore focus both on the special faculty of memory and on the participation of the consciousness in the activities of the sleeping state.

“Someone who wishes to recover the memory of a forgotten dream should first of all focus his attention on the vague impressions which the dream may have left behind it and in this way follow its indistinct trace as far as possible.

“This regular exercise will enable him to go further every day towards the obscure retreat of the subconscious where these forgotten phenomena of sleep take refuge, and thus trace out an easily followed path between these two domains of consciousness.

“One useful remark to be made from this point of view is that the absence of memories is very often due to the abruptness of the return to the waking consciousness. (The waking should not be too abrupt.)

“As a matter of fact, at that moment, the new activities breaking into the field of consciousness force out everything that is unfamiliar to them and add to the difficulty of the subsequent work of concentration needed to recall the things which have been expelled in this way. On the other hand, this work will be made easier whenever certain mental and even physical precautions are observed for a quiet transition from one state to another. (If possible, do not make any abrupt movements in bed at the time of waking.)

“However, this special training of the faculty of memory can only transform into conscious phenomena in the waking state the phenomena which have already

been made conscious, even if only fleetingly, during sleep. For where there is no consciousness, there can be no memory.

“Consequently, in the second place, we must work to extend the participation of the consciousness to a greater number of activities in the sleeping state.

“The daily habit of reviewing with interest the various dreams of the night, whose traces will gradually become transformed into precise memories, as well as the habit of noting them down on waking, will be found most helpful from this point of view.

“By these habits, the mental faculties will be led to adapt their mechanism to phenomena of this kind and to exercise on them their attention, their curiosity and power of analysis.

“A kind of intellectualisation of our dreams will then occur, with the double result of making the conscious activities intervene more and more closely in the play of the formerly disorganised activities of the sleeping state, and of progressively increasing their scope by making them more and more rational and instructive.

“Dreams will then take on the nature of precise visions and sometimes of revelations, and useful knowledge of a whole important order of things will be gained.”

25 March 1912

THE MOTHER

(Words of Long Ago, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 2, pp. 32-39)



A TALK OF 1 FEBRUARY 1951

This talk is based upon the Mother's essay "On Dreams"
(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 32-39)

IN order to remember something, you must first of all be conscious of it.

I dreamt of an ocean flowing and flowing silently. It gave me a great joy. I could feel it like a physical thing.

It is almost an experience — more than a dream.

There are places one goes to periodically in dreams. One can continue with the same dream, sometimes after a lapse of several months. There are also dreams of warning, which often repeat the same thing so as to compel you to concentrate your attention on it.

I saw X recently. Was it the real person?

What is a person? When you are in a body you always see the body and think it is the person. But in this body there is now the whole being, now part of the being, with the rest somewhere else. Sometimes it is one activity of the being that comes forward, sometimes another. Because you have a body which you continue to see, you think that the being you see is always the same, but that is not true. The centre of the being, the psychic being, rarely takes on the appearance of the manifested being. The psychic being has passed through innumerable bodies and even if it did keep an imprint of all these bodies, the result would be unrecognisable, wouldn't it? Most often it is a thought of the person who has gone which assumes a form, either in your atmosphere or in your own thought. So a sort of emanation comes. It is there, and depending on your own condition you see it more or less clearly. But the form you give it is your own creation; it conforms to this person's physical form as you know it. I don't say this is an absolute rule, but nine times out of ten it is like that.

And I can give you a very clear example of this. When you see someone you did not see at the time of his death, you don't see the form he had at that time but the form he had the last time you saw him. Therefore you give the form yourself. I don't say this is something absolute. It may happen differently, but that is so rare that it is better not to speak of it. Only one person in a million can be objective enough not to add anything to his vision. So it is better not to speak about it, except as an ideal to aspire for.

In everything you see, in sleep as well as in visions in the waking state, there are always a considerable number of subjective details. If you do not see the person as he was when you saw him last, the difference always comes from your own thought. If you think that the person must be older, you will see him looking older; if you think that he must look ill, you will see him looking ill, and so on. An absolutely objective vision, which conforms wholly to the reality, is very rare. The dream you mentioned simply means that you have kept a tender, affectionate relationship with her, and so one part of her being has remained close to you and for some reason you became aware of it in your dream.

Since I left my family, I dream of them regularly at least once a week.

This comes from the subconscious.

As I told you, I have studied this subject of dreams in great depth. Unless you concentrate in a very special way you always dream of things you have experienced or felt or been aware of some time before; but you don't dream of the things that belong to your present life. You may think of them, you may remember them, but you don't dream of them. Except in a few very rare instances, a dream is the awakening of something recorded in the subconscious. This recording is made gradually; some kind of assimilation is needed before the thing can manifest of itself, and this assimilation may take time. You dream of things — and people — that you knew a very long time ago; when a very long time has elapsed, it is usually for some special reason. Some things come back at regular intervals and you have a kind of cycle of movements in your dream. If you can find a point at which things that are present have struck you at a previous time in your life, then you can see them both at the same time.

Very few dreams have a meaning, an instructive value, but all dreams can show you what your present state of consciousness is and how things are combined in the subconscious, what the terrestrial influences are, what traces they leave and how they are combined. This is a very interesting subject of study.

In dreams one is usually passive and one doesn't react as one does in ordinary life. Why?

Not always. I have known many people who were far more active in their dreams than in their waking life and who would do things which they would have been incapable of doing in their waking life. For example, I have known people who used to be petrified with fear in their waking life but would express indomitable courage and accomplish truly heroic deeds in their dreams. Sometimes too, if you dream of something unpleasant, instead of having a reaction, you say, "All this is only a dream, it is not true, it is impossible," etc., and in this way the dream assumes

another form. Of course, you must be aware that you are dreaming for this to happen. It is a tremendous field of observation — there is no end to the discoveries you can make in your dreams. But there is one important point: you must not go to sleep when you are very tired, for if you do, you fall into a sort of unconsciousness in which dreams do whatever they like with you, and you have no reaction. Just as I said that you should not eat without having taken rest, I would advise everyone to rest before going to sleep. And for that, you must know how to rest.

Now I will tell you a very recent dream of mine which I had just a few days ago. It wasn't exactly a dream, it was very conscious. (I am not one of those people who dream of things that occurred a very long time ago; I know what to do to avoid that.) I went to a place in the vital world where I knew that many of our boys go to rest — at least, in their physical sleep, they look as if they are resting. But since they don't really know how to rest, instead of accumulating energy, they lose it. Some of them lose a tremendous amount of energy: instead of recovering their energy, they waste it. So I went there and saw many rows in which there were things that looked like beds but weren't really beds. I walked about in the room and saw them resting, trying to rest, but since they didn't know how to do it, they couldn't. They were all more or less sprawled out, their eyes were open — they weren't asleep, it wasn't sleep, it was a state of rest; the vital wasn't active but in a state of semi-awareness. I got them to understand that I could show them how to rest in such a way as to recover their energy instead of wasting it. And would you believe it, only one of them was willing to learn! The others said, "No, we are quite all right as we are, we don't want to learn anything else!"

When we see you in dream, where do we see you? Is it always the same place?

There are many different places, many. It may be in the subtle physical, for all of you live in my physical atmosphere and so it is in the subtle physical that you see me most often. And there you feel that what you see is almost material, but with a slight distortion. Because it is the subtle physical, you can quite easily remember what you have seen. Very often, in the middle of the night, I take care of you (I don't want to boast about it!) and I remember many things that are of some importance — I don't remember everything because it is not worth burdening the memory with a lot of useless things. And I have noticed that several of you are able to remember, but the thing takes place in your consciousness with a slight distortion — it wasn't exactly the same.

Some people can see me vitally, some people can see me psychically (this is quite rare), some people can see me mentally and some people can see me in the subconscious and, in certain conditions, in the unconscious; but that is rare.

Others may have a revelation about me and see me as I am, but not many can do that.

What is the way to take rest before going to sleep?

There are many methods, but I will give you one. First, your body must be comfortable, on a bed, in an easy-chair — anywhere so long as it is comfortable. Then you learn how to relax your nerves one after the other, until you achieve complete relaxation. You should relax all your nerves — you can relax them all together, but perhaps it is easier to relax them one after the other, and this becomes very interesting. And when that is done, you must make your brain quiet and silent and at the same time keep your body like a rag on the bed. You must make the brain so still and absolutely quiet that it is not aware of itself. And then, don't *try* to sleep, but pass very gently from this state into sleep without being aware of it. When you wake up the next morning you will be full of energy. But if you go to bed very tired and without even trying to relax, to calm down, you will fall into a heavy, dull and unconscious sleep and the vital will lose all its energy. Perhaps this won't have any immediate effect, but it is better to try it than to plunge into sleep when you are very tired.

If you relax very gently before going to sleep, you will feel great pleasure in going to sleep. If you manage to relax the nerves, even of only one arm or leg, you will see how pleasant it is. If you go to sleep with your nerves tense, you will have a very restless sleep and change position very often during the night. That kind of rest is no good.

I have noticed that if I go to sleep on one side, I wake up on the other. Is it always like that?

No, not necessarily. There is no rule. If you think it is like that, it will be like that!

I have noticed that if an interesting dream wakes me up, I can go back to sleep and continue the same dream.

Yes, this can be done and it means that you are partially conscious of your night activities.

I used to know someone who went on having the same dream all the time, until he could no longer distinguish between dream and reality.

It sometimes happens that when you go out of your body, when you exteriorise yourself during sleep and are conscious in the vital world, you can live a vital life that is just as conscious as the physical life. I have known people — not many have this capacity of going out of their body — but I have known people who had such a strong interest in their experiences in the vital world that in the end they refused to return to their body, they went on sleeping almost indefinitely.

If you are conscious and self-controlled in the vital world and have a certain

power there, the things that happen are wonderful, infinitely more varied and magnificent than in the physical world. It is true that some regions in the vital world are wonderful.

Now I will tell you how this happens. When you are very tired and in need of rest and if you know how to exteriorise yourself, if you go out of your body and enter consciously into the vital world, there are regions there, in the vital world, which are like a marvellous virgin forest, with all the splendour of a rich and harmonious vegetation, and beautiful, mirror-like pools. And the atmosphere is filled with the living vitality of plants, with every shade of green reflected in the water . . . And there you feel so much life, so much beauty, so much richness and plenitude that you wake up full of energy. And all this is so objective! I have been able to take people there, without telling them anything at all about how it would be, and they were able to describe the place exactly as I can myself, and they had exactly the same experience. They were absolutely exhausted before going to sleep and they woke up with an absolutely marvellous feeling of plenitude, of force and energy. They had stayed there only a few minutes.

There are regions like that — not many, but they exist. On the other hand, there are many unpleasant places in the vital world and it is better not to go there. Leaving aside those who are so attached, so rivetted to their bodies that they don't even want to leave them, those who can easily learn to go out of their bodies ought to do so with great care. I haven't been able to teach this to many people, for that would mean exposing them, sometimes without protection — when they do it alone, without my presence — to experiences which can be extremely harmful to them.

The vital world is a world of extremes. If, for example, you eat a bunch of grapes in the vital world, you can go for thirty-six hours without feeling hungry — fully nourished. But you can meet with certain things, enter certain places that drain all your energy in a trice, and sometimes leave you with illnesses and after-effects that belong to the vital world.

I used to know a woman who was absolutely wonderful from the occult point of view. She was absolutely conscious of herself, of all the regions of her being; she could go from one region to another — in short, she was marvellous. Well, she had an accident in the vital world. She was fighting some beings from the vital world in order to save someone whom she was very fond of, and she got a blow on the eye. And when I met her, she had lost an eye. Many people have these accidents in the vital world, and they keep traces of these accidents for hours after they wake up. That is why you can't tell just anyone, "Learn to go out of your body", for there are many requirements before you can do it safely. If you have any affinities with the forces of falsehood and violence, it is better to stay in your physical body.

THE MOTHER

TIME

I HAVE often wondered why men say that time flows from past into future. It is the future which reveals itself as the present and the present which changes into the past. Memory, constituting our sense of what has been, comes after each event that happens in the present: to-day comes before and afterwards grows into yesterday and not vice versa. Then, when one present event has grown the past, where does another come from? If it is not a growth from the past and if time flows in a direction opposite to what we normally conceive, it must arise from the future. Hence what we call cause is really a sign and a hint flung out by something pre-existing, the so-called effect. Thus there is now a smooth orange flush in the sky; it was preceded by a shredded golden glow: the former is the present, the latter the past — the one happens after the other, but the shredded gold occurred because the orange smoothness had to come, it was the stage of atmospheric colour necessitated by the stage which followed it, it was the preparation for the orange smoothness as that in turn is a prelude to something else “rich and orange”.

Does such a view imply that the whole future exists already? Of course! But in that case, the whole time-process which we see as an unfolding continuity exists as a *totum simul* — a total simultaneousness which we can only consider as what the mystics call eternity, an ever-present Now. And something of this wonderful Now is what we experience as the present — a Now clipped off, as it were, at two ends, a spot of light between two darkneses. But because we are a developed consciousness and no mere insensate stone wherein the consciousness lies dormant or unexplicit, we feel from what has been manifested the tendency of what is to come and this feeling interprets itself as a vision of purpose: we seem to plan and strive to carry out our plan, thus exerting what we consider our will. Our will is the *totum simul* in the act of manifesting itself as the time-process but only partially conscious in the act, yet in as much as there is a certain degree of developed consciousness there is the sense of creativity which is the essence of the full *totum simul* spreading itself out as time. This sense of creativity we experience as free will, a divine attribute, though one that is much obscured and weakened in us by our limited mental status. Therefore from one point of view, all is necessity, the past had to occur because the present had to be what it is and similarly the present is thus and thus because something else is pressing for unfoldment; while from another, we enjoy a freedom, however partial, and share in the creative divinity of the Eternal.

In any case, the order of the time-process is the very reverse of our conventional sequence of past, present and future.

What is the aim of the vast unfolding, and our limited creativity? I can best express it by means of a little poem which does not exactly expound but suggest,

RUMOURS OF DESTINY

Rumours of destiny run
 Secret through every sun
 Flashed on the groping soul:
 From future into past
 The galaxies are cast,
 Lamps for an unreached goal.

By ignorance we see
 A moulding tyranny
 Out of dim eras gone;
 But, through time's lifting veil
 Shimmers each night a tale
 Of harmonies unknown.

Therefore man's love is lit
 By dreams of an infinite
 No earthly scenes portray:
 Therefore a god's desire
 Leaps from the pregnant mire —
 Child of some deathless day

Whose far enhaloed kiss
 Quivering through the abyss
 Of bare unconstellate sky
 Has sown a horoscope
 Of golden-fruited hope
 Within man's desert-eye.

27 September 1936

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of June 2012)

Chapter XIV

“A White Heat of Inspiration”

*Tablet of brain thou hast made for thy writing,
Master divine.
Calmly thou writest or full of the grandeur
Flushed as with wine,
Then with a laugh thou erasest thy scroll,
Bringing another, like waves that roll
And sink supine.¹*

Sri Aurobindo
'Perfect thy motion'

BEFORE passing on to the other streams of Sri Aurobindo's life at Baroda, political and spiritual (early February 1893-early June 1906), this author proposes to present a factual outline, not any critical evaluation, of his literary endeavours and accomplishments of this period.

Sri Aurobindo set foot on the Indian soil at Mumbai on the 6th of February 1893 and reported for work at the Secretariat of the Baroda Administration on the 8th of February. We see that the very next month he had begun translating Vyasa's *Mahabharata* into English. When did he have the time to master the ancient Sanskrit well enough to take up such an epic task? Years later, while answering a query, he casually stated that he learnt Sanskrit by reading the 'Naladamayanti' episode in the *Mahabharata* "with minute care several times". The statement only answers a small part of the question informing us what reading "with minute care" could achieve, but its bigger part that remains unanswered is how many scholars could exercise that uncanny minute care. The mystic calm that descended on him the moment he disembarked at Apollo Bunder could not have played a minor role in switching his attention with ease from the blunt and the down-to-earth to the call of the Muse sublime.

Baroda was a totally unfamiliar world for him; the kind of duty the Administration allotted to him — to deal with the issues of land revenue in the Settlement

Department — could have hardly been attractive to him. His love for Sanskrit remained steady even as years rolled on, his official duties shifting him from one desk to another. He said much later, “My interest lay outside, in Sanskrit literature and in the national movement.”²

By the way, by the time he returned to India, the range of his knowledge of languages included, apart from English and French, Latin, Greek, German, Spanish and Italian. Before long he picked up Hindi, Bengali and to some extent Gujarati, the local language and Marathi, the language of the Maharaja’s family spoken by many of the staff of the palace numbering about a thousand.

Just a month or two later, his first political essay, ‘India and the British Parliament’ was published in the *Indu Prakash*, a weekly journal from Mumbai, in its issue of 26 June 1893. It is not surprising that he had ample knowledge of the functioning of the British Parliament, but the article shows that he had, in that quite short time, thoroughly comprehended the illusions the Indian intellectuals nurtured about the lofty character of the British political institutions. But to his political writings and activities we will come later.

Much of his creative works and translations of the pre-Baroda and Baroda days are lost, thanks to his own lack of care for them³ and the atypical course his life took before long. However, among what survived the vicissitudes are a bunch of poems that were published under the title *Songs to Myrtilla* (1898), probably through the initiative of some of his friends, for the anthology was meant for private circulation only. Most of these poems were of course written in England, in his late teens.

This biography does not include any scope for literary and qualitative evaluation of its subject’s writings. But a few reflections are unavoidable in order to follow his thoughts and inspirations at the time evident on the surface. *Songs to Myrtilla* is the first unmistakable indication of its poet’s wide range of interest embracing themes classical and romantic, events that mattered for human progress as well as personalities who were remarkable. As the epigraph to this chapter shows, he was conscious of his brain receiving a variety of inspirations — several of which must have been “erased” too.

We have seen earlier how, while in England, particularly during his Cambridge days, Sri Aurobindo’s anguish at the Indian condition under the colonial yoke had found expression through several speeches he delivered at the Indian Majlis.

Even though “he knew nothing about India or her culture”⁴ according to his own statement, when he wrote in England the poems included in *Myrtilla*, there are stanzas in a couple of them that are steeped in an innate love for his country to which he was then returning:

Mine is not Byron’s lightning spear,
Nor Wordsworth’s lucid strain
Nor Shelley’s lyric pain,
Nor Keats’, the poet without peer.

I by the Indian waters vast
 Did glimpse the magic of the past,
 And on oaten-pipe I play
 Warped echoes of an earlier day.⁵

‘To a Hero-Worshipper’ (September 1891)

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
 Has called to regions of eternal snow
 And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
 Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow.⁶

‘Envoi’ (1890-1892)

Yet another fact emerges from this bunch of poems. The illustrious writer Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the poet of *Bande Mataram* (whom Sri Aurobindo designated as Rishi and the title became a permanent affix to his name), died on the 8th of April 1894. Between 16 July and 27 August 1894 Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of articles on him in the *Indu Prakash*. Almost simultaneously he wrote two poems on him, ‘Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’ and ‘Saraswati with the Lotus’. The first one concluded with these lines, reflecting at once the regrettable time-backdrop of the departed and his great contribution to Bengali literature:

Thus moving in these iron times and drear,
 Barren of bliss and robbed of golden cheer,
 He sowed the desert with ruddy-hearted rose,
 The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose.⁷

Bankim Chandra wrote in Bengali and Sri Aurobindo was yet to have a guide in the person of Dinendra Kumar Roy for learning that language, towards the end of 1898. But it is obvious that his reading of Bankim Chandra’s prose and poetry that had already begun in England, had achieved thoroughness and he had been moved by them. No wonder that Dinendra Kumar was not required to take much trouble! In fact the rare sessions the teacher had with his illustrious employer helped him to develop a greater confidence in his own understanding of English that facilitated his transcreating a series of English fiction into Bengali.

It may not be far-fetched to find a hint of Sri Aurobindo’s intellectual ideation from the epigraph. The mystic truth that sees inspirations and ideas as independent of the brain though they use the brain, seems to have been native to the poet’s knowledge.

We can feel his reaction to some of the memorable events in the world — that had an inspirational relevance to the Indian condition — in poems like ‘Lines on Ireland’ and ‘To the Boers’ written at Baroda. But if his creative sweep took into its fold an Arabian romance entitled ‘Khaled of the Sea’ for a while (he left the narrative poem incomplete), he wrote an essay ‘The Age of Kalidasa’ in *The Indian Review* of June 1892 that showed his growing access into Indian literature and the minds of its makers. Of his several other writings and translations of this time, much is lost, probably forever, but much was luckily discovered, before they were disposed of as wastepaper, from the bundles piled up inside the storeroom of Alipore jail. All that survived has been made available to us in print. Among them the one long poem that stands out for its splendid retrospective relevance to one aspect of the vision of Sri Aurobindo that was to emerge from Pondicherry years later as a luminous element in his epic *Savitri*, is *Love and Death* (June-July 1899).

The poem is based on an episode in the *Mahabharata*. According to the legend, Ruru hails from a line of forest-dwelling sages. Pramadvara, the daughter of a nymph and a gandharva, is brought up by a sage. The two sweet young souls are soon to marry when tragedy strikes: Pramadvara is bitten by a serpent and she dies. Ruru is shocked, but he is not prepared to reconcile with that stark reality. Mustering the purity of his unshakable faith, he invokes intervention by the gods and wins his bride back to life, giving to her half of the remaining length of his own life.

As Sri Aurobindo emphasises, humanity’s “earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, — God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.”⁸ The Upanishadic and Puranic lore refers to so many instances of human aspiration and endeavour in these directions, some explicit and some cryptic. The Ruru-Pramadvara episode belongs to the line of man’s continued battle against the despotism of Death. In fact the battle began long before man came into being — as we find in the myth of *Samudra Manthan* — the Churning of the Ocean. Once the human beings have reached an “awakened consciousness”, we find the forerunners of aspiration trying to unravel the enigma of death and reaching the truth beyond it. The myth of Nachiketa is a distinct parable of this human quest. The boy’s father, a Rishi, in the course of performing a Yajna, is giving away everything he possessed to the guests — even an old cow. Nachiketa, his young son, wonders who was to own him, for he too belonged to his father. Upon his making the query more than once, the annoyed father is reported to have said that he had given the boy away to Yama, the god of Death. The boy forthwith proceeds to Yama’s abode and waits in front of it for three days as the god happened to be away. On his return the god, deeply impressed, offers the boy three boons as a reward for his three days of patient waiting. After Nachiketa has obtained two boons that show his nobility of character and his concern for his father, the seeker in him asserts itself as he demands the forbidden knowledge of the mystery of death and what lies beyond. Despite the god trying to divert his mind with offers of tangible gains and pleasures, the seeker

remains unmoved and the god is obliged to divulge to him his treasured secrets.

Needless to say, no Upanishad would care to record the earlier half of the episode if it had no greater significance than a Rishi giving away a worthless cow and a disgusted son offering himself to be given away as a part of the ritual and the father almost cursing him like an ordinary man even at that auspicious moment. We can very well decode the allegory. The Rishi's motive in giving away his possessions was to get rid of his attachment to them. Nachiketa knew very well that he was his father's foremost object of attachment and the Rishi's Yajna would be complete only if he got over that encumbrance. Far from an outburst, the Rishi's was a commandment: he commissioned the boy the task of exploring the formidable mystery that is death. The boy meditated for three days on the issue and the mystery was revealed to him.

Yet another well-known myth belonging to this cycle is that of Markandeya.

Sage Mrikanda had been offered a choice: he could have a foolish son who would live long or a wise one who must die at twelve. The enlightened sage chose the second and was blessed with a spiritual prodigy, Markandeya. But as the boy stepped into his twelfth year, the human in the sage and his wife came to the fore and they began shedding tears. The boy extracted the truth from them and assured them that he was capable of handling the issue of his own destiny himself. He sat in meditation and got immersed in Siva-consciousness. The popular narratives and pictorial depictions of the myth showing the emissaries of Yama who came to claim his soul at the destined moment being chased away by the attendants of Lord Siva would mean that he, totally engrossed in Siva the Eternity, became non-existent as a personal entity thereby disabling the emissaries to locate the mortal Markandeya. The moment passed. Markandeya regained his individual self and seven Rishis who were passing by blessed him with a long life as he bowed to them.

In a sense his was a victory over death. (Significantly, it is Markandeya who narrates the legend of Savitri and Satyavan to Yudhisthira in the Vana Parva of the *Mahabharata*.)

The episode of Ruru and Pramadvava, as presented by Sri Aurobindo — he resorts to the tradition of poetic license and changes Pramadvava to Priyumvada — assumes a qualitatively new import when he introduces the role of Love into the issue of Life *vis-à-vis* Death. The very beginning of the poem takes us into a primeval milieu, sweet and serene:

In the woodlands of the bright and early world,
When love was to himself yet new and warm
And stainless, played like morning with a flower
Ruru with his young bride Priyumvada.⁹

It is the mysterious flower the god of Love gives to Ruru that enables the hero to enter the nether world and find Priyumvada's soul and bring her back to her life on earth. But that he succeeds in doing by paying as price half of his own longevity. Though it was still a bargain with Death, the irreplaceable function of the supreme power of Love in the occult adventure for the conquest of death — a truth to be vivified in the epic *Savitri*, has already been visualised in it.

Like all the other poems of Sri Aurobindo this one too was an inspired piece, yet with a difference. As Sri Aurobindo wrote in his reply to a poet-critic's query in 1933:

The poem itself was written in a white heat of inspiration during 14 days of continuous writing — in the mornings, of course, for I had to attend office the rest of the day and saw friends in the evening. I never wrote anything with such ease and rapidity before or after.¹⁰

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*; SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 7.
2. A. B. Purani: *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
3. Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter on 5.8.1938: "In England indeed I could write a lot every day but most of that has gone to the Waste Paper Basket." *On Himself*; SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 228.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
5. Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*; SABCL, Vol. 5, pp. 8-9.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
8. Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*; SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 1.
9. Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*; SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 231.
10. Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*; SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 267.

SRI AUROBINDO ON CONSCIOUSNESS, WILL AND MOTIVATION

(Continued from the issue of June 2012)

Freedom of Will

IN yogic psychology, freedom of will is not, as it has been in Western thought, a topic of speculative philosophy but a question that is dealt with in the light of yogic experience.

In our ordinary consciousness, characterised by the sense of ego, a separate and independent “I”, we feel that we have a certain conscious power of choice in determining the course of our action. To this ability to choose and decide one’s course of action without external coercion we give the name of free will.

As we have seen, the power of mental will, which we use in executing a chosen course of action, is subject to and limited by the tendencies of one’s physical nature and vital impulses. The mental will can therefore be said to be free only to the extent that it can override the physical and vital impulses that may oppose it. But to the deeper view of the Yogin, even the relative freedom of the mental will is largely illusory, and the so-called free will only “a partial and apparent, therefore an unreal eidolon of liberty”.¹

. . . there is no such thing as a mental will which is absolutely free. And this is because mind is part of the action of the outward Ignorance, an action which seeks for knowledge but does not possess its full light and power, which can conceive of Self and Spirit and infinity and reflect them, but not altogether live in them, which can quiver with infinite possibility but can only deal in a limited half-effective fashion with restricted possibilities.²

In the terminology of the Sankhya, the Conscious-Soul (Purusha) in unconsciously identifying itself with Nature-Force (Prakriti) — physical, vital and mental — and, forgetting its real nature as the Witness, and thereby experiencing itself as an ego — physical, vital, mental — becomes inevitably subject to the essential modes of energy (Gunas) of the Nature-Force. These essential modes of Prakriti consist in: Tamas, the quality of inertia and obscurity, characteristic of the physical consciousness; Rajas, the quality of passion which characterises the vital consciousness; and Sattwa, the principle, of light, poise and peace, characteristic of Buddhi, the thinking mind which is at once intelligence and will. It is not difficult to see how the tamasic tendencies and the rajasic impulses limit the freedom of will.

What is less obvious is that even Sattwa is a force of Nature and that the sattwic mental will of Buddhi, too, is an enslaved will of Nature, not the free will of the Conscious-Soul. It is because of the identification of the Conscious-Soul with Nature and the consequent sense of ego that one has an illusory sense of having a will which is basically free:

The Buddhi or conscious intelligent will is still an instrument of Nature and when it acts, even in the most sattwic sense, it is still Nature which acts and the soul which is carried on the wheel by Maya. . . . When the ego thinks “I choose and will this virtuous and not that evil action”, it is simply associating itself, somewhat like the fly on the wheel, or rather as might a cog or other part of a mechanism if it were conscious, with a predominant wave or a formed current of the sattwic principle by which Nature chooses through the Buddhi one type of action in preference to another.³

Thus it is Nature, not the soul that chooses and wills in us, whether it is through the force of Tamas, Rajas or Sattwa.

. . . at least nine-tenths of our freedom of will is a palpable fiction; that will is created and determined not by its own self-existent action at a given moment, but by our past, our heredity, our training, our environment, the whole tremendous complex thing we call Karma, which is, behind us, the whole past action of Nature on us and the world converging in the individual, determining what he is, determining what his will shall be at a given moment and determining, as far as analysis can see, even its action at that moment. . . . Nature forms itself in us and wills in us, the Sankhya would say, for the pleasure of the inactive observing Purusha.

But even if this extreme statement has to be qualified, . . . still the freedom of our individual will, if we choose to give it that name, is very relative and almost infinitesimal, so much is it mixed up with other determining elements. Its strongest power does not amount to mastery. It cannot be relied upon to resist the strong wave of circumstance or of other nature which either overbears or modifies or mixes up with it or at the best subtly deceives and circumvents it. Even the most sattwic will is so overborne or mixed up with or circumvented by the rajasic and tamasic Gunas as to be only in part sattwic, and thence arises that sufficiently strong element of self-deception, of a quite involuntary and even innocent make-believe and hiding from oneself which the merciless eye of the psychologist detects even in the best human action. When we think that we are acting quite freely, powers are concealed behind our action which escape the most careful self-introspection; when we think that we are free from ego, the ego is there, concealed, in the mind of the saint as in that of the sinner.

When our eyes are really opened on our action and its springs, we are obliged to say with the Gita “*guṇā guṇeṣu vartante*”, “it was the modes of Nature that were acting upon the modes”.⁴

There is indeed a modicum of freedom by the exercise of which the soul, initially bound by Nature, ultimately becomes free:

And this is certainly a freedom, but only a relative freedom, and even the greatest mental self-mastery a relative and precarious thing at the best. This liberty when we look down at it from a higher station, is not well distinguishable from a lightened bondage.⁵

In brief, personal will is not truly a free will because personal will is the ego’s will and the ego’s will is not a free will because the ego is created by nature and driven by her modes. True freedom of will can come only with liberation from ego, becoming *triguṇātita*, above or beyond the three Gunas. This Sankhya wisdom regarding freedom of will, contained in the Gita, has been elaborated by Sri Aurobindo with unsurpassed clarity:

The only free will in the world is the one divine Will of which Nature is the executrix; for she is the master and creator of all other wills. Human free will can be real in a sense, but, like all things that belong to the modes of Nature, it is only relatively real. The mind rides on a swirl of natural forces, balances on a poise between several possibilities, inclines to one side or another, settles and has the sense of choosing: but it does not see, it is not even dimly aware of the Force behind that has determined its choice. It cannot see it, because that Force is something total and to our eyes indeterminate. At most mind can only distinguish with an approach to clarity and precision some out of the complex variety of particular determinations by which this Force works out her incalculable purposes. Partial itself, the mind rides on a part of the machine, unaware of nine-tenths of its motor agencies in Time and environment, unaware of its past preparation and future drift; but because it rides, it thinks that it is directing the machine. In a sense it counts: for that clear inclination of the mind which we call our will, that firm settling of the inclination which presents itself to us as a deliberate choice, is one of Nature’s most powerful determinants; but it is never independent and sole. Behind this petty instrumental action of the human will there is something vast and powerful and eternal that oversees the trend of the inclination and presses on the turn of the will. There is a total Truth in Nature greater than our individual choice. And in this total Truth, or even beyond and behind it, there is something that determines all results; its presence and secret knowledge keep up steadily in the process of Nature, a dynamic,

almost automatic perception of the right relations, the varying or persistent necessities, the inevitable steps of the movement. There is a secret divine Will, eternal and infinite, omniscient and omnipotent, that expresses itself in the universality and in each particular of all these apparently temporal and finite, inconscient or half-conscient things. This is the Power or Presence meant by the Gita when it speaks of the Lord within the heart of all existences who turns all creatures as if mounted on a machine by the illusion of Nature.⁶

Universal Will and the Transcendent Will

Will, we have said, is the energy or power of consciousness. The Universal or Cosmic Will is thus the power of the Cosmic Consciousness, the Cosmic Being, termed the Cosmic Divine by Sri Aurobindo. It is the will of the Cosmic Divine that guides the world. To someone who posed a question about the existence of such a divine guidance in the world, Sri Aurobindo replied in a letter which is well worth quoting almost in full:

The question you have put raises one of the most difficult and complicated of all problems and to deal with it at all adequately would need an answer as long as the longest chapter of *The Life Divine*. I can only state my own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience that there is such a guidance and that nothing is in vain in this universe.

If we look only at outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most, we may see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge — even scientific knowledge — comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering, and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as "this unhappy and transient world", *anityam asukham*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanical inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something beyond its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then inevitably there must be a guidance — and that means that a supporting Consciousness and Will is there with which we can come into inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual or eventual failure.

This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience and an ignorant mind and life full of that Inconscience: error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently too a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty, — at least a partial flowering of these things. The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and must be leading towards that higher state of things. It is leading the individual, certainly, and the world, presumably, towards the higher state, but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms, still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a higher Light, Truth and Bliss; the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can get only an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge and vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and can observe how they all tended, without our knowing it, towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made, — not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but also the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of further experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course: they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance, by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come which helps or directly guides or moves us: it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries

us through them and out of them — except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world-movement. That seems to move according to the conditions and laws or forces of the moment through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens at a particular juncture of the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophic, is not ultimately determinative. Here, too, one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case or at a particular time but also the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all.⁷

We may note in passing two points regarding the nature of yogic psychology implied in the above-quoted passage. Many things dealt with by yogic psychology, such as Cosmic Will, pertain to spiritual realities which are outside our normal experience. Such realities can be truly understood only by exceeding our normal consciousness and gaining spiritual experience. Secondly, such yogic knowledge through spiritual experience is similar to all scientific knowledge: it “comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes”.

The Mother speaks in the same vein regarding the divine guidance in the circumstances of life and the Grace behind it all. The perception of the constant Grace everywhere, she says, “is the result of a conscious growth, a constant observation and perpetual experience in life.”⁸

When you are in a particular set of circumstances and certain events take place, these events often oppose your desire or what seems best to you, and often you happen to regret this and say to yourself, “Ah! how good it would have been if it were otherwise, if it had been like this or like that”, for little things and big things. . . . Then years pass by, events are unfolded; you progress, become more conscious, understand better, and when you look back, you notice — first with astonishment, then later with a smile — that those very circumstances which seemed to you quite disastrous or unfavourable, were exactly the best thing that could have happened to you to make you progress as you should have. And if you are the least bit wise you tell yourself, “Truly, the divine Grace is infinite.”

So, when this sort of thing has happened to you a number of times, you begin to understand that in spite of the blindness of man and deceptive appearances, the Grace is at work everywhere, so that at every moment it is the best possible thing that happens in the state the world is in at that moment. It is

because our vision is limited or even because we are blinded by our own preferences that we cannot discern that things are like this.

But when one begins to see it, one enters upon a state of wonder which nothing can describe. For behind the appearances one perceives this Grace — infinite, wonderful, all-powerful — which knows all, organises all, arranges all, and leads us, whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, towards the supreme goal, that is, union with the Divine, the awareness of the Godhead and union with Him.⁹

The Will that guides the world “through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering” is the Universal Will, the Will of the Cosmic Divine

that has descended here into an evolutionary world of Ignorance, standing at the back of things, pressing on the Darkness with its Light, leading things presently towards the best possible in the conditions of a world of Ignorance and leading it eventually towards a descent of a greater power of the Divine, which will be not an omnipotence held back and conditioned by the law of the world as it is, but in full action and therefore bringing the reign of light, peace, harmony, joy, love, beauty and Ananda . . .¹⁰

The “greater power of the Divine” just spoken of, towards which the Cosmic Will, standing at the back of things, pressing on the Ignorance, is guiding the world, is that of the Transcendent Divine. The Will of the Transcendent Divine is the establishment of peace, harmony, love, light, beauty and bliss in place of their opposites which reign in the world of Ignorance.

Will, Motivation and Desire

From the viewpoint of yoga psychology, will, defined as the “power of consciousness turned towards effectuation”,¹¹ and motive, in its etymological sense of an internal power that moves one to action, are synonymous terms, because there exists only one Will, one Motive-Force, one Power — that of Consciousness-Force. However, motive has also a teleological connotation, referring to the goal or aim of action. Thus when we speak of the desire for the fruit of action, desire is the motive in the former sense of the internal force that impels one to seek the fruit, whereas the fruit sought after is the motive in the teleological sense, it being the goal or object of one’s action.

We have stated that Will is a universal and omnipresent force inherent in and coextensive with Consciousness but is mostly conceived in its narrow aspect of

mental will. Similarly, from the viewpoint of yogic experience, motivation is a characteristic of everything in the universe both animate and so-called inanimate, though modern psychology recognises the operation of motives only in animals and human beings. The fact that the entire universe is propelled by a Motive-Power is implicit in Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the universe. The central idea in this explanation is that the world is a manifestation of an infinite and eternal reality, the Divine which is Sachchidananda — infinite and eternal Being, Consciousness and Bliss. But the Divine, who has manifested the world in his own infinite Being, has through involution hidden himself in the material world in what seems to be the opposites of Sachchidananda — Non-Being, Inconscience and Insentience. Through evolution, the infinite Being — Sat — emerges first in Matter, then in Life, then in Mind and finally as the Spirit. Consciousness — Chit — involved in the seeming inconscience of Matter, begins to emerge in Life, becomes more apparent in Mind and manifests in its true nature in a spiritual consciousness. Bliss or Delight — Ananda — too emerges from the primeval insentience, first in the forms of pleasure and pain, with the urge to find itself in the Ananda of the Spirit. The following passage from Sri Aurobindo relates more explicitly what has just been stated about the explanation of the universe to the subject of will and motivation:

We have started with the assertion of all existence as one Being whose essential nature is Consciousness, one Consciousness whose active nature is Force or Will; and this Being is Delight, this Consciousness is Delight, this Force or Will is Delight. Eternal and inalienable Bliss of Existence, Bliss of Consciousness, Bliss of Force or Will whether concentrated in itself and at rest or active and creative, this is God and this is ourselves in our essential, our non-phenomenal being. Concentrated in itself, it possesses or rather is the essential, eternal, inalienable Bliss; active and creative, it possesses or rather becomes the delight of the play of existence, the play of consciousness, the play of force and will. That play is the universe and that delight is the sole cause, motive and object of cosmic existence.¹²

The view just stated that delight is the sole motive of cosmic existence is based on the experience of the Yogin. To our own experience, the pleasure we derive from the satisfaction of a desire is what motivates all our actions. "Desire", we feel, ". . . is the real motive power of human living and to cast it out would be to stop the springs of life; satisfaction of desire is man's only enjoyment . . ."¹³ But from the Yogin's point of view

the real motive power of the life of the soul is Will; desire is only a deformation of will in the dominant bodily life and physical mind. The essential turn of the soul to possession and enjoyment of the world consists in a will to delight, and

the enjoyment of the satisfaction of craving is only a vital and physical degradation of the will to delight.¹⁴

Thus “what becomes desire in the ego is Will in the Spirit”.¹⁵ Stated more philosophically: “. . . Desire is the impulse of the Force of Being individualised in Life to affirm progressively in the terms of succession in Time and of self-extension in Space, in the framework of the finite, its infinite Bliss, the Ananda of Sachchidananda.”¹⁶

The metaphysical explanation of the deformation of Will into desire lies in the emergence of the ego and in the nature of the will of the ego:

. . . the moment the individual soul leans away from the universal and transcendent truth of its being, leans towards ego, tries to make this will a thing of its own, a separate personal energy, that will changes its character: it becomes an effort, a straining, a heat of force which may have its fiery joys of effectuation and of possession, but has also its afflicting recoils and pain of labour. It is this that turns in each instrument into an intellectual, emotional, dynamic, sensational or vital will of desire, wish, craving.¹⁷

The will of the individualised life-force of the ego is towards self-enlargement and all-possession, for

a physical, vital, moral, mental increase by a more and more all-embracing experience, a more and more all-embracing possession, absorption, assimilation, enjoyment is the inevitable, fundamental, ineradicable impulse of Existence, . . .¹⁸

But the individualised life-force is to its own consciousness limited and full of incapacity; for it has to work not only against the mass of other enviroing individualised life-forces, but also subject to control and denial by the infinite Life itself with whose total will and trend its own will and trend may not immediately agree. . . . Hence from the gulf between the impulse to possess and the force of possession desire arises; for if there were no such discrepancy, if the force could always take possession of its object, always attain securely its end, desire would not come into existence but only a calm and self-possessed Will without craving such as is the Will of the Divine.¹⁹

Since the ego arises out of the identification of the Self with body, life and mind, the ego has three aspects — physical, vital, mental. Desires, which are born of the ego, are also physical, vital and mental. Consequently our ordinary motives pertain to the satisfaction of physical, vital and mental desires:

. . . ordinarily the human being acts because he has a desire or feels a mental, vital or physical want or need; he is driven by the necessities of the body, by the lust of riches, honours or fame, or by a craving for the personal satisfactions of the mind or the heart or a craving for power or pleasure. Or he is seized and pushed about by a moral need or, at least, the need or the desire of making his ideas or his ideals or his will or his party or his country or his gods prevail in the world.²⁰

Of the three parts of our surface being — physical, vital, mental — what chiefly governs most human beings is the vital nature, the aspect of our being which has the strongest kinetic motive power:

Most people live in the vital. That means that they live in their desires, sensations, emotional feelings, vital imaginations and see and experience and judge everything from that point of view. It is the vital that moves them, the mind being at its service, not its master.²¹

Thus the motivating forces in our work pertain mostly to the vital being:

Men usually work and carry on their affairs from the ordinary motives of the vital being, need, desire of wealth or success or position or power or fame or the push to activity and the pleasure of manifesting their capacities . . .²²

In these matters [choice of work] it is not the thinking mind but the vital being — the life-force and the desire-nature, or some part of it at least — that usually determines men's action and their choice, when it is not some outward necessity or pressure that compels or mainly influences the decision. The mind is only an interpreting, justifying and devising agent.²³

The power of the vital nature “in earthly beings is possessed by the force of desire”.²⁴ Consequently, “desire is the strongest human and animal initiator of most kinesis and action, predominant to such an extent that many consider it the father of all action and even the originator of our being.”²⁵

Desire not only dominates the vital nature but also influences Buddhi, the rational part of our being which is at once intelligence and will:

When we look from below, desire presents itself to us as a craving of the life force which subtilises in the emotions into a craving of the heart and is farther subtilised in the intelligence into a craving, preference, passion of the aesthetic, ethical, dynamic or rational turn of the Buddhi.²⁶

So subtle and all-pervasive is the influence of the desires rooted in the ego that most of even the apparently non-egoistic actions stem from desire:

All or most of the works of life are at present or seem to be actuated or vitiated by this soul of desire; even those that are ethical or religious, even those that wear the guise of altruism, philanthropy, self-sacrifice, self-denial, are shot through and through with the threads of its making.²⁷

Desire is will-in-the-vital. It is at the present stage of human evolution the strongest motivating force because humanity in general has as yet only partially emerged from the vital consciousness of the animal species into the mental consciousness which distinguishes the human being from the animal. In order to evolve beyond the present state, it is necessary to seize on a spring or leverage in the higher parts of the human nature:

In her lower vital activities it is desire that Nature takes as her most powerful leverage; but the distinct character of man is that he is a mental being, not a merely vital creature. As he can use his thinking mind and will to restrain and correct his life impulses, so too he can bring in the action of a still higher luminous mentality aided by the deeper soul in him, the psychic being, and supersede by these greater and purer motive-powers the domination of the vital and sensational force that we call desire.²⁸

(To be concluded)

A. S. DALAL

(Reproduced from *Gaveṣaṇā*, 2004)

References

1. *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p. 203.
2. *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 142-43.
3. *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, pp. 211-12.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 144.
6. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, pp. 89-90.
7. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, pp. 1626-29.
8. *Questions and Answers*, 1956, CWM 1st Ed., Vol. 8, p. 257.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 174.

11. *Words of the Mother*, CWM 1st Ed., Vol. 14, p. 167.
12. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 142.
13. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 21, p. 631.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 769.
16. *Ibid.*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 195.
17. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 21, p. 649.
18. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 194.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
20. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, pp. 96-97.
21. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1297.
22. *Ibid.*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 669.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 521.
24. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 21, p. 657.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 657-58.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 648.
27. *Ibid.*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 164.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

If Buddha had the will only after tapasyā, how was it that he left everything without hesitation in the search for Truth and never once looked back, regretted nor had any struggle. The only difficulty was how to find the Truth, his single will to find it never faltered; the intensity of his tapasyā itself would have been impossible without that strength of will. People less strong than Buddha may have to develop it by endeavour. Those who cannot do that have to find their strength in their reliance on the Divine Mother.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1642)

VISITS RELIVED

(Reminiscences of the Mother and the Ashram based on personal notes and letters)

(Continued from the issue of June 2012)

My brother Babuanna and I had another opportunity of seeing the Mother on the 27th August 1971; this had been arranged through Pandit-ji. We went up to the Mother at 9.30 a.m., but our turn to go to the Mother came at 11.30 a.m. There were about 100 visitors to see the Mother. We had to go in a queue. When it was my turn, I bent down and sat at her feet, and went on looking into her eyes. She also fixed her gaze into my eyes for some time. After about half a minute, she nodded indicating whatever she wanted to give on that occasion she had already given. She then gave me a packet containing her blessings. I got up and came out. To my brother, the Mother gave a golden ring, which my brother had prayed for. After this we came down to the Samadhi of the Lord and sat there for some time to assimilate what we had received from the Mother. As a result of my looking into her eyes for some time, I found a slight pain and pressure in my eyes; this effect remained for almost half a day. What a powerful gaze was the Mother's!

At about 2.30 p.m. we called on Pandit-ji at his residence and thanked him. At 5 p.m. we went to Nirodbaran, who was writing his book, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. I asked him a few questions and he replied. Nirodbaran said: "My *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* and Purani's *Evening Talks* are complementary to each other. Purani covers the same period which I have covered. I adopted several ways in noting down the talks with Sri Aurobindo. Sometimes I took notes while the Lord was talking. At times I returned to my room and noted down whatever had transpired during the talks. Of the several devotees who were present at the talks only three are alive now — Dr. Satyendra, myself and Champaklal."

To the last question I put to him as to whether he was seeing Sri Aurobindo nowadays, he said, "Nowadays He is very rarely seen. I am feeling the pressure of His force to complete all the volumes of talks. The second volume is already published. I also want to complete the third volume soon."

Soon my career would undergo a change, moving from the regular Forest Service into the specialised Wildlife Cadre section, though the two are interchangeable in the Forest Service. I was deputed to undergo Wildlife training at the F.R.I. Dehradun in November 1971. I wrote to Pandit-ji requesting for the Mother's darshan prior to my proceeding to Dehradun. The permission came informing that the Mother would see me on the 4th November. My brother Babuanna and I dashed to Pondy

from Hubli on the 2nd November. A severe physical upset and fever did not deter my aspiration to meet the Mother. We reached Pondy in the evening of 3rd November. We dumped our things at the Park Guest House, had a refreshing quick bath, and went to Parichand-ji with a request for fresh flowers the next day to take to the Mother. On the 4th we collected the flowers, had darshan of the Lord at the Samadhi, and at 9.30 a.m. went upstairs to have the darshan of the Mother. Like us about 35 people were waiting there for pranams to the Mother. Our names were checked by a devotee, a thin and short bearded man, from the appointment diary. We then went to the anteroom at 10 a.m. Here we waited till 11 a.m. as the Mother was busy with some of her secretaries and workers like Counouma-ji and Kireet Joshi. Visitors and disciples having their birthdays were the first to go up to the Mother. Afterwards, others were allowed in. My brother and I were the last in the line. While standing in the queue, I could look at the Mother blessing the visitors one by one. The Mother would look into the eyes of the visitors, to get in touch with their psychic being, so as to uplift them a little and to put her force into them.

Our turn came. First, I went to the Mother. Champaklal-ji soon took the flowers and the envelope containing the offerings from my hands and put them into the two trays in front of the Mother. I bent down and sat at the lotus feet of the Mother, who was seated in a chair. I looked into the eyes of the Mother, who also looked into my eyes. For some moments I was not steady in my look (my eyes were moving unsteadily), but the Mother never took away her gaze. Then she nodded indicating that whatever she wanted to give me had been given. She gave me a packet of flowers as blessings on the eve of my departure to Dehradun to join the Wildlife training programme, a new venture. I then put my head delicately on the Mother's knees. She put her right hand on my head, touched and pressed slowly at the neck, at the meeting point of the spinal cord and the skull, and blessed me. What force she pushed into my being through that centre I do not know. I lifted my face and again looked into the eyes of the Mother, who again looked into my eyes for some time and at last nodded smilingly that it was over! I got up and slowly retreated. After me, my brother bowed down to the Mother in the same manner that I had done, and received her blessings. We came out. The Mother was 94 then, and though she appeared quite frail, her looks and movements were quite sharp and agile.

On the 5th morning we met Pandit-ji and thanked him for arranging the Mother's darshan. We also met Dyuman-ji, who said he had seen our names on the envelopes offered to the Mother. He talked about developing Gloria Land. Dyuman-ji was in charge of this estate of the Mother. As per my suggestions, given in one of my previous visits to the estate, he had secured and planted lemon plants there. We returned to Hubli. I left for Dehradun on the 11th November 1971 for in-service training.

Many new vistas soon opened up. After my return from Dehradun in 1972, I was posted at Mysore as Wildlife Officer to manage several important wildlife

sanctuaries like Bandipur, Nagarahole, B.R.T. Hills, and Ranganathittu. This offered windows of opportunities in pursuing studies in environment and biodiversity, unlike a regular forest officer who looked only after the forests. The experience enabled me to produce research papers published in prestigious journals and magazines, and to author books on wild vegetation and wildlife. Later, after my superannuation from Government service in May 1987, this flowered into the pursuit of interesting hobbies like nature photography, birdwatching, environmental, wildlife and biodiversity studies etc. During this period I also came in contact with a number of well-known environmentalists and naturalists like Salim Ali, M. Krishnan and others.

My first visit to Pondy after my wildlife training was on the 15th August 1972, which was a special day, being Sri Aurobindo's Centenary Year. With my brothers I arrived on the 13th. We stayed in the Park Guest House. On the 14th there was an exhibition, wherein the chair used by the Lord, the table on which he revised *The Life Divine*, photographs from his younger days up to 1950 were exhibited.

On the 15th August 1972, the Lord's centenary birthday, First Day Postal Covers and Postal Stamps were released to commemorate Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary year (1872-1972). Special coins with Sri Aurobindo's image were also released.

At darshan time, we went in a queue to Sri Aurobindo's room at about 8 a.m. in the morning (the room darshan started at 6 a.m.). We attended meditation at the Samadhi from 10 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. We had the Mother's Balcony Darshan at 5.30 p.m. About 10,000 people had gathered for the Darshan.

We met Pandit-ji in the evening and requested a special darshan of the Mother at her room, in addition to having had the general Balcony Darshan on the 15th August. He told us that it might be possible only after the 20th. We decided to wait for this special blessing.

We went to meet Pandit-ji at his office on the 17th August 1972, and were surprised to know that the Mother would see us the same day at 10 a.m. Hurriedly we went out, collected tuberose flowers from Parichand-ji. We went up to the Mother in the last queue of the visitors and had darshan of the Mother in her room around 11.55 a.m. I bent down before the Mother, who touched my head. I looked up into her eyes for some seconds. She also kept looking into my eyes. After a few seconds she nodded that it was over. I wanted to spend some more moments in the Mother's room looking at her, but we were not permitted. We came down, and sat at the Samadhi.

We were at Pondy for the Siddhi Day Darshan on the 24th November 1972. We had meditation around the Samadhi from 10 a.m. to 10.30 a. m. and the Balcony Darshan of the Mother at 5.15 p.m. We camped one more day at the Ashram at the Park Hall.

Earlier on our arrival, we had contacted Pandit-ji to ask if it was possible to avail of a special darshan of the Mother before we returned home. On the 26th November 1972 we were informed by Pandit-ji that the Mother would bless us in

the morning. We hurriedly collected flowers from Parichand-ji and went into the Mother's room at about 11.30 a.m. along with other visitors. Earlier, when we used to see her and offer peppermint boxes, one for her and one for us to take home with her blessings, she would play with us, as if stretching her hands to give us the boxes and again withdrawing a little. But that was not to be this time! We found her withdrawn into herself. However, how graciously she allowed so many visitors to avail of her blessings. We offered sandalwood oil, flowers, a peppermint box at her holy feet and returned after Pranams.

(To be continued)

S. G. NEGINHAL

Yoga has always its difficulties, whatever yoga it be. Moreover, it acts in a different way on different seekers. Some have to overcome the difficulties of their nature first before they get any experiences to speak of, others get a splendid beginning and all the difficulties afterwards, others go on for a long time having alternate risings to the top of the wave and then a descent into the gulfs and so on till the difficulty is worked out, others have a smooth path which does not mean that they have no difficulties — they have plenty, but they do not care a straw for them, because they feel that the Divine will help them to the goal or that he is with them even when they do not feel him — their faith makes them imperturbable.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1640)

SRI AUROBINDO

“I JUST want an account of what you have seen and heard. And in that connection you could tell us about the *Yugantar* days.” This was brother Nripen’s request to me and he often reminded me of it. Today I am no longer able to ignore his request, and despite ill-health, I will briefly tell you something.

I feel I should say one or two things before going on to my acquaintance with Sri Aurobindo. Towards the end of 1902, Jatindranath Banerjee came to our village, Arballia. At that time, Surendranath Sen, the famous orator, was headmaster of Arballia school. Suren-babu was an eminent disciple of the renowned Ashwinikumar Dutt. Jatin-babu was Suren-babu’s guest in our community; he stayed at a lodging house called “Mayamriga”. It was at this “Mayamriga” lodging that I first met Jatin-babu. He had come from the state of Baroda on Aurobindo Ghose’s instructions to set up “secret societies” in Bengal. The purpose of setting up these societies was to bring about the liberation of India through armed revolution. The aim of the organisers was to gather brave young men who would fight resolutely and selflessly until death for India’s liberation. Jatin-babu was quite satisfied with our talk and he asked me to meet him two weeks later at a house at 108C Upper Circular Road in Calcutta.

I went to that house on the day specified. It was almost four o’clock. I did not find him in and was wondering what to do when a thin young man called me inside and asked me to sit down. There was a new bedstead with a new mattress and new pillow; it seemed as if he had just moved in. We began chatting about all sorts of things. He smiled sweetly but his piercing eyes did not leave me for a moment. After talking with him for just a short time, I felt great joy. Naturally it was about the country’s subjection that we talked. Finally he said: “Brother, if what you desire is the country’s liberation, then plunge into the work at once.” After this I asked him his name, and so forth, and he told me he was Sri Aurobindo Ghose’s younger brother and he had just arrived the day before. The younger brother of Aurobindo Ghose! I felt very surprised. His name was Barindrakumar. Aurobindo was his *Sejda*;¹ he had sent him to work along with Jatin-babu. Barin continued: “Brother, if India’s bondage makes your heart ache, don’t waste any more time, join us in this work today, this very moment.” I had never imagined that I would have to take the plunge just then. But when I heard Barindra’s call I clasped his hand and without the least thought about anything said: “Right, brother. From now on I’m with you.” I waited for Jatin-babu until late that night but did not meet him. At night I took my leave from Barin and went away. The very next morning I joined him and Jatin-babu. From the end of 1902 Barin and I have passed through all kinds of trials and

1. Third elder brother.

difficulties and we are still both here today.

From the house on 108C, Upper Circular Road, Jatin-babu, Barin and I began the work of collecting boys for the secret society. In the evenings we used to read and discuss all sorts of books on revolution and biographies of such men as Garibaldi, Cavour and Mazzini. Jatin-babu was older than we were; in appearance he was tall, well-built and handsome. In the very beginning he was a little serious. He took up work among the pleaders, barristers and rich men; Barin and I began our work among the school and college boys in College Square, in Haddow Park and other parks. Opposite our house was a big vacant lot; here the first *akhara* [gymnasium] was started for teaching the use of *lathi* [stout bamboo stick] and *gadka* [short *lathi*], as well as horse-riding, cycling, etc. When the boys began to get numerous, it was decided, on Barrister P. Mitra's advice, to delegate the charge of opening new *akharas* of this type in different parts of Calcutta to Satish-babu, a resident of Bechu Chatterji Street. We handed over to him our two horses and all our *lathis* and sticks. By setting up the Anushilan Samiti in various places, Satish-babu did immense good for the country.

After the three of us had worked together for six months, there was a clash between Jatin-babu and us — personal clash, not a difference of opinion. Barin and I shifted to a rented house on Madan Mitra Lane. From there our work continued. Jatin-babu moved from the house on Circular Road to one on Sitaram Ghosh Street.

Barin wrote to Aurobindo-babu about this break-up. In the early part of 1903, Aurobindo-babu wrote to Barin that he was coming to Calcutta and that he would try to patch up things between Jatin-babu and us.

Aurobindo-babu came as planned. He put up at Jatin-babu's residence. Barin told me: "Come, Abinash, I'll introduce you to *Sejda*." I went with him with great pleasure. When we arrived we saw Aurobindo-babu and Jatin-babu sitting on a mat spread on the floor, talking and laughing. I did *pranam* to him and hardly had sat down before him when Barin said: "*Sejda*, his name is Abinash Bhattacharya, Bengal's first volunteer." I said, "I'm not the first. Jatin-babu is, and you are second. I'm only the third." Barin countered: "No, Jatin-babu and I came here after being initiated in Baroda. You were the first person we found in Bengal, the first to give up everything and plunge into our work. So you are Bengal's first volunteer." With great concentration Aurobindo-babu looked into my eyes for a long time. I felt completely thrown off balance — it seemed as if he were wringing out my inmost being. I could neither shut my eyes nor avert them. My heart began to pound. Then Aurobindo-babu looked at my forehead, examined it by pressing; after this he looked at my eye-brows. He lifted my eyelids and looked. Suddenly he pushed my head down and began examining it by pressing. Finally he said: "Your first recruit is quite fine. He is a determined, faithful and silent worker." I felt as if an elixir had revived my dead self back to life. I was the first in Bengal! My heart was swollen with pride.

We stayed together for a few days after that. Then one day Jatin-babu put on the saffron robe of a sannyasi and went away. Aurobindo-babu used to visit us from time to time. He would stay for a couple of days and then go back to Baroda.

We were not able to gather a very significant number of fearless, self-sacrificing workers. When Lord Curzon decided to carry out the partition of Bengal, Aurobindo-babu wrote: "A golden opportunity has come. Lay special stress on the Anti-Partition movement. Many workers will come from this movement." He sent us a little pamphlet he had written entitled *No Compromise*. No press would print it. With no other course open, we bought types, sticks, lead, case, etc. and got the matter composed at our house by a young Marathi man named Kulkarni. Needless to say this Kulkarni used to stay with us. One night we got a press to print about a thousand copies of the pamphlet. It was distributed among all the newspaper editors and among the respectable educated classes. Barin and I took a copy to the venerable Surendranath Banerjee. At first he asked us to leave the pamphlet and go, but as we stood there obstinately, he took it up to glance at it — and could not put it down. He read the entire thing with great concentration, utterly stunned. He asked who the author was. No Indian, why, not even a Bengali, could write such English, and present the facts so cogently — such was his opinion. When he was told that Aurobindo Ghose was the author, he said: "Yes, he is the only person who could write in this way." The Anti-Partition movement took firm shape and grew in momentum day by day.

March 1906. Our *Yugantar* appeared. A few days later, after settling all his affairs in Baroda, Aurobindo-babu joined us. The Maharaja of Baroda came to call him back but had to return disappointed. Once in Calcutta, Aurobindo-babu stayed in Raja Subodh Mullik's house. I went to see him almost every day. One day he told me: "Abinash, I can't stay here — can you arrange something else?"

"Why? Are you having problems in regard to the food or lodging here?"

"Not that. It's not a question of hospitality or food. The reason I don't want to stay here — the real difficulty about staying here — is that ordinary people cannot frequent me here so easily."

I understood what he meant and rented a house on Chaku Khansama Lane, where Barin, I, Sarojini-didi, and others stayed with him for some time. Later we moved to No. 23 Scott's Lane. Barin did not stay at No. 23. Our work was steadily developing into something serious and so for reasons of security and convenience Aurobindo-babu divided it up. Barin was to look after the bombs and so forth in the Muraripukur Garden. He would direct the bomb-section from there while I would be in charge of the publication-section. Barin could come to our house for consultation when needed. I was not to go to the Garden unless it was absolutely necessary.

Needless to say, this Muraripukur garden-house property — seven bighas [one hectare] of land — belonged to Aurobindo-babu's family. It had a nice pond with steps leading down to the water, and a smaller pool. It was covered with mango,

jack-fruit, coconut, betel and bamboo trees. The one-storied house had three rooms and a verandah.

In the house on Scott's Lane, Aurobindo-babu stayed with his wife Mrinalini Devi, his sister Sarojini-didi and myself. After a while, I brought Sailen Bose too.

I observed Aurobindo-babu's day-to-day life very attentively. Many people came to meet him here. It was during this period that he gave up the principalship of the National College and started editing *Bande Mataram*. He was always in a meditative state. When somebody came he talked and chatted cheerfully, then he fell silent and became absorbed in meditation. If someone came to him for articles or about other *Bande Mataram* matters, he would ask him to wait and would begin writing. Sometimes looking at the paper, sometimes not glancing at it, he would write. The pen or pencil did not stop at all. After writing a few pages he would say: "Do you think that will do?" I would say yes, take the article and hand it over to the person who had come. It is easy to imagine how difficult it was for such a man to look after his domestic affairs. Food or clothing did not matter to him. He ate whatever was there. There were holes in his shoes but he did not notice. He did not concern himself with the household at all. I had to look after everything. He got 150 rupees a month from the National College, but it did not always come and finally it stopped altogether. Sometimes I borrowed from Mr. Hemendraprasad Ghosh and then tried to pay him back at my convenience. Those who came in touch with Aurobindo were captivated by his simple, childlike laughter and behaviour. Whenever I gave him a fond scolding, he broke out in laughter. It was at this time, when we were living at Scott's Lane, that Vishnu Bhaskar Lele came to our house with one of his disciples. The practice of yoga increased noticeably after his coming. Aurobindo-babu normally ate rice and dal with us, but after Lele's arrival he just took a boiled potato or a boiled plantain with a small portion of rice. I conferred with *Baudi* (Mrinalini Devi) and arranged to have some ghee put in his rice. On Shivaratri day, all of us fasted and went to Belur Math. When the evening prasad was distributed Aurobindo-babu noticed I was wondering whether to eat it or not, and said: "Eat up, eat up."

"I was wondering whether I should, since we're fasting today."

"But isn't this the prasad of Ramakrishnadev? Eat it up quickly." He and Lele Maharaj had started eating. Another evening four of us went to Kalighat for darshan of Mother Kali. The darshan and so on went off well. But then an altercation broke out over the offering and it soon turned into a free fight. Lele Maharaj's disciple was far from being a puny or harmless sort of fellow, and he entered the fray. Finally, Lele Maharaj pulled him away and came out. I went immediately to Haridas Haldar's house but didn't find him in. The following day at the *Bande Mataram* office I told Haridas Haldar about the incident. He rebuked the nasty priests and apologised to Aurobindo.

Lele Maharaj was settling in more and more securely. I sensed disaster — was

terribly upset — imagined all our plans would come to grief. I went to the garden-house and secretly told Barin and Upen everything. How could we divert Aurobindo from this path? I started to contrive with *Baudi*; Sarojini-didi also began worrying. When fair means failed, I asked him one day: “*Sejda*, on the one hand you practise the austerities of yoga and on the other you sleep in one bed with your wife. What kind of austerity is that?” Smiling sweetly he said: “It is not simply by sharing a bed with one’s wife that *brahmacharya* [chastity in spiritual practice] is lost. To form a group of naked ascetics is not my intention. We have thirty-three lakhs of such ascetics in India. I want ‘*grihastha sannyasis*’ — men leading the full life in the world who when the need arises will renounce everything at the call of duty.”

When we were recruiting volunteers, most of the young men complained that they certainly would have joined us if they hadn’t got married. But how could they come away abandoning their young wives to grief? Some, as the eldest sons, had to take upon themselves the liabilities of their dead fathers; how could they be of any use to us?

“Nothing could ever be achieved with such men.”

“What I say to them does not carry any conviction because I am unmarried myself.”

“Then get married.”

“I’m afraid.”

“Don’t be afraid.”

I was constantly thinking about how to get rid of Lele Maharaj. It would be unthinkable for me to slight someone who was Aurobindo-babu’s guide in the practice of yoga.

One day I saw that Lele Maharaj had begun to give lectures on Yoga to *Baudi* too. I was even more crushed, and told her: “Now even you have joined in, *Baudi*.”

“What am I to do, brother? I do not want to hold him back. I’ll do all I can to follow after him.”

Unable to contain myself, I blurted out to Lele Maharaj: “You won’t be satisfied until you have wrecked everything. When are you going to get out of here?” Smiling he said: “Your resolution will be fulfilled. The freedom of India is imminent but it will not come by the path you are following. Believe me.”

“What do you mean by imminent?”

“Fifty years or so.”

“My God! Fifty years! No, no, that’s impossible. At the most ten years. We can’t wait any longer.” Patting my back, he told me: “One day, you too will take this path.”

“We are passionate people, we don’t want to hear about all that.”

“You will have to listen, you will have to follow this path.”

Every day, many people came to see Aurobindo. He told me that this disturbed his sadhana. I too was a bit disturbed — how was I going to stop them from coming?

I politely asked a lot of people to go away, but I could not do it with everyone. It wasn't just Bengalis; Marwaris came too.

One day about noon a dignified-looking Marwari arrived and asked to speak to Aurobindo. I requested him politely to come back in an hour. He was stubborn. "Well, let me sit here in the drawing-room and chat with you. An hour will pass quickly."

He said that so jovially that I could not refuse him. Helplessly I sat down and began to chat with him. Talking with him was really a pleasure. Barely fifteen minutes had passed before Aurobindo-babu slowly came down the stairs with his slippers on. Recognising the visitor from a distance he called out happily: "Tilak, it's you!" I gave a start. Balgangadhar Tilak! I bowed down at his feet and apologised. He took my hands close to his chest and said: "Forgive you for what? You haven't done anything wrong."

"Why didn't you tell me at once that you were Balgangadhar Tilak? I would have called him down."

"I knew that. But I was aware that Aurobindo was resting."

The whole responsibility of looking after *Yugantar* fell on me. In the very beginning the respected Abinashchandra Chakravarti from time to time gave considerable help with the finances. Barin was so involved with his tours of East Bengal and the bomb-making that his articles were not always up to the mark. For this reason I had to patch them up a little. This annoyed Barin and he decided he would not submit any more articles to *Yugantar* and stopped writing. When Aurobindo-babu heard about this, he called us both and said: "Now Bari, it seems that you won't write any more for *Yugantar*?"

"Yes, Abi meddles with my articles."

"In whose hands is the policy of the paper?"

"Abi's," Barin replied.

"Then Abinash will act as he thinks right. You shouldn't raise any objections." Barin swallowed his pride and he never raised objections again.

Yugantar was involved again and again in sedition cases. In the first of these cases the statement given by Shri Bhupendranath Dutt as editor was actually written by Aurobindo-babu. And it was on his instructions that the case was not defended. I too was frequently arrested but each time I was defended. The others had to undergo imprisonment. Everything was done according to Aurobindo-babu's instructions. Bhupen sent a request for an appeal to be filed in the High Court! When Aurobindo-babu was informed of this, he said: "How can we appeal a case in the High Court that we did not even defend? Listen, go to the jail and get Bhupen to sign a power of attorney, bring it back here and destroy it." Needless to say, this is what was done. It was Kingsford who sat on all these cases.

C.I.D. officers and policemen used to come in the evening of the day before the *Yugantar* was issued and confiscate all the printed copies of the paper as well

as all the forms, so that the paper could not hit the streets. But even this ploy proved futile. *Yugantar* hit the streets in time. *The Statesman* wrote: How can this be? Is it some sort of supernatural trick, and so on. Let me say something about how we managed to bring it out on time. During that period Bengal was stirred up and there was such an enthusiasm in the air that every man, every newspaper was most eager to help us. Even if they were unable to help us openly, they gave whatever secret help they could. *Hitavadi* helped the most. Before the police came I used to take a few copies of *Yugantar* and keep them elsewhere. As soon as the forms and so forth were taken away, we would get the paper printed late at night, usually at the *Hitavadi* office, and send it out to the streets on time. Unable to stop us, either by charging us with sedition or by seizing the printed newspapers and forms, they finally confiscated the Sadhana Press where *Yugantar* was printed. The printing room was locked and two constables guarded the place day and night. Our office was then in a big building in Bowbazar. We stayed upstairs with Aurobindo and the press worked downstairs. Our work was greatly hindered by the constables sitting in front of the door. I wrote a letter to the Inspector of the Muchipara police station, asking him to remove the constables and to shift the press elsewhere as it had been confiscated and we did not care to have it kept in the house. The Inspector replied that the appeal of the confiscation order was being heard by the High Court and a final settlement had not been reached. If the confiscation order were to be overruled by the High Court, removing the press now would be simply a waste of time, etc. So we should wait for the High Court's decision regarding our appeal.

In due course I won the appeal. Barrister A. Chaudhuri fought the case on my behalf. At 9.30 at night on the day I won the case, the Inspector summoned me to the station to make some arrangement about the transfer of the press. When I was getting ready to go, Aurobindo-babu said: "Take ten or twelve boys with you when you go; I think they may arrest you. At this late hour they may be of some help." I went to the police station with an escort. As soon as I arrived, the Inspector showed me an arrest-warrant and said: "You are under arrest. You may be released on bail by furnishing two securities of Rs. 20,000 for a total bail of Rs. 40,000. We had to act in this way — calling you to the station at night to arrest you — because of the arrogant tone of your letter." My companions went to Aurobindo-babu with this news; he wrote a letter and sent it to Krishnakumar Mitra, editor of *Sanjivani*, and wrote letters to several other men too. Krishnakumar Mitra presented himself at the police station. The well-known detective Inspector Puma Lahiri was there at that time. He accepted Krishnakumar Mitra's surety of twenty thousand rupees. When the second security did not arrive, Lahiri said: "This time you are finally going to get locked up. Every time you manage to slip away." Since no one had turned up to furnish the second security, they were getting ready to send me to Lalbazar police station. Just then a gentleman arrived to stand security for me. I had never seen him

before. He said that he would stand security for me but Lahiri was not willing to accept his bail. The gentleman tried to reason, told him that he owned three houses in Calcutta, that he was a big businessman, and so forth. Lahiri did not budge an inch. The gentleman took an Imperial Bank cheque book out of his pocket and said: "I'm giving you this cheque for twenty thousand rupees." Lahiri softened a little and agreed. And so I escaped the lock-up again. Later I came to know the gentleman's name: Bhupati Basu. I won this case as well.

All the sedition cases — against *Yugantar*, *Bande Mataram*, *Sandhya*, etc. — were heard by Kingsford. It was he who ordered Sushil Sen's caning. For these and other reasons the people were aroused against Kingsford. Barin became obsessed with the idea of killing him. When this bomb [a bomb in the form of a book that was sent to Kingsford] failed to explode, it was decided to finish him off by throwing a bomb right at him. Sriji Charuchandra Dutt, Subodh Mullick and Aurobindo considered the matter and gave their unanimous verdict. In the meanwhile Kingsford was transferred to Muzaffarpur.

Before this, Barin had sought Aurobindo's view about assassinating the French mayor of Chandernagore. He came and said: "*Sejda*, I want to kill the mayor of Chandernagore."

"Why?"

"He broke up a national meeting there and persecuted the local population."

"So he ought to be killed? How many people will you kill in this way? I cannot give my consent to this. Nothing will come of it."

"No, *Sejda*, if this isn't done, these oppressors will never learn the lesson we have to teach them."

"Very well, if that's what you think, do it." Barin came out and told the boys waiting outside: "*Sejda* agrees." It is true that Charu Dutt, Subodh Mullick and Aurobindo gave their consent to the murder of Kingsford; but it is difficult to say how far Aurobindo truly consented.

On 14 April 1908, Khudiram and Prafulla Chaki received a bomb from Barin and came to me. As planned, I gave them two of our best, tested revolvers. They bowed to me in farewell and set off on their destined road.

When I learned that the respected Manoranjan Guha Thakurta had decided to wind up his daily *Navashakti*, I told Aurobindo that if he allowed me, I would speak to Manoranjan about taking over the charge of running the paper. Aurobindo consented gladly. The very next day, I went to Manoranjan-babu's house in Giridih and asked him to hand over the charge of the paper to me. He planned to sell the press; but when he heard of my intention he became very happy and said: "I will give you the whole press and everything else if you can save *Navashakti*."

"You don't have to give it away. The press and everything having to do with *Navashakti* will still be yours. I will only manage it, you will be the editor. I just need four thousand rupees for the preliminary expenses. After this you won't have

to give anything else.” He thought a while and then said: “Fine, here is what remains of my capital.” In the last issue of *Navashakti* there was a notice that Abinash Bhattacharya had taken over the management of *Navashakti* and that for two weeks there would be no issue so that the new arrangements could be made. In two weeks’ time *Navashakti* would appear again in a new form, and so forth. Many handbills were distributed with the same information.

After I returned from Giridih, we all left the house at Scott’s Lane and put up at the *Navashakti* office. Aurobindo-babu used to go to the *Bande Mataram* office from here. I got especially caught up in the preparations for the publication of *Navashakti*. Before two full weeks had passed (on 30 April 1908) the bomb exploded at Muzaffarpur. On the night of May 1st at 8 o’clock, I brought five rifles and five bags of cartridges and kept them in a room downstairs on the ground floor. The reason I had brought this stuff — much against my wishes — was that someone was to take it from me. It had to be removed that very night. I waited anxiously for Aurobindo-babu, to ask him where to take it. He came at 10 o’clock at night. I told him everything including the possibility of our being arrested the next morning. For that evening I had gone to the Lalbazar Police Court area to try to find out the reactions there to the Muzaffarpur bomb explosion. I told Aurobindo-babu what I had learned. He asked me to go to the Garden at once and ask Barin to remove everything [from the *Navashakti* office] and to shift all the boys that were living at the Garden to another place that very night. I went to the Garden and brought back Barin and six other workers. They took everything and disappeared. Our fears were realised. On the second of May, early in the morning, Aurobindo-babu, Sailenbabu and I were arrested in the usual way. Barin, Upen, Ullaskar and others were arrested at the same time at the Muraripukur Garden.

This case against us was called the Alipur Bomb Case or the Manicktolla Bomb Case. It lasted for more than a year. During the trial we were kept in Alipur Central Jail. After the three of us (Aurobindo, Sailen and I) were arrested, we were taken first to a police station and then to the Lalbazar lock-up [*hajat*] where we were kept in separate cells. On the third day we were brought before the Presidency Magistrate. While we were at the Lalbazar *hajat*, C.I.D. officers came to try to make us give confessions. They tried to frighten us with all kinds of tales — “Barin has confessed; Upen and Ullaskar too,” and so on. None of us could believe that Barin and others had confessed. From the Presidency Magistrate’s Court we were sent to Alipur Central Jail. Just at the moment that the three of us, following police instructions, were getting into a horse-carriage, my younger brother Upendra forced his way through a contingent of policemen and a large crowd of people, tossed a daily newspaper to us and slowly walked away; his age at that time was thirteen or fourteen. When we looked at the paper we learned that Barin had actually confessed. Aurobindo-babu simply said, “Has Barin gone off his head?”

During the first days in Alipur jail, we were kept in groups of three, four, five

or six to a cell. Later we were kept together in a very large room. People arrested in different places were brought and kept with us. Panchanan Tarkachudamani, the highly respected scriptural scholar of Bhatpara, and some of his students were arrested, brought in and kept with us. In the morning and in the evening, while returning from court, a few of us used to practise a little yoga. A few others used to respond to this with a little jeering. One day I asked Aurobindo-babu to explain a verse from the Upanishads to me. He explained it to me in a very simple and easy-to-understand way. I told Aurobindo-babu's interpretation to the great Pundit Tarkachudamani. He exclaimed with great joy: "Why Abinash, I could never have explained this as simply as Aurobindo-babu has." When he became acquainted with Aurobindo-babu's Sanskrit scholarship and deep knowledge, he was overwhelmed. He encouraged us very much in our practice of yoga and meditation. We really enjoyed talking with him during the short period he was with us. He never ate any of the jail food. Ganges water and wood-apple leaves were brought from outside; he sat by the side of a pool outside the room and took them at about two in the afternoon. After a few days he was released on bail.

One of our companions, Hem Sen, used to hide a little of the food that he got from outside. The next morning he distributed it to everyone. In the middle of the night some people took the food out and had a lot of fun sharing it with those who were still awake. Hem used to shout a lot while distributing the food in the morning. I usually got a share. Once, when I was passing out some of Hem's biscuits, I noticed that Aurobindo-babu was awake. I stuffed three or four biscuits into his hands. He chortled with delight like a child, stretched out on the floor and started munching them. During our free time we sat in a circle with Aurobindo-babu and played "wordmaking". Hem Sen taught ju-jitsu almost every morning. In this way our days passed and the trial went on.

It was during this period that suddenly at eight one morning Kanai Dutt and Satyen-babu killed Naren Gossain, the government approver, in the hospital compound with a revolver. That very day around noon we were put in the "44 Degree" cells, one person to a cell. Kanai and Satyen had already been put in the first two cells. When it was time to go to the court, we were all handcuffed, dumped into the van and taken together. We had a lot of fun in the courtroom during the trial. We were kept inside a cage with handcuffs fastened to our wrists and attached to a chain. Barrister Chittaranjan Das drew Beachcroft's attention to the fact that it was illegal to keep someone handcuffed before the honourable judge; we raised our arms, chain and all, to show him. The judge replied: "This is an arrangement made by the police for reasons of security. I do not want to interfere with it." At that moment we lowered our arms, unshackled ourselves and again raised our now free arms for him to see. The judge was rather astonished and said: "If they can in any case release themselves, of what value is this arrangement?" Needless to say we had learned to open our handcuffs in a trice. During the trial, Aurobindo-babu sat in

the first place on the first bench, I sat next to him. He was always absorbed in meditation. Sometimes he said a word or two to me. Mr. Das and the other lawyers asked each of us to write down whatever we had to say in our defence. I used to write down whatever had to be said about Aurobindo-babu for Barrister Das. Sometimes I even used to answer questions for him.

After the trial had gone on for more than a year, judgement was delivered on 6 May 1909. Aurobindo was acquitted; Barin and Ullaskar were sentenced to be hanged and I and nine others given transportation for life. Some received jail-terms of a few years and others were freed.

We were beside ourselves with joy over Aurobindo's acquittal. No one gave a thought to his own fate at that time. The farewells began. People started embracing Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo told Barin and Ullas: "You won't be hanged." To me he said: "You'll return soon." We came back to our senses. Those who went back to their cells went with faces stained with dejection. Soon would come the journey to the Andamans.

I was the first to return from the Andamans. Almost four years later, Hem-da and Ullaskar came back.

I met Aurobindo again for the first time in fourteen years in Pondicherry. I was with him for a month. Every day we used to talk on various subjects. I have brought out excerpts of these talks in the monthly *Basumati*. I mention one or two things here. When I first saw him he told me: "Chitta has made a big mistake."

"What has Chitta done this time?"

"Signed this pact — this pact means admitting that there are two races in India, the Hindus and Muslims. Now we will have to face the virulent consequences."

"You are engaged in the discipline of yoga and have become a *sadhu* — why do you have to concern yourself with all this?"

"I am not doing this yoga for my personal liberation, my sadhana is for the good of the whole world. To lift man to a higher state of progress is my endeavour."

"In that case you shouldn't make a distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims."

"That is just what I say. In India there will be no Hindus and no Muslims, All will be one — Indian."

"How are Europe and America to blame?"

"I do not reproach or hate them. But I still want our fallen Mother India to rise once again, resplendent and glorious. I also want — without the others being diminished — that my Mother should stand out as the foremost among them — my mother Bengal. Let the Bengali be the foremost — this is my heartfelt desire."

"Then I have nothing more to say."

I was fortunate enough to have lived together with Sri Aurobindo for a few days. I called him *Sejda* and addressed him as *tumi*.² I had the opportunity to observe

2. The familiar form of the second person.

him at close range at his daily work. He often talked about his holiness Sri Sri Ramakrishnadev and Swami Vivekananda. Sometimes he spoke of Bijoy Krishna Goswami as well. Those who got the chance to come close to him and speak with him went away deeply impressed by his simple beautiful laughter; his childlike bearing left a mark on every heart. Usually he was absorbed in thought. I have looked upon him at different times as a brother, a friend and a companion. He gave me affection and sometimes scolded me for my childish conduct. I have been charmed by his heart's vastness. In him I discovered a vast being, beyond my imaginings. The lotus-consciousness of Sri Sri Ramkrishnadev, fostered by the light of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo has blossomed into hundred-petalled glory. Into the confusion of the present-day world, bearing the perfection of Sri Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, descended the lord of my heart, Sri Aurobindo, endowed with divine life: He cannot die. The whole world will experience his glory in the not too distant future. I can hear the cry: "Fear not, fear not."

(Originally published in *Galpa-Bharati*, Vol. 6, 1357 [1950-51], pp. 829-50)

ABINASH BHATTACHARYA

(Translated from the Bengali. Reproduced from *Srinvantu*, November 1984.)

You are quite right in taking an optimistic and not a pessimistic attitude in the sadhana — progressive sadhana is enormously helped by an assured faith and confidence. Such a confidence helps to realise, for it is dynamic and tends to fulfil itself.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1632)

A MANIFOLD ACHIEVEMENT*

SRI AUROBINDO THE POLITICIAN

SRI AUROBINDO'S role as a politician was momentous since it was in the crucial initial period of India's struggle for freedom. Let me begin with its background. At the age of 7 he was sent to England by his father with instructions to his guardian to keep him from contact with anything Indian. But at the age of 11, when still in England, he received a strong impression that great revolutionary changes could take place in the world and that he was destined to play a part in them. His attention was now drawn to India and at Cambridge he made revolutionary speeches at the Indian Majlis. To fulfil his father's wish he appeared successfully in the ICS examination except that he deliberately managed to fail in the riding test. This saved him from service to the British rulers.

Returning to India at the age of 21 he joined the Baroda State service. But secretly he formed a revolutionary organisation with its centre in Bengal. In a famous letter to his newly-wed wife he wrote that he adored India as a divine Mother-Spirit and to fight for her freedom was all in all to him. Resigning his lucrative post in Baroda he went to Bengal and joined Bepin Pal's journal *Bande Mataram*, writing fiery articles in it that stirred the whole of India. The Government arrested him. Poet Tagore wrote a poem to him beginning with words which, translated, mean: "Aurobindo, Rabindranath bows to you." He was released for want of sufficient evidence.

He now organised the Nationalist Party. To the dismay of the Moderates who then constituted the Congress he openly declared complete independence as India's political goal. After crushing the Moderates at the Surat Conference his party developed a programme of non-cooperation, passive resistance, boycott of foreign goods, Swadeshi, etc., with Bankim Chandra's song, "Bande Mataram" ("I bow to you, O Mother") as India's national anthem. Most of this programme was later taken up by Gandhi. The Government again arrested Sri Aurobindo. He spent a year in Alipore Jail as an undertrial prisoner. There he immersed himself in Yogic practice and had the realisation of Sri Krishna as present everywhere. Sri Krishna assured him that he would be released. And released he was, to everyone's surprise. It was also at an inner command by Sri Krishna that he suddenly left Calcutta for Chandernagore in French India and then for Pondicherry. There he lived to the end and created his Ashram of Integral Yoga.

However, he never forgot his motherland and worked spiritually for her freedom. In 1935 I asked him whether in his future scheme of things India's independence

* Five talks gathered by Pradeep Sen for a radio broadcast.

formed a part. He replied that this was quite settled: his concern was with what would follow. To quote his words: “goonda raj or Bolshevism?”

During World War II he had insight into Hitler’s evil designs and took the side of the Allies while Indian leaders launched a non-cooperation campaign. Then came the Cripps Proposals. Sri Aurobindo read in them a genuine prelude to independence. But the Congress rejected his appeal to accept them. Later several Congressmen regretted the refusal. Independence came in 1947 — on August 15, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday. Sri Aurobindo saw in it the Divine’s sanction to his work for his country. All India Radio asked for a message. After referring to the significant coincidence, he listed his five dreams: (1) a united unpartitioned India; (2) a resurgent Asia; (3) a world union; (4) India’s gift of spirituality to the world; (5) a new step in evolution to a more-than-human Consciousness.

Q: Could you recollect the memories of 15th August 1947?

A: I was not actually present at that time; but I heard that the Mother had come on the small terrace near her room [Dyuman’s terrace] and devotees had collected below. They began singing *Bande Mataram* with Dilip Kumar Roy at the centre. Then in the end the Mother hoisted the national flag and the Ashram flag and cried “Jai Hind!”

NIRODBARAN

SRI AUROBINDO THE PHILOSOPHER

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy is unique in its originality in the history of spiritual thought. Its originality consists mainly in four ideas.

First, God has manifested the world in his own being by his inherent Conscious Force, but he is not manifest in it. Rather he is veiled in all the principles of existence including the most obscure, viz. Matter. God as Substance, Consciousness and Force has evolved from Matter as Life and Mind.

Secondly, man, the mental being, consciously seeks knowledge of and union with the supreme Reality. But all experiences and realisations of mental-spiritual man are partial, not integral as is evident from the tenets and values of the different religions and the strands of the various spiritual disciplines and their results. Sri Aurobindo emphatically asserts that the integral realisation is possible and will surely be attained.

Thirdly, the acceptance and commitment to life in the world not as it is now but as it will be as the result of a further unfolding of consciousness in the world.

Fourthly, Sri Aurobindo says there will be a further evolution of consciousness to a still unmanifest level of itself. He calls this level of consciousness the

supermind. Integral and comprehensive Knowledge; omnipotent and infallible Will and pure self-creative Bliss are the essence of the supermind. It is the divine Nature.

The evolution of mental man's consciousness will enable him to know, be and possess God in all his aspects both beyond and in the world. The ascent of man to the supermind and its descent into his being and nature will bring about a radical change within, a true transformation. His mind will not cling to particular truths but will open itself to the integral Truth, his vital life will shed its passions and attachments and enjoy God in all its experiences, Matter organised as the physical body of man will become fully conscious and arrive at God.

God has a purpose in the world. It is his unveiled manifestation on earth and in individual and collective life there. The supermind is the indispensable means of achieving that purpose. It will fulfil the intention of the Divine in his creation. The supramental spiritual being will live his life in Knowledge and from the Truth of the Spirit. The members of the community of supermen will enjoy a divine existence and their life will be the Life Divine.

ARABINDA BASU

SRI AUROBINDO THE POET

Sri Aurobindo was a poet on a grand scale, the scale natural to all the sides of his versatile personality. He has given us poetry of various kinds — several narratives, numerous lyrics and sonnets, half a dozen dramas, a substantial body of experiments in new metres and, to top everything, an epic of nearly 24,000 lines of blank verse, the longest poetic creation in English: *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*.

This poem takes up the famous traditional story of a woman's love which manages to reclaim from the God of Death the life of her prematurely dead husband. Sri Aurobindo turns that Indian legend to his own spiritual purposes without depriving it of human interest. He transforms it into a symbol of conquering all the ills that attend on man's mortality. But the vision unfolded goes beyond a mere individual's perfection. A democracy of the Divine, liberating the human collectivity, is the goal as in that utterance by the story's main character:

A lonely freedom cannot satisfy
A heart that has grown one with every heart:
I am a deputy of the aspiring world,
My spirit's liberty I ask for all.

What is specially notable about Sri Aurobindo's epic is that it attempts to open up a new dimension of poetic expression. In English literature we have the Shakespearian accent of the thrilled rapid life-force, the Miltonic tone of the

majestically thinking mind, the deep or colourful cry of the idealistic imagination as in Wordsworth and Shelley and, recently, Yeats and AE. *Savitri*, while taking into itself the whole past of English poetry, adds not only the Indian spirit: it adds also in ample measure the typical intonation, at once intense and immense in its rhythmic significance, which the Rigveda, the Upanishads and the Gita bring. Sri Aurobindo calls it “overhead poetry”. It is not what the common man may suppose: poetry that passes clean over his head! It is inspired verse with an illuminating power, hailing from secret regions of a more-than-human consciousness which lie above the mental level reached so far by earth’s evolution. This poetry may be generally characterised, in Sri Aurobindo’s own words from *Savitri*, as consisting of

The lines that tear the veil from Deity’s face.

If you want to relish variously such lines which the Rishis of old called the Mantra, the supreme vibrant Word, I may offer a few samples. In the exquisite vein you have:

A gate of dreams ajar on mystery’s verge.

The note of sheer sublimity is struck by

Our life’s repose is in the Infinite.

A music goes home to our human concerns with the whisper of an ultimate assurance when Sri Aurobindo says:

All can be done if the God-touch is there.

K. D. SETHNA

SRI AUROBINDO THE YOGI

Sri Aurobindo had many facets to his personality, but the most central one which holds the key to his life is that of a Yogi. His Yoga, as is well known, is a new approach to life: it includes all life in Yoga.

Q: Is the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo for the sake of humanity?

A: I would say Yes and No. Yes, because it aims at the fulfilment of God’s intention in humanity. No, because its aim is not confined to the betterment of the state of humanity. It aims at raising the level of human life into a divine state.

Q: What has one to do to prepare oneself for Yoga?

A: First to fix an aim for one's life. Normally people carry on without any central aim; a central objective has to be fixed and then all the faculties of oneself have to be gathered and focused on this objective which in this Yoga is to realise the Divine Consciousness. In other words, one has to make an effort to raise all the movements of daily life to a higher level which corresponds to the requirements of a divine life.

Q: What are the main characteristics of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga?

A: It is this integral character. It concentrates not only on the health of the soul but also on the health of the mind and the life-energies and the physical body. It embraces the whole of life in its perspective.

Q: How is the present generation influenced by the Yogic life of Sri Aurobindo?

A: For the first time in Indian tradition, Yoga has been turned earthwards. It accepts life, seeks to improve and perfect life and not to reject life. It is this positive note in Sri Aurobindo's approach that has appealed to the rising generation in our country.

MADHAV PANDIT

SRI AUROBINDO THE EDUCATIONIST

What is Sri Aurobindo's idea of education?

In the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, education is a discipline and a training that begins at birth and continues throughout one's life. They believe in the perfectibility of man, of his whole being, and, thus education consists in the full and perfect manifestation of all the possibilities lodged within his body, his life, his mind. It should provide him with the ideal opportunities that will help him realise all his potentialities. "The human being," says Sri Aurobindo, "is a self-developing soul, and the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material . . . The true secret is to help him find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within." Thus, education should not only bring out of the child the best and the noblest he is capable of, but also endow him with an understanding of the true aim and significance of human life.

Sri Aurobindo describes this in very simple words when he says: “The children should be helped to grow up into straightforward, frank, upright and honourable human beings, ready to develop into divine nature.”

For life is a process of evolution, an evolution of consciousness. This consciousness emerges progressively and can manifest itself through all the activities of the different parts of the being. The teacher helps the child to discover these possibilities within him. He is a helper and a guide who shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not teach, he only helps the child to discover the knowledge hidden within. Everyone has within himself something divine and the chief aim of education is to help the growing child to draw that out and manifest it fully, joyfully and harmoniously. “A free and natural growth is the condition for genuine development,” according to Sri Aurobindo. The human personality is encouraged to grow and exercise all its capabilities, the physical, the vital, the mental and moral, the aesthetic and the spiritual. The evocation of this real man within is the right object of education, indeed of all human life.

The future clearly demands the development of the larger possibilities of the human personality. Our education looks ahead to the future. It seeks to break out of the arbitrary grooves of training and preordained and compulsory shaping of thought and personality. This aim is expressed in the Students’ Prayer which the Mother wrote out in 1952:

Make of us the hero warriors we aspire to become. May we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born against the past that seeks to endure, so that the new things may manifest and we be ready to receive them.

JHUMUR

(Adapted from *Mother India*, January 1992)

A sincere heart is worth all the extraordinary powers in the world.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1642)

THE LUMINOUS PAST

(Continued from the issue of June 2012)

PAVITRA-DA sent a circular to all the classes informing the teachers that they could order textbooks of their choice. He wanted us to put down on a piece of paper the titles of the books and the number of copies required so that the order could be placed. I wrote down the title of the book and put twenty copies against it. I had counted three extra copies because there was a rule according to which we could take in new pupils in the 'accelerated course' till the month of April. All the books arrived. There was a notice informing everyone that we could get the books from the School Library. As I was coming back with the books in my hands the teacher of the experimental class, whom Pavitra-da had asked to stop teaching, came up to me and said that I should not teach from the books I had chosen. He was a senior teacher and it had been his work to select books. I wanted to get Pavitra-da's opinion on this. He said, "Compare the selections made by the two of you. Then choose the one you find easier and to your liking." I chose the books which I had already selected. All confusions got resolved because I had asked Pavitra-da for his guidance.

*

In order to gain experience and skill in teaching I went to see, following Bharatidi's guidance, a Polish lady called Janina who had been a teacher. She used to work in Dr. Sanyal's clinic. When I went to her and asked for help she willingly agreed. She promised to teach me twice a week and she also asked me to come back the next day so that she could give me in writing the methods used for teaching little children. The following day when I went to her I saw that she had written it down in German as well as in French. I told her that all my pupils were new. Only two of the boys had been in our school, had come to my class from another class. They did not know anything, were very naughty and had no interest in studies.

Janina looked at me with a very calm gaze then told me that I should try and observe them, when they were naughty, to find out what it was they really wanted. Everything was written in the paper she had given me. Two days in the week were to be reserved for lighter activities. If the weather was cloudy the children could be taken for a walk outside. By going out they would be able to learn much more. She said, "Whatever they see, ask them to come back and draw. Next to the drawings, ask them to write down clear descriptions of what they have drawn. Ask them to make a little garden inside the classroom. They should choose shade-loving plants. Then they should write a description of this garden which would be in their classroom.

The pupils will really enjoy this activity, and they will also learn a lot. After this, ask them to talk about the park, the sea, the streets, the trees, the flowers and everything else. The ones who can speak better will speak and the ones who have a better handwriting will write. All the pupils together will discuss the subject. The teacher should only give directions and advice and guide the class.”

I followed Janina’s instructions and saw that my class was progressing very well. The ones who used to be naughty had made an effort to make their handwriting better. From time to time Pavitra-da used to enquire whether the children were learning properly. I told him about Janina’s plan. Pavitra-da was happy. He immediately asked Rishabhchand-da to make four benches for my class. On each bench there would be place for four flower pots. The benches were made with four holes in them. Under the benches were thick planks on which were kept four earthen pots. The excess water from the flower pots would fall into these pots. Everything was painted in green — the benches, the earthen pots, the flower pots. Ambabhikshuji gave sixteen saplings as per Pavitra-da’s instructions. One of the saplings was planted in order to show the children how the others were to be planted. All the other saplings were planted by them. They were the gardeners of this little garden. Now those who used to be naughty became the most eager pupils. The classes were no longer boring. The classroom looked as if it was a fair ground. Everything went on quietly. The pupils took turns to water the plants as well as to clean the garden. They gave shapes to the saplings, drew them and wrote little descriptions in the pages of their notebooks. They would come and ask me the spellings of the words. And all this was done in French.

*

About a month later Pavitra-da came one morning to my class and gave me the lock and key of the classroom. The maths teacher had pulled the ear of an older pupil, hurting him very badly. The Mother had forbidden him to teach any more. I was asked by the Mother to look after that maths class for eight months. The Mother’s words were my commands. But what would happen to my work at the Laundry? Pavitra-da was my cousin’s friend. He smiled and told me, “I have seen Jatindranath and have made all arrangements. You will take your classes during the first, third and fourth periods. The second period will be taken by the English teacher. After the fourth period the classroom will not be used. So you should lock the door and take the key with you.” I was happy. The plants were going to be safe.

*

The next day, the first thing I did was to take the children to the Ashram Library to look at the garden and to leaf through the picture books. There the children were thrilled to see the lily pond and the fish playing in it. After spending a long time at the Library I could teach in the classroom only for one hour. In the afternoon as I was about to enter my house I saw a little boy sitting and waiting for me at the door. He came into the room with me. He was neither afraid nor shy. I asked him who he was. He told me his name and also his friend's name. I asked him, "Why are you telling me your friend's name?" He replied, "Both of us have been turned out of our class by the teachers."

"Why?"

"Because we don't study and we are mischievous."

"Why have you come to me?"

"Pavitra-da told us that the Mother wants me and my friend to find our own teacher, the one who will tolerate us."

"Very good. Go and look for one."

"We want to study in your class. We have three friends who are already in your class. They are also naughty. They have told us that they enjoy gardening, going out for walks, sitting and drawing in the park and listening to stories. Won't you take us? In the morning, at the Library everybody makes fun of us. Even in the Playground we are asked to sit. We feel humiliated."

This word "humiliated" coming from a child's mouth made me feel sorry for him so I decided to take them.

"I will take you."

The boy did not even wait another minute. As he ran out he said, "I am going to tell Pavitra-da that we have found our teacher."

The next day was a Sunday. In the evening Pavitra-da told me at the Playground, "Pramila, you have done a very good thing by taking these two children. The Mother is happy about it. I had already enrolled you as a student at the Alliance Française. Now I have also made you a member of the Library. You can borrow books and also watch a film once a week. I am giving this opportunity to three or four of you. If you can do your work following the Mother's ideals then she will give you more opportunities to know and learn."

With joy in my heart I inwardly expressed my gratitude to the Mother.

(To be continued)

PRAMILA DEVI

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

BOOK REVIEW

Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram by Narayan Prasad — 3rd enlarged edition, published by Sri Aurobindo Karmi Sangha Trust, West Bengal, 24th November 2010, 420 pages, price Rs. 250.

THE word ‘Ashram’ like many such words that we have inherited from the great traditions evokes a certain image in the human mind. Generally it is associated with ochre- or white-robed monks and sannyasis who have renounced the world. Or it raises images of an organisation devoted to philanthropy and humanitarian service through free hospitals etc. Generally, one conceives of idyllic surroundings in some mountain ranges, of a place far-off from the restless tread and noise of ordinary mundane life. Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry defies any such image. Located in the heart of the city, without any fixed geographical boundaries, the Ashram and its life are, in keeping with the nature of Sri Aurobindo’s teaching, quite conterminous with the life of the people around. If one looks at the surface of things, it is even impossible to differentiate the two. But a somewhat deeper look shows us how this other life, the life at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, is different. To use an analogy that the book itself provides, one can see and feel this other life as a butterfly in formation within the pupa of the caterpillar. The pupa itself is not something visible but an inner something that separates the Ashram life even as a baby is enclosed within the safety of the mother’s womb, even though it is connected with all that is outside through its mother.

What then is Sri Aurobindo Ashram? Most persons who visit the Ashram are at once struck by two things, — inwardly, they feel a strong dynamic peace that is not found even in remote Himalayan retreats. On the other hand, they find a great emphasis on physical beauty and perfection that is missing in most other similar places. At the same time, if they stay a little longer they are surprised by the many-sidedness of the Ashram life where almost every activity of the world is represented in miniature. Some are even given much more importance than one could imagine in an Ashram, the comprehensive programme of physical education, for example. One is also struck by the absence of any proselytising and evangelical spirit as well as the absence of any rigidly fixed routine or easy-to-learn technique purchased at a price. As one probes a little deeper, one cannot help appreciating that in the Ashram equality is practised without any ostentation — equality between men and women, between the rich and poor, between the learned and cultured and the less fortunate and illiterate. These are things that one easily notices. But what one is unable to see easily is the spiritual intent in all this. Longstanding tradition in India as well as the West has created a strong dichotomy between life and yoga, between god and the

world, between material and spiritual life. When we look at the Ashram life through this lens, we can easily become confused. But there are some genuine seekers who are drawn to the Ashram life intuitively yet find it an enigma. The enigma is partially due to a lack of comprehension of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo which is new in many ways compared to the old yogas. But it is also due to the fact that the Ashram defies any simple and easy understanding . . . if one looks for what one commonly expects when turning to institutions that bear the name 'Ashram'. On one side, the complexity of the world and its activities are represented here. On the other side, one finds here a divine Presence mightier than any ever witnessed, at least in the recent memory of the earth. This book comes as a relief to such seekers.

At the very outset, the author starts on the right note setting the backdrop of the Ashram life through the revealing words of the Master and the Mother:

I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits.

Sri Aurobindo

* * *

An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life is of no great use; for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realisation withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways. . . . An ideal of this kind may be good for those who want it, but it is not our Yoga. For we want the divine conquest of this world, the conquest of all its movements and the realisation of the Divine here.

The Mother

* * *

. . . this is not an Ashram like others — the members are not Sannyasis; it is not *moksha* that is the sole aim of the Yoga here. What is being done here is a preparation for a work — a work which will be founded on Yogic consciousness and Yoga-Shakti, and can have no other foundation.

Sri Aurobindo
(*Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* pp. 2-3)

The Ashram is indeed a creation at once simple and complex that defies any easy description. It is simple since everything is centred around and referred back to the Divine Mother whose creation the Ashram is. It is complex since gathered within its folds of Light and Grace is a whole world or rather worlds within worlds representing all that exists in the universe in a miniature symbolic way. It is therefore no easy task to write about the Ashram life. Yet it is to the credit of Narayan Prasad, author of the book under review, that he does a more than admirable work by bringing alive the various facets of the many-sided Ashram life. To his credit also is the fact that he puts many of these things in a certain historical perspective. As a result, we are better able to appreciate how things have developed and are worked out within the Ashram context.

The Mother is revolutionary in everything. She has revolutionised the whole system of yogic sadhana. The peak of her teaching is not *samādhi* but self-consecration, not salvation but transformation; the manifestation of not only the Truth and the Good but also the Beauty of the One in everything. (p. 10)

* * *

Since 1962 physical access to the Mother has been much restricted. Still her guidance is there; the words she spoke long ago come ringing back into our ears:

Formerly I used to keep control over everything. Nothing could be done without my first knowing and approving it. Afterwards I adopted a different mode of acting. I withdrew from all details and kept myself at a distance, sending the right inspiration to each worker in his own field. (pp. 28-29)

The author is uniquely placed to write about all this since he has seen the Ashram intimately not just as a long-standing inmate but as someone who has a deep and subtle understanding of the path. He is not one of those curious collectors of data who record 'facts' pell-mell. Nor is he a superficial observer of actions and events without any understanding of the Idea-Forces that stand behind and operate from the hidden recesses of our own being and the world. This is especially important while writing something like the history of the Ashram, since the Divine Wisdom works here, often unseen, and leads us individually and collectively through all the apparent anomalies, paradoxes and contradictions, towards Truth and Light and Harmony. All this comes so beautifully through the pages of this book. This subtle understanding of the complex fabric of the Ashram life comes out in many remarkable passages. Take for instance this one:

Among the people constituting the body of the Ashram there are those who once were merchants, ministers, writers, scientists, scholars, engineers, government officials and others.

They have come here impelled by an inner urge or led by a Light or in quest of the Truth.

Some have, of course, come with the Mother “to share in the work, others she has called, others have come seeking the light.”

It is not men of high calibre alone who are chosen for the path. The Master holds: “One man who earnestly pursues the Yoga is of more value than a thousand well-known men.”

Another thing: They represent not only different walks of life but different natures and characters. To give only one example: In the course of a casual talk J spoke out: “However furious one may be it would produce no effect on me. It will not provoke my temper, no harsh word will escape my lips.” . . .

J is an example of balanced and measured life. A scholar and a poet, yet so sweet in nature and noble in conduct, he seems like an answer to the Upanishadic prayer:

May my body be swift to all works, may my tongue drop pure honey.

(Sri Aurobindo’s translation)

But there is also R who is so overpowered by anger that he stands helpless. The attack comes so often and so suddenly that he is unable to check himself. Does he not represent a type of humanity?

If only J is given a chance, how can a change come about in R who typifies the majority?

“Then why are not all accepted in the Ashram?”

“Why should they be? Will they sacrifice their all for the sake of the Divine?”

“Does R?”

“Of course! Further, he is not satisfied with what he is, what he has (though a man of position). The Ashram shows him the way to his higher possibilities for which is the yearning of his heart and soul.” To quote the Master:

“. . . If only sattvic and cultured men come for Yoga, men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then, because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail . . . Those in the Ashram come from all quarters, and are of all kinds; it cannot be otherwise.”

That way alone can the problems of life be solved in a cosmic way. That is why this Yoga cannot be done by shutting oneself in a Himalayan cave but only in the midst of life as we live it.

Here it must be kept in mind that Sri Aurobindo Ashram is no hermitage nor a peace-retreat for deserters from life. Rather it is a nursery of divine life, a place from which the Light of the divine radiates. (pp. 61-62)

This rather long passage is typical of the author's method in the book. He reveals subtle truths of this Yoga through examples from the Ashram life, supported by appropriate quotes from the Master and the Mother. This is no mere weaving of words but a deep understanding of the complex and many-sided movement of this Yoga. The author has packed in the nearly 400 pages not just the external life of the Ashram but much more importantly the inner life, the internal struggles of an aspirant, the difficulties of the path, the way to overcome the resistances of nature, the difference between this path and other yogas. Even some deep and profound experiences of yogic life are brought close to our human understanding through the same method of narration and through examples. Space does not permit quoting more passages and the choice is made difficult since the book is full of them.

Seen thus, the book becomes an important part of the Ashram's work itself, a work that dispels Ignorance, gives hope, inspires faith, ignites the flame of aspiration and ultimately invites us to the greatest of all adventures that the Integral Yoga is. What is more, it also provides us with many practical hints about the path, taking certain leaves from the Ashram's history. The reader is brought face to face not only with the inherent complexity of this Yoga but also its dynamic unfolding under the ever-watchful and divinely loving gaze of the Supreme Mother. Once again to quote from the book, here is a clue to the central role and the method of the Divine Mother:

Before the Mother came all were living in the mind with only some mental realisations and experiences. The vital and everything else were unregenerate and the psychic behind the veil. . . . — Sri Aurobindo

[The author explains] How the Mother has awakened us to self-discipline and made us discipline-minded, filling the air with the spirit of dedication, laying more and more stress upon sincerity to one's inner call, correcting our attitude of approach to the Divine is an achievement possible only for the Mother. . . .

To D the Mother had said . . . “. . . I do mean it when I say that I would have no rules at all if the Ashram could be run without them. But I am wide awake and have always held that all rules should come from within. So I never consent to formulating more rules or codes of general conduct than are absolutely necessary and minimum.” (pp. 225-26)

The book is divided into three parts which are arranged primarily in the context of the Ashram's evolutionary history, its progressive development from a small

community of sadhaks drawn by the divine fragrance and light of Sri Aurobindo to a growing community representing a whole universe of people and activities centred around the love and grace of the Divine Mother.

Part One deals with the Ashram in the making as well as some key ideas about the way of sadhana as practised at the Ashram. It may however be relevant to note here that the sadhana of Sri Aurobindo's Supramental Yoga has itself evolved through different and distinct phases. For instance, the Mother speaks about the change in the Ashram collectivity following the Supramental Manifestation on the 29th February 1956. She also reveals to us how the inner purpose of the Darshan days changed over time. Some of these are well recounted in the book but certain aspects are not touched upon. Nevertheless the most important aspects have been mentioned.

Part Two deals with some events that brought the Ashram collectivity together. It explores in a way the collective dimension of the Ashram life. This part also recounts some significant interviews granted by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to some important personages of that time such as Lala Lajpat Rai, Purushottam Das Tandon, Rabindranath Tagore, Pandit Nehru, Maurice Schumann among others.

Part Three deals with the action of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in shaping the Future both within the Ashram as well as far beyond the boundaries of Space and Time in which the two Avatars had placed themselves for their present work. For instance, the book reveals Sri Aurobindo's role in the Second World War and his gifts to the world. This part ends with a note on the way the Work has expanded and the Divine action initiated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is yet going on openly and subtly but nevertheless perceptibly to all who have a vision that extends deeper than the mere surface of things.

All this makes the book extremely interesting especially since it is full of relevant anecdotes from the Ashram's life by way of illustration of the way and the path. The language is simple and easy to understand even where it suddenly bursts into moments of splendid inspiration.

The first edition of the book came out in 1965 and the second in 1968, making it an even more precious document since it is quite likely that it must have received some touch of the Mother's consciousness, perhaps even her sanction. The present and third edition has come out after nearly 42 years. The author himself is no more in our midst and also much has happened since then. It is to the credit of the present editors that something like a postscript has been added indicating some developments after the Mother withdrew beyond the range of mortal sight. That is why they have preferred to call it an enlarged edition. Yet it is a truism that the Ashram has changed much through the nearly forty long years since 1973. Whether the change has always been for the good or in tune with the way of the Ashram life as envisaged in this work is a matter over which views may differ. But one thing is certain that the Ashram is the Mother's creation and it surely has a supramental destiny. Whatever the passage the individual and the collective life of the Ashram may take, the rough

and the smooth part of it, the Ashram life is bound to adapt and eventually align to the evolutionary Force that has gone into its roots as its very sap and life. We may not have the eyes to behold the Mother of Radiances amongst us but there is this faith and this aspiration that sustains the Ashram's collective life, — the faith that she is here, there, everywhere, in every heart and soul and we have to just look a little within and we will find her there waiting and smiling over all our stumbles and errors, wiping off all our sorrows and struggles just as before, and, the aspiration that one day this *yoga-bhumi*, the *taposthali* of the twin Avatars will be the seat of resurrection of the ancient Vedic life in a new form adapted to the present age and the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for which they came and sacrificed all of themselves will be done. It is this faith and this aspiration that comes so beautifully and so powerfully through the pages of this book. We can leave with this as an end-note referring to an observation made by Pandit Sripad Damodar Satwalekar, Sahitya Vachaspati, who had made a life-long study of the Vedas and authored thirty volumes on the Vedas. This is what he had to say about the Ashram after his visit in 1960:

The thing for which I was praying for the last fifty or sixty years, the dream I cherished all these years I see in living forms here. Perhaps after the Vedic age for the first time this kind of thing is being attempted. The whole process of sadhana is based here on Vedic principles. My heart overflows with joy to see that all that is hinted at in the Vedas is trying to find its fulfilment here in one way or another. (p. 209)

His interview quoted in the book ends with a very touching reminiscence:

In his final interview on the eve of his departure the Mother told him: “When you come to the Ashram, take it to be your home.”

Back in his own place, he wrote: “I feel here like a *prabāsi*; one far away from home, a sojourner. Every morning I have balcony *Darśan* and not a day passes without my feeling the Mother's Presence.” (p. 212)

Perhaps he had divined in some way that the seed called the Ashram planted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in Pondicherry had grown into a full blown tree. Though its roots continue to be here and it draws all its sustenance from this atmosphere, yet its branches have spread far and wide and the larger Ashram is no more just a geographical locality but one that extends in inner psychological space, in every soul that has woken up to the call of Sri Aurobindo's flute and in every heart that is touched by the embodiment of Divine Love and Supreme Grace we know as the Mother.

Indeed the book is a must read and priceless treasure whose value will only increase with time when people will look for and ask about how the Ashram life

was organised and how it evolved under the direct guidance of the Master and the Mother when they were within the range of our mortal sight and played their earthly *lila* with us humans.

ALOK PANDEY

ADDENDUM

[Editorial Note: The reviewer, we felt, would have liked to add a longer passage from the reminiscences of Pandit Satwalekar, but constraint of space prevented him from doing so. We give below the full passage.]

Let us close this chapter with the interview and impression of a notable figure, Vedamurti Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Sripad Damodar Satwalekar, Sahitya Vachaspati, Gitalankar, author of two volumes of commentary on the Gita in English and 30 volumes on the Veda. He has made a life-long study of the Veda, and its interpretation. He visited the Ashram on 29th July 1960 and remained here up to 17th August as an honoured guest. He had an interview with the Mother on July 30, just a day after his arrival.

His eyes lit up as he recounted his reminiscences. From the very day of his decision to come he had been, he said, feeling the Mother's Presence within him and undertook the journey from Surat to Madras all alone, having no difficulty on the way. As he was alighting from the train at Madras, he was met by a gentleman waiting to receive him and he drove him in his car to the Ashram.

The interview was mostly in silence and meditation. In meditation he saw six to seven gates of different hues opening in his heart one after another. He also saw his own being steeped in white light.

As long as he remained, he experienced the Presence of the Mother more and more. In the activities of the Ashram, he was moved to his depths to see the Mother's power at work everywhere. He said, "The thing for which I was praying for the last fifty or sixty years, the dream I cherished all these years I see in living forms here. Perhaps after the Vedic age for the first time this kind of thing is being attempted. The whole process of sadhana is based here on Vedic principles. My heart overflows with joy to see that all that is hinted at in the Vedas is trying to find its fulfilment here in one way or another."

Ravindra, who had been asked by the Mother to show him round the Ashram and to whom Panditji has given his personal impressions, reports:

"We all know that once Gandhiji lamented that he had put in so much effort to do away with casteism but saw no sign of the evil going away. Pandit Satwalekar

said: ‘Here I see not a trace of casteism anywhere. What a change the Mother has brought about here! However, this is a thing which one can understand and appreciate with the mind. But it is simply a miracle that young boys and girls are allowed to meet without the least bit of scruple in the Ashram, in the school, in the Playground and anywhere else. Here co-education, academic and physical, has raised no problem.’

“Panditji said further: ‘The Mother makes no distinction between men and women. It is a great experiment indeed. It seems to me the Mother is trying to found a purely spiritual society. The Veda recognises no sex-distinction. It looks as if the Mother wants to create Society where relations would be as between soul and soul. Bodily difference does not count. Fault-finding minds may detect defects here and there, I also do not say that it is all perfect but the attempt is definitely in the direction envisaged by the Veda, and I am sure that the Mother’s efforts will one day meet with success.’

“One department of the Ashram has been named Prosperity by the Mother. When Satwalekarji was told that the inmates could have soap, oil, clothes, etc. from this department, he broke out in ecstasy: ‘Here we can see spirituality taking true form. Nowhere in the Veda is there the gospel of *sannyās*. Everywhere we come across prayers for prosperity, fire and force, tejas and ojas, even material things. Nowhere one sees the scene of poverty, nobody living the life of a destitute, passing his days at the foot of a tree, clad in rags with total renunciation of material things. Escape from the world and its concerns and passing one’s days in inert contemplation of the All-High — these things are far from the Vedic way of life. In the Vedic age kings like Janak ruled kingdoms; Rishis like Vasishtha stood behind kings to give them counsel. The Rishis never betook themselves to the forest, renouncing the world. These things belonged to the dark period of India. I see, today, that the Mother insists on prosperity, not austerity. She does not want to leave the world to its fate but to endow it with opulence governed by spirituality. The world itself has to be changed. Here one finds the Vedic age re-born. No material thing has been shunned. Everything is trying to find its own legitimate place.’”

These truths uttered by him are as striking as the wide open receptivity of his scholarly mind.

It would naturally be too much to expect of a man of 93 to interest himself in the activities of the Playground. But we learn from Ravindra that Panditji is above the common run. He could not contain himself when he saw men and women, boys and girls marching together and taking an equal part in games, sports, even athletics. He spoke out:

“Do you know the real cause of the fall of India? I attribute it to two things: We despised the material world in order to turn to the spiritual, gave more importance to luck than to labour and reduced our women, that is to say, half the Society, into a benumbed mass.

“What a pity! The country which gave birth to the idea of women as Shakti, the country which gave to gods four to eight hands in the pages of the Puranas but visioned the goddesses as having a hundred and eight hands, that very country relegated women to a lower level than that of men and deprived them of the right to read the Veda and worst of all, shut them up within the four walls of the family, lowering their status in society to being cooks and child-bearing machines.

“I have been praying for years: Oh Lord! Grant that our women may rise again to their rightful place as in the days of yore.

“What we see being done in the country to-day for the advancement of women is far from advancement in its true sense. It is here that I see signs of true progress. It is here that the Mother seems to have taken upon herself to raise the status of women. It is here, I repeat, that I sense the Vedic ideal taking form.”

We hear the echo of the Mother’s voice in Satwalekarji’s statement: “Man cannot be reckoned young or old by the length of his years. He who marches on and on is, despite his years, young. He who cannot is old. According to the Veda old age begins after 116. Until one was 80 one could not pass for a full-blown youth; only after 116-120 old age dare set in. Before that, even if death appeared, a true sadhak could defy it and say that his whole life was a ceaseless *yajña* and he must not be stopped from his offering.”

He further added: “At the time of the Mahabharata Arjun was 72 and was reckoned as a full-bloomed youth. The oldest among them all was Bhishma and he was about 170. Leave aside olden days, even 1,400 years ago, the Chinese pilgrims to India left on record the fact of their meeting men of 140 even in lanes and by-lanes of Indian towns. What the Mother has said is wholly true.”

In his final interview on the eve of his departure the Mother told him: “When you come to the Ashram, take it to be your home.”

Back in his own place, he wrote: “I feel like a *prabāsī*; one far away from home, a sojourner. Every morning I have balcony *Darśan* and not a day passes without my feeling the Mother’s Presence.”

(*Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* by Narayan Prasad, pp. 208-212)

*Man’s hopes and longings build the journeying wheels
That bear the body of his destiny
And lead his blind will towards an unknown goal.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 465)

THE KRISHNA WORLD

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

11. At Home at all Times

It had been a beautiful experience ever since I landed in the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham near Coimbatore about ten years ago. The Deemed University was busy with its annual Janmashtami celebrations and I had been given the privilege of being the Chief Guest. The carnival-parade astounded me. Groups of young men and women — students all — went by dancing, singing, playing a variety of instruments. One could distinguish some of the group dances, the Garba of Gujarat, the Kolattam of Tamil Nadu, the Odissi from Orissa. There were any number of little Krishnas being led by their mothers appropriately dressed as cowherdesses of the Dwapara Yuga. Suddenly there appeared on the horizon the movement of kine. Perhaps one hundred cows went by along with their calves. Men walked along, dressed as cowherds. They may have been actually cowherds in charge of the institution's dairy. Somehow I felt that time stood still for a moment in that patch of land that we hail today as Gokula. But then, Gokula is forever! Gokula is everywhere! We are able to recreate the ambience repeatedly during all these centuries. Krishna feels at home at all times!

My mind went back to that beautiful (Hindi/Tamil) picture 'Meera' which remains as poetically realistic today as it was when it hit the silver screen more than six decades ago. When it was time for the public meeting attended by hundreds of students, I started with the song, "*Brindavan ki mangala lilā yād āvey, yād āvey.*" It is Meera reminiscing the joy that must have overflowed Brindavan in Dwapara Yuga. Why, she is a gopi too! "I remember, I remember those days when Krishna was around with his playfulness that brought joy for every one. Those days when I went with my friends to Yamuna for our bath and we had an occasional glimpse of the enchanting figure of Krishna. And we enjoyed listening to his playfully executed exploits. Some may say these are but sweet dreams (*koyi kahe yah mīthe sapne*), but does it matter? I remember, I remember." I then spoke on how Krishna refuses to be lost in the folds of the past. He remains very current. Weddings or seminars, quite often it is Krishna who rules the mind. Fifty years ago no Brahmin wedding in Tamil households was complete without a Tanjore portrait of Baby Krishna holding a pot of butter. Krishna in so many poses, the Baby Krishna, the Laddoo Krishna, the Radha Krishna, the Yashoda Krishna, the Flute-Player of Brindavan. And, of course, Krishna reining in the horses and teaching the Gita Shastra to the Pandava hero. Well, the Flute-Player and the Teacher of the Gita are very popular as gift articles too, I concluded.

At the end of the meeting, Swami Abhayamrita Chaitanya, Pro-Chancellor of the Peetham placed in my hands a gift package. As I thanked him while receiving it, he smiled and said: “Open it when you get back home and find out whether it is the happy-go-lucky Flute-Player or the Stern Teacher who has come to you today.” When I did as I was told on my return, it was of course the Anandamaya! The sheer loveliness of this figure transforms our existence: *Murali gati viparīta karāyi:*

The sounds of Krishna’s flute
Have transformed the ways of the world!
The movements of creation have been stilled
By the flute-call of Radha’s Beloved.

The calf does not suck at its mother’s teats
Nor does the cow graze the grass.
Yamuna is flowing in reverse.
Still is the wind, listening to the flute.

Why only men and women on earth?
Even the Gandharva men and women
Are caught in a self-lost mood.
O Surdas, the cowherdesses of Vraja
Stand still like painted pictures.¹

Through my restless existence all these years, the image of the flute on the Lord’s lips has, perhaps, given me the much-needed still centre of peace within. The image of a very sweet-looking boy (with a touch of mischief in his eyes) with the flute at his lips never fails to stop us on our tracks even if just for a moment. I have experienced this joy for decades. I live close to the Ranganatha temple at Srirangam and the huge complex has many images of Krishna playing the flute. Many theories have been floated for the presence of so many Krishna icons in a temple which is chiefly associated with the *Ramayana*. His appeal is to all — the inhabitants of the north as well as the south.

The Tamil bhakti hymnologists known as Alwars (3rd to 9th centuries A.D.) were partial towards the Krishna incarnation. No other avatar has given such a wide range to choose from for inspiration. Though Rama is also known as a complete incarnation, Valmiki has not dealt elaborately with his childhood. Certainly, we do not associate Rama with any fine arts. Even gods need the help of music and dance to wander in the spaces of a devotee’s heart. Hasn’t the Nataraja figure become a universal icon?

1. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

In the same way, the devotees and sculptors have made the Flute-Player a familiar icon for the common man. He confronts me in quite a few places, the Dark God, his body bent in the traditional *tribhangi* (triple-bend) posture, the hands holding the flute to the lips. When I enter the Damodaran Fort Entrance in the East Chitra Street, he stands playing the flute in a small shrine at the entrance to the sixth circle called the Uttara Street.

One moves from one circle to another inner circle in this vast temple complex, and he is always there, the Divine Spy watching our movements though playing the flute with nonchalance. Some figures command at least a few minutes of stay and meditation. There is a Pinnai tree on the banks of Chandra Pushkarini (a beautiful pond) in the temple. Santhana Gopala Krishna stands under it, playing his reed, recreating the Brindavan ambience. He is a four-armed Krishna whose upper hands carry the conch and the discus.

What if one is seventy-five years old? The romantic tradition about this tree links me to the Yoga of Divine Love in a flash. I recall again the legend that refers to the Divine Couple, the presiding deities of the temple, relaxing under the Pinnai tree on the banks of Chandra Pushkarini. Whenever Goddess Ranganayaki wants to pluck the flowers, Ranganatha bends the branches to help her. The entire space is full of Krishna atmosphere. The big circular wall of the tank has been raised by placing more than a hundred Krishna and Naga sculptures for the wall. It is possible these stones were originally offerings by different people for propitiating the Naga (some of them show only snakes) and were interwoven with the cowherd boy who ate butter and danced on the Kaliya serpent, thus underlining the desire for a child. When the wall of the Pushkarini was raised, the numerous sculpted stones may have caught the attention of the builder who decided to decorate the wall with them. Right now, it is a lovely walk around, watching the various depictions of snakes and Krishna.

Apart from the flute-player, there is also a sculpture of Radha-Krishna which is more recent. Both Radha and Krishna are sumptuously proportioned. Radha is embracing Krishna pleading for the butter in his hand while he is teasing her by pulling away his hand. This is what the priest tells me and I nod my head with a smile. The post-Jayadeva period was rich in celebrating the Radha-Krishna union but I cannot remember any poem on this "butter incident". But though Radha is absent in the *Bhagavata*, she is very much present in Sri Aurobindo's choice translations of Vidyapati, Horu Thakur, Chandidas and others which are a joy to read. I even have a favourite which I never tire of taking up, Vidyapati's, *ki kahibore sakhi kānuka rūpa . . .*

How shall I tell of Caanou's beauty bright?
Men will believe it a vision of the night.

As lightning was his saffron garment blown
Over the beautiful cloud-limbs half-shown.

His coal-black curls assumed with regal grace
A peacock's plume above that moonlike face.

And such a fragrance fierce the mad wind wafts
Love wakes and trembles for his flowery shafts.

Yea, what shall words do, friend? Love's whole estate
Exhausted was that wonder to create.²

Anyway, I imagine Radha asking for a portion of the fresh butter Krishna may have lifted from his mother's kitchen by stealth and gaze at the figures. The subtleties of the sculptor's art cannot be perceived by the onlooker as the keepers of the temple have placed silky garments on the twin figures like a huge cloak. Radha is a late phenomenon in South India. Could we place the installation of the Radha-Krishna image with the Krishna bhakti that sent waves in this holy city when Chaitanya Mahaprabhu came here? Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu spent a few months in Srirangam in the 16th century. There is a place belonging to the Srirangam temple that is associated with the Mahaprabhu in North Chitra street. The place was renovated by Jaigovind Dalmia and a temple was consecrated in 1973 with the idol of Jagannath. In fact, one of the major architects of Chaitanya's movement to renovate Brindavan was from Srirangam. Directed by the Mahaprabhu, Gopala Bhatta, son of the Srirangam temple priest, Venkata Bhatta, went to Brindavan. When Chaitanya merged in Lord Jagannath, Gopala Bhatta fulfilled Chaitanya's desire by setting down a doctrinal and ritual code for the Vaishnavas. Gopala Bhatta lived to be more than one hundred years old. He led a life of utter purity and devoted worship, his personal deity being the Salagram which was like a babe to him. Such was the overflow of his love for his *ishta devata* that it is said the figure of Radharaman grew out of the Salagram on a full moon day in the month of Vaishakha. He then built a temple to Radharaman in Brindavan.

Historical details and hoary legends get so totally mixed-up when Krishna is the subject. They pour in from books, my own experiences and the tales of pilgrims. Wonder of wonders! Yet, no whiff of any doubt crosses my mind. I manage to make my own connections when I come into the Srirangam temple for a quiet time of silence, breathing the silken breeze within this stone-walled edifice. When I turn to the shrine of Vyasa on the banks of the Chandra Pushkarini I am not surprised. He is the author of the *Mahabharata*, isn't he? The golden thread of association for

2. Sri Aurobindo, *Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 423.

the epic's major action is Krishna. It is Vyasa who has recorded the many-faceted glory of the Krishna incarnation in the epic, and so his presence is appropriate too. As I feel soothed by the breeze that brings the coolth of the pond, I seem to glimpse dimly why Sri Aurobindo called Krishna the Anandamaya Purusha:

The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually, the descent of supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the overmind leading it towards the Ananda.³

So simple! Do you wish to escape for a while the worries and brickbats of humdrum, earthly life? Do you want to be led by Krishna to Ananda? Think of Krishna and you are caught in Ananda at once! Excitement is added to Ananda when we see varied depictions of this Lord of the Overmind. I walk into the temple of Sukra Vara Krishna in the Srirangam Complex.

Here is a striking image of the flute-player. The sculpture shows him standing beneath the Pinnai tree while Adishesha holds up his hood as an umbrella. A cow is seen licking Krishna's foot. It is an image of total surrender by the Jivatman (Cow, *Pasu*) to the Paramatman (*Pati*).

When deep devotion holds hands with an electrically free imagination and both embrace a superb sculptor, mere stone becomes a divine icon. One such is the Ashtabhuj Krishna, the Flute-Player with eight shoulders in the Tondaradippodi Alwar Sannidhi in Srirangam. While two hands are playing the flute, the six other hands are ornamented (or shall we say, armamented) with the weapons, *sankha*, *chakra*, *pushpabāna*, *ankusa*, *danda* and *musala*. The cow is licking the right foot of Krishna while its body is marked with the sign of *chakra*. The priest here is very patient with me, does not miss a single detail of the Krishna figure or the significance associated with it. He says the cow with the mark of the discus indicates total surrender, *śaranagati*, to the Lord which is the very life of Srivaishnavism. A beloved badge of servitude!

The Krishna presence in the Srirangam temple can be overwhelming at times. In a shrine in the Kili Mandapam, we have Baby Krishna with the bronze figurines of Vasudeva, Devaki and Rohini. Vasudeva carries a milkpot and a cup (*pālādai*) to feed Baby Krishna, the priest says. How sweet the legend! Vasudeva is very much like a contemporary father taking his duties seriously and giving the bottle to his newborn child!

The traditional scholar says that Krishna returned to his Eternal Abode at the close of Dwapara Yuga. Now it is many millennia since the Kali Yuga began. But Krishna has continued to be the baby, the mischievous boy, the tantalising lover,

3. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 405.

the sage teacher in life's battlefield. So many versions of this remarkable personality, this Delight of Existence. When the grandmother feeds the little baby, both of them enjoy reminiscing the days far away and long ago when Krishna led Yashoda a dance by not coming to have his food. There is plenty for young boys in Krishna. Like the incident of Krishna and Sudama going into the forest to collect fuel in a storm. As for the young lovers, it is all romance when Krishna takes the stage in the ecstatic vision of Chandidas:

O love, what more shall I, shall Radha speak,
 Since mortal words are weak?
 In life, in death,
 In being and in breath
 No other lord but thee can Radha seek.

About thy feet the mighty net is wound
 Wherein my soul they bound;
 Myself resigned
 To servitude my mind;
 My heart than thine no sweeter slavery found.⁴

What an avatar to keep all the age-groups under his thrall through all these ages? Even if a philosophical significance is sought for his many-faceted avatarhood, there are no clear-cut answers. Sri Aurobindo studies the ten avatars as a meaningful projection of the theory of evolution. Here again, there are no problems till he comes to Krishna. Is he the Divine or is he but a Vibhuti since he says, "I am Vasudeva among the Vrishnis"? Sri Aurobindo concedes that we have to leave it there:

We may therefore fairly assume that in many lives he manifested as the Vibhuti veiling the fuller Divine Consciousness. If we admit that the object of Avatarhood is to lead the evolution, this is quite reasonable, the Divine appearing as Avatar in the great transitional stages and as Vibhutis to aid the lesser transitions.⁵

We then come back to the question of Swami Abhayamrita Chaitanya: "Happy-go-lucky Flute-Player or the Stern Teacher?" With Krishna there is no 'negative' of any kind. We vote for both! Krishna cannot escape our net!

(To be concluded)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

4. Sri Aurobindo, *Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 390.

5. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 402.