

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE  
24 NOVEMBER 2013

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

### INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

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#### Sea Mail:

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

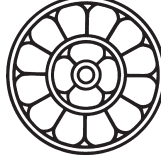
#### Air Mail:

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.

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



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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. LXVI

No. 11

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE BIRTH OF THE WAR-GOD

### Blank verse rendering of Canto I<sup>1</sup>

A god concealed in mountain majesty,  
Embodied to our cloudy physical sight  
In snowy summits and green-gloried slopes,  
To northward of the many-rivered land  
Measuring the earth in an enormous ease,  
Immense Himaloy dwells and in the moan  
Of eastern ocean and in western floods  
Plunges his giant sides. Him once the hills  
Imagined as the mighty calf of earth  
When the Wideness milked her udders; gems brilliant-rayed  
Were born and herbs on every mountain marge.  
So in his infinite riches is he dressed,  
Not all his snows can slay his opulence,  
And though they chill the feet of heaven, her sons  
Forget that fault mid all his crowding gifts,  
As faints in luminous floods the gloomy mark  
On the moon's argent disk; they choose his vales  
For playground, his hill-peaks for divine homes.  
Brightness of minerals on his rocks is spread  
Which to the Apsaras give adorning hues  
In their love-sports and in their dances; flung  
On the split clouds their brilliant colours ranged,  
Like an untimely sunset's glories live.  
Far down the clouds droop to his girdle-waist;  
Then by the low-hung plateaus' coolness drawn  
The Siddhas in soft shade repose, but flee  
Soon upward by wild driving rain distressed  
To summits splendid in the veilless sun.  
The hunter seeks for traces on his sides,  
And though their reddened footprints are expunged

1. Editorial Note: Around 1916-18, Sri Aurobindo made three separate translations of parts of the first two cantos of Kalidasa's epic *Kumarasambhava* under the title *The Birth of the War-God*. The first rendering [reproduced in the October issue of *Mother India*], which breaks off after the twentieth verse, is in rhymed stanzas. The second rendering [reproduced in this issue] is a translation of the first canto in blank verse; verses 7-16 were translated in a different order from the original. (based on CWSA)

By the new-falling snows, yet can he find  
The path his prey the mighty lions go;  
For, it is told, pearls from slain elephants  
Are clotted, fallen from their hollow claws,  
And tell their dangerous passage. When he rests  
Tired with the chase and bares to winds his brow,  
They come, fay-breezes dancing on the slopes,  
Shaking the cedars on Himaloy's breast,  
Scattering the peacock's gorgeous-plumed attire,  
With spray of Ganges' cascades on their wings  
Sprinkling his hair. He makes the grottoed glens  
His chambers of desire and in the night  
When the strong forest-wanderer is lain  
Twined with his love, marrying with hers his sighs,  
The luminous herbs from the dim banks around,  
Faint oilless lamps, give light to see her joy.  
Nor only earthly footsteps tread the grass,  
Or mortal love finds there its happy scenes.  
The birch-leaves of the hills love-pages are;  
Like spots of age upon the tusky kings,  
In ink of liquid metals letters strange  
Make crimson signs, pages where passion burns  
And divine Circes pen heart-moving things.  
The Kinnars wander singing in his glades.  
He fills the hollows of his bamboo flutes  
With the wind rising from his deep ravines,  
And with a moaning and melodious sound  
Breathes from his rocky mouths as if he meant  
To pipe, tune-giver to their minstrelsies.  
The delicate heels of the maned Kinnari  
Are by his frosted slabs of snow distressed,  
Yet for her burden of breasts and heavy hips  
Can change not their slow motion's swaying grace  
To escape the biting pathway's chill unease.  
She too in grottoed caverns lies embraced.  
When from her limbs is plucked the raiment fine  
Of the Kinnar's shamefast love, then hanging come  
The convex clouds across the grotto doors  
And make chance curtains against mortal eyes,  
Shielding the naked goddess from our sight.  
The elephant herds there wander: resinous trees

Shaken and rubbed by their afflicting brows  
Loose down their odorous tears in creamy drops;  
The winds upon the plateaus burdened pant  
And make of all the air a scented dream.  
The yaks are there; they lift their bushy tails  
And in their lashings scatter gleamings white  
As moonbeams shed upon the sleeping hills:  
Brightly they seem to fan the mountain king.  
He hides in his deep caves the hunted night  
Fearful of the day's brilliant eyes. His peaks  
Seem to outpeer the lower-circling sun,  
Which sends its upward beams as if to wake  
Immortal lilies in his tarns unplucked  
By the seven sages in their starry march.  
Such is Himaloy's greatness, such his strength  
That seems to uplift to heaven the earth. He bears  
The honey Soma plant upon his heights,  
Of godward symbols the exalted source.  
He by the Master of sacrifice was crowned  
The ancient monarch of a million hills.  
In equal rites he to his giant bed  
The mind-born child of the world-fathers bore.  
The earthly comrade and the help-fellow  
Of Meru, their sublime celestial home,  
Stable of soul, to make a stable race  
Mena he wed whose wisdom seers adored.  
Their joy of love was like themselves immense  
And in the wide felicitous lapse of time  
Its long and puissant ecstasy bore fruit.  
Bearing the banner of her unchanged youth  
And beauty to charmed motherhood she crossed.  
Mainac she bore, the guest of the deep seas,  
Upon whose peaks the serpent-women play,  
Their jewelled tresses glittering through the gloom,  
Race of a cavernous and monstrous world;  
There fled when Indra tore the mountains' wings,  
His divine essence bore no cruel sign,  
Nor felt the anguish of the lightning's bite.  
Next to a nobler load her womb gave place;  
For Daksha's daughter, Shiva's wife, the Lord  
Of Being, in her angry will who left

Her body soulless in her father's hall,  
Sought in their mountain home a happier birth,  
And by her in a trance profound of joy  
Conceived was born of great Himaloy's seed.  
Out of the soul unseen the splendid child  
Came like success with daring for its sire  
And for its mother clear-eyed thought sublime.  
Then were the regions subtle with delight,  
Soft, pure from cloud and stain; then heaven's shells  
Blew sweetly, flowery rain came drifting down,  
Earth answered to the rapture of the skies  
And all her moving and unmoving life  
Felt happiness because the Bride was born.  
So this fair mother by this daughter shone,  
So that new beauty radiated its beams  
As if a land of lapis lazuli  
Torn by the thunder's voice shot suddenly forth  
A jewelled sprouting from the mother bed.  
Parvati was she called, the mountain's child,  
When love to love cried answer in her house  
And to that sound she turned her lovely face,  
But after-days the great maternal name  
Of Uma gave. On her as fair she grew  
Her father banqueted his sateless look;  
He felt himself a lamp fulfilled in light,  
Heaven's silent path by Ganges voiceful made,  
Or thought made glorious by a perfect word.  
Like bees that winging come upon the wind  
Among the infinite sweets of honeyed spring  
Drawn to the mango-flower's delicious breast,  
All eyes sought her. Her little childlike form  
Increasing to new curves of loveliness,  
She grew like the moon's arc from day to day.  
Among her fair companions of delight  
She built frail walls of heavenly Ganges' sands  
Or ran to seize the tossing ball or pleased  
With puppet children her maternal mind,  
Absorbed in play, the mother of the worlds.  
And easily too to her as if in play  
All sciences and wisdoms crowding came  
Out of her former life, like swans that haste



In autumn to a sacred river's shores;  
They started from her mind as grow at night  
Born from some luminous herb its glimmering rays.  
To her child-body youth, a charm, arrived  
Adorning every limb, a wine of joy  
To intoxicate the heart, the eyes that gazed,  
Shooting the arrows of love's curving bow.  
Even as a painting grows beneath the hand  
Of a great master, as the lotus opens  
Its petals to the flatteries of the sun,  
So into perfect roundness grew her limbs  
And opened up sweet colour, form and light.  
Her feet limned a red rose at every step  
On the enamoured earth; like magic flowers  
They moved from spot to spot their petalled bloom;  
Her motion studied from the queenly swans  
With wanton swaying musically timed  
The sweet-voiced anklets' murmurous refrain.  
From moulded knee to ankle the supreme  
Divinely lessening curve so lovely was  
It looked as if on this alone were spent  
All her Creator's cunning. Well the rest  
Might tax his labour to build half such grace,  
Yet was that miracle accomplished. Soft  
In roundness, warm in their smooth sweep her thighs  
Were without parallel in Nature's work.  
The greatness of her hips on which life's girdle  
Had found its ample rest deserved already  
The lap of divine love where she alone  
Might hope one day embosomed by God to lie.  
Deep was her navel's hollow where wound in  
Above her raiment's knot that tender line  
Of down as slight as the dark ray shot up  
From the blue jewel central in her zone.  
Her waist was like an altar's middle small  
And there the triple stair of love was built.  
Twin breasts large, lovely, pale with darkened paps  
Could not allow the slender lotus thread  
A passage, on whose either side there waited  
Softer than delicatest flowers the arms  
Which Love victorious in defeat would find

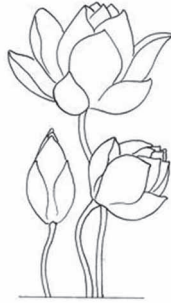
His chains to bow down the Eternal's neck.  
Her throat adorned the necklace which it wore;  
Its sweep and undulation to the breast  
Outmatched the gleaming roundness of its gems.  
Above all this her marvellous face where met  
The golden mother of beauty and delight  
At once the graces of her lotus throne  
And the soft lustres of the moon. Her smile  
Parted the rosy sweetness of her lips  
Like a white flower across a ruddy leaf  
Or pearls that sever lines of coral. Noble  
Her speech dropped nectar from a liquid voice  
To which the coil's call seemed rude and harsh  
And sob of smitten lyres a tuneless sound.  
She had exchanged with the wild woodland deer  
The startled glance of her long lovely eyes  
Fluttering like a blue lotus in the wind.  
The pencilled long line of her arching brows  
Made vain the beauty of Love's bow. Her hair's  
Tossed masses put voluptuously to shame  
The mane of lions and the drift of clouds.  
To clasp all beauty in a little space  
He who created all this wondrous world  
Had fashioned only her. Throned in her limbs  
All possibilities of loveliness  
Here crowded to their fair attractive seat  
And now the artist eyes that scan all things  
Saw every symbol and sweet parallel  
Of beauty only realised in her.  
Then was he satisfied and loved his work.  
The sages ranging at their will the stars  
Saw her and knew that this indeed was she  
Who must become by love the beautiful half  
Of the fair body of the Lord and all  
His heart. This from the seers of future things  
Her father heard and his high hope renounced  
All other but the greatest for her spouse.  
She waited like an offering for the fire.  
For to compel himself the divine mind  
He dared not, but remained like a great soul  
Which watches for the destined hour's approach

Curbing the impatience of its godlike hopes.  
But he the spirit of the world, forsaken  
By that first body of the mother of all  
Nor to her second birth yet come, abode  
Unwed, ascetic, stern, mid crowded worlds  
Alone and passionless and unespoused,  
The Master of the animal life absorbed  
In dreamings, wandering with his demon hordes  
Desireless in the blind desire of things.  
At length he ceased; like sculptured marble still  
To meditation turned he yoked his spirit;  
Clothed in the skins of beasts, with ashes smeared  
He sat a silent shape upon the hills.  
Below him curved Himadri's slope; a soil  
With fragrance of the musk-deer odorous  
Was round him, where the awful Splendour mused  
Mid cedars sprinkled with the sacred dew  
Of Ganges. Softly murmuring their chants  
In strains subdued the Kinnar minstrels sang,  
On oil-filled slabs among the resinous herbs  
His grisly hosts sat down, their bodies stained  
With mineral unguents, bark upon their limbs;  
Ill-shaped they were and their tremendous hands  
Around their ears had wreathed the hillside's flowers.  
On the white rocks compact of frozen snow,  
His great bull voicing low immortal pride  
Pawed with his hoof the argent soil to dust,  
Alarmed the bisons fled his gaze; he bellowed  
Impatient of the mountain lion's roar.  
Concentrating his world-vast energies  
Built daily his eternal shape of flame  
He who gives all austerities their fruit,  
In what impenetrable and deep desire?  
And though to him the worship even of gods  
Is negligible, worship the mountain gave  
And gave his daughter the Great Soul to serve.  
Nor though to remote trance near beauty brings  
Its lovely danger, was that gift refused.  
Surrounded by all sweetness in the world  
He can be passionless who is creation's king.  
She brought him daily offering of flowers

And holy water morn and noon and eve  
And swept the altar of the divine fire  
And heaped his altar-seat of sacred grass,  
Then bending over his feet her falling locks  
Drowned all her soft fatigue of gentle toil  
In the cool moonbeams from the Eternal's head.  
So had they met on summits of the world  
Like the still Spirit and its unwakened force,  
Near were they now, yet to each other unknown,  
He meditating, she in service bowed.  
Closing awhile her vast and shining lids  
Fate over them paused suspended on the hills.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 263-270)



# **SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER**

*(Continued from the issue of October 2013)*

## **THE MOTHER'S HELP IN DIFFICULTIES**

### **Difficulties and the Mother's Help**

Nor to be disturbed, to remain quiet and confident is the right attitude, but it is necessary also to receive the help of the Mother and not to shrink back for any reason from her solicitude. One ought not to indulge ideas of incapacity, inability to respond, dwelling too much on defects and failures and allowing the mind to be in pain and shame on their account; for these ideas and feelings become in the end weakening things. If there are difficulties, stumblings or failures, one has to look at them quietly and call in tranquilly and persistently the divine help for their removal, but not to allow oneself to be upset or pained or discouraged. Yoga is not an easy path and the total change of the nature cannot be done in a day.

27 May 1931

\*

Throw aside this weakness. The Mother's help is there — keep yourself quiet and calm and face the difficulties with the courage a sadhak must have when seeking the Divine.

22 November 1933

\*

Once one has entered the path of Yoga, there is only one thing to do, to fix oneself in the resolution to go to the end whatever happens, whatever difficulties arise. None really gets the fulfilment in Yoga by his own capacity — it is by the greater Force that stands over you that it will come — and it is the call, persistent through all vicissitudes, to that Force, by which the fulfilment will come. Even when you cannot aspire actively, keep yourself turned to the Mother for the help to come — that is the one thing to do always.

3 January 1934

\*

*X says that while giving us flowers the Mother always says something to us silently about future difficulties, dangers or falls. Is it so?*

Mother never thinks of future difficulties, falls or dangers. Her concentration is always on help and uplift, not on difficulty and downfall.

8 January 1934

\*

All the Mother's love and help will remain with you unchanged as before. The whole difficulty comes from a vital movement which wants to possess in the wrong way, by comparison with others, instead of living fully in the close relation of your heart and soul with the Mother. It is the same in your relation with X. But this is a defect common in human nature and many here have it. It is not a thing that cannot be removed from the nature. Indeed since your heart and soul want to be free from it, it cannot but go. Do not be discouraged therefore when it returns owing to old habit. With the Mother's love and help what your heart and soul desire will surely come and the wrong obscuring element disappear.

25 September 1935

\*

*Is it true that the nearer the descent of the Supermind the greater will be the difficulties of those in whom it is to come down?*

It is true, unless they are so surrendered to the Mother, so psychic, plastic, free from ego that the difficulties are spared to them.

4 October 1935

\*

You must not yield to impatience and let it bring thoughts of the old kind that cannot possibly help the working but must impede it. These thoughts that come are not true. Those who left, left because they mingled their own ego with the sadhana — ambition, vanity and other wrong movements — and wanted to use the force that sadhana gave them for these things, — or they had to go because the pull of the old life, family, home, action in the world outside was too strong for them. Also the idea that Mother is leading all others happily along and they are becoming perfect and only you are left out, is the usual delusion that comes when one allows despondency to rise. Almost all have these difficulties to overcome and these difficulties rise again and again till the inner being is sufficiently developed to make them impossible.

There is therefore no reason to suppose that others will be able and you will not be able.

The change of the old habitual movements of the nature cannot be done in a single stroke; the inner consciousness has to grow in such a way that finally it occupies the outer being also and renders these things impossible. What I have written to you about these things and the attitude to be taken is the knowledge that we have and the truth of the human nature and of sadhana confirmed by our and by all spiritual experience. It is your outer being that has these reactions and not your inner nature. You have only to trust in the Mother and follow what I say and these difficulties will be worked out of the outer being and return no more; but patience is necessary because it takes time, not in you alone, but in all. Do not allow such thoughts as the idea "what is the use of spiritual experiences, since my nature is not changed" etc., for these are thoughts of the mind's ignorance. Recover the attitude and the resolution that you had taken and were developing. Keep the will and the faith and in quietude and patience let the Mother work all out in you.

26 March 1936

\*

Be sure that the Mother will be always with you to carry you upon the path. Difficulties come and difficulties go, but, she being with you, the victory is sure.

18 July 1936

### **Difficulties and the Mother's Force**

*What is the means of dealing day by day with difficulties?*

Equality, rejection, calling in of the Mother's force.

1 August 1933

\*

When difficulties arise, remain quiet within and call down the Mother's Force to remove them.

26 August 1933

\*

*In my sadhana I have received only what I prayed for. I have yearned greatly for what has come to me. The Divine's reasonless Mercy is not so important to me as Tapasya, the capacity to open to Him and hold Him. This is my belief.*

It was by your personal efforts without guidance that you got into difficulties and into a heated condition in which you could not meditate etc. I asked you to drop the effort and remain quiet and you did so. My intention was that by your remaining quiet, it would be possible for the Mother's Force to work in you and establish a better starting-point and a course of initial experiences. It was what was beginning to come; but if your mind again becomes active and tries to arrange the sadhana for itself, then disturbances are likely to come. The Divine Guidance works best when the psychic is open and in front (yours was beginning to open), but it can also work even when the sadhak is either not conscious of it or else knows it only by its results.

8 September 1933

\*

*Is there no way for me to follow your path happily? I will not be able to do anything for the Mother in this life, so I simply try to stay away from the defects of previous lives. Why can't I understand anything? Why can't the Mother pull me towards her? What is it I feel hurt about and worry about? Can you explain it to me?*

All this is of no utility — complainings, questionings etc. of this kind should be put aside. You have to go on quietly, without depression or trouble, receiving the Mother's forces, allowing them to work, rejecting all that stands in their way, but not troubled by difficulty or defects in yourself or by any delay or slowness in the working.

25 October 1933

\*

This kind of grief and despondency are the worst obstacles one can raise up in the sadhana — they ought not to be indulged in. What one cannot do oneself one can get done by calling the Mother's force. To receive that and let it work in you is the true means of success in the sadhana.

1934

\*



Do not brood over your difficulties. Leave them to the Mother and let her Force work them out of you.

22 March 1935

\*

In such conditions try to remain as quiet as possible within and, if you cannot call the Mother, think of her and expect the help of the Force.

These attacks are always on the outer part of the consciousness covering up the inner being. One should always try to detach (separate) the inner being and look at the attack as a movement of the surface.

13 June 1935

\*

We will send you help, so that you may get rid of the obstruction.

Never allow this idea "I am not able" or "I am not doing enough" to come and vex you; it is a tamasic suggestion and brings depression and depression opens the way to the attacks of the wrong forces. Your position should be, "Let me do what I can; the Mother's Force is there, the Divine is there to see that in due time all will be done."

4 November 1935

\*

There has been no letter from you for three nights. Whatever difficulty has come across, keep your faith and reliance on the Mother and lay open whatever opposes from outside or within to the working of the Mother's Force.

25 March 1936

\*

*Many times I feel hatred towards my own self because I neither have the ability nor the skill in me to do anything. I start doing some work and then leave it undone. I have no perseverance. What is the reason for this?*

These come from a certain restlessness in the vital. Most people put a control of the will on these things and try to get rid of them in that way. But they disappear fully only when the inner being is awakened and a new Force (the Mother's) begins fully to work on the nature.

9 April 1937

\*

Do not admit these suggestions of despair or impatience. Give time for the Mother's force to act.

12 June 1937

\*

Whatever difficulties still remain, be sure that they will be surmounted. There is no need for the outer being to be nervous — the Mother's Force and the devotion within you will be sufficient to overcome all that stands in the way.

### **Difficulties and the Mother's Grace**

You must throw all that away. Such depression can only make you shut to what Mother is giving you. There is absolutely no good reason for such an attitude. The existence of difficulties is a known thing in the Yoga. That is no reason for questioning the final victory or the effectivity of the Divine Grace.

4 February 1933

\*

*Can it be believed that the Mother's Grace is acting even when the difficulties do not disappear?*

In that case everybody might say that all my difficulties must disappear at once, I must attain to perfection immediately and without difficulties, otherwise it proves that the Mother's Grace is not with me.

20 July 1933

\*

You should not yield to sorrow or despair — there is no reason why you should. The Mother's grace has not been withdrawn from you for a moment. Do not allow the attacks of others to shake you like this — you know well the motives from which they act — and for the rest they are not going to pursue any farther the course which a fit of passion dictated to them. The protection will be with you and you need not fear or sorrow any longer. Put your trust in the Divine and shake off all this like a nightmare that has passed. Believe that our love and grace are with you.

### Turning to the Mother for Help

It is the physical mind that feels too inert — but if some part of the being turns to the Mother, that is enough to bring the help.

25 January 1934

\*

*I feel a sense of tiredness, depression, sadness, but all the same I stick to you. I am quiet sometimes, but still feel sad. What should I do?*

Remain firm and turned in the one direction — towards the Mother.

*The sense of sadness and depression does not want to go — it comes and goes as it likes. Tell me what to do.*

When the habit of these moods (depression or revolt) has been formed, they cannot be got rid of at once. There are three ways of doing it — (1) to strengthen your own will, so that nothing can come or stay as *it* likes but only as *you* like; (2) to think of something else, plunge the mind in some healthy activity; (3) to turn to the Mother and call in her force. One can do any of these or all, but even in doing them, it will take a little time to get rid of the habit.

1934

\*

If meditation brings a headache, you should not meditate. It is a mistake to think that meditation is indispensable to the sadhana. There are so many who do not do it, but they are near to the Mother and progress as well as those who have long meditations.

The one thing necessary is to be turned to the Mother and that is all that is needed. Do not fear or be sad, but let the Mother do quietly her work in you and through you and all will be well.

16 March 1935

### Personal Effort and the Mother's Help

The Mother's help is always there for those who are willing to receive it. But you must be conscious of your vital nature, and the vital nature must consent to change. It is no use merely observing that it is unwilling and that, when thwarted, it creates

depression in you. Always the vital nature is not at first willing and always when it is thwarted or asked to change, it creates this depression by its revolt or refusal of consent. You have to insist till it recognises the truth and is willing to be transformed and to accept the Mother's help and grace. If the mind is sincere and the psychic aspiration complete and true, the vital can always be made to change.

15 July 1932

\*

As for the feeling of people that there must be something bad in you, it does not arise merely from your relations with X. The Mother and I do not speak of "good" and "bad" in this way; we look only at what helps or hinders the sadhana. There is nothing in you that is not in many other sadhaks. What makes people hesitate to help you is your subjection to vital moods — all this weeping, self-starvation, uncertain temper; your unsteadiness — for today you accept help, tomorrow you reject it; your want of trust in others — which you have often expressed in your letters; your quickness to take offence, your readiness to suspect people's motives, especially in their behaviour towards you. Others have these faults, but they try to control them. You, when a mood like these comes upon you, seem to yield to it and let it have free course.

If you want to get on in your sadhana and if you want people to feel comfortable with you and ready to help you, you must get rid of these vital moods and defects — you must put a control on yourself and try to change. The Mother's Force is there to help you, but there must be your active consent and cooperation, your own steady will and endeavour.

1 November 1933

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*I cannot do anything myself so long as the inertia in me is so strong. May I ask, what does the Mother mean to do with the inertia in me?*

If Mother's "doing" with the inertia were sufficient, it would have been done long ago and also the supramental down in you. The question is not what the Mother is going to do with it but what you are going to do with it.

29 November 1936

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These ideas are wrong suggestions that you must throw away. There is no reason why you should be able to do nothing in this life or all should be postponed to another. It is in this life that you have been called and are to reach the Divine. The Mother has not left you to yourself. But I think it is advisable that you should spend some time daily in concentration to keep the conscious connection and also write more often; if not every day, yet every second or third day.

17 December 1936

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It is not that I want you to do all by your own strength; the Mother's force is there. I should like you however to persist in meditation and the endeavour to be quiet within; even if at present there is no definite self-understanding or experience, this is the way to open the nature to them; we will try to do the rest for you.

20 December 1936

### **Opening to the Mother in Difficulty**

There is nothing wrong in your experience or insincere in your expression of it; to write is helpful and it is our wish that you should go on doing it. An occasional sinking of the consciousness happens to everybody. The causes are various, some touch from outside, something not yet changed or not sufficiently changed in the vital, especially the lower vital, some inertia or obscurity rising up from the physical parts of nature. When it comes, remain quiet, open yourself to the Mother and call back the true condition, and aspire for a clear and undisturbed discrimination showing you from within yourself the cause or the thing that needs to be set right.

4 March 1932

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*The attack of darkness is over, but my body is still restless and my consciousness troubled. I have lost connection with your peace, the peace that used to make the feelings quiet and the body restful. But I can still aspire and I am hopeful to get back your touch again.*

However strong the attack may be and even if it overcomes for the time being, still it will rapidly pass away if you have formed the habit of opening to the Mother. The peace will come back, if you remain quiet and keep yourself open to it and to the Force. Once something of the Truth has shown itself within you, it will always, even

if for a time heavily clouded over with wrong movements, shine out again like the sun in heaven. Therefore persevere with confidence and never lose courage.

14 March 1932

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You should not allow yourself to get upset by these small things. If when the movements you complain of come, you remain quiet and open to the Mother and call her, after a time you will find a change beginning to come in you. Meditation is not enough; think of the Mother and offer your work and action to her, that will help you better.

7 April 1932

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The play of the mental and vital defects in the human nature which belongs to the Ignorance is allowed — as also the attacks and suggestions of the Asuric forces — so long as there is anything in the nature which responds to these things. If they rise in you in the presence of the Mother, it is because then a strong pressure is put on them so that they have either to go out or to put up a fight for existence. The remedy is to open to the Mother only and to reject entirely and at all times all other forces, and to reject them most when they become most active. Faith, sincerity, perseverance will do the rest.

16 November 1932

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*Yesterday I prayed, “O Divine Mother, how can I realise that I am always guided by Thee and that Thy presence is in all things and everywhere. I pray that I may love Thee and be Thy child and an instrument for Thy work.”*

Yes. The more one is open to the Mother’s action, the more easily difficulties get solved and the right thing is done.

21 September 1934

### **The Mother’s Protection**

The Mother puts her protection round all the sadhakas, but if by their own act or attitude they go out of the circle of the protection there may be undesirable consequences.

1 April 1933

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*I think that one observes the rules here either because one feels it is for one's spiritual good or because it is better, for love of the Mother, not to do otherwise and thus go out of her protection.*

It is precisely that — one immediately goes out of the protection.

8 June 1933

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*I was invited by friends to go to a restaurant and accepted. Later I learned that you were opposed to the idea. What should we — those of us who live outside the Asram — do?*

The Mother has made an arrangement with a view to all the occult forces and the best possible conditions for the protection of the sadhaks from certain forces of death and disease etc. It cannot work perfectly because the sadhaks themselves have not the right attitude towards food and kindred vital-physical things. But still there is a protection. If however the sadhaks go outside her formation, it must be on their own responsibility — the Mother does not and cannot sanction it. But this arrangement is for the Asram and not for those who are outside.

14 July 1933

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*When the Mother's protection is put around a person, how does he go out of it?*

By desire, wrong thoughts, wrong actions, wrong feelings — by revolt, pride, ambition, lust or any other vital indulgence.

16 July 1933

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*Last night I dreamt that in my native village I entered a house where a madman came to attack me. Being afraid of the madman, I ran away for I have always been afraid of madmen, especially violent ones. My movement was slow, but along the way I found a stick and got rid of the attacker.*

It was a dream of the vital plane where all kinds of dangers occur until you get courage to face them. If there is no fear or if there is the protection of the Mother (which becomes manifest by remembering or calling her) then these dangers come

to nothing. It is the fear of madmen that brought the thing in the vital; such things as this fear have to be thrown out of the nature.

8 September 1933

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*All would like the Mother's protection to remain with them; but perhaps certain conditions have to be fulfilled to allow her to encircle them fully?*

There are very few who allow it. There is a general protection around all, but most go out of it by their attitude, thoughts or actions or open the way to other forces.

24 August 1934

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*If a sadhak has the Mother's circle of protection around him, I don't think he will have gloom, depression, doubt or anything hostile to the Divine.*

These things may try to come but they will not be able to enter or stay.

24 August 1934

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*Yesterday I went with X and Y for an outing. We bought plantains from the market and ate them. After our return I began to feel out of sorts and by the time of meditation the body appeared to be weak and a little feverish. Was my going out and eating plantains inadvisable?*

It is better to let the Mother know when you go far out like that so that it may be with her protection that you go. The eating of plantains from the bazaar was indeed a mistake — Mother has several times warned against it and X knows that. The body often becomes sensitive at a certain stage of the Yoga, but there should at the same time be the development of a higher Force which will protect and push back all attacks upon it.

1934

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These things that come to frighten you are merely impressions thrown on you by small vital forces which want to prevent you (by making you nervous) pushing on in sadhana. They can really do nothing to you, only you must reject all fear. Keep



always this thought when these things come: "The Mother's protection is with me, nothing bad can happen"; for when there is the psychic opening and one puts one's faith in the Mother, that is sufficient to ward these things off. Many sadhaks learn, when they have alarming dreams, to call the Mother's name in the dream itself and then the things that menace them become helpless or cease. You must therefore refuse to be intimidated and reject these impressions with contempt. If there is anything frightening, call down the Mother's protection.

The heat you felt was probably due to some difficulty in the force coming down below the centre between the eyes where it has been working up till now. When such sensations or the unease you once felt or similar things come, you must not be alarmed, but remain quiet and let the difficulty pass.

What you had before that, the moonlight in the forehead, was this working in the centre there between the eyebrows, the centre of the inner mind, will and vision. The moonlight you saw is the light of spirituality and it was this that was entering into your mind through the centre, with the effect of the widening in the heart like a sky filled with moonlight. Afterwards came some endeavour to prepare the lower part of the mind whose centre is in the throat and join it with the inner mind and make it open; but there was some difficulty, as is very usually the case, which caused the heat. It was probably the fire of tapas, Agni, trying to open the way to this centre.

The experience of being taken up into the sky is a very common one and it means an ascent of the consciousness into a higher world of light and peace.

The idea that you must go more and more within and turn wholly to the Mother is quite right. It is when there is no attachment to outward things for their own sake and all is only for the Mother and the life through the inner psychic being is centred in her that the best condition is created for the spiritual realisation.

11 November 1935

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Fear in these experiences is a thing one must get rid of; if there is any danger, a call to the Mother is sufficient, but in reality there is none — for the protection is there.

29 November 1935

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*This morning around eight o'clock I heard a great crash. I ran out and found our X sitting on the footpath with blood coming out of the wound on his forehead. The wheels of his cycle were under the wheel of a car. Could the Mother not have foreseen the possibility of this accident and prevented it? Or could it not be prevented because X had in some manner gone out of the zone of her protection?*

It was not possible to prevent the accident. When the danger comes, a call to the Mother is the first thing to be done, that makes the general protection at once effective. X was in too externalised a state to do that and he did the very opposite thing to what should have been done — trying to get away in front of the car instead of behind it. But the true cause was something more internal — one of those choices made by the inner being (not necessarily known to the conscious mind) which bring these things as a response.

27 January 1936

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The experience you had of the power of the Name and the protection is that of everyone who has used it with the same faith and reliance. To those who call from the heart for the protection, it cannot fail. Do not allow any outward circumstance to shake the faith in you; for nothing gives greater strength than this faith to go through and arrive at the goal. Knowledge and tapasya, whatever their force, have a less sustaining power — faith is the strongest staff for the journey.

The protection is there over you and the watchful love of the Mother. Rely upon it and let your being open more and more to it — then it will repel attacks and always uphold you.

8 October 1936

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It is not because the Mother has withdrawn her protection — she has not done that. It is more likely that it [*the difficulty*] came because you have been going too much out of your inner being and externalising yourself. It is better to draw back within again and recover the inner calm and peace.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 294-309)

## **‘NOTHING ELSE EXISTS BUT THOU ALONE IN THE SPLENDOUR OF THY IMMUTABLE PEACE’**

**April 10, 1914**

SUDDENLY the veil was rent, the horizon was disclosed — and before the clear vision my whole being threw itself at Thy feet in a great outburst of gratitude. Yet in spite of this deep and integral joy all was calm, all was peaceful with the peace of eternity.

I seem to have no more limits; there is no longer the perception of the body, no sensations, no feelings, no thoughts — a clear, pure, tranquil immensity penetrated with love and light, filled with an unspeakable beatitude is all that is there and that alone seems now to be myself, and this “myself” is so little the former “I”, selfish and limited, that I cannot tell if it is I or Thou, O Lord, sublime Master of our destinies.

It is as though all were energy, courage, force, will, infinite sweetness, incomparable compassion. . . .

Even more forcibly than during these last days the past is dead and as though buried under the rays of a new life. The last glance that I have just thrown backward as I read a few pages of this book definitely convinced me of this death, and lightened of a great weight I present myself before Thee, O my divine Master, with all the simplicity, all the nudity of a child. . . . And still the one only thing I perceive is that calm and pure immensity. . . .

Lord, Thou hast answered my prayer, Thou hast granted me what I have asked from Thee; the “I” has disappeared, there is only a docile instrument put at Thy service, a centre of concentration and manifestation of Thy infinite and eternal rays; Thou hast taken my life and made it Thine; Thou hast taken my will and hast united it to Thine; Thou hast taken my love and identified it with Thine; Thou hast taken my thought and replaced it by Thy absolute consciousness.

The body, marvelling, bows its forehead in the dust in mute and submissive adoration.

And nothing else exists but Thou alone in the splendour of Thy immutable peace.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 123-24)*

## TO NESTLE IN THE DIVINE

So, anything new?

*Nothing, or always the same thing.*

What?

*I am waiting.*

Ah! You are waiting — I too! (*Laughter*)

(*Silence*)

It is as though all the ways of seeing the world were passing by, one after another: the most detestable and the most wonderful — like this, like this, like this (*Mother turns her hands like a kaleidoscope*), and all of them come as though to say: there, one can see like this, there, one can see like that, there, one can . . . And the Truth . . . what is true? What is true? . . . All that (*same movement of a kaleidoscope*) and “Something” which one does not know.

First of all, I am sure that this necessity of seeing things, of thinking things, is purely human, and it is a means for transition. It is a period of transition which to us appears long, long, but it is in fact quite short.

Even our consciousness is an adaptation of the Consciousness — *the* Consciousness, the true Consciousness, that is another thing.

And so the conclusion for my body is . . . (as well as I can translate it): to nestle in the Divine. Not to try to understand, not to try to know — but to try to *be* . . . and to nestle. And I pass my time that way.

Not to “try”: one minute in this way (*gesture of slight withdrawal*) is enough, and time no longer counts. Very strange, I experiment with all the small movements of life; well, when I nestle myself like this, when I stop thinking, simply the consciousness like this (*gesture of going inward*), all appears to be instantaneous. There is no time. When I am in the external consciousness (what I call “external” is a consciousness which sees the creation), then that takes time, more or less long according to the attention that is given. Then all, all appears . . . there is nothing that appears (how to say it?) absolute, in the sense of real — real, with a concrete reality — there is nothing that appears like that — except the unpleasant things in the body; then one is aware that it is imperfection. It is imperfection that makes it perceptible to the senses; otherwise it is like this (*same gesture of going inward, nestled within the Lord*). And “like that” the Power is tremendous, in the sense that . . . for example, in the case of some people an illness disappears (and in fact

without my doing anything externally, without even my speaking to the person, nothing, nothing — cured), in the case of another who wants to leave . . . it is the end, it is tilting over to the other side. And so this other side has become at the same time altogether familiar and . . . absolutely unknown.

I remember a time when the memory of past lives, the memory of nightly activities was so concrete, this so-called invisible world was altogether concrete. Now . . . now all is like a dream — dream — all is like a dream veiling a Reality . . . a Reality . . . unknown and yet perceptible to the senses. I seem to be talking nonsense.

*No, no!*

Because the thing cannot be expressed.

You asked me the other day (your question has remained with me), you asked me: “When I am like that, silent and still, what is it that is there?” . . . It is just an attempt (I cannot say it is an aspiration, nor can I say it is an effort — it is the word *urge* in English): the truth as it is. And not trying to know it nor to understand it; all that is altogether beside the point: to be — to be — to be (*Mother has a smile full of sweetness*).

*(Silence)*

So it is altogether strange: at the same time — at the same time — not the one in the other nor the one with the other, but the one and the other, at the same time (*Mother holds the fingers of her right hand between those of the left*): wonderful and frightful. . . . Life as it is, as we feel it in our ordinary consciousness, as it is for men, seems to be a thing . . . so frightful that you ask how one can live there even for a minute; and the other, *at the same time*: a wonder. A wonder of Light, of Consciousness, of Power — wonderful. Oh! Power! a Power! . . . And it is not the power of a person (*Mother pinches the skin of her hand*), it is something . . . it is something which is all . . . And then one cannot express oneself.

So, quite naturally, what is most interesting is to find That. Quite naturally when I have nothing to do . . . (*Mother makes a gesture of going within and nestling within the Lord*).

*(Long silence)*

Only Thou — that is all. And it is quite evident that the creation has that as its goal, that wonderful delight . . . of feeling itself to be Thou.

*(Mother ends with a smile.)*

28 August 1971

THE MOTHER

*(Notes on the Way, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 266-68)*

## **“INEFFABLE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

Are these lines worth anything? If they are unequal, which of them strike you as the best?

My victories of song shrivel up now  
In fires no speech can twine to wreath my brow —  
The Spirit's golden truth! What conquering word  
Shall crown my life when God remains unheard?

He marks a measureless magnificent pause,  
A reverie ineffable, because  
Not through one gate alone — the chanting mouth —  
His giant splendour can procession out,  
But every pore must open to express  
The myriad wealth of Everlastingness  
Until the dark clay, tense with limitless soul,  
~~Outbreathes~~ a universe of aureole!  
~~Sings out~~  
Breathes out

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

The lines are very good — I ought to say perhaps “very fine” — not unequal, except the second line which reads a little stiffly; perhaps “speech cannot twine” might give it a more plastic turn?

13 October 1934

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### **INEFFABLE**

My victories of song shrivel up now  
In fires speech cannot twine to wreath my brow —  
The Spirit's golden truth! What conquering word  
Shall crown my life when God remains unheard?

He marks a measureless magnificent pause,  
 A reverie ineffable, because  
 Not through one gate alone — the chanting mouth —  
 His giant splendour can procession out,  
 But every pore must open to express  
 The myriad wealth of Everlastingness  
 Until the dark clay, tense with limitless soul,  
 Breathes out a universe of aureole!

AMAL KIRAN  
 (K. D. SETHNA)

*Poetry, or at any rate a truly poetic poetry, comes always from some subtle plane through the creative vital and uses the outer mind and other external instruments for transmission only. There are three elements in the production of poetry; there is the original source of inspiration, there is the vital force of creative beauty which contributes its own substance and impetus and often determines the form, except when that also comes ready made from the original sources; there is, finally, the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet. The most genuine and perfect poetry is written when the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and there takes its true native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration, while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what it receives from the godheads of the inner or the superior spaces. When the vital mind and emotion are too active and give too much of their own initiation or a translation into more or less turbid vital stuff, the poetry remains powerful but is inferior in quality and less authentic. Finally, if the outer consciousness is too lethargic and blocks the transmission or too active and makes its own version, then you have the poetry that fails or is at best a creditable mental manufacture. It is the interference of these two parts either by obstruction or by too great an activity of their own or by both together that causes the difficulty and labour of writing. There would be no difficulty if the inspiration came through without obstruction or interference in a pure transcript — that is what happens in a poet's highest or freest moments when he writes not at all out of his own external human mind, but by inspiration, as the mouthpiece of the Gods.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 5)

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

*(Continued from the issue of October 2013)*

## **Chapter: XXVII**

### **A Method in Madness**

If India is to be India, if her civilisation is to retain a distinctive stamp and extend its spiritual conquests for the benefit of the world at large, it must be propped up with the strength of her own people.

To include India in a federation of colonies and the motherland is madness without method. The patriotism that wishes the country to lose itself within an Empire which justifies its name by its conquest — the colonies being no portion of the Empire in its strict sense — is also madness without method. But to talk of absolute independence and autonomy — though this be madness, yet there is method in it.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo

*(Bande Mataram; 25 February 1907)*

That “absolute independence and autonomy” were the goal of the nationalists was thus pronounced without any ambiguity for the first ever time in the pages of the *Bande Mataram* in its issue of 25 February 1907. The Indian synonym for Independence, “Swaraj” had been first used in a contemporary political sense by Sakharan Ganesh Deuskar, the celebrated author of *Deshar Katha* and a member of the teaching staff of the National College of which Sri Aurobindo was the Principal. Brahma-bandhav Upadhyay put the word into circulation through his Bengali journal *Sandhya* and the nationalists used it in its original sense that was complete freedom. But in the Calcutta session of the National Congress the President, Dadabhai Naoroji diluted its significance by using it in a sense that was equivalent of colonial self-government.<sup>2</sup>

But the word bounced back to its original meaning in no time.

The passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter can be properly appreciated in its immediate political backdrop. Here is the summary of a vital part of that as presented by a biographer of Tilak:

A year of ceaseless work considerably swelled the ranks of the extremist party, but in the Congress the Moderates were still a powerful majority. Tilak was far more popular in the country than any Congress leader, and his towering per-





The *Bande Mataram* office



sonality, his erudition, his suffering and sacrifice, entitled him to the Presidency of the Congress. During his visit to Calcutta in 1906, Pal made a proposal that Tilak should be invited to preside over that year's Congress which was to meet in Bengal. The Moderates were nervous and they cabled to Dadabhai Naoroji who was in England then, to return to India and preside over the Congress. It was suggested by the Extremists that this device was hit upon by the Moderates to prevent Tilak from becoming the Congress President for he would not agree to stand against the Grand Old Man of India. Acute difference had by now developed between the two sections of the Congress, and the storm which should have burst in 1906 was put off until the next session. But the subject committee witnessed "the most uproarious and almost rebellious" scenes. It was difficult to keep order and the Moderates were able to speak, if at all, by sheer persistence.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen earlier, any call for complete independence was chimerical for an average member of the Congress of those days and for the leading Moderates, a dangerous madness. Because of their class-character some such leaders were not very different from the members of the British Indian Association, "an almost purely loyalist body" as stated by a leading historian.<sup>4</sup> Tireless labour by Sri Aurobindo — despite his weak health — and Tilak made it possible for the Congress to adopt some progressive resolutions concerning Swadeshi and boycott. That the pent up anguish of the Moderates would be exposed in their preparations for the next Congress is a different matter!

The conclusion drawn by a research scholar was that the Congress would have broken up at this Calcutta conference itself (what practically happened at its next conference at Surat which we will see later), but if that did not happen, the credit goes to Sri Aurobindo's capacity to keep the situation under control — keeping Tilak in the forefront and himself remaining behind.<sup>5</sup>

From October 1906 till the first quarter of 1907 Sri Aurobindo fell intermittently ill and two of the spells were serious indeed. A. B. Purani in his *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded in his entry for 5 November 1925 that Sri Aurobindo said:

My own experience is that when I was practising Pranayama at Baroda I had excellent health. But when I went to Bengal and left Pranayama, I was attacked by all sorts of illness which nearly carried me off.<sup>6</sup>

During the Alipore Trial, C. R. Das presented with proofs the specific periods of his illness:

The next period I take is the period from 1906 to April 1907. This is a period of very little activity on Aurobindo's part as you will find during that period he

was mostly ill. You will find — I will state the facts before I prove them — that he was at Deoghur from 11<sup>th</sup> December 1906 to the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1906 and again from 27<sup>th</sup> January 1907 to the middle of April 1907 and you have heard from the evidence of Sukumar Sen that on the night he left for Deoghur permission was asked — after his name appeared in the *Bande Mataram* — if he would agree to be the editor and upon his refusal his name was removed the next day.<sup>7</sup>

From early December, Sri Aurobindo was not only in full control of the policy of *Bande Mataram*, but also was obliged to act as its de facto chief manager, despite his illness and absence. During the first phase of his association with the newspaper he was residing at Subodh Mullik's mansion. A young man, Suresh Chandra Deb, who came to collect his contribution, records,

It fell to me to come to him every evening at about 5 p.m. and receive from him the article promised. I found it ready; I did not have to wait for it on any single day. . . . Now and then I found him with friends — Subodh Chandra Mullik, Charu Chandra Dutt, Surendranath Halder, Bijoy Chandra Chatterjee, Rajatnath Roy, Hemendra Prasad Ghose, Jogendra Krishna Basu — when he opened out; and still do I appear to hear that tinkling laughter that expressed the joy of his heart at the temporary release from the burden of thought and responsibility generally felt by him. Now and then politics cropped up in these discussions and their handling in the daily Press, in his own articles. He generally spoke in English, but when he used his mother-tongue Bengali, the foreign accent and a lisping sound made it pleasant to the ear. Even during these pleasantries a book was always by his side into which he would dip and lose himself. And there were silences eloquent of the prevailing mood of all present. Now and then there was small talk and Sri Aurobindo extracted the utmost pleasure from it . . .

In August-September 1906 Sri Aurobindo's writings showed the quality of a master that was an inspiration to thousands. And almost daily Reuter and the correspondents of the foreign Press used to cable the news and the views published in the *Bande Mataram* as reflecting the authentic feelings of the Indian people in their struggle for national self-respect which is *Swaraj*.<sup>8</sup>

It may be relevant to mention here that in 1971 while going through the original Minto Papers at the National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, this author found some correspondence between Theodore Roosevelt, President of the U.S.A. from 1901 till 1909, and Lord Minto, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India from 1905 to 1910, the former desiring to see a copy of the *Bande Mataram*, the latter obliging him — and the President observing that it was very interesting!<sup>9</sup>

From the last week of October 1906 the *Bande Mataram* was being published from a building on what was then known as Creek Road. A glimpse of him at this office from the unsophisticated reminiscences of a young worker, Nirmal Dutt:

The very first day, on going to my office I met him. He had been allotted a small room on the first floor, entirely to himself. I never found anybody else in that room. He was not yet Sri Aurobindo, but only Aurobindo Ghose, and I had no fear or worry about my work which was simply to take his article from his hand and read it out to the proof-reader in another room. I could do it easily because his handwriting was one of the very best I had ever seen and his English perfect. Yet one day I thought I found a mistake in his writing, or rather to me it seemed as a mistake. I showed it to others and they also were inclined to agree with me. They advised me to take it to him which I did without hesitation. I asked him whether it was a mistake. He looked at it and said "No". He spoke no other word either to explain it or disparage a cheeky boy but remained immersed in deep thought as he always was.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had a couple of highly accomplished helpers in his Editorial section, but many among his staff and readers must have often stumbled on phrases, idioms and allusions that flowed through his pen with the grandeur and spontaneity of the Ganga emerging from the Himalaya. But most of them stood inspired and educated. Only rarely would he have encountered a boy like Nirmal Dutt who suspected an error in his writing. But we have a first-hand report of his facing a jolly well-wisher who felt himself wise enough to "correct" an "error". (The word concerned was *Churchianity*, no doubt of infrequent use, which means "devoted to the Church rather than Christianity itself" according to the large-size three-column-3800-page *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*.) Here is that event narrated by one of the eminent members of the editorial staff and himself a revolutionary who later suffered incarceration in the Andamans, Upendranath Bandopadhyay:

Fellow-workers viewed Aurobindo Babu with both awe and devotion. If there was unsatisfactory performance he became irritated but kept quiet. It was only when he was very annoyed that his lips quivered slightly. People around him felt alarmed at that.

We had a sub-editor named Binoy Babu. Rarely one could find an amalgamation of so many virtues in one individual in this *Kali Yug*. When Subodh Babu's wife suffered from tuberculosis it was this gentleman who went forward to cure her. With tuberculosis on one hand and Binoy Babu as the physician on the other hand, no wonder that the patient would choose a quick final exit, thereby escaping the treatment . . .

One night the task of proof-reading fell on him. Sri Aurobindo's article

contained a word *Churchianity*. Poor Binoy Babu had never had anything to do with that kind of a word. Without the least hesitation he corrected and shortened it to Christianity. In the morning Aurobindo Babu noticed that some Pundit had improved upon his writing. Inquiry established that the credit must go to Binoy Babu. He was summoned to appear before Aurobindo Babu. Hands folded, he stated, “Sir, not I, but the university was to blame. I read a fat heap of books and passed B.A., but never met with a word named *Churchianity*.”

We do not know for how long he would have gone on explaining his stand, but it was observed that Aurobindo Babu’s lips had started quivering. Binoy Babu ran away as fast as he could. (Translated from Bengali.)<sup>11</sup>

To return to Nirmal Dutt’s reminiscence for a further glimpse of Sri Aurobindo at the *Bande Mataram* office:

His dress at this time was one of the plainest: an ordinary coat buttoned up to the neck and a common *dhoti*. It seemed nobody cared to clothe him properly, while he himself was too preoccupied to give attention to it. He seemed oblivious of his body even. He was always meditating deeply about something. When he looked at one, he seemed not to view one, as if mentally he were soaring far, far away. I found him always sitting in the same posture with a pen in his hand, deeply immersed in thought. That he had few words for others was not due to any inherent pride or superciliousness. It was probably in his nature. After the first day I was not at all surprised that he was the only person in the office who never talked to me . . .

One day, however, I found the room vacant as I entered the office and no one was sitting on his chair. I learnt that he had been arrested in a bomb case along with some others and was lodged in prison . . .<sup>12</sup>

Much water of course was yet to flow under the Howrah Bridge before that fateful day!

MANOJ DAS

(To be continued)

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*If a nation were an artificial product which could be made, then it might be possible for one nation to make another. But a nation cannot be made, — it is an organism which grows under the stress of a principle of life within. We speak indeed of nation-building and of the makers of a nation, but these are only convenient metaphors. The nation-builder, Cavour or Bismarck, is merely the incarnation of a national force which has found its hour and its opportunity, of an inner will which has awakened under the stress of shaping circumstances. A nation is, indeed, the outward expression of a community of sentiment, whether it be the sentiment of a common blood or the sentiment of a common religion or the sentiment of a common interest or any or all of these sentiments combined. Once this sentiment grows strong enough to develop into a will towards unity and to conquer obstacles and make full use of favouring circumstances, the development of the nation becomes inevitable and there is no power which can ultimately triumph against it. But the process, however rapid it may be, is one of growth and not of manufacture.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(Bande Mataram, CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 367)



## THE LIVING ATOM<sup>1</sup>

“It is no exaggeration to say that the whole course of human life in the future depends largely upon the development of knowledge concerning the atom.”

Floyd W. Parsons

### I. A CLUE TO SCIENTIFIC PROBLEMS

PHYSICAL science has now reached a stage when it must go beyond itself in order to fulfil itself. By definition it is limited to the consideration of physical phenomena; but a purely physical phenomenon is a mere abstraction of the mind, there is no such thing in reality. The physical is the basis of the vital and the mental, and all three constitute the form in which the Spirit manifests itself in the world. The classification of objects into physical or material, vital or living and mental is not absolute, but a rough classification valid for practical purposes, based on the preponderance of one or other of the three principles which in their interrelation constitute the manifested universe. It is the inability or unwillingness to recognise this truth that has inevitably landed physics into difficulties and given rise to some of its most insoluble problems. It is a sign of the times that eminent thinkers, even in the West, have begun to lay emphasis on this deficiency of scientific thought. Criticising science in a recently published book, *Nature and Life*, Professor Whitehead remarks that it makes arbitrary cuts across the field of Nature and then studies the areas which it has segregated in isolation from their context. His general thesis is that only by the fusion of life with Nature can the activity of physical science be given content and meaning.

Physicists are loath to admit that there is in Nature anything more fundamental than matter. But science has now reached a stage when all material or physical phenomena can be interpreted in terms of one thing, viz., energy (or waves or vibrations of energy). It was the great achievement of Maxwell to consolidate optics with electricity and magnetism. It is now seen that all kinds of radiation, light, heat, electricity are of electro-magnetic nature; it is also recognised that radiation has energy, momentum and, in fact, all the dynamical properties usually ascribed to gross matter. As all gross matter is supposed to be built up of protons and electrons, all matter may be regarded as essentially electro-magnetic in nature. Thus the utmost limit at which modern science has reached is that this physical universe is the manifestation of a force or energy which is essentially one in nature. For all these

1. Written in 1934.



assertions, physics has justification in its methods of observation and experiment depending on sense-experience. But about this ultimate force or energy, physics has made an assumption for which it has no justification in its methods, *viz.*, that it is mechanical and incontinent. It is a fundamental assumption of physical science that everything happens in this world according to fixed and rigid laws, and that given a particular cause, a particular effect is bound to happen. This principle known as the Uniformity of Nature is sufficiently valid in the large-scale phenomena of Nature; but it breaks down when one comes to the ultimate units, the atoms and the electrons. It has been rigorously shown by scientists like Heisenberg that physics has no means whatever of ascertaining how an electron will behave at any particular moment; and that this inability of physics is not due to the inefficiency of its instruments, but it is inherent in the very nature of things. Thus to find where an electron is at a particular moment, we have to allow it to scatter light or material particles; but in that very act it suffers a recoil and moves away from that particular place. Thus physics has been compelled by its own methods to admit the principle of uncertainty within the atom. Still it does not give up its deterministic position. The argument from the analogy of large-scale phenomena is not valid; modern science has definitely shown that Newton's laws of motion which are obeyed by matter-in-bulk are not applicable to electrons and protons for which a new mechanics has had to be devised. Here within the atom we enter into a distinctly different order of existence, and we are not justified in making any assumption about it from the analogy of large-scale phenomena. Yet physicists dogmatically assert that the reign of determinism is absolute even within the atom. They say that they cannot predict the future behaviour of an electron only because they cannot determine its present position with certainty. Heisenberg, with whose name the Uncertainty Principle is associated, has stated the matter very clearly as follows: "It is not assumed that the quantum theory as opposed to the classical theory, is essentially statistical, in the sense that nothing but statistical conclusions can be drawn from data which are given exactly. In the formulation of the causal law, namely, 'If we know the present exactly, we can predict the future' not the conclusion, but the premise is at fault."

Thus though physicists admit that they have no means of testing the existence of determinism within the atom, yet they assume its existence all the same. In 1905, explaining the Michelson-Morley experiment, Einstein's argument was, "If a thing cannot be observed, why should it be necessary to assume its existence?" Following this argument, he gave to the scientific world his epoch-making law of relativity, and this is accepted as the "logic of modern physics". But coming to the principle of determinism, all this logic is thrown to the winds.

When physics reaches a region where its methods of observation and experiment are not available, the only rational course for it to follow is not to make dogmatic assumptions, but depend on pure reasoning. The inner activities of the atom, at least to a considerable extent, constitute such a region. If science can find

any concept from which the observable properties of the atom can be deduced or explained, it must not hesitate to accept it. Hitherto science has not been able to find any such satisfactory concept, because it has strictly limited itself to a mechanical and deterministic view of Nature. There are physicists of great eminence today, who are impelled by their scientific knowledge to regard the atom to have some sort of life and will. For example, Dr. Herman Weyl of the University of Göttingen says: "The Quantum Theory places the origin of those phenomena which confront us in the fully developed organism as Life, Soul and Will back in the same original order of nature to which atoms and electrons belong." But no one as yet dares to introduce this concept of a living atom into the domain of physics. When scientists will give up this prejudice, they will see clear light where now they find only mist and darkness. That the atom has a life, and not only life but a consciousness and will is not a mere conjecture or guess; it is a truth which has been seen in the highest spiritual experience of mankind. It is for the physicists to see whether they can take advantage of this knowledge and allow it to throw light on the results of their own investigations. By way of illustration, we shall consider here some of the outstanding problems of modern science.

One of the most fascinating studies in physics is the inner structure of the atom. The discovery of the electron and the proton, as well as experiments on the scattering of alpha particles by atomic nuclei, have clearly shown that an atom consists of a nucleus around which external electrons revolve. Thus the atom has a structure very much like a living cell with its protoplasm, nucleus and attraction sphere. But physicists seem to have taken a vow not to accept any concept from biology or psychology. Lord Kelvin once said that he could not understand any phenomenon unless he could imagine a mechanical model having a similar behaviour; and with some modification that still continues to be the general attitude of physicists. Thus when Bohr conceived a model of the atomic structure, he took the analogy of the solar system with the nucleus as the sun and the electrons as the planets revolving round it. Though this concept still has its value in describing some of the properties of the atom, it has now to be definitely rejected as it does not agree with experimental results. Heisenberg's mechanics of the atom, which is accepted today, is based on the principle that we must not take a too mechanical view of the atom. There are no definite orbits which electrons follow mechanically; their movement at every moment is uncertain and indeterminate. What physics can calculate is the probability of finding an electron at a certain place, that is, it can give only statistical laws. This is exactly what we should expect if the atom be a living body having the movements of its parts analogous to what is known as Brownian movements within living cells.

Another problem of great interest is to discover the scheme which Nature uses in building the 92 (93 ?) elements or primary substances — oxygen, sulphur and so forth — out of the two fundamental particles of positive and negative electricity. In

1870 the Russian chemist Mendeleef discovered that the elements were not altogether unrelated, "that they could be arranged according to their atomic weights in a certain order, an ascending spiral in which the chemical properties correspond with the position of the elements on the curve". This is known as the "periodic" law of the elements. Thus there is a group of elements called "alkalis"; these are the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, etc. in the series. These are very similar in their chemical behaviour, and also in certain physical respects, notably their spectrum. As explained by the scientific correspondent of the *Times*: "Clearly the order was more than accidental; it was the kind of order to be expected if there had been an evolution of the elements from some primitive substance. The periodic law was not absolute. Irregularities existed as if another factor were at work, something capricious such as exists in the evolution of living forms." In this century Mosley brought evidence from a wholly new quarter (*viz.*, the application of X-ray methods) showing that all the elements constitute a family, each member of which is related to every other member in a definite and simple way. It seems that hydrogen is the primordial element from which the other elements have evolved. This periodic law of the elements is in beautiful accord with the conception that the atom is a living body which by an inner urge evolves more and more complex forms, a process which is repeated on a larger scale in the higher orders of life such as the plant and the animal.

In 1900 Planck found a formula showing how the heating effect of black body radiation varied with the wave length. Seeking a physical explanation of this relation he got the quantum idea which has changed the whole outlook of science. His fundamental assumption was that the ultimate sources of radiation (the atoms or molecules composing the radiant body) were intermittent rather than continuous in their modes of action; and that the radiant energy was emitted in packets (or quanta as they are called) of very definite energy content; in fact a given source could emit energy only in units which are exactly equal to  $hr$ ,  $r$  being the natural frequency (that is, the rate of vibration) of the emitter and  $h$  a constant which was the same for all emitters. "No one knows in the least," says Bertrand Russell, "why this should be the case." Modern physics has accepted Planck's quantum as a brute fact. But a very simple explanation of this "brute fact" is found if only we admit that the atom is a living body. It is a fundamental characteristic of a living body or system that it acts and reacts only as a whole; that is, the whole organism must be excited before it can act. In physiology this is known as the "All or nothing law". Planck's formula  $e=hr$  gives this law for the activity of the atom which, having a definite and simple structure, has a simple law of its excitability and action. The atom does not radiate at all until the radiant energy reaches a certain critical value,  $hr$ , when explosive emission takes place. We have a close analogy of this intermittent and discontinuous action of the atom in the functioning of such involuntary muscles as the heart in animal bodies. During the period of rest, the cilium of the heart is accumulating potential energy, till it becomes so charged that it discharges; potential energy is converted

into kinetic energy or movement.

Another insoluble problem is the conflict between the corpuscular and undulatory theories of light. This conflict is very old in the history of science. When in 1850 Foucault proved by a crucial experiment that the velocity of light is less in water than in air, a definite verdict was given in favour of the wave theory, and it has since explained beautifully all such phenomena as interference, diffraction, polarisation which cannot be accounted for by the corpuscular theory. The first difficulty arose, as pointed out in 1903 by Sir J. J. Thomson, in the explanation of the new facts as to the emission of electrons under the influence of ether waves. When light of appropriate wavelength falls on a metallic surface, electrons (called photo-electrons) are ejected from the latter with a velocity which seems to be inexplicable on the basis of the wave theory. The energy of a wave is distributed over the whole of its front. As the wave becomes wider with distance the energy at a particular point becomes less and less. But it is found by experiment that the energy with which an electron is ejected by light, does not depend upon the distance of the source of radiation. No matter how distant or feeble the light, the maximum velocity of the photo-electron is always the same. On the basis of the wave theory, we should expect the electron to have a cross-section millions of times greater than that which is customarily assigned to it, in order to receive from the radiation the energy which it is observed to have. It seems necessary therefore that the energy be not distributed on a wide front as in a wave, but be concentrated in a small particle or photon. In this way the corpuscular theory was revived. Moreover, when a wave passes over an area, it comes into contact with all the atoms contained within it; but it is only from a limited number of atoms that electrons are ejected. This also is easily explained by the corpuscular theory; for if light consists of particles, many of them will pass through inter-atomic spaces without coming into contact with any atom at all. The corpuscular theory thus revived found further support from the effect of X-rays known as the Compton effect. Compton found in 1926 that an electron may receive a "kick" when allowed to come into a beam of X-rays. The direction and magnitude of the resultant momentum of the electron is found to be exactly what it would have been if it collided with a material particle having the same mass as that of a photon.

But to explain the phenomena of interference, etc., it is still necessary to retain the undulatory theory of light. Einstein has shown a way out of this dilemma by suggesting that the wave of which light consists is only a wave of probability, that is to say, the wave only indicates the probability that a photon is at the point in question; thus the wave has no energy of itself but acts only as a "ghost field" to direct the particles. This is evidently a makeshift; just like his four-dimensional space-time continuum, it is only a conventional way of mathematically describing the phenomena observed; but it does not go to the root of the matter, and is accepted by the scientists today only as they can as yet see no other way out of the dilemma. "There are great

differences in the two points of view," say the Physics staff of the University of Pittsburgh, "but we are not able to adopt at present either the classical or the quantum picture to the exclusion of the other. Each has its field of usefulness." Thus the scientists of the world today are in such a position that on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays they have to regard light as consisting of particles, and on the other days of the week they have to consider light to be of the nature of an electromagnetic wave!

But in order to explain photo-electric phenomena, we need not revive the corpuscular theory with all its difficulties, if only we suppose that the energy of the photo-electron comes from within the atom itself and not from the incident light which only serves as an exciting agency. It is a mystery how living organisms such as a green plant absorb and store up radiant energy, and the atom possesses this mysterious power. Discoveries in connection with X-rays and radium have shown that the atom is a great storehouse of power. As one authority points out, if a gram of iron could be made to discharge the energy of its atoms in one minute, the power obtained would be equal to fifty tons of dynamite. Sir Ernest Rutherford considers that the heat of the sun may be due to the energy given out in the formation of helium from hydrogen atoms. Though the scientists today are making many interesting observations about the atom, they have not yet learnt the secret of controlling the energy that lies stored up in the atom. In the phenomena of photo-electricity, we have a glimpse how atoms emit their energy under the influence of light.

How is it that of the many atoms which come into contact with the same light (considering light as a wave) only some emit electrons while others do not? The simple explanation is that in all these respects the atom behaves like a living body acting under a stimulus, and we cannot expect mechanically uniform behaviour from living bodies. Within certain limits, whether a living body will respond to a particular stimulus or not depends on the condition in which that particular body is at that moment, and it may not be exactly similar to that of its neighbours. The greater the intensity of the incident light, the greater the number of the atoms excited and this is as much uniformity as we can expect from a living body.

We are not the first to suggest that photo-electrons derive their energy not from the exciting light, but from within the atom itself. There was a theory put forward by Lenard in which the atom was supposed to be like a loaded gun, the trigger of which was pulled by the wave of light. This however was a too mechanical view of the atom, and could not explain the relation which exists between the frequency of the incident light and the energy of the ejected electron. There is in fact clear experimental evidence that the maximum energy of emission is a linear function of the frequency of the exciting light. It is this which led to the rejection of the theory that the energy came from the atom and not from the incident light. But when a living body is acted upon by a stimulus, the resulting response is not altogether

independent of the quality and the quantity of the stimulus. The atom in fact does not mechanically respond to the light like an exploding gun. We shall understand its behaviour better if we consider how higher forms of life respond to external stimulus. The characters of a sensation produced in us “depend not only on the strength, vibration-rate, duration, etc. of the stimulus, but also upon the condition of the sensory apparatus which is stimulated and upon the temporary condition of neighbouring sensory areas; nay, the characters of sensation depend upon the state of the nervous system generally, upon the total mental state at the moment of application of the stimulus”. Very few atoms will be in a sufficiently sensitive state to be awakened by a weak light; but if an atom is awakened, the vibrations raised within it will correspond to the vibration-rate of the incident light; just as whether a sleeping man will be awakened by a beam of light falling on his eyes depends on the intensity of the light, but what kind of light or colour he will see, that is to say, what kind of vibrations will be produced in the sensory centres of his brain will depend on the frequency or vibration-rate of the exciting light. And by Planck’s law the energy of a vibratory system is  $h$  times the rate of its vibration; thus it happens that when an electron is ejected by an atom it has a maximum energy  $h$  times that of the frequency of the incident light, irrespective of the intensity of that light. If the frequency be below a certain limit, there will be no ejection, as the energy supplied by the atom in correspondence with the rate of vibration will not be sufficient to separate electron from the atom, and this limit, called the threshold frequency, differs with different substances. Thus we can explain all the experimental evidence regarding photo-electrons on the basis of the wave theory only by supposing that the energy of the ejected electron comes from within the atom itself and not from the incident light. If anyone finds it hard to accept this explanation, he should remember that the corpuscular theory, as revived by Einstein to explain photo-electric phenomena, does not offer less difficulty. Planck’s quantum theory only referred to the quantity of the energy emitted by a radiating body, and did not deny that radiation, once emitted, was propagated as a wave motion. Einstein’s corpuscular theory presupposes not only the emission of a quantum of energy by an ultimate source in accordance with Planck’s hypothesis but in addition, the continuation of this quantum intact like a projectile in its passage away from its source and finally in its complete absorption by some one atom or molecule. And for all this presupposition, there is not only no independent evidence, but there is actually evidence to the contrary. Robert Milikan mentions two potent objections against Einstein’s corpuscular theory: first, it cannot predict any one of the facts of interference: secondly, there is direct positive evidence against this view that the ether possesses a fibrous structure.



## II. TOWARDS IMMORTALITY

When we say that the atom has life, we do not suggest that it is living in the same sense as an animal or a plant, and we do not resort to gross animism though we recognise that like all instinctive beliefs of mankind, animism had an element of truth. The atom has predominantly the character of a material body and must be classified as such. It is not like living matter in a continual state of unstable chemical equilibrium, building itself up on the one hand, breaking down on the other. But as we have said at the beginning, there is no sharp line dividing life and matter. The atom has in it in nascent form what is more fully developed in plants and animals, and even in that nascent state we find some crude signs of vital activity which must be taken into account if we are to give a correct account of the physical phenomena manifested by the atom. It is these crude phenomena of life manifested by the atom that give a complete explanation of the photo-electric effect, and will no doubt explain many other things. We go still further and say that the atom has not only life, but a consciousness and will. "In what seems to us the sleep or insensibility of matter and inconscient force," says Sri Aurobindo, "there is a consciousness which we shall find to be essentially the same in all, but which differs in its action, its pitch and organisation." "We may regard life as an action of consciousness operating as force, but in very different gradations, first in the way proper to material being, then in a way proper to nervous being, — which is the basis of what we pre-eminently call life — then in a way proper to mental being, but essentially the same in all of these stages."

The life in the atom remains concealed as it has not the organism or instrument for its manifestation; when many atoms are combined in such a manner as to furnish the necessary instrument, life comes to the front, and we get what is characteristically a form of life. A conglomeration of atoms where this specific organisation is absent is characteristically a form of matter. It is exactly for this reason that more strict determinism is found in the ordinary matter-in-bulk and large-scale phenomena. But an individual atom has a definite structure, which, though not so organised as a living cell, yet is sufficiently organised to manifest some of the life and will which is always nascent in it. At every point it betrays gleams and hints of the things it conceals.

An atom is nothing but a concentration of the force or energy of which the whole universe is built up, and that is a force which is informed always with consciousness even when that consciousness appears to be involved and forgetful of itself in the absorption of its mere activity. "Necessarily in such a view the word consciousness changes its meaning. It is no longer synonymous with mentality but indicates a self-luminous force of existence of which mentality is a middle term. Below mentality, it sinks into vital and material movements which are for us subconscient, above it rises into the supramental which is for us the superconscient."

The New Psychology in the West also has begun to recognise these different grades of consciousness; Freud, for example, in his latest series of lectures speaks not only of the subconscious but also of the superconscious.

The assumption that life was mechanically formed out of dead matter has absolutely no justification in scientific observation and experiment. On the other hand, the Indian spiritual view that the atom has a nascent life and will in it, and that living organisations are formed out of it by the pressure of a higher principle acting from above is in accord with the latest investigations in Biology. The eminent German biologist Professor Driesch in an essay on "The Breakdown of Materialism" recognises that the "mechanical laws of physics and chemistry are inadequate to explain biological phenomena, and render it probable that new concepts peculiar to biology will have to be created". From his own experiments Driesch holds that "an organism has a mind-like factor associated with it". And his fellow-essayists find "reason and order everywhere in the universe, in which law is dominant. . . . Law which is inconceivable without intelligence, its inevitable antecedent". The world is deterministic and mechanical only in its outward form. We can explain our point by referring to our own actions as human beings. There are many operations in us which are quite mechanical. We walk, we breathe, we write, type, even think mechanically, and this mechanicality has a use in the economy of our life. But behind all these mechanical movements, we have a consciousness which can interfere at any moment, and deliberately change or stop the movements. In the same manner, there is an all-knowing, all-guiding, all-powerful consciousness behind this world-play; for its own purpose, it withdraws its full action from certain points and allows things to go on more or less mechanically and this is how the material world operates. From behind that, conscious Force can interfere at any moment at any place, and set things right if they go against its purpose. But that Force does not remain completely behind everywhere; through the world-process instruments and organisations are being evolved where it can come more and more to the front; it has come more to the front in plants than in material bodies, more in animals than in plants, and most in the self-conscious life of humanity. This is really the meaning of terrestrial evolution. The human body, life and mind have been evolved by a long process so that the Universal Conscious Force may fully come to the front and consciously carry the evolution to its goal. As Sri Aurobindo puts it: "The apparent inconscience of the material universe holds in itself concealed all that the superconscious eternally reveals and to reveal it is the slow and deliberate delight of Nature and the aim of her cycles."

As we have said above, many physicists of eminence today are taking a spiritual view of the world; but people do not as yet take them seriously as they become quite different persons when they enter into their own domain of physics, and stick to strict determinism. They fear that if they once give up the deterministic position, they will cut away the ground from beneath all scientific investigations. For is not



uniformity of Nature the fundamental assumption of science? If it be once admitted that the same cause may not always produce the same effect, will not all scientific investigations cease to have any value or meaning? But this fear is groundless. A spiritual view of the world does not deny that external nature is overwhelmingly mechanical and deterministic. Indeed it is a part of the universal plan that physical nature should have this uniformity to a very large extent so that it may serve as a stable basis of the manifestation of spiritual life under terrestrial conditions. And physical science has ample scope for its work in exploring this phenomenal aspect of nature where determinism prevails. It is this outward mechanical aspect of nature which can be described symbolically and represented by mathematical formulas and laws; but scientists should never forget that mathematics is only a convention of the human mind, and however useful it may be in giving us some idea of the world, it cannot go to the root of the matter and give us a full description of reality. Indeed with the advance of scientific knowledge, it has already become necessary to adopt a new algebra and a new geometry. An eminent physicist has recently said: "It is all a matter of mental force. If you can construct further mathematically sound geometries, nature will continue to hand you the outer facts with which to confirm them." Thus the world of the mathematician is chiefly a construction of his own mind. He not only speaks of four dimensions, but even of six dimensions whenever it suits him. "Of course, there are not really six dimensions," says Mr. Darwin, Tait Professor of Physics in the University of Edinburg, "but the mathematician finds it convenient to think and speak in that way."

If a mathematician gives us a description of the Taj Mahal measuring the height of the minarets, the perfect exactitude of the curves of arches and domes and the area of the enclosing gardens, he will certainly give us much useful information, but still we shall be far from ascertaining the real value which the Taj Mahal has for mankind. So about the universe, the scientists should be humble enough to admit that they are only describing the most outward aspect of nature, and that the reality behind, so far as science can infer from the results of its own investigations, is a conscious spiritual force; or, at least that science has absolutely no means of saying that that ultimate force is not conscient or spiritual. "Life would be stunted and narrow," says Professor A. S. Eddington, "if we could feel no significance in the world around us beyond that which can be weighed or measured with the tools of the physicist, or described by the metrical symbols of the mathematician. The idea of a Universal Mind or Logos would be, I think, a fairly plausible inference from the present state of scientific theory; at least, it is in harmony with it." By admitting such a spiritual conception of the world, science will not, as many fear, revert to animism; that is an impossibility after all the progress science has made during these centuries. There have been three broad epochs in the study of Nature — animistic, mechanical, mathematical. Now the time has come for it to fulfil itself by entering the fourth and the final stage, the spiritual.

A spiritual view of the world-process will not make any practical difference in the scope and method of scientific investigations; it will only “rationalise” science, so to say, and this is essential for its own progress. Science today is arraigned before the bar of public opinion. “There are many,” as Sir James Jeans observed in his recent presidential address to the British Association meeting at Aberdeen, “who attribute most of our national woes — including unemployment in industry and the danger of war — to the recent rapid advance in scientific knowledge.” Indeed science has been compared to a cancer, a poisonous overgrowth. The map of research, says Professor Julian Huxley, is “entirely lopsided, with a great bulge on the side of industry, and the physical and chemical sciences which help industry; distinctly undeveloped on the biological and health side, and quite embryonic in the region of the psychological and human sciences”. Commenting on this state of things, a critic observes, “The prospects of *homo sapiens* are gloomy. The evolution of this species of mammal may possibly culminate in its self-encompassed destruction.” “It is becoming increasingly realised,” says Mr. A. S. Russel, “that we have now sufficient technical knowledge.” But that would be a misfortune if people thus cry a halt to science. Knowledge can never be a source of evil unless it is mixed up with prejudice and ignorance and lends itself to be abused, when it becomes a tremendous power of evil. If there is an avenue of escape, it does not lie in the direction of less knowledge, but of more knowledge, scientific as well as spiritual; science must purify itself by getting rid of materialism, and becoming an ally of truth and spirituality.

An insufficient knowledge of the physical world given by science, supported by a very superficial knowledge of human nature derived from the New Psychology, is responsible for a view according to which all life is a long roundabout way to the nirvana of death, and the highest good, the *summum bonum*, of human life is to take as much joy out of it as one can with the very limited and poor faculties of the mind and the body. It is this view of life which is at the root of the conflicts between man and man, between nation and nation, which have made human life so full of misery in spite of its infinite possibilities and opportunities, and of which war is only an extreme and inevitable expression. If this materialistic, atheistic, sensualistic view of life had been allowed free play, human society would have fallen to pieces long ago, and *homo sapiens* would have been wiped out from the face of the earth. But there is a deeper self of humanity not yet dreamt of in physical science and psychoanalysis; and that self knows better the destiny of man and the goal of terrestrial evolution. Whenever it gets a chance, it works for peace and harmony, for truth and love and beauty. It is the proper business of man to find this deeper self, to allow it to come to the front and take complete charge of human life and human affairs transforming them into an image of the Divine.

It is science which has thrown the mind of the modern man into a materialistic mould, and materialism as a view of life and the world can lead only to darkness and confusion. There is no meaning and significance in human life without God,

and science, by dismissing God as a useless hypothesis, has made life meaningless. Instead of saying that there is no place for God in the universe, as Laplace said to Napoleon, science must say now that the universe has no meaning without God. Professor H. Compton, of the Department of Physics in Chicago and a Nobel Prize winner, the other day stated, "To the physicist it has become clear that the chances are infinitesimal that a universe filled with atoms having random properties would develop into a world with the infinite variety that we find about us. . . . This strongly suggests that the evolutionary process is not a chance affair but is towards some definite end. If we suggest that evolution is directed we imply that there is a directive intelligence directing it." Says another scientist, "The more deeply I contemplate the theorems of atomic physics the more clearly I realise that the basis of this beautiful world is not matter as I once regarded it, but eternal spirit manifested through thought and life." If we can know this not only with the intellect as these Western savants are doing, but in the spirit, "if we can live in this knowledge, our whole psychological attitude will be revolutionised; life changes its apparent meaning, it loses its falsity or partial truth of appearance and assumes its real sense."

Self-knowledge which leads to right knowledge is the key; and herein comes the importance of the growing attention paid to the study of psychology. Already the phenomena of telepathy or extra-sensory perception have been based on scientific experiments and have been admitted by an authority like Sigmund Freud, thus striking at the root of materialism. Physical science also, as we have noted above, is coming round to idealism in its own way. "The law and order," says Sir James Jeans, "which we find in the universe are most easily described — and also, I think, most easily explained — in the language of idealism." Beyond that idealism lies the knowledge of the spirit which will bring with it, along with the discovery of spiritual truth, a spiritual foundation of thought and wisdom.

It is not expected that fire will cease to burn or water will arbitrarily refuse to allay our thirst; but it may very well be that in the course of evolution Nature will arrive at more perfect organisations than what have been produced hitherto, and that the human body, still following Newton's laws of motion, may become free from disease, senility and even death. Indeed if we admit that the atom has life, it follows as a necessary consequence that life is indestructible. In spite of the formidable devices set up in the modern laboratories to bombard the atom, no one has ever been able to destroy a single atom. What happens in a case of so-called disintegration is this that an atom of one substance, losing some of its constituent parts, forms itself into an atom of another substance: for example, an atom of radium becomes an atom of lead, but still continues to be an atom with all its properties. The atom can retain its individuality in the tremendous heat of the sun. But the life in the atom is too crude to be the vehicle of spiritual manifestation; so the earth came out of the sun so that under favourable temperature the atoms might combine to form suitable organisations for the manifestation of higher forms of life. In man

Nature has found an organisation suitable for the expression of the glories of the spirit; but still that organisation of life is far from perfect. Mother Earth is now going to take another step in her evolution — and this time with the conscious cooperation of man and not as an unconscious process as it has been hitherto — and produce a race which will have a body and life and mind sufficiently plastic and luminous to manifest the Divine's attributes of light and power and bliss and thus fulfil man's ancient dream of immortality on the earth.

It comes at last, the day foreseen of old,  
 What John in Patmos saw, what Shelley dreamed,  
 Vision and vain imagination deemed,  
 The City of Delight, the Age of Gold.

ANILBARAN ROY

(Reprinted from *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 26<sup>th</sup> Number, 1970)

*One might ask whether Science itself has arrived at any ultimate truth; on the contrary, ultimate truth even on the physical plane seems to recede as Science advances. Science started on the assumption that the ultimate truth must be physical and objective — and the objective Ultimate (or even less than that) would explain all subjective phenomena. Yoga proceeds on the opposite view that the ultimate Truth is spiritual and subjective and it is in that ultimate Light that we must view objective phenomena. It is the two opposite poles and the gulf is as wide as it can be.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 380)*

## THE IRONY OF FATE

### (The Lessons of Kedarnath)

IN the Greek legends Fate is pictured as a goddess whose face is covered from everyone's sight except Zeus, the God of gods. Even the lesser gods are not privy to the script of Destiny, leave aside the world of mortals. This is the irony of Fate that even the gods who are ever busy weaving the fate of the mortals know not where the blow shall fall, who shall be struck by the thunder and lightning and who shall be rewarded. The recent events at Kedarnath amply reveal that the thread of Fate is neither easy to understand nor simple to unravel. For here were pilgrims travelling to a place they considered holy and sacred, many of whom would have gone with a prayer and a wish in their hearts for a better future and a happier destiny, at least better in terms of our common and ordinary human standards. But what awaited many of them after a long and gruesome journey to the Lord of Compassion and Mercy was the cruel hand of Destiny. For reasons too deep for the human intellect to fathom and for purposes that our hearts may never know, they met, not the calm and forgiving Shiva in His benign mood, but the strong and mighty Rudra with his fierce and unforgiving force ready to strike and slay. Even the normally sweet and sonorous Ganges, the mother of rivers and the giver of Moksha, the great liberator and purifying force sprung from the heart of Vishnu the Preserver, assumed another role, — that of Kali who purifies by destroying everything that has even a shade of falsehood. Though it is not given to man to question the wisdom of the gods yet it is but natural to ask whether there is a meaning in it all. Such incidents and events test the belief of the devout who always sees in God the image of a Power and Being who is kind, helpful, benevolent. So how can a pilgrimage to a shrine considered to be the abode of God bring such a calamity to the faithful?

Of course, true faith is never disturbed by all this, for it is never dependent upon external proofs, neither is it validated or undone by anything external, however pleasant or painful it may be. A true devotee sees the Hand of God in everything. He is able to embrace everything with an equal joy since for him even death and destruction come from his lover and beloved. But such a devotee is rare and the Hand of the Lord is always felt upon his life. Often the life of such a devotee is full of miraculous interventions where a saviour Hand of Grace rescues him from all kinds of situations. Even if he dies in such a stroke, his soul would still rejoice, seeing in the swallowing flood of the Ganges the Hand of Grace that comes to free him from earthly ties. For what greater boon for a devotee of Shiva than to die at His Feet, — his soul going straight to the heart of his Lord, his body sinking into the bosom of the purifying Ganges! For him there is no tragedy; for him all is Grace and beneficence!

In one his beautiful essays, 'The Principle of Evil', Sri Aurobindo reveals this deep Yogic truth behind even the hardest of blows, at least what appears to us as evil and strikes us as a sharp contradiction to our belief in a world governed by an all-beneficent Power called God:

To our mind there is no escaping from the belief that, if God exists, He is All. All proceeds from Him; from what other source can it proceed? All exists in Him; in what other being or continent can it exist? Therefore evil must proceed from Him, evil must exist in Him. Since He is All-Wise, for all knowledge is His, it must exist for some wise and perfect purpose. Since He is All-Love, it must exist for good and not for anything which contradicts the good. Only, His is an infinite wisdom, ours a finite, His perfect, ours undeveloped. His is an infinite and all-wise love, ours a finite and unwise love, a love imperfectly informed by knowledge, full of *māyā*, attachment to passing happiness and pleasure. God's love looks beyond, ours fixes its eyes on the moment.

Experience must always be the basis of true knowledge, but it must be experience illuminated by true perception, not experience dominated by surface impressions. The experience of the mind which has compassed calm and is able to preserve its tranquillity under the most strenuous assaults of pain, misfortune and evil, is alone worth having. The mind which is not *dhīra*, which feels grief and thinks under the influence of affection and passion, even if it be noble affection and passion, cannot arrive at the *samyag jñānam*, the complete and perfect truth. Emotion is for the heart, it should not besiege the intellect; for the proper business of the intellect is to observe and understand, not to be obscured by the slightest prejudice, the least trace of feeling. One who is *dhīra* will look narrowly at every incident and, if he cannot see at once, wait for enlightenment as to its ultimate purpose and issue; so waiting, so calmly considering, the meaning of life dawns on the mind, an infinite purpose reveals itself in things small and great, in occurrences good and bad: omniscient Providence reveals itself in the fall of the sparrow and the death of the ant as well as in the earthquake that destroys great cities and the floods that make thousands destitute and homeless. Rudra and Shiva reveal themselves as one. The Yogin sees God in all things, not only in all beings but in all events. He is the flood, He is the earthquake, He is Death that leads to a higher life, He is Pain that prepares us for a higher bliss. This is a thing that cannot be argued; it has to be seen. *Paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ*. And sight is only possible to the calm heart and the unperturbed understanding.

The materialist is not wrong when he holds good and evil to be merely operations of Nature which she uses impartially and without making a distinction, and that the distinction is an evolution in the human mind. Evil is good disintegrating to prepare for a higher good. That which is now tyranny,



was once necessary to consolidate human society. What was once an ideal state of society, would now be barbarous and evil. Morality progresses, religion widens with the growing manifestation of that which is divine in the human race. As with the individual, so with the race and the world, evil tends to good, it comes into existence in order that men may reject the lesser good and rise to the higher. (*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 61-62)

It is in the background of this vast and infinite Truth that we need to see all such events. As we have seen, for a true devotee, one who lives by his faith and his convictions, the question does not arise. So also for a Yogin since he, his eyes cleansed of the mud of the desire-self, emptied of the distorting scales of the momentary ego-personality, is able to look beyond the mood of the moment and see the One Lord everywhere. He may go even as far as to rejoice with the fury of Nature, witnessing the dance of the Mighty Lord as He goes about on His path towards the yet unseen Future which must be built after razing the present to the ground. But we only see the present destruction, not the future creation that must inevitably follow in its wake, and we cry and lament with the sense of loss and tragedy. Yet the only tragedy for the spiritually inclined is to die without realising his soul, the immortal substance within his body built ingeniously by Nature out of mud and mire. The Yogin sees in Death the rendering to Nature what belongs to Nature and giving to the Spirit what belongs to the Spirit. True, ultimately everything belongs to God but it must be the gift of our free will. Until we are able to give our body also to God we cannot ensure that it will be spontaneously protected against the furies of Nature and her ruthless moods. The soul, yes, is always safe but the body belongs to Nature, has been built by Nature, sustained by Nature and thereby Nature has acquired the right to destroy it whenever she wants and wherever she wants to restore her disturbed balance. This is the plain and simple logic that operates behind the forces of Nature in their normal operations.

True, there are also deeper moments, higher operations and beautiful moods of Nature but to invoke that mood in the midst of a raging fury one should be oneself attuned to these higher movements of compassion, kindness, selflessness etc. If we live these qualities then even in the midst of a seemingly blind destruction, Nature stops or pauses, the mother of Mercy and Kindness emerges for some of her children, a saving hand lifts the struggling person out of the path of fury leading them to safety before going back again to her darker mood. Gauri, the fair, benign mother, and Kali, the dark slayer of the worlds, are simply two sides of one Reality, one Force. Which part will emerge at a given moment depends, at least partly, upon us. If we have lived with the ideal of kindness and forgiveness, love and charity, mercy and compassion, the same Nature that is going about destroying cities and uprooting homes and ravaging lives, comes to our lone rescue, to save and to succour. All is the play of the Mighty Mother whose one arm is Strength and other is Com-

passion but always she has the heart of Love. For even those who are destroyed are rebuilt and rehabilitated in better bodies and better homes even though our eyes glued to the moment see not. Or we see the hands of men that rescue but not the heart of Nature that is at work in them. She destroys only to rebuild on a better footing.

And whom does she destroy? To the eye of oneness she destroys something of herself and takes back into her folds of secrecy what she had let out into creation. For she is also Chhinnamasta, the Goddess who destroys her own body if that be needed for the forward march of mankind. Yes, when we refuse to move forward, when we remain stuck in the mud of our greed and selfishness, when the narrow personal interests of priests and politicians, of builders and dwellers, travellers and pilgrims, and all other sections of humanity take precedence over care for mother earth; when worship becomes an ostentatious outer ritual for outer gains without any concern for the true, the right and the beautiful, then our own collective ugliness falls back upon us. Nature is as a mirror in which we can see ourselves, see our own greed reflected in her fury, our own selfish dealings with God and Nature and World and Humanity and Earth and all else mirrored in the dance of destruction. Men see the outer act, God's eye and Nature mark the inner purpose. To put it more squarely, one does not become a pilgrim simply because one has taken the trouble to reach physically inaccessible heights. One becomes a pilgrim when one walks through life with the staff of an unflinching faith and is led by the light of his soul, his aspiration flaming forth, leading him from hill to hill, from height to sublime height of human glory and greatness rising to divine proportions, his heart full of love and surrender, his soul and mind given to God, his body simply a pedestal for his deity or an instrument for God's work. Such a one is always protected, no matter what his station and whatever deep calamity he may find himself in. But these stories often go unnoticed, undocumented. There are tales of survival amidst the horror, stories of miraculous escape from the rain of ruin and rubble!

But who can understand this mystery of her moods? Not so long as we scan the surfaces and are attached to appearances!

The average man is made up of a different fibre. His life is built by bricks of the ego and for him God is the great fulfiller of his desires, the giver of boons, the dispenser of earthly goods, of wealth, children, health and all the rest men desire normally. It is this type of humanity that stands in the half-way home of religion built more by his beliefs than the actual truth of things; such events shake him up or rather his house of beliefs. He is suddenly thrown out of his comfort zone as it were and finds himself once again confronting the danger and the delight of the Unknown. He is once again face to face, not with any limited Deity whose actions must conform to the dictates and rules and norms of his little mind but with the universal Spirit in things whose actions are too vast and complex for our smallness to fathom.

Besides, it is an error to suppose that everything that Nature does is with man



as her reference point. This is but an extension of the anthropomorphic view of life which places man at the centre of things and all else, Nature and even God included, revolve around him. In this obviously erroneous view (erroneous since Nature existed with all her upheavals much before man even came into existence) there is a tendency to explain everything in Nature from her mighty world-shaking moods to her mild and kinder moments as a punishment or reward to man. All that one can say is that Nature has many more important things to look into than simply keep 'thinking' of man. Most of all, her actions are determined by an instinctive need and knowledge of balance — a balance of energies, of her creations, of forms and forces. Whenever there is an excess tilting in one or another direction there is a tendency to recoil and restore the balance. This happens irrespective of man though man can and does play an important role in it. For no other creature has disturbed the balance of Nature. To that extent he needs to take the blame, especially when he has gone around exploiting and plundering Nature driven by greed and lust. Yet Nature does not react out of an impulse to punish man as some are inclined to think when events of such magnitude strike. The actions of Nature are not negatively driven to punish a wrong-doer but with a positive will to restore the balance. Yes, when she is moved to do so, her steps can be too strong and her mood too ruthless for man's weak heart to bear. But even here those who have treated her with respect and love and care or those who are truly surrendered to her Lord, not just in outward show of devotion but inwardly, are very often spared even in the midst of calamities.

This is the lesson that we need to learn from such events. First of all, not to commit excesses against Nature, since beyond a point there is bound to be a recoil. Instead, to treat her with all love and care and respect. It is a strange irony that while we speak of Earth and Nature as living goddesses, we do not pause to think even for a moment before littering Earth's beautiful body or plundering Nature's riches for our own greed. We need to pause and think! Secondly, we invest so much time and energy in an outer show of devotion, in external ritualistic acts whereas our inner life is hardly even coloured by it. Instead of surrendering to God within, we surrender to all that is false and egoistic and ignorant. Instead of obeying God's will in us and in creation, we wish and want God's Will to be the servant of our blind and ignorant fancies and desires! Perhaps the time has come when we need to find the inner Godhead who dwells unworshipped while we multiply images and idols and shrines and cults. Perhaps it is time that we discover the inner Amarnath, the luminous cave of the immortal soul, the inner Goddess, omnipotent and pure, rather than simply make an annual trip to comfort our mind that we have paid our debt to God. Perhaps it is time that we scale the inner Kailash and bathe in the inner Mansarovar that appears when the mind is stilled by a higher Light. Perhaps it is also time that we open our doors to the purifying streams of the Ganges that is ready to pour her energies into all who care to call her than simply bathe in her ghats and pollute her streams with dirt and effluents. We need to drown in her vast and loving heart the

corpse of our desires rather than sully her beautiful flow with dead bodies and clog and choke her passage with garlands of dried and shrivelled flowers.

These religious symbols had their place and utility and the seers of the past did well to initiate some of them so as to preserve the memory of an inner truth, thereafter lost to the outer mind of the race. Even now those who are ready and awake can discover the inner truth through the outer symbol and it is this that has justified the external rituals. But when the spirit departs from the symbol and only an outer shell is left, it becomes like a dead body, once living and beautiful, driven by the breath of higher things, but now simply a home for maggots and insects. Such is the fate that has fallen upon many of these religious symbols, a fate inevitable to all such external things that have a term in Time when they flourish and then are broken and left aside since it is time for still greater deeds and higher things, or perhaps because the time has come for the spirit to be realised and the symbol is no more needed as it has become an encumbrance and a bar that prevents us from turning to the Real Thing.

Perhaps we have entered such an Age, an Age of Truth, of the Real and the One when the goddess of Religion must pass away giving way to the Age of the Spirit when man will awake to the truths behind all symbols in which religion draped itself. Waking up to his inner Self he has to find the intrinsic truth, not only of all religions and the religious impulse but going beyond them, discover a New Law and Way of being wherein he shall feel and live and breathe God and Unity everywhere. Realising the inner godheads that the mind of the race has preserved and conjured carefully in images and forms he shall grow and go beyond the gods. Or shall we say, walk as a god upon earth and not merely seek them in some remote inaccessible heavens of which these pilgrim spots are the symbols. God and the gods are willing to move out of the boundaries of the temples and churches where we have locked them in prison houses of creed and cult. That is why we can hear their stride and the world-shaking force that accompanies their drift and movement. The question is, are we ready? Are we ready to release the gods from the small and big houses and institutions and let them step out into the world at large, release them from our rites and rituals and worship them in the most common and ordinary acts of everyday life? Are we ready not only to release but also to realise them in our thoughts and feelings and willings and impulsions? Perhaps that is why most external symbols of religion are being broken so that the truth of the symbol can be reproduced within us and, in the inmost temple of the heart, man can discover God and worship Him and thus purified of his ego, stripped of his desire-self, find release in His Consciousness of Light and Truth and Bliss. It is this common pressure for change to which both material and human Nature are reacting, giving rise to increasing upheavals. It will go on until we have learned our lessons and discovered the secrets of inner mastery through which alone the outer mastery over physical nature and material forces can become complete. A giant dance of Shiva is tearing away our

past as has been foreseen by Sri Aurobindo:

A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;  
 There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;  
 Earth was o'errun with fire and the roar of Death  
 Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made;  
 There was a clangour of Destruction's wings:  
 The Titan's battle-cry was in my ears,  
 Alarm and rumour shook the armoured Night.

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 343)

But there are also the seeds of a New Creation awaiting to blossom, seeds that are being sown in the midst of these upheavals, seeds seeking their hour to sprout. Let us also look beyond the cataclysm towards the New Creation awaiting its hour, beyond the dance of destruction towards the New Creation of which these upheavals are merely crude signs and symbol pointers.

The ancient Mother faces all with joy,  
 Calls for the ardent pang, the grandiose thrill;  
 For with pain and labour all creation comes.  
 This earth is full of the anguish of the gods;  
 Ever they travail driven by Time's goad,  
 And strive to work out the eternal Will  
 And shape the life divine in mortal forms.  
 His will must be worked out in human breasts  
 Against the Evil that rises from the gulfs,  
 Against the world's Ignorance and its obstinate strength,  
 Against the stumblings of man's pervert will,  
 Against the deep folly of his human mind,  
 Against the blind reluctance of his heart.  
 The spirit is doomed to pain till man is free.  
 There is a clamour of battle, a tramp, a march:  
 A cry arises like a moaning sea,  
 A desperate laughter under the blows of death,  
 A doom of blood and sweat and toil and tears.  
 Men die that man may live and God be born.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 444)

Fate is a double mystery. Death is only the beginning of a new life. We see the disappearance of appearances but not the return under new circumstances. We feel

the wrath of Rudra but not the compassion of the benevolent Shiva who dwells in Rudra's heart and whose will the lesser godheads obey. Hidden in the rhythms of Kali, the great mother who slays the present, relegating it to the past, is the heart of Gauri, the benign and beneficent Mother whose powerful love carries the world forward with each pulsation towards its great divine consummation. We see the dance of destruction and not the regenerating streams of a New Creation that inevitably follows the old. But the eye of faith and a deeper spiritual experience affirm that the Powers that create, sustain and destroy are but one, the divine Trinity.

ALOK PANDEY

*Well, the determination of human life and events is a mysterious thing. Can't help that, you know. Fate is composed of many things — Cosmic Will + individual self-determination + play of forces + Karma + x + y + z + a + b + c ad infinitum.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 515)*

## ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA RAY — I

SRI AUROBINDO writes in ‘The Renaissance in India’:

In poetry, literature, art, science there have, on the contrary, been definite beginnings. Bengal in these, as in many other directions, has been recently the chief testing crucible or the first workshop of the Shakti of India; . . . she has not only two renowned scientists, one of the two world-famous for a central and far-reaching discovery, but a young school of research which promises to count for something in the world’s science. (*SABCL*, Vol. 14, p. 421)

The two renowned scientists alluded to by Sri Aurobindo in 1918 must have been Acharya Jagadis Chandra Bose (1858-1937) and Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray (1861-1944). Indeed, the resurgence of science research in India began in a serious way after J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray joined the Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1885 and 1889 respectively and made their scientific breakthroughs from around 1894. While J. C. Bose was the pioneer in experimental Physics and Biophysics, P. C. Ray initiated research in Chemistry.

The last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a significant decade of the renaissance in India. The year 1893 witnessed Sri Aurobindo’s return to India, Swami Vivekananda’s tour of the USA and Mahatma Gandhi’s visit to South Africa. The research breakthroughs of J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray during the next couple of years were turning points for science in India. The worldwide fame of Bose and Ray as scientists (1895-96), closely followed by Ray’s revelations on ancient Indian science (around 1902), boosted the confidence of the Indian youth. Besides, it must have had an impact on the colonial administration whose officials could no longer neglect the development of science education and research in India on the ground of incapability of “natives”. Slowly but surely conditions for research improved. The otherwise infamous Universities Act of 1904 made important provisions to make faculty appointments, to equip and maintain laboratories and museums, and to promote research. The Government agreed to give financial support to the Tata scheme for a Research Institute in Science and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) could be established at Bangalore during 1909-11.<sup>1</sup> A few years later, Sir Asutosh Mukherjee was permitted to open a centre for postgraduate studies and research in science at Calcutta University, a step that created the proper setup for science to flourish in Bengal.

1. More than 3 decades before IISc was set up, Dr. Mahendralal Sircar had founded the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS) in 1876, with donations from his countrymen. But the funds procured by Dr. Sircar were inadequate for creating any endowment for faculty appointments.

The year 2011 marked the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of P. C. Ray. A pathfinder in chemical research and education as also in chemical and pharmaceutical industries, and a pioneering historian of ancient Indian Chemistry, Prafulla Chandra Ray contributed significantly to the scientific, intellectual, economic and social renaissance in India in general and Bengal in particular. We recall some of these aspects in this 6-part article. We begin with Prafulla Chandra's early life as an inquisitive student. We shall use phrases from his autobiography ([7]) in quotation marks.

## The Student Prafulla Chandra

Prafulla Chandra was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1861 in Raruli, a village in the district of Jessore (subsequently of Khulna), now in Bangladesh. Jessore was the kingdom of the great rulers Raja Pratapaditya and Raja Sitaram Ray.<sup>2</sup> Poet Madhusudan Dutta<sup>3</sup> and dramatist Dinabandhu Mitra<sup>4</sup> also hailed from the district of Jessore. Prafulla Chandra's father Harish Chandra, a student of Ramtanu Lahiri,<sup>5</sup> was a man of refined taste, wide learning and enlightened views; his mother Bhubanmohini Devi too was an accomplished lady. Prafulla Chandra had four brothers and two sisters.<sup>6</sup>

2. Pratapaditya Ray (1561-1611), a valiant warrior and an able administrator, had fought fierce battles to preserve the independence of his kingdom. His bravery and patriotism have inspired many ballads. His legacy, like the legacy of Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh, has been a source of inspiration for Nationalists during the struggle for Independence. Sitaram Ray (1658-1714) too is remembered for his welfare activities and his struggles to preserve the independence of his kingdom. Recall the stanza from Sri Aurobindo's poem 'To The Ganges':

Yet Pratapaditya's great fierce spirit shall in might awake  
In Jessore he loved and made,  
Sitaram the good and mighty for his well-loved people's sake  
Leave the stillness and the shade. (*Collected Poems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2009, p. 258)

3. Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-73), one of Bengal's greatest poets, introduced the sonnet, the blank-verse and the literary epic in Bengali literature; he has been referred to as the 'Milton of Bengal'. His famous epic *Meghnadbadhakavya* was composed in 1861, the year in which P. C. Ray was born. In the words of Sri Aurobindo (SABCL, Vol. 3, p. 95), "All the stormiest passions of man's soul he expressed in gigantic language." A poem by Sri Aurobindo on Madhusudan Dutta begins with the lines:

Poet, who first with skill inspired did teach  
Greatness to our divine Bengali speech — (*SABCL*, Vol. 5, p. 27)

4. Dinabandhu Mitra (1830-76), one of the greatest dramatists of his time, is most famous for his play *Nildarpan* (1860) which, by highlighting the plight of indigo cultivators, played a historic role similar to that of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The play was translated into English by Madhusudan Dutta.

5. Ramtanu Lahiri (1813-98) was a renowned teacher and social reformer of Derozio's Young Bengal group. "There are few persons in whom the milk of kindness flows so abundantly." — this was a remark on Ramtanu Lahiri by his contemporary Peary Chand Mitra, the author of one of the earliest Bengali novels.

6. Of the five sons of Harish Chandra and Bhubanmohini Devi, the eldest son, Jnanendra Chandra became a pleader; the second, Nalini Kanta a doctor; Prafulla Chandra was the third; the fourth son, Purna Chandra managed the ancestral properties of their joint family; the youngest, Buddhadev (alias Gopal) died at a young age. The names of the daughters are Indumati (Ghosh) and Belamati. Prafulla Chandra's younger sister Belamati died in her childhood when he was in Britain for higher studies.

Prafulla Chandra was admitted to the village school founded by his father. Through conversations with his father, Prafulla Chandra (and his brothers) had an early intellectual training. By the age of nine, Prafulla Chandra “had shown a predilection for history and geography”. Having “an inquisitive turn of mind and studious habits”, Prafulla Chandra “used to ransack the shelves” of his father’s library. Quotations from classical authors like Shakespeare, that he came across in Johnson’s *Dictionary*, used to fill him with delight and he would memorise passages like

“Ignorance is the curse of God,  
Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to Heaven.” — Shak.

though, at that age, the child Prafulla Chandra could not make out what an abbreviation like “Shak” stood for! As he grew, this early acquaintance with Shakespeare “ripened into close friendship”.

In 1870, Prafulla Chandra’s father shifted to Calcutta mainly for the proper education of his children. Recalling the thrill he experienced on coming to the city as a young boy, P. C. Ray writes ([7], p. 19):

I spent the month of August [1870] in Calcutta, to my great joy, almost every day seeing new sights. I caught glimpses of a new world. A panorama of gorgeous vistas was opened to me.

However, he used to regularly visit his ancestral home in the village. It was due to this close contact with peasants and villagefolk from his childhood that P. C. Ray could later throw himself “heart and soul into the Famine and Flood Relief Work in 1921 and 1922 respectively”. His nephew Jatindranath writes ([10], p. 198) that in his early life Prafulla Chandra came in contact with Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.<sup>7</sup>

Prafulla Chandra was admitted at Hare School in 1871. But prescribed textbooks could never quench his intense thirst for knowledge. He became “a voracious devourer of books”. Prafulla Chandra “read Chambers’ *Biography* right through several times”. The lives of Newton, Galileo, William Jones, John Leyden and Benjamin Franklin fascinated him. He writes ([7], p. 30):

The answer of Jones’ mother to his interrogations “Read and you will know” also was not lost upon me.

7. P. C. Ray’s autobiography mentions that his father made acquaintance with Vidyasagar and some of the leading men of Calcutta ([7], p. 9); he does not mention his own interactions with Vidyasagar. Ray’s educational, social and philanthropic activities (to be discussed in Parts II and VI) show that the life and ideals of Vidyasagar made a deep impression on him.



Benjamin Franklin was his special favourite.

Due to a health problem which emerged in 1874, Prafulla Chandra had to discontinue regular school education for several months. It was “a blessing in disguise”: set free “from the tyranny of the dull and dreary routine method followed in the schools”, Prafulla Chandra could now freely indulge in his passion for studies without hindrance. From the books of his father and eldest brother, Prafulla Chandra contracted a taste for the rich and copious English literature. He became a witness to a new dawn in Bengali literature as he followed with “intense and breathless interest” Bankim Chandra’s masterpiece *Bisabriksha* (The Poison Tree) serialised in the periodical *Bangadarsan*. During this period, Prafulla Chandra developed a taste for antiquarian studies as he read writings like *Valmiki and his Age* (by Prafulla Chandra Banerjee), *Age of Kalidas* (by Ramdas Sen), etc. The seeds of his future blossoming as a researcher and writer on ancient Indian Chemistry can be traced to the antiquarian bent acquired during this period.

Articles on Physics, Zoology and Geology in *Tatwabodhini Patrika* and *Vividhartha Samgraha* grafted in him the seed of science. While reading an issue of *Samachar Darpan*, he was struck with awe at the story of Franklin bringing down electric current to the earth by means of a wet thread connected to a flying kite ([4], pp. 89-90). He also regularly read the newspapers *Somaprakasa*, *Amritabazar Patrika*, the *Hindu Patriot* and the *Indian Mirror*.

One day Prafulla Chandra chanced upon William Smith’s *Principia Latina*, a first introduction to Latin. Having already gone through *Vyakarana Upakramanika* (the first step in Sanskrit grammar) of Vidyasagar, Prafulla Chandra was filled with wonder at the remarkable similarity between Sanskrit and Latin. It did not take him long to finish the first and second parts of the *Principia* series and the companion grammar. This was the beginning of his life-long interest in languages; he would later learn, on his own, French and German.

Prafulla Chandra resumed regular studies later at Albert School founded by the Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen and passed the Entrance Examination in 1879. He had fond memories of the Albert School ([7], p. 42):

... I recollect with grateful feelings the obligations I am under to my Albert School teachers and the cordial and happy relations in which I stood with them.

In 1879, Prafulla Chandra joined the recently opened college of the Metropolitan Institution (now named Vidyasagar College) founded by Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Two factors determined his choice of college. First, the Metropolitan was a “national institution and something we could look upon as our own”. Second, the Professor of English prose at Vidyasagar’s College was none



other than Surendranath Banerjee,<sup>8</sup> an idol of the students in Bengal; English poetry was also taught by another distinguished Professor, Prasanta Kumar Lahiri. However Prafulla Chandra had to attend Chemistry and Physics classes at Presidency College as an external student since Metropolitan College did not have adequate arrangements. During this time, he began to get attracted towards Chemistry. The subject was taught by Alexander Pedler whose manipulative skill in experiments was of a high order.<sup>9</sup> Not content with merely watching classroom experiments, Prafulla Chandra and one of his batchmates set up a miniature laboratory at the lodging of the latter and took delight in reproducing some of the experiments done at college by Prof. Pedler. Apart from his textbook, Prafulla Chandra tried to procure and go through as many works on Chemistry as he could lay his hands on.

In 1882, Prafulla Chandra won the prestigious Gilchrist Scholarship of the University of Edinburgh and sailed for England.<sup>10</sup> He studied Chemistry, Physics and Zoology in the First Year. Again he felt his natural affinity towards Chemistry and took up the pursuit of his favourite science. He had as his teacher Prof. Alexander Crum Brown, one of the most philosophically minded chemists of the time. Prafulla Chandra obtained the B.Sc. degree (1885) and then the D.Sc. degree (1887) of the Edinburgh University.<sup>11</sup> Ray stayed in England for one more year with the Hope Prize Scholarship. Before his return to India, Ray had been given testimonials and letters of introduction by Prof. Crum Brown, Sir William Muir and Prof. C. H. Tawney. Prof. Brown wrote highly of Ray's attainments in chemistry; Prof. Tawney (Principal

8. Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925) was appointed Professor of English in Metropolitan College in 1876 by Vidyasagar. In 1879, he founded the newspaper *The Bengalee*; in 1884, he established the Ripon College (now Surendranath College). One of the earliest political leaders of British India, S. N. Banerjee founded the Indian Association (1876) which later merged with the Indian National Congress (founded in 1885); he was President of the Congress in 1895 and 1902. Such was his all-India popularity that when he was imprisoned (1883) for remarks in the paper *The Bengalee* condemning the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court (who had ordered a Hindu family to produce the idol of their household deity in the Court), there was a wild outburst of indignation not only in Bengal but also in far-off places like Agra, Faizabad, Amritsar, Lahore and Pune. Famous for his oratory, Surendranath was at the forefront of the agitation against the Partition of Bengal (1905); he vowed to "unsettle" what Curzon had declared as a "settled fact". He earned sobriquets "Rashtraguru", "Surrender not Banerjee" and "uncrowned King of Bengal". Surendranath Banerjee was one of the senior-most Moderate leaders of the Congress. Sri Aurobindo is reported to have revealed (*Evening Talks*, p. 595) that, in private, Surendranath Banerjee would accept the revolutionary movement and that he was full of enthusiasm when a bomb was taken to him.

9. Sir Alexander Pedler was posted as a Professor of Chemistry at Presidency College in 1874. It was here that he did his researches on "Cobra Poison", "Action of Light on Phosphorus", etc., which won for him the distinction of FRS. It is due to the efforts of Pedler, John Eliot and others, that practical classes in Chemistry and Physics were made compulsory for the B.A. degree in Science; and the course content was made more substantial.

10. Bahadurjee from Bombay was the only other Indian recipient of the scholarship that year.

11. Prior to Prafulla Chandra, Aghornath Chattopadhyaya (1850-1915) was the only D.Sc. from Bengal. Aghornath obtained the D.Sc. from Edinburgh in 1875. At the invitation of the Nizam, he joined the educational service of Hyderabad. His children include the revolutionary Virendranath Chattopadhyay, the poet Harindranath Chattopadhyay (who was in Sri Aurobindo Ashram for a few years) and Sarojini Naidu.

of Presidency College who was visiting England) wrote that Dr. Ray would prove to be a valuable acquisition.

### P. C. Ray's Academic Affiliations

Dr. P. C. Ray returned to India in 1888 but, in spite of his accomplishments and strong letters of recommendation, he remained without a job for a year. During this period of unemployment, he stayed with his friend Dr. J. C. Bose, spending his time in reading chemical literature and pursuing botany — collecting and identifying specimens of plants around Calcutta. Job opportunities in educational institutions were limited and, when available, were mostly reserved for the British. There were two classes in the Education Service: Imperial and Provincial. The Imperial Service had more pay and privileges, but it was practically reserved for Europeans. Due to the personal intervention of the then Viceroy Lord Ripon,<sup>12</sup> J. C. Bose was reluctantly given an appointment in the Imperial Service (1885). But such was the racial discrimination that Bose was given only a temporary appointment at one-third of the salary given to a European.<sup>13</sup> In 1889, P. C. Ray too got a blatantly unfair appointment at Presidency College as a temporary Assistant Professor in Chemistry under the Provincial Service at the monthly salary of Rs. 250, a ridiculously low pay for someone with his qualifications. Ray protested, but accepted the offer.

When P. C. Ray joined Presidency College in 1889, research facilities were abysmal.<sup>14</sup> The situation began to get worse as the number of students increased. During practical classes, “the atmosphere, especially in the rainy season, thickly laden with fumes, became suffocating and highly injurious to health.” Thanks to P. C. Ray's persuasion, and the efforts of A. Pedler backed by A. Croft, the British authorities agreed to construct a new laboratory in a new building. The authorities began discussing the plans with Pedler and Ray in 1892. While at Edinburgh, P. C. Ray had procured a copy of the reprint of the description of Edinburgh University's new chemical laboratory containing detailed drawings and diagrams. Some of the features of Edinburgh's laboratory were incorporated in the plan. Pedler too had

12. Lord Ripon, the Viceroy of India during 1880-84, was the most liberal Viceroy of colonial India. Sympathetic to the cause of the Indians, he was particularly concerned about the sphere of education where he tried to introduce reforms. No other Governor-General or Viceroy was dearer to the Indians. Lord Ripon was still the Viceroy when Bose returned to India in 1884.

13. Bose refused to accept the salary and taught for three years *without salary*. Finally the authorities, realising the value of his teaching and the loftiness of his character, made Bose's appointment permanent and gave him the *full salary* for the past three years.

14. It is now difficult to imagine the conditions in which both J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray began their research. Jagadis Bose had undertaken his pioneering experiments on millimeter waves in a small enclosure in Presidency College which he converted into a laboratory (1894), devising new instruments which he constructed with his own money with the help of an untrained tinsmith.

some designs of German laboratories. The new laboratory became operational from 1894.<sup>15</sup>

Till 1916, the research activities of P. C. Ray and his research students flourished in the laboratory of Presidency College with its limited facilities. In 1916, Asutosh Mukherjee, the visionary Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, opened the University College of Science (popularly known as “Science College”) at Rajabazar in Calcutta. Posts in Chemistry and Physics were created at Science College from a donation of Rs 15 lakhs given by Taraknath Palit.<sup>16</sup> Sir Asutosh invited P. C. Ray and C. V. Raman to join the Science College as the Palit Professor in Chemistry and Physics respectively.

P. C. Ray resigned from his Government job at Presidency College to join the Science College. The chemical research work of his team now continued with renewed vigour. The Science College was shaped by P. C. Ray and his students. It was around this time that he became known as the “Acharya”. Even when Ray was in his sixties, he continued to work hard in his laboratory from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with an hour’s break for lunch and rest. Except for a month’s break during the summer vacation (when he would stay in his native village), Ray would not deviate from this routine even during Sundays and holidays ([8], p. 3).

About one year after the Rajabazar Science College began to function, Acharya Ray, a life-long bachelor, came to reside in a room in its premises. P. C. Ray breathed his last in this room on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1944. The road on which the Rajabazar Science College is located is now named “Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road”.

15. Amidst the various obstacles and adverse conditions in the career of P. C. Ray, Pedler seems to have acted as an instrument of Providence at crucial junctures. Pedler’s attractive lectures and experiments kindled the student Prafulla Chandra’s interest in Chemistry. It was Pedler who moved the Government for an additional post in Chemistry during the 1880s, which was sanctioned eventually and in which P. C. Ray got an appointment (even if in the lower Service); Pedler had spoken highly of P. C. Ray to the authorities. The new laboratory, built in 1894 at Pedler’s initiative, enabled P. C. Ray to carry out his chemical research and build the nucleus of the Indian School of Chemistry. During his landmark research on “History of Hindu Chemistry” (to be discussed in Part III), P. C. Ray was given a liberal grant for meeting his expenses (chiefly for collecting rare manuscripts) by the Bengal Government at the recommendation of Pedler who had become the Director of Public Instruction. When Ray wished to visit some of the laboratories of renowned scientists of Europe in 1904, there was a difficulty as technically he belonged to the Provincial and not the Imperial Service. Again, at the initiative of Pedler, the DPI, the Curzon Government issued a minute declaring that an Indian who has shown the capacity for original research should not be denied study leave simply because he was a member of the Provincial Service. In preparing the case for Ray, Pedler had written in glowing terms about Ray’s contributions including his “History of Hindu Chemistry”.

16. The eminent lawyers Sir Taraknath Palit (1831-1914) and Sir Rashbehari Ghose (1845-1921) donated their life-long earnings to the University for the cause of science. The building of Science College at 35, Ballygunge Circular Road was also donated by Sir Taraknath. An anonymous pupil of P. C. Ray remarks in 1924 ([8], pp. 12-13): “It is not too much to say that the great munificence of the two lawyer-sons of Bengal in the founding of the College of Science with an endowment of about 30 lacs may be attributed to the painstaking, steady and whole-hearted devotion of Sir P. C. Ray to the cause of science and education extending over more than 30 years.”

## P. C. Ray, The Investigator of Chemistry

Prafulla Chandra's research in Chemistry began with his D.Sc. thesis in Inorganic Chemistry titled "Conjugated Sulphates of the Copper-Magnesium Group: A study of Isomorphous Mixtures and Molecular Combinations". In the words of Crum Brown ([6], p. iv), the thesis was "a piece of excellent analytical work, well arranged, and thoroughly and conscientiously carried out". The work impressed his professors and examiners and he was elected Vice President of the Chemical Society of the Edinburgh University during the session 1887-88.

Pained at the growing evil of adulteration of food-stuffs, P. C. Ray's first research work after his return to India was a chemical examination of certain fats and oils like ghee and mustard oil. He wished to create standards and identify the adulteration of foodstuffs in Indian cities. After a stupendous labour for nearly three years, Ray published his findings in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1894.

P. C. Ray's subsequent research work spanned a period of 40 years from 1894 to 1934 during which he published more than 150 research papers in journals like the *Journal of the Chemical Society* (London), *Proceedings of the Chemical Society* (London), *Zeitschrift für anorganische allgemeine Chemie* (Germany), *Annalen der Chemie* (Germany), *Nature* (UK), the *Journal of the Indian Chemical Society* (after its establishment in 1924), and other internationally reputed journals. Around half of this research was done in collaboration with his research students. Indeed, it was his mission to create an enthusiasm for research among his young students and to bring into the atmosphere of Indian Universities an urge towards research.

Along with his students, P. C. Ray prepared many new interesting families of compounds and examined their properties to the extent possible at that time. He became particularly famous for his work on inorganic and organic nitrites; he was regarded as the "Master of Nitrites". Among metals, Prafulla Chandra Ray had a special fascination for mercury, which is an important element in Ayurveda.

In the very second sentence of his autobiography ([7]), P. C. Ray mentions that the year of his birth (1861) is memorable in the annals of Chemistry for the discovery of the element thallium by Crookes. After the new chemical laboratory was set up at Presidency College in 1894, P. C. Ray attempted a chemical analysis of certain rare Indian minerals to see if they contain one or two undiscovered elements which would fill up the gaps in Mendeleev's Periodic Table (1869). He soon made an unexpected discovery (1895) which "opened a new chapter" in his life. He reported the first synthesis of the hitherto unknown compound mercurous nitrite  $\text{Hg}_2(\text{NO}_2)_2$ , a moderately stable yellow crystalline solid formed by a chemical reaction between metallic mercury and dilute aqueous nitric acid. Thus, although he did not come across any new element to fill up any blank in the Periodic Table, in the words of his former teacher Alexander Pedler in 1896 ([6], p. ix):

Dr. P. C. Ray, by his discovery of the method of preparation of this compound, has filled up a blank in our knowledge of the mercury series.

The reactions of nitric acid with mercury have fascinated chemical researchers since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The discovery of mercurous nitrite, a compound of unexpected stability composed of two relatively unstable ions, attracted immediate international attention. Ray began to receive congratulatory letters from eminent chemists like Roscoe, Divers, Berthelot, Victor Meyer and Volhard. Inspired by their appreciations, Ray was stimulated to further activity. In a series of significant publications, P. C. Ray reported the chemical properties of mercurous nitrite and its derivatives. The investigations on nitrites and related areas that Ray launched with his students heralded the birth of the first research school of chemistry in modern India.

Ray published interesting findings on the chemistry of hyponitrites. The hyponitrites of mercury were found to be thermally more stable than the corresponding nitrites and nitrates. Ray also synthesised numerous nitrites of alkali, alkaline earth and coinage metals, and double nitrites containing both mercury and alkaline earth metals, and investigated their thermal decomposition and physio-chemical properties like relative stability, molecular volume and molecular conductivity.

One of P. C. Ray's most significant contributions to the chemistry of nitrites was his isolation of ammonium nitrite in pure form and determination of its vapour density in vacuum. Before Ray's synthesis, it was believed that ammonium nitrite readily breaks up into nitrogen gas and water with the evolution of heat, and hence the isolation of this extremely unstable substance is not possible. Ray showed in 1907 that the compound can not only be isolated but also sublimated in vacuum, without decomposition, even at 60°C. Ray's findings, which he presented in a meeting of the London Chemical Society in 1912, impressed Sir William Ramsay,<sup>17</sup> Sir Henry E. Roscoe and other eminent chemists. The high esteem in which his work was regarded by them can be seen from the following concluding words of a speech that Sir Ramsay made after a lecture by Ray ([8], p. 6):

We had the privilege and pleasure of listening to-night to that eminent Indian chemist whose name is already familiar to us for his most interesting researches on nitrites, and who unaided has kept the torch burning for years in that ancient land of civilization and learning.

Prior to his research on ammonium nitrite (1907), P. C. Ray had published his much-acclaimed monumental treatise *History of Hindu Chemistry Volume I* (1902). At the Chemical Society meeting, Dr. V. H. Veley welcomed Prof. Ray as “an

17. Sir William Ramsay (1852-1916) was a Scottish chemist most famous for his discovery of the noble (or inert) gases for which he received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1904.

illustrious representative of a great Aryan nation which had attained a high degree of civilisation and discovered many chemical processes when this country [England] was but a dismal swamp". Paying a warm tribute to Dr. Ray and his pupils for their valuable researches, Veley pointed out ([7], p. 174):

Prof. Ray has shown, contrary to text book statements, that ammonium nitrite could be obtained in a stable crystallised condition and volatilised.

*Nature*, the most famous scientific journal of UK, reported on August 15, 1912:

Prof. P. C. Ray has added to his success in preparing ammonium nitrite in a tangible form, a further accomplishment in determining the vapour density of this very fugitive compound.

Prof. Armstrong remarked in 1914 ([7], p. 114):

The way in which you have gradually made yourself 'master of nitrites' is very interesting and the fact that you have established that as a class they are far from being the unstable bodies chemists had supposed, is an important addition to our knowledge.

P. C. Ray and his team at the University College of Science also made major contributions to the chemistry of organic sulphur compounds. He synthesised new compounds and studied their interactions with salts of mercury. His work on long-chain sulphur compounds acquired a new significance after the development in the knowledge about high polymers. He also made extensive contributions to the coordination chemistry of the heavier transition metal ions like platinum, iridium and gold.

The article [3] gives an account of P. C. Ray's research in Chemistry. During his time, the study of structural principles was still in its infancy. A recent paper [12] discusses the molecular structure of mercurous nitrite and a nitrate derivative.

In his tribute 'Sir P. C. Ray, The Man and His Work', the noted Irish physical chemist F. G. Donnan of University College, London, remarks ([9], p. 67):

I hope that future ages will cherish his name as one of the band of self-denying and devoted men who have revived and handed on the flame that once burned so brightly in India, the search for truth and the hidden mysteries of things.

In the next instalment of the article, we will highlight the role of P. C. Ray as Teacher.

*(To be continued)*

AMARTYA KUMAR DUTTA



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*Every child is a lover of interesting narrative, a hero-worshipper and a patriot. Appeal to these qualities in him and through them let him master without knowing it the living and human parts of his nation's history. Every child is an inquirer, an investigator, analyser, a merciless anatomist. Appeal to these qualities in him and let him acquire without knowing it the right temper and the necessary fundamental knowledge of the scientist.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 395)*

## SELF-EFFACING YET FORTHRIGHT AMAL KIRAN

### (An Impression)

IN the summer of 1988 I visited Pondicherry for the first time, in my quest to get acquainted with the Ashram. On arrival at the bus stand I instructed a cycle rickshaw man to take me to an Ashram Guest House. Instead, I was taken to a private Guest House tucked away in a lane near the market area. Oblivious to Ashram procedures, layout and facilities, I was unaware that this was not an Ashram Guest House. Perhaps the rickshaw driver got a nominal commission for his endeavours — a norm in many tourist towns. Mercifully, the hotel owner helped me to obtain Dining Room meal coupons, so at least my boarding element fell under the Ashram umbrella.

There were two highlights during my visit. The first was my meeting with Champaklal-ji, for he was kind enough to allow strangers to visit him. I wanted to pose a question to him but alas he had taken a vow of silence. As a goodwill gesture, he did give me a spider lily.

The second highlight was a bit fortuitous. My hotel owner was a wee bit indifferent but his sister — who was connected to the Ashram — was really nice. She knew Amal Kiran, whom I had heard of through readings of Ashram literature over the years. I was deeply curious to know the man who had been so closely associated with Sri Aurobindo. To my utter surprise she offered to set up a meeting and I lit up at the prospect. Next morning, lo and behold, she confirmed the meeting to my great joy. This lady was the cause of my link with Amal Kiran, the beloved disciple of my hero and the greatest personality I know of — Sri Aurobindo.

I visited his home on Rue François Martin. An unassuming bespectacled pleasant man with a roundish face, tapering at the chin, crowned with a broad forehead, warmly greeted me when I entered the room. He resembled an erudite professor and was perhaps meticulously correcting the grammar of a student's written English. The atmosphere was quite informal and there was not a whiff of self-importance about him and he had the grace to allow me to talk to him quite freely. I wondered how a person so closely associated with Sri Aurobindo could meet a stranger of a far lower stature and yet be so gentle. I mentioned to him that it must have been heavenly interacting with Sri Aurobindo and he lit up in affirmation. Whilst departing, I conveyed to him that it was a privilege to meet someone who had been so closely associated with Sri Aurobindo.

The meeting proved to be more fortuitous than I thought; for it later transpired that this initial encounter helped me overcome my diffidence to approach him in later years — a harbinger of many more encounters during my biennial visits to the Ashram in the 1990's. Subsequently, over the years he merrily narrated some of his



adventures and interactions with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I hardly knew anybody in the Ashram and this first-hand account by a beloved disciple was like a fairy tale unravelling and demystifying the magical air around the Masters. My imagination soared and my heart swelled as he regaled me with his stories and insights.

To ascertain the significance of an experience, I did reveal to him an intense joyous experience that I had had on my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday and which had penetrated the physical. Prior to this, astonishingly, for hours I was in an extremely anguished and intensely depressed state of mind, so much so that I was forced to concentrate on my breathing to get away from a distressed whirling mind. I queried him on this bizarre ecstatic phenomenon and he promptly proclaimed without batting an eyelid “Descent of the Ananda”. I then went on to relate my first visit to the Ashram in 1988, when I had briefly met him. I had then sought guidance on sadhana from someone who directed me to a certain learned sadhak. When I went to his house he appeared a bit curt and asked me to come later. I found his attitude a bit stand-offish and I protested to Amal Kiran, “What, is he going to show me the Truth!” to which he countered: “Why didn’t you tell him that?” I had already sensed his humility and amiability, and so was pleasantly surprised when he put forth such forthrightness. Certainly the style of receiving visitors, at least, was indeed most contrasting between the two! However, to be fair to the sadhak, I was perhaps a bit unthoughtful for I had visited him without prior appointment in the afternoon when he may have been resting.

After browsing through some of Amal Kiran’s writings, I realised that forthrightness was his forte. For instance, as a mere 23-year-old stripling he made a daring and far-fetched statement to the Mother in his first interview:

Mother, I have seen everything of life; now I want nothing except God.

So sweeping was the statement that the Mother, after ascertaining his age, had to rein him in:

Oh, at 23 you have seen all of life? Don’t be in such a hurry, you must take your time. Stay here, look about, see how things are, see if they suit you and then take a decision.<sup>1</sup>

Amal Kiran felt as if cold water had been poured over his enthusiasm but this did not deter him from stopping the Mother in her tracks whilst she was departing. To the Mother’s surprise, this young dapper gentleman in European clothes with a neck tie and other paraphernalia, promptly fell at her feet, in the process informing

1. Amal Kiran, *Light and Laughter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p. 11.

her that this native gymnastic exercise is the Indian way of offering respects to their spiritual Master, referred to as a pranam, little realising that dozens of people kept falling at her feet everyday. I would speculate that this would qualify as a rare instance of a disciple giving lessons on spiritual etiquette to their Guru and that too on the first encounter. Apparently the Mother mentioned this comic incident to Sri Aurobindo and reportedly he was amused.

Sri Aurobindo too was not spared by Amal Kiran's candidness, for on the first darshan he tried to size up the Master and finally gave his verdict:

. . . Quite an impressive Guru: he is very fine in appearance, very grand — I think I can accept him!<sup>2</sup>

Later when he enquired from the Mother if Sri Aurobindo had commented about him, she replied: "Well, he just said that you had a good face." It was a testing moment, for he did not feel that the compliment was good enough but realised that the Guru had come down to his level and it was a bit of a tit for tat — a harbinger of many such battles with the Guru.<sup>3</sup>

Not only was Amal Kiran forthright, he could couple it with being headstrong — perhaps another side to the persevering and the determined. He narrated to me an interesting story on the question of will. Once whilst contemplating on fate and freewill, he wondered if every event is predestined and an expression of Divine Will or does man have a choice of exerting his will, what he called freewill. And if everything was the Divine Will then *ipso facto* the human being had no role whatsoever in determining the future. In other words are we mortal beings mere puppets? This utter subordinating and subjugating role was a matter of great consternation to Amal Kiran whilst he grappled with this great dilemma night and day till something just caved in. His very foundations were being shaken to the core and this compelled him to rush to the Mother with this perplexing predicament that if everything is predetermined then do we poor mortals have any role or a will of our own to change our fate? Just as the Mother commenced to give a detailed exposition on this enigmatic question, he fearlessly interrupted her and said, "Mother, I do not want to hear your explanation, I just want a 'Yes' or 'No'." The Mother smiled and said: "Yes." That was all he needed to know. Needless to say, our protagonist was indeed appeased and placated by the Mother. He then told me, that subsequently he wrote an article on Fate and Freewill — titled "'Freewill' in Sri Aurobindo's Vision". He triumphantly concluded that the piece was read out to Sri Aurobindo who remarked, "It is excellent. In fact, it could not be bettered." Unquestionably this superlative praise must perhaps be the highest accolade an

2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

3. See *Light and Laughter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p. 14.

essayist could receive; a sense of self-fulfilment must have enveloped him. However, what struck me was his seemingly daring and audacious interruption of the Mother when she had just started to expound on his dilemma. I felt this was a reflection of his transparency and straightforward rapport with her; and the fact that she responded with a smile was an affirmation of that. A few aphorisms of Sri Aurobindo come to mind at this transgression of the disciple:

No doubt, when the priest curses, he is crying to God; but it is the God of anger and darkness to whom he devotes himself along with his enemy; for as he approaches God, so shall God receive him.<sup>4</sup>

O fool of thy weakness, cover not God's face from thyself by a veil of awe, approach Him not with a suppliant weakness. Look! thou wilt see on His face not the solemnity of the King & Judge, but the smile of the Lover.<sup>5</sup>

To fear God really is to remove oneself to a distance from Him, but to fear Him in play gives an edge to utter delightfulness.<sup>6</sup>

Until thou canst learn to grapple with God as a wrestler with his comrade, thy soul's strength shall always be hid from thee.<sup>7</sup>

I started visiting him fairly frequently in the mornings. There was not the slightest display of irritation on my encroaching into his time and privacy. I took advantage and conveniently brushed away any thought that I was an inconvenience to him. On the contrary, he exuded warmth and recounted all his exciting stories of the glorious Ashram days. His self-effacing nature coupled with his informality and friendly demeanour made me feel at home. At times I sensed a bonhomie of two long lost friends catching up with past exciting events, making me oblivious of the reverence I should have maintained to his Aurobindonian halo. He was generous, more than willing to share his vast knowledge and experience, be it about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Yoga, Philosophy, World History or Arts. I sensed a broad-mindedness and expansiveness of heart that endeared him to me. We had a love for the same language *i.e.* English, though I was a poor understudy. He once asked me to read a passage — I suspect to check my diction — and I came across the word 'effete' whose meaning I did not know. He responded by clarifying that it meant 'weak'. On another occasion whilst departing after a vigorous discussion, I tried to be polite and asked, "May I take your leave, sir" only to be graciously told that the correct phraseology is "May

4. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 486.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 495-96.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 481.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 496.

I take my leave". It was a lesson so sweetly and effectively communicated that whenever I use this sentence I remember his timely correction. I later read that he had heard many educated Indians make this mistake, clarifying that one cannot take somebody else's leave when one is leaving oneself.<sup>8</sup>

Somehow I felt he was trying to widen my horizons and expose me to expanses I was unaware of; for instance, pointing out some lines of Wordsworth and then enlightening me that Sri Aurobindo had revealed to him that this verse literally had come from the Overmind plane thus making Wordsworth's words worthy. I had rarely read poetry but his exposition on the nuances of fine poetry was all very mesmerising and mysterious, to say the least. I subsequently had the good fortune of visiting two of Wordsworth's houses, located in the picturesque Lake Districts, during my subsequent stay in England. In the autumn of 1997, just prior to my temporary residence in England, he had corrected an article I had written — my first attempt at creative writing and the story, incidentally, was set in his hometown of Bombay. I was pleasantly surprised when I went to collect my article the next day, for he wrote a comment, "A lively piece but needing a bit of linguistic revision here and there. I've tried to do the needful. A." Along with the article I had inadvertently left my handkerchief on his chair the previous day. It was left untouched and he said: "You forgot your hanky, a rather colourful one," unmistakably the word colourful was being directed at me *vis-à-vis* the article. I was never a writer, nevertheless I was over the moon for not only had he read the whole article but painstakingly corrected it. By some quirk of fate, many years later, I did dabble in some writing. In retrospect, perhaps his encouragement was a catalyst, though having a rather belated effect.

Many years later, in 2008, I approached him with this corrected article which Minna earnestly showed him, referring to his evaluative remarks made more than a decade earlier. He was more distant now but somehow we managed to break the ice and chatted in the Nursing Home hall facing the sea-front. I told him that I was learning French and found it a 'melodic' language. He immediately pounced on the word 'melodic' for he found the coinage interesting since the usual usage was melodious. Whilst we were sea-gazing he described the wide horizon of the sea, as 'elongated'. He liked the play of words and to listen to their inner rhythm akin to the vast and placid sea before us interspersed with the calm rhythm of the marching and waning waves with their accompanying melodious roar followed by the cool fresh waft of breeze that softly fanned our faces.

During our conversations in the 1990's, he expatiated on World History with a certain liking for great historical personalities, some of whom were emanations of our Masters in previous lives. Indeed it was a most novel and invigorating fashion of learning one's history lessons from such inspirational characters. He spoke about

8. See Amal Kiran, *Our Light and Delight*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 217.

the greatness of Napoleon but expressed his disappointment when he betrayed Toussaint L'Ouverture — referred to also as the Black Napoleon who led the Slave Rebellion in Haiti against the French — when he invited him to the negotiating table and then captured and condemned him to the dungeon. Amal Kiran revealed that Napoleon had his major successes whilst he was still married to Joséphine, who he said was a *vibhuti* of the Mother. He narrated how he wrote to Sri Aurobindo each time naming a great historical character to ascertain if this was his past emanation but the response was always in the negative. However on two occasions there was no denial, the characters named were Augustus Caesar and Leonardo da Vinci. Amal Kiran remarks:

. . . the great Leonardo who, we are convinced, was an emanation of Sri Aurobindo's. I may have handed him brushes when he was doing his portrait of Mona Lisa whom we take to be an emanation of the Mother in that period. At least once I confronted the Mother with the question of Mona Lisa. Just as she had asked me to hold up my hand I held up her hand on one occasion after a private meditation with her, and said: "See! your fingers, when curved like this, look exactly like Mona Lisa's as Leonardo has painted them." She didn't confirm or deny but looked pleased. . . .<sup>9</sup>

In a letter to Amal Kiran, Sri Aurobindo elucidated on the stellar evolutionary role played by Augustus and Leonardo in their respective eras:

Augustus Caesar organised the life of the Roman Empire and it was this that made the framework of the first transmission of the Graeco-Roman civilisation to Europe — he came for that work and the writings of Virgil and Horace and others helped greatly towards the success of his mission. After the interlude of the Middle Ages, this civilisation was reborn in a new mould in what is called the Renaissance, not in its life-aspects but in its intellectual aspects. It was therefore a supreme intellectual, Leonardo da Vinci, who took up again the work and summarised in himself the seeds of modern Europe. — 29.7.1937.<sup>10</sup>

Our sphere of discussion not only touched Heroes and *Vibhutis* but traversed to the other end of the spectrum, *Asuras* and Devils. He told me that Hitler was possessed by an *Asura* whereas Stalin was an *Asura*, a devil without a psychic being. Jinnah too was an *Asura* who effectively partitioned India. Amal Kiran revealed that, prior to independence, Jinnah was suffering from cancer but this was kept a top secret and ultimately he died about a year after the Partition. The timely revelation of his terminal

9. *Light and Laughter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p. 57.

10. *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, Edited by Nirodbaran and R.Y. Deshpande, p. 25.

illness could have changed the course of Indian history, as Congress leaders may not have agreed to the Partition had they known this. A decade and a half later, *Mother India* published a series of articles-cum-compilations prepared by me that covered the Second World War where Churchill, supported by Sri Aurobindo's Force, was the protagonist on the side of the evolutionary forces whilst Hitler and Stalin, the antagonists. Prior to the publication of the article I told him that I was quoting him on his assessment on Jinnah. He evinced interest for I had to repeat it twice to him. I wonder if those initial lessons were seeds which bore fruit after a long gestation.

In retrospect, Amal Kiran in a mysterious way was like a teacher to me — albeit I was a stranger — quietly guiding me towards my quest for Beauty, Knowledge and Truth. I am not sure even if he knew my name, for he never uttered it but he seemed to recognise me on my visits. He told me to come to Pondicherry at regular intervals to seek succour. On being queried, he counselled me on how to maintain an inner life whilst being obliged to socialise in the outer world amongst friends and colleagues.

I recollect another instance when he gave me a compliment. I expressed to him my fascination and awe for Karna, the character in the epic *Mahabharata*. Though this erudite scholar must have been well acquainted with many noteworthy epics, I wanted to share my sense of joy and wonder about someone whom I considered to be the noblest of them all. Karna's personality is admirable — for his sense of dharma, strength of character, nobility, selflessness and heroism were of the highest order. His Achilles' heel was his grievous sense of hurt pride when humiliated. Karna's generosity was legendary; when asked, he even gave away his shield of invincibility, the most precious gift a warrior could have. Despite his intense hatred for Arjuna he restrained himself from killing him when he had an opportunity in the battlefield, giving him the benefit of doubt on a point of technicality — despite battle-rules being flagrantly violated by both the warring sides. Finally, just prior to the war, Krishna, of whom he was a Bhakta, revealed that he was the eldest brother of the Pandavas and invited him to cross over to the other side, literally assuring him of victory and kingdom. However, Karna refused to abandon Duryodhana, despite knowing the grave repercussions, for he felt indebted to him and could not betray his trust even if it meant having hell instead of heaven for his portion. Amal Kiran listened attentively. My narration concluded with Arjuna's arrow striking Karna in unfair circumstances (in contrast to the earlier reprieve Karna had given Arjuna), and Krishna approaching him moments before his death and asking: "Karna you are known as the Generous One, what can you give me at this hour?" Karna then gave himself a blow on the jaw and broke a golden tooth that he had and offered it to Krishna. So impressed and amazed was Krishna with his generosity, that he exclaimed: "Karna, ask me for a boon." Karna replied: "I wish that I be cremated in such a place where no one has ever been cremated nor will ever be."

Krishna then took him in his palms and cremated him there. I wrapped up this poignant tragedy by saying to Amal Kiran: “And that was the evolution of Krishna, for all the substance and superman-like qualities of Karna had gone into Krishna, absorbed into his blood, veins and body.” As I was departing I distinctly remember Amal Kiran’s attentive resplendent face, a gleam in his eye, and his remark, “It’s a fine story.”

On a lighter vein, I would like to share a well-known anecdote that he related to me *vis-à-vis* the first job he got in the Ashram which entailed supervising the stock of furniture. The most difficult and stressful part of his job was haggling with the rickshaw-wallahs to make deliveries. I guess that for a philosopher-poet to communicate his ideas, vision and instructions to an uneducated wheeling-dealing labourer can sometimes prove a wee bit tedious. One day, whilst he was indisposed, due to a serious fall in course of his duties, Amrita-da came to reluctantly give him the sad news — much to Amal Kiran’s joy! — that he was being relieved of his prized post. Such was his sigh of relief that a duly impressed Amrita-da reported to the Mother that Amal Kiran took the news like a Yogi.<sup>11</sup>

On a more sombre note he expressed his disappointment about some renovation done in the room at the Guest House where Sri Aurobindo had lived for some years. Amal Kiran had the good fortune of later being allotted this room. Coincidentally, the duration of stay for both was nine years. Sri Aurobindo had done a large part of his sadhana walking 6 to 8 hours a day in this room so much so that the floor was visibly eroded on the path he walked, leaving a very well-marked trail. Later this worn-out pathway was inexplicably refloored and cemented. That the floor weathered by the Lord’s feet was not preserved in its pristine state was a matter of great angst for Amal Kiran.

Amal Kiran proudly — and justifiably — declared to me that he was named by Sri Aurobindo himself — the christening of the charismatic clear Kiran. Just to clear the air, he clarified the precise meaning of ‘clear ray’, in a book:

. . . The very name I have been given by them — ‘Amal Kiran’, meaning the ‘The Clear Ray’ — is meant to point not only towards clarity but also towards radiancy — towards being on the mental plane the manifestation of a light above it, a sun of Truth from which a revealing ray acts in the mind. . . .<sup>12</sup>

He recounted his last Darshan of Sri Aurobindo on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1950 and how the Mother had whispered into Sri Aurobindo’s ear just as he entered. Later when Amal Kiran tried to ascertain from the Mother what she had told Sri Aurobindo, she said: “Amal is coming.” Apparently Sri Aurobindo could not see very well then

11. See *Light and Laughter*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., pp. 25-26.

12. *Our Light and Delight*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 237.



and hence the forewarning. He then told me that Sri Aurobindo smiled at him and even when he turned away and departed Sri Aurobindo kept smiling in his direction. I wondered aloud and burst out: “But how could Sri Aurobindo recognise you, if he could not see.” He stopped me in my tracks with this startling comment: “He could feel my consciousness.” Amal Kiran considered this last Darshan to be a sweet intimate farewell present for it was the first time that Sri Aurobindo had smiled at him.

Even on the night when the Mother left her body, Amal Kiran had experienced her giving him a farewell present:

. . . I returned to the Ashram on hearing in the early morning of 18 November that she had renounced her embodiment. On the preceding night she had appeared to me in a vivid dream, with a bunch of red roses which she had told me to put on my head.<sup>13</sup>

I once expressed my concern to Amal Kiran about the Mother’s suffering in the last few months prior to passing away. He consoled me by saying that she must have been in a trance.

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

13. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

*To do this yoga, one must have, at least a little, the sense of beauty. If one does not, one misses one of the most important aspects of the physical world.*

*There is this beauty, this dignity of soul — a thing about which I am very sensitive. It is a thing that moves me and evokes in me a great respect always.*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother – III, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 353)*



# AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

*(Continued from the issue of October 2013)*

## 3. Opening the History of England

It was 1954. The excitement of becoming a student in the Andhra University was great. I was familiar with the campus, as my father was a Professor there and both of us were used to taking our morning and evening walks in its vast area. As a child, I had admired for long the women students who seemed self-possessed, wearing starched cotton sarees and walking with tons of books and notebooks in their hands. It was only when I got the syllabus and list of books to be purchased, did I realise that I had entered waters that were not easily fordable.

The syllabus included a history of England. At that time England for me was the festival of Great Britain as Father had recently returned from England and had brought me a powder compact (treasured and used by me still!) commemorating the festival. He had been speaking about the technological and scientific advancements England had made and how it commemorated the centenary of the 1851 Exhibition, held when the land was ruled by Queen Victoria.

It was when studying the history of England that the class did gently slip into the Middle English period. After those early attacks by the Vikings and their kind, the first major assault on England occurred during the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 A.D. The language and literature underwent a tremendous transformation. William II of Normandy led an army made up of Normans, Bretons and Frenchmen. The rule of the House of Wessex, the ruling dynasty ended when its last representative, King Edward the Confessor died. His brother-in-law Harold ascended the throne. When the Norwegian king Harald Hardrada attacked, Harold was able to defeat him at Stamford Bridge. But Harold could not stop William II at the Battle of Hastings. Harold was killed and William II was crowned. Apart from other changes like giving his people a good portion of the land to manage, he favoured Anglo-Norman, derived from Old French as the official language. French words poured into the English language. The English language as we know it, the language of Shakespeare and Milton, William Wordsworth and Christopher Fry, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo was now born.

Naturally, the writers of that time could choose their language, partly out of their own knowledge and partly to reach out to a particular section of the community. Like a *bhasha* writer today in India choosing to write in Sanskrit, there were also scholarly persons who chose to write in Latin at that time. The first history of England thus came to be written by Geoffrey of Monmouth in Latin in the early part of the

12<sup>th</sup> century. *Historia Regum Britanniae* is a history of Britons, the original dwellers of the island and the ancestors of the Welsh, the Bretons and the Cornish people. Within a short period a poet named Wace wrote a work based on it titled *Brut* in Norman French. Apparently there was a ready audience to know about the history of the land, myth-encrusted or otherwise. The first English history inspired by this work was brought out by Layamon towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This early Middle English poem is also known as *The Chronicle of Britain*.

According to Geoffrey, the original historian, the island received its name from Brutus, a great-grandson of Aeneas. Students of Sri Aurobindo's works have never had any problem with the mythology of the West. There is always some illumination from him. Aeneas, the son of Goddess Aphrodite, was a cousin twice removed of Hector. He would flee the city of doomed Ilium on the last day of the Trojan War and become the founder of Rome. His grandson, Brutus, would be the founder of Britain. This was history as we jotted down points in the classroom. In later years, I would get into the presence of heroic Aeneas speaking brave words of sterling patriotism in the Book of the Assembly in Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion*. This is *desha bhakti*, forever blessed by history!

Nor should a life that was honoured and noble be stained in its ending.  
 Nay, then, the mood of a child would shame a grey-headed wisdom,  
 If for the fault of the people virtue and Troy were forgotten.  
 For, though the people hear us not, yet are we bound to our nation:  
 Over the people the gods are; over a man is his country;  
 This is the deity first adored by the hearths of the noble.  
 For by our nation's will we are ruled in the home and the battle  
 And for our nation's weal we offer our lives and our children's.  
 Not by their own wills led nor their passions men rise to their manhood,  
 Selfishly seeking their good, but the gods' and the State's and the fathers'.<sup>1</sup>

Aeneas was indeed a worthy progenitor of heroes. Among them was the founder of Britain, Brutus. Layamon's *Brut* belonging to the earlier part of Middle English, has plenty of Anglo-Saxon words, reminding us constantly of Old English. But it has a goodly number of Norman-French words as well. Layamon's audience was not from the court. It was the poor peasantry of Worcestershire which was almost illiterate. They loved to hear tales of past heroism, and Layamon obliged them by giving them the early history of Britain. And why did Layamon write in English when the current fashion was either Latin (to appear classical) or French (to chime in with the victor)? A shrewd suspicion voiced is that when Layamon wrote his work, Henry III was the king of England and he liked to raise the flag of English

1. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 393.

and make himself known as an Englishman, in the process giving the cold shoulder to the Old French dialects that had been the fashion (and necessity) for a while. It is a situation not unlike the Dravidian Party leaders like E.V. Ramaswami, M. Karunanidhi and M. G. Ramachandran giving total importance to the Tamil language though Tamil was not their mother-tongue. This political move in England was welcome for English literature, for now it began to grow strong, drawing freely from other languages.

We were not expected to read Layamon at the University. Only, we had to know something about him from secondary sources. I had no problem there. So many histories of English literature to dig into, but my favourite was actually a translation from French! Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian were French scholars and the English translation was by W. D. MacInnes. This was a detailed history and I felt proud to be sitting with this fat volume on my lap, as though that made me look like a scholar! Anyway I had a choice of histories in my father's library but this book became my favourite and continues to live with me, though the book calls for gentle handling these days. I was committed to three years of living with English literature in 1954. I thought I might as well know something about the first historian in English. In any case, I had to "for examination purposes"!

Legouis and Cazamian did not disappoint. Their book assured me Layamon was actually "a pure German by race and tongue". He admired the Britons and hated the Saxons as invading barbarians. But there was more of Arthurian legends in this section than on the dynasty of Brutus. From here and there in translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Welsh Chronicles and the help of the Professor we students gathered some material. It made quite a myth-studded history as we have in Indian *itihisas*.

Brutus was the son of Silvius. His mother died in childbirth. When he was fifteen he accidentally killed his father while out hunting. Brutus was exiled from his native Italy and while travelling through Greece he received the homage of some Trojans who joined him. While journeying further in the oceans, Brutus and his people landed in Devon. Heroism and probably avoidance of the kind of violent destruction that victors are tempted to indulge in, brought him the friendship of the locals. He became a king, and the land came to be called after him as Britain. He is said to have ruled for a long time.

Brutus married Ignoge of Greece. They had three sons, Locrinus, Kamber and Albanactus. Since names from this history would pop up in our books on the history of Elizabethan literature, I took down notes and generally felt pleased with myself for my studiousness. Then all the names including Gorboduc, Ferrex and Porrex became just a vague memory.

Fancy my excitement when the fragment of Sri Aurobindo's play, *The House of Brut* was published! It was a gift from the *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* (Calcutta) of 1962. The introduction was very brief: "Sri Aurobindo wrote this fragment during

the early part of his stay in Baroda, probably in 1899. The idea for *The House of Brut* seems to have come from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* or another chronicle of early Britain." Back again to those days of anxious searchings, attempts to understand so alien a history, learning to cope with descriptions of winter and the roar of turbulent seas, was not unlike the experience of the poet Firdausi.

Much have I labored, much read o'er  
Of Arabic and Persian lore,  
Collecting tales unknown and known;  
Now two and sixty years are flown.  
Regret, and deeper woe of sin,  
'Tis all that youth has ended in,  
And I with mournful thoughts rehearse  
Bu Tahir Khusrawani's verse:  
"I mind me of my youth and sigh,  
Alas for youth, for youth gone by!"<sup>2</sup>

But no such regret comes near me of those days when I was energised to get back to these names that sounded familiar: Albanact, Locrine, Cambre, Humber. I realised that in Baroda Sri Aurobindo had been digging into English history deeply and was planning to write a play or a series of plays on the descendants of Brutus. Sri Aurobindo's conceptions were always Himalayan and he was ready to do hard work and complete his projects. He had been toying with other subjects too but then Mother India in shackles was an image that drew him away from all such literary activity in the first decade of the twentieth century. Later on, the Alipore Bomb Case played havoc with his manuscripts. So we have hardly a couple of pages of the play, *The House of Brut*. The rest is lost.

Sri Aurobindo knew Latin and French and so Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace were no problem. He could read them and understand. He was living in Britain. It was logical that he should dive deep into its history. By his time brilliant historians had begun to write about Britain but Geoffrey was the first! And his history of Britain gave colourful information. Brutus had three sons: Locrinus, Kamber and Albanactus. When Brutus died his kingdom was divided between them. Kamber had Wales, Albanactus received Scotland and Locrinus became the king of the area now known as England. Cornwall, however, was ruled by the father-in-law of Locrinus, Corineus. Without the knowledge of Corineus, Locrinus married another lady, Estrildis whom he made his queen after the death of his father-in-law.

The first wife, Gwendolen was incensed. She had a big following in her natal land and soon went to war with her own husband and killed him. Estrildis along

with her daughter was killed. Gwendolen became the queen of England then and abdicated in her son's favour after fifteen years. Perfect plot for an Aurobindonian five-act play *à la* Shakespeare!

The dynasty of Brut, raised in violence, continued with violence. There were steady rulers and tyrants, fratricides and murderers. There were heroes too. Ebraucus who ruled for thirty-five years is famous for sacking the city of Gaul and creating a city which is today known as York, derived from his name. As we turn the pages of this early history, some familiar names gently stroke our memory cells. Hudibras of 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., a fine king. But for students of English literature the name means Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (17<sup>th</sup> century), a satire on the English Civil War. The character of Sir Hudibras would do justice to our contemporary politicians haranguing when the election fever is on:

His ordinary rate of speech  
In loftiness of sound was rich;  
A Babylonish dialect,  
Which learned pedants much affect.  
It was a parti-coloured dress  
Of patch'd and pie-bald languages;  
'Twas English cut on Greek and Latin,  
Like fustian heretofore on satin;  
It had an odd promiscuous tone,  
As if he had talked three parts in one  
Which made some think, when he did gabble,  
That had heard three labourers of Babel . . .

Back to the dynasty of Brutus. Another name that catches our eyes is Leir who ruled for sixty years. This is the King Lear who had three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia, the hero of Shakespeare's great tragedy. Sri Aurobindo, the Shakespeare-enthusiast would have noted how colourful a play could be written from the bare bones in the narrative of Geoffrey of Monmouth. He would also have observed how Shakespeare had transformed a happy ending into a tragedy. In the history, Cordelia survives and succeeds her father as the queen. Subsequently her sisters depose her and she dies in prison.

Some two hundred years later once again the literature enthusiast has a historical person for dramatic presentation. King Gorboduc was the last of the dynasty of Brutus to occupy the throne. He had no peace in his old age. History speaks of the problems of inheritance created by his sons Ferrex and Porrex. Since we had a paper on Elizabethan literature, the play, *Gorboduc: or Ferrex and Porrex* was required reading. "Jointly authored by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville," we wrote down in our notebooks diligently, and listed out its importance in the

Elizabethan dramatic canon. A historical play; the first play in English to employ blank verse; closer to Greek plays of bloodshed than to Church-inspired morality plays of Middle English literature and so on. Probably I found it all tedious and terrifying too for Gorboduc's wife kills her own son Porrex because he had killed her favourite son, Ferrex. I kept on and on because of the lure of a first class at the end of three years. But I am glad I did, for today I can remain alone with my thoughts of how much Sri Aurobindo would have discussed with himself regarding the ambitious undertaking, *The House of Brut*.

It is quite clear the work was meant to be a five-act Shakespearian play. Also, it is possible, Sri Aurobindo was thinking of completing a trilogy, as the title shows. Already English literature had two well known plays on two major kings of the dynasty of Brut. King Leir was somewhere in the middle and Gorboduc brought up the rear. So how about the beginnings of this dynasty which had managed to lumber through almost one thousand years? Could a play put at the starting point of the dynasty explain the historical events of later times? Sri Aurobindo may have conceived *The House of Brut* as an answer.

He seems to have chosen the most dramatically tragic situation in the immediate family of Brutus. The dramatis personae lists names that can be found in *Historia Regum Britanniae*:

BRUTUS, Prince of Britain.

CORINEUS }  
ASSARAC } his brothers.

DEVON, son of Corineus.

CAMBRE, Prince of Cambria }  
ALBANACT, Prince of Albany } sons of Brutus.  
LOCRINE, Prince of Leogrys, }  
HUMBER, King of Norway.

OFFA }  
SIGFRID } Norwegian leaders.

GUENDOLEN, daughter of Corineus.

ESTRILD, a Pictish princess, concubine of Humber.

The first question that accosts us is the presence of Brutus in the list of characters. Did the first act deal with the death of Brutus and the division of his land? Since Humber and Estrild are present in the second act, Brutus would not be appearing on the stage. Perhaps Brutus was not there even in the first act but appeared (or was to appear) in some context, somewhere in the play. The Shakespearian touch would have been complete with the Ghost of Brutus appearing before the sons!

From the placement of action in this fragment from the second act, it is clear that the play would have dealt with Humber's killing of Albanactus. The war-cry of blood-thirsty Humber makes this clear:

Spare not to drain this sweetened force of earth,  
 You Vikings! How it bubbles to the lips  
 Vigorous as newspilt blood. Drink deep, and shout  
 "Glory to Thor and Humber!" With the sun  
 Upon the force of Albanact we march.  
 Shout, Norsemen! Let the heavens hear your menace.  
 Drinkhael!<sup>3</sup>

An accent Sri Aurobindo would recapture again during the Second World War:

We have seen the sign of Thor and the hammer of new creation,  
 A seed of blood on the soil, a flower of blood in the skies.  
 We march to make of earth a hell and call it heaven.  
 The heart of mankind we have smitten with the whip of the sorrows seven;  
 The Mother of God lies bleeding in our black and gold sunrise.<sup>4</sup>

Estrild's presence in his camp is proclaimed with fierce savagery by Humber himself:

Have I not slain the Alban hosts and bound  
 The necks of princes? Yea, their glorious star  
 And wonder for whom three kingdoms strove, Estrild,  
 Led to my ships? The queens of the Orcades  
 Are slaves and concubines to private Norsemen.<sup>5</sup>

Ironically Estrild means Battle Goddess! Born in glory, but bound to slavery by Humber and taken as a victor's trophy by Lochrine, she seems to have found a brief interregnum of joy and motherhood with him. History tells us that she perished with her daughter when Gwendolen defeated Lochrine and killed him. How would Sri Aurobindo have handled her presence? Another Rodogune, born to sorrow and drown in the ocean of sorrow in mortal things, perhaps.

Humber himself is typical of the man who thinks he is a superman because of some negligible battle victories which have filled his wretched coffers. He has reached

3. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vol. 4, p. 779.

4. 'The Children of Wotan', *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 641.

5. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vol. 4, p. 780.



a stage of megalomania when he thinks of himself superior even to their god, Thor:

Have I not harried Ireland, Denmark, Orkney?  
 Shattered the Pictish wheels, broken their scythes,  
 Unpeopled living tracts? Why then prefer you  
 Thor's self to me? Has he filled up your ships  
 With gold and wines of France, rich rings and jewels,  
 Metals untold and beautiful sharp steel?  
 Who has enriched and aggrandized you all  
 Till you are gods, to each hand a country's wealth,  
 To each sword a century's glory? Who has given  
 The commonest man beauty divine to sleep with,  
 Made queens your slaves and kings your thralls, you Norsemen?<sup>6</sup>

So, day after day, whenever I happen to take up some book of Sri Aurobindo, I get lost in conversations with the voices that call from the past and marvel. Father was right. One has to read the entire literature of the world if we seek to understand the Aurobindonian canon. Is it possible?

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

6. *Ibid.*

*Immortality is the nature of our being, birth and death are a movement and incident of our immortality. Birth is an assumption of a body by the spirit, death is the casting off [of] the body; there is nothing original in this birth, nothing final in this death. Before birth we were; after death we shall be. Nor are our birth and death a single episode without continuous meaning or sequel; it is one episode out of many, scenes of our drama of existence with its denouement far away in time.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 300)*





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