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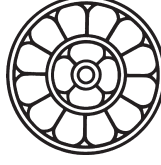
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVI

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE VEDANTIN'S PRAYER

Spirit Supreme

Who musest in the silence of the heart,
Eternal gleam,

Thou only Art!

Ah, wherefore with this darkness am I veiled,
My sunlit part

By clouds assailed?

Why am I thus disfigured by desire,
Distracted, haled,

Scorched by the fire

Of fitful passions, from thy peace out-thrust
Into the gyre

Of every gust?

Betrayed to grief, o'ertaken with dismay,
Surprised by lust?

Let not my grey

Blood-clotted past repel thy sovereign ruth,
Nor even delay,

O lonely Truth!

Nor let the specious gods who ape Thee still
Deceive my youth.

These clamours still;

For I would hear the eternal voice and know
The eternal Will.

This brilliant show

Cumbering the threshold of eternity
Dispel, — bestow

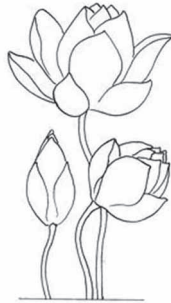
The undimmed eye,
The heart grown young and clear. Rebuke in me
These hopes that cry

So deafeningly,
Remove my sullied centuries, restore
My purity.

O hidden door
Of Knowledge, open! Strength, fulfil thyself!
Love, outpour!

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 212-13)



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of November 2013)

THE MOTHER'S HELP IN DIFFICULTIES

Calling the Mother in Difficulty

Why this bad feeling? I am feeling all bad today.

When in difficulties always remain as quiet within as possible and call the Mother.

Surely the Mother's force is there to transform you and it will prevail.

You must progress to a point at which there is always something within which in spite of any surface disturbance is always quiet, unshaken, holding on to the Mother — then these things will no longer be able to cloud the inner consciousness as now.

*

Plenty of people have this condition (it is human nature) and there is naturally a way of coming out of it — having full faith in the Mother to quiet the inner mind (even if the outer continues to be troublesome) and call in it the Mother's Peace and Force, which is always there above you, into the Adhar. Once that is there, consciously, to keep yourself open to it and let it go on working with a full adhesion, with a constant support of your consent, with a constant rejection of all that is not that, till all the inner being is tranquillised and filled with the Mother's Force, Peace, Joy, Presence — then the outer nature will be obliged to follow suit in its turn.

8 May 1933

*

In a dream I saw a dull painting with an expanse of water in the background, and in the centre a temple with trees in front. As I was looking at it, I went on calling the Mother and the painting began changing — the waters actually began to move and white light was falling on them here and there until the whole picture was sparkling like silver. Then I woke up. Does this mean that some light will come into the obscurity in me?

Yes, it is a symbol, — the expanse of water means the ordinary outward consciousness which is obscure and dull, the temple is the psychic centre behind it. By calling the Mother her white light comes upon the dark consciousness and begins to change the darkness into lustre.

27 May 1933

*

For about a month I have the feeling that devotion, love and aspiration for the Divine have disappeared from me. I feel this way even during the morning pranam. Mother, I pray to Thee to shower Thy Grace and inspire me to have devotion, love and aspiration for Thee once again. What may be the reason for this?

You may have allowed your consciousness to go too much outward and get taken up by ordinary things. It is usually when the outer physical consciousness covers up the inner being that this happens. The aspiration is not gone, but it no longer rises to the surface. If you remain very quiet inwardly and call to the Mother, it should come back.

13 July 1933

*

When I awoke this morning, I found the atmosphere surcharged with the Mother's presence. The air around me, the cot on which I lay, everything was filled with her presence. A burning aspiration was in my heart. The consciousness there was aspiring intensely, flapping its wings like a caged bird, trying to leave the body and unite with the Mother present everywhere. After some time it seemed to me that although I was in the body I was free, free of every limitation, but helpless, strengthless, drifting away and exposed to the hostile forces. Then I saw the red, rolling, frowning eyes of X, threatening me. Helpless in this limitless space, I called the Mother and the atmosphere was clear.

What happened in your experience was that the vital being got free from the body through its desire to unite with the Mother (you met the Mother on the border between the vital and physical) and lived with its own life independent of the body. It entered into the vital world and, not being sheltered any longer in the body, felt helpless at first, till it called the Mother. The appearance of X there might possibly have been some part of the vital of X himself, but was more probably a vital being in his shape, perhaps the very vital being who has been troubling him. When you go into the

vital world, you meet many such things, — the one sufficient protection is to call the Mother.

7 September 1933

*

This morning after pranam I felt a sudden uprush of impatience, restlessness, uneasiness and a quick, strong beating of the pulse. Confusion was there too. I sat down and after a long time the dark forces began to grow less, bringing a normal state again. My pulse also became normal. Is it due to the Mother's action? Have I been able to make some place for her in the lower parts of my being?

It is the forces of the Ignorance that begin to lay siege and then make a mass attack. Every time such an attack can be defeated and cast out, there is a clearance in the Adhar, a new field gained for the Mother in the mind, vital or physical or the adjacent parts of the being. That the place in the vital occupied by the Mother is increasing is shown by the fact that you are now offering a strong resistance to these sieges that used formerly to overpower you altogether.

In the afternoon all my problems started coming to the front. I felt that they had become too big a burden for me to bear. Then I felt an opening in the heart, and I opened up a conversation with the Mother. I told her all my joys and sorrows and I got some consolation and strength.

That is good. To be able to call the Mother's presence or force at such times is the best way to meet the difficulty.

Was all this mere imagination of the heart and mind? Was I in touch with Mother? Did she hear the language of my heart?

It is with the Mother who is always with you and in you that you converse. The only thing is to hear aright, so that no other voice can come in between.

7 December 1933

*

To call to the Mother always is the main thing and with that to aspire and assent to the Light when it comes, to reject and detach oneself from desire and any dark movement. But if one cannot do these other things successfully, then call and still call.

The Mother's force is there with you even when you do not feel it; remain quiet and persevere.

15 September 1934

*

When X complained to me about her difficulty, I told her that it could be removed by calling the Mother's help. But she argued that there was no hope for the calls of a newcomer like herself to be heard by the Mother. There were so many calls coming from the older and advanced sadhaks that fresh calls from a beginner like herself would be but calls in the wilderness and go unheard in that clamour. I replied that if the Mother does not come in answer to our calls she must have her reasons; possibly she has more important work to do than to act according to our bidding. Why should we insist that she should leave that work and attend to us? The Mother has never been known to fail in answering when a real call is sent to her straight from the heart, for the very force in the call presupposes her presence. When I told this to X, I felt a strong pressure and vibrations from the centre of my forehead downwards between the eyebrows. What is the reason for this?

X's reasonings are not very sound; yours are better if not altogether flawless. The Mother is not limited by the physical mind, so even if she has "more important" work to do, that would not in the least stand in the way of her listening to a call from the wilderness or anywhere else. Also spiritual things do not go by seniority; so why should the clamour of "older cases" keep her? She can be and is with all who need her. So your "Mother does not come? will not come?" is not quite to the point, but the rest of your answer is. Mother is there even now and working in you, it is only your inner vision and feeling that are not opened so that you cannot see or feel her.

What came down to the centre of the forehead was the answer, let us say the touch of the Mother's presence, — her consciousness, her force working in you to open the centre of the inner vision. For in the centre of the forehead between the eyebrows is the centre of the inner mind, inner will, the inner vision and when that opens one begins to see and know what is to the physical eye invisible and to the surface mind unknowable.

11 October 1935

*

It is an obsession from the subconscious physical bringing back habitual thoughts, "I can't call rightly — I have no real aspiration" etc.; the depression, the memory etc. are from the same source. It is no use indulging in these ideas. If you cannot call the Mother in what you think the right way, call her in any way — if you can't call her, think of her with the will to be rid of these things. Don't worry yourself with the idea whether you have true aspiration or not — the psychic being wants and that is sufficient. The rest is the Divine Grace, on which one must steadfastly rely — one's own merit, virtue or capacity is not the thing that brings the realisation.

I shall put the force to rid you of this obsession in any case, but if you can abandon these habitual ideas, it will make the disappearance of the attack easier.

4 January 1937

*

It is always best in these difficulties to tell the Mother and call for her help. It is probably something in the vital that needs somebody to protect and care for — but you must accustom yourself to the idea that it is not needed and the best thing is to give the person to the care of the Mother — offer the object of your affection to her.

15 January 1937

*

As to the experience, certainly X's call for help did reach the Mother, even though all the details she relates in her letter might not have been present to the Mother's physical mind. Always calls of this kind are coming to the Mother, sometimes a hundred close upon each other and always the answer is given. The occasions are of all kinds, but whatever the need that occasions the call, the Force is there to answer it. That is the principle of this action on the occult plane. It is not of the same kind as an ordinary human action and does not need a written or oral communication from the one who calls; an interchange of psychic communication is quite sufficient to set the Force at work. At the same time it is not an impersonal Force and the suggestion of a divine energy that is there ready to answer and satisfy anybody who calls it is not at all relevant here. It is something personal to the Mother and if she had not this power and this kind of action she would not be able to do her work; but this is quite different from the outside practical working on the material plane where the methods must necessarily be different, although the occult working and the material working can and do join and the occult power give to the material working its utmost efficacy. As for the one who is helped not feeling the force at work, his knowing might help very substantially the effective working, but it need not be indispensable; the effect can be there even if he does not know how the thing is done. For instance, in your work in Calcutta and elsewhere my help has been always

with you and I do not think it can be said that it was ineffective; but it was of the same occult nature and could have had the same effect even if you had not been conscious in some way that my help was with you.

24 March 1949

Praying to the Mother

You say, "When one is a sadhak the prayer should be for the inner things belonging to the sadhana and for outer things only so far as they are necessary for that and for the Divine work." This latter portion about prayer for outer things is not clear to me. Can you kindly explain?

All depends on whether the outer things are sought for one's own convenience, pleasure, profit etc., or as part of the spiritual life, necessary for the success of the work, the development and fitness of the instruments etc. It is a question mainly of inner attitude. If for instance you pray for money for buying nice food to please the palate, that is not a proper prayer for a sadhak; if you pray for money to give to the Mother and help her work, then it is legitimate.

I quote several types of prayers which I offer and shall be grateful to know which of them are outer or inner, right or wrong, helpful or hindrance, or what amendment to them can make them pure:

1. In the night-time when I sit to read and an untimely attack of sleep comes, I pray to the Mother to be freed from the attack.

If your reading is part of the sadhana, that is all right.

2. When I go to sleep, I pray to the Mother for her Force to take over my sadhana during the sleep, to make my sleep conscious and luminous, to protect me during the sleep, to keep me conscious of the Mother.

3. When I wake up any time in the sleep, I pray to the Mother to be with me and protect me.

These two are part of the sadhana.

4. While going out for a walk and during it, I pray to the Mother to give me force to take more exercise and to gain more strength and health and I thank the Mother for the help.

If strength and health are requested as being necessary for the sadhana and the development of the perfection of the instrument it is all right.

5. When I see any dog on the way while walking, I at once pray to the Mother to protect me from its attack and remove my fear.

A call for protection is always permissible. The removal of fear is part of the sadhana.

6. When I go for food, I pray for the Mother's Force to help me to offer every morsel to the Mother, to get everything easily digested, to make a growth of complete equality and detachment in my consciousness enabling me to take any food with equal Rasa of universal Ananda without any insistence or seeking or greed or desire.

This is again part of the sadhana.

7. When I go for work, I pray for the Mother's Force to take over my work, help me and make me do it well and carefully with love, devotion and pleasure, with the remembrance of the Mother and the feeling of being supported and helped by her without ego or desire.

This also.

8. During the work also when there is a pause, I pray for force, help and constant remembrance.

This also.

9. When any bad or impure thought, seeing or sensation comes into me, I pray for its removal and purity.

This also.

10. When I am reading, I try to pray when possible to understand all quickly, to grasp and absorb completely.

If it is as sadhana or for the development of the instrument, it is all right.

11. When I commit any mistake in the work, I pray to be more conscious, alert and unerring.

This also is part of the sadhana.

12. When I go to the post office to register a parcel of Prasad to my friend, I pray to have the parcel accepted immediately and avoid any delay.

That can be done, if avoidance of waste of time is considered as part of the right regulation of the life of sadhana.

13. When I sit down for meditation, I pray for Mother's Force to take over my meditation and make it deep, steady, concentrated and free from all attacks of troubling thoughts, vital restlessness, etc.

This is part of the sadhana.

14. In depression, difficulty, wrong suggestions, doubt, inertia, on any occasion or happening I pray to the Mother to have courage, keep faith, face them and overcome them.

This also.

15. At all other times as far as I can, I pray to the Mother to fill me with her peace, power, light etc., or offer any other kind of required prayer, and thank her for supporting, strengthening and sustaining me.

This also.

16 September 1938

The Mother's Help and the Hostile Forces

There are times when I think myself to be a simple vessel and imagine that things coming from the outside have no importance, for the adhar can be purified and what is not wanted can either be thrown out or allowed to end in a natural way. But at other times I feel that every outside contact may have harmful effects, and care and tapasya are needed to avoid confusion. I want to know which view is correct.

It is not possible to make a fixed rule covering all cases and circumstances; sometimes one has to remain quiet waiting for the Mother's light and force to act, sometimes it is necessary to use an active tapasya. But one thing is always necessary, to refuse to accept the adverse forces and suggestions that try to disorganise and disturb the

system; for the basis of the Yoga must be peace, quiet, clarity, self-possession and nothing should be allowed to invade and upset the basis and substitute confusion and disorder.

13 September 1931

*

It might be charitable to warn *X* not to listen to imbecile remarks [*about the Mother*] of this kind, from whomsoever they may come, and, if he hears them, to do nothing to propagate them. He had been progressing extremely well because he opened himself to the Mother; but if he allows stupidities like that to enter his mind, it may influence him, close him to the Mother and stop his progress.

As for *Y*, if he said and thought a thing like that, it explains why he has been suffering in health so much lately. If one makes oneself a mouthpiece of the hostile forces and lends oneself to their falsehoods, it is not surprising that something in him should get out of order.

7 January 1932

*

I see now the damage I have done by my disobedience in work. I must go about my work consciously, performing it as a service to the Mother. I must work with full concentration and feel a connection with the Mother.

The difficulty this time must have come from this very act of distrust and disobedience. For distrust and disobedience are like falsehood (they are themselves a falsity, based on false ideas and impulses), — they interfere in the action of the Power, prevent it from being felt or working fully and diminish the force of the Protection. It was the same thing that made you lose touch for a while — for the adverse vital Formation always makes use of these wrong movements to cloud the consciousness. Not only in your inward concentration, but in your outward acts and movements you must take the right attitude. If you do that and put everything under the Mother's guidance, you will find that difficulties begin to diminish or are much more easily got over and things become steadily smoother.

Now that these things have happened you should learn from them and feel the necessity of being, as you say, conscious in your work. In your work and acts you must do the same as in your concentration. Open to the Mother, put them under her guidance, call in the peace, the supporting Power, the protection and, in order that they may work, reject all wrong influences that might come in their way by creating wrong, careless or unconscious movements.

Follow this principle and your whole being will become one, under one rule, in the peace and sheltering Power and Light.

17 March 1932

*

At 4.30 in the afternoon, while serving vegetables in the Dining Room, I suddenly fell into a very unhappy condition. My consciousness entered into a world of obscurity and uneasiness and wild vital forces. Innumerable hostile suggestions pierced my helpless consciousness. Then the form of X appeared and he threatened me, saying that my fate would be the same as his — I would have to leave the Asram. Later, while in this condition I passed by Y's room and felt that the Mahakali forces of the Mother were around me; I also felt that her very name would create fear in the hostile forces. As I thought of her with feeling, suddenly all was clear.

It is the Force that attacks everyone in the Asram who can at all be attacked in this way — the X form is merely an appearance which it took for the sake of having a more concrete effect. It is a vital violence which suggests always a catastrophic breaking of the personal sadhana or of my work. Such a Force is naturally met by the power of Mahakali. You felt it while passing Y's room because it is always there with Y, and it is by that that he meets the suggestions of this Force when it comes. The Mother's name called with faith is usually enough to meet it. It disappeared at once because it is a Falsehood which cannot stand once the light of the Truth touches it. It prevailed with X because he welcomed its suggestions of pride, revolt, hostility to the Mother, even clung to them — otherwise it would have had no chance.

2 October 1933

*

This hostile force is still trying to attack me and it also wants to harm you and the Mother. When I utter your name and Mother's name, it tries to finish me and make wrong impressions about Mother and turn me against her. Why is it still troubling me?

This Force is one that is there to break the Yoga if it can — it is not only you it attacks but all who do the sadhana. It hates the Mother and myself because we bring the Light into the consciousness of the physical world and it wants to keep the physical world in darkness. It knows that the only way it can succeed in preventing the success of the sadhak in his sadhana is, first, by turning him against the Mother, or, if it cannot do that, by persuading him that he is unfit and so disturbing him that

he gets upset and loses faith and courage. What you have to do is always to remain calm and call in the Mother's force and to refuse steadily all the suggestions whether against yourself or against the Mother. Preserve your calm always, keep an entire faith in the Mother and in your own spiritual destiny. Reply always that whatever it may say, you are the Mother's child and cannot fail in the sadhana.

5 November 1933

*

These suggestions are what we call hostile suggestions — they come from a Force which is wandering about in the atmosphere trying to do harm to the sadhana. Its suggestions are always the same, to whomever they come — the suggestion of going away, the suggestion of unfitness and failure, this suggestion of madness, and a certain fixed number of others with the same purpose. There is only one thing to do with them — never to listen to them; one must reply as you have done and dismiss them summarily from the consciousness. If one takes this simple stand, "I have come for the Yoga — I will allow nothing to divert me from my aim; I have the demand of the soul within and the help and protection of the Mother", then these things can no longer approach or approach in vain.

I am glad you have the aspiration and the push awake; it is always bound to revive after every interval and to carry you farther. Keep it and progress.

17 March 1934

*

A few sadhaks here are supposed to be using the occult process. But when it is done to harm a fellow sadhak, is this not an egoistic use of occult power, more like the use of black magic? I told X that when occult power is used, without asking Mother, to satisfy one's like or dislike, a clash may occur on the vital plane and some disembodied being there may give a dangerous hit. He said it is not really like this — rather it happens naturally as the result of a play of forces on the vital plane.

It is obviously a wholly Asuric thing to do when it is turned to egoistic purposes or against fellow sadhaks. It is certainly not a natural play of forces over which one has no control. Anybody doing that may get a serious back-blow, especially if it is done against people protected by the Mother — for, knocking against a wall of protection the force put out may automatically recoil on the sender.

10 September 1934

*

It will not do to yield to these attacks which are without reason and obviously are only waves from outside. You should recognise them as such, things not your own but forced on you by a Force from outside and when they come remain still, reject and call the Mother's force to liberate you.

15 July 1936

Natural Disasters, Adverse Forces and the Mother's Help

Is it true that earthquakes are inevitable phenomena in the process of the Divine Manifestation on the earth and the transformation of matter?

Not at all. The method of the Divine Manifestation is through calm and harmony, not through a catastrophic upheaval. The latter is the sign of a struggle, generally of conflicting vital forces, but at any rate a struggle on the inferior plane.

Have I been kept here, outside the Asram, so that I can, by constant surrender to the Mother, rise above the difficulties of this environment and control the adverse forces that now touch and move and affect my lower nature?

You think too much of adverse forces. That kind of preoccupation causes much unnecessary struggle. Fix your mind on the positive side — open to the Mother's power, concentrate on her protection, call for light, calm and peace and purity and growth into the divine consciousness and knowledge.

Am I right in thinking that every bad movement in my life is the result of my past karma and takes place with the sanction of the Mother because she is testing me at every moment?

This idea of tests also is not a healthy idea and ought not to be pushed too far. Tests are applied not by the Divine but by the forces of the lower planes — mental, vital, physical — and allowed by the Divine because that is part of the soul's training and helps it to know itself, its powers and the limitations it has to outgrow. The Mother is not testing you at every moment, but rather helping you at every moment to rise beyond the necessity of tests and difficulties which belong to the inferior consciousness. To be always conscious of that help will be your best safeguard against all attacks whether of adverse powers or of your own lower nature.

23 February 1931

Helping Others and the Mother's Help

The best way to help X is to assist her by your own example and atmosphere to get the right attitude. Instead of the sense that she is very ill, she should be encouraged to have a bright and confident feeling, open to receive strength and health from us, contributing by her own faith to a speedy recovery. These ideas that they do not see the Mother, are outside the atmosphere, at a distance, are just the wrong notions and most likely to come in the way of and block your sisters' receptivity; it is surprising that you should accept or echo them and not react against them at once. They are here in the Asram (a little nearer or farther makes no difference), in the Mother's presence and atmosphere; meeting her every day at the Pranam where everyone who is open can receive as much of her touch and her help as they can hold, — that is what they should feel and make the most of their opportunity and not waste it by a negative attitude.

For yourself what you must have with other sadhaks (including your sisters) is a harmonious relation free from any vital attachment (indifference is not asked from you) and free from any indulgence in wrong vital movements of the opposite kind (such as dislike, jealousy or ill-will). It is through the psychic consciousness that you have found it possible to be in a true constant relation with the Mother and your aim is to make that the basis of all your life, action and feelings; all in you, all you feel, say and do should be consistent with that basis. If all proceeds from that psychic union of your consciousness with the Mother's, dedicating everything to her, then you will develop the right relations with others.

10 February 1932

*

To think one can help others is a defect in the sadhana. How can one help others who is himself full of imperfection, falsehood and darkness? Those who really assist others must turn themselves into channels through which the Mother can act. Otherwise it is just vital ego trying to show others that one can "help".

Quite right. One can be a channel for the Mother's help, but the idea of oneself helping others comes in the way and so long as it is there one cannot be a truly effective channel.

17 April 1935

*

I believe that I cannot really help others or rightly influence them. Am I right in this?

One can help another truly only when it is the Mother that helps through him and he is aware of it and does not think that it is he who is helping.

6 May 1935

*

I have observed that someone with a sensitive disposition becomes very prone to the easy admission of forces from the vital world or from persons who are full of lower vital desires, especially when the sensitive person has a highly sympathetic attitude which manifests in nursing others or trying to save others, in lavishing emotional pity, in philanthropy, etc.

That is very interesting — for it agrees with the Mother's constant insistence that to feel sympathy or any emotion of the weak philanthropic kind with those possessed by vital forces is most dangerous as it may bring an attack upon oneself which may take any form. One must do what is to be done but abstain from all such weakness.

11 October 1936

*

Mother does not set much value on propaganda, but still work of that kind can be her work. Only it has to come from her impulsion, be done with quietude, with measure, in the way she wants it to be done. It is from the inner being that it should be done in union with the Mother's will, not from the vital mind's eager impulse. To concentrate most on one's own spiritual growth and experience is the first necessity of the sadhak — to be eager to help others draws away from the inner work. To grow in the spirit is the greatest help one can give to others, for then something flows out naturally to those around that helps them.

9 April 1937

The Mother's Help in Worldly Matters

The Mother does not usually give specific advice such as you ask for in regard to the Insurance company. You must learn to get the true inspiration in the mind's silence.

18 August 1932

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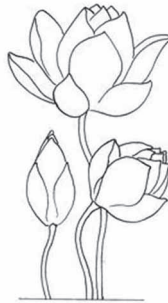
X has written me a letter and asked something which I have marked for you to read. Kindly tell me what to answer her.

It is not possible for the Mother to promise to give help in worldly matters. She intervenes only in special cases. There are some of course who by their openness and their faith get her help in any worldly difficulty or trouble but that is a different thing. They simply remember or call the Mother and in due time some result comes.

9 October 1935

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 309-25)



‘A NEW CENTRE OF THOUGHT IMPLIES A NEW CENTRE OF EDUCATION’

A NEW centre of thought implies a new centre of education. The system prevailing in our universities is one which ignores the psychology of man, loads the mind laboriously with numerous little packets of information carefully tied with red tape, and, by the methods used in this loading process, damages or atrophies the faculties and instruments by which man assimilates, creates and grows in intellect, manhood and energy. The new National Education, as inaugurated in Bengal, sought immensely to enlarge the field of knowledge to which the student was introduced, and in so far as it laid stress on experiment and observation, employed the natural and easy instrument of the vernacular and encouraged the play of thought on the subject of study, corrected the habit of spoiling the instruments of knowledge by the use of false methods. But many of the vicious methods and ideas employed by the old system were faithfully cherished by the new, and the domination of the Council by men wedded to the old lines was bound to spell a most unfavourable effect on the integrity of the system in its most progressive features. Another vital defect of the new education was that it increased the amount of information the student was required to absorb without strengthening the body and brain sufficiently to grapple with the increased mass of intellectual toil, and it shared with the old system the defect of ignoring the psychology of the race. The mere inclusion of the matter of Indian thought and culture in the field of knowledge does not make a system of education Indian, and the instruction given in the Bengal National College was only an improved European system, not Indian or National. Another error which has to be avoided and to which careless minds are liable, is the reactionary idea that in order to be national, education must reproduce the features of the old *tol* system of Bengal. It is not eighteenth century India, the India which by its moral and intellectual deficiencies gave itself into the keeping of foreigners, that we have to revive, but the spirit, ideals and methods of the ancient and mightier India in a yet more effective form and with a more modern organisation.

What was the secret of that gigantic intellectuality, spirituality and superhuman moral force which we see pulsating in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, in the ancient philosophy, in the supreme poetry, art, sculpture and architecture of India? What was at the basis of the incomparable public works and engineering achievements, the opulent and exquisite industries, the great triumphs of science, scholarship, jurisprudence, logic, metaphysics, the unique social structure? What supported the heroism and self-abandonment of the Kshatriya, the Sikh and the Rajput, the unconquerable national vitality and endurance? What was it that stood behind that civilisation second to none in the massiveness of its outlines or the perfection of its

details? Without a great and unique discipline involving a perfect education of soul and mind, a result so immense and persistent would have been impossible. It would be an error to look for the secret of Aryan success in the details of the instruction given in the old ashrams and universities so far as they have come down to us. We must know what was the principle and basis on which the details were founded. We shall find the secret of their success in a profound knowledge of human psychology and its subtle application to the methods of intellectual training and instruction.

At the basis of the old Aryan system was the all-important discipline of Brahma-charya. The first necessity for the building up of a great intellectual superstructure is to provide a foundation strong enough to bear it. Those systems of education which start from an insufficient knowledge of man, think they have provided a satisfactory foundation when they have supplied the student with a large or well-selected mass of information on the various subjects which comprise the best part of human culture at the time. The school gives the materials, it is for the student to use them, — this is the formula. But the error here is fundamental. Information cannot be the foundation of intelligence, it can only be part of the material out of which the knower builds knowledge, the starting-point, the nucleus of fresh discovery and enlarged creation. An education that confines itself to imparting knowledge, is no education. The various faculties of memory, judgment, imagination, perception, reasoning, which build the edifice of thought and knowledge for the knower, must not only be equipped with their fit and sufficient tools and materials, but trained to bring fresh materials and use more skilfully those of which they are in possession. And the foundation of the structure they have to build, can only be the provision of a fund of force and energy sufficient to bear the demands of a continually growing activity of the memory, judgment and creative power. Where is that energy to be found?

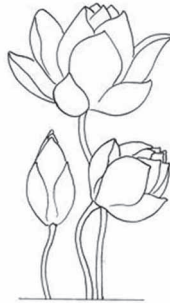
The ancient Aryans knew that man was not separate from the universe, but only a homogeneous part of it, as a wave is part of the ocean. An infinite energy, Prakriti, Maya or Shakti, pervades the world, pours itself into every name and form, and the clod, the plant, the insect, the animal, the man are, in their phenomenal existence, merely more or less efficient *ādhāras* of this Energy. We are each of us a dynamo into which waves of that energy have been generated and stored, and are being perpetually conserved, used up and replenished. The same force which moves in the star and the planet, moves in us, and all our thought and action are merely its play and born of the complexity of its functionings. There are processes by which man can increase his capacity as an *ādhāra*. There are other processes by which he can clear of obstructions the channel of communication between himself and the universal energy and bring greater and greater stores of it pouring into his soul and brain and body. This continual improvement of the *ādhāra* and increase in quantity and complexity of action of the informing energy, is the whole aim of evolution. When that energy is the highest in kind and the fullest in amount of which the human *ādhāra* is capable, and the *ādhāra* itself is trained utterly to bear the inrush

and play of the energy, then is a man *siddha*, the fulfilled or perfect man, his evolution is over and he has completed in the individual that utmost development which the mass of humanity is labouring towards through the ages.

If this theory be correct, the energy at the basis of the operation of intelligence must be in ourselves and it must be capable of greater expansion and richer use to an extent practically unlimited. And this also must be a sound principle, that the more we can increase and enrich the energy, the greater will be the potential range, power and activity of the functions of our mind and the consequent vigour of our intellectuality and the greatness of our achievement. This was the first principle on which the ancient Aryans based their education and one of the chief processes which they used for the increased storage of energy, was the practice of Brahma-charya.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 368-71)



‘ALL IS FULL OF THEE’

Karikal, April 13, 1914

EVERYTHING works together to prevent me from remaining a creature of habits, and in this new state, in the midst of these circumstances, so complex and unstable, I have never before so completely lived Thy immutable peace or rather the “I” has never before disappeared so completely that Thy divine peace alone is alive there. All is beautiful, harmonious and calm, all is full of Thee. Thou shinest in the dazzling sun, Thou art felt in the gentle passing breeze, Thou dost manifest Thyself in all hearts and live in all beings. There is not an animal, a plant that does not speak to me of Thee and Thy name is written upon everything I see.

O my sweet Lord, hast Thou at last granted that I may belong entirely to Thee and that my consciousness may be definitively united with Thine? What have I done to be worthy of so glorious a happiness? Nothing except to desire it, to want it with constancy — that is very little.

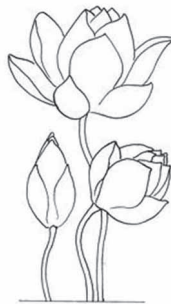
But, O Lord, since now it is Thy will and not mine that lives in me, Thou wilt be able to make this happiness profitable to all; and its very purpose will be to enable the greatest possible number of beings to perceive Thee.

Oh, may all know Thee, love Thee, serve Thee; may all receive the supreme consecration!

O Love, divine Love, spread abroad in the world, regenerate life, enlighten the intelligence, break the barriers of egoism, scatter the obstacles of ignorance, shine resplendent as sovereign Master of the earth.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 125)



COMMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING ANILBARAN'S 'The Living Atom'¹

A

Comments by Arjava (J. A. Chadwick) on Anilbaran's article

(1)

It is not and cannot be the claim of instructed scientists that their scientific work even *aims at* going "to the root of the matter" and giving "a full description of reality". Scientists and philosophers who discuss science take note of the *abstract* character of the scientific scheme of things; that is the reason why it is called science and not metaphysics. Therefore talk about science "going beyond itself in order to fulfil itself" would seem to involve a confusion. Either science is going to be cultivated or it is not; if it is cultivated it will be limited by its abstract character; if all investigators drop the pursuit of science and become metaphysicians, science simply ceases — so the question of its "fulfilling itself" could not arise.

Just as a judge has to pull up a pleader who strays off into irrelevant issues, so a scientist must check in himself the least deviation into disparate 'realms of being' (considerations and ways of regarding things that would be extra-scientific); he is concerned with gaining the best available point of vantage from which to survey his data and gain an intellectual mastery over them — this involves precise quantitative schematisation, and vague general assertions about the aspect of atoms as living organisms or as conscious minds (aspects which may very well be *there*, in the full concrete reality) are not in the least helpful to him. Only in this sense could your statement be found acceptable: "No one as yet dares to introduce this concept of a living atom into the domain of physics."

It could be only a verbal confusion (but we cannot be too much on our guard against these linguistic traps) to equate Heisenberg's "principle that we must not take a too mechanical view of the atom" with any 'principle' that biological or psychological views ought to be substituted!

Another point concerns the *integrating* of scientific formulations into a close-knit structure. This shows itself, for instance, in the new status accorded to the corpuscular aspect and the wave aspect of physical happenings. In the past, so far as concerns light, there were two rival 'theories' which alternately gained the upper

1. See *Mother India*, November 2013.

hand; but present-day Physics cannot do without either, and is accordingly so reformulating them that each "falls into its place" and they no longer compete with one another to occupy the *same* place (tentatively and roughly, this is made to result from each 'aspect' being regarded as the aspect that physical processes present *in relation to* a specific piece of apparatus used in a particular type of experiment).

Again, the unity within the structure of physical theories shows itself when some specific hypothesis is accepted, or rejected as the case may be, because of a whole bundle of converging lines of evidence. Often the historical occasion for this accepting or rejecting is not found to be the one most effective or easily apprehended when a systematic account is to be drawn up for giving a general review. Thus a very strong support for the present theory about the photo-electric effect comes from the reverse phenomenon, the production of X-rays by the impact of electrons (as pointed out in Pavitra's comments). X-rays are emitted from the scene of the collision with energy that is found to be correlated with the energy of the moving electrons before the collision; reverse these happenings and you would get electrons (now photo-electrons) emitted from the scene of the collision whose energy of motion is correlated with that of the impinging radiation (which may be X-rays, ultra-violet light, etc). Thus unity and simplicity in the structure of physical theory are enhanced if one rejects the hypothesis that photo-electrons have gained their energy of projection from within the atom itself. It is of course fundamental that "The assumption that the simplest classification of observed facts is the true one, is common to all science." The point to be dwelt on in the foregoing, then, is that the impinging electrons possessed, before their flight was brought to rest by the collision, a definite amount of energy which has now to be accounted for. The upshot seems to be that this energy is later found in the X-rays which are generated from the collision. It would hardly give any other plausible account of the subsequent destination of the energy initially possessed by the moving electrons. Turn next to the reverse phenomenon. Here "the simplest classification of observed facts" will be to give a similar account of the energy-transactions — viz., that in the initial state of affairs the impinging radiation (the photons) possesses such-and-such an amount of energy which is found, in the final state of affairs, to have been handed on to the photo-electrons.

(By the way, in what you have written there is nothing to indicate that you were bringing forward the atom's *extra-nuclear* energy to account for the ejection of photo-electrons. Each of the concrete illustrations you cite refers exclusively to nuclear energy, while your emphatic phrase about the atom being "a great store-house of power" becomes pointless and misleading if it is applied to extra-nuclear energy.)

(2)

Your revival of a once-tried and now discarded hypothesis would have no standing whatsoever, because scientific investigators who have first-hand acquaintance with the relevant phenomena report that the hypothesis in question will not do. Secondly, the fact you appeal to about the atom being “a store-house of power” refers to *the nucleus*; deep-seated changes in that nucleus are needed to release the power, and these changes involve “atomic disintegration” (breaking up of the original atom into one or more simpler atoms with release of stray individual electrons, etc.); and it is precisely evidence for such disintegration and transmutation that is wholly lacking in the case of the photo-electric effect — as, therefore, the same atom can presumably repeat this effect on different occasions, there is no escape from the conclusion that the projected electron has gained its energy from the impinging light and not from some energy-store within the atom. Thirdly, you are mistaken if you suppose that you can detach “the corpuscular theory” from the theoretical structure of physics without bringing down the main building in ruins. The “corpuscular” aspect and the “wave” aspect are as the woof and warp of a woven fabric; there is not, as you suggest, a contradiction between them in the form which they have recently taken. Each answers appropriately the question “How will the ‘natural’ course of happenings be modified if I poke my apparatus into it” — for the scientist *qua* scientist cannot offer metaphysical speculations as to how things go on when unobserved! For reasons connected with or analogous to the ‘Uncertainty Principle’, the *same* apparatus cannot in a given experiment disclose both wave properties and corpuscular properties. Apparatus constructed in a specific way asks the sample of physical reality submitted to its authority one or other of the *leading questions*: “Are you a swarm of moving corpuscles?”, “Are you a continuous train of waves?”, and in either case the sample takes the mould supplied to it and gives the docile answer, “Yes, I am.” As you will have read in those books, material particles — electrons, protons and so forth — can be persuaded to manifest wave properties; this being the basis of the new “Wave Mechanics”.

The saddling of natural science with the epithet “spiritual” (or “unspiritual” as the case may be) appears to me to be on a par with discussing whether a triangular shape is or is not virtuous, or whether prime numbers are or are not more intelligent than composite numbers. Leibniz worked out, in his metaphysical speculations about Monads, the view that the ultimate corpuscles of matter (assuming it to have such a “granular” structure) are living conscious beings. Scientists do not assert or deny this view, just as the astronomer *qua* astronomer cannot and never will be able to find theological concepts *relevant to* his science. For the *extra-scientific* considerations help not one whit to make quantitative or any other estimations about the future. Physics, for instance, requires to specify four quantum numbers to describe an atom’s state at a given moment; change in one or more of these numbers is a sign

of emission or absorption of a light corpuscle (photon). No conceivable 'progress' *within* science is going to displace this restriction to Quantity — to Mechanism, if you will. *That* "Mechanism" has only a verbal connection with the mechanistic or materialist philosophy which is in conflict with a spiritual philosophy.

17.11.1934

ARJAVA
(J. A. CHADWICK)

B

Sri Aurobindo's letter to Arjava apropos of his comments on Anilbaran's article

I think what you write is unexceptionable as a statement of the necessary limitations of Physical Science to its own field. It is only in the occult sciences that one can find the necessary connection or bridge between the spiritual and material which Anilbaran is demanding from the physical sciences. Anilbaran's attitude is a sort of reaction against the old error of the materialism which used science to discredit not only the mistakes of religion, but all spiritual truth — but that phase is now over and one can be content with recording its passing without trying to reverse the process by using science to support or establish spiritual truth — spiritual truth can exist in itself and needs no such buttressing from outside.

17.11.1934

SRI AUROBINDO

C

Comments by Pavitra (P. B. Saint-Hilaire) on Anilbaran's article

I feel that science cannot be spiritualised in itself, as something independent. Science can only become spiritual when the scientist reaches spiritual experience, and whatever you may say to him now about God, the Spirit, etc., is of no avail, as you cannot convey to him your *inner experience*; the words you use will only evoke in his mind the current religious notions and, if he is a true scientist, he will say at once that these mental beliefs have nothing to do with Science.

Some scientists believed in God, the Spirit and an unseen world, others did not, but such beliefs have no bearing upon their scientific value. In fact mental beliefs have little importance, if any. Even great vibhutis behaved as if they were unbelievers; they were conscious of an urge towards a certain kind of realisation and felt the power to achieve it, but did not care about God, the Spirit, etc.

You will say, and I know it is true, that you do not mean religion but spirituality, not mental beliefs but spiritual experience. But you cannot give spiritual experience

to a man who is not ready for it and a paper like yours is sure to rouse in a scientific mind an opposition due to its (apparent) use of a dogmatic religious argumentation.

If you think back to the middle age period, you will realise that Science had to go, and *still has to go*, on the way it has trodden, otherwise it would be crushed by religious narrowness, fixity and superstition from which it emerged with such difficulty. The time of Galileo, Bruno and others is not very far back and many sincerely religious people in Europe have nothing but regret for it. Any surrender of the critical and free mind, *at the present time*, would be a submission to the powers of falsehood and it would be immediately seized on by them for their own purpose. You can see how the spiritual aspiration created by the sufferings of the war and after-war has been turned into religious revivals and not towards a real seeking after truth. There is no spiritual discernment anywhere and you cannot give it by preaching. Many have preached and the critical mind feels that everyone is preaching for his own church and it has become quite rightly suspicious of preaching.

Much is a question of language also and the words you use have not the same meaning for another man. Many, though nominally atheists and materialists, have high ideals of truth or love and beauty. Einstein always refused to support any religious belief, but he is a good violinist and likes to play as a rest and relaxation from strenuous mental work, reaching thus an abode of harmony, peace and beauty, and perhaps receiving his inspiration through this channel. What more can you expect?

Moreover I doubt very much whether Science is really following the direction you are pointing at. The using, even by scientific authors, of the order, harmony and beauty of the universe as a support of their religious beliefs is not a new thing; you can find it abundantly in scientists of the 17th and 18th centuries, for instance, Pascal, Newton. It is especially frequent with English writers and is considered by many continental thinkers as an Anglo-Saxon weakness (inserting, as one put it, pages of the Bible into a logarithm table).

If you follow the work of the present school of physicists of Central Europe, you will find them extremely agnostic. They refuse even to consider anything that cannot be directly experienced and, urging that nothing can be known, use reasoning and mathematics as a symbolic handling to reach practical results which alone matter to them (e.g. Heisenberg's matrix-calculus).

I have put frankly what I consider as the main objections. There are also some minor ones.

I do not find that the conception of a living atom enables one to "see clear light where before were found only mist and darkness". Not that I deny life and consciousness to the atom, but I do not see how any of the difficulties of science is solved by simply saying that the atom has life and consciousness and will, or, for instance, how "admitting simply that the atom is a living body" explains Planck's quantum law. The difficulty is not so much to grasp that the atom absorbs or emits radiation by lumps, as there are many instances of a similar behaviour (e.g. a cash-

box, which is not a living body!) but to understand how such a quantity of energy can be present at a given time at a given place, that is, where the atom is. It is true that you support the theory that, in the photo-electric effect, the energy comes from within the atom. This is not a new theory and it has already been tried. Many facts seem to be against it, e.g. the converse of the photo-electric effect: the production of X-rays by the impacts of electrons. If it had been proved by the facts, scientists would have adopted it, as they have certainly no materialistic prejudice against it. Really, I do not see how it is more spiritual than the other or why you cast your whole weight on its side. It may be true or not; it is simply a question for experience to decide. And to enter into this line of mixing spiritual experience and intuition with mental reasonings and guessings and scientific experience and theories can lead nowhere and is dangerous. Dangerous, for any mistake in reasoning or lack of scientific knowledge will be interpreted by the learned reader as against spirituality and higher knowledge. This kind of hotch-potch appeals only to those who have some spiritual aspiration together with a very superficial knowledge of science; they feel comforted by reading it as it makes them believe that they have gained (at a very cheap price indeed) a much deeper insight into Reality than the disreputed scientist, so stupidly blind to spiritual evidence.

The explanation given of some experimental results by analogy with the behaviour of a living body appears to me somewhat childish. Of course, one would be free to state that, when an iron bar expands by heat, its atoms feel the heat and react in this way to the stimulus (probably because they like heat and shrink from cold!). This is the kind of explanation current in the pre-scientific period. (Nature abhors a vacuum! . . .) Nothing is gained by this anthropomorphism which really explains nothing, for its vagueness can never account for the *quantitative laws* (e.g. how much iron or copper expand, or why Nature abhors a vacuum only up to so many inches of mercury and not more) which are the only laws science really cares for.

The living atom is not a new thing. The comparison of the atom with a living body has been made several times, especially in radio-activity. The atom with its nucleus and surrounding electrons has been also compared to a living cell, with a nucleus and protoplasm. But emphasis has been laid upon the differences between atomic processes and those of the so-called "living beings" which pass through birth, life, decay and death. For instance, the process which is more akin to a living one is radio-activity: the atom takes birth, lives and breaks into other elements. It has been shown that, while one can well say that the atoms of radium die, they *never* become old: one atom newly born from uranium has exactly the same chance of dying within say one year as an atom born millions of years ago.

There seems to be a confusion between the two categories of atomic energy: the energy from the peripheric electrons, which is quite within our reach and is responsible for the absorption and emission of light and heat (and photo-electric

effect), and the energy from the nucleus (radio-activity). Moreover the storage of solar energy by a plant is a molecular and not an atomic process, viz. the dissociation of carbon dioxide and fixation of carbon.

One thing more. To a certain extent your picture of the living atom, endowed with a separate existence of its own, appears to me more material than the one after which science seems to be reaching: the electron (also the proton, I suppose, therefore all matter) being not of a corpuscular nature, but consisting only in vibrations — that is to say, a train of waves which, though spread more or less over all space, shows, by a process of interference similar to stationary waves, places of concentration where its actions and reactions are interpreted by us as the “presence” of an electron. My description is only tentative, the whole thing being highly mathematical and purely symbolical.

In short I will say that I feel that the way on which you would like to see science enter is not the right one. And in this particular instance, I cannot see that your conception of a living atom throws any light on the difficulties of the problem. In truth it does not explain anything. What alone could give to the scientist the kind of explanation you are aiming at is the granting of the fully awakened higher consciousness.

17.11.1934

PAVITRA
(P. B. SAINT-HILAIRE)

D

Pavitra's letter to Sri Aurobindo enclosing his comments on Anilbaran's article

Master and Lord,

I would like to know what truth there is in the remarks sent herewith. I have put down my thoughts frankly, more for me perhaps than for Anilbaran, so that you might tell me whether any of these criticisms come out from the stiffness or even the revolt of the “scientific” mind in me.

Shall I show this to Anilbaran? I hope he will understand that nothing of what I have written is directed against him.

17-11-1934

PAVITRA

E

Sri Aurobindo's reply to Pavitra apropos of his comments on Anilbaran's article

Yes, certainly, it can be shown to Anilbaran.

I think A.B. bases his ideas on the attempt of Jeans, Eddington and other English scientists to thrust metaphysical conclusions into scientific facts; it is necessary that he should appreciate fully the objections of more austere scientific minds to such a mixture. Moreover, spiritual seeking has its own accumulated knowledge which does not depend in the least on the theories or discoveries of science in the purely physical sphere. A.B.'s attempt like that of Jeans and others is a reaction against the illegitimate attempts of some scientific minds in the nineteenth century and of many others who took advantage of the march of scientific discovery to discredit or abolish as far as possible the religious spirit and to discredit also metaphysics as a cloudy verbiage, exalting science as the only clue to the truth of the universe. But I think that attitude is now dead or moribund; the scientists recognise, as you point out, the limits of their sphere. I may observe that the conflict between religion and science never arose in India (until the days of European education) because religion did not interfere with scientific discovery and scientists did not question religious or spiritual truth because the two things were kept on separate but not opposing lines, so the fear which you express may not appeal to A.B.'s mind so much as it would to a Western intelligence.

18.11.1934

SRI AUROBINDO

F

Anilbaran's reply to Arjava and Pavitra apropos of their comments on his article

Arjava and Pavitra,

I have carefully gone through the valuable comments you have kindly made on my article. My quarrel is not with the instructed scientists who do not claim that science goes to the root of the matter; but there are uninstructed scientists and science-mongers — their name is Legion — and their influence on the popular mind has been disastrous. The very vastness of the universe is used as an argument against spirituality. In a world, so it is argued, the extent of which has to be measured by millions of light years, is not man utterly insignificant, and his religion more so? In the face of all this, I do not really see any reason why it should be considered as illegitimate to point out that the results of scientific investigations are in harmony with spiritual truths, at least, there is no conflict between them; and that is the central theme of my article, everything else is, as Pavitra has rightly said, minor and accessory. My article is a sort of counter-attack which is regarded as the best defence, and the only consideration that appeals to me is what Sri Aurobindo has pointed out that it is not necessary. But that is an aspect which I could not realise as I found that luminaries like Leonard Woolf and Julian Huxley in England were still swearing in

the name of science to ridicule everything spiritual and were broadcasting throughout the country that “scientifically speaking, God is a hypothesis which is no longer necessary” (the underlining is mine); in France of today books like *La Défense de l’Occident* are being published to preach emphatically that “the India of Yoga and Vedanta has nothing to teach us”; and in our own blessed land only the other day the Indian Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University was seriously warning all learned men against Vedantism, Vivekanandism and spirituality in general.

As for physical science taking the help of spiritual truths, I confess I was not very sure myself; I only threw out a suggestion that science might try, and it served the purpose of stressing the main theme of my article. However it does not appear to me to be quite childish; after all, Truth is one and one of its aspects may throw some light on other aspects; it is not a fact that science confines itself solely to mathematical relations and quantitative measurements; it is constantly seeking physical explanations of these relations amid quantities and constructing hypotheses and models in search of which it often ransacks heaven and earth. Thus it conceives of space being finite and curved which can be “circumnavigated”; of light being a wave or a particle; of the universe as contracting and expanding alternately like a huge breathing giant, somewhat like Visva Purusha of the Gita. I have not asked science to give up its methods; I have clearly stated that a spiritual view of the world will make no practical difference in the scope and methods of scientific investigations, as science will confine itself to the deterministic and mechanical aspect of outer Nature. I did not offer the analogies as proofs, but only as suggesting lines of enquiry and showing possibilities. Analogies have often proved very fruitful in scientific investigations, and one need not have any prejudice against them. Nowhere have I even hinted that science should give up critical reasoning and depend on vague conjectures; on the contrary, my criticism is that science is not sufficiently rational; it can be as dogmatic as anything. My only suggestion is that science should not hesitate to accept a concept or hypothesis, if it can be shown to give a rational explanation of experimental facts. My opening sentence about science exceeding itself should be read in the light of all these statements. My main point is that science and spirituality need not be at loggerheads as they always have been in the West; it is essential for the progress of human civilisation and culture that they should be in harmony with each other as they had been in India where physical science made great progress before it was interrupted by the decline in interest and intellectual vigour of the succeeding generations of Indians.

I am conscious that my knowledge of science is very superficial; and that consciousness has made me very, very careful not to make any statement to which exception can be taken from the point of view of scientific knowledge. Only in explaining the photo-electric effect, I have done something like rushing in where angels fear to tread. But then I was confident that if I made any gross blunder, you were there to correct me. I do not as yet see why my theory cannot be accepted. I

should have said expressly that the greater part of the energy of the atom remains locked up in the nucleus and I am thankful to you for having pointed that out; but as you will agree, that does not affect my argument at all; for the energy of the photo-electron is not much and it can come from the peripheral region. I have already said that so far as I understand the position, no true integration has been made between the two theories of light; they are still regarded as contradictory by scientists, though they cannot reject any of them; the so-called reconciliation has been made by making a ghost of one of them, and that has satisfied nobody though it has been accepted tentatively. You say many facts seem to be against my theory; will you kindly mention them? I have considered all the objections raised hitherto, some of which can be answered only on the supposition that in certain respects the atom behaves as a living body. You say that a very strong support for the present theory about the photo-electric effect comes from the reverse process, the production of X-rays by the impact of electrons. As a matter of fact, I did not find this particular objection raised against the wave theory in any of the recent scientific books that I have consulted on this subject. The reverse process will be explained in the same manner as the photo-electric process. In one case the atom is excited by the electron to emit X-rays, in the other case the atom is excited by X-rays to emit electrons. What happens within the atom is a mystery; no one can say why or how one kind of energy is transformed into another kind. The mechanistic theory is that the atom only serves as a transmitter of energy; my theory is that the impinging energy only serves to awaken and stimulate the atom which then emits energy from within itself and for that emission there is a simple law given by Planck's formula. One may not accept this theory on other grounds, but how is it more complex?

The reverse process, the emission of X-rays from an atom, can be very well explained by the wave theory, and is actually done so. You raise the question how the initial energy of the impinging electrons is to be accounted for, and you accept the explanation that it is later found in the X-rays generated from the collision. This seems to me to be too simple an explanation. The atom is a store-house of energy; even outside the nucleus, it has electrons moving in different energy levels. How is it that the incoming energy is not mixed up with the internal energy of the atom and thus changed in quantity? Every collision of an atom with light or electrons does not produce X-rays or photo-electrons; where does the impinging energy go? The simplest explanation is, and I suppose it is accepted by the present theory, that the energy is absorbed by the atom. Only in certain cases, emission takes place after the absorption, and the nature of the emission depends as much upon the nature of the incident energy as on the condition in which the atom is at that particular moment. The atom does not mechanically transmit the energy it receives, it makes it its own and then under certain conditions lets out something from within itself; this is borne out by the fact that different substances emit different "characteristic" X-rays when invaded by electrons from the same source.

You regard it as fundamental that: —

“The assumption that the simplest classification of observed facts is the true one, is common to all science.”

Have I not followed this very principle in abolishing dualism in the explanation of light and bringing all optical phenomena under the wave theory?

ANILBARAN

G

Anilbaran's letter to Sri Aurobindo enclosing his reply to Arjava's and Pavitra's comments on his article

Sri Aurobindo,

I gave this reply to Pavitra and Arjava. Pavitra says it is no use continuing the discussion and that he himself is trying in his own way to make a synthesis. But he feels very strongly that the *publication* of my article may bring discredit on the Ashram. Will it not be better if out of respect for the feelings of Arjava and Pavitra I omit from my article those passages where I have tried to deduce scientific results from the living atom? That will not, I suppose, affect the unity and the central theme of my article. Or should I drop the article altogether?

5.12.1934

ANILBARAN

H

Sri Aurobindo's reply to Anilbaran apropos of his letter about Arjava's and Pavitra's comments on his article

I don't know. Pavitra's objection seemed to be aimed at other things besides the living atom. The difficulty is that you are a non-scientist trying to impose your ideas on the most difficult because most material field of science — physics. It is only if you were a scientist yourself basing your ideas on universally acknowledged scientific facts or else your own discoveries — though even then with much difficulty — that you could get a hearing or your opinion have any weight. Otherwise you open yourself to the accusation of pronouncing in a field where you have no authority, just as the scientist himself does when he pronounces on the strength of his discoveries that there is no God. When the scientist says that “scientifically speaking, God is a hypothesis which is no longer necessary” he is talking arrant nonsense — for the existence of God is not and cannot be and never was a scientific hypothesis or problem at all, it is and always has been a spiritual or a metaphysical problem. You cannot speak scientifically about it at all either pro or con. The metaphysician

or the spiritual seeker has a right to point out that it is nonsense; but if you lay down the law to the scientist in the field of science, you run the risk of having the same objection turned against you.

As to the unity of all knowledge, that is a thing *in posse*, not yet *in esse*. The mechanical method of knowledge leads to certain results, the higher method leads to certain others, and they at many points fundamentally disagree. How is the difference to be bridged — for each seems valid in its own field; it is a problem to be solved, but you cannot solve it in the way you propose. Least of all in the field of physics. In psychology one can say that the mechanical or physiological approach takes hold of the thing by the blind end and is the least fruitful of all — for psychology is not primarily a thing of mechanism and measure, it opens to a vast field beyond the physical instrumentalities of the body-consciousness. In biology one can get a glimpse of something beyond mechanism, because there is from the beginning a stir of consciousness progressing and organising itself more and more for self-expression. But in physics you are in the very domain of the mechanical law where process is everything and the driving consciousness has chosen to conceal itself with the greatest thoroughness — so that, “scientifically speaking”, it does not exist there. One can discover it there only by occultism and yoga, but the methods of occult science and of yoga are not measurable or followable by the means of physical science — so the gulf remains still in existence. It may be bridged one day, but the physicist is not likely to be the bridge-builder, so it is no use asking him to try what is beyond his province.

5.12.1934

SRI AUROBINDO

Everybody now knows that science is not a statement of the truth of things, but only a language expressing a certain experience of objects, their structure, their mathematics, a coordinated and utilisable impression of their processes — it is nothing more. Matter itself is something (a formation of energy perhaps?) of which we know superficially the structure as it appears to our mind and senses and to certain examining instruments (about which it is now suspected that they largely determine their own results, Nature adapting its replies to the instrument used), but more than that no scientist knows or can know.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – I, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 233)

HEAVEN'S LIGHT AND MORTAL DOOM

The Parthenon's pillars built to upbear the sky
Could keep not even an earthly roof; and all
That colour kindled for the Eternal's eye
In deep Ajanta fades; no rhythms recall
The two grand plays the terrible chisel-stroke
Of the titan mind of Aeschylus set beside
Prometheus Bound: their power Time's brute hand broke.
Heaven's light passes — divine Aurobindo died.

But this one death where Heaven's own self gave room
For dire eclipse of its eternity
Has spent the whole blind force of mortal doom
Against the Soul's vision of a wondrous sod
In which the Undying can work His artistry.
Now Man breaks free to grow for ever God.

(1954)¹

[*Amal's remarks about the poem:*]

. . . The phrase haunting you — “divine Aurobindo died” — from a poem of mine which you couldn't find has somehow been ringing in my own ears time and again during the last month or so. It is not only “stunning”, as you say: it is also heart-shattering. It sums up in three climactic words the long tragedy of our untransformed world. And there is a concentrated art in it which drives it home with a terrible poignancy as if putting a final seal on the transience and unhappiness of the cosmic condition. The art lies in the consonance-assonance of the two words “divine” and “died” in the midst of diametrically opposite suggestions. And the art of this connection gets a secret support from the occurrence of the *d*-sound in the name “Aurobindo”, a sound which subtly counteracts the four-syllabic length of the name dividing — triumphantly, as it were — those two suggestions. The horror and the hopelessness of the mutability of even the greatest factors — or actors — in the

1. “Heaven's Light and Mortal Doom”, *The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)*, 1993, p. 395.

earth-drama are clinched by the three-worded phrase's position at the end of the many-versed sonorous octave of the sonnet. Then comes the sestet's surprise — the conjuring up of the paradox of a death that is a breakthrough into a new life for a humanity that has always dreamt of the undying although faced everywhere with the passing of the most beautiful, the most lofty. Yes, "dreamt", but mortality has ever intruded to make the vision splendid fade, and the most disastrous touch came when the hope was at its highest — during the career of Sri Aurobindo, the Supramental Avatar.

25.3.1988

(*Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, pp. 274-75)

* * *

. . . the next question is perhaps the toughest in its two aspects: the conquest of the cosmic principle of death and the victory over the death-power attacking the individual body. What I have tried to expound in my article, "The Passing of Sri Aurobindo", is summed up in the sestet of my sonnet, "Heaven's Light and Mortal Doom".

The last six lines speak of the potentiality created for physical immortality by the absorption of the cosmic principle of Death by Sri Aurobindo's body consenting to give up its individual future of transformation so as to clear the path for his co-worker the Mother. As I learned afterwards from the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's self-sacrifice, the fulfilment of what was implied by — as you put it — "the strange sentence of Sri Aurobindo saying that one of the two should go away", had for its consequence the establishment of the "Mind of Light" in her. She said: "The moment Sri Aurobindo left his body, what he had called the Mind of Light was realised in me." She defined this new power as "the physical mind receiving the Supramental Light." Here was the first phase — the preliminary opening up — of

A pathway towards Immortality

for the very body. The bodily sense was confirmed by the Mother's words on the two lines with which my poem on her realisation commenced:

The core of a deathless sun is now the brain
And each grey cell bursts to omniscient gold.²

2. "Mind of Light", *Ibid.*, p. 573.

The Mother said that these lines were revelatory: the truth of the realisation had exactly expressed itself.

(1991)

(From a letter to a friend)

* * *

. . . Now for your scruple about my use of the word “death” for Sri Aurobindo’s leaving his body. You have rightly guessed that the adjective “mysterious” should modify — at least partly — the usual association of this word. But even if “mysterious” were not here, “death” would be the *mot juste* here in order to stress, as I have done, how really living in a most extraordinary sense was Sri Aurobindo when to all appearance life had fled. To drive home this sense a touch of stark “realism” was needed. In another earlier context the same touch was equally called for. You may remember my sonnet “Heaven’s Light and Mortal Doom”. There the last line of the octave and the first two of the sestet run:

Heaven’s light passes — divine Aurobindo died.

But this one death where Heaven’s own self gave room
For dire eclipse of its eternity . . .

The Mother never liked the word “death” in relation to Sri Aurobindo. But when I showed her this sonnet, there was not the slightest demurring. She wholly accepted the usage as an inevitable part of the extraordinary thing I was visualising in the poem. Besides, from the standpoint of “form” — the rhyme-scheme and the metre — nothing else could replace it.

(Undated)

(Life-Poetry-Yoga, Vol. 2, p. 252)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his own body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary.

12 April 1953

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 9)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of November 2013)

Chapter: XXVIII

Farewell to the Academics

There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service. You will earn your living that you may live for her sake. You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice.

Sri Aurobindo

(Last address to the students of the Bengal National College)¹

In a dignified function organised at the Calcutta Town Hall on the 14th of August 1906 the National Council of Education formally declared the Bengal National College open. Adequate preparations had already been made and the College started functioning right from the next day, the 34th birthday of its Principal, Sri Aurobindo.

Here is a picture of Sri Aurobindo as the Principal of the College (now transformed into Jadavpur University) on the opening day itself:

We were admitted to the college on the very first day. Sri Aurobindo was the first Principal and the sage Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay (founder of the Dawn Society) the Superintendent . . .

I saw a young man of serene appearance seated at the central hall. He wore a shirt wrapped by a chuddar . . . His eyes, detached from the world around, was as if concentrated in the free realm of his inner being. He was Sri Aurobindo who gave a talk addressing the professors and the students that day . . . Presenting a critical comparison of the native character with the European, he said that if the English conquered the world, it was because of their dedication to action. When this Asuric strength for action would be harmonised with the spirituality of

India, our national character would develop to a degree that would be unique.²

Sri Aurobindo diligently discharged his duty towards the College from 15 August 1906 till 2 August 1907, twelve days short of a year. While the entire period of his stay in Kolkata was a trying time for him, this phase of a half-decade was especially difficult because of severe setback to his health during November-December 1906 and once again during the early part of January 1907. He had to leave for Deoghar on the 11th of January where he convalesced till the 1st week of April. He was back in Calcutta on the 9th of April. His illness, however, did not exempt him from his editorial commitment to the *Bande Mataram*. His contributions continued to appear in the paper.

But the commitment to the College and the *Bande Mataram* — the latter often faced financial hardship despite growing more and more popular — were only a part of his burden. Mobilising the Nationalists, chastening the groups of young revolutionaries functioning under the banner of the Anushilan Samiti and the Manik-tala group — as well as responding to the demands of other publications such as the Bengali *Yugantar* that had been launched on the 12th of March 1906 under his inspiration before he finally came over to Calcutta, and the Bengali *Nabashakti* that appeared in May 1907, had their share of claims on his attention and guidance. The greater part of the factual details of his role in different organisations and publications are not available — and Sri Aurobindo himself did not care to speak a word more than what he thought necessary even when questioned — but memoirs, comments and observations left by those who were linked with such adventures and enterprises speak of an incredible source of energy that he was. Let us look into a highly valuable work of research, *Aurobindo and Jugantar*, undertaken by a leader of the later phase of the *Yugantar* group, the veteran Parliamentarian, economist and a minister at the Centre, Arun Chandra Guha (1892-1983):

To implement his objective of having a public propaganda “intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence” four papers were started: *Bande Mataram*, *Sandhya*, *Yugantar* and *Navashakti* which were persistently preaching the cult of Indian independence and of armed revolution. These papers had an informal common editorial board with Aurobindo as its head. These papers were preaching the same gospel of national independence — only with the difference of either an outspoken or a subtle language. *Yugantar* and *Sandhya* were using very blunt language while *Bande Mataram* and *Navashakti* were using subtle language. At one time Aurobindo took up the direct editorship of *Navashakti*. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya of *Sandhya* was also closely associated with the *Bande Mataram* and similarly Aurobindo was also closely associated with the *Sandhya*. These papers had a definitive contribution to the rousing of the conscience of the dormant people. The broad policy of these

four papers was provided by Aurobindo — “Our ideal is that of Swaraj or absolute autonomy free from foreign control. We claim the right of every nation to live its own life, by its own energies and according to its own culture and ideals.”

In the *Bande Mataram* he was preaching the policies in a very subtle manner; never could the Government launch a case against the editorials of the *Bande Mataram*. The editor of *The Statesman* complained that these editorials were “too diabolically clever, crammed full of sedition between the lines, but legally unattackable because of the skill of the language.” The prosecution launched against the *Bande Mataram* in 1907 was not for any editorial, but for something appearing in the correspondents’ columns.³

From 12 November 1906 till the end of April 1907 Sri Aurobindo was on leave from the National College. But despite his interrupted work as a professor and the Principal, he was deeply loved by the students and valued by the staff and the management. It appears that he was more conscious than the others about the embarrassment he may cause to the College on account of any vengeful action the rulers could take against him any time. The *Yugantar* office was searched on the 3rd of July 1907 because, the Police claimed, it published objectionable articles. The newspaper did not print its editor’s name. Editing and writing were done mostly by Barindra, Upendranath Bandopadhyaya and Debabrata Bose.⁴ But it was Bhupendranath Dutt who identified himself as its editor. His house was searched and he was arrested on the 5th of July. As instructed by Sri Aurobindo, he refused to defend himself in the court because “*Yugantar*, a paper ostentatiously revolutionary advocating armed resurrection, could not do that and must refuse to plead in a British court.”⁵

Presidency Magistrate Kingsford ordered him to suffer a year’s rigorous imprisonment for contempt of court.

The *Yugantar* case and the judgment created quite a sensation; the capacity of the printing machines at the disposal of the management did not allow the circulation to match the demand. Nevertheless, twenty thousand copies, a considerable figure in those days — were churned out and each copy was generally shared by several readers.

The *Yugantar* case was an ominous enough indication for the *Bande Mataram*. Whatever evidence was there to suggest that Sri Aurobindo was its editor was eliminated well before the expected raid that took place — on the 30th of July. The police ransacked the desks and probed every nook and corner of the building and bundled away bagfuls of files and papers. They examined them as thoroughly as possible to find some evidence to link the seditious implications in the articles the paper carried with Sri Aurobindo. It was, alas, an essay in futility.

But he must have felt sure that that the Government was not going to rest until

it arrested him under some pretext. It was time, he thought, when he should take steps to protect the National College from any attack from the Government on ground of his association with it. Indeed, the way he managed his daily routine would suggest that he had as if entered into a mysterious pact with time. For example, on the 4th of July we find him attending a meeting of the National Council of Education; he attends a public meeting on the same day at the College Square. He had to write his article entitled “Try Again” for the next day’s issue of the *Bande Mataram* (5th of July). Of course, editorials for the newspaper flowed from his pen with a spontaneity that was incredible — as a number of statements from surprised witnesses inform us. To turn to Balai Deb Sharma once again on this point:

Let me present a glimpse of the *Bande Mataram* office . . . It is night, about 10 p.m. All other items are almost ready, barring only the editorial. Sri Aurobindo is seated like a self-forgetful poet or a Yogi absorbed deep within himself. Shyam Sundar Babu came and asked for the editorial. Sri Aurobindo tore away a scrap of paper from the packing. Beginning from a corner of it he wrote on and completed his piece in ten or fifteen minutes. He did neither eliminate nor add a single word, neither paused nor stopped for a second. Next morning the write-up spread out as a hymn of the national spirit. The tyrant trembled; flames of enthusiasm flashed in the heart of the nation . . .⁶

We can gain some more impression of the time he was passing through from a piece of reminiscence left by the outstanding historian Dr. Radhakumud Mukhopadhyay (1884-1963), Sri Aurobindo’s professorial colleague:

I happened perhaps to be one of the very few who had the rare good fortune of coming into direct touch with Sri Aurobindo as a youth in the full bloom of his life and power when he was pleased to take over the appointment of Principalship of the Bengal National College at which I was appointed Professor of History directly working under him. I recall many personal anecdotes about his life and work in those stirring times when the country, especially Bengal, was thrown into a whirlwind agitation over the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon.

At that time Sri Aurobindo took up the personal leadership of the Revolution which ushered in the nation’s battle for freedom. Every day he would go from the National College to the evening gathering at the house of one of India’s patriotic martyrs, Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick in Wellington Square. The gathering, by its thought and inspiration, resembled that of the French encyclopaedists, the intellectuals who paved the way of the French Revolution . . .

At home, in the domestic sphere, at the College, I had rare glimpses of his innate spirituality which made him always keep calm and reticent. I used to sit

by him and had the natural advantage of studying some of his remarkable traits at close quarters. . .

One evening his elder brother Poet Manomohan Ghose came rushing to Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick's in great excitement: "Aurobindo, you forget that you are a born poet and must not drift into politics. Politics is not your mission in life. Your mission is poetry." Sri Aurobindo smiled at the anxiety of his brother for his future.⁷

Dr. Arthur R. S. Roy, who for a while had been appointed by Sri Aurobindo, at the recommendation of educationist Dr. P. K. Roy, to teach Philosophy at the National College, had also the opportunity to work later as the manager-cum-accountant of the *Bande Mataram*. His recollection brings out the empathy with which Sri Aurobindo treated his workers:

I knew nothing of accounts or managing a press; . . . when an accountant, one of the few Chartered Accountants in those days, began to point out my mistakes and expressed his emphatic disgust about my book-keeping, Aurobindo just looked at him and smiled at me and said, "He does not know book-keeping and we should have had a cashier who knew." I was much eased in mind and thankful as I was getting quite nervous at the terrible bungle I had made of it all. It was here that I called him the Chief, a title that stuck to him naturally. It was at the *Bande Mataram* that I became closer to him and felt that there was something big in him; but at that time I did not quite understand what it was that was big in him . . . He was a grand scholar . . . I was astounded to learn that in two years he had mastered Sanskrit and had actually translated the *Bhagavat Gita*. He recommended to me the study of the *Bhagavat Gita* and gave me a typed copy of his translation in metrical verse with corrections and annotations in his own handwriting that was later stolen from me in New York City . . . I believe he worked for 56 hours at a stretch without rest and he was even-tempered and seemed fresh throughout. He became a demigod to me.⁸

On the 2nd of August Sri Aurobindo resigned as the Principal of the National College and also from the governing body of the National Council of Education.

Even though it failed to discover a single clue to associate Sri Aurobindo with any writing that smacked of sedition, the Government ran out of patience. A warrant was issued against him and the Police appeared at the *Bande Mataram* office to arrest him on the 16th of August in the evening, but did not find him there. He was at the residence of his friend Byomkesh Chakravarty, Bar-at-Law (Sri Aurobindo pays tribute to his legal skill in his reminiscences of his prison days, *Kara Kahini* in Bengali) where the news reached him immediately. The Police was spared the trouble of running about for catching him. Obviously in consultation with this eminent

lawyer he surrendered himself at the Police Station. He was arrested and enlarged on bail, and in accordance with its conditions, presented himself at the office of the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta. He was instructed to appear before the Chief Presidency Magistrate on the 26th of August.

Five days before the trial began and the wide reactions shook the society and two days before Rabindranath Tagore wrote his immortal poem *Aurobindo Rabindrer laho namaskar* — Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, salutes thee — the staff and the students of the National College gathered together in a solemn atmosphere to express their deep sense of distress at the departure of their great teacher. It will not be easy to find a second instance of an organisation unanimously and openly going public in the support of one towards whom an oppressive foreign ruling clique was so conspicuously hostile.

The assembly passed three unambiguous resolutions. This is how the event was reported in *The Bengalee* in its issue of 23rd August 1907:

A meeting of the students and teachers of the Bengal National College and School, Calcutta, was held on Wednesday, the 21st August, at 3.45 p.m. to express regret at the resignation of Mr. Aurobindo Ghosh, B.A. (Cantab) Principal, and to record an expression of sympathy with him in his present troubles, under the Presidentship of Babu Satish Chandra Mukherjee, M.A., B.L., Hony. Principal and Superintendent of the college. It was resolved: —

1. That the students and teachers of the Bengal National College and School in a meeting assembled do hereby express their hearty appreciation of the eminent qualities as a teacher of Shrijukta Aurobindo Ghosh, B.A. (Cantab), Late Principal, and record their deep regret at his resignation on the 2nd of August 1907 of the high office which he had filled with such conspicuous ability and at so much personal sacrifice to himself during the first year of the existence of the college.

Proposed by Sj. Radhakumud Mukherjee, M.A., P.R.S. (Lecturer); Seconded by Sj. Srish Chandra Banerjee (Student); Supported by Sj. Bipin Behari Chakravorty (Lecturer).

2. That the meeting desires to express its heart-felt sympathy with Srijukta Aurobindo Ghose, B. A. (Cantab) in his present troubles.

Proposed by Sj. Prasanna Cumar Bose, M.A. (Lecturer); Seconded by Sj. Gopi M. Dutta and Aditya N. Maitra (Students); Supported by Sj. Manindra Nath Banerjee and Kissory M. Gupta (Lecturer).

3. That a copy of these resolutions be forwarded to Srijukta Aurobindo Ghose over the signature of the President of the meeting.

Proposed by Sj. B.B. Ranade, L.M.E. (Supdt., Technical Deptt.); Seconded by Sj. Pandit Mokshada Charan Samadhyayi; Supported by Sj. Satish Chandra Banerjee (Student).⁹

A decision was also taken to install a photograph of Sri Aurobindo on the wall of the College hall. A well-researched testimony says:

Accordingly the next day Srijukta Aurobindo Ghose was invited to come over to the college premises to be photographed. When the boys of the college and school came up to their beloved Principal one by one, bowed at his feet and garlanded him, it was a sight for gods to see! After two photographs were taken, the teachers requested him on behalf of the boys to speak to them some words of advice. Sri Aurobindo then delivered a speech, "Advice to Students".¹⁰

Indeed, the extempore speech exemplified the living spirit that inspired so many of the brilliant young men of the time to sacrifice their lives, even when some of them did so in a way deviant from the way of an ideal revolution. This chapter began with an extract from the speech that according to an official publication of the Jadavpur University, "has become historic".¹¹ The chapter concludes with another extract:

When I come back I wish to see some of you becoming rich, rich not for yourselves but that you may enrich the Mother with your riches. I wish to see some of you becoming great, great not for your own sakes, not that you may satisfy your own vanity, but great for her, to make India great, to enable her to stand up with head erect among the nations of the earth, as she did in days of yore when the world looked up to her for light. Even those who will remain poor and obscure, I want to see their very poverty and obscurity devoted to the motherland.¹²

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

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2. Balai Deb Sharma: 'Sri Aurobindo Smriti' in the anthology *Sri Aurobindo Smriti*, (Bengali) edited by Biswanath Dey; Sahityam, Kolkata.
3. Arun Kumar Guha: *Sri Aurobindo and Yugantar*; Sahitya Samsad, Kolkata.
4. Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*; SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 24. Upendranath was a sub-editor of the *Bande Mataram*. Debabrata Bose, after his acquittal in Alipore Conspiracy Case, joined the Ramakrishna Mission.
5. *Agniyuger Agnikatha* (Bengali), edited by Ansuman Bandopadhyay; Publication Department, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

6. Balai Deb Sharma: 'Sri Aurobindo Smriti'.

7. Extract from a paper the historian was to read at a function to mark the Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo that took place on the 18th of August 1963 in Kolkata under the presidentship of historian and educationist Dr. Kalidas Nag. But he could not attend it and he passed away shortly thereafter, in October. The paper was published in the *Mother India*, December 1963.

8. Dr. Arthur R. S. Roy, Ph.D. (Berlin), D.Litt. (N.Y.): 'Sri Aurobindo Ghose — Memoirs of Long Ago' reproduced in *Sri Aurobindo's Action*, July 1973.

9. "Sri Aurobindo: Advice to National College Students" — a brochure compiled by Biswajit Gangopadhyay to mark the Centenary of the event in 2007; Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *The National Council of Education, Bengal, 1906-1966*; Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

12. Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*; CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 656.

Patriotic sentiments are not incompatible with our yoga — far from it — to will for the strength and the integrity of one's Motherland is a quite legitimate sentiment, the will that she may make progress and that more and more she may manifest, in full freedom, the truth of her being, is a fine and noble will which cannot be harmful for our yoga.

But one must not get excited, one must not plunge prematurely into action. One can and should pray, aspire and will for the victory of the truth and, at the same time, continue to discharge one's daily duties and wait quietly for the unmistakable sign to come, indicating the action to be done.

With my blessings.

27 October 1962

The Mother

(*Words of the Mother – I*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 356)

ANANDA MATH — NOT JUST A FIGMENT OF THE NOVELIST'S IMAGINATION

This is with reference to the chapter 'Miracle of a Phrase and a Song' in Prof. Manoj Das' series on the Mahayogi which appeared in the September issue of *Mother India*, page 758:

He described the manner in which the mantra had been revealed to Bankim Chandra, probably by a sannyasi under whose teaching he was.

This has now been identified. I provide the details below.

1.1. The seeds of Bankimchandra's anti-British sentiments were sown in Berhampore, the district headquarters of Murshidabad district (West Bengal) where he was posted as a Deputy Magistrate [he was the first Bengali to be offered a job in the civil service after he graduated with grace marks in Bengali, his examiner having been none other than Iswarchandra Vidyasagar who did not give him pass marks!]. It was the 15th of December 1873 when Bankimchandra was, as usual, crossing the Barrack Square field opposite the Collectorate in his palanquin while some Englishmen were playing cricket. Suddenly one Lt. Colonel Duffin stopped the palanquin with some abusive remarks and insisted that it should be taken out of the field. When Bankim refused to abandon his customary route, Duffin apparently forced him to alight from the palanquin and pushed him violently (as reported in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 8.1.1874). Witnesses to the incident included the Raja of Lalgola Jogindranarain Roy, Durgashankar Bhattacharji of Berhampore, Judge Bacebridge, Reverend Barlow, Principal Robert Hand and some others. Furious at the insult, Bankimchandra filed a criminal case against the Colonel, with the Lalgola Raja, Durgashankar Bhattacharji and Hand cited as witnesses. Duffin had to get a lawyer from Krishnagar in Nadia district, as no one in Berhampore was willing to appear for him, while all the local lawyers had signed vakalatnamas for Bankimchandra.

1.2. On 12th January 1874 the Magistrate, Mr. Winter, summoned Duffin and had just begun to question him when Judge Bacebridge entered and requested a few words in his chamber. After a little while they called in Bankimchandra and Duffin. Apparently they told Bankimchandra that Duffin had not recognised that Bankim was a Deputy Magistrate and regretted the incident. They requested Bankimchandra to withdraw the case. This he was not prepared to do and after much persuasion agreed, provided Duffin offered a formal apology in open court. Reluctantly,

Duffin agreed. Winter took his chair in the court thereafter and in his presence, before a packed court, Lt. Col. Duffin offered an unconditional apology to Bankimchandra. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 15.1.1874 reports: “*It appears that the colonel and the Babu were perfect strangers to each other and he did not know who he was when he affronted him. On being informed afterwards of the position of the Babu, Col. Duffin expressed deep contrition and a desire to apologise. The apology was made in due form in open court where about a thousand spectators, native and Europeans, were assembled.*”

2. Almost immediately thereafter we find Bankimchandra taking three months leave. After this incident there must have been considerable resentment in the Berhampore Cantonment among the British militia and, apprehending bodily harm, Rao Jogindranarain Roy took Bankimchandra away to stay with him in Lalgola.

3. In Lalgola the Guru of the Raja’s family was Pandit Kali Brahma Bhattacharya who practised tantrik sadhana. Kishanchand Bhakat has obtained an excerpt of seven *slokas* from a book in the family of Kali Brahma Bhattacharya whose rhythm, sense and even some words bear an uncanny resemblance to Bankim’s song. It is most probable that Bankimchandra took the first few lines of his immortal “Bande Mataram” (up to *ripudalabarining*) from here because in the first edition of the novel in *Banga Darshan* (Chaitra 1287, pp. 555-556), these lines are given within quotation marks and the spelling is ungrammatically retained as “*matarang*”. Bankim faced considerable criticism on this account from Haraprasad Shastri, Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay, and others. In the later editions he removed the quotation marks and changed the spelling to the proper Sanskrit “*mataram*”, wiping out all trace of the borrowing.

4.1. There is an image of Kali in the Lalgola palace temple that is unique. Its four hands are bereft of any weapon. The two lower hands are folded in front (*karabadhha*), the palm of one covered by that of the other, just as a prisoner’s hands are shackled. From behind, the image is shackled to the wall with numerous iron chains. Kali is black, of terrifying mien, naked, a serpent between her feet, and Shiva a supine corpse before her. This represented to Bankim what Bhārat, the Mother, had become:

The Brahmacharin said, “Look on the Mother as she now is.”

Mohendra said in fear, “It is Kali.”

“Yes, Kali enveloped in darkness, full of blackness and gloom. She is stripped of all, therefore naked. Today the whole country is a burial ground, therefore is the Mother garlanded with skulls. Her own God she tramples under her feet. Alas, my Mother!” (Sri Aurobindo’s translation, 1909). [CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 504]

4.2. It is extremely significant that on either side of this unusual Kali we find Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kartik and Ganesh, who are never represented with this goddess. It is in this Kali that Bankim envisioned *Mother as she shall be* and that is why he wrote, “*tvam hi durga dashapraharana dharini* — Thou, indeed, art Durga, ten-armed, weapon-wielding”. It is this temple that is the source of Bankimchandra’s *Monastery of Bliss*.

4.3. To reach this temple a tunnel existed, whose vestiges are still visible, from another temple that is now in ruins and covered up with jungle. This ruined edifice was the Jagaddhatri temple that Bankim would have seen and described in his novel thus:

There he saw an image of Jagaddhatri, Protectress of the world, wonderful, perfect, rich with every ornament . . .

“The Mother as she was . . .

She trampled underfoot the elephants of the forest and all wild beasts and in the haunt of the wild beasts she erected her lotus throne. She was covered with every ornament, full of laughter and beauty. She was in hue like the young sun, splendid with all opulence and empire . . .”

The Brahmacharin then showed him a dark underground passage . . . In a dark room in the bowels of the earth an insufficient light entered from some unperceived outlet. By that faint light he saw an image of Kali. [*Ibid.*, p. 503]

4.4. A little to the east is another temple in which the image of goddess Durga was worshipped by Kali Brahma Bhattacharya — “Mother as she shall be”:

The ascetic . . . began to ascend another underground passage. . . . In a wide temple built in stone of marble they saw a beautifully fashioned image of the Ten-armed Goddess made in gold, laughing and radiant in the light of the early sun. . . . Her ten arms are extended towards the ten regions and they bear many a force imaged in her manifold weapons; her enemies are trampled under her feet and the lion on which her foot rests, is busy destroying the foe. . . . on her right Lakshmi as Prosperity, on her left Speech, giver of learning and science, Kartikeya with her as Strength, Ganesh as Success. [*Ibid.*, p. 504]

5. In the tenth chapter of *Ananda Math* there is an elaborate description of an extremely opulent building housing a dazzling image of four-armed Vishnu with two huge demons, beheaded, lying in front, Lakshmi garlanded with lotuses on the left with flowing hair, as though terrified, and on the right Sarasvati with book and musical instrument, surrounded with incarnate *raga-raginis* and on his lap one lovelier than either goddess, more opulent and more majestic: the Mother. The

dynastic deity of the Lalgola Raja family was Vishnu and the image was worshipped inside the huge palace. Underground chambers can still be seen here and it is possible that the Kali icon was originally housed in one of these, reached through the tunnels.

6. A little further on is the ruin of an ancient Buddhist Vihara where the Buddhist goddess Kalkali was worshipped. The stream that flows by is named after her, and is mentioned in the novel. In chapter 5 of the novel he describes this “great monastery engirt with ruined masses of stones. Archaeologists would tell us that this was formerly a monastic retreat of the Buddhists and afterwards became a Hindu monastery.” This is where Kalyani first sees the noble, white-bodied, white-haired, white-bearded, white-robed ascetic. Is Kali Brahma Bhattacharya the inspiration for this figure?

7. To the north of the palace, through what was then a dense forest, one reaches the confluence of Kalkali, Padma and Bhairav rivers known as “*Sati-maar thaan (sthaan, place)*”. Here, under a massive banyan tree, groups of Bir and Shri sects of violent Tantriks used to meet. Kali Brahma used to tutor them in opposing British rule to free the shackled Mother. One tunnel from the Kali temple goes straight to the Kalkali river, whose banks were dotted with a number of small temples in which these tantriks used to take shelter. It is said that in this Kali temple Bankim witnessed a very old tantrik offering a red hibiscus to the goddess, shouting “*Jaya ma danujdalani, bande bandini matarang*”. Is it mere coincidence that if “bandini” is dropped from this tantrik’s exclamation we get exactly Bankim’s “*bande mata-rang*”?

8. Bhakat hazards a guess that this may have occurred on the full moon night of Maagh, 1280 B.S. (Jan-Feb 1874) when the death anniversary of Rao Ramshankar Roy used to be observed in the Lalgola family. This occasion occurred very soon after the court case in Berhampur and Bankimchandra’s taking leave. On this anniversary, sadhus from Benares used to arrive at this Kali temple. Repeatedly Bankim refers to “Maghi purnima” in the novel.

9. The inspiration Bankim received from all this is reflected first in his essay ‘Aamaar Durgotsab’ (1874).

10. In the same area we find the Raghunath temple with icons of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Hanuman, Radha and Krishna, with 51 Shiva lingas and 34 Saligrams. It is said that these were kept here from the time of the Sanyasi Revolt of 1772-73. Bhakat points out that near the Lalgola zamindari was the estate of Rani Bhawani of Natore who used to distribute food freely to the ascetics and was therefore renowned as goddess Annapurna herself. Her patronage extended right up to Benares. In

1772-73 Warren Hastings, the Governor General, forfeited a large portion of the Rani's estate. This led to stoppage of the supplies to the Sanyasis. The famine that followed in Bengal fanned the flames and the Sanyasis attacked the British. Led by the tantrik Mahant Ramdas of Dinajpur's Kanchan Mashida monastery, they deposited the icons of their deities with Rao Atmaram Roy, the Lalgola zamindar, and left on their mission.

11. Bhakat has identified Bankimchandra's "Padachinnha" village with Dewan Sarai village which tallies with all the data in the novel: north to south beside Padachinnha the earthen embankment built by the Nawab runs through "to Murshidabad, Cossimbazar or Calcutta" where Kalyani urges Mohendra to go and also mentions "town" which could be a reference to "nagar/Rajnagar" in Birbhum which can also be reached by this embankment (chapter 1 of *Ananda Math*). On either side of the embankment there used to be dense forest, and at the confluence, at Basumati (located in Nashipur, now washed into the river) was a burning ghat frequented by Bhojpuri Tantriks. All the temples mentioned in the novel are also here, as also the tunnels, the Vishnu temple, Kalkali river. Bhojpuri speaking looters and sepoys feature in the novel who tally with the fact of such people having been brought into Lalgola by the zamindar to act as sepoys and servants. Bhakat himself is a scion of such a family of staff-wielding guards and servants. They used to live in the "Deshwali" area in the jungle adjacent to the palace on the banks of the Kalkali and Padma with surnames like Mishra, Pande, Rai and used to receive initiation in tantric worship from Kali Brahma. The guru was addressed as "maharaj".

12. Bhakat proposes that Satyananda of the novel is none other than Kali Brahma Bhattacharya; that Dhirananda is based on the court-poet and priest of Lalgola, Trailokyanath Smritibhushan; that Bhabananda is based on the character of Raja Jogindranarain Roy (himself a tantric sadhak), who stood by Bankim and helped him get away from the wrath of the British militia; that Jibananda reflects much of Bankim himself. Bankim would have lived in the first floor room that still exists in the Kali temple courtyard. In the ground floor room lived Dr. Parry who had spent nearly Rs.10,000 in 1873 to make a medical library for the Lalgola palace. He is said to have worshipped Kali and could be the original for the physician in the novel who is loyal to the British.

On the basis of these findings, it can now be asserted that *Ananda Math* was not just a figment of the novelist's imagination, but was rooted in a personal insult suffered by Bankimchandra and in the experiences he had in Lalgola as a guest of Raja Jogindranarain Roy.

ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA RAY — II

(Continued from the issue of November 2013)

THE year 2011 marked the 150th birth anniversary of two great stalwarts of the renaissance in India: Rabindranath Tagore and Prafulla Chandra Ray. The legacy of P. C. Ray as the Acharya, the revered teacher, is captured in a profound tribute by Tagore in 1932:

The scientist unfolds the latent power in the material world. Acharya Prafulla Chandra has gone deeper; many are the young men in whose minds he has aroused the hidden unmanifested powers of perception, discernment and insight. The seeker of knowledge is not rare, but seldom does one come across a savant who can activate the minds of men by the force of his character.

It is recorded in the Upanishads that The Being that was One, declared: ‘I shall be Many.’ This urge for self-abnegation is at the root of Creation. Acharya Prafulla Chandra has followed the same creative principle. He has become many in his pupils, his mind has rejuvenated in the minds of many. This would not have been possible if he had not made a gift of himself unreservedly. This power of creation, based on self-sacrifice, is a divine power. The glory of this power in the Acharya will never fade. (Translated from the Bengali original in [7].)

The Acharya and His Pupils

Having obtained the D.Sc. degree from Edinburgh, P. C. Ray became known to his students and friends as “Dr. P. C. Ray”, a name which was soon to become very dear to his countrymen. After P. C. Ray was knighted in 1919, people proudly referred to him as “Sir P. C. Ray”. But they soon felt that “Sir P. C. Ray” did not quite convey their appreciation of their beloved leader. His countrymen conferred the title “Acharya” and referred to the revered savant as “Acharya Ray” or “Acharya-deva”.

When P. C. Ray joined Presidency College (1889), Chemistry was not yet a popular subject. With his demonstrator Chandrabhusan Bhaduri, Ray began to produce exciting experiments which impressed the students so much that they used to invite friends from other colleges to witness the magical effects. Thanks to Dr. Ray’s personality, his reputation as a brilliant expositor, and the interest generated by his spectacular laboratory demonstrations, Chemistry soon began to attract a large number of students at Presidency College. The enthusiasm soared further with the international recognition of Ray’s work on mercurous nitrite. Thus, when the

Government of Bengal introduced research scholarships, generations of talented youngsters got motivated to carry out research under P. C. Ray after completing their M.Sc. in Chemistry. The nucleus of an Indian School of Chemistry was thus formed and it began to grow with the years. In the words of Prof. F. G. Donnan ([7], pp. 66-67):

It was he who first devoted himself to a life of scientific research on chemical problems. By his teaching and his example he has produced a great school of chemical research in India.

Ray's former student J. N. Mukherjee observed in 1961 ([10], p. 14):

Outweighing his achievements as a scientific worker, the creation and fostering of the Indian School of Chemistry will ever remain his conspicuous contributions towards national progress of Indians.

P. C. Ray's laboratory was described by Prof. Sylvain Lévi as "the nursery from which issue forth the young chemists of New India" ([5], p. 164). About the pupils of P. C. Ray, Prof. Donnan observed ([7], p. 67):

They were infused by the spirit of their Master in India, and were determined to carry on the great work which he had begun. Nobly have they done so. India now ranks high amongst the nations of the world which contribute importantly to the advance of science. It would be difficult to overestimate the part which the work and influence of Sir P. C. Ray has played in this splendid development.

Among P. C. Ray's students at Presidency College who became world-famous chemists, Nilratan Dhar (1892-1986) originated Physical Chemistry research in India and was a pioneer in agricultural research in the country; Jnanendra Nath Mukherjee (1893-1983) was a pioneer in Colloidal Chemistry research in India and Jnan Chandra Ghosh (1894-1959) "excited the attention and admiration of the scientific world" by his theory of strong electrolytes and formulation of "Ghosh's Law". To give an idea of their stature, we mention here that N. R. Dhar served in the Nobel Committee (for Nobel Prize Award) in Chemistry in 1938, 1947 and 1952; J. N. Mukherjee became Director of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute; J. C. Ghosh succeeded C. V. Raman as the Director of IISc at Bangalore and then became the first Director of the first IIT established at Kharagpur. J. N. Mukherjee and J. C. Ghosh founded the Indian Chemical Society in May 1924 with the Acharya as its first President. *The Journal of the Indian Chemical Society* was founded in the same year.

While N. R. Dhar, J. C. Ghosh and J. N. Mukherjee were brilliant students at

Presidency College, P. C. Ray could also recognise in Jitendra Nath Rakshit, a student who failed in the B.Sc. degree examination from St. Xavier's College, a "worker of rare gifts". This precious "find" of P. C. Ray collaborated with him in the isolation of ammine nitrites (one of Ray's major research achievements) and contributed around 40 papers. Rakshit's method of estimation of morphine and codeine has been quoted at length in treatises on Analytical Chemistry.

Bires Chandra Guha (1904-62), who was a student of Acharya Ray at Calcutta University during 1923-26, is regarded as the Father of modern Biochemistry in India. Other students of P. C. Ray who made their mark in Chemistry include Priyada Ranjan Ray (1888-1982), Pulin Behari Sarkar (1894-1971), Rasik Lal Datta, Manik Lal Dey, Hemendra Kumar Sen, Biman Behari Dey, Panchanan Neogi, Prafulla Chandra Guha, Jnanendra Nath Ray, Jogendra Chandra Bardhan, Prafulla Kumar Bose, Gopal Chandra Chakravorty, Monomohan Sen, Susil Kumar Mitra. Jatindra Nath Sen, the first research scholar to work under P. C. Ray, collaborated with him in his investigations on mercurous nitrite.

While many of P. C. Ray's students were to become renowned chemical scientists, some became teachers in different colleges in India inculcating a love for Chemistry among students and some of his students went into manufacturing houses, especially chemical industries, under his guidance. As narrated by one of his pupils in 1924 ([6], p. 12):

Sir P. C. Ray takes so much interest in the progress and future well-being of the students that he always attracts a large band of young enthusiastic workers around him and imparts to them his enthusiasm for the subject. He is the founder of a large school of chemists in India, his students are filling chairs of chemistry in every part of the country and he may be looked upon as the intellectual father of most young Indian chemists.

One of his students, Atul Chandra Ghosh, became a teacher in Dayal Singh College, Lahore. Among the students of the college to whom Atul Chandra Ghosh transmitted his master's enthusiasm for Chemistry was Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (1894-1955) who was to become a stalwart of the Indian School of Chemistry. Like P. C. Ray, his grand-pupil S. S. Bhatnagar contributed extensively to both basic and applied research.¹ Acknowledging the impact of Ray, Bhatnagar had remarked in 1928 ([10], p. 15):

1. S. S. Bhatnagar also played a major role in building the Science and Technology infrastructure in independent India and formulating the national science policies. The highest Prize in India for research in Science and Technology, instituted in 1958, has been named after him.

If a census were to be taken of all the Indian Chemists who have published any original work and if they were asked to indicate the source of their inspiration, I believe the majority would ascribe the credit to Sir P. C. Ray.

P. C. Ray was also the teacher of many celebrated names like Upendra Nath Brahmachari (1875-1946), Meghnad Saha (1893-1956) and Satyendra Nath Bose (1894-1974) who made major contributions in other disciplines of science, each of them keeping up the promise “to count for something in the world’s science” mentioned at the beginning of Part I. Dr. U. N. Brahmachari (1922) synthesised a series of antimonial compounds, most notably Urea Stibamine — a wonder drug that was mainly responsible for the eradication of the deadly disease kala-azar which was taking a heavy toll of lives in Assam and Bengal. M. N. Saha’s work, which laid the foundation of the theory of thermal ionisation in the 1920s, is a cornerstone of modern Astrophysics; his Saha ionisation equation is used to describe the chemical and physical conditions of stars. The seminal 1924 paper of S. N. Bose laid the foundations of quantum statistics. Primarily a mathematical physicist, the interests of this versatile pupil of P. C. Ray included Chemistry.²

What made P. C. Ray’s teaching so effective in infusing a strong chemistry culture among students? We list a few salient features that come out from the accounts of his former students and Ray’s autobiography.

First, his excellence in performing chemical experiments which he planned and arranged so as to make his class-lectures more interesting and intelligible. As a Hope Prize scholar in Edinburgh, Ray had already gained a fair amount of experience of laboratory work while assisting his Professor in conducting practical classes. After joining Presidency, he “went through repeated rehearsals of class-experiments requiring dexterity”. Never allowing pride to come in the way of learning even from a subordinate, Ray did not hesitate to take the aid of the experienced demonstrator Bhaduri in order to perfect his experimental skills; sometimes he also consulted Prof. Pedler, his former teacher.

Second, his careful preparation of class lectures. The lectures, supplemented by experimental demonstrations, were designed to help students attain a grasp of principles and a clarity in their ideas. Again, without trusting himself to “mere extempore delivery”, Ray often used to “write the substance of his lectures beforehand”. N. R. Dhar reminisces ([8], p. 161) that Acharya Ray “took great pains and often corrected the lecture notes taken down by his pupils”. B. N. De mentions ([8], p. 151) that in the event of an appreciable number of students not following his

2. Satyen Bose had set up laboratories in organic chemistry at the universities of Dhaka and Calcutta and interacted with chemists. Bose’s collaborators include the noted chemist Dr. Asima Chatterjee who worked with him since 1946 on the structure and stereo chemistry of several alkaloids and other organic substances. Bose guided important experimental works on crystallography, fluorescence and thermoluminescence. Work on inorganic complex salts and clay minerals was another major contribution of S. N. Bose.

lectures or his experiments, he would readily repeat them for the benefit of the whole class. His simple and lucid teaching would kindle an interest among students to acquire more knowledge of the subject.

Third, his passion for teaching — it was “with relish and zest” that he performed his teaching duties. An anonymous pupil records ([6], p. 8):

That he has been able to transmit to his pupils the love he feels for chemistry is chiefly owing to his putting his whole heart into the matter when he was engaged with them in the laboratory or the classroom.

When P. C. Ray joined Presidency, Prof. Pedler went home on 3 months' leave and the young inexperienced Prafulla Chandra was left in charge of the entire department. Sometimes Ray had to lecture to three classes in succession. His attitude towards teaching can be seen from the effect that the heavy workload had on him ([5], p. 84):

. . . the work itself was my delight and, as I experienced almost a romantic sensation, I did not break down, nor did my interest flag.

Fourth, the historical insights into the subject that he gave to the students by weaving into his lectures the contributions of the pioneers. Ray tried to build a bridge between the “Makers of Modern Chemistry” and his pupils by interspersing his lectures with inspiring anecdotes from the lives of the great masters. J. N. Mukherjee recalls ([10], p. 336) that Ray would explain the true significance of the subject, its practical utility and its necessity in the industrial progress of the nation. He would also point out that it was in India that the pursuit of chemical knowledge had begun and that ancient Indian savants had made considerable progress in the discipline.

Fifth, the liveliness of his lectures. With his wide literary and historical readings and his natural wit, P. C. Ray enriched his lectures with apt citations from his favourite authors like Shakespeare and Emerson, Madhusudan and Rabindranath, Nagarjuna and Vagbhata.

Sixth, his warm lovable personality, kindness and close personal association with his students. He was a person whom students coming from the countryside could easily approach for helpful advice. He provided financial help to needy students. Ray's simplicity, his informal manners and his personal touch made him very dear to his students. Prof. F. G. Donnan, who had closely interacted with some of P. C. Ray's illustrious students, remarks about the self-effacing personality of Ray ([7], p. 66):

The extreme modesty of the man was amazing. Here was the Father of Modern Chemistry in India in my laboratory, and yet one scarcely knew he was there at all.

I noticed how he was revered by his old pupils. But not only revered — beloved also. Here was a man who, through the personal example of a life devoted to science and to the care and teaching of his disciples, could inspire in them the deepest reverence and affection.

The Acharya lived simply and dressed simply. A former student recalls ([8], p. 226),

Dr. P. C. Ray was so very simple in his habits and dress that on the first day I attended his class, I was puzzled as to who was the reputed professor and who was his lecture assistant . . . But after the roll-call was over, all doubts were set at rest: the flashing eyes out of a feeble frame, the clear and lifelike exposition soon drew out attention to him as a magnet attracts particles of iron.

The money that Ray saved by his Spartan lifestyle was disbursed in donations (some of which we will mention in Part VI). The austere lifestyle of the great philanthropist too had a profound impact on his pupils.

Ray's students at Presidency College were his constant companions in his evening walks after college. At opportune moments, whether in class or outside, Ray would talk about stalwarts in science like Cavendish, Priestly, Scheele, Lavoisier, Dalton, Berzelius, Liebig, Darwin, Pasteur — about their efforts, hurdles and triumphs. For P. C. Ray's students, who had to work with scanty equipment, it was heartening to know that Berzelius made his epoch-making discoveries in a small laboratory with his housemaid Anna as his only assistant and that he determined atomic weights with uncanny accuracy using an inkpot as a counterpoise. He would urge his students to read the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and emulate his example. Ray would also mention the dedication of ancient Indian chemists like Nagarjuna who had to undergo great hardships, austerities and penances to acquire the knowledge of chemical operations. Sometimes he would recite *shlokas* from ancient Indian manuscripts, sometimes he would quote long passages from English literature.

P. C. Ray retired from Presidency College and joined the University of Calcutta in 1916, where teaching took place only at the postgraduate level. One of his former students records, with regret, in 1924 ([6], p. 15) that, as a consequence, "the students first entering into their college career now no longer find any opportunity of coming in contact with a teacher of such inspiring presence as P. C. Ray. There are none to fire them with a burning love for chemistry." There have been good students and teachers subsequently; but the magic of the earlier years when scientists like J. C.

Bose and P. C. Ray were nurturing young pupils like S. N. Bose, M. N. Saha, J. C. Ghosh, J. N. Mukherjee, M. L. Dey, P. B. Sarkar (all belonging to the memorable 1909 batch), N. R. Dhar, P. C. Mahalanobis and R. L. Datta (slightly senior to the above batch), was perhaps never recreated again.

When the Acharya passed away in 1944, a Memorial programme was held at Presidency College. P. C. Mahalanobis³ (who was, by then, well-established as an outstanding scientist) came to attend the Memorial programme in spite of his ill-health and declared, "Though I am very ill, I have rushed here to tell you something. The kind of treasures that we got when we were students, from Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray and other teachers, have been great assets in our life. But, with a deep sadness, I have to tell you that when we became teachers we could not hand over to you any such treasure. It is to convey this message that I had to come out of my medical confinement today."⁴

Acharya Ray's life with his pupils reminds us of ancient Indian Ashramas. An admiring pupil remarks ([6], pp. 14-15):

Again, his close relationship with his pupils reminds one of the Rishi-Gurus (sages and preceptors) of India. He has been able to some extent to revive the traditions of the Ashramas of ancient India. This is the reason why he has been instrumental in inspiring his pupils with a love for chemistry and in maintaining a succession of students of chemistry in Bengal.

The Acharya transmitted to his students not only his love for Chemistry, but also his love for Bengal and love for India. He made them aware of the nation's problems. Through his personal lifestyle and interactions, he moulded the minds and characters of his students. They could feel that it was his identification with the poor people of India that made the Acharya shun all comforts and luxury. As noted in *Nature* (1937):

Those who know him are fully aware, there could be no better preacher for throughout his long life he has practised every precept he preaches with a vigour which is beyond admiration.

3. Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis (1893-1972) is the pioneer in research and use of statistics in India — the "Mahalanobis distance" and his work on large-scale sample survey are among his great contributions to the subject. Almost all the statistical work in India during the 1920s and till the mid 1930s was done under his leadership. The early statistical studies were of great impact in the control of floods and development of agriculture. In 1931, Mahalanobis founded the Indian Statistical Institute. He was elected FRS in 1945.

4. The episode is narrated by Prof. Shyamal Sengupta (*Rachana Sankalan*, p. 367), who was a student at Presidency College in 1944. I thank Prof. Syamal Chakrabarti of Calcutta University for this anecdote.

Not surprisingly, some of his students, like his beloved pupil Meghnad Saha, became prominent figures in social and national service. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, had P. C. Ray as a teacher when he joined Presidency College as a science student in 1902. Rajendra Prasad shifted to Arts, but he would lovingly recall the influence of Ray. In a message from the Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1962, he said ([8]):

. . . many of us were infused by the spirit of our Master and even inspired by his ideal and example to dedicate ourselves to the service of our mother country.

We mention an episode ([8], pp. 151-152) narrated by Birendranath De who hailed from Midnapore and had P. C. Ray as a teacher at Presidency from 1898. As a novice in the chemistry practicals, Birendranath had been heating a cold test-tube containing some liquid, holding it without shaking on the flame. Ray noticed it from the other end of the laboratory and rushed to De and explained that the tube might burst if he held it in that manner, as glass is an imperfect conductor of heat. P. C. Ray gave the instruction to bring the tube over the flame gradually and intermittently through the Bengali phrase, *saiye saiye dharte habe ebong kāj karte habe*, an utterance which conveyed to Birendranath the more general advice that, in any sphere of life, one has to carefully accomplish a work by gradual stages. Years later, the Acharya would be giving the following advice to Ranjit Singh Satyasray, a student-volunteer in a political conference ([8], p. 224):

You are to shape a national character which is not yet formed. Do not tell them what they cannot grasp or follow. . . . *Lead them step by step, bit by bit*. There is no hope for Swaraj by chance.

When P. C. Ray began to stay in the Rajabazar premises of the University College of Science, two or three of his students generally stayed with him and shared his simple food. They had to manage the household affairs among themselves and conduct the mess-management economically; someone would be the house-keeper, someone would keep accounts, etc. But the Acharya never allowed them to render him any personal service and commanded them to be absorbed in their studies.⁵ Bires Chandra Guha, one of his illustrious students, recalls ([8], pp. 180-182) that when he joined the Science College as an M.Sc. student the Acharya asked him to stay with him as otherwise he would be spending two hours daily in commuting which would mean a loss of a large number of days in a year. The Acharya said that

5. Gopal Chandra Chakravorty, Prafulla Kumar Bose, Bires Chandra Guha, Nadiabehari Adhikari, Susil Kumar Mitra, Dinesh Chandra Sen, Sanat Kumar Bandyopadhyay and Nripendra Nath Ghosh were among the students who had the privilege of staying with him.

such a loss of time could not be tolerated when all of them had to work hard and work fast. Guha writes that the Acharya lived on Rs. 30 per month, washed his own clothes and refused even to have an electric fan in his room.

The Acharya disliked lackadaisical work or any wastage of time and resources in the laboratory. People were not to talk with each other except on scientific problems, no Bunsen burner could be kept burning with a long flame when not in use, no chemical, filter-paper, gas, water or electricity could be wasted, no printed letter-head could be used for scribbling. A research scholar was severely rebuked for dropping a few drops of mercury while filling a tube.

The Acharya also emphasised the importance of a good physique; he used to express his admiration for students with vigorous health and energy.

The bonds that existed between the Acharya and his students were, in the Acharya's words, "as subtle as those of chemical affinity". The address which the students presented on the eve of his retirement from Presidency College ([5], pp. 188-189) speaks for itself. We quote excerpts:

Your place in the college, Sir, we are afraid, can never be filled. Men will come and men will go but where else can we possibly expect to find again that sweetness of disposition, that vigour of simplicity, that unwearied spirit of service, that broadbased culture, that wisdom in deliberation and debate which for the space of thirty years or more endeared you so much to your pupils?

. . . Your way of life, with its distinct Indian traits, recalled us to the sweet and simple and manly days of Indian attainment. You have been to us all through a guide, philosopher and friend. Easy of access, ever-pleasant, ever-willing to help the poor and needy student with your counsel and your purse, living a life of sturdy, celibate simplicity, with genuine patriotism, not loud but deep, you have been to us an ancient Guru reborn, a light and an inspiration from the treasure-house of old Indian spirituality.

P. C. Ray's Writings and Discourses on Science

P. C. Ray wrote extensively in English and Bengali, on a wide variety of subjects ranging from primers in science to scholarly articles on Shakespeare. A striking feature of his writings is the simplicity in style, very much in tune with his general personality. One is reminded of a remark by Bipin Chandra Pal ([1], p. 181):

. . . simplicity is the deepest characteristic of Sir P. C. Ray's genius and character. To miss that would be to miss the whole secret of his greatness.

Noting the inadequacy of existing textbooks for undergraduates, P. C. Ray took upon himself the task of writing a new textbook on Inorganic Chemistry (1909)

adapted to fulfil the requirements of the I.Sc. syllabi of Calcutta and Allahabad universities. By then, he had the experience of 20 years' undergraduate teaching at Presidency College. Even after a hundred years, the book can serve as a role-model for teachers and textbook writers as to how a subject can be presented in the style of a lively interesting narrative, how the principles of the subject can be gently instilled in the minds of juvenile learners and how the art of discovery can be subtly promoted using illustrious examples from history. Avoiding the temptation of crowding the pages with a multiplicity of facts, Ray chooses to build the main fabric of his subject with the aid of a few well-chosen facts. Symbols, formulae, equations, hypotheses, terms and technicalities are not rushed in at the outset but introduced gradually. Figures like Priestley, Lavoisier, Cavendish, Dalton and others are constantly kept before the mind of the learner. This textbook (reprinted in [10]) and his books like "The Makers of Modern Chemistry" (1925) and "The Discovery of Oxygen" (1926) give us some concrete idea regarding the teaching genius of P. C. Ray, the Maker of the Indian School of Chemistry. In the next part, we shall discuss separately Ray's writings on the history of science, especially ancient Indian science.

Ray's Bengali books related to science include a primer on Zoology (written around 1890 but published in 1902), a book on Modern Chemistry and its development (1906), a book on chemical synonyms (with Probodh Chandra Chattopadhyay), a book on Indian Colours (1929), a book on Food (with Haragopal Biswas, 1936). Besides, he wrote numerous articles in periodicals.

To give a flavour of Ray's discourses on science, we quote excerpts from a lecture at Calcutta in January 1916, where Ray refers to the insuperable difficulties, hostility or indifference faced by the early pioneers of modern science ([4], p. 37):

These great and mighty interpreters of the laws of nature cared not for name or fame, but considered themselves lucky if only they could be instrumental in giving to the world the results of their lifelong labours. Kepler had imposed upon himself years of incessant toil including midnight vigils in observing and recording the motions of heavenly bodies; and after embodying the results of his labours he exclaims, "I may well wait a hundred years for a reader, since God Almighty has waited six thousand years for an observer like myself."

If Europe is what she is to-day — if she is in the van of scientific progress — it is in no small measure due to the self-denying ordinances of these great heroes in science and their worthy successors.

Ray then makes no secret of the long road ahead for India ([4], pp. 37-39):

Those who intend to pursue chemistry in India must not expect to reap a rich harvest in the immediate or near future. . . . Those who are pioneers in this field have no traditions to go by or follow up; they have to chalk out their own

path and formulate their own schemes and carry them out as best as they may. Difficulties arise at every turn but with faltering steps the weary pilgrim must keep marching on towards the goal; happy if he reaches it but equally happy if he perishes in the attempt.

One feels as if one is hearing the utterance of an ancient Rishi.

Again, in an address at Madras University in February 1918, we hear Dr. Ray, the historian, the teacher and the prophet ([4], pp. 87-89):

Thus it is that even after a lapse of 7, 8 or 10 centuries, Govinda, Somadeva, Nagarjuna, Ramchandra, Svachchanda Bhairava and others appeal to modern India in eloquent terms from dust-laden shelves and worm-eaten tomes and manuscripts not to give up the pursuit of the Science they so dearly professed. As I find gathered round me the flower of the youth of Madras, may I join in the appeal so eloquently given utterance to by the chemist Nagarjuna some 1000 years ago:

“For 12 years I have worshipped in thy temple, O Goddess; if I have been able to propitiate thee, vouchsafe unto me, thy devotee, the rare knowledge of Chemistry.”

If twelve years was considered as the irreducible minimum of time which an ardent student ought to spend in mastering the intricacies of our science at such a distant date how many years' assiduous devotion is required to master it to-day? . . . If I could for a moment command the organ voice of Milton I would exclaim that we are of a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest the human capacity can soar to. . . .

You, young men of the rising generation, will not, I trust, fail to play your part. As in the glorious palmy days of old, so in the days to come, it will depend upon you whether or not our dear Mother-land is to hold her head aloft and secure for herself a recognised place in the comity of nations.

P. C. Ray on Education

The topic is vast. We touch upon only one theme dwelt at length in ([5], pp. 259-315):

P. C. Ray's concern at the “inordinate, insane craze — almost a mania — for securing a degree” which he describes as — “a canker eating into the very vitals of intellectual life and progress” ([5], pp. 260-261). Ray was of the view that “those alone should seek the portals of the University, who have got the real vocation for it” ([5], p. 497). But he observes that the universities were becoming “huge factories for mass-production of graduates” and turning out youngsters with a “lamentable

lack of initiative, resourcefulness and pluck” ([5], pp. 260- 261). The aimless pursuit of degrees like M.A. and M.Sc. by the Bengali youth only results in putting off “the unpleasant day when they will be called upon to face the stern realities of life, forgetting all the while that the higher they go up the ladder, the more hopeless and incapacitated they become when confronted with the world’s battlefield” ([5], p. 497). For P. C. Ray, “the degree only serves as a cloak to hide the degree-holder’s ignorance” ([5], p. 261). Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh⁶ mentions an anecdote ([8], p. 259) regarding the Acharya’s contempt for the excessive propensity towards bookish examination-oriented studies among Bengalis. A person with an M.A. degree came to meet Acharya Ray. On hearing that the person was preparing for M.A. examinations in another subject, Ray quipped in his characteristic style, “Creator created the Bengalis for passing examinations, fulfil His wish.”

P. C. Ray laid stress on the cultivation of the mother-tongue (cf. [5], pp. 289-299). In recognition of his contributions towards the advancement and enrichment of the Bengali language, P. C. Ray was elected President of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (1931-34). Earlier, he had been elected President of the Bangiya Sahitya Sammilan (1909).

Acharya Ray was opposed to the abolition of compulsory Sanskrit from the Matriculation course. Ignorance of Sanskrit, he felt, would hopelessly weaken and vitiate the style of Bengali authors, even on scientific subjects. He declared ([9], p. 134):

. . . those who do not know Sanskrit literature, cannot write Bengali well.

In his early days, P. C. Ray had studied Sanskrit under the guidance of Pandit Harish Chandra Kaviratna, a Professor of Sanskrit in Presidency College. While the Acharya might not have written at length on Sanskrit literary or philosophical treatises, he had studied Sanskrit classics, like some of the works of Kalidasa. His nephew recalls ([8], p. 199) Acharya Ray once telling him that the knowledge of all Upanishads is condensed in the verse (the first verse of the Isha Upanishad)

īśā vāsyamidam sarvam yat kiñca jagatyām jagat
tena tyaktena bhujjīthā mā gṛdhah kasya svid dhanam

ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद् धनम्॥१॥

6. Gandhian leader who later became the first Chief Minister of West Bengal.

This favourite verse of the Acharya declares that the Lord pervades all things that move and change in this moving world; renouncing the ephemeral, one is to rejoice in Him and not covet what belongs to others.

P. C. Ray would advocate the Eastern conception of Education — the tradition of the Tapovana, the ideal of plain living and high thinking. In a convocation address at the Aligarh National Muslim University in 1923, the Acharya remarked ([9], p. 554):

. . . Oxford and Cambridge with their costly appurtenances will not do for us; in the rage for forms and furniture and machinery, we must not lose the substance. We cannot allow our Mother Saraswati to be enmeshed in the toils of wood and brick and mortar and strangled to death.

He continues on the ideals of a student's life ([9], p. 554):

I would even go further. I would, if I could, revive the Brahmacharya traditions of our ancient schools, that ascetic discipline that laid the foundations of a virile and self-controlled manhood, that enabled the young men in after-life to stand four-square to all the winds that blew.

The above statement reminds us of a passage from Sri Aurobindo's "The Brain of India" written in *The Karmayogin* in 1909.⁷

In the next instalments of the article, we will briefly recall how the Acharya had made a gift of himself not only as a scientist, a teacher and an educationist, but also as a science historian and a writer, an industrial entrepreneur, a patriot and a nationalist, a social worker and a philanthropist.

(To be continued)

AMARTYA KUMAR DUTTA

7. See pp. 1006-08 of this issue for the passage referred to. — Ed.

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The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and guide.

Sri Aurobindo

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 384)

SELF-EFFACING YET FORTHRIGHT AMAL KIRAN

(An Impression)

(Continued from the issue of November 2013)

AMAL KIRAN'S conduct as a gentleman was truly impeccable and astonishingly he treated everyone as his equal. He had a sweetness of temper tempered with humility and humour. He once admitted in his book:

. . . As far as I can recollect, I was angry only twice in my first ten years and that too for a moment. I am unfortunately not so Yogic now, since I find that every year I once lose my temper for a second and I feel so ashamed not only because of the loss of control but also because the occasion is so tremendously trivial.¹

Nilima-di told me that the magnitude of his magnanimity was such that once when she entered his room she saw a young man sitting with him, whose clothes were rather shabby and dirty. When she later mildly protested to Amal Kiran about the admittance of this stranger he replied that the visitor was studying in an Arts College and had come to him for peace and so he was giving him peace. I have read elsewhere:

Another positive trait of his nature is that he never counts the outward worth of a person. Whosoever comes to him, he sees the divine possibilities and encourages him. A visitor from Orissa, a so-called layman, once came to meet him. But he gave him much of his time and answered all his questions. One of such questions from this person was "Can I find the Divine in this life?" He replied, "Surely, you will!". . .²

Indeed Amal Kiran was one of a kind, a truly kind-hearted soul. His friends and well-wishers were innumerable and a further testament to his kindness. I have read many of his letters consoling his friends and acquaintances who had written to him in distress and assuring them that he has prayed to the Mother at the Samadhi for their welfare.

1. Amal Kiran, *Light and Laughter*, 3rd Ed., p. 67.

2. K. D. Sethna (*Amal Kiran*): *A Centenary Tribute*, Edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, p. 93.

His kindness was not exclusive to human beings only but extended to all living things, be they animals or plants. He was a lover of Nature and animals and at various times kept cats or dogs and often sought the Mother's blessings on their behalf!

The Mother once remarked:

A kind heart treats all men and even animals as members of one family, one humanity.³

Amal Kiran loved horses and he once told me that he wanted to keep a horse in his house! In his youth he loved going to the races. Coupled with the fact that he had a genius for punning I am indulging in a mild bit of horse-play by penning him as the punning punter. However minding my p's and q's I would more appropriately describe him as the pondering punctilious punning pundit.

An incident regarding his big-heartedness particularly comes to mind when he shared the first lines of *Savitri* with Nolini-da. When he recounted this story to me — familiar to many — I was overawed by his generosity for the treasured verses were a secret which Sri Aurobindo initially forbade him to divulge to anyone. There was no pride or possessiveness for prized privileged paradisiacal poetry passages, privy only to him. Though Nolini-da and Amal Kiran were possibly the two foremost exegetes of *Savitri* there was never any sense of jealousy. By his own admission:

Another thing fairly infrequent with me by the grace of God is that very upsetting movement called jealousy. People think jealousy is a most human and natural feeling — but, if they are right, it makes one lament the human and natural, for it is one of the most dangerous responses in a life of Yoga. . . . if jealousy takes possession of one in regard to the Mother's relations with the sadhaks, I am sure that one digs one's own spiritual grave. . . .⁴

On good gentlemanly behaviour he writes:

To behave rightly, one must have the qualities of tolerance, love, kindness and joyfulness. Good behaviour is only possible when people rise above narrow-mindedness and selfishness.⁵

Indeed, an admirer comments on his gentlemanly behaviour:

3. *Words of Long Ago*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 2, p. 245.

4. *Light and Laughter*, 3rd Ed., p. 68.

5. Amal Kiran, *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 3, p. 265.

He is free from all useless gossip and politics. Never have I heard any criticism of anybody or anything from him. He is a true follower of the Mother's advice to the Ashramites: "When you have nothing pleasant to say about something or somebody in the Ashram, *keep silent*."

"You must know that this silence is faithfulness for the Divine's work."⁶
(*Words of the Mother – I*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 145)

I reproduce a rather moving letter where Amal Kiran speaks of sportingly facing criticism and pardoning others:

. . . It is a rare quality to pray to God to pardon whoever hurts one. And it is also rare to search for some fault in oneself which may have brought about the criticism, instead of being so filled with one's own merit as to resent the critical word or act. But the sensitiveness of which you speak is a weak point. One should have a calm and a poise which are beyond disturbance. Short of them, one should say to oneself: "Am I so important that nobody has the right to criticise me? Surely not. On the other hand, why should I attach such importance to people that what they say would have the power to hurt me? Neither I nor they really matter. Let me inwardly offer everything to the Divine. Whatever He wants should be done with me and in me."

To be strict about truth is a fine trait too, but the strictness must not be schoolmasterly. One should not be always on the watch to find reasons to punish; rather one should seek excuses to forgive. There is a Latin tag: *Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*, which may be translated: "Firm in principle, gentle in practice." What is called 'the human touch' has to be in action everywhere. My physical mother taught me in Parsi Gujarati: "Don't look simply at the *chaal* of a person, consider chiefly his *haal*" — that is, not just the conduct of a person but first of all his condition and his circumstances are to be kept in mind. Utmost clarity in the head, utmost charity in the heart — these must be our guides in all domains of life.

I am very much moved by your concern about me, your constant prayer for my health. I am sure your prayer will be answered — and I pray to be worthy of your love.⁷

Whilst reiterating the need of facing criticism with equanimity he also states that criticising others reflects a sense of superiority and is an egoistic feeling.

6. K. D. Sethna (*Amal Kiran*): *A Centenary Tribute*, Edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, p. 94.

7. Amal Kiran, *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, pp. 101-02.

. . . Neither blame nor praise should bring either down-heartedness or euphoria. Sensitiveness is another form of the ego's activity. It will often create an impression that people are inconsiderate when really they are inattentive. Again, one's constant criticism of people would be a sign of the egoistic feeling that one is superior to them. The Mother never supported passing judgment on people's actions or motives, though a clear calm perception of what goes on was never discouraged: what was discouraged was getting excited over the faults of others. We must try to get into the minds of people before putting them into an unfavourable category. The best thing is to have no reaction. When it is pointed out to you how mean towards you somebody has been, you should feel nothing. . . .⁸

The most remarkable facet of Amal Kiran is an almost total lack of self-importance and vanity, despite being referred to as a genius so close to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He was known to receive visitors and strangers, despite his busy schedule, with a remarkable equality, goodwill and openness, irrespective of their social background. I realised that my perception was not awry when I recently read in one of his letters:

Not to be disturbed by anything or anybody: that could be a short definition of my attempt at Yoga. I must be pretty much of a failure in many spiritual things, but I have tried my utmost to practise equanimity. When someone comes to me without notice and apologises: "I hope I am not disturbing you", I often answer: "To say this is hardly a compliment to me. Do you think I can be disturbed so easily?" People laugh in appreciation, but I am afraid they feel encouraged to come again in the same way. And why not? Truly speaking, I don't mind their bursting upon me. They have always something interesting to say and I stand to profit in one manner or another. They too, I think, get benefited, and it is a pleasure to me to be able to give help. As for my work being interrupted, a link always remains in my mind and I can carry on the work afterwards as if nothing had happened.⁹

Jugal-da writes:

In spite of his universally recognised superior intellect and eminent attainments in many fields, Amal-da is basically a man of childlike innocence and intrinsic humility. He takes in his stride all discomfiture and embarrassment without batting an eyelid. His *amour propre* does not get easily bruised. . . .¹⁰

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 73.

9. Amal Kiran, *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, pp. 154-55.

10. Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, *The Wonder That is K. D. Sethna alias Amal Kiran*, pp. 21-22.

Huta writes on Amal Kiran:

I always marvelled at his modesty, selflessness and good will.¹¹

Nirod-da remarks about Amal Kiran:

. . . what I came to admire in him most was his freedom from vanity, largeness of spirit and an inborn equanimity.¹²

The roots of his equanimity lay in the fact that he never had a sense of repulsiveness towards anyone and tried to see the inner substance rather than the exterior:

In the ordinary round of life I have as close friends those who are eminent in intelligence and those who are quite simple-minded, men and women with shining eyes along with men who are dull and women who are drab. No doubt some people are dearer to me than others, but I shut out none as despicable, or perhaps I should make a small exception: I have a special admiration for and affinity with living vessels of courage and generosity. Broadly speaking, what appeals to me is not this or that characteristic but the basic substance of which a person is constituted. . . .¹³

Amal Kiran writes of detachment and goodwill as aids to acquire equanimity:

When I attempted to practise Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga this special detachment of the intellect began to deepen into an equanimity of the whole nature. The slings of general adverse fortune and the arrows of particular outrages by individuals missed their target. What others might feel as mean acts, movements to hurt or overlook one, produced no effect on me. So there was never any antagonism to anybody. On the contrary there was an endeavour to stand in the shoes of people and extend a friendliness to their troubled minds in order to touch the roots of their cold or angry reactions to me. More than ever before, a calm consideration, a tranquil kindness towards all with whom I came in contact, grew out of my equanimity. . . .

. . . there have been persons who have disliked me. It is surely necessary for me to look sharply into myself and honestly decide whether there is a substantial source of deliberate nastiness within me or my critics have a streak of perversity in them. Maybe the truth lies in between. In any case the

11. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): A Centenary Tribute*, Edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, p. 58.

12. *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, Edited by Nirodbaran and R.Y. Deshpande, p. 298.

13. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 3, p. 218.

Aurobindonian equanimity demands that I should look on them with peaceful if not also gentle eyes.¹⁴

His demeanour too had a stamp of impersonality about it, a sense of detachment, of not taking oneself too seriously. On the matter of people suffixing a ‘da’ or ‘ji’ to his name, he remarks: “I personally have never cared about respectful address.”¹⁵ On impersonality Nolini-da remarks:

The greatness of a person is the greatness of the Impersonal in him.¹⁶

And

Sri Aurobindo from his birth was such an impersonal personality — and, in the very highest sense. He had never the consciousness of a particular individual person: all reference to a personal frame of his was deleted from the texture of his nature and character.¹⁷

Amal Kiran comments on Sri Aurobindo’s impersonality:

Once I told the Mother that I found Sri Aurobindo’s *Life Divine* not sufficiently logical! She opened wide her eyes — and said: “This is the first time anybody has said such a thing.” As with the first Pranam, she related the incident to Sri Aurobindo: “Look at what he says. . . .” Sri Aurobindo, it seems, just nodded and smiled, as he often used to do. He was not given to being very voluble or demonstrative. The Mother, I am told, would go and tell him something or other quite animatedly and he would do nothing but gaze. Then she, thinking she had not made herself clear, would repeat the matter in other words. Then he would say, “I see.”¹⁸

On the impersonal worker, Sri Aurobindo has said:

To be impersonal generally is not to be ego-centric, not to regard things from the point of view of how they affect oneself, but to see what things are in themselves, to judge impartially, to do what is demanded by the purpose of things or by the will of the Master of things, not by one’s own personal point of view or egoistic interest or ego-formed idea or feeling. In work it is to do

14. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 3, pp. 167-68.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

16. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Lights from Nolini Kanta Gupta*, 1st Ed., p. 245.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Light and Laughter*, 3rd Ed., p. 16.

what is best for the work, without regard to one's own prestige or convenience, not to regard the work as one's own but as the Mother's, to do it according to rule, discipline, impersonal arrangement, even if conditions are not favourable to do the best according to the conditions, etc., etc. The impersonal worker puts his best capacity, zeal, industry into the work, but not his personal ambitions, vanity, passions. He has always something in view that is greater than his little personality and his devotion or obedience to that dictates his conduct.¹⁹

Perhaps Amal Kiran's impersonality was a direct influence of Sri Aurobindo, for had not Sri Aurobindo said: "Adore and what you adore attempt to be."²⁰ The Mother, too, has said:

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that one grows into the likeness of what one loves. Therefore if you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone.²¹

Through my conversations with Amal Kiran it was obvious that he deeply adored and had a boundless admiration for Sri Aurobindo, keeping him as a reference point for everything. My discernment was not off the mark for I read in Jugal-da's book that Amal Kiran

has always aspired to realise those 'other truths' whose ultimate reach may be expressed by that short but all-comprehending command Sri Aurobindo himself communicated to K.D.S. in one of the latter's moments of utter desolation. The command was, "Become like me."

"It was indeed a tall order," as K.D.S. reminisces, "but the only one really ultimate." And Amal-da the Sadhaka has always yearned for this 'absolute attainment'. This yearning has been crystallised in a poignantly beautiful early poem of his inspired by the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. The poem bears the title, 'At the Feet of Kanchenjanga':

I have loved thee though thy beauty stands
Aloof from me,
And hoped that dwelling in thy sight
From dawn to dawn at last I might
Become like thee —

Become like thee and soar above . . .²²

19. *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, pp. 211-12.

20. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vol. 3, p. 527.

21. *On Education*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, p. 69.

22. Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, *The Wonder That is K. D. Sethna alias Amal Kiran*, p. 34.

Indeed, Amal Kiran worshipped Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He wrote:

. . . I had lost my head over Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the moment I had seen them and that was surely the heart's doing.²³

He was so centred on Sri Aurobindo that he could not care less what others thought or said of him. He remarks in his personal copy of *Overhead Poetry*:

Who cares for what the world says when those great wide eyes, deeper than oceans, fell on these poems and accepted them as fit offerings to His divinity? The Lord's look, the Lord's smile — that is what I have lived for.²⁴

Once, during a particularly tense period, the British Government was trying to dislodge Sri Aurobindo from Pondicherry. In order to counter this danger to the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo suspended all correspondence for a fortnight to enable him to concentrate his Yogic Force to neutralise these hostile forces. When the crisis passed, Amal Kiran wrote to Sri Aurobindo stating that in order to defend him and the Mother he could easily sacrifice his life. He then did a self-analysis of his character and asked Sri Aurobindo if he was right. Sri Aurobindo replied:

Your analysis is correct, but the doubts are not your own, they come from outside. It is true you have a capacity for heroism which can come out on the surface *if* your will helps, but usually it needs difficult circumstances to come out. In ordinary circumstances your vital tends to become dull and needs excitement. You must be careful to resist the encroachment of the outer atmosphere when you go to Bombay.²⁵ (February 1934)

He once told me that Sri Aurobindo was unconcerned or impersonal to people worshipping him. During the pre-November 1926 days a sadhak did his pranam to Sri Aurobindo and then got up after a few moments, only to discover, to his dismay, that Sri Aurobindo had disappeared into his room. From his writings I found the said sadhak was Purani-ji. Amal Kiran narrates:

I remember my friend Purani telling me an incident of early days. Sri Aurobindo was standing at the door of his room while Purani was leaving. The disciple went down on his knees to make obeisance to Sri Aurobindo's feet. After a few seconds he lifted his head and looked up. There was nobody standing any

23. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, p. 231.

24. *K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): A Centenary Tribute*, Edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, p. xiv.

25. *Our Light and Delight*, 1st Ed., p. 89.

more. Purani told me with a laugh: “Strange Guru indeed who runs away like that!”²⁶

Amal Kiran has written that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were never anxious to have disciples.²⁷ He notes:

. . . I know that she set no great store by mere ceremony. This attitude applied in general to the common religious practice of mankind. Formal devotionism had little meaning for her. . . .²⁸

The Mother had said:

But if you take real divine beings, this is not at all something they value. They do not like to be worshipped. No, it does not give them any special pleasure at all! Don't think they are happy, for they have no pride. It is because of pride that a man likes to be worshipped; if a man has no pride he doesn't like to be worshipped; and if, for instance, they see a good intention or a fine feeling or a movement of unselfishness or enthusiasm, a joy, a spiritual joy, these things have for them an infinitely greater value than prayers and acts of worship and pujas . . .²⁹

Another facet of his persona was his cheerfulness, amazing for a man who was almost immobile and needed the help of a wheelchair and attendants to live his energetic lifestyle. He used to work very hard, often finishing work at 3 a.m. and rising at 6 a.m. with no sleep during the day. He once told me that Mother had showered him with hope by stating that she would cure his polio-afflicted leg. Years later I read in his book:

. . . The Mother once told me that she hoped to cure the damage infantile paralysis had done to one of my legs, but that the cure could be effected only by the Supermind when it had been brought into the very substance of her body. So the marvellous cure was to be on some far future day.³⁰

Perhaps he considered his handicap as an act of God for he told me that Sri Aurobindo had said that not even a blade of grass moves without the grace of God. He quoted Sri Aurobindo:

26. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, p. 140.

27. See *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, p. 140.

28. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 186.

29. *Questions and Answers 1954*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 6, pp. 195-96.

30. *Our Light and Delight*, 1st Ed., p. 52.

Sir Philip Sidney said of the criminal led out to be hanged, “There, but for the grace of God, goes Sir Philip Sidney.” Wiser, had he said, “There, by the grace of God, goes Sir Philip Sidney.”³¹

Another aphorism of Sri Aurobindo states:

They explained the evil in the world by saying that Satan had prevailed against God; but I think more proudly of my Beloved. I believe that nothing is done but by His will in heaven or hell, on earth or on the waters.³²

His good cheer was fuelled by his wonderful sense of humour; self-effacing, subtle, light yet piercing. This quality of not taking himself seriously superimposed on his sense of humour, created an informal and open atmosphere which puts even a diffident man at ease. Another facet of his humour was that it was free from scorn or any malignant intention. Once when I entered his house a lady from Bangalore was sitting and talking to him. On seeing me he promptly said to both of us: “Introduce yourselves.” I was charmed by his direct and casual, yet attentive style of welcome.

Besides, Amal Kiran was a great sport and at times he made barbs at himself. For instance:

Indeed my life has been a series of fallings, physical and spiritual — and perhaps some gossipers may add, moral.³³

He relates another instance:

. . . Did I tell you what a sadhak once told me? He said: “We read X and Y and Z and others like them in *Mother India* — and only when we have nothing else to read we read you.” I told him: “Well, I have to be thankful for small mercies. And that in whatever circumstances you do read me at all is God’s grace enough.” Under my breath I said: “Maybe it is a bit of God’s grace to you also.”³⁴

Musing on his future, he said:

I am doing my best to live long both because I am happy and can give happiness and because I want as much time as possible to go nearer to Sri Aurobindo’s

31. *Essays Human and Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 426.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 487.

33. *Light and Laughter*, 3rd Ed., p. 4.

34. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, p. 138.

luminous Truth and the Mother's radiant Beauty. All the same I am ready to say "Hurrah" whenever they tell me, "Your time is up."³⁵

Amal Kiran told me that he was once invited to give a lecture in the USA but Sri Aurobindo forbade him to go and so he had to depute someone else instead. He recollected how during his sojourns in Bombay Sri Aurobindo never forsook him and expressed his awe and gratitude on how Sri Aurobindo wrote numerous letters to him, some several pages long and even neatly typed on foolscap paper. The editor of *Sri Aurobindo Circle* wrote:

. . . he [Amal] is surprised how Sri Aurobindo could allow him to write not only at great length but also in bold terms as if to an equal, and how the Master had the patience and the graciousness to deal in detail with all the topics proposed. . . .³⁶

To illustrate, I give an extract from a letter that reflects Sri Aurobindo's concern for Amal Kiran, when he took the initiative to write to him after not hearing from him for a fairly long interval, following an illness whilst he was away in Bombay in 1938:

Amal,

I write to get news about your progress in recovery — I hear that you are better. I hope you can confirm it. . . .

In sending news of yourself, you will no doubt send news of your mother also. . . .

Sri Aurobindo³⁷

Highlighted below are a few — amongst several — incidents in Amal Kiran's life that reflect his unique and intimate relationship with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

It is common knowledge that after his accident on 23 November 1938 Sri Aurobindo stopped all correspondence with his disciples. Amal Kiran along with Dilip Kumar Roy were the only two exceptions to this rule and they regularly corresponded with Sri Aurobindo.

The Guru's concern about the disciple's health and his achieving realisation in this life is narrated by Amal Kiran:

Incidentally, another condition for realising a transformed body comes out in a talk recorded by Nirodbaran between Sri Aurobindo and his attendants. Sri

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 272-73.

36. *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, Edited by Nirodbaran and R.Y. Deshpande, p. 57.

37. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, pp. 217-18.

Aurobindo says there: “Amal once asked the Mother if he would realise the Divine. The Mother replied that he would unless he did something idiotic to cut short his life. And that is exactly what he very nearly did!” The reference is to my taking, under a wrong impression, a huge quantity of a powerful drug prescribed by a doctor friend during a visit of mine to Bombay. I took forty-eight times the normal dose and was about to die. Nirod, after meeting me on 21 March 1940 in Pondicherry, informed Sri Aurobindo of my conviction that I had been saved by a special divine intervention. Sri Aurobindo emphatically said: “Yes.”

The same point is made in a letter by him on 1 August 1938 when I wrote from Bombay after my accident that I was all agog to know whether I should pack up for Pondicherry and come away with my heart still below normal by medical standards. Sri Aurobindo replied: “You must on no account return here before your heart has recovered. No doubt, death must not be feared, but neither should death or permanent ill-health be invited. Here, especially now when all the competent doctors have gone away or been sent to a distance from Pondicherry, there would be no proper facilities for the treatment you still need, while you have them all there. You should remember the Mother’s warning to you when she said that you would have your realisation in this life provided you did not do something silly so as to shorten your life. That ‘something silly’ you tried your best to do when you swallowed with a cheerful liberality a poison-medicine without taking the least care to ascertain what was the maximum dose. You have escaped by a sort of miracle, but with a shaken heart. To risk making that shaky condition of the heart a permanent disability of the body rendering it incapable of resisting any severe physical attack or shock in the future, would be another ‘something silly’ of the same quality. So it’s on no account to be done.”³⁸

He continues how the Mother subsequently encouraged him, by affirming that he would get realisation:

It took me almost ten years to regain half my vigour . . . I was despondent about myself and said: “I can see that I am not fit for this Yoga and will never be able to do it properly.” The Mother calmly answered: “Do you think you know more about yourself than I do? I am not at all in doubt.” Then I suggested: “Well, I may be able to do something in some other life, some future rebirth.” The Mother’s response was clear-cut: “When I speak of the fulfilment of our Yoga, I don’t think of other lives. I refer only to the present one.” . . . Even as late as 1966 or thereabouts she repeated that if I took reasonable care of my body I would “participate in the realisation of the New World.” . . .³⁹

38. *Our Light and Delight*, 1st Ed., pp. 100-01.

39. *Ibid.*

Needless to add, Amal Kiran did take care of his body, for he lived to a ripe old age.

Their Grace was there also when Amal Kiran's life was in danger at Bombay when he contracted scarlet fever with constant high temperatures and severe headaches.

The Mother later told me that it was my sense of certainty of her help that made the curative power of her Grace work so well and save me from the possibility of meningitis which is a common sequel to scarlet fever.⁴⁰

Amal Kiran had an unshakable faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and at times took risks, thinking that the Divine would protect him. The Mother had to caution him:

We have saved you from all kinds of disasters and it is indeed good that you have so much faith, but don't go on exploiting our protection. . . .⁴¹

When the Mother was once asked who called for her help most often, she named Doraiswamy and Amal Kiran. Although he had a close inner relation with the Mother he modestly clarified that calling her more often was an indicator of the constant help they needed for their protection and did not necessarily mean that they were more devoted than others.⁴²

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

40. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

41. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, p. 272.

42. See *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, p. 117.

A tireless benevolence, clear-seeing and comprehensive, free from all personal reaction, is the best way to love God and serve Him upon earth.

I mean a benevolence sincere and spontaneous in thought and speech and not a supposed benevolence in acts which is accompanied most often by a dreadful sense of condescending superiority serving chiefly as a platform for human vanity.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 187)

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of October 2013)

V

REGARDING allegories written in prose, we have our author's more detailed pronouncements on the same subject, in a letter written in 1933:

Allegory comes in when a quality or other abstract thing is personalised and the allegory proper should be something carefully stylised and deliberately sterilised of the full aspect of embodied life, so that the essential meaning or idea may come out with sufficient precision and force of clarity. . . . Allegory is an intellectual form; one is not expected to believe in the personalisation of the abstract quality, it is only an artistic device. . . . An allegory must be intellectually precise and clear in its representative figures as well as in their basis, however much adorned with imagery and personal expression; otherwise it misses its purpose.¹

In these sentences have been repeated, in clearer detail, the concepts he had expanded in *The Future Poetry*. But then, the former is discursive writing and these extracts are from a letter in which something is being explained to someone on a person-to-person basis.

In order to find an example of allegory in his own writing one cannot do better than go back to one such he wrote way back in 1892, when an undergraduate in Cambridge. Named *The Harmony of Virtue*, it is in the form of a Platonic dialogue. Referring to it he was to say later:

It is true that under his [Plato's] impress I rashly started writing at the age of 18 an explanation of the cosmos on the foundation of the principle of Beauty and Harmony . . .²

The Dialogues he wrote are Platonic and the particular passage with which we are concerned occurs in Book III of *The Republic* — it is the famous Allegory of the Cave. It is quite a few pages long, but the basic idea is given in the opening paragraph:

1. *Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 89.

2. *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 765.

Behold! Human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fires and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.³

Our author takes this basic allegory and remoulds it nearer to his heart's desire. One can presume to call it an inimitable imitation of Plato. Let it be known that I take the classical view of imitation, not the modern view which does not look upon imitation with favour. So here is our author picturing man, struggling against the torrent of thought in the Platonic dark cave:

He sends a wailing cry to heaven, but only jeering echoes fall from the impenetrable ceiling, for there is no heaven, and he sends a hoarse shriek for aid to hell, but only a gurgling horror rises from the impenetrable floor, for there is no hell, and he looks around for God, but his eyes cannot find him, and he gropes for God in the darkness, but his fingers cannot find him but only the clammy fingers of night, and goblin fancies are rioting in his brain, and hateful shapes pursue him with clutching fingers, and horrible figures go rustling past him half-discerned in the familiar gloom. He is weary of the dreadful vaulted ceiling, he is weary of the dreadful endless floor. And what shall he do but lie down and die, who if he goes on, will soon perish of weariness and famine and thirst? Yet did he but know it, he has only to turn back at a certain angle and he will see through a chink of the cavern a crocus moon with a triple zone of burning stars, which if he will follow, after not so very painful a journey, not so very long an elapse of hours, he will come into a land of perennial fountains, where he may quench his thirst, and glistening fruit-groves where he may fill his hunger, and sweet cool grass where he may solace his weariness, and so pursue his journey by the nearest way to the wavering tree-tops, and the blooming gardens and the acres in their yellow gaberdines for which his soul has long panted.⁴

After reading this wonderful prose the reader will easily understand why I called this an inimitable imitation of Plato. Indeed the last part of the last sentence

3. Buchanan, Scott ed., *The Portable Plato*, Penguin, 1997 ed., p. 546.

4. *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 43-44.

reminds one strongly of the “upper earth which is under the heaven” that Plato describes in *Phaedo*.

Now this indeed is an allegory in whichever way the word is understood. It is a narrative with an underlying meaning which is explained by the author. This explanation comes a few sentences later:

The myth means . . . that our present servitude to conventions which are the machinery of thought and action, is principally due to weaknesses forming a large element in human nature. Our lives ought not to be lived in accordance with human nature which can nowhere be found apart from the disturbing element of reason, but according to nature at large where we find the principle of harmony pure and undefiled.⁵

As is required, the allegory is personalised but also “carefully stylised and deliberately sterilised of the full aspect of embodied life.” This is seen in the dominating character — “man” or rather Mankind. It is awesome to reflect how mature the thought-processes and artistic abilities of this undergraduate had been in 1892, so that the story bears out what he was to say in 1933. What is more, it helps us in a most significant manner to understand the essential nature of allegory far better than Spenser’s poem would, and is based on the archetype of all allegories, Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.

But let us not forget that we are dealing here with the work of an undergraduate, an erudite undergraduate who delights in bewildering his readers. So he says: “This is the legend of Purush, the son of Prithivi and his journey to the land of Beulah.” What a fine amalgam of the Puranas and Blake! But then, he does talk of “two broad rivers of Thought, the Greek and the Hindu,” so we should be prepared!

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

5. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Inspiration means that the papyrus of your imagination is held to the fire of memory and reveals characters written in Indian ink by unseen compositors.

Sri Aurobindo

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 85)

Addendum

THE LEGEND OF PURUSH

(A passage from *The Harmony of Virtue*)

Keshav — . . . I think we had gone so far as to discover that human life is the great element of discord in the Cosmos, and the best system of morality is that which really tends to restore the harmony of the universe, and we agreed that if we apply the principles governing the universe to human life, we shall discover the highest principle of conduct. That was the point where we broke off, was it not?

Wilson — Yes, we broke off just there.

Keshav — So we profess to have found a sense in which the theory advanced by philosophers of every age has become true, that life ought to be lived in accordance with nature and not in accordance with convention. The error we impute to them was that they failed to keep nature distinct from human nature and forgot that the latter was complicated by the presence of that fallible reason, of which conventions are the natural children. Thus men of genius like Rousseau reverted to the savage for a model and gave weight to the paradox that civilization is a mistake. Let us not forget that it is useless to look for unalloyed nature in the savage, so long as we cannot trace human development from its origin: to the original man the savage would seem nothing but a mass of conventions. We have nothing to learn from savages; but there is a vast deal to be learned from the errors of civilized peoples. Civilization is a failure, not a mistake.

Wilson — That is a subtle distinction.

Keshav — Not at all. Civilization was necessary, if the human race was to progress at all. The pity of it is that it has taken the wrong turn and fallen into the waters of convention. There lies the failure. When man at the very first step of his history used his reason to confound the all-pervading Cosmos or harmonious arrangement of Nature, conventions became necessary in order to allure him into less faulty modes of reasoning, by which alone he could learn to rectify his error. But after the torrent had rolled for a time along its natural course and two broad rivers of Thought, the Greek and the Hindu, were losing themselves in the grand harmony, there was a gradual but perceptible swerve, and the forces of convention

which had guided, began to misguide, and the Sophists in Greece, in India the Brahmans availed themselves of these mighty forces to compass their own supremacy, and once at the helm of thought gave permanence to the power by which they stood, until two religions, the most hostile to Nature, in the east Buddhism, her step-child Christianity in the west, completed the evil their predecessors had begun.

Hear the legend of Purush, the son of Prithivi, and his journey to the land of Beulah, the land of blooming gardens and yellow-vested acres and wavering tree-tops, and two roads lead to it. One road is very simple, very brief, very direct, and this leads over the smiling summit of a double-headed peak, but the other through the gaping abysses of a lion-throated antre and it is very long, very painful, very circuitous. Now the wise and beautiful instructress of Purush had indeed warned him that all other wayfarers had chosen the ascent of the beautiful hill, but had not explicitly forbidden him to select the untried and perilous route. And the man was indolent and thought it more facile to journey smoothly through a tunnel than to breast with arduous effort the tardy and panting slope, yet plumed himself on a nobler nature than all who had gone before him, because they had obeyed their monitress, but he was guided by his reason and honourably preferred the unknown and perilous to the safe and familiar. From this tangle of motives he chose the cavernous lion-throat of the gaping antre, not the swelling breasts of the fruitful mother.

Very gaily he entered the cave singing wild ballads of the deeds his fathers wrought, of Krishna and Arjun and Ram and Ravan and their glory and their fall, but not so merrily did he journey in its entrails, but rather in hunger and thirst groped wearily with the unsleeping beak of the vulture Misery in his heart, and only now and then caught glimpses of an elusive light, yet did not realise his error but pursued with querulous reproaches the beautiful gods his happy imagination had moulded or bitterly reviled the double-dealing he imputed to his lovely and wise instructress — “for she it was” he complained “who told me of the route through the cavern”. None the less he persevered until he was warmed by the genuine smiles of daylight and joy blossoming in his heart, made his step firmer and his body more erect.

And he strode on until he arrived where the antre split in two branches, the one seeming dark as Erebus to his eyes, though indeed it was white and glorious as a naked girl and suffused by the light of the upper heaven with seas of billowing splendour, had not his eyes, grown dim from holding communion with the night and blinded by the unaccustomed brilliance, believed that the light was darkness, through which if he had persevered, he had arrived in brief space among the blooming gardens and the wavering tree-tops and the acres in their glorious golden garb and all the imperishable beauty of Beulah. And the other branch he thought the avenue of the sunlight, because the glimmer was feeble enough to be visible, like a white arm through a sleeve of black lace. And down this branch he went, for ever allured by unreal glimpses of a dawning glory, until he has descended into the abysmal

darkness and the throne of ancient night, where he walks blindly like a machine, carrying the white ashes of hope in the funeral urn of youth, and knows not whence to expect a rescue, seeing the only heaven above him is the terrible pillared roof, the only horizon around him the antre with its hateful unending columns and demogorgon veil of visible darkness, and the beautiful gods he imagined are dead and his heart is no longer sweetened with prayers, and his throat no longer bubbles with hymns of praise. His beautiful gods are dead and her who was his lovely guide and wise monitress, he no longer sees as the sweet and smiling friend of his boyhood, but as a fury slinging flame and a blind Cyclops hurling stones she knows not whither nor why and a ghastly skeleton only the more horrible for its hideous mimicry of life. He sends a wailing cry to heaven, but only jeering echoes fall from the impenetrable ceiling, for there is no heaven, and he sends a hoarse shriek for aid to hell, but only a gurgling horror rises from the impenetrable floor, for there is no hell, and he looks around for God, but his eyes cannot find him, and he gropes for God in the darkness, but his fingers cannot find him but only the clammy fingers of night, and goblin fancies are rioting in his brain, and hateful shapes pursue him with clutching fingers, and horrible figures go rustling past him half-discerned in the familiar gloom. He is weary of the dreadful vaulted ceiling, he is weary of the dreadful endless floor. And what shall he do but lie down and die, who if he goes on, will soon perish of weariness and famine and thirst? Yet did he but know it, he has only to turn back at a certain angle and he will see through a chink of the cavern a crocus moon with a triple zone of burning stars, which if he will follow, after not so very painful a journey, not so very long an elapse of hours, he will come into a land of perennial fountains, where he may quench his thirst, and glistening fruit-groves where he may fill his hunger, and sweet cool grass where he may solace his weariness, and so pursue his journey by the nearest way to the wavering tree-tops, and the blooming gardens and the acres in their yellow gaberdines for which his soul has long panted.

This is the legend of Purush, the son of Prithivi and his journey to the land of Beulah.

Wilson — That is a fine apologue, Keshav; is it your own, may I ask?

Keshav — It is an allegory conceived by Vallabha Swami, the Indian Epicurus, and revealed to me by him in a vision.

Wilson — There we see the false economy of Nature; only they are privileged to see these beautiful visions, who can without any prompting conceive images not a whit less beautiful.

Keshav — The germ of the story was really a dream, but the form and application are my own. The myth means, as I dare say you have found out, that our present servitude to conventions which are the machinery of thought and action, is principally due to weaknesses forming a large element in human nature. Our lives ought not to be lived in accordance with human nature which can nowhere be found apart from the disturbing element of reason, but according to nature at large where we find the principle of harmony pure and undefiled.

Wilson — On that we are both at one; let us start directly from this base of operations. I am impatient to follow the crocus moon with her triple zone of burning stars into the Eden of murmuring brooks and golden groves and fields of asphodel. . . .

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 40-44)

We have expanded our description of virtue as the evolution of the inborn qualities native to our personality, by throwing in the epithet "perfect", and have interpreted the full flavour of the epithet in words to the effect that qualities in their evolved perfection must be harmonious one with another and have a beautiful form or expression, and a beautiful colour or revelation of the soul, and a beautiful perfume or justly-attempered manner and must subdue all three into a just and appropriate harmony.

With this conviction in our souls we will journey on, despising the censure and alarm of the reputable, and evolve our inborn qualities and powers into a beautiful and harmonious perfection, until we walk delicately like living poems through a radiant air, and will not stunt the growth of any branch or blossom, but will prefer to the perishable laurels of this world a living crown of glory, and hear through the chaotic murmur of the ages the solemn question of Christ "What profiteth it a man if he own the whole world and lose his own soul?" and will answer according to the melodious doctrines of philosophy and acquire by a life of perfect beauty the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 76-77)

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of November 2013)

4. Towards *Pearl*

How much of English literature percolated into Sri Aurobindo's writings is a question that would need tomes to categorise. English literature is in the background all the time in all his writings like the strains of a *sruti* for a song. Between the fourteen years of being a student in England and an enormous appetite for reading books for another fourteen years as a Professor in Baroda and Calcutta had given him a strong, inescapable grounding in English literature. But we get to have him speak on English literature in a big way only in *The Future Poetry* much later. Taking in the entire panorama from its Anglo-Saxon beginnings to T. S. Eliot, Sri Aurobindo says that the literature generally reflected the character of the nation.

No spirituality, but a robust ethical turn; no innate power of the thought and the word, but a strong turn for action; no fine play of emotion or quickness of sympathy, but an abundant energy and force of will. This is one element of the national mind; the other is the submerged, half-insistent Celtic spirit, gifted with precisely the opposite qualities, inherent spirituality, the gift of the word, the rapid and brilliant imagination, the quick and luminous intelligence, the strong emotional force and sympathy, the natural love of the things of the mind and still more of those beyond the mind, left to it from an ancient mystic tradition and an old forgotten culture, forgotten in its mind, but still flowing in its blood, still vibrant in its subtler nerve-channels.¹

That spiritual ruminations were not alien to the English mind is made clear by Sri Aurobindo's analysis. I was not aware of this argument when I attended the classes on Middle English literature. Nor do I remember now much of that literature till we come to Geoffrey Chaucer. But three names have pursued me down the years. William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, the not-easily forgotten *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (thanks to a latter-day enthusiasm for the sumptuous novels of J.R.R. Tolkien) and the poem *Pearl* by an unknown author. It could be because they have a religious background and even tremble on the edge of spirituality.

Langland's poem appears to have been very popular in his time. The work as it has come down to us has undergone revisions since the fourteenth century when

1. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 52.

it was composed. In a literature that is almost silent about the private life of the authors in the Old English period, we begin to have some pieces of interesting information. Langland (1330-1386) was born in Shropshire and settled down in London with his wife, Kitte. They had a daughter called Calote. In those days when printing was not yet in vogue (William Caxton would be setting up a printing press in London only in the following century), people who had mastered calligraphy were in great demand. Langland became a public scribe who was popular in law courts to prepare documents. However, occasionally he seems to have gone around seeking alms as a religious man, a way of life known as *unchavritti* in Indian parlance.

Religion in *Piers Plowman* is only a backdrop for conveying ethical precepts. Obviously Langland was pained by the decay in morals and wished to teach the society the way to live an ideal life. It takes up the triune Heaven-Hell-Purgatory vision popular in Christian theology. Purgatory is of course life on earth. A shepherd, William, falls asleep one May morning in Malvern Hills. His dream vision has a hill-top tower and an enclosed, dark space in a valley. The former symbolises heaven; the latter, hell. However, this does not mean that Langland has an architectonic approach as in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. We get to watch allegorical figures intertwined with human situations. The characters easiest to comprehend and feel close to are Dowel (Do Well), Dobet (Do Better) and Dobest (Do Best) and the plowman Piers who is in search of Truth. The opening is a simple description, and we would be returning to this idea later on in Chaucer and Spenser:

In a summer season when soft was the sun,
I clothed myself in a cloak as I shepherd were,
Habit like a hermit's unholy in works,
And went wide in the world wonders to hear.
But on a May morning on Malvern hills,
A marvel befell me of fairy, methought.
I was weary with wandering and went me to rest
Under a broad bank by a brook's side,
And as I lay and leaned over and looked into the waters
I fell into a sleep for it sounded so merry.²

Why wander in the world for experience? Here is experience come to the seeker! Heaven and hell with the earth between appears now in a dream:

Then began I to dream a marvellous dream,
That I was in a wilderness wist I not where.
As I looked to the east right into the sun,

2. Translations from *Piers Plowman* quoted in the text are by Donald and Rachel Attwater.

I saw a tower on a toft worthily built;
 A deep dale beneath a dungeon therein,
 With deep ditches and dark and dreadful of sight
 A fair field full of folk found I in between,
 Of all manner of men the rich and the poor,
 Working and wandering as the world asketh.
 Some put them to plow and played little enough,
 At setting and sowing they sweated right hard
 And won that which wasters by gluttony destroy.

It is the world in miniature which contains all varieties of people. Langland hails the karmayogins and castigates the lazy parasites in a society. There were people who seemed to be in search of God by just putting on the hermit's dress and remaining in their rooms, and were supposed to be silently communing with God. Such people are not in the good books of Langland. They are cheaters, telling tall tales. In fact, with so many false gurus making their pile by mouthing a bit of scriptures and making use of a few stances of yoga today, Langland sounds utterly contemporary!

I found there friars of all the four orders,
 Preaching to the people for profit to themselves,
 Explaining the Gospel just as they liked,
 To get clothes for themselves they construed it as they would.
 Many of these master friars may dress as they will,
 For money and their preaching both go together.
 For since charity hath been chapman and chief to shrive lords,
 Many miracles have happened within a few years.

How to get rid of such hypocrisy being practised in the name of God? Langland's remedy is work. Is there not enough work to suit everyone according to their strength and intelligence? If we work well, we will have enough and to spare for the people who are really in need of help like the sick and the poor. Each according to his capacity, and here is Piers advising women:

“Some shall sew sacks,” quoth Piers “for sheltering the wheat;
 And ye, lovely ladies with your long fingers,
 Have silk and sendal to sew, while there's time,
 Chasubles for chaplains churches to honour.
 Wives and widows wool and flax spin;
 Make cloth, I counsel you and so teach your daughters.
 The needy and naked take heed how they lie

And contrive for them clothes for so commands Truth.
 I shall get them livelihood unless the land fails,
 Flesh and bread both to rich and to poor,
 As long as I live for the Lord's love of Heaven.
 And all manner of men that by meat and drink live,
 Help ye them to work well that win you your food."

We have Piers treading the passages in Hell too. Langland is all enthusiasm when deeper and deeper into allegorical fields. There is never a dull moment in the confession of the seven deadly sins. Pride? It is Pernel proud-heart who now seeks forgiveness "for all this I have hated in my heart". The confession of Envy is heart-warming. We want to overcome our weaknesses but then!

Away from the altar then turn I mine eyes,
 And behold how Helen hath a new coat:
 I wish then it were mine and all the webb as well.
 At men's losses I laugh that liketh mine heart.
 For their winnings I weep and wail all the time;
 Deem that they do ill where I do far worse;
 Whoso chides me therefore I hate him deadly after.
 I would that each wight were mine own knave,
 For whoso hath more than I angereth me sore.
 And thus I live loveless like a lousy dog . . .

As I wrote in an earlier essay, where would we be but for translators? Middle English has grown vague for me now. Words like 'quoth' 'soote' and 'pees' have become Greek and Latin! But Langland remains accessible because of translators and because it is the odyssey of a practical, good and hard-working farmer through Christian theological spaces, the work gains in importance for students of philosophical and spiritual poetry also.

If *Piers Plowman* provides a stepping stone to great poems like Dante's *The Divine Comedy* which deal with the concepts of Heaven and Hell, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* opens the door for the rich repast of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. This text was welcome because of its interesting story content. The teen brains in my graduate class welcomed and discussed the story. On New Year's Eve the Green Knight appears at King Arthur's gathering and challenges anyone to cut off his head. When the King and his knights remain stunned, Sir Gawain beheads the newcomer. As per the challenge, Gawain has to find the Green Knight a year hence and be prepared to receive an identical blow.

To the astonishment of those present, the Green Knight calmly picks up his head and rides away with it in hand! After the passage of a few months Sir Gawain

goes in search of the challenger, has terrifying adventures and reaches a magic castle where the host's wife tries to seduce him. More inexplicable and strange things happen but all is well that ends well, the Green Knight (who is actually Bertilak, the lord of the castle) assures Gawain that he has passed the tests of chivalry and honesty with fair points and Sir Gawain returns to his place at King Arthur's table. This seemed childish when I was a teenager. But in my middle age I entered the Tolkien world made of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* thanks to my children!

The Middle English poem opens with proper pride in Britain, the growing nation. Brutus has built the nation and now King Arthur holds the reins in his hands:

And when this Britain was built by this baron rich,
bold men were bred therein, of battle beloved,
in many a troubled time turmoil that wrought.
More flames on this fold have fallen here oft
than any other I know of, since that same time.
But of all that here built, of Britain the kings,
ever was Arthur highest, as I have heard tell.³

When the Green Knight throws the challenge and no one is ready to face him, King Arthur prepares to accept the challenge. But his nephew Sir Gawain, begs him for the honour. And then the terror-strike:

Green knight on his ground graciously stands:
with a little lean of the head, flesh he uncovers;
his long lovely locks he laid over his crown,
and let the naked neck to the stroke show.
Gawain gripped his axe and glanced it on high,
his left foot on the field before him he set,
letting it down lightly light on the naked,
that the sharp of the steel sundered the bones,
and sank through the soft flesh, sliced it in two,
that the blade of the bright steel bit in the ground.
The fair head from the frame fell to the earth.

The knights seem relieved, but then the unexpected happens. The Green Knight, headless, is very much the master of the situation. As the courtiers look on, the Green Knight walks away to his horse!

3. Translations from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* quoted in the essay are by A. S. Kline.

But stoutly he started forth on strong shanks,
 and roughly he reached out, where the ranks stood,
 latched onto his lovely head, and lifted it so;
 and then strode to his steed, the bridle he catches,
 steps into stirrup and strides him aloft,
 and his head by the hair in his hand holds.
 And as steady and staunch him in his saddle sat
 as if no mishap had him ailed, though headless now instead.

Bleeding profusely and the blood shining brilliantly in the green background, the Green Knight rides away after reminding Sir Gawain that he has to meet him at the end of the year.

The third poem I remember of those days is *Pearl*. Like many other poems that seek an answer for an untimely death, *Savitri* among them, *Pearl* is about a father losing his little daughter. Sorrowing he falls asleep in a garden and has a dream-vision where he meets a lovely lady, the Pearl-maiden. In the course of their dialogue she teaches him the truth of life and death according to the Christian doctrine and helps him have a vision of Heaven. We would be coming across an identical situation in Dante's *The Divine Comedy* where Beatrice would lead the poet to Paradise. Much later, I would take up *The Divine Comedy* and *Savitri* for a comparative study. But, for the present Dante is not in my horizon.

Pearl by itself was just the right poem for that time when a touch of distant tragedy evokes wet eyes in a young girl: ah, would I be dying too? How will my parents face it? Not yet initiated into the world of Christian theological perspectives, I found the poem tragically beautiful and no more at that time. The description of the Pearl-maiden in terms of her white silken garments and pearl ornament and everything so sheerly white made a lasting impression on my psyche. Especially the vision which placed emphasis on dress and ornaments as being "spiritual" adjuncts to one's life and the deep sighs of a parent over his loss and his elevation to a rare joy of the spirit at the conclusion seemed so real in those far-off days.

The dead maiden had been buried, but the event came as an image, calling for silent tears: "Alas! On the green all unaware she slipped to ground in a grassy plot."⁴ The father returns to the place some months later. The grimness is gone. It is August:

Blossom and leaf spread shade therein,
 Gilliflower, ginger and gromillon.
 Peonies pied the grass between.
 Lovely to look on was that scene

4. Translations from *Pearl* quoted in this essay are by A. G. Stock.

And fair the fragrance drifting out:
 A goodly house she sojourned in.
 My precious pearl without a spot!

It so happened that not long after my graduation, I had the privilege of meeting Miss A. G. Stock who had brought out a new translation of the Middle English poem. She was then a Professor and Head of the department of English in Calcutta University and had come to the Andhra University for some official meeting. I was a research scholar at that time and during a brief meeting in the English Department, she was kind enough to read out some passages from her translation of *Pearl*. For me it was a new experience. Haven't we been reading all about the literature of her land? Asked about her favourite English poem, to our astonishment, she mentioned T. S. Eliot's 'Macavity'! She was kind enough to recite it for us too:

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw —
 For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
 He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
 For when they reach the scene of crime — Macavity's not there!

In his concluding remarks at the meeting, my father (who was Professor of English) mentioned that Sri Aurobindo had also written a poem on a cat and proceeded to recite it too!

Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair,
 An image of magnificent despair;
 The grandeur of a sorrowful surmise
 Wakes in the largeness of her glorious eyes.
 In her beauty's dumb significant pose I find
 The tragedy of her mysterious mind.
 Yet is she stately, grandiose, full of grace.
 A musing mask is her immobile face.
 Her tail is up like an unconquered flag;
 Its dignity knows not the right to wag.
 An animal creature wonderfully human,
 A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman,
 Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat,
 Is now the problem I am wondering at.⁵

5. 'Despair on the Staircase', CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 639.

Miss Stock's translation of *Pearl* is easily readable. Down the years many facets of the poem that I had not thought of have drawn close to me thanks to scholars in this area. For instance, Sarah Stanbury, introducing her translation of the poem in 2001 says that it has been a great inspiration for creative writers. The poem

. . . leads off with a rich display of these qualities in a story of crossing-over, the stepping out from the ordinary life into a parallel universe where things operate by different natural laws: down the rabbit hole, through the wardrobe or looking glass, across the ocean to be shipwrecked on Prospero's island or, more recently, across a bridge to the island of Willow Springs in Gloria Naylor's haunting novel, *Mama Day*, where the crossing-over moves into a place of memory and hope, the nostalgic space of home as well as Beulah or Eden, the earthly paradise.⁶

The essence of the poem is that the laws of trade, of profit and loss, of wages commensurate with work, of good and evil do not work here. Ultimately the Lord is a compassionate Lord and if we turn to Him, we will never be turned away. The Pearl-maiden tells the poet:

Our gentle Chieftain is not mean;
 Whether his hand be soft or hard
 His gifts like flowing water run
 From unexhausted gulfs outpoured.
 His range is wide who turns toward
 His love that can our sin o'erthrow:
 From him no blessing shall be spared,
 For the grace of God is great enow.

England, India, anywhere in this world: the visionary's thoughts sound the same when it comes to the grace of the Supreme. So why should we sorrow?
 Sri Aurobindo has given us the divine armour!

For the grace of the Divine Mother is the sanction of the Supreme and now or tomorrow its effect is sure, a thing decreed, inevitable and irresistible.⁷

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

6. Introduction to *Pearl* edited by Sarah Stanbury; Medieval Institute Publication, Michigan, 2001.

7. *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 8-9.



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