

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SEPTEMBER 2013

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$35 or Rs. 1,400.00

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

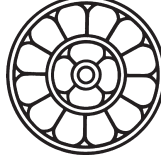
Air Mail:

Annual: \$70 or Rs. 2,800.00

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

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

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



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Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

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

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVI

No. 9

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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‘WHAT WAS THE GARDEN HE BUILT WHEN THE STARS WERE FIRST SET IN THEIR PLACES . . .’

. . . What was the garden he built when the stars were first set in their places,
Soul and Nature together mid streams and in cloudless spaces
Naked and innocent? Someone offered a fruit of derision,
Knowledge of good and of evil, cleaving in God a division.
Though He who made all said, “It is good; I have fashioned perfection,”
“No, there is evil,” someone whispered, “’tis screened from detection.”
Wisest he of the beasts of the field, one cunning and creeping;
“See it,” he said, “be wise; you shall be as the gods are, unsleeping,
They who know all.” And they ate. The roots of our being were shaken;
Hatred and weeping and wrath at once trampled a world overtaken,
Terror and fleeing and anguish and shame and desires unsated;
Cruelty stalked like a lion; Revenge and her brood were created.
Out to the desert he drove the rebellious. Flaming behind them
Streamed out the sword of his wrath and it followed leaping to find them,
Stabbing at random. The pure and the evil, the strong and the tempted,
All are confounded in punishment; justly is no one exempted.
Virtuous? yes, there are many, but who is there innocent? Toiling
Therefore we seek, but find not that Eden. Planting and spoiling,
“This is the garden,” we say, “lo, the trees and this is the river.”
Vainly redeemers came, not one has availed to deliver.
Never can Nature go back to her careless and childlike beginning,
Laugh of the babe and the song of the wheel in its delicate spinning,
Smile of the sun upon flowers and earth’s beauty, life without labour
Plucking the fruits of the soil and rejoicing in cottage and arbour.
Once we have chosen to be as the gods, we must follow that motion.
Knowledge must grow in us, might like a Titan’s, bliss like an ocean,
Calmness and purity born of the spirit’s gaze on the Real,
Rapture of his oneness embracing the soul in a clasp hymeneal.
Was it not he once in Brindavan? Woods divine to our yearning,
Memorable always! O flowers, O delight on the tree-tops burning,
Grasses his herds have grazed and crushed by his feet in the dancing,
Yamuna flowing with song, through the greenness always advancing,
You unforgotten remind; for his flute with its sweetness ensnaring
Sounds in our ears in the night and our souls of their teguments baring
Hales us out naked and absolute, out to his woodlands eternal,
Out to his moonlit dances, his dalliance sweet and supernal,

And we go stumbling, maddened and thrilled to his dreadful embraces,
 Slaves of his rapture to Brindavan crowded with amorous faces,
 Luminous kine in the green glades seated, soft-eyed gazing,
 Flowers on the branches distressing us, moonbeams unearthly amazing,
 Yamuna flowing before us, laughing low with her voices,
 Brindavan arching o'er us where Shyama sports and rejoices.
 Inly the miracle trembles repeated; mist-walls are broken
 Hiding that country of God and we look on the wonderful token,
 Clasp the beautiful body of the Eternal; his flute-call of yearning
 Cries in our breast with its blissful anguish for ever returning;
 Life flows past us with passionate voices, a heavenly river,
 All our being goes back as a bride of his bliss to the Giver.
 Even an hour of the soul can unveil the Unborn, the Everlasting,
 Gaze on its mighty Companion; the load of mortality casting,
 Mind hushes stilled in eternity; waves of the Infinite wander
 Thrilling body and soul and its endless felicity squander;
 All world-sorrow is finished, the cry of the parting is over;
 Ecstasy laughs in our veins, in our heart is the heart of the Lover.
 As when a stream from a highland plateau green mid the mountains
 Draws through broad lakes of delight the gracious sweep of its fountains,
 Life from its heaven of desire comes down to the toil of the earth-ways;
 Streaming through mire it pours still the mystical joy of its birthplace,
 Green of its banks and the green of its trees and the hues of the flower.
 Something of child-heart beauty, something of greatness and power,
 Dwell with it still in its early torrent laughter and brightness,
 Call in the youth of its floods and the voice of the wideness and whiteness.
 But in its course are set darkness and fall and the spirit's ordeal.
 Hating its narrowness, forced by an ardour to see all and be all,
 Dashed on the unconscious rocks and straining through mud, over gravel,
 Flows, like an ardent prisoner bound to the scenes of his travail,
 Life, the river of the Spirit, consenting to anguish and sorrow
 If by her heart's toil a loan-light of joy from the heavens she can borrow.
 Out of the sun-rays and moon-rays, the winds' wing-glimmer and revel,
 Out of the star-fields of wonder, down to earth's danger and evil
 Headlong cast with a stridulant thunder, the doom-ways descending,
 Shuddering below into sunless depths, across chasms unending,
 Baulked of the might of its waters, a thread in a mountainous vastness,
 Parcelled and scanted it hurries as if storming a Titan fastness,
 Carving the hills with a sullen and lonely gigantic labour.
 Hurlled into strangling ravines it escapes with a leap and a quaver,
 Breaks from the channels of hiding it grooves out and chisels and twistens,

Angry, afraid, white, foaming. A stony and monstrous resistance
Meets it piling up stubborn limits. Afflicted the river
Treasures a scattered sunbeam, moans for a god to deliver,
Longing to lapse through the plain's green felicity, yearning to widen
Joined to the ocean's shoreless eternity far-off and hidden.
High on the cliffs the Great Ones are watching, the Mighty and Deathless,
Soaring and plunging the roadway of the Gods climbs uplifted and breathless;
Ever we hear in the heart of the peril a flute go before us,
Luminous beckoning hands in the distance invite and implore us.
Ignorant, circled with death and the abyss, we have dreamed of a human
Paradise made from the mind of a man, from the heart of a woman,
Dreamed of the Isles of the Blest in a light of perpetual summer,
Dreamed of the joy of an earthly life with no pain for incomer.
Never, we said, can these waters from heaven be lost in the marshes,
Cease in the sands of the desert, die where the simoom parches;
Plains are beyond, there are hamlets and fields where the river rejoices
Pacing once more with a quiet step and with amical voices:
Bright amid woodlands red with the berries and cool with the breezes
Glimmer the leaves; all night long the heart of the nightingale eases
Sweetly its burden of pity and sorrow. There amid flowers
We shall take pleasure in arbours delightful, lengthening the hours,
Time for our servitor waiting our fancy through moments unfasting,
Under the cloudless blue of those skies of tranquillity resting,
Lying on beds of lilies, hearing the bells of the cattle
Tinkle, and drink red wine of life and go forth to the battle,
Fight and unwounded return to our beautiful home by the waters,
Fruit of our joy rear tall strong sons and radiant daughters.
Then shall the Virgins of Light come down to us clad in clear raiment
Woven from sunbeam and moonbeam and lightnings, limitless payment
Bring of our toil and our sorrow, carrying life-giving garlands
Plucked by the fountains of Paradise, bring from imperishable star-lands
Hymn-words of wisdom, visions of beauty, heaven-fruit ruddy,
Wine-cups of ecstasy sending the soul like a stream through the body.
Fate shall not know; if her spies come down to our beautiful valley,
They shall grow drunk with its grapes and wander in woodland and alley.
There leaps the anger of Rudra? there will his lightnings immortal
Circle around with their red eye of cruelty stabbing the portal?
Fearless is there life's play; I shall sport with my dove from his highlands,
Drinking her laughter of bliss like a god in my Grecian islands.
Life in my limbs shall grow deathless, flesh with the God-glory tingle,
Lustre of Paradise, light of the earth-ways marry and mingle.

These are but dreams and the truth shall be greater. Heaven made woman!
 Flower of beatitude! living shape of the bliss of the Brahman!
 Art thou not she who shall bring into life and time the Eternal?
 Body of the summer of the Gods, a sweetness virginal, vernal,
 Breathes from thy soul into Nature; Love sits dreaming in thy bosom,
 Wisdom gazes from thy eyes, thy breasts of God-rapture are the blossom.
 If but the joy of thy feet once could touch our spaces smiting
 Earth with a ray from the Unknown, on the world's heart heaven's script writing,
 All then would change into harmony and beauty, Time's doors shudder
 Swinging wide on their hinges into Eternity, other
 Voices than earth's would be fire in our speech and make deathless our thinking.
 One who is hidden in Light would grow visible, multitudes linking,
 Lyres of a single ecstasy, throbs of the one heart beating,
 Wonderful bodies and souls in the spirit's identity meeting
 Even as stars in sky-vastness know their kindred in grandeur.
 Yet may it be that although in the hands of our destiny stands sure
 Fixed to its hour the Decree of the Advent, still it is fated
 Only when kindling earth's bodies a mightier Soul is created.
 Far-off the gold and the greatness, the rapture too splendid and dire.
 Are not the ages too young? too low in our hearts burns the fire.
 Bringest thou only a gleam on the summits, a cry in the distance,
 Seen by the eyes that are wakened, heard by a spirit that listens?
 Form of the formless All-Beautiful, lodestar of Nature's aspiration,
 Music of prelude giving a voice to the ineffable Silence,
 First white dawn of the God-Light cast on these creatures that perish,
 Word-key of a divine and eternal truth for mortals to cherish,
 Come! let thy sweetness and force be a breath in the breast of the future
 Making the god-ways alive, immortality's golden-red suture:
 Deep in our lives there shall work out a honeyed celestial leaven,
 Bliss shall grow native to being and earth be a kin-soil to heaven.
 Open the barriers of Time, the world with thy beauty enamour.
 Trailing behind thee the purple of thy soul and the dawn-moment's glamour,
 Forcing the heart of the Midnight where slumber and secrecy linger,
 Guardians of Mystery, touching her bosom with thy luminous finger,
 Daughter of Heaven, break through to me moonlike, mystic and gleaming;
 Tread through the margins of twilight, cross over borders of dreaming.
 Vision delightful alone on the peaks whom the silences cover,
 Vision of bliss, stoop down to mortality, lean to thy lover.

AHANA

Voice of the sensuous mortal, heart of eternal longing,
 Thou who hast lived as in walls, thy soul with thy senses wronging!
 But I descend at last. Fickle and terrible, sweet and deceiving,
 Poison and nectar one has dispensed to thee, luring thee, leaving.
 We two together shall capture the flute and the player relentless.
 Son of man, thou hast crowned thy life with the flowers that are scentless,
 Chased the delights that wound. But I come and midnight shall sunder.
 Lo, I come, and behind me Knowledge descends and with thunder
 Filling the spaces Strength, the Angel, bears on his bosom
 Joy to thy arms. Thou shalt look on her face like a child's or a blossom,
 Innocent, free as in Eden of old, not afraid of her playing,
 When thy desires I have seized and devoured like a lioness preying.
 Thou shalt not suffer always nor cry to me lured and forsaken:
 I have a snare for his footsteps, I have a chain for him taken.
 Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster
 Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master.
 Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;
 Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.
 Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,
 Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,
 Brindavan's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,
 Take thy place in the Ras¹ and thy share of the ecstasy after.

SRI AUROBINDO
‘Ahana’

(*Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 486-91*)

1. The dance-round of Krishna with the cowherdesses in the moonlit groves of Brindavan, type of the dance of Divine Delight with the souls of men liberated in the world of Bliss secret within us.

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of July 2013)

SADHANA THROUGH WORK FOR THE MOTHER

Finding the Mother's Force in Work and Action

Yesterday I worked with great vigour and after I saw Mother in the evening I felt that there was no physical tiredness at all and that I could work for twelve hours more.

It is the Mother's energy that comes down into the vital and physical for those who are open.

12 February 1933

*

I told you that I could work peacefully at the Granary, but alas, I am unable to do so. As I sit quietly doing my work, X comes and starts talking about many things and creates a disturbance in me. I pray that you will help me.

You must be able to find the Mother in work and action as well as in concentration and silence. It is quite possible even if there is the silence within you and no restless movement, to move and act and do all that is needful. It is in fact when all within is silent, free from desire and with no restless movement that the Mother's force can act best and do things in the right way. You should aspire to the Mother for the right force to act and do work and find her in the work and action.

31 May 1933

*

When I do any work for myself or do any work as my own, I get tired. But my mind realises now that this tiredness comes because I have not offered the work to my Divine Parents.

If there is the full surrender in the work and you feel it is the Mother's and that the Mother's force is working in you, then fatigue does not come.

July 1933

*

During the work, is it good to go on thinking: "It is the Mother who does the work through us"?

If it is *work*, you can always do that, provided you realise that it depends on the instrument whether the Mother's force works fully or not.

But if we think it is the Mother who is working through us, wrong movements may hide in the disguise of the Mother?

If you think all your actions come from the Mother, then of course it will have that effect — the actions come from Prakriti. Work is a different matter, for it is the Mother's work you are doing.

16 August 1933

*

Today I felt as if someone other than myself was carrying out my actions. Of course I was there, but in the background. Was it not the Mother's Force trying to take me into itself integrally?

It is too much to say that. What you say amounts only to some glimpse of the cosmic Force behind all the actions.

2 June 1934

*

Everybody is in the Mother, but one must become conscious of that, not of the work only.

1 April 1935

*

The feeling that all one does is from the Divine, that all action is the Mother's is a necessary step in experience, but one cannot remain in it — one has to go farther.

Those can remain in it who do not want to change the nature, but only to have the experience of the Truth behind it. Your action is according to universal Nature and in that again it is according to your individual nature, and all Nature is a force put out by the Divine Mother for the action of the universe. But as things are it is an action in the Ignorance and the ego; while what we want is an action of the divine Truth unveiled and undeformed by the Ignorance and the ego.

So when you feel that your actions are all done by the force (শক্তি) of the Mother, that is a true experience. But the will of the Mother (মায়ের ইচ্ছা) is that all you do should be done not by her force in Nature as now, but her own direct force in the Truth of her nature, the higher divine Nature. So also it was correct, what you thought afterwards, that unless there is this change, the experience that all you do is done by her will cannot be altogether true. So it will not be permanent till then. For if it were permanent now, it might keep you in the lower action as it does many and prevent or retard the change. What you need as a permanent experience now is that of the Mother's Force working in you in all things to change this ignorant consciousness and nature into her divine consciousness and nature.

It is the same with the truth about the instrument. It is true that each being is an instrument of the cosmic Shakti, therefore of the Mother. But the aim of the sadhana is to become a conscious and perfect instrument instead of one that is unconscious and therefore imperfect. You can be a conscious and perfect instrument only when you are no longer acting in obedience to the ignorant push of the lower nature, but in surrender to the Mother and aware of her higher Force acting within you. So here too your intuition was perfectly true.

But all this cannot be done in a day. So you are once more right in not being anxious or uneasy. One must be vigilant, but not anxious and uneasy, ব্যস্ত. The Mother's Force will act and bring the result in its own time — provided one offers all to her and aspires and is vigilant, calling and remembering her at all times, rejecting quietly all that stands in the way of the action of her transforming Force. Your second view of this was more from the right angle of vision than the first. To say that it is not I who have to act, so I need not mind, is to say too much — one has to act in so far as one has to aspire, offer oneself, assent to the Mother's working, reject all else, more and more surrender. All else will be done in time; there is no need for anxiety or depression or impatience.

13 July 1935

*

What is meant by being an instrument or being used by the Mother's Force? When one acts on impulse, often it is a wrong movement — how can that be a case of being an instrument? When you wrote to X, "You are being used as an effective instrument", did you write it as a temporary encouragement?

So long as one is not conscious of the Force working through one, one is moved by the Prakriti. The Prakriti may be used sometimes by the Divine for some work to be done, but that is not what is meant in the Yoga by being an "instrument". I do not know to what you refer as regards X, — his poetry was inspired by us and he felt it and it certainly helped several people; to that extent he was an effective instrument for the work so long as he was in the right attitude. Naturally, it is for the work that one can be an instrument, not for things like sex which have nothing to do with the Yoga or the work. But the real instrumentality begins when the consciousness of the Force working begins within.

30 October 1935

*

In a letter about work Sri Aurobindo says: "As for the dedication make the sañkalpa always of offering it, remember and pray when you can. . . . This is to fix a certain attitude. Afterwards, the Force can take advantage of this key to open the deeper dedication within." May I know in what terms this deeper dedication can be expressed?

One begins to feel a double consciousness, one an inner being within which is always dedicated, spontaneously and silently full of the devotion to the Mother or aware of her Force working or of her presence or all these together and another the outer through which the work is done.

1936

*

During work, the consciousness, however high it was before, falls at once into inertia. Is this condition never to change?

It is not necessary to fall into inertia, but one always comes into a less intensity of consciousness during work unless one has established in work the conscious contact with the Mother's Force and is aware of that during the work or unless one has developed a double consciousness, the inner concentrated, the outer doing the work.

12 April 1936

*

You seem to have written to X that there is a special force for the work and, if it is brought down, its action need not remain a separate thing from meditation. What is this special force for work?

It is the Mother's force, naturally.

16 May 1936

*

It is only when work and action are done in that way, without insistence on one's personal ideas and personal feelings but only for the Divine's sake without thought of self that work becomes fully a sadhana and the internal and the external nature can arrive at a harmony. It makes it more possible for the inner being to take up and enlighten the outer action and grow conscious of the Mother's force behind it guiding it in its works.

3 January 1937

*

Should one try to put out the Mother's Force during work, if one is conscious of it?

It is the Mother's Force that has to work through the sadhak, not the sadhak who has to work through the Mother's Force.

If one is not yet conscious of her Force, should one put out one's inner energy in work? How is the inner energy related to the outer energy?

The first stage is when one works with the outer energy, but there is an inner consciousness supporting it which relies wholly on the Mother. The second is when there is an inner consciousness and force which uses the outer instruments — the outer energy being quiescent or else a part only of the inner — while this inner consciousness knows that the force is the Mother's or feels the Mother's presence in it: there are different experiences in this respect. The third is when all is the Mother's Force working.

10 April 1937

*

There are two ways of making an offering to the Mother: one is to offer an act at her feet as one might offer a flower; the other is to withdraw one's personality and feel as though she were doing all the actions. Which of these ways is better for the sadhana?

There is no need to ask which is the better as they are not mutually exclusive. It is the mind that regards them as opposites. The psychic being can offer the act while the nature is passive to the Force (the ego being expunged or having withdrawn) and feels the Mother's Force doing the act and her Presence in it.

5 November 1938

*

Efface the stamp of ego from the heart and let the love of the Mother take its place. Cast from the mind all insistence on your personal ideas and judgments, then you will have the wisdom to understand her. Let there be no obsession of self-will, ego-drive in the action, love of personal authority, attachment to personal preference, then the Mother's force will be able to act clearly in you and you will get the inexhaustible energy for which you ask and your service will be perfect.

27 November 1940

Work for the Mother in the Integral Yoga

To go entirely inside in order to have experiences and to neglect the work, the external consciousness, is to be unbalanced, one-sided in the sadhana — for our Yoga is integral; so also to throw oneself outward and live in the external being alone is to be unbalanced, one-sided in the sadhana. One must have the same consciousness in inner experience and outward action and make both full of the Mother.

*

There should be not only a general attitude, but each work should be offered to the Mother so as to keep the attitude a living one all the time. There should be at the time of work no meditation, for that would withdraw the attention from the work, but there should be the constant memory of the One to whom you offer it. This is only a first process; for when you can have constantly the feeling of a calm being within concentrated in the sense of the Divine Presence while the surface mind does the work, or when you can begin to feel always that it is the Mother's force that is doing the work and you are only a channel or an instrument, then in place of memory there will have begun the automatic constant realisation of Yoga, divine union, in works.

April 1930

*

Those who do work for the Mother in all sincerity, are prepared by the work itself for the right consciousness even if they do not sit down for meditation or follow any particular practice of Yoga. It is not necessary to tell you how to meditate; whatever is needful will come of itself if in your work and at all times you are sincere and keep yourself open to the Mother.

15 March 1932

*

The Mother does not think that it is good to give up all work and only read and meditate. Work is part of the Yoga and it gives the best opportunity for calling down the Presence, the Light and the Power into the vital and its activities; it increases also the field and the opportunity of surrender.

It is not enough to remember that the work is the Mother's — and the results also. You must learn to feel the Mother's force behind you and to open to the inspiration and the guidance. Always to remember by an effort of the mind is too difficult; but if you get into the consciousness in which you feel always the Mother's force in you or supporting you, that is the true thing.

18 August 1932

*

The Mother refuses to relieve you of all work — work is a necessary part of this Yoga. If you do not do work and spend all the time in “meditation”, you and your sadhana will lose all hold of realities; you will lose yourself in uncontrolled subjective imaginations such as those you are now allowing to control you and lead you into actions — like your absenting yourself from Pranam, becoming fanciful and irregular in your taking of food, coming to the Mother at a wrong time and place under the imagination that she has called you — actions dictated by error and false suggestion and not by Truth. It is by doing work for the Mother with surrender to her, with obedience to her expressed will, without fancies and vital self-will that you can remain in touch with the embodied Mother here and progress in the Yoga. Mere subjective experiences without control by us will not lead you to the Truth and may lead you far from it into sheer confusion and error.

If you do not want to do the B. D. [*Building Department*] account and letter work, you can take up the work of keeping the gate daily from 12 to 2; but it is better if you combine this gate work with the typing of letters whenever needed. If you do not want to do the gate work, then you must go on with the work you now have. If you take the gate work only, you must hand over the typewriter to the B. D. so that it may continue to be used for the work you were doing up till now.

I must warn you that by withdrawing into a one-sided subjective existence

within and by pushing away from you all touch with physical realities, you are running into a wrong path and imperilling your sadhana. What happens to sadhaks who do this is that they make a mental Formation and put it in place of the true embodied Mother here, and then under its inspiration they begin to lose touch with her and disobey her and follow the false suggestions of their mental Formation. The first thing it does is to instigate them not to write to her, not to come to Pranam, not to act as regards food, work etc. on the lines laid down by her, to disobey her — as you have disobeyed her with regard to coming to Pranam this morning. Another very bad sign of this false condition is when they feel not in touch with the Mother when they meet her in the body and guided only by some disembodied Mother in their own egoistic consciousness — that is a sure sign that a Falsehood is getting into their sadhana. As regards their way of life, they do not wish to do like the others, but to have a special way of life of their own, governed by some Imagination within them. All this you must stop. You must come to Pranam regularly, take your food regularly, sleep regularly, do the work given you conscientiously, following the lines laid down for this Asram by the Mother, and through a right consciousness in this life you must realise her Truth in the physical existence.

Your unwillingness to come to the Pranam because that would interrupt some subjective experience is altogether out of place. No experience in formal meditation, not a hundred experiences together can be worth the touch of the Mother in the Pranam. If you had the psychic being in front in the physical or even in the heart and the vital, you would feel that at once. Moreover, these experiences are not supramental as you seem to imagine. The supramental Truth could never stand behind such errors as you are making now. Moreover to get the supramental Light is not so easy as you fancy; I have warned again and again the sadhaks against the error of thinking they are already in possession of the supermind or in touch with it. One has to go through a long and patient development through many lower stages of consciousness before one can be even within measurable distance of the supermind.

All attachment and self-indulgence are dangerous — attachment and self-indulgence in subjective experiences and remote “meditations”, pushing aside the Truth in objective life is as dangerous as any other. Draw back from these errors and get back into the true balance of the sadhana. If you want the psychic in the physical, you cannot get it by merely sitting in meditation and having abstract experiences; you can get it only by seeking it in physical life and action, by work for the Mother, obedience and surrender in work to the Mother who is present in her own body here.

15 September 1932

When I am alone for some time, I feel aspiration in the heart, peace and Samata. I feel as if nothing can disturb me. But when I come out to work or move here and there and mix with others, I lose this feeling. Why does it happen like this?

It is the difficulty of being calm and surrendered in action and movement; when there is no action and one is simply sitting still, it is easy to be quiet.

How can this weakness be rejected from the nature so that I can live in peace and Samata in the midst of work and everywhere?

By rejecting ego and desire and living and working for the Divine alone.

Will those who live in peace and Samata but do not work for the Mother's sake or do little work be transformed fully?

No; they do not get transformed at all.

7 May 1933

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If one works with an attitude of service and love, but does not meditate, will it not lead to stagnation from an inner standpoint? Many say, "We are doing Mother's work and that is sufficient."

If they do it in the right spirit, then it may be sufficient for them, as it will bring the rest — because of the spirit in which they do it. It is a matter of idiosyncrasy — there are some who cannot get anything by meditation, so that work or bhakti is their only resource.

24 May 1933

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People say, "As long as the lower nature is not fully purified, it is dangerous to do a lot of meditation. If one meditates too much before one has become purified by means of work, things might rise up from the lower nature and upset the sadhak. When the higher forces come down into a nature not sufficiently purified through work, it is difficult to bear the descent of the divine forces."

It is not the descent of the higher or divine forces that upsets a sadhak, it is his acceptance of forces of falsehood through ambition, vanity, desire to be a great Yogi or an attachment to his experiences without regard to their truth or their source.

It is not well to spend the whole time or the greater part of the time in meditation unless one is very strong in mind — for one gets into a habit of living in an inner world entirely and losing touch with external realities — this brings in a one-sided inharmonious movement and may lead to disturbance of balance. To do both meditation and work and dedicate both to the Mother is the best thing.

6 August 1933

*

My thoughts, emotions and sensations are all turned towards the Mother. But how can I make them serve her in practical life? I still make mistakes and do not always get the right inspiration.

That depends on the physical mind. It has to learn to stop listening to itself and following its own ideas and to call seriously and persistently for the inspiration of the Mother — your physical mind has to become a portion of hers, answering at once and accurately to whatever comes from her.

27 December 1933

*

X says that he cannot feel your presence during work as he can during meditation. He does not understand how work can help him.

He has to learn to consecrate his work and feel the Mother's power working through it. A purely sedentary subjective realisation is only a half realisation.

23 January 1934

*

I pray that I may feel the Mother's protection while working. I feel happy to work. I am not able to meditate every day, but as long as I am working I feel that the work itself is sadhana.

Work for the Mother done with the right concentration on her is as much a sadhana as meditation and inner experiences.

14 March 1934

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During physical pursuits, I find that the Mother's Force takes them up. But when I am not working, what should I aspire for?

For the Mother's power to work and bring down by the proper stages the higher consciousness. Also for the system to be more and more fit — quiet, egoless, surrendered.

5 June 1934

*

It is not our experience that by meditation alone it is possible to change the nature, nor has retirement from outward activity and work much profited those who have tried it; in many cases it has been harmful. A certain amount of concentration, an inner aspiration in the heart and an opening of the consciousness to the Mother's presence there and to the descent from above are needed. But without action, without work the nature does not really change; it is there and by contact with men that there is the test of the change in the nature. As for the work one does, there is no higher or lower work; all work is the same provided it is offered to the Mother and done for her and in her power.

You have probably taken too much work on yourself by adding to the rest accounts, etc. That was not necessary. There is no reason why you should not do a normal amount and have time and energy for meditation as well. If you wish, however, to change, Mother may consider it, though she does not just now see how to arrange.

6 October 1934

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This [*experience of the true attitude*] happens when the work is always associated with the Mother's thought, done as an offering to her, with the call to do it through you. All ideas of ego, all association of egoistic feelings with the work must disappear. One begins to feel the Mother's force doing the work; the psychic grows through a certain inner attitude behind the work and the adhar becomes open both to the psychic intuitions and influences from within and to the descent from above. Then the result of meditation can come through the work itself.

5 May 1936

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Just as you give yourself through work to the Mother doing all for her, so there is an inner giving or consecration. Ordinarily the mind and vital live for themselves,

want this or that, seek after it and feel dissatisfied and unfulfilled if they do not get it. But when they give themselves, this ceases. Whatever the Mother does with them that they accept — ask for nothing, rely on her entirely, live for her will and not for their desires. Then they begin to be empty of their old selves and old movements, fill with the presence of the Mother, the will of the Mother, the workings of the Mother — that becomes all their life.

27 July 1936

*

Once in an interview the Mother told me, "Why do you make any difference between me and work?" I am not sure if I have been able to reproduce the exact words, but they are almost like that. I pray to you to make the idea a little more explicit.

As it stands, it has no meaning. What Mother must have said is "Why do you make any separation between me and work?" It is she who is doing the work, she is there in it, so it is a mistake to make an opposition between concentration on her and the work. Her presence is there in both.

1936

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This state of mind, described in your letter, must be due to a tension created by an urge in the psychic to make a complete surrender to the Mother and some obstruction in the vital mind and surface intellect. This mind supports the obstruction by an excessive self-depreciation (not well-founded as a sound and just self-examination would be) and a questioning of all you do so that you can see only defects and wrong motives. That creates unrest, doubt and strain and hampers your sadhana and prevents the psychic impulse from acting freely.

You should do your work simply in the confidence that it is accepted and appreciated by the Mother, as indeed it is, — for your work has been very good and helpful to her. Let the psychic movement express itself simply and spontaneously in action without allowing the outer mind to interfere; that would very likely release the tension and then your sadhana could proceed in a quiet cheerfulness, confident of its own truth and the Mother's loving acceptance.

6 December 1943

Work for the Mother as Karmayoga

He should carry on his work and do all things else in the right consciousness, offering all he does to the Mother and keeping in inner touch with her. All work done in that spirit and with that consciousness becomes Karmayoga and can be regarded as part of his sadhana.

10 March 1932

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What you received and kept in the work is indeed the true basic consciousness of Karmayoga — the calm consciousness from above supporting and the strength from above doing the work, with that the Bhakti which feels it to be the Mother's consciousness present and working. You know now by experience what is the secret of Karmayoga.

15 September 1936

Following the Mother's Will

The conditions for following the Mother's will are to turn to her for Light and Truth and Strength, to aspire that no other force shall influence or lead you, to make no demands or conditions in the vital, to keep a quiet mind ready to receive the Truth but not insisting on its own ideas and formations, — finally, to keep the psychic awake and in front, so that you may be in constant contact and know truly what her will is; for the mind and vital can mistake other impulsions and suggestions for the Divine Will, but the psychic once awakened makes no mistake.

A perfect perfection in working is only possible after supramentalisation; but a relative good working is possible on the lower planes if one is in contact with the Divine and careful, vigilant and conscious in mind and vital and body. That is a condition, besides, which is preparatory and almost indispensable for the supramentalisation.

23 February 1932

*

How can I become master of myself and keep self-discipline?

Observe yourself so that nothing passes without being conscious of it. Do not allow yourself to be moved by the forces of nature without the inner consent. Obey the

Mother's will always; let your consent or refusal to the movement of forces be in consonance with her Truth.

10 June 1933

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How can the will be made one with the Mother's Will?

The will can be made one with the Mother's by establishing a constant contact of the consciousness with hers.

24 June 1933

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Does "constant contact of the consciousness" mean mental contact or psychic?

It means the whole — with the psychic as the base.

25 June 1933

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I have been thinking that to change one's nature first one must restrain one's desire, then one must act according to the Mother's will and gradually there will be no will of one's own any more — all will happen by the Mother's will. Am I right?

At first one must put one's will in unison with the Mother's will knowing that it is an instrument only and that it is the Mother's will behind that alone can give the result. Afterwards, when one becomes conscious fully of the Mother's force working within, then the personal will is replaced by the divine.

15 July 1935

The Mother's Consciousness and the Divine Law

What I seek is the total transformation of myself, so that no movement can be outside the Divine Law.

Establish the Divine Consciousness (the Mother's consciousness) in you and the Divine Law will flow from that.

25 March 1932

Opening to the Mother in Work

Demands should not be made. What you receive freely from the Mother helps you; what you demand or try to impose on her is bound to be empty of her force.

The Mother deals with each person differently according to his true need (not what he himself fancies to be his need) and his progress in the sadhana and his nature.

For you the most effective way to get the strength you need would be to do the work conscientiously and scrupulously, allowing nothing to interfere with its exact discharge. If you did that, opening yourself at the same time to the Mother in your work, you would receive more constantly the grace and would come to feel her power doing the work through you; you would thus be able to live constantly with the sense of her presence. If on the contrary you allow your fancies or desires to interfere with your work or are careless and negligent, you interrupt the flow of her grace and give room for sorrow and uneasiness and other foreign forces to enter into you. Yoga through work is the easiest and most effective way to enter into the stream of this sadhana.

8 March 1930

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Even the most purely physical and mechanical work cannot be properly done if one accepts incapacity, inertia and passivity. The remedy is not to confine yourself to mechanical work, but to reject and throw off incapacity, passivity and inertia and open yourself to the Mother's force. If vanity, ambition and self-conceit stand in your way, cast them from you. You will not get rid of these things by merely waiting for them to disappear. If you merely wait for things to happen, there is no reason why they should happen at all. If it is incapacity and weakness that oppose, still, as one opens oneself truly and more and more to the Mother's force, the strength and capacity necessary for the work will be given and will grow in the adhar.

11 March 1932

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It is owing to the good psychic condition in which you are that this lightness and power of work comes into you; for then you are open to the Mother's Force and it is that that works in you, so that there is no fatigue. You felt the fatigue formerly *after* the work was over because your vital was open and the vital energy was the instrument of the work, but the body consciousness was not quite open and had some strain. This time the physical seems to have opened also.

1932

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In the ordinary condition of the body if you oblige the body to do too much work, it can do with the support of vital force. But as soon as the work is done, the vital force withdraws and then the body feels fatigue. If this is done too much and for too long a time, there may be a breakdown of health and strength under the overstrain. Rest is then needed for recovery.

If however the mind and the vital get the habit of opening to the Mother's Force, they are then supported by the Force and may even be fully filled with it — the Force does the work and the body feels no strain or fatigue before or after. But even then, unless the body itself is open and can absorb and keep the Force, sufficient rest in between the work is absolutely necessary. Otherwise although the body may go on for a very long time, yet in the end there can be a danger of a collapse.

The body can be sustained for a long time when there is the full influence and there is a single-minded faith and call in the mind and the vital; but if the mind or the vital is disturbed by other influences or opens itself to forces which are not the Mother's, then there will be a mixed condition and there will be sometimes strength, sometimes fatigue, exhaustion or illness or a mixture of the two at the same time.

Finally, if not only the mind and the vital, but the body also is open and can absorb the Force, it can do extraordinary things in the way of work without breaking down. Still, even then rest is necessary. That is why we insist on those who have the impulse of work keeping a proper balance between rest and labour.

A complete freedom from fatigue is possible, but that comes only when there is a complete transformation of the law of the body by the full descent of a supramental Force into the earth-nature.

Remembering the Mother in Work

It is only by an inner development that you can remember in the midst of work. Meanwhile offer all your work inwardly to the Mother.

21 May 1933

*

How to remember the Mother during work? I have tried to follow a mental rule, without success. Perhaps it is the inner consciousness that remembers while the outer is busy?

One starts by a mental effort — afterwards it is an inner consciousness that is formed which need not be always *thinking* of the Mother because it is always conscious of her.

31 May 1933

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During mental activities my outer being never remembers the Mother. Please show me the way to remain conscious of her in the midst of intellectual pursuits.

It can be done when you become the witness detached from the mental actions and not involved in them, not absorbed in them as the mental doer or thinker.

20 March 1934

*

Since yesterday I have always been in touch with the Mother during work. Not only do I remember her but the connection with her remains during work. Her Force constantly flows into the Adhar and the work is done automatically, but swiftly, perfectly, unhesitatingly — without personal anxieties and responsibilities; instead, there is confidence, sureness, strength, calmness. I feel that if I can do work in this attitude, it will be perfect, flawless, the work of the Mother's child, not of an egoistic man. Kindly let me know if I am correct.

Yes, it is a very good progress and the first step towards the right use of the Power for action.

1 April 1935

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The little experience I have of sadhana through works makes me incline to the view that work as sadhana is the most difficult of all. I don't remember any experience got through it nor can I remember that I am doing the Mother's work; whereas in poetry, though I may be unlucky as regards experiences, when one writes a poem one does try to think of her, at least mentally. I can even say that it is only by thinking of her that I can compose the lines.

Many find it easy to think of the Mother when working; but when they read or write, their mind goes off to the thing read or written and they forget everything else. I think that is the case with most. Physical work on the other hand can be done with the most external part of the mind, leaving the rest free to remember or to experience.

10 January 1936

Offering Actions to the Mother

Whatever work you do, take it as the Mother's and offer it to the Mother.

14 November 1933

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After finishing any activity, even eating and drinking, I make an offering of it to the Mother, saying, "I offer this work done by me to Thee." But now a sense is growing in me that all works are done by the Mother's Power of Nature through the individual nature. Accordingly, can I substitute the wording in this way, "All the work that is done by the (or my) individual nature is wholeheartedly offered to Thee"? Or what to say?

All that is done in me by Nature, I offer wholeheartedly for transformation to Thee, O Mother.

5 March 1934

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I have read in many places that we should refer all our actions to the Mother. But I don't know how to refer them and get her answer as to whether the actions should be done or not.

There is no question of getting an answer. It is simply to offer the actions to the Mother and call her Force to guide or do what is necessary.

13 January 1936

Work for the Mother and the Worker's Ego

Is it always necessary for our work to be prompted or initiated by the Mother in an outward way? Could one not feel so intensely that a thing has to be done that it is almost an inner prompting?

It would be dangerous to take every "inner prompting" as if it were a prompting or initiation of action from the Mother. What seems an inner prompting may come from anywhere, any Force good or bad seeking to fulfil itself.

One may have ego about the work even if the work itself comes from the Mother. The ego of the instrument is one of the things against which there must be special care in the Yoga.

When one is doing the work, usually the urge of the force that works and the preoccupation of doing it and getting it done or the pleasure of doing it are sufficient and the mind does not think of anything else. Afterwards the sense of "I did it" comes up. With some however the ego is active during the work itself.

3 November 1935

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In order to separate the being from the constant interference of the ego, I propose to do only those actions that I feel are one with the Mother's will. I know that the ego will still present itself, but it will be easy to recognise its interference as something coming from outside.

Of course it is a way. But one has still to be careful about the ego. Even people who sincerely think they are doing only the Mother's will are yet actuated by ego without knowing it.

4 April 1936

THE MOTHER'S LIGHTS

Lights and the Mother

Yesterday when the Mother came down in the evening to give Darshan, I saw her face shining with crimson light like the sun when it rises in the morning. What is the meaning of crimson light?

Crimson light indicates the manifestation of love in the material atmosphere.

5 July 1933

*

When I write to the Mother I often see flashes of light which are tiny, round and of different colours — white, gold, green, blue and yellow. What are they?

When you write, you put yourself probably in contact with the Mother's forces — these lights of different colours are the play of her forces.

14 October 1933

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Looking at the Mother on the terrace in the evening, I saw a dark blue light around her like the colour of the flower named "Radha's consciousness". Is the light around her of different colours? For I have also seen white light around her many times, and sometimes a pretty pale blue light.

There are various lights around the Mother indicating the forces that come from her. White is her own characteristic light, the pale blue is mine, — the golden, dark blue and others correspond to various other forces.

26 October 1933

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We normally see your force working in us as a pale blue light and the Mother's force working as a white light. But today I saw a red-coloured force working in me, red like a lotus flower. Was this your force too?

It must have been a special force working. The blue light is the characteristic force as the white is of the Mother, but we are not limited to that, the other forces and therefore the other lights are also ours.

24 November 1933

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Today I saw emerging from the Mother the whitish blue light of Sri Aurobindo. Why did I see it so? Is it because both are the same?

All the lights are put out by the Mother from herself.

6 March 1934

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Today at Pranam while feeling the Mother's Powers pouring into me, I saw the sacred word मा [Mā] inscribed in dark blue light in the corner of my breast below the right shoulder. Does it have any significance?

It means the impression of the Name with its power in some part of the being — (vital mental).

9 April 1934

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The lights are the Mother's Powers — many in number. The white light is her own characteristic power, that of the Divine Consciousness in its essence.

15 July 1934

The Mother's White Light

Last night I got contact with the Light and prayed for its descent. But it got lost as soon as my mind began to get into a white peaceful Mother's consciousness.

That was quite right. The contact with the Light must create peace.

I felt myself in a mind all white, but each time I tried it was impossible to get a rapid downward pull of the Light. After that I got into feelings and nice sensations in the body, but they took me down to a low state.

(1) The Mother's consciousness (white) is not only peace, but Light and Power.

(2) When one gets into contact with the Light above the mind, the first result should be peace in the mind.

(3) Whatever Power of the Light descends should descend into the peace of the mind without disturbing it.

(4) If you pull down the Light into an active mind, then the action of the Light may get deformed and may be used by the mind in a wrong way, with confusion and disturbance or for purposes and movements that are those of an inferior consciousness and not those of the Truth.

(5) There cannot be any real incompatibility between the Mother's consciousness and contact with the Light above.

2 June 1932

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What is the colour of the light around the Mother?

The Mother's special colour is white, but all the other colours are hers also.

7 June 1933

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In the evening when the Mother came out, I saw a huge white light following behind her. At first I thought it was an illusion, but when I kept on looking at it I knew it was no illusion. I was full of joy.

The white light is the Mother's light and it is always around her.

22 August 1933

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Today at Pranam I saw a pale blue light around the Mother. Is pale blue the colour of her light?

The pale blue light is my light — white light is the Mother's (sometimes gold also). People generally see either the white or both the white and the pale blue around her.

4 September 1933

*

When the Mother comes on the terrace in the evening, I often see white light around her; it is clearly visible around her body and sometimes the top of the whole building seems to emit light. One day I thought that there may be a background of light behind all material things which can be seen physically. Is it true? Is there any systematic process to open oneself to that physical vision?

The white Light around the Mother is the Mother's own light — that of the Divine Consciousness. Many nowadays are able to see it around her when she is on the roof. One can also see all objects in this light — it means that the light has descended here and is floating around everything.

10 September 1933

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Last night after eight o'clock after returning from work, I sat for meditation. My mind and vital became quiet and opened to the Mother. My heart became vast and opened to her. Then in this quietness something very soothing descended from my chest down to my navel and below it. Then, below the navel, I saw a bright white light penetrating and it filled the whole area with light; then it rose up above the navel till even the head was filled with light. I am unable to express the peace and quietness I felt at that time. The peace was very pure. Now whenever I sit for meditation, I see a very white light coming around me.

The white Light is the Mother's light. Wherever it descends or enters, it brings peace, purity, silence and the openness to the higher forces. If it comes below the navel, that means that it is working in the lower vital.

31 July 1934

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The Mother's white light is the light of the Divine Consciousness; you are living more and more under it and it is that that is liberating you.

25 August 1934

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What you saw in vision was a supraphysical body of the Mother made probably of her white light which is the light of the Divine Consciousness and Force that stands behind the universe.

30 January 1935

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I am sending you a letter received from X. She has written her experiences and wants to know their meaning. She says that now she concentrates in the heart. Formerly she felt it was dark, but now, concentrating on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for a long time, she sees a white ray in which their bodies become more brilliant.

The important experience is that of the white ray in the heart — for that is a ray of the Mother's light, the white light, and the illumining of the heart by this light is a thing of great power for this sadhana. The intuitions she speaks of are a sign of the inner consciousness growing in her — the consciousness which is necessary for Yoga.

28 July 1937

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It [*the Mother's light*] is always there in the inner Purusha.

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That means the light of the divine consciousness (the Mother's Consciousness, white light) in the vital. Blue is the higher mind, gold the divine Truth. So it is the vital with the light of the higher mind and the divine Truth in it emanating the Mother's light.

The Mother's Diamond Light

(a) It [*the diamond light*] means the essential Force of the Mother.

(b) The diamond light proceeds from the heart of the Divine Consciousness and it brings the opening of the Divine Consciousness wherever it goes.

(c) The Mother's descent with the diamond light is the sanction of the Supreme Power to the movement in you.

(d) The Mother's diamond light is a light of absolute purity and power.

(e) The diamond light is the central consciousness and force of the Divine.

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The Mother's light is white — especially diamond white. The Mahakali form is usually golden, of a very bright and strong golden hue.

12 October 1935

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The diamond is the symbol of the intensest light of the Mother's consciousness, so your visions indicate that you saw her full of that light and radiating it. Other jewels must be symbols of other forces, the ruby indicating power in the physical.

23 February 1936

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The diamond is the symbol of the Mother's consciousness; the colour depends on the particular force which her consciousness puts forth upon you at the moment.

14 April 1936

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The diamond is the symbol of the Mother's light and energy — the diamond light is that of her consciousness at its most intense.

13 November 1936

The Golden Light of Mahakali

Today at Pranam I saw a light like a golden thread coming from the Mother to me, but it vanished in a short time. Once I saw this light very clearly when she was standing on the terrace, just before coming down the staircase. Is this light from inside or outside? Since I saw it only for a while, I cannot believe my own eyes.

The golden Light is the light of the Divine Truth on the higher planes above the ordinary mind — a light supramental in origin. It is also the light of Mahakali above the mind. The golden light is also often seen emanating from the Mother like the white Light.

17 September 1933

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The line of golden light is a line of the light of the higher Divine Truth encircling the Akash of the heart and the diamond mass is the Mother's light pressing into that Akash. It is therefore a sign of these powers working on the psychic-emotional centre.

17 December 1936

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One night I found a vast light, yellowish white, cool and peaceful, coming down from above. Is this the light of the higher mind consciousness or of some spiritual consciousness?

It depends on the shade of the yellow. If it is golden white it comes from above the mind and the combination suggests the Maheshwari-Mahakali power. Higher Mind colour is pale blue.

21 March 1938

Seeing Light around the Mother

Sometimes I see an outline of white light around Mother. Is it that truly I can see Mother's Light?

Of course you can see it. Nowadays it is visible to many.

2 July 1933

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Last evening when the Mother was walking on the terrace I saw a light on her body. What was it?

Many see light around the Mother. The light is there always.

26 July 1933

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Today as soon as the Mother took her seat in the Pranam Hall I saw that white light was playing both on her left and right sides. Was there any particular reason why I saw like this?

No. One can always see white Light around the Mother, for it is her light, always there.

8 August 1933

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This evening when the Mother came to give us darshan, I saw Sri Aurobindo's light around her like a cloud. Was this a formation of the mind or the vital? Was there a mistake in it?

If seeing the Mother's Light is a mistake or a mental or vital formation, then the realisation of the Divine and all spiritual experience can be questioned as a mental or vital formation or mistake and all Yoga becomes impossible.

6 September 1933

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While watching the Mother walk on the terrace, I saw a light like moonlight around her. How strong and bright it was. Seeing it, my being became quiet and gradually settled into a deep indrawn condition.

People see all kinds of lights around the Mother when she walks on the roof. They are all the flowing out of different forces. If it was like the moonlight in appearance it would be the spiritual force.

1 November 1933

*

What people see around the Mother is first her aura, as it is called nowadays, and secondly the forces of Light that pour out from her when she concentrates, as she always does on the roof for instance. (Everybody has an aura — but in most it is weak and not very luminous, in the Mother's aura there is the full play of lights and powers.) People do not see it usually because it is a subtle physical and not a gross material phenomenon. They can see only on two conditions, first if they develop sufficient subtle sight, secondly if the aura itself begins to become so strong that it affects the sheath of gross matter which conceals it. The Mother has certainly no idea of making people see it — it is of themselves that one after another, some 20 or 30 in the Asram, I believe, have come to see. None of them are big Yogis, some of them are mere beginners. It is certainly one of the signs that the higher Force (call it supramental or not) is beginning to influence Matter.

15 November 1933

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Some people see light etc. around the Mother but I am not able to do so. What is the obstruction in me?

It is not an obstruction — it is simply a question of the growth of the inner senses. It has no indispensable connection with spiritual progress. There are some very far on the path who have very little of this kind of vision if any — on the other hand

sometimes it develops enormously in mere beginners who have as yet had only very elementary spiritual experiences.

1 December 1933

*

X says that she sees white light streaming out from the Mother when she sees her walking on the terrace. And some days, when the Mother is meditating, she sees some figure behind her.

There is always light around the Mother which the eyes can see if the inner vision opens. There are also many beings that are around her.

4 September 1934

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 241-70)



**‘O LORD, MY SWEET ETERNAL MASTER,
BREAK THIS RESISTANCE . . .’**

April 7, 1914

WHAT kind of courage is mine that I always try to avoid the fight? What kind of energy is mine, that I am instinctively frightened of the new effort to be made and try, without being aware of it, to go to sleep passively, relying upon the results of previous efforts? In order to act, I have to be compelled and my mute contemplation is partly made of laziness. . . . All this is becoming more and more clearly apparent to me. All that I have done till now seems to me to be nothing. The poverty and limitations of the instrument I put at Thy service, Lord, are evident to me, and I laugh a little sorrowfully at the idea that at times I could have a good opinion of my being, its efforts and their results. This threshold of the true life that I always think I have reached is like a hope bestowed upon me but never a tangible realisation; it is the toy promised to a child, the reward held out for a moment before the weak.

When shall I become a truly strong being, made entirely of courage, energy, valour and calm perseverance; when shall I have forgotten my own person completely enough to be nothing but an instrument moulded solely by the forces it has to manifest? When will my consciousness of unity be no longer tinged with any inertia; when will my feeling of divine love be no longer mixed with any weakness?

O Lord, all thought seems dead within me, now that I have asked these questions. I search for my conscious mind and I do not find it; I search for my individuality and I cannot discover it anywhere; I search for my personal will and it is not there. I search for Thee, and Thou art silent. . . . Silence, silence. . . .

Now I seem to hear Thy voice: “Never hast thou known how to die integrally. Always something in thee has wanted to know, to witness, to understand. Surrender completely, learn how to disappear, break the last barrier that separates thee from me; accomplish unreservedly thy act of surrender.” Alas, O Lord, for a long time have I wanted it, but I could not. Now wilt Thou give me the power to do so?

O Lord, my sweet eternal Master, break this resistance which fills me with anguish . . . deliver me from myself!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 119-20)

“ASCENT” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

How do you find the poem? Is there a marked inequality of inspiration in it or is it all from the same source?

ASCENT

A nectar-dew falls glimmering from the Unknown
To wake the shadowless seed of mystic love
Lost in the blind abysses of our brain.
A memory stirs that locked immensity — [1]
An occult creative Eye now yearns afar,
Dreams upward through the gilded sky of mind,
The hard deceiving dome of a false heaven,
To an infinite ether of apocalypt blue.
Then slowly breaks on hyalines of hush
A white rumour of flames and fragrances,
A vast virginity kindles above time.
The lotus of the soul has lifted high
{ Its million
 xxA thousand rapturous petal-arms to clasp
 Its — [2]
{ A secrecy of sempiternal sun!
 The secret of a sempiternal sun!

[Amal's question and remark:]

[1] What about “the” instead of “that”?

[2] Please do the cancelling thoroughly.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] Much better

All from the illumined mind — only some lines more intensely illumined than others, but all fine.

15 February 1938

[Version from *The Secret Splendour* —
Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 160:]

ASCENT

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To wake the shadowless seed of mystic love
Lost in the blind abysses of the brain.
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A white rumour of flames and fragrances,
A vast virginity kindles above time.
The lotus of the soul has lifted high
A million rapturous petal-arms to clasp
The secret of a sempiternal sun.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

*The Lotus is the symbol of the opening
of the centres to the Light.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 976)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of July 2013)

Chapter: XXV

Miracle of a Phrase and a Song

The greatest and the most enduring gift of the Swadeshi movement was *Bande Mataram*, the uncrowned national anthem.

The Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV

NEVER in the history of the world had a phrase — and the song that contained it — played a role in the life of any nation comparable to the role played by ‘Bande Mataram’ and the song known by that name in the life of India. Even Rouget de Lisle’s ‘La Marseillaise’, eminently associated with the French Revolution, was relatively lighter in its impact than that of ‘Bande Mataram’ when both are evaluated in the backdrop of their space and time.

To view the motherland as one’s mother was an age-old concept for Indians. The sentiment was firmly articulated by Rama in his assertion on the eve of his triumphant return home rejecting the throne of golden Lanka: *Janani Janmabhumi-scha swargadapi gariyasi* — the Mother and the Motherland are loftier than Heaven itself! But this truth buried in the collective subconscious seems to have emerged to the surface with a vengeance through the spirit underlying Bankim Chandra’s inspired creation.

The Mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself,¹

wrote Sri Aurobindo.

In the *Bande Mataram* of April 16, 1907, Sri Aurobindo wrote about the poet of the lyric, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay:

There are many who, lamenting the by-gone glories of this great and ancient nation, speak as if the Rishis of old, the inspired creators of thought and civilisation, were a miracle of our heroic age, not to be repeated among degenerate men and in our distressful present. This is an error and thrice an error. Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose

strength, greatness, holiness may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease. The hero, the Rishi, the saint, are the natural fruits of our Indian soil; and there has been no age in which they have not been born. Among the Rishis of the later age we have at last realised that we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving *mantra* which is creating a new India, the *mantra Bande Mataram*.²

This statement was followed by a distinction Sri Aurobindo made between a Rishi and a saint. The Rishi, Sri Aurobindo wrote in reference to Bankim Chandra in particular, did not sport any conspicuous mark of holiness, but he could energise a nation with “a great and vivifying message”.³

Indeed, one of the foremost characteristics of the culture, polity and spirituality of ancient India was the institution of the Rishi. The Rishis, as creators, stood at the dawn of India’s literary heritage — Valmiki and Vyasa; the Rishis were the founders of our medical tradition — Charaka and Sushruta. As gurus presiding over educational institutions, the Gurukuls, the Rishis imparted lessons in fields ranging from the Vedas to the martial arts. They advised monarchs on matters mundane and at the appropriate time showed them the way to the ultimate goal of life. It mattered little for a Rishi if he was not credited for his contribution.

The Rishi, unlike the general run of hermits and ascetics, did not reject the world as false or dismiss it as illusion. He saw the supreme creative power in one of its manifold modes at work at the core of the material universe, and the earth inhabited by us was nothing if not one of its manifestations. In one of Sri Aurobindo’s early poems, the Rishi says in an answer to a question put by King Manu:

King, not in vain. I knew the tedious bars
That I had fled,
To be His arms whom I have sought; I saw
How earth was made
Out of His being; I perceived the Law,
The Truth, the Vast,
From which we came and which we are; I heard
The ages past
Whisper their history, and I knew the Word
That forth was cast
Into the unformed potency of things
To build the suns.⁴

Sri Aurobindo reminded us in his article written in 1907 that the Rishi was a continuing phenomenon. But even some thirteen years earlier, in 1894, Sri Aurobindo had recognised the extraordinary in Bankim Chandra. Aged only twenty-one and a

resident of Baroda only for a year after his return to India, Sri Aurobindo read in the death of Bankim Chandra the passing of a colossus and wrote a series of seven articles in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, highlighting the unique role played by that departed genius in shaping the Indian consciousness of the moment and the era that was to follow. He concluded the series almost prophetically:

And when Posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a place hunting politician nor on the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer, but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or for power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does, and just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, was able to create a language, a literature and a nation.⁵

The *Bande Mataram* dated 5 February 1908 carried a third-person report of a talk given by Sri Aurobindo at the Grand Square near the National School, Amaravati (Berar) on 29 January 1908. Since the meeting commenced with the singing of the national anthem 'Bande Mataram' which Sri Aurobindo found to have "become so popular in all parts of India, and that it was being so repeatedly sung",⁶ he evidently decided on the spot to speak on its significance.

The song, he said, was not only a national anthem as the European nations look upon their own, but one replete with mighty power, being a sacred mantra, revealed to us by the author of *Anandamath*, who might be called an inspired rishi. He described the manner in which the mantra had been revealed to Bankim Chandra, probably by a sannyasi under whose teaching he was. He said that the mantra was not an invention, but the revivification of the old mantra which became extinct. . . . The mantra of Bankim Chandra was not appreciated in his own day and he predicted that there would come a time when the whole of India would resound with the singing of the song, and the word of the prophet was miraculously fulfilled. . . . The speaker then unfolded the meaning of the song. As with the individual, so with the nation, there were three bodies or Koshas, the Sthula, Suksma and Karana Shariras. In this way the speaker went on clearing up the hidden meaning of the song. The manner in which he treated of love and devotion was exceedingly touching and the audience sat before him like dumb statues, not knowing where they were or whether they were listening to a prophet revealing to them the higher mysteries of life. . . .⁶

The song is widely known as a part of Bankim Chandra's famous novel, *Anandamath*.⁷ But it was composed in 1875 or 1876, a few years before the novel was written. The Sannyasi Vidroha or the Rebellion by the Ascetics (1763 onward),

which has been referred to in an earlier chapter, was no doubt the inspiration for the novel. ‘Om Bande Mataram’ had been the war cry of the rebels.

Bankim Chandra had kept the poem with him — we do not know what he intended doing with it — and when one of his assistants saw it and proposed to publish it in *Banga Darshan*, a prestigious magazine the author edited, he refused to part with it, saying, “You can’t appreciate its value now. By the time you are able to do so, I may not be there.”⁸

A highly gifted musicologist and singer of the time, Jadu Bhatt, set the lyric to music and sang it before its author and the latter’s friends. Great names were to be associated with its singing in the succeeding years. Rabindranath Tagore sang it at the 1896 session of the Congress and Sarala Devi at the 1905 session. The latter was obliged to sing the whole song at the insistent demand of the delegates.⁹

Satish Chandra Chattopadhyay, the author’s nephew, recounts this anecdote in his biography of his celebrated uncle, entitled *Bankim Jeebani*:

A few years before Bankim Chandra’s death my [*cousin*]sister (the eldest daughter of Bankim Chandra) told her father, “People don’t like your *Bande Mataram* very much!”

“You too?”

“I too don’t like it so much!”

The great man observed with gravity, “A day will come when you will see — twenty to thirty years from now — the land will become vibrantly alive with this song.”

I heard this from my sister soon after Bankim Chandra’s death.¹⁰

The seer-poet’s words proved literally true. The appeal of the song did not remain confined to Bengal which of course responded to it with an unheard of fervour. In fact, nothing short of a large volume would do justice to the enthusiasm and sacrifice, repression and triumphant martyrdom that are linked to this stirring phrase and the song, if one were to compile even whatever records are available today though obviously much had been washed away by the sweep of time.

The momentum reached a high point when ‘Bande Mataram’ was presented as the opening song at the great anti-partition rally in Calcutta, at the Town Hall, on the 7th of August 1905. The phrase evoked the greatest ever appeal till then. Two months later was founded the ‘Bande Mataram Sampraday’ (community) which conducted processions every Sunday morning through the streets of Calcutta, singing the song. Rabindranath Tagore and Dwijendralal Roy too joined the programme occasionally.¹¹ By and by the practice of greeting one another uttering ‘Bande Mataram’ became widespread. While receiving a leader it became a robust chorus. The song served as the invocation not only for political meetings, but also for numerous social, cultural and educational functions.

The power of the phrase, it would appear, grew more and more intense. Contem-

porary records show that it was generating hitherto unsuspected courage in the hearts of those who uttered it — a feat only a Mantra could achieve — since the time Sri Aurobindo gave it that status.

And the more widespread this practice became, the more active became the merciless lathis wielded by the police, breaking thousands of limbs during the hundreds of processions. Students were fined, flogged or expelled from schools for shouting ‘Bande Mataram’ which had been banned by a Government circular. Houses were set on fire because the slogan ringing inside did not stop despite threats.¹²

The Tribune of Punjab wrote, as early as on 25th of November 1905, against the terror let loose by the government:

They have adopted as their cheering cry the words ‘Bande Mataram’ which has no formidable meaning than Hail Mother! . . . and can ‘Bande Mataram’ be abolished by help of terrorism? Even in the Punjab when educated gentlemen meet, their salutation for each other now-a-days is frequently ‘Bande Mataram’. How many soldiers the authority must have to stop the mouths of countless millions of India?¹³

Accused of writing a seditious article in the *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo was arrested on the 16th of August 1907 but was released on bail. A large number of people gathered around the court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, Douglas Kingsford, on the 26th of August 1907 when the hearing began. Most of them were students. As the crowd shouted ‘Bande Mataram’, the police became far more aggressive than the situation warranted and pounced upon the people and thrashed them with clubs, of course at Mr. Kingsford’s order. A boy aged fifteen, Sushil Sen, a student of the National College of which Sri Aurobindo was the Principal, reacted by planting a blow on the cheek of one Mr. Huey, a British sergeant, when the latter tried to capture him. The boy was arrested. Mr. Kingsford ordered that he be lashed fifteen times. What reveals a bizarre aspect of the judge’s nature, he supervised the operation himself paying it utmost attention so that the wielder of the whip did not grow lax or resign to fatigue. There was of course no chance of that, because after each lash the boy shouted ‘Bande Mataram’ ever more passionately, thereby infuriating and ridiculing the tormentor who performed his role only more diligently, under a desperate, grim and grinning Mr. Kingsford.¹⁴

The fire of ‘Bande Mataram’ spread to the South in 1905, with the great poet Subramania Bharati taking a leading role in the process:

Bharati’s first homage to Bankim was a translation of ‘Bande Mataram’ into *ahava* metre. This was because he heard Tamil patriots singing the original Bengali without having a clear grasp of its meaning. Also, his friend Mahesh Kumar Sharma had expressed a desire to have a translation of the poem by

Bharati to be included in his translation of the novel *Anandamath*. However, the poem was published earlier, in the monthly *Chakravarthini*. It was reprinted on 28 December 1905 in *Swadesamithran*. Again, *India* carried the translation (along with the original Tamil transcription) on 20 October 1906 with the editorial note: “We were happy to listen to the singing of ‘Bande Mataram’ at many places in Madras during the Diwali festival. The readers are sure to rejoice with the Tamil transcription of the original song. We are publishing C. Subramania Bharati’s translation as well.”¹⁵

And here is the report of a meeting on the Marina beach of Madras towards the end of 1907 left by the distinguished British journalist and author Nevinson:

It was evening, and the sky was full of the deep and ominous colours of an Indian sunset in the rains. A hot wind blowing in from the sea threw the waves in heavy surf upon the sand. . . . But on the broad, dry sand, between the esplanade and the surf, a vast circle of people was gathered round a little platform and chair. They were seated by hundreds on the sand — between four or five thousand of them altogether — and round the outer edge of the seated circle hundreds more were standing upright, like the rim of a flat plate . . .

Through the middle of the crowd came a line of white-robed students carrying a yellow banner with a strange device. “Bande Mataram! Bande Mataram! Hail to the motherland! We bow before our mother!” rose the familiar cry from the thousands seated there. But there was no wild gesticulation, no frantic excess, such as we might imagine in a fanatical East. A Trafalgar Square crowd is more demonstrative and unrestrained.¹⁶

The influence of the Mantra abroad — on patriots including the members of the Gadar movement — was remarkable. *The Times* of London published a few letters on the topic including one by Sir Henry Cotton who explained the true import of the song and quoted from a translation of it by W. H. Lee, a Member of the Indian Civil Service.¹⁷ But that will require a separate chapter and the exercise may not come strictly under the scope of this work.

We end this chapter with a sample of the kind of brain-racking puzzle the phrase must have meant for some of the stalwarts of the colonial rule. This is from the memoirs of no less a person than Ambika Charan Mazumdar, a former President of the Indian National Congress:

Like the red rag to the bull, the innocent expression ‘Bande Mataram’ became almost intolerable to a certain class of officials. Some interpreted it to mean ‘seize and beat the monkey’. . . .¹⁸

That is to say, *Bande* was confused with *Bandar* or monkey and *Mataram* with *Maro* or beat up!

Henry Nevinson was confronted by this appeal in Chennai, “Try our *Bande Mataram* cigarettes!”¹⁹

(*To be continued*)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Early Cultural Writings*; CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 640-41, ‘Rishi Bankim Chandra’.

It is important to note what Sri Aurobindo wrote subsequently in the *Standard Bearer* of August 22, 1920, and is included in the *Karmayogin*, SABCL, Vol. 2, p. 431:

“We have worshipped the country, the National Mother, as God. That was well, that carried us far. But it was only a stage, a means to bring the Europeanised mind back to spirituality. It was the worship of a *rūpa*, an *iṣṭa* by which to rise to the worship of God in His fullness. We used the Mantra *Bande Mataram* with all our heart and soul, and so long as we used and lived it, relied upon its strength to overbear all difficulties, we prospered. But suddenly the faith and the courage failed us, the cry of the Mantra began to sink and as it rang feebly, the strength began to fade out of the country. It was God, who made it fade out and falter, for it had done its work. A greater Mantra than *Bande Mataram* has to come. Bankim was not the ultimate seer of Indian awakening. He gave only the term of the initial and public worship, not the formula and the ritual of the inner secret *upāsanā*. For the greatest Mantras are those which are uttered within, and which the seer whispers or gives in dream or vision to his disciples. When the ultimate Mantra is practised even by two or three, then the closed Hand of God will begin to open; when the *upāsanā* is numerous followed the closed Hand will open absolutely.”

2. Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*; CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 315.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

4. Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*; CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 227.

5. Sri Aurobindo: *Early Cultural Writings*; CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 119.

6. Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*; CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 845-46.

7. Sri Aurobindo’s translation of the novel’s prologue and the first thirteen chapters, originally published in the *Karmayogin* between 1909 and 1910, are included in CWSA, Vol. 5, *Translations*.

8. Jagadish Bhattacharya: *Bande Mataram*; Dey’s Publishing House, Kolkata, 2006.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Several books on Bankim Chandra refer to this dialogue, including the one mentioned above.

11. Amallesh Bhattacharya: ‘*Bande Mataram*’ in *Srinvantu*, Kolkata.

12. A large number of books in Bengali, English and other languages record these and similar incidents. The list includes Henry Nevinson's *The New Spirit in India*.

13. At a time when most of the English newspapers were controlled by the British, *The Tribune* was founded by Dayal Singh Majithia, encouraged by Surendranath Bannerjea. See *The History of the Press in India* by S. Natarajan; Asia Publishing House, Mumbai.

14. Dr. Jayanti Mukhopadhyay: *Sangram Dashake Sri Aurobindo* (Bengali); Jatiya Siksha Parishad, Kolkata, among several other works.

15. Dr. Prema Nandakumar: 'Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Subramania Bharati' in *Bankim Chandra Chatterjee: Essays in Perspective*; Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

16. Henry W. Nevinson: *The New Spirit in India*; Metropolitan Book Co. New Delhi; Indian Reprint, 1975.

17. Amalesh Bhattacharya: 'Bande Mataram' in *Srinvantu*, Kolkata.

18. Ambika Charan Mazumdar: *Indian National Evolution*; G. A. Natesan & Co., Chennai, 1917.

19. Henry W. Nevinson: *The New Spirit in India*.

Corrections:

1. On page 569 of the July issue, in the beginning of Chapter XXIV of 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', the date is erroneously printed as 2nd of June 1908. It should be 2nd of May 1908.

2. On page 575 of the same article, in the References and Notes, the author of *Agniyuger Agnikatha* has been wrongly mentioned as Anshuman Mukhopadhyay. The author is Anshuman Bandopadhyay.

3. In the May issue, in the article 'Essentials of Indian Culture', the words *kalu* and *jhumus* on p. 404 and p. 407 should have been *kabi* and *jhumur*.

We are sorry for the slips.

VISIONS AND VOICES

(Continued from the issue of July 2013)

THE BIRTH OF THE SUN-LORD

THE happy luminous tremors of the sky of this dark night which is passing away proclaim the birth of the Sun-Lord that is to be. The earth at the thought of his immediate birth is astir with a fresh and vigorous life like a young and swift horse ready to gallop and the heavens are aglow with the soft and radiant blush of the dawn. The two shining firmaments are fostering the Sun-Lord with the wine of their swift-moving waters of being. Every calmly hastening minute that quietly passes away is a throb, a sting of delight, a thrill of agonisingly poignant joy, the throes of travail that the firmaments endure before they bring out the Sun-Lord from their infinite and cavernous womb of dreadful night and darkness.

This infinite, cavernous and dark womb of night is vast and has seven portals, each one leading and opening into the other, and between runs a long and sinuous network of labyrinthine ways. The Sun-Lord takes seven births before he comes to the last of the portals. Each portal supported by beams and pillars of gold opens into a vast and infinite world balanced and held between two supporting and fostering firmaments. Thus these seven interpenetrating and intertwining worlds of different substances — the frames of the rhythmic dance of God's *lila* — have fourteen firmaments of various colours and shades creating the lines of their ordered existence. The Sun-Lord takes his birth in each and every one of the seven worlds, rends asunder their darknesses and diffuses through them the seven lights of his seven aspects. Enriching the firmaments he himself gets enriched in substance and power; and he establishes by his fiery roamings from firmament to firmament a unity in their diverse existence. The Sun-Lord is the suffused calm light of *shanti* — the profound peace of the world of matter and its fathomless silence; he is the vibrant light of movement and growth in the world of *prana*; he is the twilight of animated thought in the world of mind. And now he is moving away to climb the outskirts of the firmaments of supermind, the first and foremost of his many true homes. Thus ascends the Sun-Lord through the firmaments — every new ascent into a new firmament, a new birth and enrichment of the wide and opulent ranges of his being.

THE GREAT TITAN

God is substance-delight whose nature is consciousness that is force. The innateness of force is vibration. That is its inherent character in activity, vibration of consciousness, vibration of delight, vibration of substance. Matter in the present manifestation is the lowest vibration of the one densely packed consciousness — Spirit the highest, the most intense vibration of the same densely packed consciousness — radiating the longest luminous waves. Between matter and spirit there intervenes a long series of waves of different lengths which radiate lights of different colours with infinite shades. Among them one can easily distinguish four broad major divisions — the vital, emotional, mental and supramental *koshas*, resultants of four great and distinct vibrations of the one densely packed consciousness.

Man has four principal centres in him through which he can put himself in connection with all these *koshas*. The higher vibrations are received by the brain-centre and the successively lower and lower vibrations by the centres that descend in a series below the brain. The more he is responsive to any one of them, the more he comes in touch with the *kosha* with which that centre connects him.

The *Purushottama*, the inmost of all that is and all that is not, is the Supreme being of that transcendent and universal substance-delight whose nature is consciousness that is force. He is the divine Archer who is seated high in his own immensities far, far away from those *koshas*, above them in the mystic beyonds whence he shoots his arrows of light and power; and infinite in length are each of the shafts of the Eternal. These arrows of the divine Archer create by their contact various grades of vibrations in the consciousness, and each of them is a grand cosmic movement. Hence have these ordered universes come into being.

The present manifestation is governed by a deity and he has under him a legion. The deity and his legion are ensouled dark substances. He is capable of an enormous strength, but it is Titanic or Asuric in its Nature. He is ever-greedy in his strength, ever-absorbing, ever-devouring, mightily, fiercely, cunningly, forcefully, whatever he gets from whatsoever source. That which he annexes to his kingdom turns into the law and nature of this presiding deity — this great Titan. He is the Lord of the three kingdoms. He sets in motion mixed and disordered rhythms. He is a leader of many forces and does equally good, bad and indifferent things.

The brightest of his three kingdoms — the world of mind — is his indeed, but still not completely under his sway. Now he is victorious, now he is defeated, and always thus he goes on his way amid the paths of mind, advancing and flung backward, conquering and insecure, amid doubtful victories and momentary lordships. His laws are partially obeyed and sometimes disobeyed by the inhabitants of his half-lit, half-murky kingdom — this conflict-ridden world of mind. Its inhabitants are never sure of a peaceful existence even for one short moment. Their opulent riches are taken away from them as spoils by the Great Titan and they look on

helpless, not masters of themselves and therefore not masters of their gains and possessions.

The mind is an empire of rich peoples who possess a dull and grey coloured wealth — but an empire without an emperor. The Lord of the vital world is an aggressive ruler who rules his own peculiar kingdom mostly without a challenge. He goes a-hunting for more riches into other kingdoms also. The docile and peace-loving inhabitants of the mind gather wealth only to be forcefully deprived of them in the end by the Titan below who has always a purpose, an object, an aim in him and most often successfully carries it out by a relentless pressure. And if he sometimes yields to enemy forces, it is with an obstinate intention finally to circumvent them and be their lord or victor.

Behind this lower greyer mentality there is a greater and more luminous country — the higher mind. The beings of this region possess sufficient power to unsettle and overrule the workings of the Titan in part if not wholly, at times if not always; for a season but not for ever. Here is found the more splendid wealth of ideas and ideals. And these are undying by-products cast up from the high and tense vibrations of the arrow-lights that are shot by the divine Archer seated far away in the mystic beyonds. The present state of human societies, whether in Europe or Asia, is based upon the inspirations of the vital world, but they are not given freedom for their full play because they are crossed, crippled, mutilated and maimed of their fullness in their movement by the disturbing and powerful vibrations of the arrow-lights shot by that great Archer. The cause of discontent, disharmony, failure and all their brood is to be sought for in the struggle between the Titan and his legion on one side and the descent of the higher vibrations into the lower world on the other.

The higher mind is peopled by a few leading beings, powers or forces — beings who are splendours of light, forces that are like sword-like flames. Or rather they are less self-existent forces than the principal aspects of the mother-force. One flames high, cool to the eye, wide and dense blue, like the starless and cloudless sky; it nourishes and protects whatever comes to it; it has an enormous strength; its foundation is the quiet calmness of the Eternal. There is another that flames up high. This force is bright white in colour. It has the mighty power to rend asunder the cavernous halls of the darknesses, and ever and anon it brings out of the secrecy of the inner caves and mountains the broods of creation. This too is wide; it is concentrated and bright in its immaculate whiteness. The third flame is lurid-red in colour, broad and mighty in strength and is based on a stupendous calmness like the other two flames; and this flame lives by destruction. There is an amity among the three and they work one at a time in the field of consciousness or, when one is in motion on one side, the other two play and work on the other two sides of this manifestation.

The three luminous flames or high gods descend at long intervals on this earth that is in possession of the great Titan, wage successful battles with him and establish

their rule, but it is never permanent, it lasts only for a less or longer but always limited time. Each one of these gods has around him a thousand cohorts selected and chosen from the worlds below, where they have been endowed by their divine head and leader with great powers and heightened capacities. These are his cohorts, *ganas*, souls to the last moment of their life faithful to their resplendent lords.

These three great and bright flames of force of the blue, white and red hues have their different seats of power, the blue in his heart, the white in his head and the red in his shoulder-blades. The blue tinged flame is ornate with bright gold and shining diamonds, the white flame is rich with wisdom; and the red-hued flame soars high with its thousand blazing tongues, each a force, a power of majestic destruction.

The goddess of opulence has chosen the heart of her lover as her permanent abode; the goddess of learning and wisdom finds a peaceful dwelling in the head of her lover; and the goddess of sustaining power and calmness has chosen to pervade and enshrine half the body of her lord. These gods and goddesses are inseparable either at work or at rest; together they sleep, together they labour.

Above and beyond these flames lies burning in splendour the region of the fourth *kosha*, the sheath of the supramental, the incandescent light, matrix and mother of three flames, of the world of the Titan and of all that is below him. Here are many pure fires and lucent flames, a magnificent multitude that evolve and involve, work and play and rest, each moving in its own and true way, delighted, unhindered and harmonious. When at rest, they are in luminous peace, unlike the lower forces who lapse into dull inertia when they have no work. And their work when they are in motion is the ordered and harmonious evolving of many truths in their own sufficient delight of rightness, in the *kartavyam* manner, quite unlike the forces below that grope and stumble, collide and clash in their half-lit or gloomy seekings. When the luminous knowledge comes, it comes from within the pure fires and lucent flames of truth, and they have no fear of losing it at any time like the powers of the nether regions, whose dimmer lustre of indirect and derived illuminations is a gleaning from outside their range and they have in them a continual fear of losing the earned treasure that is light and lapsing back into impotence and darkness.

Now there is one who has loosened himself from the tight and oppressive grip, the narrowing and perverting rule of the Titan, and long before he threw himself entirely into the hands of the three principal flames or deities of the higher mind — Vishnu, Brahma, Siva — the three flames and forces of blue, white and red colours of the higher mind. They too like the Titan wanted only to utilise him instead of delivering him to their mother — Mahakali-Krishna, the Supramental. From this restraint and limitation too he has loosened himself away, he has proceeded even beyond the large precincts of the higher mind. And now he has gone into the true land of the Mother. He is the first chosen of the Mother; he is the emperor of the many kingdoms that are in him; such only are admitted by the Mother into the land

of the Truth-consciousness. He becomes the emperor of those that come to him. He is the centre of a small nucleus consisting of a few which is the beginning of the future, the seed of the coming race of Supermen. All the forces that are reigning in the present world will be out to combat it, to destroy the new creation if possible; but that is not to be.

At present he is working in dumb, profound and rich silences away from the immediate and near presence of the great Titan and his rulings. A series of circular rows of fences enring him; and these fences are made of sharp and shining swords of the Light pointing in all possible directions and ready to cut down and destroy any amount of enemy forces of whatever might and insolence. No danger, not even the Titan himself can pierce the fences of Light that enring him.

To be accepted by Him is to be accepted by the double personality of Mahakali-Krishna. The secret of acceptance by Him — the *guh yatamam* or *uttamam rahasyam* is the secret of the old text, *sarvakarmāṇi parityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja*. The secret is known but it is not easy of achievement; the land of the Truth-Consciousness is not near but still far away, and we are not far removed from the temptations of the present deity that is ruling us — the Great and Grand Titan.

(Concluded)

AMRITA

(*Visions and Voices*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1969, pp. 42-56.
The first edition was published in 1929.)

In the same book [The Mother] you say of Mahakali, "her hands are outstretched to strike and to succour" [p. 44]. What do you mean here by "strike"?

It expresses her general action in the world. She strikes at the Asuras, she strikes also at everything that has to be got rid of or destroyed, at the obstacles to the sadhana etc. I may say that the Mother never uses the Mahakali power in your case nor the Mahakali pressure.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 115)

AVATAR AND VIBHUTI

THE concept of the Avatar is very intimately connected with the Indian tradition and thought, and though Avatarhood had been accepted much before the Gita, a lot of credit must go to the Gita for making it one of the pivots of Indian spirituality. The Gita has cast much light on the concept of the Avatar, on the process and purpose of Avatarhood, its aim and need, and in this essay we will try to explore these through Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's exposition.

Meaning of Avatar

The word 'Avatar' has acquired an omnibus and manifold meaning in popular conception. If we are to understand the word Avatar to mean the embodied divine in physical form, then we can all be described as 'Avatars', for in each one of us, there is the Divine portion, the spiritual basis of manifestation and thus since we all embody a divine potential or essence, we are all 'avatars'. More correctly stated this embodiment would refer to the eternal Avatar, continuing from time eternal and continuing till the Divine aim in manifestation is realised. Then there is the idea of the partial Avatar and full Avatar, what in India, we call Amsa Avatar and Purna Avatar. Purna Avatar refers to the full manifestation of the Divine in all his aspects, while Amsa Avatar would refer to the manifestation of one aspect or more of the Divine, but not the full Divinity. Then there are Vibhutis who are manifestations of certain forces, powers, qualities, attributes of the Divine in physical form.

For our purpose and to avoid confusion, we will use the term Avatar in the sense used by the Gita, which has made a very significant contribution to the concept of the Avatar.

The Mother says,

The Avatar (at least when understood in the true sense) is the incarnation upon earth of the Supreme Truth. Now, many meanings are given to this word. . . . But originally (as it is said in the Gita, for example) when the Supreme decides to manifest himself upon earth for a particular reason and takes an earthly body, it is said that he is an Avatar. He may take many successive bodies according to the needs and circumstances, but it is always what could be called the "central being", which takes an earthly body. That is what is called an Avatar. (CWM, Vol. 4, p. 398)

Again, explaining the expression "eternal birth", the Mother says,

And finally, from the purely spiritual point of view, it could be said that it is the birth of the Eternal on Earth. For each time the Avatar takes a physical form it is the birth of the Eternal himself on Earth. (*CWM*, Vol. 9, p. 179)

Sri Aurobindo says,

An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action; he feels identified inwardly with this divine power and presence. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 406)

And finally, on the meaning and origin of Avatars, we have this elaborate answer from the Mother:

Today I have been asked to speak to you about the Avatar.

The first thing I have to say is that Sri Aurobindo has written on this subject and the person who has asked me the question would do well to begin by reading what Sri Aurobindo has written. . . .

But I could speak to you of a very old tradition, more ancient than the two known lines of spiritual and occult tradition, that is, the Vedic and Chaldean lines; a tradition which seems to have been at the origin of these two known traditions, in which it is said that when, as a result of the action of the adverse forces — known in the Hindu tradition as the Asuras — the world, instead of developing according to its law of Light and inherent consciousness, was plunged into the darkness, inconscience and ignorance that we know, the Creative Power implored the Supreme Origin, asking him for a special intervention which could save this corrupted universe; and in reply to this prayer there was emanated from the Supreme Origin a special Entity, of Love and Consciousness, who cast himself directly into the most inconscient matter to begin there the work of awakening it to the original Consciousness and Love.

In the old narratives this Being is described as stretched out in a deep sleep at the bottom of a very dark cave, and in his sleep there emanated from him prismatic rays of light which gradually spread into the Inconscience and embedded themselves in all the elements of this Inconscience to begin there the work of Awakening.

If one consciously enters into this Inconscient, one can still see there this same marvellous Being, still in deep sleep, continuing his work of emanation, spreading his Light; and he will continue to do it until the Inconscience is no longer inconscient, until Darkness disappears from the world — and the whole creation awakens to the Supramental Consciousness.

And it is remarkable that this wonderful Being strangely resembles the

one whom I saw in vision one day, the Being who is at the other extremity, at the confines of form and the Formless. But that one was in a golden, crimson glory, whereas in his sleep the other Being was of a shining diamond whiteness emanating opalescent rays.

In fact, this is the origin of all Avatars. He is, so to say, the first universal Avatar who, gradually, has assumed more and more conscious bodies and finally manifested in a kind of recognised line of Beings who have descended *directly* from the Supreme to perfect this work of preparing the universe so that, through a continuous progression, it may become ready to receive and manifest the supramental Light in its entirety.

In every country, every tradition, the event has been presented in a special way, with different limitations, different details, particular features, but truly speaking, the origin of all these stories is the same, and that is what we could call a direct, conscious intervention of the Supreme in the darkest matter, without going through all the intermediaries, in order to awaken this Matter to the receptivity of the Divine Forces.

The intervals separating these various incarnations seem to become shorter and shorter, as if, to the extent that Matter became more and more ready, the action could accelerate and become more and more rapid in its movement, more and more conscious too, more and more effective and decisive.

And it will go on multiplying and intensifying until the entire universe becomes the total Avatar of the Supreme. (*CWM*, Vol. 9, pp. 332-34)

Regarding the Vibhuti this is what the Mother says:

We said the other day that “Vibhutis” are aspects, qualities (what are called in occultism emanations) of a being. They are like certain forces, powers, qualities, attributes which are put in contact with an outer form — a physical form, for instance — and which manifest themselves through this form. This may be a human form. (*CWM*, Vol. 4, pp. 397-98)

And Sri Aurobindo says:

A Vibhuti is supposed to embody some power of the Divine and is enabled by it to act with great force in the world, but that is all that is necessary to make him a Vibhuti: the power may be very great, but the consciousness is not that of an inborn or indwelling Divinity. This is the distinction we can gather from the Gita which is the main authority on this subject. . . .

(*SABCL*, Vol. 22, pp. 406-07)

Process of Avatarhood

Having agreed on the meaning of Avatar and Vibhuti, the next question is about the process of Avatarhood, how is the birth of an Avatar different from ordinary birth? The Avatar is always conscious of his Divinity even at an early age, though he keeps it veiled. In his outer parts, what are called instrumental (mind, life and body), he takes on a human nature. As Sri Aurobindo says:

The Avatar takes upon himself the nature of humanity in his instrumental parts, though the consciousness acting behind is divine. (*CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 430)

And again,

There are two sides of the phenomenon of Avatarhood, the Divine Consciousness and the instrumental personality. The Divine Consciousness is omnipotent but it has put forth the instrumental personality in Nature under the conditions of Nature and it uses it according to the rules of the game — though also sometimes to change the rules of the game. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 408)

And yet again,

The language of the Gita shows therefore that the divine birth is that of the conscious Godhead in our humanity and essentially the opposite of the ordinary birth even though the same means are used, because it is not the birth into the Ignorance, but the birth of the knowledge, not a physical phenomenon, but a soul-birth. It is the Soul's coming into birth as the self-existent Being controlling consciously its becoming and not lost to self-knowledge in the cloud of the ignorance. It is the Soul born into the body as Lord of Nature, standing above and operating in her freely by its will, not entangled and helplessly driven round and round in the mechanism; for it works in the knowledge and not, as most do, in the ignorance. (*CWSA*, Vol. 19, p. 156)

From the above it is clear that an Avatar has a dual aspect, the outer human nature and the indwelling conscious Divinity. The Avatar, though outwardly human in nature and obeying the laws of nature, is not bound by them and can and sometimes when required, for special purpose, does transcend them. Further, even though the means used are the same, the Divine birth is the opposite of the ordinary birth, for the Divine birth is the birth in knowledge while ours is a birth in ignorance; and secondly, the Divine in the body is always the Lord of Nature, standing above her and acting freely by his will while we are the slaves of nature, entangled and helplessly driven round by her. The Divine in a body is always conscious of the Divinity

behind and not lost in the outer personality as is the case of a normal man.

Further, the Avatar fixes his place of birth, selects the parents, and chooses the body and also the time of his advent. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

The Descending Power (Avatar) chooses its own place, body, time for the manifestation. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 401)

Sri Aurobindo, on being asked:

When the Divine descends here (as the Avatar), he has to veil himself and deal with the world and its movements like an ordinary man of the cosmic product.

replied:

Exactly.

On being further asked:

But behind he is perfectly conscious of what happens. The universal forces cannot make him their tool as they make us.

replied:

That does not prevent the Avatar from acting as men act and using the movements of Nature for his life and work. (*CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 430)

Sri Aurobindo writes in another letter:

The Avatar is not supposed to act in a non-human way — he takes up human action and uses human methods with the human consciousness in front and the Divine behind. If he did not his taking a human body would have no meaning and would be of no use to anybody. He could just as well have stayed above and done things from there. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 409)

About the same thought Sri Aurobindo writes in another letter:

I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness — if nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is also that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha also, is all wrong or the whole life and action of the Avatar is quite futile. X seems to say that there is no way and no possibility of following, that the

struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are unreal and all humbug, — there is no possibility of struggle for one who represents the Divine. Such a conception makes nonsense of the whole idea of Avatarhood; there is then no reason in it, no necessity in it, no meaning in it. The Divine being all-powerful can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth. It is only if it is a part of the world-arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that Avatarhood has any meaning.

(SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 408-09)

And in another letter on the same subject Sri Aurobindo says:

If the Avatars are shams, they have no value for others nor any true effect, Avatarhood becomes perfectly irrational and unreal and meaningless. The Divine does not need to suffer or struggle for himself; if he takes on these things, it is in order to bear the world-burden and help the world and men; and if the sufferings and struggles are to be of any help, they must be real. A sham or falsehood cannot help. They must be as real as the struggles and sufferings of men themselves — the Divine bears them and at the same time shows the way out of them. Otherwise, his assumption of human nature has no meaning and no utility and no value. What is the use of admitting Avatarhood if you take all the meaning out of it? (SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 411-12)

It is because the Avatar is human in his outer nature and he faces the difficulties that we all face and overcomes them, that his example has any meaning and relevance for us, for else we could not relate to him and his earthly life. He shows the way by example. It must be remembered that the struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are real and not shams or make believe.

Sri Aurobindo expresses this so beautifully in *Savitri*:

But when God's messenger comes to help the world
 And lead the soul of earth to higher things,
 He too must carry the yoke he came to unloose;
 He too must bear the pang that he would heal:
 Exempt and unafflicted by earth's fate,
 How shall he cure the ills he never felt?

(CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 446)

Further, as the Avatar keeps his Divinity veiled, in his lifetime he may not be recognised as an Avatar or may be by very few people. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

I suppose very few recognised him [Krishna] as an Avatar, — certainly it was not at all a general recognition. Among the few those nearest him do not seem to have counted — it was less prominent people like Vidura etc.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 406)

And further:

Those who were with Krishna were in all appearance men like other men. They spoke and acted with each other as men with men and were not thought of by those around them as gods. Krishna himself was known by most as a man — only a few worshipped him as the Divine. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 406)

Purpose of Avatarhood

Now we come to the crucial question of the work and purpose of Avatarhood. What is the secret meaning of Avatarhood? What is the real work of the Avatar for which he takes physical form, becomes embodied here? The popular notion of the work of the Avatar is the famous shloka of the Gita that whenever there is increase of unrighteousness, injustice, sin, the Lord takes birth to slay the unrighteous, the unjust, the wicked and restore the way of Dharma. The advent of the Avatar no doubt leads to restoration of Dharma and consequently decrease of unrighteousness and injustice. But if this was all the purpose of the Avatar, it could very well have been done by a Vibhuti, as Julius Caesar and Napoleon did in the physical field and Shankaracharya and Vivekananda did in the spiritual field. There is a deeper esoteric meaning, a much deeper secret behind the advent of the Avatar. According to Sri Aurobindo not only is there a physical evolution but more importantly there is a spiritual evolution of Consciousness. In matter is hidden the principle of life, from which it springs forth; in life is hidden the principle of mind from which it has manifested; and further, in mind is hidden the principle of the Supramental from which it has been manifested by the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The manifestation of each principle has a dual aspect, the aspiration from below for bringing out that which is hidden and the descent from above from the corresponding plane. Once we grasp this, we can see that Consciousness is like a ladder rising to ever higher planes, and each time a new principle is manifested, one more rung is added to the ladder and a new creation is born.

This is how the Mother puts it in a very important talk which not only clarifies the matter but also gives valuable information about the Supramental and the Avatar in general:

The consciousness is like a ladder: at each great epoch there has been one great being capable of adding one more step to the ladder and reaching a place

where the ordinary consciousness had never been. It is possible to attain a high level and get completely out of the material consciousness; but then one does not retain the ladder, whereas the great achievement of the great epochs of the universe has been the capacity to add one more step to the ladder without losing contact with the material, the capacity to reach the Highest and at the same time connect the top with the bottom instead of letting a kind of emptiness cut off all connection between the different planes. To go up and down and join the top to the bottom is the whole secret of realisation, and that is the work of the Avatar. Each time he adds one more step to the ladder, there is a new creation upon earth. . . . The step which is being added now Sri Aurobindo has called the Supramental; as result of it, the consciousness will be able to enter the supramental world and yet retain its personal form, its individualisation and then come down to establish here a new creation. Certainly this is not the last, for there are farther ranges of being . . . It [*Supramental*] is essentially a creation of order, a putting of everything in its true place; and the chief spirit or force, the Shakti active at present is Mahasaraswati, the Goddess of perfect organisation. (*CWM*, Vol. 3, pp. 178-79)

The Mother further adds a deep insight about the Avatar:

The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.

(*CWM*, Vol. 3, pp. 179)

This then is the real work of the Avatar, adding one more step to the ladder of Consciousness, leading creation one more step towards Divinity and fulfilling the Divine aim. As Sri Aurobindo says:

I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness. . . . (*CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 420)

In another place Sri Aurobindo has written,

The Avatar is necessary when a special work is to be done and in crises of the evolution. The Avatar is a special manifestation while for the rest of the time it is the Divine working within the ordinary human limits as a Vibhuti.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 401)

Further, about the parable of the Dasavatar, Sri Aurobindo says:

Avatarhood would have little meaning if it were not connected with the evolution. The Hindu procession of the ten Avatars is itself, as it were, a parable of evolution. First the Fish Avatar, then the amphibious animal between land and water, then the land animal, then the Man-Lion Avatar, bridging man and animal, then man as dwarf, small and undeveloped and physical but containing in himself the godhead and taking possession of existence, then the rajasic, sattwic, nirguna Avatars, leading the human development from the vital rajasic to the sattwic mental man and again the overmental superman. Krishna, Buddha and Kalki depict the last three stages, the stages of the spiritual development — Krishna opens the possibility of overmind, Buddha tries to shoot beyond to the supreme liberation but that liberation is still negative, not returning upon earth to complete positively the evolution; Kalki is to correct this by bringing the Kingdom of the Divine upon earth, destroying the opposing Asura forces. The progression is striking and unmistakable. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, pp. 401-402)

This then is the real meaning of Avatarhood, the purpose for which the Avatar takes birth — the opening of a new and higher level of Consciousness, opening the doorway through which others can ascend in the natural progression of Consciousness, without losing the contact with the material Consciousness and consequently bring down that new Consciousness to act upon the material, leading to a new creation.

Finally, as always, the Mother has explained the work of the Avatar very simply and beautifully in two sentences:

The great work of the Avatar is to manifest the Divine Grace upon earth. To be a disciple of the Avatar is to become an instrument of the Divine Grace.

(*CWM*, Vol. 14, p. 83)

As the Mother has said, this work is done inside the consciousness of the Avatar, without any outward fanfare or display of power. It is quite alien to our mental conception. The way the Divine (the Avatar) works is quite different from our human ways. This is what Sri Aurobindo says:

Men's way of doing things well is through a clear mental connection; they see things and do things with the mind and what they want is a mental and human perfection. When they think of a manifestation of Divinity, they think it must be an extraordinary perfection in doing ordinary human things — an extraordinary business faculty, political, poetic or artistic faculty, an accurate memory, not making mistakes, not undergoing any defeat or failure. Or else they think of things which they call superhuman like not eating food or telling cotton-futures or sleeping on nails or eating them. All that has nothing to do with manifesting the Divine. . . . These human ideas are false.

The Divinity acts according to another consciousness, the consciousness of the Truth above and the Lila below and It acts according to the need of the Lila, not according to man's ideas of what It should or should not do. This is the first thing one must grasp, otherwise one can understand nothing about the manifestation of the Divine. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, pp. 410-11)

Further, Sri Aurobindo states in another letter:

An Avatar or Vibhuti have the knowledge that is necessary for their work, they need not have more. There was absolutely no reason why Buddha should know what was going on in Rome. An Avatar even does not manifest all the Divine omniscience and omnipotence; he has not come for any such unnecessary display; all that is behind him but not in the front of his consciousness. As for the Vibhuti, the Vibhuti need not even know that he is a power of the Divine. Some Vibhutis like Julius Caesar for instance have been atheists. Buddha himself did not believe in a personal God, only in some impersonal and indescribable Permanent. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 410)

Avatar — Presence and Lineage

Now we examine the question as to whether the Avatar evolves with the evolution of Consciousness as suggested by the Dasavatar parable above. Is there at all times an Avataric or Vibhuti presence on the earth?

Here is what the Mother has said:

Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations, under one form or another, one name or another. (*CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 10)

And about herself she has said:

Since the beginning of the earth, wherever and whenever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of the Consciousness, I was there.

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 37)

Sri Aurobindo was even more explicit in this correspondence with a disciple. On being questioned:

It is said that you and the Mother have been on the earth since its creation. But what have you been doing for so many millions of years in disguise? I say "disguise" because it is only now that you are showing yourselves to the world in your real nature.

he answered simply in four words:

Carrying on the evolution.

The disciple persisted:

I fail to understand what you mean by "Carrying on the evolution." Could you explain this more fully?

and Sri Aurobindo answered:

That would mean writing the whole of human history. I can only say that as there are special descents to carry on the evolution to a farther stage, so also something of the Divine is always there to help through each stage itself in one direction or another. (CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 88)

In another letter, Sri Aurobindo says,

But each being in a new birth prepares a new mind, life and body — otherwise John Smith would always be John Smith and would have no chance of being Piyusha Kanti Ghose. Of course inside there are old personalities contributing to the new life — but I am speaking of the new visible personality, the outer man, mental, vital, physical. It is the psychic being that keeps the link from birth to birth and makes all the manifestations of the same person. It is therefore to be expected that the Avatar should take on a new personality each time, a personality suited for the new times, work, surroundings. In my own view of things, however, the new personality has a series of Avatar births behind him, births in which the intermediate evolution has been followed and assisted from age to age. (SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 406)

And in yet another letter Sri Aurobindo says,

As for the lives in between the Avatar lives, it must be remembered that Krishna speaks of many lives in the past, not only a few supreme ones, and secondly that while he speaks of himself as the Divine, in one passage he describes himself as a Vibhuti, *vṛṣṇinām vāsudevaḥ*. We may therefore fairly assume that in many lives he manifested as the Vibhuti veiling the fuller Divine Consciousness. If we admit that the object of Avatarhood is to lead the evolution, this is quite reasonable, the Divine appearing as Avatar in the great transitional stages and as Vibhutis to aid the lesser transitions.

(SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 402)

And most tellingly, in another passage Sri Aurobindo says:

Are we then to suppose an eternal or continual Avatar himself evolving, we might say, his own fit mental and physical body according to the needs and the pace of the human evolution and so appearing from age to age, *yuge yuge*? In some such spirit some would interpret the ten incarnations of Vishnu, first in animal forms, then in the animal man, then in the dwarf man-soul, Vamana, the violent Asuric man, Rama of the axe, the divinely-natured man, a greater Rama, the awakened spiritual man, Buddha, and, preceding him in time, but final in place, the complete divine manhood, Krishna, — for the last Avatar, Kalki, only accomplishes the work Krishna began, — he fulfils in power the great struggle which the previous Avatars prepared in all its potentialities.

(CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 166)

Further, on being asked the question:

Is it true that the Avatar is the full manifestation of the Divine Vibhuti?

Sri Aurobindo answered as follows:

If you consider it from the earth's point of view. But it may be truer to say that the Avatar holds himself back and manifests as a Vibhuti in many lives till the time comes for his manifesting as the Avatar. (CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 401)

And the Mother puts the matter beyond any doubt. When questioned by a disciple:

May I know, Mother, how many centuries ago You descended upon earth?

she replied:

I have never left the earth since it was formed. (CWM, Vol. 17, p. 75)

From what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said above, three points would appear to emerge, firstly, that either as Avatar or as Vibhuti, the Divine is present on the earth most of the time or one can say all the time. Secondly, that the Avatar evolves with time and manifests himself according to the needs of new time, age and surroundings. And lastly, that there is a lineage of evolving Avatars.

The Mother in reply to a question has shed some very interesting light on the preservative and destructive aspect of the lineage of the Avatar. On being asked:

Mother, about the Buddha I have a question. You said that the Avatar comes to the earth to show that the Divine can live upon the earth. Then why did he preach just the contrary? Is he an Avatar or not?

the Mother replied:

That! . . . Some people say he was an Avatar, others say no, but this, to tell you the truth, it is . . .

I think that this first thing, that the Avatar comes to the earth to prove that the Divine can . . . it is not so much to prove by words as to prove by a certain realisation; and I think that it would be rather this aspect of the Divine which is constructive and preservative, rather than a transformative and destructive aspect. You see, to use the Indian names known in India, well, I think they are Avatars of Vishnu who come rather to prove that the Divine can come upon earth; whereas each time Shiva has manifested he has always manifested like this, in beings who have tried to fight against an illusion and demolish what is there.

I have reasons to think that the Buddha was one. To speak more accurately, he manifested something of the power of Shiva: it was the same compassion, the same understanding of all the misery, and the same power which destroys — obviously with the intention of transforming, but destroys rather than constructs. His work does not seem to have been very constructive. It was very necessary to teach men practically not to be egoistic; from that point of view it was very necessary. But in its deeper principle it has not helped very much in the transformation of the earth.

As I said, you see, instead of helping the descent of the higher Consciousness into the terrestrial life, it has strongly encouraged the separation of the deeper consciousness, which he said was the only true one, from all outer expression.

Now, you see, this question of the Divine upon earth: well, quite naturally those who believed in him have made a god of him. One has only to see all the

temples and all the Buddhist godheads to know that human nature has always the tendency to deify what it admires.

So, there it is!

(CWM, Vol. 7, pp. 292-93)

Avatars in History

Talking about those whom Sri Aurobindo considered as Avatars, the Mother has said:

In the *Essays on the Gita* Sri Aurobindo mentions the names of three Avatars, and Christ is one of them. An Avatar is an emanation of the Supreme Lord who assumes a human body on earth. I heard Sri Aurobindo himself say that Christ was an emanation of the Lord's aspect of love.

(CWM, Vol. 10, p. 61)

About Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo has said:

He was certainly quite as much an Avatar as Christ or Chaitanya.

(CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 162)

We had earlier referred to a letter of Sri Aurobindo wherein he has made the distinction between the Avatar and Vibhuti based on the Gita's words. In the same letter Sri Aurobindo continues:

... If we follow this distinction, we can confidently say from what is related of them that Rama and Krishna can be accepted as Avatars; Buddha figures as such although with a more impersonal consciousness of the Power within him. Ramakrishna voiced the same consciousness when he spoke of Him who was Rama and who was Krishna being within him. But Chaitanya's case is peculiar; for according to the accounts he ordinarily felt and declared himself a bhakta of Krishna and nothing more, but in great moments he manifested Krishna, grew luminous in mind and body and was Krishna himself and spoke and acted as the Lord. His contemporaries saw in him an Avatar of Krishna, a manifestation of the Divine Love.

Shankara and Vivekananda were certainly Vibhutis; they cannot be reckoned as more, though as Vibhutis they were very great.

(SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 407)

Sri Aurobindo while giving an insight into the source of power of the Vibhutis has stated:

It may even be said that each Vibhuti draws his energies from the Four [*aspects of the Mother*], from one of them predominantly in most cases, as Napoleon from Mahakali, Rama from Mahalakshmi, Augustus Caesar from Mahasaraswati.

(CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 113)

Kalki — the last Avatar?

Now we come to the final question — Is Kalki the last Avatar? With the advent of the Supramental, will there be future Avatars?

The Mother was asked precisely this question:

Will the Avatars still need to take birth on earth once the supramental consciousness is firmly established?

She replied:

This question will be easier to answer when the supermind is manifested in living beings on earth.

I had always heard that Sri Aurobindo was the “the last Avatar”; but he is probably the last Avatar in a human body — afterwards, we do not know. . . .
(CWM, Vol. 10, p. 253)

In another talk about the great disparity, the difference between the Divine Consciousness which is full of light, bliss, love, compassion and this material Consciousness which is full of darkness, suffering, pain, — and as to what is the solution for the same, a disciple asked her:

Has this solution any connection with the date, August fifteenth? Is there any connection between the Feast of the Assumption in the Catholic Church and the date of Sri Aurobindo’s birth?

She answered:

Yes. And he has also said it himself. The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is the divinisation of Matter. And this is the aim of the last Avatar.
(CWM, Vol. 8, p. 269)

Lastly, in a very important, very significant revelation, the Mother has said:

I do not think that a single individual on the earth as it is now, a single individual, however great, however eternal his consciousness and origin, can on his own change and realise — change the world, change the creation as it is and realise this higher Truth which will be a new world, a world more true, if not absolutely true. It would seem that a certain number of individuals — until now it seems to have been more in time, as a succession, but it could also be in space, a collectivity — are indispensable so that this Truth can become concrete and realise itself.

Practically, I am sure of it.

That is to say, however great, however conscious, however powerful he may be, *one* Avatar cannot by himself realise the supramental life on earth. It is either a group in time, extending over a period of time, or a group spread out in space — perhaps both — that are indispensable for this Realisation. I am convinced of it. (*CWM*, Vol. 10, pp. 136-37)

ANIL PURI

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RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of July 2013)

III

THE first group of figures to be taken up is that of the ones based on resemblance. I have listed only three under this head: simile, metaphor and allegory. These are very familiar figures, so there is no need to say anything about them, beyond the fact that there are a few sub-divisions within them, which we will take up one by one.

Simile thus encompasses Homeric simile and extended simile. A Homeric simile is one that is continued for a few lines and extended simile occurs when the same thing is compared with several other things in quick succession. Our writer uses similes easily and often:

. . . it may be that height of bare and direct expression where language seems to be used as a scarcely felt vaulting-board for a leap into the infinite . . .¹

The reader will notice that the simile is used here, not for ornamentation, but in order to clarify the meaning. Indeed, with our writer it is almost always like this: figures of speech are used, not for their decorative value, but for their functional value. In the very next page there is another:

In the lesser poets these moments are rare and come like brilliant accidents, angel's visits . . .²

Here indeed the writer has gone beyond that which is merely necessary and given us beauty, for "brilliant accidents" is enough by itself to clarify the meaning, but the writer has given us something extra in "angel's visits". Did not Keats say that poetry surprises by a fine excess? Well, so does prose, when the pen is wielded by a master like our writer.

Homeric similes occur frequently in poetry, but not so frequently in prose — at least not in prose of this kind. But if and when he wants to, our writer uses this figure to wonderful effect. The example I am going to give is in *The Hour of God*. I feel most uncomfortable taking examples from works like this — it is like sacrilege.

1. *The Future Poetry*, p. 38.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

But even when reading the work with no thought of prose style in mind I could not, just could not, help noticing the simile. Let the reader forgive my presumption and enjoy the wonderful prose:

And if his presence is felt behind the veil, yet is it like the winter sun behind clouds and saves not from the rain and snow and the calamitous storm and the harsh wind and the bitter cold and the grey of a sorrowful atmosphere and the dun weary dullness.³

Would the reader like to know which I am perfectly sure is the longest Homeric simile in English poetry? It is in *Savitri*, Bk VII, Canto III, where Savitri is sitting in meditation and “A spate, a torrent of the speed of life” breaks into her soul. This torrent is described in the next few pages and on page 493 is compared with winged horses. This simile goes on for no less than 29 lines and I am sure there is no Homeric simile in English poetry longer than this. As is known well enough, our poet often out-Homers Homer, and here that has been done with a vengeance. But we are studying prose, not poetry, so I will control myself and not give the lines here.

Turning to metaphors now, this is a figure of speech over which the ancients wax eloquent. Both metaphor and simile are discussed by Demetrius under Elevated Style. Aristotle tells us that to be a master of metaphor is the greatest gift a poet can have and it cannot be learnt from anyone else. He gives four kinds of metaphors into which there is no need for us to go. I would, however, like to refer to Longinus whose book has many things in common with *The Future Poetry* as I have had occasion to point out in another context.⁴ He comes much later than the rhetoricians referred to till now (the first century A.D.), so he refers to both Aristotle and Theophrastus and says:

... figurative language is a natural source of grandeur and metaphor contributes to sublimity.⁵

He has many things to say about the other figures of speech, but it is only about metaphor that he says without any qualifications that it “contributes to sublimity”.

So now, without any more ado, let me say that apart from the usual variety, there are three kinds of metaphors that are generally accepted and generally known: mixed metaphor, frozen metaphor and hidden metaphor. Our author, needless to

3. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 156.

4. *Bhabisyater Kāvya*, 1 & 3 in *Bartika*, 21-2-12, 24-4-12.

5. T. S. Dorsch transl., *Classical Literary Criticism*, Penguin, 1965, p. 142.

say, makes copious use of all these kinds, they are strewn in every page. First of all let me give an example of a metaphor as it is generally known, the ordinary, simple kind. Thus, commenting on James Cousins' book, he says that it:

. . . is almost too small a pedestal for the figures it has to support . . .⁶

This is a metaphor in which a book has been compared with a pedestal and the poets discussed with statues.

In the very next paragraph we have a frozen metaphor. These are words which were initially used as a metaphor but down the centuries the metaphorical value of the word has been forgotten and the word is used in a perfectly ordinary manner. Thus the phrase "fluent tongue" is a frozen metaphor, for the word "fluent" means a flowing river. But this metaphorical value is neglected today. There are thousands of such words that are being used like this. All the same, since I have this opportunity of parading my knowledge, why not use it, to the scorn and perhaps the delectation of the patient reader? So here it is:

The English language and literature is practically the only window the Indian mind . . . possesses into the world of European thought and culture . . .⁷

The word "window" has been used here to mean a window — an aperture to look out of, but actually it is a frozen metaphor, as originally it used to be a phrase, "the wind's eye". This metaphorical meaning is totally forgotten today and this is the reason I am pointing it out.

Later we shall read about another kind of metaphor — the hidden metaphor. It is very like the frozen one. Let me point out the difference between the two here and now. In a frozen metaphor the whole thing goes back a long way. It has become "frozen" through time, down the centuries. The poet has nothing to do with it. But in a hidden metaphor it is the poet (or the prose artist) who does the hiding. Usually it is done unconsciously. The writer is not deliberately doing the hiding. He is not using a word which has already become a frozen metaphor. It will become clear when we take up this figure of speech. It is difficult, sometimes impossible, to detect whether it is the work of time or of the poet himself.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

6. *The Future Poetry*, p. 2.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

POEMS WRITTEN IN GOLCONDE

(Offered at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother)

MATRIMANDIR

There sits a secret chamber of silence and peace,
Hidden deep, inside the heart of Auroville,
In a temple of the Mother
Of none other than the One.
On majestic columns that are carved in stone
With the divine names of Mahasaraswati,
Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Maheshwari,
Carved in an Earth bowl of petals of gold,
Surrounded by emerald lush greenery,
Beside an overflowing Banyan tree;
That, that is a pathway to the journey
Into the depths of one's own inner being.

RESONATING

'Resonating'—
What a beautiful word it is.

For only empty vessels do resonate together,
Empty of their egos and desires,
Empty of their expectations,
And empty of their demands too;
Then they resonate,
Full of joy and suffering,
Aspiration and hope,
Care and concern,
For each and the other,
On this journey called 'Life'.

THE GATE

(At Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi)

I am the Gate,
 I am the Light,
 I am the Voice,
 I am the Guide,
 I am the Spirit,
 I am the one, the only One
 You have been seeking
 With your aching heart,
 A deep longing,
 A secret yearning,
 In eternal Time.

I will lead you to a peace and silence
 With love and beauty,
 Overflowing with joy and bliss.

O soul! O soul seek no further,
 This is the end of your journey,
 And the beginning of a new one.

THE DAWN

A force works in an apparent sleep,
 A conscious power of the Divine,
 Bringing forth into Light a new reality.

In that silent space of the Night,
 A lamp is lit.

The Child sleeps in the cradle of the Unknowable,
 Lulled by the music of the Spheres.

The Truth awakes
 At the end of each Night
 Bringing in a dawn of peace and of bliss.

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

1. An Icon

IN the years of growing up, in that tricky period of teenage, in those seven years bridging childhood and early adulthood, one definitely needs an icon. It may not be oriented towards a repeat performance of the achievements of the icon. But the presence of an icon is a constant inspiration: someone points out this image: 'Try to be like this in real life!'

India, fortunately, is rich in this sphere. For millennia great men and women have worked like gods on this earth. People have followed them eagerly as a talisman against going under. It is as well, for day-to-day living in India has never been an easy-going affair. Struggle is the reality which has been effectively countered by the call for simplicity, sacrifice, immense scholarship and sterling tapasya by these icons. Their achievements are Himalayan, yet we have not recorded the life and work of all these great personalities. Where we manage to do that at least with partial brush-strokes, there come the icon-shatterers looking for cheap publicity. Handling vague research instruments such as Marxian sociology and Freudian psychology that can only lead to dubious results, the icon-shatterers, invariably suffering from metaphoric scotoma, exult into their cracked mirrors: "I have managed to scratch this face with a rusted knife!" However, Mother India is a tough goddess. Rooted in Sanatana Dharma, she remains spiritually a single unit. Her image endures for all time. Like her eternal youth and strength, Rishi Bankim's hymn endures for ever:

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,
Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,
Thou the love divine, the awe
In our hearts that conquers death.
Thine the strength that nerves the arm,
Thine the beauty, thine the charm.
Every image made divine
In our temples is but thine. . . .

Mother, mother mine!
Mother sweet, I bow to thee,
Mother great and free!¹

1. Translated by Sri Aurobindo, *CWSA*, Vol. 5, pp. 465-66.

My early years were practically spent among my father's bookshelves. There never was a separate library room in any of the houses we lived, and one was in no way surprised to find a shelf of books even in the kitchen. All his life, Father² remained a teacher and could not afford big houses. He never built one either. That was his way. Books were his career; not applying for loans to build houses or buy cars. "I have never owned a car, and cannot pedal even a bicycle," he would say laughingly.

But he bought books, read them and wrote books also. As one who shaped my thoughts, quite early in my life, Father showed me an icon who was very much present in the house as portraits and books. He would speak to me of how as a very young boy, Sri Aurobindo had become a voracious reader and achieved academic excellence. That was the time when Ambalal Purani was gathering original papers of Sri Aurobindo's stay in England. Oh yes, Father would say, Sri Aurobindo had studied in England and so you better study English literature well. He would not be happy if you are lax with this area of literary studies. If you want to understand Sri Aurobindo, first try to know the history of the language which he wields with such expertise.

Such was Father's constant emphasis on Sri Aurobindo the reader-scholar. Mother would be stringing *parijatha* blossoms to make garlands for the portraits of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and just listen as Father went on speaking about Sri Aurobindo. It was familiar territory for her as she was there from day one when Father borrowed the *Collected Poems and Plays* from Shankargowda Patil in 1942 and brought the volumes home to read. Then Father had gone deep into Aurobindonian studies, written a biography of Sri Aurobindo which was corrected by the Master himself. He had indeed spent his lifetime writing and lecturing about Sri Aurobindo in various fora. At home too he went on speaking about Sri Aurobindo but each time it sounded new, there was something new to know about the Master.

Father would exclaim at times: "How much he must have read to write such beautiful English!" and then read a page from a book picked up at random from his Aurobindonian shelf. It could be just a brief poem, maybe a sonnet:

O Thou of whom I am the instrument,
 O secret Spirit and Nature housed in me,
 Let all my mortal being now be blent
 In Thy still glory of divinity.

I have given my mind to be dug Thy channel mind,
 I have offered up my will to be Thy will:
 Let nothing of myself be left behind
 In our union mystic and unutterable.

2. Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, biographer of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

My heart shall throb with the world-beats of Thy love,
 My body become Thy engine for earth-use;
 In my nerves and veins Thy rapture's streams shall move;
 My thoughts shall be hounds of Light for Thy power to loose.

Keep only my soul to adore eternally
 And meet Thee in each form and soul of Thee.³

This would be followed by some words on the sonnet form and how Sri Aurobindo was a master of English prosody.

All this had led to my taking up English literature for my graduate studies in the Andhra University. In the 'fifties we were still in the syllabus-content of British Universities, though other Universities (Madras, for instance) had jettisoned some subjects like Old English. Studying Sri Aurobindo I have felt at home precisely because his writing has a total view of English literature and reflects it from the Anglo-Saxon days to his own time.

More than half a century has passed me by since those college days. Looking back I feel happy that we had this heavy, wholesome syllabus in my student days. If one goes by today's list of subjects studied by students, I can only pity them. To study English literature without having watched Beowulf kill Grendel in the deep seas or watch Chaucer's Nun's Priest recount the tale of the Chaunticleer! To say I am a student of English literature without watching the Lady Britomart in her male disguise rout a whole set of Knights in Armour! To think of oneself as a Master of Arts in English literature without having had several glimpses of the *History of the English People* by the Venerable Bede! The Venerable Bede gave me my earliest introduction to the mystery of life and death and the days we spend on earth. He records in the *History* about the missionary Paulinus who had come to the court of King Edwin of Northumberland and told his royal host:

It seems to me that the life of man on earth is like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your captains and counsellors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall. Outside, the storms of winter rain and snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one window of the hall and out through another. While he is inside, the bird is safe from the winter storms, but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. So man appears on earth for a little while — but of what went before this life, or what follows, we know nothing.

3. 'Surrender' by Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 611.

Sri Aurobindo was a master of many languages. He even wrote works in Bengali and Sanskrit. But English was his favourite. There may be richer literatures in the past but English was in the forefront as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth century. I have always enjoyed his document on the character of English poetry which is part of *The Future Poetry*. There is the firm opening:

Of all the modern European tongues the English language — I think this may be said without any serious doubt, — has produced, not always the greatest or most perfect, but at least the most rich and naturally powerful poetry, the most lavish of energy and innate genius. The unfettered play of poetic energy and power has been here the most abundant and brought forth the most constantly brilliant fruits.⁴

He finds it curious that English literature has not been a force in offering plenty of inputs for Europe's creative genius. But no matter. We know that it has had a very big hand in shaping the bhasha literatures of India thanks to the colonial rule. At the same time, Indians have taken to English with enthusiasm and have created a branch for English literature, "Indian writing in English"! Again, the unique star that has continued to shed its brilliance in this branch is Sri Aurobindo himself. History has many pleasant turns and this has been one, for it has given us *Savitri*.

It goes without saying that English literature exercised its inspirations also on Sri Aurobindo as an Indian writing in English. Of course he subsumed all that came to his creative forge with his yogic fire, and it will be vain to go in for comparative passages and thoughts and techniques as we do when writing soulless research dissertations. At the same time it is of incalculable Ananda for us personally to traverse those regions where he had also wandered long ago.

One of his statements that has charmed me no end refers to his habit of taking in the whole of a book and not harping upon individual words and phrases as writers of bazaar notes do. They may present the body but they lose the life-spirit. As he said on 29th December, 1938:

Once I was giving a lecture on Southey's *Life of Nelson*, and my lecture was not in agreement with the notes. So the students remarked that it was not at all like what was found in them. I replied that I had not read the notes; in any case they were all rubbish. I could never go into minute details. I read and left my mind to do what it could. That's why I could never become a scholar.⁵

4. CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 48.

5. *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 edition, p. 210.

I guess this attitude helped me keep my love of English literature undimmed during all these decades. The text has been my joy. Sri Aurobindo read voraciously and Dinendra Kumar Roy who was with Sri Aurobindo in Baroda has said that he saw all the poets from Chaucer to Swinburne in his library. It must have contained the literature preceding Chaucer too. With his passion for the classics, he would have had books on Old English literature also in his Baroda library. For he spent lavishly on books which seems to have been his solitary luxury in those days.

Whenever I have come to *The Future Poetry* and read his references to the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic element in English literature, I have simply spent some time with a text of those times. So it has been whenever I see the mention of a familiar name from that literature in all his writings: Chaucer, Marlowe, Rossetti or Morris. This has been a luxury indeed! I used to wonder sometimes at this habit of repeatedly going back to such writings when they have nothing to do with my work on hand and positively do hamper my deadlines. That is, till suddenly a line in *Savitri* brought me illumination one day.

Hidden in the forest's bosom of loneliness
Amid the leaves the inmate voices called,
Sweet like desires enamoured and unseen,
Cry answering to low insistent cry.
Behind slept emerald dumb remotenesses,
Haunt of a Nature passionate, veiled, denied
To all but her own vision lost and wild.
Earth in this beautiful refuge free from cares
Murmured to the soul a song of strength and peace.⁶

This is the introduction to the forest where Satyavan has spent his childhood, boyhood and youth. Savitri's chariot is passing through the area and we have this splendid description. The unseen inmates were welcoming her to come, see and stay. Who wants to leave a place that gives you a feeling of absolute peace, comfort, the adventure of quiet imagination, the rainbow hues of loving togetherness?

Browsing in my library I have often felt the same way, the silent call of a book. So many inmate voices! Many had been handled by my father long before I was born. Some very precious volumes too: the books which carry the divine signatures of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother given to my parents at various times: "To Srinivasa; to Padmasani." And all those books given to me by my father at various times, the earliest dated 1944!

Perhaps this immersion in English literature has made me feel absolutely at home with the writings of Sri Aurobindo. I find delight in well-wrought phrases and

6. CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 392.

Sri Aurobindo never fails to surprise me in this regard. Have I understood all that he has written? Certainly not. I am, after all, a human being with limitations. But the sheer pleasure of reading him! Ah, yes, it is good that my basic grounding was in English literature.

The entry into that field was quite harsh. It was alien territory in all respects. Like ancient Tamil of the Sangam Age, the Old English period traverses the same time scale, 500 B.C. to 2nd century A.D. And like Sangam Tamil, Old English sounds like another language. Even the script has variations. For both, written records come much later. In the beginning, it was quite a pain to attend the Old English classes. We had come to the discipline hoping for an absolutely lovely time reading novels(!) as already various serials like Classics Retold had charmed us. Nor were we strangers to English poetry. *The Golden Treasury* was a beloved companion for the aspiring teenager in those days. But here the Professor was spreading several tough nuts for us to crack, including the epic poem *Beowulf*.

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
 þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
 hu ða æpelingas ellen fremedon.
 Oft Scyld Scefing sceapena þreatum . . .⁷

This is not English, our minds rebelled. But we plodded through the words for there was no choice. There was also a temptation. Papers on Old English, Middle English and the History of the English Language could help us score marks as in mathematics. Memory power was important too. But once the coveted degree was in my hands, promptly I forgot the originals. But the story of heroism, the battle between Beowulf and the sea-monster Grendel and some of the kennings have continued to walk with me down the decades. Scyld, the heroic king had wanted a sea-burial. When he dies, he is placed in a boat which is set adrift in the sea. As I was living in a coastal town at that time, the scenery would come back to me as I stared at the Bay of Bengal in the evenings. Scyld's son was the hero Beowulf. It is an incomplete epic, though.

Old English literature is mostly about battle heroism and the pain of war, loss and death. Even later poems (5th, 6th centuries) can overwhelm us by sheer melancholy. 'The Battle of Maldon' was a prescribed text and we learnt about the horrifying Viking invasions of Britain which were numerous, and our Professor helpfully linked it to the repeated invasions of Mahmud of Gazni who plundered

7. "Lo! the Spear-Danes' glory through splendid achievements
 The folk-kings' former fame we have heard of,
 How princes displayed then their prowess-in-battle.
 Oft Scyld the Scefing from scathers in numbers ..."

(Translated by Lesslie Hall)

India. Athelgar, Godric, Godwig, Wulfstan, Aethelred the Unready and Brihtnoth became familiar names. Brihtnoth was of course the heroic warrior who challenged the invading Vikings, avaricious for Anglo-Saxon riches:

Thou messenger of the seamen, back with thy message.
 Tell to thy people, these far more hateful tidings,
 There stands here a good earl in the midst of his men,
 Who will this country ever defend,
 The kingdom of Aethelred, mine overlord,
 The folk and the ground — but they shall fall,
 The foemen in the fight; too shameful methinks
 That ye with our tribute, to ship should be gone
 Without a blow struck — now that ye have thus far
 Made your incoming into our land.
 Nor shall ye so softly carry off our riches.
 Sooner shall point and edge reconcile us,
 Grim warplay indeed — before we give tribute.⁸

So why should we be surprised that the seeds of patriotism had been sown in Sri Aurobindo's heart even when he was in England, studying such books? However, battle heroism is not all about these Anglo-Saxon recordings. There are also the earliest references to the coming of Christianity, the change from the terrifying gods of Norse mythology like Thor to the beckoning love of Jesus Christ's message. 'The Dream of the Rood' was another prescribed poem. It was amazing to know that part of the poem had been carved on a wooden pillar known as the Ruthwell Cross but it was pulled down during a Protestant revolt. Who was the author? Caedmon? Cynewulf? What does it matter who the author was? The poem is the reality and is a wonderful introduction to the art of personification.

The poet has a dream in which he comes across the Cross on which Jesus Christ had been nailed. Encrusted with precious gems as also stained by blood the Cross speaks to the poet of the last hours of Jesus. It was originally a tree which was cut down to make the Cross on which to crucify Jesus. It had shared the pain of being nailed with Jesus and had been mocked by the onlookers. Later, just as Jesus is now praised by all, the Cross too has gained a very high position. It is now decorated with gems to celebrate it.

Now the time has come
 That I will be honoured far and wide
 By men over the earth and all this glorious creation;

8. Translated by Wilfrid Berridge.

They will pray to this beacon. On me the Son of God
 Suffered for a while; because of that I am glorious now,
 Towering under the heavens, and I am able to heal
 Each one of those who is in awe of me.
 Formerly I was made the hardest of punishments,
 Most hateful to the people, before I opened for them,
 For the voice-bearers, the true way of life.
 Listen, the lord of glory, the guardian of the kingdom of heaven,
 Then honoured me over the forest trees,
 Just as he, almighty God, also honoured
 His mother, Mary herself, for all men
 Over all womankind.⁹

I studied Old English between 1954 and 57. That was a time when we did not (or could not) even consider writings by Americans or Africans or Canadians or Indians writing in English as ‘English literature’. The austere Professor K. Viswanadham saw to it that we did not let our attention wander, as he painstakingly went through the syllabus. There were good moments of laughter when he explained a few Old English “riddles” and drew our attention to “*nainam chhindanti śastrāṇi*” sloka in the *Gita* when explaining one of them:

A noble guest of great lineage dwells
 In the house of man. Grim hunger
 Cannot harm him, nor feverish thirst,
 Nor age, nor illness. If the servant
 Of the guest who rules, serves well
 On the journey, they will find together
 Bliss and well-being, a feast of fate;
 If the slave will not as a brother be ruled
 By a lord he should fear and follow
 Then both will suffer and sire a family
 Of sorrows when, springing from the world,
 They leave the bright bosom of one kinswoman,
 Mother and sister, who nourished them.
 Let the man who knows noble words
 Say what the guest and servant are called.¹⁰

9. Translated by Elaine Treharne.

10. Translated by Craig Williamson.

So apt an image to explain the relationship of the body and the soul! I salute the Professor who made the distant Anglo-Saxon poem come so close to our own religious experience.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

We have first the dominant Anglo-Saxon strain quickened, lightened and given force, power and initiative by the Scandinavian and Celtic elements. This mixture has made a national mind remarkably dynamic and practical, with all the Teutonic strength, patience, industry, but liberated from the Teutonic heaviness and crudity, yet retaining enough not to be too light of balance or too sensitive to the shocks of life; therefore, a nation easily first in practical intelligence and practical dealing with the facts and difficulties of life. Not, be it noted, by any power of clear intellectual thought or by force of imagination or mental intuition, but rather by a strong vital instinct, a sort of tentative dynamic intuition. 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. In life a subordinate element, modifying the cruder Anglo-Saxon characteristics, breaking across them or correcting their excess, sometimes refining and toning, sometimes exaggerating the energy of the Norman and the Scandinavian strength and drive, we may perhaps see it emerging at its best, least hampered, least discouraged, in English poetry, coming there repeatedly to the surface and then working with a certain force and vehement but still embarrassed power, like an imprisoned spirit let out for a holiday but within not quite congenial bounds and with an unadaptable companion. From the ferment of these two elements, from the vigorous but chaotic motion created by their fusion and their clash, arise both the greatness and the limitations of English poetry.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Future Poetry, CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 51-52)



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