

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JANUARY 2014

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

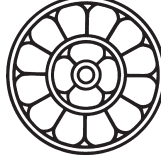
Air Mail:

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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All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

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

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVII

No. 1

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE BIRTH OF THE WAR-GOD¹

Expanded version of Canto I

A god concealed in mountain majesty,
Embodied to our cloudy physical sight
In dizzy summits and green-gloried slopes,
Measuring the earth in an enormous ease,
Immense Himaloy dwells and in the moan
Of western waters and in eastern floods
Plunges his hidden spurs. Of such a strength
High-piled, so thousand-crested is his look
That with the scaling greatness of his peaks
He seems to uplift to heaven our prostrate soil.
He mounts from the green luxury of his vales
Ambitious of the skies; naked and lost
The virgin chill immensity of snow
Covers the breathless spirit of his heights.
To snows his savage pines aspire; the birch
And all the hardy brotherhood which climb
Against the angry muttering of the winds,
Challenge the dangerous air in which they live.
He is sated with the silence of the stars:
Lower he dips into life's beauty, far
Below he hears the cascades, now he clothes
His rugged sides the gentle breezes kiss
With soft grass and the gold and silver fern.
Holding upon her breast the hill-god's feet
Earth in her tresses hides his giant knees.
Over lakes of mighty sleep, where fountains lapse,
Dreaming, and by the noise of waterfalls,
In an unspoken solitary joy
He listens to her chant. The distant hills
Imagined him the calf to which she lows
When the wideness milks her udders. Meru is near,
The heavenly unseen height; like visible hints
Of his great subtle growths of peace and joy

1. Two other versions have been reproduced in the October and November issues of *Mother India*. — Ed.

Her musing woods arise; gems brilliant-rayed
She bears and herbs on every mountain marge,
Gifts of the mother to her mighty child.
In such warm infinite riches has she dressed
His fire of life, from his cold heights of thought
The great snows cannot slay its opulence.
Though stark they chill the feet of heaven, her sons
Forgive the fault amid a throng of joys.
As faints from our charmed sense in luminous floods
The gloomy stain on the moon's argent disk,
They have forgot his chill severity
In sweetness which escapes from him on life.
For as from passion of some austere soul
Delight and love have stolen to rapturous birth,
From iceborn waters his delicious vales
Are fed. Indulgent like a smile of God,
White grandeurs overlook wild green romance.
He keeps his summits for immortal steps.
The life of man upon his happier slopes
Roams wild and bare and free; the life of gods
Pronely from the unattainable summits climbs
Down the rude greatness of his huge rock-park.
As if rejecting glory of its veils
It leaps out from the subtle gleam of air,
Visible to man by waterfall and glade,
And finds us in the hush of sleeping woods,
And meets us with dim whisperings in the night.
Of their surrounding presence unaware
Chasing the dreadful wanderers of the hill
The hunter seeks for traces on his side;
He though soft-falling innocent snows weep off
The cruelty of their red footprints, finds
The path his prey the mighty lions go.
For glittering pearls from the felled elephants
Lain clotted, dropping from the hollow claws
Betray their dangerous passage. When he sits
Tired of the hunt on a slain poplar's base
And bares to winds the weariness of his brow,
They come, fay-breezes dancing on the slopes,
Scattering the peacock's gorgeous-plumed attire.
Shaking the cedars on Himaloy's breast,

With spray from Ganges' cascades on their wings,
They have kissed the wind-blown tangles of his hair,
Sprinkling their coolness on his soul. He has made
The grottoed glens his chambers of desire,
He has packed their dumbness with his passionate bliss;
Stone witnesses of ecstasy they sleep.
And wonderful luminous herbs from night's dim banks
When the strong forest-wanderer is lain
Twined with his love, marrying with hers his sighs,
Give light to see her joy those thrilled rocks keep
Moved to desire in their stony dreams.
Nor only human footsteps tread the grass
Upon his slopes, nor only mortal love
Finds there the lovely setting of the hills
Amid the broken caverns and the trees,
In the weird moonlight pouring from the clouds
And the clear sunlight glancing from the pines:
A wandering choir, a flash of unseen forms,
Go sweeping sometimes by and leave our hearts
Startled with hintings of a greater life.
The Kinnar passes singing in his glades.
Then stirred to keep some sweetness of their voice,
He fills the hollows of his bamboo stems
With the wind sobbing from the deep ravines
And in a moaning and melodious sound
Breathes from his rocky mouths, as if he meant
To flute, tune-giver to wild minstrelsies.
The delicate heels of the maned Kinnari
Are with his frosted slabs of snow distressed.
But by the large load of her breasts and hips
To escape the biting pathway's chill unease
She is forbidden: she must not break the grace
Of her slow motion's tardy rich appeal.
She too in grottoed caverns lies embraced.
Forced from the shamefast sweetness of her limbs
The subtle raiment leaves her fainting hands
To give her striving beauty to the gaze
Of her eternal lover. But thick clouds
Stoop hastily bowed to the rocky doors
And hang chance curtains against mortal eyes,
Shielding the naked goddess from our sight.

The birch-leaves of his hills love-pages are.
In ink of liquid metals letters strange
We see make crimson signs. They lie in wait
Upon the slopes, pages where passion burns,
The flushed epistles of enamoured gods
Where divine Circes pen heart-moving things.
The Apsaras rhyme out their wayward dance
In glen and valley; or upon brown banks
They lie close-bosomed of colour amorous.
The smooth gold of their limbs by harder hues
Stained curiously makes contrasts bright, to seize
The straying look of some world-lover's eyes,
As when Himaloy's metals flinging back
Upon the hangings of the tawny heavens
From glistened rocks their brilliant colourings
Like an untimely sunset's glories sleep.
Far down the clouds droop to his girdle-waist
Holding the tearful burden of their hearts,
Drifting grey melancholy through the air;
There on the low-hung plateaus' wideness lain
The Siddhas in soft shade repose, or up
Chased by wild driving rain for refuge flee
To summits splendid in the veiless sun.
Earth's mighty animal life has reached his woods.
The lion on Himaloy keeps his lair,
The elephant herds there wander. Oozing trees
Wounded by stormy rubbings of the tuskers' brows
Loose down their odorous tears in creamy drops,
And winds upon the plateau burdened pant
Weaving the air into a scented dream.
The yaks are there; they lift their bushy tails
To lash the breezes and white gleamings leap:
Such candours casting snares for heart and eye,
The moonbeams lie upon the sleeping hills.
Like souls divine who in a sweet excess
All-clasping draw their fallen enemies
To the impartial refuge of their love
Out of the ordered cruelties of life,
He takes to his cavern bosom hunted night.
Afraid of heaven's radiant eyes, crouched up
She cowers in Nature's great subliminal gloom,

A trembling fugitive from the ardent day,
Lest one embrace should change her into light.
Himaloy's peaks outpeer the circling sun.
He with his upstretched brilliant hands awakes
Immortal lilies in the unreached tarns.
Morning has found miraculous blooms unculled
By the seven sages in their starry march.
Such are the grandeurs of Himaloy's soul,
Such are his divine moods; moonlit he bears,
Of godward symbols the exalted source,
The mystic Soma-plant upon his heights.
He by the Father of sacrifice climbs crowned,
Headman and dynast of earth's soaring hills.

These were the scenes in which the Lovers met.
There lonely mused the silent Soul of all,
And to awake him from his boundless trance
Took woman's form the beauty of the world;
Then infinite sweetness bore a living shape;
She made her body perfect for his arms.
With equal rites he to his giant bed
The mind-born child of the world-fathers bore.
Mena, a goddess of devising heart,
Whom for her wisdom brooding seers adored,
The shapers of all living images,
He won to shape in her his stable race.
Their joys of love were like themselves immense.
Then in the wide felicitous lapse of time
The happy tumult of her being tossed
In long and puissant ecstasies bore fruit,
Bearing the banner of her unchanged youth
And beauty to charmed motherhood she crossed.
Mainac she bore, the guest of the deep seas,
Upon whose peaks the serpent-women play,
Race of a cavernous and monstrous world,
With strange eyes gleaming past the glaucous wave,
And jewelled tresses glittering through the foam.
Not that his natural air, who great had grown
Amid the brilliant perils of the sun;
From Indra tearing the great mountains' wings
With which they soared against the threatened sky,

Below the slippery fields the fugitive sank.
His sheltered essence bore no cruel sign,
Nor felt the anguish of the heavenly scars.
They disappointed of that proud desire
Mixed in a larger joy. It took not earth
For narrow base, but forced the heavens down
Into their passion-trance clasped on the couch
Calm and stupendous of the snow-cold heights.
Then to a nobler load her womb gave place.
For Daksha's daughter, Shiva's wife, had left
Her body lifeless in her father's halls
In that proud sacrifice and fatal, she
The undivided mother infinite
Indignant for his severing thought of God.
Now in a trance profound of joy by her
Conceived, she sprang again to livelier birth
To heal the sorrow and the dumb divorce.
Out of the unseen soul the splendid child
Came like bright lightning from the invisible air,
Welcome she came as Fortune to a king
When she is born with daring for her sire
And for her mother policy sublime.
Then was their festival holiday in the world,
Then were the regions subtle with delight:
Heaven's shells blew sweetly through the stainless air
And flowery rain came drifting down; earth thrilled
Back ravished to the rapture of the skies,
And all her moving and unmoving life
Felt happiness because the Bride was born.
So that fair mother by this daughter shone,
So her young beauty radiated its beams
As might a land of lapis lazuli
Torn by the thunder's voice. As from the earth
Tender and green an infant lance of life,
A jewelled sprouting from the mother slab,
The divine child lay on her mother's breast.
They called her Parvati, the mountain child,
When love to love cried answer in the house
And to the sound she turned her lovely face.
A riper day the great maternal name
Of Uma brought. Her father banqueted

Upon her as she grew unsated eyes
And saw his life like a large lamp by her
Fulfilled in light; like heaven's silent path
By Ganges voiceful grown his soul rejoiced;
It flowered like a great and shapeless thought
Suddenly immortal in a perfect word.
Wherever her bright laughing body rolled,
Wherever faltered her sweet tumbling steps,
All eyes were drawn to her like winging bees
Which sailing come upon the wanderer wind
Amid the infinite sweets of honeyed spring
To choose the mango-flower's delicious breast.
Increasing to new curves of loveliness
Fast grew like the moon's arc from day to day
Her childish limbs. Along the wonderful glens
Among her fair companions of delight
Bounding she strayed, or stooped by murmurous waves
To build frail walls on Ganges' heavenly sands,
Or ran to seize the tossing ball, or pleased
With puppet children her maternal mind.
And easily out of that earlier time
All sciences and wisdoms crowding came
Into her growing thoughts like swans that haste
In autumn to a sacred river's shores.
They started from her soul as grow at night
Born from some luminous herb its glimmering rays.
Her mind, her limbs betrayed themselves divine.
Thus she prepared her spirit for mighty life,
Wandering at will in freedom like a deer
On Nature's summits, in enchanted glens,
Absorbed in play, the Mother of the world.

Then youth a charm upon her body came
Adorning every limb, a heady wine
Of joy intoxicating to the heart,
Maddened the eyes that gazed, from every limb
Shot the fine arrows of Love's curving bow.
Her forms into a perfect roundness grew
And opened up sweet colour, grace and light.
So might a painting grow beneath the hand
Of some great master, so a lotus opens

Its bosom to the splendour of the sun.
At every step on the enamoured earth
Her feet threw a red rose, like magic flowers
Moving from spot to spot their petalled bloom.
Her motion from the queenly swans had learned
Its wanton swayings; musically it timed
The sweet-voiced anklets' murmuring refrain.
And falling to that amorous support
From moulded knee to ankle the supreme
Divinely lessening curve so lovely was
It looked as if on this alone were spent
All her Creator's cunning. Well the rest
Might tax his labour to build half such grace!
Yet was that miracle accomplished. Soft
In roundness, warm in their smooth sweep, her thighs
Were without parallel in Nature's work.
The greatness of her hips on which life's girdle
Had found its ample rest, deserved already
The lap of divine love where she alone
Might hope one day embosomed by God to lie.
Deep was her hollowed navel where wound in
Above her raiment's knot the tender line
Of down slighter than that dark beam cast forth
From the blue jewel central in her zone.
Her waist was like an altar's middle and there
A triple stair of love was softly built.
Her twin large breasts were pale with darkened paps,
They would not let the slender lotus-thread
Find passage; on their either side there waited
Tenderer than delicatest flowers the arms
Which Love would make, victorious in defeat,
His chains to bow down the Eternal's neck.
Her throat adorning all the pearls it wore,
With sweep and undulation to the breast
Outmatched the gleaming roundness of its gems.
Crowning all this a marvellous face appeared
In which the lotus found its human bloom
In the soft lustres of the moon. Her smile
Parted the rosy sweetness of her lips
Like candid pearls severing soft coral lines
Or a white flower across a ruddy leaf.

Her speech dropped nectar from a liquid voice
 To which the coil's call seemed rude and harsh
 And sob of smitten lyres a tuneless sound.
 The startled glance of her long lovely eyes
 Stolen from her by the swift woodland deer
 Fluttered like a blue lotus in the wind,
 And the rich pencilled arching of her brows
 Made vain the beauty of love's bow. Her hair's
 Dense masses put voluptuously to shame
 The mane of lions and the drift of clouds.
 He who created all this wondrous world
 Weary of scattering his marvels wide,
 To see all beauty in a little space
 Had fashioned only her. Called to her limbs
 All possibilities of loveliness
 Had hastened to their fair attractive seats,
 And now the artist eyes that scan all things
 Saw every symbol and sweet parallel
 Of beauty only realised in her.
 Then was he satisfied and loved his work.
 His sages ranging at their will the stars
 Saw her and knew that this indeed was she
 Who must become by love the beautiful half
 Of the Almighty's body and be all
 His heart. This from earth's seers of future things
 Himaloy heard and his proud hopes contemned
 All other than the greatest for her spouse.
 Yet dared he not provoke that dangerous boon
 Anticipating its unwakened hour,
 But seated in the grandeur of his hills
 Like a great soul curbing its giant hopes,
 A silent sentinel of destiny,
 He watched in mighty calm the wheeling years.
 She like an offering waited for the fire,
 Prepared by Time for her approaching lord.

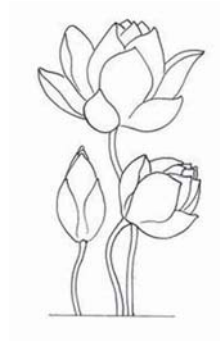
But the great Spirit of the world forsaken
 By that first body of the Mother of all,
 Not to her second birth yet come, abode
 In crowded worlds unwed, ascetic, stern,
 Alone and passionless and unespoused,

The Master of the animal life absorbed
In dreamings, wandering with his demon hordes,
Desireless in the blind desire of things.
At length like sculptured marble still he paused,
To meditation yoked. With ashes smeared,
Clothed in the skin of beasts []
He sat a silent shape upon the hills.
Below him curved Himadri's slope; a soil
With fragrance of the musk-deer odorous
Was round, and there the awful Splendour mused.
Mid cedars sprinkled with the sacred dew
Of Ganges, softly murmuring their chants
In strains subdued the Kinnar-minstrels sang.
Where oil-filled slabs were clothed in resinous herbs,
His grisly hosts sat down, their bodies stained
With mineral unguents; bark their ill-shaped limbs
Clad [] and their tremendous hands
Around their ears had wreathed the hillside's flowers.
On the white rocks compact of frozen snow
His great bull voicing low immortal pride
Pawed with his hoof the argent soil to dust.
Alarmed the bisons fled his gaze; he bellowed
Impatient of the mountain lion's roar.
Concentrating his world-vast energies,
He who gives all austerities their fruits
Built daily his eternal shape of flame,
In what impenetrable and deep desire?
The worship even of gods he reckons not
Who on no creature leans; yet worship still
To satisfy, his awe the mountain paused
And gave his daughter the great Soul to serve.
She brought him daily offerings of flowers
And holy water morn and noon and eve
And swept the altar of the divine fire
And plucking heaped the outspread sacred grass,
Then showering over his feet her falling locks
Drowned all her soft fatigue of gentle toils
In the cool moonbeams from the Eternal's head.
Though to austerity of trance a peril
The touch of beauty, he repelled her not.
Surrounded by all sweetness in the world

He can be passionless in his large mind,
Austere, unmoved, creation's silent king.
So had they met on summits of the world
Like the still Spirit and its unawakened force.
Near were they now, yet to each other unknown,
He meditating, she in service bowed.
Closing awhile her vast and shadowy wings
Fate over them paused suspended on the hills.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 271-82)



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of December 2013)

SECTION FOUR

THE MOTHER IN THE LIFE OF THE ASHRAM

The Mother and the Sadhana in the Ashram

The Mother Does the Sadhana

In what way does the Mother do the sadhana for the sadhaks?

The sadhana is done by the Mother according to the truth and necessity of each nature and of each plane of Nature. It is not one fixed process.

13 September 1933

*

I heard from someone: "The Mother has chosen only those who have got capacity to do this Yoga, but they will reach the goal only if the vital gets transformed. If not, they will realise in the next birth." Is it so?

The Mother has never spoken of anything to be done in the next birth.

Naturally the vital has to be transformed if one is to succeed.

15 January 1934

*

Why do we feel that the Mother is experiencing this or that? Has she still to go on experiencing?

Experiencing what? She has her own experiences in bringing down the things that have to be brought down — but what the sadhaks experience she had long ago. The Divine does the sadhana first for the world and then in others.

3 January 1935

*

Yesterday you wrote in regard to the Mother, "Experiencing what?" I meant experiencing what we feel. For sometimes we feel that our experiences are felt not only by us but by the Mother in us.

Naturally, the Mother does sadhana in each sadhak — only it is conditioned by their need and their receptivity.

Also I failed to understand your comment: "She has her own experiences in bringing down the things that have to be brought down."

I have said that the Divine does the sadhana first for the world and then gives what is brought down to others. There can be no sadhana without realisations and experiences. Both myself and the Mother have done sadhana. The *Prayers* are a record of Mother's experiences.

4 January 1935

*

What you write is in itself unexceptionable — it is indeed what was offered to the sadhaks at the beginning — but the difficulty is precisely there, in the complete sincerity of the nature. Few have been able to rise to it and only a distant approximation (if the phrase can be accepted) has been attained by some. Apart from incomplete sincerity, there is the difficulty that the brain is clouded by egoism and desire and imagines it is doing the very thing when it is doing something else. That is why I spoke of the danger of the theory of all from the Mother. There are people who have taken it that all that comes from the ego or the vital, comes from the Mother, is her inspiration or what she has given them. There are others who have taken it as an excuse for going on in the old rut indefinitely, saying that when the Mother wants she will change things! There were even some who on this basis created a subjective Mother in themselves whose dictates, flattering to their ego and desire, they pitted against the contrary dictates of the Mother here and came to think that this external Mother was after all not so much the real thing as the inner one or that she was putting them through an ordeal by contradicting the inner dictates and seeing what they would do!! The truth remains the truth, but this power of twisting by the mind and other parts of the nature has to be kept in sight also.

17 October 1936

The Mother's Victory

I am confident that in the long run everything will be clear and there will be Mother's victory.

The Mother's victory is, essentially, the victory of each sadhak over himself. It can only be then that any external form of work can come to harmonious perfection.

12 November 1936

Being Taken Up by the Mother

When does the Divine take up the sadhaks fully?

When they give up the ego.

What is the meaning of "the Divine takes up" a sadhak?

When it is the Divine Force that works out all the Yoga and the actions by a direct action of which the sadhak is conscious.

When a person begins to do Yoga and comes to live under the shade of the Mother, is he not taken up fully by her?

Not until he is ready. He has first to accept her and then to give up more and more his ego. There are sadhaks who at every step revolt, oppose the Mother, contradict her will, criticise her decisions. How can she take them up fully in such conditions?

What is the sign that one is taken up by the Divine?

One can feel it.

21 June 1933

*

My dear Mother, I have heard a good deal about your divine power and supernatural knowledge from X. As I myself am a humble servant of the Goddess, I would request you to instruct me in the development of supernatural force in order to attain the ultimate end — Darshan of the Goddess.

Reply¹ that the Mother is not able to write letters herself, and you are writing on her behalf. What is given by the Mother is not a development of supernatural force, but if someone is accepted to take up this path of Yoga he is led towards a deeper and higher consciousness in which he can attain union with the Divine Mother. This however is a path long and full of difficulties — Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do not admit anyone to it unless they are sure of his call and his capacity to follow it and the person himself is sure of his will to follow it until the goal is reached.

6 March 1937

Broad Lines of the Sadhana

The basis of life here is wholly spiritual. An inner discipline is given, but it is on broad lines allowing each individual the necessary freedom for his nature and temperament to grow and change spontaneously. Broadly, the sadhana consists of a progressive surrender of oneself — inward and based upon it the outward also — to the Guru, to the Divine; meditation, concentration, work, service — all these are means for a self-gathering in all one's movements with the sole aim of delivering oneself into the hands of a Higher Power for being worked on and led towards the Goal. The Mother guides, helps each according to his nature and need, and, where necessary, herself intervenes with her Power enabling the sadhak to withstand the rigours and demands of the Path. She has placed herself — with all the Love, Peace, Knowledge and Consciousness that she is — at the disposal of every aspiring soul that looks for help.

*

All in me is proceeding towards the Mother's love, devotion and purity. Why then am I not going up in my consciousness and getting higher experience?

The power of experience is not gone — but what is most important now is to develop the psychic condition of surrender, devotion, love and cheerful confidence in the Mother, an unshaken faith and a constant inner closeness, and also to bring down from above the peace, wideness, purity etc. of the higher Self which is that of the Mother's consciousness. It is these things that are the basis of the siddhi in this Yoga — other experiences are only a help, not the basis.

17 January 1934

1. Written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the enquirer. — Ed.

The Mother and Other Paths of Yoga

The idea of your friend that it is necessary to receive a mantra from here and for that he must come is altogether wrong. There is no mantra given in this Yoga. It is the opening of the consciousness to the Mother from within that is the true initiation and that can only come by aspiration and rejection of restlessness in the mind and vital. To come here is not the way to get it. Many come and get nothing or get their difficulties raised or even fall away from the Yoga. It is no use coming before one is ready, and he does not seem to be ready. Strong desire is not a proof of readiness. When he is inwardly ready, then there will be no difficulty about his coming.

*

Before coming here I was attracted to the path of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, and sometimes it attracts me still. Occasionally I wonder if I will be able to follow this yoga through all its vicissitudes. I would like the Mother to tell me what I should do.

The Mother cannot decide for you, she can only offer to you the Truth she has come here to bring to the world and, if you accept it, guide you towards it.

9 September 1933

*

Someone told me that Ramana Maharshi lives on the overmental plane or that his realisation is on the same level as Shankara's. How is it then that he is not aware of the arrival of the Divine, while others, for instance X's Guru, had this awareness?

I can't say on what plane the Maharshi is, but his method is that of Advaita Knowledge and Moksha — so there is no necessity for him to recognise the arrival of the Divine. X's Guru was a bhakta of the Divine Mother and believed in the dynamic side of existence, so it was quite natural for him to have the revelation of the coming of the Mother.

23 January 1936

*

After reading a chapter in The Synthesis of Yoga I wrote to you the other day about the strong mental realisation of cosmic oneness; now I find that that state has disappeared. Was there anything wrong in writing about it? Is it that the Mother does not like this sort of Yoga of Knowledge? Or is it that one should always write about the darker side and never mention the other side?

Why should Mother dislike Yoga of Knowledge? The realisation of self and of the cosmic being (without which the realisation of self is incomplete) are essential steps in our Yoga; it is the end of other Yogas, but it is, as it were, the beginning of ours, that is to say, the point where its own characteristic realisation can commence. The disappearance of a realisation when it is spoken of is an experience some people have, but it is not likely to be the case with you. To write only of the dark side would be to overemphasise it and not to give a chance to the other. It is probable that the realisation comes only as a first touch; it comes often like that and afterwards repeats itself until the consciousness is able to hold it as its normal state.

26 March 1936

Turning Entirely to the Mother

All things are the Divine because the Divine is there, but hidden not manifest; when the mind goes out to things, it is not with the sense of the Divine in them, but for the appearances only which conceal the Divine. It is necessary therefore for you as a sadhak to turn entirely to the Mother in whom the Divine is manifest and not run after the appearances, the desire of which or the interest in which prevents you from meeting the Divine. Once the being is consecrated, then it can see the Divine everywhere — and then it can include all things in the one consciousness without a separate interest or desire.

*

Is it easily possible for my nature to terminate the remaining journey only with love, joy and happiness? I mean to say, can the transformation of my lower nature go on at the same time that the sadhana proceeds with full love?

It is possible if you (1) can get free of vital demand, (2) regard the difficulties of the nature calmly and dispassionately as if some defects of a machine that has to be set right, the being that uses the machine remaining fully dedicated to the Mother.

17 October 1935

*

No, Mother was not serious or displeased with you at all. But why attach so much importance to what X or Y do or say. They are still so full of darkness and ego.

The path you have now taken — to cleave to the Mother through all circumstances and let nothing shake you from that — will bring the true solution of difficulties for you. For it means that the psychic being has started its work in you.

24 December 1935

Acceptance of the Mother

There seems to be a lack of harmony or unity of will between you and the Mother. What you write the Mother seems to contradict almost intuitively by exerting her weight on the opposite side.

On what grounds do you come to this conclusion? I do not write anything that is not approved by the Mother.

My physical is convinced that the right will has not descended in the Mother. That is why she finds so many reasons not to support me. I think it is better for the present that I remain in retreat till the Will and love have descended in her, which would make her turn fully towards me.

Is it the opinion of your physical that the test of the right will in the Mother is that she must always support *you*? Does your physical think then that the infallible right will is necessarily in you — that it has descended in you first before it descends in the Mother? Otherwise, what is the basis of such a strange idea, that to disagree with you or suggest something else shows that her will is in the wrong and in error?

8 November 1932

*

I feel I have an inner relation with you, but I do not feel the same relation with the Mother. In all probability she has no place in my inner heart. Perhaps it is this consciousness in her that makes her act against the spirit of what she agrees to when you write things.

I again repeat that what I write is what the Mother approves or decides; we have not two separate wills. This idea of division or opposition between us is a suggestion of the Ignorance.

10 November 1932

*

Even a good devotee and a brilliant student like X finds it difficult to accept Mother. I cannot understand why he cannot see the simple truth about her.

If he finds it difficult to accept Mother, how is he a good devotee? A devotee to whom? A brilliant student is another matter; one can be a brilliant student and yet quite incompetent in spiritual matters. If one is a devotee of Vishnu or some other godhead, then it is different — one may see only one's object of worship and so not be able to accept anything else.

14 November 1934

*

Today is really a great day for me. What greater day can there be than the one when the Mother is accepted even by the obscure, ignorant, revolting parts of my lower vital nature?

Yes, when that has been done, it is one of the biggest steps in the sadhana.

28 March 1935

*

The Mother puts energy into all who can receive it; it depends on them whether they use it rightly or not — or waste it. Men are not machines, they have a will — and they can choose whether they accept the Divine or not — whether they do the Divine's will or not.

Confidence in the Mother

Have confidence in the Mother and be sure that the liberation from these things will surely come. What the soul feels is the sign of the spiritual destiny as of the spiritual need. What opposes is a remnant of the nature of the human ignorance. Our help will be there with you fully to overcome it.

27 February 1935

Recognising the Mother's Divinity

Up till now, I have not recognised the divinity of anyone except Sri Krishna. I have looked on the Mother as a Guru who can take me to him. But now something in me wants to hold the Mother fast as divinity. I can't keep her out of my mind,

nor can I reject Sri Krishna. The more I think, the more I am perplexed. I pray for your help.

This struggle in you (between bhakti for Sri Krishna and the sense of the divinity of the Mother) is quite unnecessary; for the two things are one and go perfectly together. It is he who has brought you to the Mother and it is by adoration of her that you will realise him. He is here in the Asram and it is his work that is being done here.

2 March 1932

*

This evening when I looked at the Mother, I found in her the utmost beauty. She was glimmering. I felt as if a great Goddess had come down from the heavens. Can I know what this was?

It was only that you felt the Divinity with her which is always there.

20 July 1933

*

There are people who start at once, others take time.

X recognised the Mother as divine at first sight and has been happy ever afterwards; others who rank among Mother's devotees took years to discover or admit it, but they arrived all the same. There are people who had nothing but difficulties and revolts for the first five, six, seven or more years of the sadhana, yet the psychic ended by awaking. The time taken is a secondary matter: the one thing needful is — soon or late, easily or with difficulty — to get there.

circa 22 July 1935

*

It seems X has climbed to the top rung of your spiritual ladder in a very short period. In your heavenly Parliament he must have been in charge of a very important portfolio! Otherwise I don't see how he could, at first sight, have had a vision of the Divine in the Mother, besides other things.

What top rung and what Parliament? There is no such thing as a heavenly parliament. X progressed smoothly and rapidly from the beginning in Yoga, first, because he was in dead earnest; secondly, because he had a clear and solid mind and a strong and tenacious will in complete control of the nerves; thirdly, because his vital being was calm, strong and solid; finally, and chiefly, because he had a complete faith

and devotion to the Mother. As for seeing the Divine in the Mother at first sight, he is not the only one to do that. Plenty of people have done that who had no chance of any portfolios, e.g. Y's cousin, a Musulman girl, who as soon as she met her declared "This is not a woman, she is a goddess" and has been having significant dreams of her ever since and whenever she is in trouble, thinks of her and gets helped out of the trouble. It is not so damnably difficult to see the Divine in the Mother as you make it out to be.

23 July 1935

*

As for the Divine in the Mother, I know what the Musulman lady exactly saw. From what you say it seems to be a flash of intuition.

Not at all, it was a direct sense of the Godhead in her — for I suppose you mean by intuition a sort of idea that comes suddenly? That is what people usually understand by intuition. It was not that in her case nor in X's.

By seeing the Divine in the Mother, I don't mean imagination or calm, calculated reasoning. But to see actually the fully flaming, resplendent, effulgent Divine Mother in any one of her Powers — why, that is damnably difficult at least for me who have not even seen the halo around her.

I don't believe X or anybody would have that at first view. That can only come if one has already developed the faculty of vision in the occult planes. What is of more importance is the clear perception or intimate inner feeling or direct sense "This is She." I think you are inclined to be too romantic and poetic and too little spiritually realistic in these things.

29 July 1935

*

I suppose you do not expect me to answer in detail this list of old grievances or try to justify the Mother or explain what you consider to be her indefensible conduct. I do not intend to do these things. It is for each sadhak to discover for himself whether he can take the Mother as divine or accept her government and guidance, or regards her as one like himself or inferior to himself, whose conduct he can see rightly, weigh, condemn and judge. It is not for the Mother to explain or justify herself, nor indeed was it ever the rule for the Guru to stand at the bar for the judgment of the disciple. Each has to see for himself whether he can give that obedience and self-opening to one who has or lives in the Divine Consciousness or has realised the Divine Truth, by which alone he can receive what is to be given.

19 December 1936

*

I do not have an active faith on every occasion that the Mother is divine or that her dealings with us are divine. How to have a firm conviction of this?

It is only if you see the divinity of the Mother that there can be a settled conviction — that is a question of the inner consciousness and vision.

5 June 1937

*

It seems to me that the part of my external nature which was not accepting the Mother as divine is now being convinced of her divinity. But why do I forget her divinity when I actually come before her?

It is the physical mind in its most external action that sees physical things as only physical.

15 August 1937

*

How to convince the mind that the Mother is the Divine and that her workings are not human?

It is by opening up the psychic and letting it rule the mind and vital that it can be done — because the psychic knows and can see what the mind cannot.

*

Is there some doubting part in me, always doubting that the Mother is divine, or does something in me simply form for the enjoyment of doubt?

If something forms for the enjoyment of doubt and if that something is in you, then that part must surely be a doubting part. Or if these formations (which are always busily going about in the atmosphere) present themselves to you and something in you responds, it means that there is a part in you which is still open to the suggestions of doubt.

There is, I suppose, something in your vital and exterior mind which is still prone to the idea that the Mother cannot be divine because she does not satisfy their desires or act according to their ideas.

Discontent with the Mother

In your letter to the Mother I note that you profess to be writing a confession, but the tone of it is rather a justification of your faultless self accompanied by an accusation against the Mother of favouritism, bad temper, and injustice. I observe also that your statement of facts is incorrect and as far as it concerns the Mother, grotesque. You lay stress too on a point in which you can justify yourself, and you ignore all the rest in which you were in fault. I will assume, however, that all this was unintentional and that, in writing such a letter, you were unconscious of the movements of your vital being which inspired its spirit and tone.

I would suggest that in your relations with others, — which seem always to have been full of disharmony, — when incidents occur, it would be much better for you not to take the standpoint that you are all in the right and they are all in the wrong. It would be wiser to be fair and just in reflection, seeing where you have gone astray, and even laying stress on your own fault and not on theirs. This would probably lead to more harmony in your relations with others; at any rate, it would be more conducive to your inner progress, which is more important than to be the top-dog in a quarrel. Neither is it well to cherish a spirit of self-justification and self-righteousness and a wish to conceal either from yourself or from the Mother your faults or your errors.

As for your doubts about the Mother, they are not likely to disappear so long as you think you can read the Mother's mind by the light of your own and pass your mental judgments on her and her action from those erroneous data. Nor can they easily disappear if your faith breaks down every time that she does something which your limited intelligence cannot understand or which is displeasing to the feelings and demands of your vital nature. If you do not believe that she has a consciousness greater and wider than yours and not measurable by ordinary standards and judgments, at the very least a Yogic consciousness, I do not see on what ground you are practising Yoga here under her guidance. Those who constantly doubt and criticise and blame or attribute her actions to the most common and vulgar human feelings and motives and yet pretend to accept her or to accept myself and my Yoga, are guilty of a stupid and irrational inconsequence. As for understanding, that is another matter. I would suggest that you must grow out of the ordinary mind and become conscious with the true consciousness before you can hope to do it. And for that faith and surrender and fidelity and openness are conditions of some importance.

6 November 1929

Are there sadhaks in the Asram who do not understand that “the Divinity acts according to the Consciousness of the Truth above and the Lila below and not according to men’s ideas about what it should or should not do”?

There are plenty who do not realise it — they expect the Mother to act according to their ideas and wishes, not according to a higher consciousness.

20 October 1934

*

When the Mother pointed out my mistake, I became discontented. Misguided by the suggestions of the refractory parts of my being, I took it as an undeserved reproach. I feel very ashamed.

It was simply a statement of fact, not a reproach, and it was not you but your ego that got discontented because it felt scratched by the facts.

I had promised you that I would never be discontented with the Mother. I failed to keep that promise. I pray to you again to pull me out of this state and I promise again that I shall never be discontented with the Mother.

Very well, I take the promise. But the rising of discontent is surely a sufficient indication that the consciousness is going wrong. As soon as you feel it you should immediately draw back and say, “O ego, you are up again against the Mother! Stop that or I will take you by the scruff of the neck and throw you out of the window.” I hope indeed to see that “thrown out” actually happen one day.

21 October 1935

*

I have no intention of entering into an explanation, defence or apology for the Mother’s action. I have long ago decided that I would not allow the Mother’s rightful position here to be lowered by the sadhaks putting her as an accused before the tribunal of their ignorant mind or vital ego and demanding that she or I for her should plead her case. The Mother acts from her own knowledge and consciousness which is not that of the sadhaks; their ideas of what she ought to do or ought not to do have no place. Rather they are here to discard such ideas and accept her guidance by which they can themselves enter into a higher consciousness where these mental and vital errors have no right of existence.

I have already pointed out to you that your action was entirely mistaken. You had no right to ask for a letter placed there for the Mother’s perusal. You had no

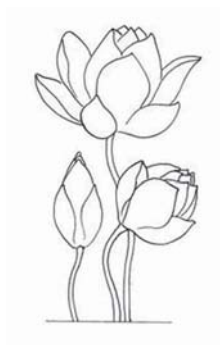
right to demand that the Mother should give you the letter. You had no special claim to mend the envelope for X. It is not a question of bad or good desire. The pretension of doing good can contain as much ego and desire as any other personal claim, and that it was egoistic is proved by the violent reaction against the Mother that her not satisfying it raised in you. If it had been pure of ego, you would have had no reaction but quietly accepted the Mother's action as right because it was the Mother's.

If you want to get rid of the painful inner and physical reactions, you must get rid of their cause in you, the ego of self-esteem, demand and desire. It is only by a complete surrender of yourself, your mind, vital and everything else to the Divine that this ego can go. Your reaction and accusation of injustice against the Mother shows that you are still clinging to it in some part of you and you should welcome rather than resent anything that gives you a chance of rejecting it still more from your nature.

7 March 1937

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 327-44)



THE ACTION OF THE SUPRAMENTAL BEING

. . . THE supramental being in his cosmic consciousness seeing and feeling all as himself would act in that sense; he would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total self, of his individual will with the total will, of his individual action with the total action. For what we most suffer from in our outer life and its reactions upon our inner life is the imperfection of our relations with the world, our ignorance of others, our disharmony with the whole of things, our inability to equate our demand on the world with the world's demand on us. There is a conflict — a conflict from which there seems to be no ultimate issue except an escape from both world and self — between our self-affirmation and a world on which we have to impose that affirmation, a world which seems to be too large for us and to pass indifferently over our soul, mind, life, body in the sweep of its course to its goal. The relation of our course and goal to the world's is unapparent to us, and to harmonise ourselves with it we have either to enforce ourselves upon it and make it subservient to us or suppress ourselves and become subservient to it or else to compass a difficult balance between these two necessities of the relation between the individual personal destiny and the cosmic whole and its hidden purpose. But for the supramental being living in a cosmic consciousness the difficulty would not exist, since he has no ego; his cosmic individuality would know the cosmic forces and their movement and their significance as part of himself, and the truth-consciousness in him would see the right relation at each step and find the dynamic right expression of that relation.

For in fact both individual and universe are simultaneous and interrelated expressions of the same transcendent Being; even though in the Ignorance and under its law there is maladjustment and conflict, yet there must be a right relation, an equation to which all arrives but which is missed by our blindness of ego, our attempt to affirm the ego and not the Self one in all. The supramental consciousness has that truth of relation in itself as its natural right and privilege, since it is the supermind that determines the cosmic relations and the relations of the individual with the universe, determines them freely and sovereignly as a power of the Transcendence. In the mental being even the pressure of the cosmic consciousness overpowering the ego and an awareness of the transcendent Reality might not of themselves bring about a dynamic solution; for there might still be an incompatibility between its liberated spiritual mentality and the obscure life of the cosmic Ignorance which the mind would not have the power to solve or overcome. But in the supramental being, not only statically conscious but fully dynamic and acting in the creative light and power of the Transcendence, the supramental light, the truth light, *ṛtaṁ jyotiḥ*, would have that power. For there would be a unity with the cosmic

self, but not a bondage to the Ignorance of cosmic Nature in its lower formulation; there would on the contrary be a power to act in the light of the Truth on that Ignorance. A large universality of self-expression, a large harmonic universality of world-being would be the very sign of the supramental Person in his gnostic nature.

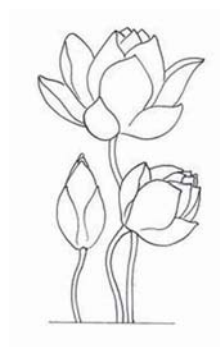
The existence of the supramental being would be the play of a manifoldly and multiply manifesting truth-power of one existence and one-consciousness for the delight of one-existence. Delight of the manifestation of the Spirit in its truth of being would be the sense of the gnostic life. All its movements would be a formulation of the truth of the spirit, but also of the joy of the spirit, — an affirmation of spiritual existence, an affirmation of spiritual consciousness, an affirmation of spiritual delight of being. But this would not be what self-affirmation tends to be in us in spite of the underlying unity, something ego-centric, separative, opposed or indifferent or insufficiently alive to the self-affirmation of others or their demand on existence. One in self with all, the supramental being will seek the delight of self-manifestation of the Spirit in himself but equally the delight of the Divine in all: he will have the cosmic joy and will be a power for bringing the bliss of the spirit, the joy of being to others; for their joy will be part of his own joy of existence. To be occupied with the good of all beings, to make the joy and grief of others one's own has been described as a sign of the liberated and fulfilled spiritual man. The supramental being will have no need, for that, of an altruistic self-effacement, since this occupation will be intimate to his self-fulfilment, the fulfilment of the One in all, and there will be no contradiction or strife between his own good and the good of others: nor will he have any need to acquire a universal sympathy by subjecting himself to the joys and griefs of creatures in the Ignorance; his cosmic sympathy will be part of his inborn truth of being and not dependent on a personal participation in the lesser joy and suffering; it will transcend what it embraces and in that transcendence will be its power. His feeling of universality, his action of universality will be always a spontaneous state and natural movement, an automatic expression of the Truth, an act of the joy of the spirit's self-existence. There could be in it no place for limited self or desire or for the satisfaction or frustration of the limited self or the satisfaction or frustration of desire, no place for the relative and dependent happiness and grief that visit and afflict our limited nature; for these are things that belong to the ego and the Ignorance, not to the freedom and truth of the Spirit.

The gnostic being has the will of action but also the knowledge of what is to be willed and the power to effectuate its knowledge; it will not be led from ignorance to do what is not to be done. Moreover, its action is not the seeking for a fruit or result; its joy is in being and doing, in pure state of spirit, in pure act of spirit, in the pure bliss of the spirit. As its static consciousness will contain all in itself and must be, therefore, forever self-fulfilled, so its dynamis of consciousness will find in each step and in each act a spiritual freedom and a self-fulfilment. All will be seen in its relation to the whole, so that each step will be luminous and joyous and satisfying in

itself because each is in unison with a luminous totality. This consciousness, this living in the spiritual totality and acting from it, a satisfied totality in essence of being and a satisfied totality in the dynamic movement of being, the sense of the relations of that totality accompanying each step, is indeed the very mark of a supramental consciousness and distinguishes it from the disintegrated, ignorantly successive steps of our consciousness in the Ignorance. The gnostic existence and delight of existence is a universal and total being and delight, and there will be the presence of that totality and universality in each separate movement: in each there will be, not a partial experience of self or a fractional bit of its joy, but the sense of the whole movement of an integral being and the presence of its entire and integral bliss of being, Ananda. The gnostic being's knowledge self-realised in action will be, not an ideative knowledge, but the Real-Idea of the supermind, the instrumentation of an essential light of Consciousness; it will be the self-light of all the reality of being and becoming pouring itself out continually and filling every particular act and activity with the pure and whole delight of its self-existence. For an infinite consciousness with its knowledge by identity there is in each differentiation the joy and experience of the Identical, in each finite is felt the Infinite.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, pp. 1009-12)



**‘AT NO MOMENT, IN NO CIRCUMSTANCES
MUST WE FORGET
THAT OUR “I” HAS NO REALITY OUTSIDE THEE’**

Pondicherry, April 17, 1914

O LORD, O almighty Master, sole Reality, grant that no error, no obscurity, no fatal ignorance may creep into my heart and my thought.

In action, the personality is the inevitable and indispensable intermediary of Thy will and Thy forces.

The stronger, the more complex, powerful, individualised and conscious is the personality, the more powerfully and usefully can the instrument serve. But, by reason of the very character of personality, it easily tends to be drawn into the fatal illusion of its separate existence and become little by little a screen between Thee and that on which Thou wilt to act. Not at the beginning, in the manifestation, but in the transmission of the return; that is to say, instead of being, as a faithful servant, an intermediary who brings back to Thee exactly what is Thy due — the forces sent forth in reply to Thy action, — there is a tendency in the personality to want to keep for itself a part of the forces, with this idea: “It is I who have done this or that, I who am thanked. . . .” Pernicious illusion, obscure falsehood, now are you discovered and unmasked. That is the maleficent canker corroding the fruit of the action, falsifying all its results.

O Lord, O my sweet Master, sole Reality, dispel this feeling of the “I”. I have now understood that so long as there will be a manifested universe, the “I” will remain necessary for Thy manifestation; to dissolve, or even to diminish or weaken the “I”, is to deprive Thee of the means of manifestation, in whole or part. But what must be radically and definitively suppressed is the illusory thought, the illusory feeling, the illusory sensation of the separate “I”. At no moment, in no circumstances must we forget that our “I” has no reality outside Thee.

O my sweet Master, my divine Lord, tear out from my heart this illusion so that Thy servant may become pure and faithful and faithfully and integrally bring back to Thee all that is Thy due. In silence let me contemplate and understand this supreme ignorance and dispel it for ever. Chase the shadow from my heart, and let Thy light reign in it, its uncontested sovereign.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 126-27)

“ARABESQUE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

As the title indicates, this poem is designedly *recherché*, but has it inspiration enough to make it successful? And does the form-symmetry hold the parts together sufficiently?

ARABESQUE

Like the dim voice of vagrant
Water among leaf-shadowed hours,
Ripples the soft remembrance of her sable-shining hair.

Like the nocturnal fragrant
Dew-mystery of hidden flowers,
Hallow
(Jewel) my dream the ecstatic tears in the gloom-glow of her eyes.

Vague with a serpent-shimmer,
To my enchanted heart's love-tune
Waken flame-echoes of her arms in the slumbering void air.

Tense with a timeless glimmer
Slaying all grief, her spirit's moon
Spreads by a virgin scimitar the peace of paradise.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

Yes, it is successful enough and has sufficient symmetry.

22 January 1933

[Version from *The Secret Splendour* —
Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 426:]

ARABESQUE

Like the dim voice of vagrant
Water among leaf-shadowed hours
Ripples the soft remembrance of her sable-shining hair.

Like the nocturnal fragrant
Dew-mystery of hidden flowers,
Hallow my dream the ecstatic tears in the gloom-glow of her eyes.

Vague with a serpent-shimmer,
To my enchanted heart's love-tune
Waken flame-echoes of her arms in the slumbering void air.

Tense with a timeless glimmer
Grief-slaying, her spirit's crescent moon
Spreads by a virgin scimitar the peace of paradise.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

For poetry three things are necessary.

First, there must be emotional sincerity and poetical feeling . . .

Next, a mastery over language and a faculty of rhythm perfected by a knowledge of the technique of poetic and rhythmic expression . . .

Finally, there must be the power of inspiration, the creative energy, and that makes the whole difference between the poet and the good verse-writer.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 567)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of December 2013)

Chapter XXIX

The Voice Incarnate of India's Soul

Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee,
O friend, O country's friend, O voice incarnate, free,
Of my country's soul! No soft renown doth crown thy lot,
Nor pelf or careless comfort is for thee . . .
. . . O Victory and Hail!
Where is the coward who will shed tears today, or wail
Or quake in fear? And who'll belittle truth to seek
His own small safety? Where's the spineless creature weak
Who will not in thy pain his strength and courage find? . . .
The fiery messenger that with the lamp of God
Hath come — where is the king who can with chain or rod
Chastise him? Chains that were to bind salute his feet,
And prisons greet him as their guest with welcome sweet . . .

Rabindranath Tagore
'Aurobindo! Rabindrer laho namaskar'
(August 1907)¹

The case of the prosecution, in short, was that the *Bande Mataram* was spreading sedition through its articles and that as its editor, Sri Aurobindo was responsible for this; hence he deserved punishment.

As was observed by the Anglo-Indian press, with both bitterness and amazement, the articles in the *Bande Mataram* were written with such brilliant tact and skill that though each line breathed sedition, it was impossible to establish it in legal terms. The brains active behind the prosecution must have scanned hundreds of pages and constructed numerous interpretations of the words and phrases used by Sri Aurobindo and a couple of his extraordinarily gifted editorial lieutenants to prove their contention in the court, but the fact that they decided upon an article or two that were translations from the *Yugantar* and a 'letter to the Editor', only show their despair. Obviously the top brass of the ruling establishment were determined

to put Sri Aurobindo behind bars and the subordinates were trying in whatever way they could to execute the order.

No trial of any newspaper had created such a nation-wide commotion till then as did this one. According to a critical Bengali biography of Sri Aurobindo:

Till today Sri Aurobindo was the leader of Bengal, but in a week he grew renowned in the whole of India . . . Since the year 1902 he had been the founder of secret societies and was an unrevealed revolutionary. People knew Bipinchandra as the editor of the *Bande Mataram*; Sri Aurobindo's name remained undisclosed. But because of the case in the month of August 1907 his name spread in all the provinces of India. Sri Aurobindo emerged on the contemporary political stage as an undisguised leader and in the role of a great actor. From an unrevealed revolutionary to a well-revealed leader — this was a great change indeed . . .²

Wrote the *Madras Standard*:

. . . few outside Bengal had heard of Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, so much so that even the London *Times* persisted in saying that none but Bipin Chandra Pal could be the author of the sharp and stinging articles published in the *Bande Mataram*. But now that mistake stands removed. Now all have come to know that Aurobindo was the power behind the paper.³

Wrote the *Indian Patriot*:

Aurobindo happens to be the foremost talent and genius among the budding youths of Bengal. He has stood up prepared to suffer for expressing his free opinion. He is not the person to buy cheap popularity . . . A man of very fine culture, he is of a lovable nature, merry, sparkling with wit and humour, ready with refined repartee. He is one of those men to be in company with whom is a joy; and behind whose exterior is a steadily glowing fire of unseen devotion to a cause.⁴

According to reports in the *Bande Mataram* there were other papers like *The Empire* and *The Indian Daily News* which flashed the news with their editorial views. Numerous newspapers and periodicals in different languages must have commented on the event too. The *Mahratha* wrote sarcastically:

We received the telegram about the case just when we were going to the press. Mr. Aurobindo Ghose had passed the I.C.S. examinations, but had he succeeded in riding a horse the judge who will try him now could very well have been an officer subordinate to him.⁵

It also wrote:

Who knows but what is sedition today may be divine truth tomorrow? Mr. Aurobindo Ghose is a sweet soul.⁶

The Indian Daily News presented some information about Sri Aurobindo which *The Empire* found to be wrong. It revealed to its readers the mystery of his middle name, Akroyd, which Sri Aurobindo had dropped and how his father was a thoroughly anglicised gentleman, etc.⁷ We can very well surmise the curiosity that had arisen all over the country. People were amused to discover in the quiet and serene person who deliberately kept himself outside their ken the author of the unique editorial articles which made them see the situations and different contemporary issues in a new light and at the absorbing and witty style at which they marvelled.

But the tribute that has survived as an immortal piece of literature came from the great poet, Rabindranath, a part of which is reproduced as the epigraph to this chapter. This was significant from many points of view. Each line of the poem is vibrant with the intensity of a radiant love for its subject — Sri Aurobindo, an esteem steeped in wisdom and a deep instinctive realisation of what Sri Aurobindo represented. “Nobody ever received anything like this; none was lucky enough for that” writes a critic.⁸

An inspired poem indeed, but it also reveals a rare quality of the poet’s character — his disarming humility. Eleven years older than Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath was by then a famous personality in the literary, social and even political field; Sri Aurobindo was relatively unknown. But the poet had no hesitation in pronouncing the greatness of this “Voice Incarnate of India’s Soul” in unequivocal terms in a diction that was at once lyrical and vibrantly powerful.

The process of trial included summons to Bipin Chandra Pal. No other proof would be necessary to hold Sri Aurobindo guilty of spreading sedition once Pal did not contradict the accusation that he was the editor. But Pal refused to admit the right of the court — an organ of an illegitimate authority, to demand any co-operation from him. As twice he defied the court’s demand, he was pronounced guilty of contempt of court and punished with six months of simple imprisonment, an ordeal from which Pal emerged a greater celebrity.

Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, author of the authentic biography of Rabindranath writes that the poet himself went to meet Sri Aurobindo and handed over the poem to him.⁹

The *Bande Mataram* of 27th August 1907 reported:

Yesterday, on the opening of the Bande Mataram Case the students mustered strong in the court premises and its neighbourhood. They were there to pay their tribute of respect to Sri Aurobindo Ghose.¹⁰

They shouted “Bande Mataram” and slogans hailing Sri Aurobindo and Pal. Even though there was no sign of any violence from the youths, the judge, Kingsford became annoyed and ordered the police to drive the crowd away. The police mercilessly went on whipping the youths with seasoned rattan canes. A particular British sergeant exhibited more enthusiasm in his action than other members of his team, but when his blow fell on a teenager Sushil Sengupta, the boy returned it with compound interest. As the officer fell down, hell broke loose and his subordinates captured the boy, humiliating him in the process. He was detained and the next day the judge ordered him — most judiciously — to be caned fifteen times on his buttocks — for he was aged fifteen! The punishment was carried out in the open court with much more vigour than expected from a reasonably civilised authority, till the boy “fell down unconscious bleeding all over”.¹¹

The judgment was delivered on the 23rd of September. It said:

... the inference I draw is that the evidence is inconclusive. I find in it nothing, which is materially inconsistent with the theory that Aurobindo is a mere member of the editorial staff and that he is without responsibility for and without cognisance of the articles charged. I therefore acquit him.¹²

The judge was even inspired to utter unexpectedly about Sri Aurobindo that he was

... a man of exceptionally good attainments who was interested in the promotion of this paper and had differentiated himself from the ordinary staff by refusing to take any salary for his labour.¹³

In fact nothing substantial could be established against any member of the staff either. But some action must be taken against somebody. The “Printer” is a formal term for a paid official and for the *Bande Mataram*, it was Apurba Bose. Said the judge so kindly:

Under the circumstances, I think it is proper to pass a lenient sentence upon Apurba and accordingly I direct that he be rigorously imprisoned for three months.¹⁴

The judge did not explain how rigorous imprisonment could be described as lenient.

Sri Aurobindo’s acquittal resulted in an upsurge of jubilation all over the country. Meetings were held even in far and remote parts of India and telegrams conveying congratulatory resolutions despatched to him. Newspapers carried special articles. In the C.I.D. report of a particular date, 25.8.1907, we find the following information. Though much is lost in their immature translation, we can still feel how a wide range of people felt about the event, how different people understood or imperfectly

understood Sri Aurobindo, as reflected in the media of the day:

In connection with the case of Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, the *Dacca Prakash* (Dhaka) remarks that the patriotism of this great man and his uncommon self-sacrifice attracted the heart of every son of Bengal. It rends the heart to say that the man who, in response to the call of duty, thus threw away all luxuries of life and was, though a human being, exhibiting divine traits, is now like a thief being sent to jail by the rulers of this land! Alas, the unfortunate land! Our reckless rulers are yet unable to understand that as a result of their misdeeds a fire of disgust is burning in the country which it will be beyond their power to extinguish.¹⁵

Under the headline “The Bande Mataram Case” the *Purba Bangla* (Dhaka) wrote:

Today let sounds of mirth rise from all directions and let Bande Mataram be shouted with immense joy, piercing the Indian firmament. This joy is not the outcome of tasting pleasure after a period of sorrow. For we have no ground to be sorry. We would, however, have been sorry if one of our brothers being led astray were adorned with royal honours. We would have shed tears for him at the feet of God. But when we saw that a devotee to the Mother, in his desire to worship Her, was about to be burnt by the fiery anger of alien rulers, when we understood that in his attempt to restore the pristine glory of India and to bring under control the ideal of ancient India, the worthy son of the country was at every moment apprehending the fall of the thunderbolt as a result of the ire of the rulers upon his exposed head, we indeed prayed to God for his safety from danger, but we were not sorry for him. For he who has been suffering from persecution for his devotion to the country has his life blessed and his sacred personality, like a living ideal, will point out the duties of the Indians desirous of salvation. We are, therefore, glad indeed not because Aurobindo has been let off, but because we have seen justice triumphant over injustice. Today we shall thank God alone, to whom is due all glory, and no man has any claim upon it.

Last Monday, Mr. Kingsford, the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, discharged Srijukta Aurobindo Ghose and the publisher Srijukta Hemendranath Bagchi, the accused in the Bande Mataram sedition case. Those who every day anxiously read the account of the case unanimously admitted that the accused could on no account be punished, for the charge that they were editors was not proved against them. Still none could venture to expect a good result, as the abuse of justice has become an everyday affair in India. Today Mr. Kingsford has maintained the dignity of justice, but we should not thank him, since he had done nothing beyond his duty. If the Magistrate overlooking

justice and trampling down righteousness, administered punishment to the accused, then the Indian nations, shackled as their power is, would have undoubtedly sent hatred and contempt mixed with doleful prayer to the feet of God. Today the people of the country are welcoming Aurobindo and Hemendra amidst auspicious sounds. But the imprisonment of Apurba, the printer, slightly lessens our happiness. The innocent and helpless printer is now suffering from hunger in jail. Would British supremacy in India suffer, if such a heavy punishment were not dealt out to a harmless printer for an offence based upon legal technicalities?¹⁶

Lokamanya Tilak's *Kesari* wrote:

The result of the *Bande Mataram* trial has been made known to the public by a telegraphic communication. Babu Aurobindo Ghose, who was arraigned as editor, has been acquitted. . . . His learning and patriotism are so profound that in his acquittal we discern the hand of Providence.¹⁷

Rabindranath's poetic tribute to Sri Aurobindo had already been published in the *Bande Mataram* in its issue of 7th September 1907. Sri Aurobindo himself as well as his well-wishers including Rabindranath did not anticipate his crossing the ordeal so easily. Sri Aurobindo was then living at Raja Subodh Mullick's residence, Wellington Square. Writes Charu Chandra Dutt (I.C.S.), the Raja's brother-in-law and a confidant of Sri Aurobindo:

One day, in the afternoon — that was a day or two after Sri Aurobindo's acquittal, he, his elder brother, Subodh, Nirod and I were making a jovial hullabaloo when the gate-keeper came in to inform us that Rabi Babu had arrived. We all rushed into the outer hall. Rabindranath spread his arms and embraced Aurobindo. The poet's eyes were moistened. He laughed and said, "So, Sir, you deceived me!" My Master displayed a short smile and answered, "Not for long!" The poet spent with us a long time, talking. I told him, "We did not let him go to jail. We had burnt whatever little proof was there in time. But this was only the beginning; your poem would not go in vain!"¹⁸

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

1. Rabindranath's famous tribute to Sri Aurobindo when the latter was being tried, accused of editing the *Bande Mataram* that was spreading sedition.
2. Girijashankar Roychowdhury: *Sri Aurobindo O Banglay Swadeshi Yug* (Bengali); Nababharat Publishers, Kolkata, 1956. The book gives Bengali rendering of the original passages in English, barring some lines quoted in their original. The Bengali is retranslated into English by the present author.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar: *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*; Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.
7. Girijashankar Roychowdhury: *Sri Aurobindo O Banglay Swadeshi Yug*.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Rabindra Barsha Panji*, 1962; cited in *Sri Aurobindo: Banga Parva* by Trij Ray; Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Kolkata.
10. Girijashankar Roychowdhury: *Sri Aurobindo O Banglay Swadeshi Yug*.
11. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar: *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*. Sushil C. Sengupta (1892-1915) soon joined a secret revolutionary group. He was arrested during the Alipore Conspiracy Case raids, but was released at the primary stage because of lack of evidence against him. While in a boat he was killed during cross-firing between the police and the revolutionaries on 2nd May 1915. (*Samsad Bangali Charitradidhan*)
12. Noorul Hoda: *The Alipore Bomb Case: A Historic Pre-Independence Trial*; edited by Shyam Banerji; Niyogi Books, New Delhi.
13. *Bande Mataram Case Records: Weekly Edition of the Bande Mataram*, 29 September 1907.
14. Noorul Hoda: *The Alipore Bomb Case*.
15. Documents culled by the present author from the Old India Office Library (Archives), London in 1971. See *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the 20th Century* by the author.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Charu Chandra Dutt: *Purano Katha: Upasamhar*; Visva-Bharati Granthalay, Kolkata.

Sedition to the right of him, sedition to the left of him, sedition before and behind him, and through it all the Englishman like a heroic Light Brigade, charges in for King and motherland.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 152)

THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

“But now I have come and things will change,” was the assurance she gave us when she saw us playing basketball. That day, sometime in the late 1950’s, as she came out of the tennis court area after her game of tennis, she could not recognise the girls who were playing.

When told, “But why, Mother? You know these girls, you don’t ask when the boys are playing.”

She said, “I do not see the physical but the psychological state of people. You Indian girls have no individuality. So, what I see is a mass without distinction,” and then came the assurance of her help.

Once when she asked me how I had played that evening and I told her, “Mother, we had basketball this evening, I am quite fit, you know; but when I was running it was as if I was being obstructed by something. Really, Mother, I could hardly move the way I normally do.”

Her answer was most unexpected. She said, “It is the negation, and the conviction of the whole collective notion of what a woman should do and not do, and you came across that. That was the obstruction you felt.”

Right from the beginning, when Sri Aurobindo gave her the charge of guiding this small community of men and a few women who had gathered around Sri Aurobindo to do sadhana and follow his yoga, the whole outlook changed. The Mother took care of the inner development of the sadhaks and always her watchword was progress and perfection of the external man. Every individual member was assigned a physical work — to be done in the spirit of service to the Divine. That was the way. She gave the ideal of ‘not rejection of life’ but a life of self-offering inclusive of all its activities to the Divine. A truly exceptional aspect of this experiment was that men and women were given the same status and opportunity.

This experiment was the transformation of the physical: the physical consciousness and the gross body; that was her ultimate aim. It is for that aim that the Playground was started. At that juncture a young man of 22 named Pranab arrived and was the chosen instrument to materialise her vision. The organisation to look after physical education activities in the Ashram was born.

In her article, ‘Four Austerities and Four Liberations’ the Mother had said,

Its basic programme will be to build a body that is beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful in its activities and robust in its health and organic functioning. (*CWM*, Vol. 12, p. 50)

One must build up nerves of steel in powerful and elastic muscles in order to be able to endure anything whenever it is indispensable.

(CWM, Vol. 12, p. 51)

This is the ideal, the goal of physical education here. On page 18 of the first number of the *Bulletin of Physical Education* (February, 1949) an outline of our aim and of our scheme of physical education are given. Therein we find one unique statement which says,

. . . given sufficient training, there is no essential difference in what a woman or man can do and it is only a long tradition and a collective suggestion that is responsible for the fact that at present women are normally physically inferior to men. Once this false idea has been completely uprooted, and with equal treatment of both sexes from an early age, there will be no difference in their average performance.

“For God’s sake can’t you forget that you are a girl or a boy and try to become a human being?” said the Mother. (CWM, Vol. 12, p. 290)

She reminds us again,

Why make at all a distinction between them? They are all equally human beings, trying to become fit instruments for the Divine Work, above sex, caste, creed and nationality, all children of the same Infinite Mother and aspirants to the one Eternal Godhead. (CWM, Vol. 12, p. 296)

One striking feature of our programme that is envisaged and practised here is that there is the same programme of physical education for both boys and girls. The Mother said,

In all cases, as well for boys as for girls, the exercises must be graded according to the strength and the capacity of each one. If a weak student tries at once to do hard and heavy exercises, he may suffer for his foolishness. But with a wise and progressive training, girls as well as boys can participate in all kinds of sports, and thus increase their strength and health.

To become strong and healthy can never bring harm to a body, even if it is a woman’s body! (CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 294-95)

This was an unimaginable and daring concept of the Mother’s. Let us once again recall the date. It was in 1949. In India, girls of 14 or 15 already started to discard their dresses of childhood and changed over to wearing saris. That was the custom then!

Pranab-da writes,

We want that in addition to the perfection and development of their natural and innate qualities a girl should be strong, enduring and agile as a boy must also be graceful, harmonious and beautiful. (*SportSpirit*, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 7)

We quote again from Pranab-da's article,

We have to forget these differences and treat men and women as equals. The relation between man and woman will be that of partners or comrades, working for the progress, on the path of integral transformation.

Being advised and encouraged by the Mother we lifted all the barriers, and gradually introduced to the girls the same programme as for men. . . .

We introduced men's basketball rules for women also. We gave them football, hockey, handball etc. those considered to be men's games. We gave them the opportunity to learn boxing, wrestling and malkhamb. In athletics we gave them long distance running, pole vault, triple jump and other events that were not considered as women's events in those days. In gymnastics we gave them rings, parallel bars and other difficult activities. We gave them also the opportunity to do weightlifting and weight training. In those days, in India and abroad, these activities were not given to women.

(*SportSpirit*, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 4)

Barely 25 years after the first statement by the Mother and her assurance, we saw the Indian women's hockey team win the Asian Games held in Delhi. I remember how happy I was and told myself inwardly, "See, Mother, how your work has started evolving on the visible plane. Oh how I wish you were there to see it!" But even in India now, how greatly have the conditions of the girls changed. We find them pursuing different vocations which were previously considered to be the exclusive domain of men. How successful they are now in ever-widening horizons. How could this change, in such a short time, happen in India, with her conservative social ways? This, for me, is conclusively the result of the work the Mother did and is still doing on the occult plane. I remember her promise, "But now I have come and things will change."

In 1949 due to the increased number of members some classification according to age and gender was done. The *Bulletin of Physical Education* of 1949 states,

The classification is only temporary in respect of groups C [young boys], D [young men] and E [ladies] where there is a differentiation according to sex. **Later on, the groups will be mixed and the classification will be only according to age and capacity. This, however, comes in the future plan.** [*emphasis added*]

Pranab-da writes,

Well, our scheme got a good start. It happened mainly because of the Mother's encouragement and support. The girls made good progress in all branches of our activities. Our records of performances of the girls were very close, sometimes even better than the women's All-India records in those days.

Then laxity crept in. Most of our girls could not stand the pressure of individual and collective suggestions against their coming out of women's barriers." (*SportSpirit*, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 4)

The *Bulletin* of April 1949 (p. 36) mentioned minor changes in the schemes of physical education. When the scheme was started about four years earlier, all children, boys and girls, between 8 and 10 had been placed in group B, and were given the same training, the idea being to remove all differences of physical capacities between the sexes, and when they moved as a body to the next group, C (which was then a boys' group), it would have brought us nearer to the goal of all groups being mixed. But this was not quite successful as the girls could not get rid of their sense of physical inferiority, nor the boys of their superiority; the boys did not like being grouped with the girls and the girls were diffident in learning all the items taught to the boys.

To realise the ideal given by the Mother, a tremendous amount of work by both the sexes remains to be done. It is the growth of consciousness in the individual which will give us the freedom from the customs and mental conceptions and subconscious suggestions dominating us for centuries.

A strong declaration of the Mother shows us without ambiguity the way to reach this difficult goal:

No law can liberate women unless they liberate themselves.

What makes them slaves is:

- (1) Attraction towards the male and his strength,
- (2) Desire for home life and its security,
- (3) Attachment to motherhood.

If they get free from these three slaveries, they will truly be the equal of men.

Men also have three slaveries:

- (1) Spirit of possession, attachment to power and domination,
- (2) Desire for sexual relation with women,
- (3) Attachment to the small comforts of married life.

If they get rid of these three slaveries, they can truly become the equal of women.

(*CWM*, Vol. 14, p. 289)

ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA RAY — III

(Continued from the issue of December 2013)

P. C. Ray, The Historian of Ancient Indian Science

SRI AUROBINDO writes in “A Rationalistic Critic on Indian Culture — 3” (SABCL Vol. 14 p. 67):

To say that Indian philosophy has led away from the study of nature is to state a gross unfact and to ignore the magnificent history of Indian civilisation. If by nature is meant physical Nature, the plain truth is that no nation before the modern epoch carried scientific research so far and with such signal success as India of ancient times. That is a truth which lies on the face of history for all to read; it has been brought forward with great force and much wealth of detail by Indian scholars and scientists of high eminence, but it was already known and acknowledged by European savants who had taken the trouble to make a comparative study in the subject.

The greatest among Indian scholars and scientists who have researched and written on ancient Indian science is Dr. P. C. Ray, the “Master of Nitrites”. In his highly acclaimed monumental work *History of Hindu Chemistry*,¹ P. C. Ray makes a systematic and thorough presentation of the knowledge of chemical science and technology recorded in extant ancient and medieval Indian treatises. The book, published in two volumes in 1902 and 1909 respectively, was the fruition of a dedicated painstaking research spanning 12 years. It is perhaps P. C. Ray’s most lasting contribution for posterity. Prior to Ray’s treatise, no account of the knowledge of ancient Indians could be found in modern books on the history of chemical science. Ray’s book and *History of Hindu Mathematics* by B. Datta and A. N. Singh (published in two volumes in 1935 and 1938) remain the richest source-books for information on ancient Indian Chemistry and Mathematics respectively.

The genesis of Ray’s treatise is itself an interesting history. From the late 18th and early 19th centuries, European and Indian Indologists had been making a vigorous study of ancient Sanskrit texts. Thus began an awareness about some of the advances made by ancient Indians in areas like Philosophy, Mathematics, and to some extent Medicine. But as P. C. Ray records in his Preface to the first volume of *History of Hindu Chemistry* (1902):

1. In early Indological discourses, the adjective “Hindu” was inclusive of Jain and Buddhist, and may be read as a synonym for “ancient Indian”.

One branch has, however, up till this time, remained entirely neglected, namely Chemistry. Indeed, it may be assumed that on account of its complex nature it has hitherto repelled investigators.

P. C. Ray, who always had a fascination for studying the development of the knowledge about chemical substances in various nations, was aware that the medical prescriptions of the Ayurvedic system of treatment based on Charaka and Sushruta, practised by the *Kavirajas*, used certain metals, their oxides and other derivatives. Curious to know about the progress in chemical science in ancient India, Ray undertook a systematic examination, from this chemical standpoint, of original Sanskrit texts quoted in the *Materia Medica of the Hindus* by Udoychand Dutt. The investigations brought him in correspondence with the illustrious French chemist and science historian M. Berthelot.² The 70-year-old doyen of the chemical world wrote a letter (1897) appreciating Prafulla Chandra's own chemical researches and expressing his strong desire to know all about ancient Indian contributions. He even made a personal appeal to Ray to help him with information on the subject. In P. C. Ray's words ([6], p. 117):

The moral effect, the letter produced on me, was profound. Here was perhaps the then foremost exponent of our science, approaching the allotted span of life, according to the Hebrew scriptures, showing youthful unbounded enthusiasm to know all about a new chapter in the history of chemistry, and I, a young man, was progressing rather slowly. I received almost an electric impulse and was stirred to fresh activity.

P. C. Ray hurriedly prepared a short monograph (1898) on Indian Chemistry based chiefly on *Rasendrasara Samgraha* (which he later realised to be a treatise of minor importance) and submitted it to Berthelot. The French savant carefully went through Ray's manuscript and elaborated upon it in an article in the *Journal des Savants* (April 1898) and gifted Ray his 3-volume work on the chemistry of the Middle Ages which discussed mainly the Arabian and Syrian contributions. Ray felt the need of supplementing Berthelot's work with one on Indian Chemistry. A glowing mention of Ray in another article of Berthelot in *Journal des Savants* (October 1897) stimulated him further. Narrating the impact, Ray writes ([6], p. 118):

A thrill as it were passed through my body. Here was I, a junior professor (or rather assistant professor) of Chemistry almost unknown to fame, and there

2. Pierre Eugene Marcellin Berthelot (1827-1907) is noted for the Thomsen-Berthelot principle of thermochemistry and his contributions to the understanding of the nature of organic compounds; he synthesised many organic compounds from inorganic substances. He is the foremost among science historians who worked on the origin and progress of chemical science in the West.

the foremost chemist and historian of chemistry speaking of me as a *savant*. The idea soon took possession of my mind that I was destined for some higher production. I was not at all appalled by the gigantic nature of the task.

Ray launched a vigorous search for source materials on ancient Indian knowledge of chemical entities from libraries of the British Empire. He was ably assisted by Pandit Navakanta Kavibhusan. Organised libraries were rare; old handwritten insect-eaten manuscripts lay scattered in various places like Madras, Tanjore, Ulwar, Kashmir, Benares, Kathmandu and Tibet. As Ray says ([6], p. 118):

Any one who has experience in collecting Mss. in India knows what ravages the white ant, the silver fish and other insects commit on them. The damp climate of Bengal is specially unfortunate in this respect.

Often, 3 or 4 manuscripts of the same treatise had to be collected since sometimes the introductory and sometimes the concluding pages were found eaten up by worms; and besides one compares different manuscripts as a check against errors or discrepancies in a specific manuscript.

As the relevant ancient manuscripts began to pour in, in Ray's words ([4], pp. 76-77):

I was filled with the ecstasy which a prospector feels when he suddenly comes across a vein of precious metal after years of fruitless efforts. The discovery of such unexpected and forgotten mine of wealth amply sustained me during the 12 years of the best period of my life although much difficulty was felt in apportioning my time between the demands of the library and the laboratory.

After the texts were assembled and studied, the strenuous task of writing an organised account from scattered materials had to be taken up. But as Ray remarks ([6], p. 119):

. . . when the work itself is a source of pleasure, nay, enjoyment as I have said before, it does not tell upon the health, on the contrary, it has a bracing effect.

After 5 years of concentrated work, the first volume of *History of Hindu Chemistry* came out in May 1902. It immediately created a sensation both in India and abroad. In the *Calcutta Journal of Medicine* (October 1902), Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar³ hailed

3. Dr. Mahendralal Sircar (1833-1904) is the founder of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS), the oldest institution of science set up in colonial India to be run by Indians. C. V. Raman did his research at IACS during 1907-33; it is here that the Raman Effect was discovered. At a civic reception after receiving the Nobel Prize (1930), Raman said: "I owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. It was the late Dr. Mahendralal Sircar, who, by founding the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, made it possible for the scientific aspiration of my early years to continue burning brightly." An outstanding doctor, social reformer and a visionary, Dr. Sircar was a physician to Sri Ramakrishna.

the appearance of the volume authored by “so skilful and zealot a chemist” as P. C. Ray, “not only as a matter of duty but with sincere delight”. Dr. Sircar observed that it is rare in India to come across such a historical research work on ancient Indian science whose author is “guided by a full knowledge of that science” ([6], p. 120). Appreciation for the book and its author appeared in journals like *Knowledge*, *Nature* and the *American Chemical Journal*; and in newspapers like *The Englishman*, *The Pioneer* and *The Times of India*. Berthelot wrote a highly appreciative review covering 15 pages of the *Journal des Savants* (January 1903). A revised and enlarged edition of the first volume was printed and published by Bengal Chemical in 1903.

During this 5-year period of intense historical research, P. C. Ray’s original chemical research continued, without break, at Presidency College. He published 12 research papers on nitrites during the years 1897-1901 in London’s *Journal of the Chemical Society* and *Proceedings of the Chemical Society*. He had managed to divide his time between historical studies and chemical research, between the library and the laboratory. However he was losing contact with contemporary chemical literature. To keep himself updated with the gigantic strides in the world of Chemistry at the turn of the century, Ray postponed his work on the second volume for a few years. He also made a tour of Europe in 1904. Finally, Ray prepared and published the second volume in 1909. P. C. Ray once told his student J. C. Ghosh, “All that I have written throughout my life appears to me to be trash. But people will perhaps remember my book *History of Hindu Chemistry*.” [cf. ‘Prasanga-Katha’ by Syamal Chakrabarti in P. C. Ray’s *Atmcharita* (Bengali), Dey’s Publishing (2011), p. 27.]

Here we may remind ourselves that, during this first decade of the 20th century, apart from writing his 2-volume *History of Hindu Chemistry*, publishing around 30 research papers on Chemistry in international journals, completing the difficult work of writing an elementary textbook on Chemistry and of course, taking his chemistry classes, P.C. Ray was also occupied with the development of his chemical and pharmaceutical concern (Bengal Chemical). All this was achieved by a person who had frail health, became a chronic dyspeptic (and hence a permanent “valetudinarian”) from the age of 13, and was a victim of insomnia. Incredible, but true.

Meghnad Saha writes ([8], p. 213) that as a result of the years of arduous work, P. C. Ray’s health had completely broken down. Ray was warned by his friend and physician Dr. Nilratan Sircar⁴ to regulate his mode of life, which he did.

In 1897, P. C. Ray had been asked by the Bengal Government to join Rajshahi College (now in Bangladesh) as its Principal. But, apart from the relatively better research facilities and the intellectual atmosphere of Presidency College, the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal was indispensable for his research on ancient Indian Chemistry. Besides, he was averse to executive work which would leave him very

4. Nilratan Sircar (1861-1943), an eminent doctor, philanthropist, educationist, entrepreneur and nationalist, was another prominent Renaissance figure.

little time for research and studies. Thus, although the post of the Principal involved a much higher pay, position and comfort, P. C. Ray made a representation to allow him to continue to serve as a *junior* professor in the Provincial Service at Presidency. His plea received a sympathetic response from the authorities as Dr. Martin, the DPI [Director of Public Instruction], was aware that “Dr. Ray is a distinguished Chemist engaged in original research in the Presidency College” ([6], p. 159).

P. C. Ray gave several lectures on ancient Indian Chemistry like ‘Antiquity of Hindu Chemistry’ and ‘Chemistry in Ancient India’ (at Madras University in February 1918) and ‘Makers of Modern Chemistry VI’ (at Dacca University in 1925). Some of Ray’s essays and lectures are valuable (almost eye-witness) accounts on science education and research in India (especially Bengal) during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The titles of some of his essays and discourses like ‘Scientific Education in India’ (1899), ‘Progress of Chemistry in Bengal’ (1913), ‘Forty Years of Progress of Chemistry at the Presidency College’ (1915), ‘Pursuit of Chemistry in Bengal’ (1916), ‘Higher Science in the Universities’ (1918), ‘The Place of Science in the Vernacular Literature’ (1918), are self-explanatory. In the rest of this section, we mention a few aspects of ancient Indian chemical technology like production of steel, distillation of zinc, preparation of caustic alkalis and sublimation of sulphides of mercury that P. C. Ray highlights in his lectures.

Ray discusses the marked progress made in metallurgy at an early age in India. The art of making and tempering steel was first discovered in India; the famous Damascus blades were made from Indian steel. The wrought-iron pillar near Delhi, the huge iron girders at Puri, the ornamental gates of Somnath, and the 24-feet wrought-iron gun at Narwar “bear silent but eloquent testimony to the marvellous metallurgical skill attained by the Hindus” ([4], p. 93).

Ray quotes the reference in *Rasarnava* pertaining to the identification of metals by the colouration of the flames ([5], p. 82):

Copper yields a blue flame, that of tin is pigeon-coloured, that of lead is pale-tinted . . .

Ray remarks ([5], pp. 82-83):

We are not aware of similar tests being applied anywhere at such an early period as a qualitative test for metals.

Ray points out that Indians were the first to extract zinc from its ore calamine (*rasaka*) and that the process described in the *Rasaratnasamuchhaya* “is so highly scientific that it can be quoted almost *verbatim* in any treatise on modern Chemistry”. Ray remarks ([4], p. 94):

. . . the skill displayed as also the marvellous powers of observation recorded therein extort our wonder and admiration.

Ray refers to the elaborate account of the process of sublimation, distillation, etc., and of the apparatus required for the process. The invention of the above processes is ascribed to the great chemist Nagarjuna. Ray quotes a verse which says that as mercury gets adulterated with lead and tin, the impurities are to be removed by subjecting the mercury to triple distillation ([5], p. 82).⁵

In a lecture at the Benares Hindu University, P. C. Ray says ([9], pp. 269-70):

To the student of science Benares is linked with the origin and foundation of the surgical branch of medicine.

As Ray points out, tradition

assigns to Benares the singular honour of being the birth-place of *Susruta Tantra*.

In his *History of Hindu Chemistry*, Ray had reproduced from *Sushruta Tantra* an entire chapter on 'Ksharapakavidhi' (preparation of caustic alkali). Cauterisation of bad wounds by means of caustic alkali was a well-established procedure in ancient India.

Sir Humphry Davy, who discovered potassium in 1807, had said ([5], p. 88):

The ancients did not know how to distinguish between potassium carbonate and sodium carbonate.

Quoting Davy's above remark, P. C. Ray says ([5], p. 88):

But in our *Ayurveda* this sharp distinction has been clearly stated.

Ray points out that in the work of Sushruta, potassium carbonate is called *yavakshara* and sodium carbonate *sarjikakshara*. Sushruta also makes a clear distinction between *tikshnakshara* (sharp or caustic alkali) and *mridukshara* (mild alkali). Ray also clarifies that Sushruta does not give any explanation for the difference between caustic and mild alkali. The scientific explanation (viz., the presence of carbon dioxide in the latter) was given for the first time by Joseph Black in 1755, more than 2000 years after Sushruta.

5. Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that "the process of distillation and condensation was known to the ancient Indians as early as the beginning of the first century A.D". (cf. P. C. Ray (ed): *History of Chemistry in Ancient and Medieval India*, Indian Chemical Society (1956), p. 80)

Sushruta describes at length the method of preparing alkalis, of rendering them caustic by addition of lime and gives direction for preserving caustic alkali in iron vessels. After quoting Sushruta's process, Ray remarks ([5], p. 87):

This method, you will look for in vain in any European treatise before the 16th or the 17th century. The process as given in the *Susruta* is so scientific that it can be bodily transferred to any modern text-book on chemistry.

In the lecture at Benares, Ray mentions ([9], p. 270) that Berthelot could not believe that so exact and scientific preparation of caustic alkali, as enunciated in Sushruta's text, could have been known at such a remote period. Ray remarks, "Perhaps this [Berthelot's disbelief] is indirectly the highest compliment which could be paid to our Susruta."

Again, P. C. Ray emphasises the use of metallic preparations in Indian medicines from a very early period. "Kajjvali" (black sulphide of mercury) was prescribed by Vrinda (9th century AD or earlier); its manufacturing process is elaborately described by Chakrapani. The preparation was not known in Europe before the 17th century. Indeed, the "knowledge of pharmacy which the Arabs brought to Europe was derived from the Hindus" ([5], p. 90).

Dr. Ray quotes the following passage from *Rasendra Chintamani* of Dhundukanatha to illustrate how the ancient Indians emphasised the indispensability of experimental methods ([5], p. 81):

They are alone to be regarded as real teachers who can show by experiment what they teach. They are the deserving pupils, who, having learnt the experiments from their teachers can actually perform them. The rest, both the teachers and the pupils, are merely stage-actors.

One should, however, remember that P. C. Ray was intolerant of any idle glorification of the past. In a speech at Rajshahi, Ray thundered ([4], p. 181):

For nearly a thousand years the Hindu nation has been as good as dead. As the son of a rich man having wasted his paternal property has to live a life of penury, but is full of conceit and vanity because of the wealth once possessed by his ancestors, so is the Hindu of the present day.

In view of various historical facts that are coming to light, the validity of the first sentence is debatable, but the passage gives us an indication of the agony of the author of *History of Hindu Chemistry* at the fallen state of his country. Indeed, in some of his utterances, one can see a reflection of the general spirit of self-depreciation and indiscriminate fault-finding that characterised the early stages of the Renaissance in India.

Ray believed that the scientific spirit of ancient India declined as a consequence of the hardening of the caste system. Another factor, in his opinion, was the turn given to Vedanta philosophy by Shankara as a result of which the material world came to be regarded as an illusion causing a loss of the natural curiosity. Here again Ray seems to have been influenced by an Europeanised standpoint in looking at Indian history, an approach that needs a critical re-examination.

But, amidst his strictures, the nation-builder in Ray always radiated a few words of hope. In the first *Faraday Lecture* delivered before the Chemical Society on June 17, 1869, Jean Baptiste André Dumas had exclaimed ([5], p. 90):

What an awakening for Europe! After two thousand years she found herself again in the position to which she had been raised by the profound intellect of India and the acute genius of Greece.

Reminding his audience of the place of honour thus assigned to India by the illustrious French chemist, P. C. Ray concluded his January 1916 lecture at Calcutta University with the following words ([4], p. 51):

I hope it will be hers once more to hold aloft the torch of Science and assert her true place in the comity of nations.

P. C. Ray, The Litterateur and Chronicler

The most valuable book of P. C. Ray after the *History of Hindu Chemistry* is his classic *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist*.⁶ We shall henceforth abbreviate it as *LEBC*. We see in *LEBC* P. C. Ray as a literary writer, a historian, an educationist, an economist, a social thinker, a philosopher and a concerned lover of his country. The book is dedicated to the youth of India with the hope that it would inspire a work-culture in them. In the Acharya's own words,

To The Youth of India

This volume is affectionately inscribed in the hope that its perusal may in some measure stimulate them to activities.

6. P. C. Ray was uncomfortable with the narrow provincialism in the title. He writes in the Preface, "As there are two or three chapters which relate exclusively to Bengal, I have been reluctantly compelled to substitute Bengali for Indian. It will be found, however, that most part of the subject matter is applicable to India as a whole. Even the economic condition of Bengal applies *mutatis mutandis* to almost any province in India." Also note that he dedicates the book to the youth of India.

The book appeared in two volumes in 1932 and 1935 respectively. In volume 1, his autobiographical narrative is blended with historical information and observations on various matters educational, industrial, economic and social, etc. Lyrical and lucid, thought-provoking, rich in information, anecdotes, quotations and wit, the book is a delight to read. H. E. Armstrong, while reviewing it in *Nature* (1933), observed:

From beginning to end, the message of the book is one of the highest endeavour — pulsating with vitality and intellectual force.

As another reviewer remarked in *The Madras Mail*, “The reader will be staggered by the diversity of Dr. Ray’s interests and the extent of his activities.” Besides, the autobiography “contains much thoughtful advice to the younger generation, based on his own keen observation and ripe experience” (*The Chemical Age*, London).

Apart from being an inspiring autobiography, the book is an important first-hand document of the socio-intellectual history of Bengal and gives insights into the renaissance in the 19th and early decades of the 20th century. We quote a few excerpts to convey something of the book’s flavour.

Like Swami Vivekananda, P. C. Ray strongly disapproved of the prevalent trend of the best minds taking up the legal profession to the exclusion of any other pursuit. With his characteristic sub-acid humour, Ray writes ([6], pp. 153-54):

The only field in which the Bengali brain hitherto found full play was the legal profession. Forensic talents of a brilliant order had been developed in connection with this branch. The great-grandsons of those who had founded the modern school of logic (*navyanaya*) at Nadia, and carried to perfection the dialectic skill, took to law as kindly as fish does to water. Logic chopping naturally gave place to legal quibbling. The quick-witted sons of the Gangetic delta found in the law courts which sprang up like mushrooms, a congenial occupation. All the best talents were diverted to it. Although the bar soon became overcrowded and starvation stared the junior men in the face, . . . the youth of Bengal was seeking economic ruin for himself and his fair province by the insane pursuit of one and the same profession to the neglect of several others.

The acute observer and faithful chronicler then records the intangible influence of his contemporary J. C. Bose on the Bengali youth:

It was at this critical period in the history of the intellectual development of Bengal that Bose’s achievements found full recognition in the world of science. Its moral effect on the youth of Bengal was at first slow, but none the less most pronounced.

We mention here that P. C. Ray never failed to acknowledge the contributions of two eminent lawyers Sir Taraknath Palit and Sir Rashbehari Ghose to the Science College in Calcutta.⁷ During a lecture under the auspices of the South Indian Teachers' Union, Ray remarked ([4], p. 114):

I have always quarrelled with lawyers, because they divert with their seductive power the best intellects and induce the flower of our youths to the profession of law. But I have made my peace with the lawyers, because two leading lawyers of Calcutta have been the means of founding a noble institution. I hope the leading lawyers of Madras would follow in their footsteps and I shall be glad to make my peace with them on very easy terms.

While narrating the event of his being offered the post of Principal, a job which would have adversely affected his research in chemistry and the history of chemistry, P. C. Ray observes in *LEBC* ([6], p. 158):

To many a Principalship of a first grade college which involves executive power as also free commodious residential quarters is regarded as a coveted prize post. The charm of wielding executive authority is so innate in human nature that many a man of literary and scientific tastes and activities has been known to ruin his career and rust away.

Chapter XVI of *LEBC* (Vol. 1) begins with "Use and Misuse of Time", a crucial theme for someone who was simultaneously doing research in chemistry, doing research on ancient science history and setting up chemical industries. He writes ([6], p. 209):

I have always regarded my study room as my sanctum but it is often a difficult task to preserve its inviolability. Even our educated men feel no hesitation in intruding, no matter whether one is intent upon a book or deep over a problem.

Ray then quotes Macaulay's statement "Literature has saved my life and my reason" and points out that Macaulay (unlike Ray) could keep four hours of his mornings (5 a.m. - 9 a.m.) to himself, enabling him to read ancient literature. Ray then refers to Newton ([6], p. 210):

Newton was almost in a state of trance on the eve of his propounding the gravitation theory. Imagine what would have happened if he had been constantly disturbed by exacting visitors.

7. The former donated his entire life's earning of Rs 15 lakhs and the latter gave a cheque for Rs 10 lakhs.

Next, Ray narrates the bitter experience of Coleridge who was suddenly called out on business as he was putting on paper hundreds of lines of ‘Kubla Khan’ that he composed in a reverie, lines he could not remember afterwards. He quotes Emerson’s complaint, “At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles.” P. C. Ray then narrates how he is “literally besieged by people, especially young men, seeking information and advice on a variety of subjects, including the means of earning one’s livelihood”. Over and above this, he was “flooded with letters from every part of India”. Ray reflects that he cannot complain as he had brought much of such distractions on himself by his multifarious activities. He writes ([6], p. 211):

I try to put the best possible face on it and emulate my *exemplar*, Marcus Aurelius, whose motto was, “Equanimity” and whose “meditations composed in the tumult of a camp are still extant” (Gibbon).

Ray also advises his readers to carefully read Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* for a key to the “happy participation in multifarious activities” and quotes Franklin: “The precepts of order requiring that every part of my business should have its allotted time” ([6], p. 211).

Prafulla Chandra’s flair for analytical writing had come out during his student days at Edinburgh University when he took part in an essay competition on ‘India before and after the Mutiny’. William Muir (a distinguished administrator who was a judge in the competition) referred to three essays, including Prafulla Chandra’s essay, as “bearing marks of rare excellence” ([6], p. 63). After Prafulla Chandra published his essay as a booklet, *The Scotsman*, a leading journal, observed ([6], pp. 66-67):

It is a most interesting little book. It contains information in reference to India which will not be found elsewhere and it is deserving of the utmost notice.

We shall again refer to this essay in Part V.

Admiring Acharya Ray’s versatile intellectual accomplishments, the British scientist Dr. H. E. Armstrong had remarked ([7], p. 11):

In type Sir Prafulla Ray is perhaps more like a Frenchman than an Englishman in his receptive habit of mind . . .

P. C. Ray was steeped in Shakespeare and as Prof. R. K. Dasgupta remarks ([8], p. 145):

What is really amazing about his knowledge of Shakespeare is that he could make his words a part of his mental furniture and could quote him with ease to give force to his arguments.

While we will not be able to discuss his essays on Shakespeare, we give an example of how effectively he makes one of his points regarding the factors hindering research in Bengal by an allusion to a character from Shakespeare ([4], p. 49):

Moreover, the average Professor in an affiliated College is an overworked man. The head of the institution Shylock-like exacts from him the drudgery of the routine work and it is only by sacrificing the holidays that he can expect to do some [research] work; . . .

Prof. R. K. Dasgupta writes about P. C. Ray's writing style ([8], p. 146):

It has the simplicity which marked his personality and habits of life. He wrote with a clarity and a force because he wrote with a passion and a will. His prose has the orderliness of an orderly mind. And above all it was the prose of one who wanted his words to produce some useful action.

In his review of P. C. Ray's book *The Bengali Brain and its Misuse*, Sri Aurobindo, while expressing reservations about some of its contents, observed: "Nevertheless the article is ably written . . ." ⁸

(To be continued)

AMARTYA KUMAR DUTTA

8. *The Harmony of Virtue: Early Cultural Writings*, SABCL, Vol. 3, p. 433.

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Indian civilisation must be judged mainly by the culture and greatness of its millenniums, not by the ignorance and weakness of a few centuries.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 120)

ON PLUCKING FLOWERS

It is not in the sense of killing or assassination of men alone that the word ‘murder’ is used. Though that is its primary meaning, murder is also used to denote any act or conduct of men which outrages our sense of what is right, just and proper. We speak of murdering a language, of murdering a scheme, of murdering things. The word conjures up all that is horrible, monstrous and repellent to us. The word in abstract is enough to repel us. And what about the perpetrator of the deed, the murderer? We do not have a better regard for him.

A man’s feelings and sensibilities are known by his conduct, not by his words. It is in relation to small things and apparently insignificant events of life that his real character is revealed. Take for example a habit common with most men, that of plucking flowers. Men love flowers — more so women — because of their colour, beauty, fragrance, grace, symmetry, etc. Flowers attract all lovers of beauty, art and aesthetics. But how many know the right use of flowers? Flowers are sacred and delicate things; they are not only pretty and charming but are meant for worship of the Divine. And the tradition, if not the shastric injunction on us, is to offer them unsmelt before the altar of the Gods. To smell them before offering is to desecrate them; it is an act of sacrilege. If so, then what about the men who pluck them not gently and carefully but with a violence and recklessness that would do credit to a murderer? There are men who cannot tolerate the presence of flowers on the plants that bear them but must remove them lock, stock and barrel. Others there are who do not scruple to sacrifice any number of buds for the sake of one or two flowers. There are yet others who lay hands on pretty flowers wherever and whenever found as if the plants were ever ready to welcome the fingers that deprive them of their blossoms no matter how often and at what odd hours of the day whether it be in the scorching sun or the still hours of the night. Some have no scruples to pluck immature flowers, destroying them in the bud. And the most saddening spectacle is when all these men enter into an unholy competition with one another and bring ruin and desolation to a fair and smiling garden.

Men are slaves of habits and the types indicated would go on with their depredations notwithstanding all protests and persuasions even when they know that they are wrong and suffer from qualms of conscience.

“A violet by a mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye;
Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.”

(Wordsworth)

What is our opinion of the man who removes by stealth or violence an only flower that cheers our spirit and delights our eye? Can we credit him with possession of feelings and sensibilities, the man whose sole concern is to aggrandise himself at the expense of the most tiny and delicate things on earth? All the finer moral and aesthetic sensibilities of the man whose single contact with flowers is the use of knives and scissors, must have been dulled and there is the incipient ‘murderer’ in him. The man who does not reciprocate or respond to the feeling, reverence and fervid appeal of the poet to approach flowers gently, “For, it is my faith that every flower enjoys the air it breathes”, or is callous to the beauty of the tender and moving quatrains evoked by the presence and sight of flowers, —

“I sometimes think that never blows so red
The rose as where some buried Caesar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely Head.

And this delightful Herb whose tender green
Fledges the River’s Lip on which we lean —
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lips it springs unseen, —”

(Edward Fitzgerald)

— such a man, whatever his other qualifications, must be a heartless creature. It is a sacrilege to speak of offering to the Divine when the offering is stained with blood. The Divine appreciates our offering when it is feelingly and reverentially done. So the man who culls flowers for the Divine should be doubly sensible. First, he must remember not to injure the plants or trees from which they are gathered, neither to denude them completely as do some overzealous people, leaving nothing for their decoration, sometimes not even the buds. Everything has a natural habitat where it becomes best. We speak of a fish out of water. So with flowers. A tree in blossom even though sparsely is a much lovelier sight than many flowers artificially arranged in the room. Secondly, he must remember that all offerings to the Divine should be done consciously, in a spirit of worship, humility and service and not mechanically, unthinkingly, with levity or callousness of spirit and as a matter of dead ceremony and routine. The quantity does not count; the Divine looks at the quality and the spirit behind the offering. The man who plucks flowers for the Divine should take especial care not to degenerate into a murderer by his heartlessness nor into a vandal by a cruel and insensate orgy of destruction. We cannot with impunity make the Divine a cloak, a plea or an excuse for the justification of our unchastened desires and impulses.

Plants represent but one stage in the growing manifestation of the same Divine

all-consciousness that has reached its present summit in the mental consciousness of man. Tender things should be dealt with tenderly and specially so when they are endowed with life and a consciousness like ours though not overtly mentalised. From the time of Manu, it has been known that plants are endowed with an inner consciousness and are capable of pleasure and pain, waking and sleep, exhilaration and depression of life dynamism. We know for a certainty that “when the sensitive plant shrinks from a contact, it appears that it is nervously affected, that something in it dislikes the contact and tries to draw away from it”, just as we ourselves do. Would this not be a sufficient ground for being particularly careful, loving and gentle in handling them? How much more so when it is reflected that flowers are the psychic expressions of the material nature and are meant for offering to an omniscient and omnipresent God who is also a god of Love, Beauty and Harmony!

The fact that flowers evoke joy, admiration and an aesthetic appreciation in all those who are sensitive to their beauty, ought to be a sufficient guarantee against any rough and rude handling of the plants that bear those flowers after so much of care and toil. So the persons who rear the plants, feed them and take every possible care for their health, growth and development, have a tender, nay, a paternal solicitude for their welfare. They cannot stand the sight of plants being molested or roughly handled by anybody. Since plants have essentially the same vital and nervous consciousness as man's — though organised differently — and are equally sensitive to touch, they instinctively feel and distinguish a friend's hand from a vandal's. This point should be specially borne in mind by all those who cut flowers. Plants have their periods of rest and activity. To disturb them for flowers in the burning sun or when they are resting or as often as one likes, is the height of cruelty and indiscretion.

If these mute, patient and unresisting precursors of men (precursors from the point of view of the emerging Consciousness) were endowed with a tongue, they would certainly give us no entertaining stories of gentle ways and sweet reasonableness where man's puerile interests were concerned. Their torn limbs and bruised, broken and lacerated branches, their trampled roots and scattered leaves bear silent but eloquent and irrefutable testimony to the cruelty, insensibility and utter carelessness of man. As it is, they suffer all kinds of mutilation at the hands of one who ought to have a better regard for them than birds and insects, squirrels and cattle that prey upon them. The life-history of a plant from its birth to death would be an interesting account since it would give us a complete picture of all the care and solicitude bestowed upon it on the one hand as well as all the wanton callousness and cruelty to which it is subjected on the other. If the poet could deplore in a passionate vein what “man has made of man”, one wonders how much more poignant would be his feelings when all the gruesome tales of man's cruelty to plants came to his ears. All sympathetic hearts, hearts that are sensitive to beauty, must lament the inhuman treatment to which plants are often subjected by fellowmen in their hunt

after flowers. Taste of blood, it is said, increases the thirst for blood. So with those who cut flowers indiscriminately. The more they cut and the more the habit grows upon them, the more their lust for flowers increases till at last it becomes a pleasure to destroy for destruction's sake. They find a perverse delight in cutting flowers so that even a solitary blossom withering on the plant becomes a sight too painful for them to bear. It is only when the plants are completely stripped, entirely denuded of all their flowers that their sadistic propensities are satisfied: their lynx-eyes know for a certainty, almost instinctively, where a flower is left or when or where a bud is going to open. We may think that they are rapt in conversation with us, but no, their eyes are riveted on the flower yonder and the hand automatically moves in that direction in order to grab it. Of them it may be truly said that they are possessed by flowers as men are possessed by ghosts. Those who do not scruple to destroy buds for the sake of one or two flowers should remember that their action is tantamount to infanticide in human terms and as such is highly culpable.

For the Sadhak, flower-cutting, like the rearing of plants, is a delicate work that should be elevated to the status of a pure and holy art and undertaken in a spirit of humility and reverence. How should we approach Truth? Take her by the forelock forcibly, violently and in a spirit of nonchalance? Or touch the hem of her garment tentatively, feelingly and respectfully as befits the true seeker? So with cutting flowers. It is not a mechanical work that can be done mechanically by means of knives and scissors only. There must be a deep feeling of the sanctity and delicacy of the work. If we have contracted a mechanical habit of cutting flowers simply for the sake of cutting, or degraded a devotional approach to a mere formality and routine in which there is no life or feeling, it is time to cry a halt, see the error of our ways, retrace our steps and dedicate ourselves afresh with humility and devotion to the task of the Divine so that there may be a flawless execution of His work and we also derive the utmost merit and satisfaction from it. Rearing a plant for flowers is by itself an act of worship. To pluck flowers unnecessarily is not only to injure the plant; it amounts to stealing if we have not reared the plant or otherwise taken any care of it. To mutilate a plant deliberately or through negligence is sheer heartlessness.

JIBENDRA

(Reprinted from the January 1963 issue of *Mother India*)

And in making the flowers so various, the divine artist did not fail to remember a dominant principle which prevails in the structure and character of his episode in flowers.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 48)

THE MOTHER DECIDES WHERE I SHOULD WORK

ONCE a friend of mine expressed his desire to know whether I had ever toyed with the idea of changing my work. I answered to him that I did think about it but the Mother's advice prevented me from executing it. The Mother says, "Change yourself and the circumstances will change."¹ In other words, circumstances are mirrors that reflect my present state of consciousness. Shifting from one department to another can never solve the problem. Difficulties and disharmony that I face in my department are indications that there is some weakness and fault in my nature and that I must try to mend and correct them. The Mother warns that wherever you work you will face the same or even more problems if you fail to concentrate on changing your attitude and consciousness.

Way back in 1963 my academic career was coming to an end when I was approached by two departmental heads, separately; Amiyo-da, the manager of the Ashram Press and Kalu, head of the Department of Physiotherapy. They wanted that I should join their respective Departments. I requested them to put the matter before the Mother and assured them that wherever she decides I will gladly accept it.

After some days Amrita-da, one of the first members of Ashram Trust, met me and informed me that the Mother wanted to know as to where I preferred to work. I said that I had no preference and I will abide by her decision. Three or four days elapsed and Amrita-da caught hold of me in the Ashram courtyard and passed on the message that the Mother has decided that I should work in the Department of Physiotherapy.

Five decades have flown by — 1963 to 2013. Many incidents have taken place in this long span of years, some sweet, some sour.

The subjects I studied in the Higher Course were Literature, Philosophy and Sri Aurobindo's Major Works. My mind was full of lofty and noble thoughts and ideas, my heart pulsating with sweet and beautiful feelings and emotions. I felt on top of the world and everything seemed rosy and wonderful. Then gradually as days rolled by and at work as I began to come into direct contact with people, I realised that life is not as it seemed when I was a student. Academic career prepares a student to secure a diploma or a degree that will help him to procure a job for his livelihood. But factually, it is in the College of Life that man begins to learn the true lessons of existence, rather the hard way, by knocks and shocks.

When I started working in the Physiotherapy Department I had very little knowledge of that particular work. I had learnt a little bit of massage from Biren-da who was our body-building and weightlifting instructor. Every Sunday about eight to ten of us boys assembled in the Tennis Ground early in the morning and Biren-da taught us various massage strokes and techniques. We selected our partners and

1. *CWM*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 160.

massaged each other. After the massage session we had a sun bath, a sand and mud bath and then finally sea bathing. Those were the glorious days.

Work teaches work, it is work that brings experience. Practice gives skill. Gradually, with the expert instructions of my friend Kalu, the head of Physiotherapy Department, I began to pick up the various methods of therapy: hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, Swedish massage, the different techniques and systems of massage and therapeutic exercises etc. I also attended Dr. Satyabrata Sen's (Capt. Chitra-di's brother) classes on "Sports Injuries" and Dhruva's (an American) Acupuncture courses. Moreover, I began to read articles pertaining to the subject from various magazines and books. From my side, I tried and am still trying my level best to gain as much knowledge as possible and apply it on patients.

Expertise in a particular field of work is good, but that is not enough. Something more is demanded from a disciple. I soon realised that work is an excellent means of self-study. Work is a field of action as the Mother explains, you

enter into contact with others, with circumstances and the objects of life, you become aware absolutely objectively of whether you have made progress or not, whether you are more calm, more conscious, stronger, more unselfish, whether you no longer have any desire, any preference, any weakness, any unfaithfulness — you can become aware of all this by working.²

Work is an eye-opener. It points out where I stand, my weaknesses and faults. As soon as I begin to rub shoulders with people I observe all sorts of ego problems arising from within me. Overwhelmed by discordant thoughts and feelings I get upset, agitated, disturbed, perturbed. Tension and worries overpower me and I suffer mentally and physically. I must be able to trace the inner churning that goes on within me and I must try to rectify weaknesses and deficiencies in my nature.

Discipline is one of the most important qualities to be cultivated for the proper functioning of work and life, as well as for man's own inner progress. Regularity and punctuality are the two hands of the work discipline. I must attend the work regularly, but being regular is not enough. I must come for work punctually too, before or on the time fixed to begin the work. Also the time fixed to close the department should be strictly observed and not to close it before the stipulated time. Without discipline one cannot take a step forward. Mother says,

No life can be successful without self-discipline.³

And she insists:

2. *CWM*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 7, p. 287.

3. *CWM*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 46.

To be a man, discipline is indispensable.
Without discipline one is only an animal.⁴

Working time should be followed religiously. I must not be whimsical and casual in my work or in life.

The Mother says,

When I give work to someone it is not only for the sake of the work but also as the best means to advance on the path of Yoga. When I gave you this work, I was quite aware of your difficulties and shortcomings, but at the same time I knew that if you opened yourself to my help and force you would be able to surmount these obstacles and at the same time to increase your consciousness and open yourself to the Divine's Grace.⁵

The aspirant must follow the rules of Karmayoga. He must try to free himself from the clutches of desire and ego. Desire is a strong hankering for something. It can be anything — wealth, material things, vital pleasures, name and fame etc. Desire is a lower vital movement that drags man away from the true consciousness. My main aim in work should be to serve the Mother, without desiring any kind of reward. I must remain ever-vigilant to detect any wrong movement that goes on within me, and not to allow random thoughts to enter into my mind. I must develop an inner poise that will not vacillate according to the whims of my wayward mind and vital. Single-pointed concentration on the specific work must be constantly maintained with a sincere resolution to serve the Mother and her alone, without expecting rewards in any form — money, presents or favours of any kind from patients. All belongs to her and all must be offered to her. I must also refrain from taking recourse to favouritism and partiality. All are the Mother's children and I must treat them with equal attention and care, irrespective of their status and position. I must also try to overcome this age-long problem and habit of male-female complex. The Mother wants me to see them just as human beings and nothing else.

Ego is self-aggrandisement, to put oneself in the centre of attraction. An egoistic person is haughty, selfish, rigid, inconsiderate. Now, if I put myself in the centre of everything, I give undue importance to myself. I become jealous of someone who outshines me. When I hear unpleasant comments about me, I feel hurt, that is, my ego is pricked. Anger arises in me when things go against my wishes, ideas, opinions, preferences etc., and I become unhappy and miserable. Ego is the number one enemy of man and it has infiltrated every nook and corner of his nature. Ego prevents man's onward march to progress and growth.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *CWM*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 159.

Strict sincere self-introspection is demanded from a worker. To avoid ego clashes which flare up and vitiate the atmosphere, I must avoid unnecessary loose talk and useless gossip in the department, and not be drawn into heated arguments or discussions. I must try to remain calm and quiet and fully concentrated on the work to be done. If certain differences of opinion arise with my colleagues I should just air my views and leave it at that. Better not to enter into any arguments. From my side I should try to maintain peace and harmony with my co-workers. Every individual has his own opinion, his own method of working. So be it. But I must not impose my own view-point, method and system of working on others. Each one should be allowed to work the way he thinks and feels to be the best according to his aspiration and inner call. Then I should not have the audacity to think that I am the most important and others are my assistants, rather I should consider them as my colleagues or co-workers. I must keep in mind that the Mother has given to me the responsibility to work in the department as smoothly and efficiently as possible, and that can happen by mutual cooperation and understanding. I must respect others if I expect respect from them. If I keep an attitude of superiority, then ego problems are bound to arise resulting in disharmony and tension. Aspirants have come here to serve the Mother and none else. Departmental heads must get work done from their colleagues with mutual respect, good-will and love.

Our Mother and the Master have amply clarified in their writings how to go about in the complex and slippery path of yoga. If we can apply their instructions and guidance in work and life, we will be in a position to ward off all kinds of lower vital actions and movements. If we could always remember and hearken to Sri Aurobindo's message,

Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you; because she is, indeed, always present⁶

we would be saved from lot of difficulties and problems. Sincere effort never goes in vain. The Mother says,

. . . sincerity is your safeguard⁷

and

Sincerity is the key of the divine doors.⁸

Work alone with sincere devotion and offering to the Mother can lead an aspirant safely on the path of growth, progress and God.

ARVINDBABU

6. CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 169.

7. CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 66.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

SELF-EFFACING YET FORTHRIGHT AMAL KIRAN

(An Impression)

(Continued from the issue of December 2013)

AMAL KIRAN'S closeness with the Mother was such that on many occasions he held her hand for a long time and they even walked hand-in-hand several times.¹ For instance:

Most probably we walked hand in hand, for I had always the urge to catch her hand. On several occasions when I was on my knees before her and moved slightly aside to let Champaklal or someone else talk with her, I would gently hold the hand hanging by her side. What was most delightful to me was not just my clasp on her — it was the immediate response of her fingers, her spontaneous return of the sweet warm privacy ventured by me. Her talk would go on along with the silent exchange as if of equal feeling between the infinitesimal and the infinite.²

The closeness took a decisive turn in 1953 when Amal Kiran came to the Ashram to visit the Mother. The Mother was already trying to clear the ground for his final arrival in Pondicherry. He narrates:

. . . She said softly: "You were under the impression, it seems, that *Mother India* would be published here in April only. But how can that be? It has to be published here always if you are to come and stay here permanently." I answered: "Yes, of course, but what about Sehra? Is she ready to come?" "Oh, I'll write to her that I expect her to come with you." I explained to her that Sehra had her job in Bombay. "Job!" the Mother exclaimed as though she deemed it a small matter.

"... But I believe that if you directly ask her to come, she will." The Mother said: "I have never asked anybody directly to come and stay here." I ventured to suggest: "Why not make a good beginning now? Do invite her." The Mother kept quiet, with a thoughtful face.

. . . The next day, at the staircase, the Mother said: "I have prepared my reply to Sehra. Most probably I'll give it to you in the evening."

1. See Amal Kiran, *Our Light and Delight*, p. 31.

2. Amal Kiran, *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, p. 283.

A day earlier Amal Kiran had presented the Mother, on behalf of his wife Sehra, an Easter Egg with a note where the last sentence read, “When I am sending this Egg, my prayer is: May I be your chick!” to which she had responded with a loud chuckle. The Mother’s reply was given the next day:

Surely, my child, this is quite possible. Won’t you join the “nest” and do your bit of work here? With my love and blessings.³

Sehra’s relocation to the Ashram would make Amal Kiran’s stay in the Ashram permanent. This is perhaps one of the rare instances where the Mother has directly called a disciple to settle in the Ashram, hitting two birds with one stone, so to speak.

Another instance of this intimacy is reflected when Amal Kiran had a dream experience in 1955. He recounts:

I found myself sitting at the top of the staircase leading to the darshan room. Suddenly the door of that room opened and the Mother came out and sat near the threshold, facing me. We held each other’s hands and looked into each other’s face. All of a sudden, with a smile she put her face forward and kissed me on my right cheek. I was so surprised, and I spoke from the depth of my heart, “O Mother, thank you!” She kept smiling.

A couple of days later I wrote to her, asking if this dream had been based on any genuine occult experience. In answer to my letter, she smiled as she passed by me after tennis and said: “It’s all right.” I said: “Was it real?” She nodded, saying “Yes”, and, still smiling, passed on. I was extremely happy.⁴

The Mother revealed to Amal Kiran that he was one of the five devotees who had an experience the day the supramental manifested on earth. He relates:

. . . on the night of the Supramental Manifestation on February 29, 1956 the Mother appeared to me in the railway compartment in which I was travelling from Madras to Bombay after leaving Pondicherry the same morning. She told me afterwards that she had come to intimate to me the Great Event in fulfilment of a promise given eighteen years earlier . . .⁵

Many have lauded Amal Kiran’s intellectual ability, but it was his strong and loyal vital that was the driving force in his sadhana. The Mother once disclosed to him:

3. *Our Light and Delight*, 1st Ed., pp. 35-37.

4. Amal Kiran, *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 112.

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

In your instance, it is not, as you believe, your mind that has kept you on our Path. No doubt, Sri Aurobindo has paid an extraordinary compliment to your mental ability. I should not tell you this, it may make you proud. But what has supported you in your ideal of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, what made it possible for the inner psychic call to persist all along, and brought you safe to us through all dangers and deviations, is your vital being. It is the strength and loyalty of the Vital that has ensured your return in spite of numerous obstacles.⁶

Let us look at Sri Aurobindo's views on thought power, the ability to think deeply:

... It is my belief that the main cause of India's weakness is not subjection, nor poverty, nor a lack of spirituality or religion, but a diminution of the power of thought, the spread of ignorance in the birthplace of knowledge. Everywhere I see an inability or unwillingness to think — incapacity of thought or 'thought-phobia'. This may have been all right in the mediaeval period, but now this attitude is the sign of a great decline. The mediaeval period was a night, the day of victory for the man of ignorance; in the modern world it is the time of victory for the man of knowledge. He who can delve into and learn the truth about the world by thinking more, searching more, labouring more, gains more power. Take a look at Europe. You will see two things: a wide limitless sea of thought and the play of a huge and rapid, yet disciplined force. The whole power of Europe is here. It is by virtue of this power that she has been able to swallow the world, like our tapaswis of old, whose might held even the gods of the universe in terror, suspense, subjection. People say that Europe is rushing into the jaws of destruction. I do not think so. All these revolutions, all these upsettings are the first stages of a new creation. Now take a look at India. A few solitary giants aside, everywhere there is your simple man, that is, your average man, one who will not think, cannot think, has not an ounce of strength, just a momentary excitement. India wants the easy thought, the simple word; Europe wants the deep thought, the deep word. In Europe even ordinary labourers think, want to know everything. They are not satisfied to know things halfway, but want to delve deeply into them. The difference lies here. But there is fatal limitation to the power and thought of Europe. When she enters the field of spirituality, her thought-power stops working.⁷

Amal Kiran's crowning glory was when the Mother referred to him without naming him during one of the 'Conversations in the Playground' and disclosed that he had an awakened consciousness. He notes:

6. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

7. *Sri Aurobindo: Archives & Research*, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 19-20.

On 23 December 1953 she [the Mother] spoke about accidents and how their damage gets minimised if one is constantly in touch with her through the “consciousness” remaining “wide-awake” and “in contact with one’s psychic being”. In the course of her talk she said: “I know someone who, indeed, should have died and did not die because of this. For his consciousness reacted very fast. He had taken poison by mistake: instead of taking one dose of a certain medicine, he had taken twelve [*Amal Kiran corrects the figure — it was actually 48*] and it was a poison; he should have died, the heart should have stopped (it was many years ago) and he is still quite alive! He reacted in the right way. If these things were narrated they would be called miracles. They are not miracles: it is an awakened consciousness.”⁸

However in 1948 he did have a heart-trouble and was in grave danger. After an injection of morphia, he amazingly felt doubly awake and the whole universe seemed to be a divine being and there was an inspirational burst of poetry which continued for days. The poems were sent to Sri Aurobindo and his initial dictated appraisal was as follows:

Your new poems are very remarkable and original in their power of thought and language and image, but precisely for that reason I have to study and consider carefully each individual poem separately before I can comment on them . . . Some of the poems such as *Soul of Song* have a remarkable perfection and this often accompanied with a great felicity and power of revelatory image as in *Cosmic Rhythms*. . . . (July 20, 1948).⁹

After Sri Aurobindo finished reading all the poems he wrote:

I have gone through your manuscript of poems and I propose that they should be immediately published without further delay. . . . I don’t think there is anything in the poems that needs to be changed; even when you become too original for some critics who would call you violently forceful or wilfully extravagant in your images, expressions or idea-substance, these very qualities are the breath of life of a poem and to change or modify them would take away its whole value. . . . So if you agree we will send the manuscript at once to the Press as soon as we hear to that effect from you. (December 25, 1948)¹⁰

On Amal Kiran’s poem ‘This Errant Life’ Sri Aurobindo remarks:

8. Amal Kiran, *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, pp. 219-20.

9. K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), *The Secret Splendour: Collected Poems*, 1st Ed., p. 353.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 354-55.

. . . a beautiful poem . . . If you could always write like that, you would take your place among English poets and no low place either. I consider they can rank — these eight lines — with the very best in English poetry.¹¹

Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo comments on Amal Kiran's poem, 'Truth-Vision':

It is exceedingly beautiful, one of the best things you have done. But don't ask me to analyse it. Things like that cannot be analysed, they can only be felt. It has throughout the perfection of simple inevitability about which no one can say, "It is because of this that it is beautiful or because of that." The more I read it, the more it gains upon me.¹²

At its very inception the editorship of *Mother India* was given to Amal Kiran (with Soli Albless as Associate Editor) by the Gurus as they considered him being open to their force. When Amal Kiran expressed his doubts to the Mother of undertaking such a responsibility, she said: "There is Sri Aurobindo. He will guide you in everything."¹³

Amal Kiran speaks about Sri Aurobindo's marked attentiveness for this journal:

Not only did he put from afar his mighty spiritual force to the task of 'politicising' the Editor's grey cells. He also got every editorial, however lengthy, read out to him before publication and sent a telegram of approval or modification. Matter for *Mother India* received preferential treatment among the sundry calls on the precious time of the Avatar of Supermind. And his interest in it had a directly personal touch. On one occasion, when a sadhak's sceptical attitude to the opinions expressed in the fortnightly was reported to him, he said: "Doesn't he know that *Mother India* is my paper?" . . .

When the main articles for the first issue — written by the Editor and Albless — were sent to Pondicherry, not only Sri Aurobindo but also the Mother listened to Nolini's reading out of them. Both the Gurus sent words of praise and total sanction. . . .¹⁴

Soon after Sri Aurobindo left his body, Amal Kiran wrote an article on the passing of Sri Aurobindo, which he sent to the Mother for approval. He then received a telegram from Nolini-da: "Article admirable. Fully approved by Mother. Nothing to change."¹⁵

11. K. D. Sethna, "Overhead Poetry: Poems with Sri Aurobindo's Comments", 1st Ed., p. 8.

12. *The Secret Splendour: Collected Poems*, 1st Ed., p. 175.

13. Amal Kiran, *The Sun and the Rainbow*, 2nd Ed., p. 58.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

15. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, p. 98.

Mother later added: “Amal’s article is excellent. Tell him I am extremely satisfied.” . . . “It’s quite the best thing Amal has written. I would like fifteen thousand copies of it to be printed. . . .”¹⁶

So these, in a nutshell, are some of Amal Kiran’s memorable and momentous moments with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

* * *

I visited him again in the year 2000 at the Nursing Home, after a gap of three years. I was circumspect as I was not sure if he would remember me. He was reading a book when I knocked on the door. Still immersed in his book he alertly asked in a deep sonorous voice: “Who is it?” I entered and sombrely asked him some questions. Whilst I was somewhat aware that Sri Aurobindo was an Avatar, a sadhak revealed to me that he was a *Purna Avatar*. I had also read Mother saying that Sri Aurobindo was the ‘last Avatar’. By deduction it seemed obvious that Sri Aurobindo was the final Avatar i.e. *Kalki* who had come to pull us out of the *Kaliyuga*. The method too was clear, speeding up the evolutionary process by the Integral Yoga leading to transforming the human race into a supramental one. The Mother too had hinted that Sri Aurobindo was the *Kalki Avatar* when Pranab-da queried the Mother about *Kalki*, and the significance of his arrival on a white horse, holding an unsheathed sword and yet being lame. Pranab-da then states:

Mother replied that the horse was a symbol of force and the white horse represented divine force. The unsheathed sword symbolised unhindered divine knowledge. But she could not tell me why he was lame. She said it was probably due to this collective suggestion from olden times that Sri Aurobindo too broke his leg.¹⁷

When I sought an affirmation from Amal Kiran he very uncharacteristically stressed in a vehement and adamant manner: “Sri Aurobindo is *Kalki*” and reasserted by repeating it. He was then 96 years old but still sharp and full of vigour.

I later read from Amal Kiran’s notes:

I have always regarded Sri Aurobindo as Kalki, the last Avatar of Hindu tradition, who has been figured as coming to the world riding a white horse. . . .¹⁸

The Mother observed:

16. *Ibid.*

17. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *I Remember*, pp. 210-11.

18. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 1, p. 20.

I had always heard that Sri Aurobindo was “the last Avatar”; but he is probably the last Avatar in a human body — afterwards, we do not know. . . .¹⁹

During our conversation, Amal Kiran confirmed that Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s spiritual atmosphere and presence is still very much alive. Indeed, Amal Kiran in his article ‘The Passing of Sri Aurobindo’ had quoted what the Mother had said:

To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo who is here with us, conscious and alive.²⁰

On 12 December, 1950 the Mother gave blessings to the Ashramites. On seeing Amal Kiran a little dejected, she smilingly said:

Nothing has changed. Call for inspiration and help as you have always done. You will get everything from Sri Aurobindo as before.²¹

Amal Kiran also discloses what the Mother had told him about her presence:

. . . she once told me, one could feel her subtle-physical body with great concreteness if one were sufficiently sensitive . . .²²

After the Mother left her body, Amal Kiran wrote:

. . . We may be induced to think that their physical absence leaves us rather in the lurch. Actually the Mother has clearly said that Sri Aurobindo, on leaving his body, is yet very close to us, for he has become not just a general influence: he has taken his station in the subtle-physical plane and will remain there until his work is completed. The Mother too is surely poised on the same plane to work along with the Master towards the fulfilment of their mission. Besides, we have had the Supermind partially manifested in the subtle-physical layer of the earth since 29 February 1956 and pressing gradually towards manifestation in the gross-physical layer. There is also what the Mother called the Superman-Consciousness which came at the end of 1965 to push the earth forward. So the Mother has left powerful allies for us in addition to the fact that she, together with Sri Aurobindo, is inwardly watchful over all our needs. . . .²³

19. *On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, p. 253.

20. *Words of the Mother – I*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 7.

21. K. D. Sethna (*Amal Kiran*): *A Centenary Tribute*, Edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, p. 456.

22. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, p. 283.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Further, Amal Kiran states that the sense of the presence of the Gurus is a living reality that gives impetus to the sadhana:

. . . Always think of both her and Sri Aurobindo as still embodied beings and not only as pervading and guiding consciousnesses. By thinking thus, you will draw greater help from them towards your ultimate realisation.²⁴

He also shared with me his mantra and master formula ‘Remember and Offer’.

On the same motto-mantra Amal Kiran elucidates the point further. In the old days the Mother encouraged Amal Kiran to paint flowers — he was perhaps among the first artists of the Ashram — and every week she used to peruse his drawing book. Indeed, by his own admission, he had an affinity for the artistic Latin Quarter of Paris, a case of a Parsi metamorphosed into a Parisian.

He interestingly reveals:

. . . What I want to say now is that the Mother evaluates everything from the standpoint of Yoga. Of course she appreciates competent and skilful work of all kinds, but if she had to choose between great skill with no Yoga in it and smaller skill with a splash of the Yogic consciousness going with it, she would always tilt in favour of the latter. When she turned the pages of my drawing-book I found that she simply passed over paintings I had done with a great deal of cleverness but with a tinge of self-congratulation. But she paused and smiled and appreciated very much whatever I knew I had done with real remembrance of her and with an inner gesture of offering to her. I may add that, on many occasions, things done like that acquire even a finer artistic form than things done efficiently with an outside approach in order to impress the Mother with our own talents. A psychic delicacy or an inner sensitive strength enters the line and colour and composition. The same applies to the art of writing. Writing can be surfacy or it can be depth-revealing. . . .²⁵

He emphasises that the remembrance needs to be constant and unswerving:

. . . Yoga means being in touch with the Divine’s presence every minute. It is an all-time job, as Sri Aurobindo has often said.

And, if you live out the Mother’s formula of remembering and offering, you will feel that something extremely sweet and at the same time extremely strong is awakening in you. Soon you will feel as if a bright nectar were welling in your heart and flowing everywhere in your body. The whole of you will feel

24. *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, p. 95.

25. Amal Kiran, *Light and Laughter*, 3rd Ed., p. 61.

perpetually blessed and everything you lay your hands on will appear to you as if it were receiving blessedness. What awakens in you is — to use Sri Aurobindo's phrase — 'the psychic being', the true soul in you. . . .²⁶

* * *

Many have spoken about Amal Kiran's *amalgamated* multifaceted personality, that of a genius, poet, intellectual, essayist, artist, academician, etc. but to me he represents a great soul — open and always willing to share for the benefit of others, with a respect and goodwill towards all, sans any sense of superiority.

Sometime in May 2011, thanks to Esther, I expressed to Amal Kiran my desire to write an article about him. He told me to show him the article, when it was ready. A sense of elation surged within me that a 106-year-old still had the keenness and sharpness of mind in wanting to be aware what was being written about him. A few days later I posed a riddle before him which Esha-di had related to me: "The Divine has the power to do anything and everything but there is one thing he cannot do." The answer was: "He cannot abandon the *bhakta*." Amal Kiran pretended he did not understand but evinced interest for he asked me to repeat the conundrum a few times.

At the time of his passing at 12.15 hours on 29 June 2011, I was in the midst of writing this article and was reading about Mother's explication of love being a transforming force that can heal any sort of bad will. The topic of love arose whilst reading about an experience Amal Kiran had when he had gone to the Samadhi to pray to the Mother on the right attitude to be taken at being repeatedly harassed by a certain person. Suddenly from his heart-centre an intense love flowed out towards the said person. The moment perhaps was symbolic of the man.

(Concluded)

GAUTAM MALAKER

26. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

The natural attitude of the psychic being is to feel itself as the child, the son of God, the Bhakta; it is a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but in the dynamics of the manifestation there is always even in identity a difference.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga – I*, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 61)

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of December 2013)

VI

LET us now turn to the figures based on difference. I have listed three of them: antithesis, epigram and oxymoron, as these can be found in the prose of our writer.

Antithesis is a figure of speech that consists of mutually contrasting clauses. The stock example given in books of rhetoric is “united we stand, divided we fall”, but the contrast need not be so well-marked all the time. It is a figure of speech that has challenged the rhetoricians in the matter of classification. Some classify it under figures of thought, some under figures of words, and some under both. It is a very useful figure of speech for poets as well as prose artists. But used to excess it often detracts from seriousness. The reader would surely remember those famous lines:

Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
Or some frail China jar receive a flaw;
Or stain her honour, or her new brocade;
Forget her pray'rs, or miss a masquerade.¹

It is a figure that, used to excess, not only produces comic effects, but obtrudes upon the attention and gives an impression of artificiality. Demetrius, realising this, had condemned it. He quotes a sentence of Democritus containing four antitheses and comments on it thus:

The elaborate parallelism of clauses produce the impression of false artifice; of trifling, rather than of honest indignation.²

Our writer uses the figure seriously and to very good purpose, in a most telling manner:

No spirituality, but a robust ethical turn; no innate power of 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.³

1. Alexander Pope: *Rape of the Lock II*.

2. *Democritus on Style*, translated by R. Rhys Roberts.

3. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 65.

The antitheses used here are not decorative but highly functional, for they are used for emphasis, not for decorative purposes. This sentence I have just written displayed a roguish tendency to turn antithetical itself — such is the influence of rhetoric! No wonder Dr. Johnson called a quibble “the fatal Cleopatra” as used by Shakespeare, so tempting it is to play with words.

Now that I *have* digressed a bit, let me do it to good purpose. I want to draw the attention of the reader, not to the rhetoric but to another feature — the artistry of the sentence quoted above. It is divided into three parts, each indicated by a semi-colon and each part in its turn divided into two sub-divisions, each indicated by a comma. Then also, each part is longer than the preceding one. I cannot say that the three different parts are in ascending order of importance which will be an example of climax, but the entire sentence can definitely be called a tricolon. It is by lengthening the successive parts of the sentence that the writer avoids the possibility of artificiality. Had each part been of equal length then the sentence would have given an impression of artifice. The most wonderful feature of the sentence is that when it is read within the context it does not call attention to itself. I shall never tire of pointing this out: our writer’s art conceals itself so effectively that unless one is very alert one misses it altogether.

The beauty of it is that though our writer writes about profound or complex or difficult things, he always writes so clearly! In the sentence quoted above, he is writing about the characteristics of English poetry — a subject which is, the Lord God He knoweth, complex and difficult enough. Yet, though this one sentence is no indication, it is written in elegant (middle style) and polished prose which expresses his meaning clearly. It has already been observed that Aristotle, not to say others, laid great stress on clarity and the modern writers do not lag behind. Writers other than rhetoricians have also voiced their preference for clarity, particularly in the twentieth century. Thus Anatole France had said: “Clarity first, clarity again, clarity at the end.” But against this, as a word of caution, Havelock Ellis had said: “Be clear. Be clear. Be not too clear.”⁴

The last sentence cautions a writer of prose (or poetry) against over-simplification. Our writer never does that. His writing is not just lucid, but pellucid in spite of the rhetorical devices that I am gleaning for our study. As was seen in the example for antithesis just quoted, he uses a figure of speech usually employed for comic purposes, in serious manner which is also unobtrusive. It will be seen again and again. For example it will be seen when we take up the figures based on sound, of which one is pun. These are usually employed for comic and decorative purposes.

Now to go back to anti-thesis once more. I have already observed that it is a figure of speech that lends itself to artificiality and even to a comical quality. But in the hands of a master of prose like our writer it can be used to emphasise profundity

4. For both of these sentences I am indebted to K. D. Sethna’s *Talks on Poetry*, p. 219.

of thought as well as of content. He is writing about the superman, a subject both profound and complex, in *The Hour of God*.

It is to be free and not a slave, to be one and not divided, to be immortal and not obscured by death, to be full of light and not darkened, to be full of bliss and not the sport of grief and suffering, to be uplifted into power and not cast down into weakness.⁵

Here is a splendid burst of five antitheses, the meaning is communicated most effectively, without any impression of artificiality or levity. The parallelism of clauses does but enhance the profundity and what wonderful prose it is! I am not sure that I am worthy of reading it but I can understand the beauty of the prose and be thankful that this much is granted to me. The meaning of it can be understood theoretically by the brain, but the actual comprehension — no, that has not been vouchsafed unto me.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

5. *Op. cit.* (1959 ed.) p. 9.

What a magnificent exterminating sweep do we hear for instance in that old renowned sentence, brahma satyaṁ jagan mithyā, the Eternal alone is true, the universe is a lie, and how these four victorious words seem to settle the whole business of God and man and world and life at once and for ever in their uncompromising antithesis of affirmation and negation. But after all perhaps when we come to think more at large about the matter, we may find that Nature and Existence are not of the same mind as man in this respect, that there is here a great complexity which we must follow with patience and that those ways of thinking have most chance of a fruitful truth-yielding, which like the inspired thinking of the Upanishads take in many sides at once and reconcile many conflicting conclusions. One can hew material for a hundred philosophies out of the Upanishads as if from some bottomless Titans' quarry and yet no more exhaust it than one can exhaust the opulent bosom of our mother Earth or the riches of our father Ether.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 308)

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of December 2013)

5. Confessions of a Lover

GENERALLY speaking, we do have a traditional scheme which speaks of some names forming the historical line in English literature. Old English poets. Chaucer, Langland. Then it is time for Shakespeare. These are permanently etched in the tablets of our memory. There is one other poet of these times who needs to be remembered though the 20th century has not given much thought to him. He was Chaucer's contemporary and began his writing career in French and Latin. Not a surprising message for Indians who had taken to writing in English two centuries ago, to the neglect of their own mother tongues.

Gower's Latin work, *Vox Clamantis* (The Anguished Call) is laden with sorrow as it speaks of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The horrible Black Death that crushed the populace, the heartless taxes imposed by the rulers upon a people already reeling under drought situations and the cold-blooded tradition of holding serfs were the major reasons for this revolt. Interestingly enough, Gower the poet is on the side of the landlords and he criticised the peasantry for rising in revolt, led by Wat Tyler. It is, indeed, a very powerful poem:

The poet first has a vision of a crowd of members of the populace
Changed into wild beasts and uncurbed by reason — asses, fierce as lions,
who will bear no more burdens, oxen who refuse to draw the plough, dogs
who bark at huntsmen, cats who have reverted to wildness. A jay, who
stands for Wat Tyler, harangues them, to the sound of shouts of 'Down
with honour! Perish the law!' and at the tail of their company John Ball,
an excommunicate priest, preaches on the text:

When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?¹

Sri Aurobindo's wide reading during his student days in England must have included this brilliant work, certainly a fourteenth century precursor to *Animal Farm*. The scenes of the Peasant's Revolt and the way man had turned predator and the demise of virtue are the subject of the book as it moves towards the end, the recordings of a bitter present:

1. Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature*, 1943 Ed., p. 125.

Socrates has died, checking vices with virtue,
 Epicurus is here to hand them out.
 Diogenes has died forsaking vanities,
 False Aristippus owns this world.
 Phirinus chaste has died chastising his body,
 Adulterer Agladius lives in town.
 Troilus has died steadfastly faithful in his love,
 And Jason's love now cannot keep its faith.
 Medea faithful rots content within the ground,
 False Cressida is glad to love two men.
 Semiramis burns impure in her loins, and now
 Cassandra's barely able to stay chaste.
 Penelope has died, so has Rome's Lucretia,
 Circe and Calypso rule those like them.²

Gower wrote *Mirour de l'Omme* in French. If the peasants of England and their leaders come in for caustic criticism in the Latin work, *Vox Clamantis*, the French poem laments the increasing corruption at the global level. The title means simply, "the mirror of mankind" and Gower is his usual self, moralistic, worried about the falling standards in everyday life. Incidentally, this work had long been forgotten till it was re-discovered in 1895 by G. C. Macaulay. Reading about the poem, what arrested me was the following:

Calling sin the cause of all the world's evil, Gower opens the *Mirour de l'Omme* with a discussion of the origin of sin. After his fall Lucifer gives birth to Sin, and drawn to his own vile creation, he couples with her and gives birth to Death. Driven by the same unnatural lust as his father, Death engenders with Sin seven more hideous daughters — the Seven Deadly Sins. The allegory is unmistakably reminiscent of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), but it is unlikely that Milton could have known the *Mirour de l'Omme* (since we know of no extant manuscript other than the one found by Macaulay). Still, no common source has ever been found for the allegory.³

The passage took me immediately to Sri Aurobindo's 'The Birth of Sin.' He was thorough with his Milton (indeed his blank verse style has been compared to the sublime accents of the *Paradise Lost*) and had obviously wished to get at the

2. Translated by Robert Meindl.

3. *jātasya hi dhruvo mṛityurdhruvam janma mṛtasya ca tasmād aparihārye 'rthe na tvam śocitum arhasi.* (The Gita, II, 27).

One who is born has to die; one who dies has to be born. Hence do not sorrow over this inevitable phenomenon.

root of sin. How come it is referred to as Lucifer's mind-born child? What thoughts swirled within him that gained the personification of this hideous being, a creature half-woman, half-serpent? Sri Aurobindo gives a form to these thoughts as a dialogue between Lucifer and Sirioth. Sirioth according to the *Glossary and Index of Proper Names in Sri Aurobindo's Works* is said to be the name used by Sri Aurobindo for the Angel of Love.

An argument is presented in the poem in a simple manner. Eternity could be a weary affair, since there is no challenge. Perhaps helping the humans who have mortality writ on their foreheads when they are born could be fulfilling.⁴ Lucifer prefers the instrument of Power to help human beings; Sirioth votes for Love. Lucifer disagrees with Sirioth:

Love? It was love that for a trillion years
 Gave me the instinct and immense demand
 For service, for activity. It fades.
 Another and more giant passion comes
 Striding upon me. I behold the world
 Immeasurably vast, I see the heavens
 Full of an azure joy and majesty,
 I see the teeming millions of the stars.
 Sirioth, how came the Master of the world
 To be the master?⁵

Even before he descends upon the Garden of Eden as a serpent, he has been seized by the serpent of jealousy. He wonders how God has won this supreme state where the whole of creation bows to him? Was there a god before him whom he dethroned and seized the kingship of the world? Did he persuade creation to make him the king? Granted he is the Supreme of this creation and everyone bows to him, surely there must be some tiny space available for Lucifer too!

Are there no bounds to His immense domain,
 No obscure corner of unbounded space
 Forgotten by His fate, that I may seize
 And make myself an empire as august,
 Enjoy a like eternity of rule?⁶

4. *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*.

5. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 276.

6. *Ibid*.

Sirioth warns Lucifer that if he was for rebellion to seize power, he may be in for the “eternity of dreadful poignant pain.” While Lucifer hates the idea of always being the second-in-command, Sirioth positively exults at the situation.

To embrace, to melt and mix
Two beings into one, to roll the spirit
Tumbling into a surge of common joy, —
'Tis this I seek.⁷

But someone, somewhere has desecrated this Love into a sin. Even the best in creation gets corrupted easily. Such is the fate of the human being. Someone whom Sirioth did not know, called Love as sin. She did not know who it was but saw him laugh and say:

“Sin, sin is born into the world, revolt
And change, in Sirioth and in Lucifer,
The evening and the morning star. Rejoice,
O world!”⁸

In a moment the menace had leapt out of the brain of Lucifer. Had he not harboured thoughts of rebellion? People vied with each other for her glance and favours:

“Daughter of Lucifer, be ours,
O sweet, adorable and mighty Sin!”⁹

Sri Aurobindo is neither Milton nor Gower but the idea of the birth of sin may have come to him from Milton. While in Baroda in 1895, he was purchasing plenty of books and was getting the literary news of the day. So he would have known about the Gower find. It is certainly exciting to know that he too tried to present the Lucifer-Sin-Death-Seven Deadly Sins scenario in his own style, and went digging into the roots of the myth's origin. It appears he wanted to write a detailed version in the dramatic mode. He even set up a *dramatis personae* but what we have is just a fragment. Unfinished works are a recurring disappointment one comes across when confronting Sri Aurobindo's writings. Ah, let us be grateful for what we have and not pine for what was destined to move behind the curtain of Time.

The rest of Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* is a stern lecture on morals attuned to colourful story-telling. The Devil tries various ways to ruin humankind by marrying the Seven Deadly Sins (Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy and Pride) to the

7. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

9. *Ibid.*

World. God counters it by sending the Seven Virtues to help Man: Chastity, Temperance, Charity, Diligence, Forgiveness, Kindness and Purity. Gower's message is clear. It is not God or Devil that make or mar Man. If he wants to become an ideal human being, he must cultivate the high virtues. So Man's destiny is in his hands.

Gower's work in his mother tongue which gives him a prominent place in Middle English literature is *Confessio Amantis*. As the title suggests, the work contains the confessions of a lover which holds together several short narratives. Sadly enough, it has been brushed aside as an "artificial poem". All the same it remains an important part of Middle English literature though some consider it to have been written to cash in on the popularity of the local language. After all, his contemporary, Chaucer, was making waves with his writing. Actually, the work is interesting because one gets to read stories familiar and unfamiliar. Besides, the moral tone of Gower is somewhat muted. Why should one write? A question we — the pen-scratchers — need to ask ourselves. Gower has an answer and a pointer towards his style as well:

Of those who wrote before our lives
 Their precious legacy survives;
 From what was written then, we learn,
 And so it's well that we in turn,
 In our allotted time on earth
 Do write anew some things of worth,
 Like those we from these sages cite,
 So that such in like manner might,
 When we have left this mortal sphere,
 Remain for all the world to hear
 In ages following our own.
 But it is so that men are prone
 To say that when one only reads
 Of wisdom all day long, one breeds
 A paucity of wit, and so
 If you agree I'll choose to go
 Along a kind of middle ground
 Sometimes I'll write of things profound,
 And sometimes for amusement's sake
 A lighter path of pleasure take
 So all can something pleasing find.¹⁰

10. Translations from *Confessio Amantis* used in this essay are by Richard Brodie.

Gower says he wrote the book because his king, Richard II, wanted him to; and that for once he was going to go easy on moralising. This would be a paean to love in its various garbs. However, when writing the Prologue to his work, he cannot resist releasing a few darts at the administration, the Church and the citizenry. Then Gower retells the fascinating passage from the Bible where we see Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a dazzling statue with a head of gold, and the interpretation of the same by Daniel which roughly corresponds to our Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali yugas. After a prayer for peace the book starts. With 33,000 lines, *Confessio Amantis* is a huge work. Fortunately, there are so many stories within stories and we are saved from ennui.

The thread for the collection is an aged lover who is confessing his sins in the temple of Venus. The temple priest, Genius, is the confessor. Between the lover and Genius, we have an array of stories. Genius tells the lover how the five senses are the entry gate for all things undesirable. Look at what happened to Actaeon who would not turn his eyes away from Diana when he came upon her bathing! He was devoured by his own dogs. Remember all those who were turned to stone for gazing at Medusa! Fortunately Perseus was able to overcome her. Genius comes out with his wholesome advice to the lover to keep his eyes under control:

Lo now, my son I thee advise
 That you do not misuse your eyes:
 Don't stop and at Medusa stare,
 And into stone be turned: beware
 For no man ever can be wise,
 Unless he well controls his eyes
 And wanton pleasures does despise
 That he be lured not by desire,
 And overcome with passion's fire.
 The mischief looking wrong does cause,
 I hope to you has given pause
 My son, to think and watch your eyes.

A familiar scenario for us thanks to Sri Aurobindo's *Perseus the Deliverer*. Now more stories come out tumbling to underline the need for the control of the other senses. It is like being curled up with Thomas Bullfinch's *Mythology*, my companion of sixty years. Polyphemos, Acis, Galatea, Nessus, Hercules, Geta, Amphytrion . . . so many fascinating names from the past. No wonder Sri Aurobindo was "entirely Greek" in his early days!

Dealing with the various Sins willingly embraced by human beings, it is good to linger and watch Gower's Midas. We all know that King Midas stands for avarice. According to Gower, all was well when the Lord created the world. It was only

when population began growing that man became avaricious.

That happened when the numbers grew
 Of man, of horse, of ox, of ewe.
 And when men money did invent.
 Then peace out of the window went,
 And wars erupted everywhere
 Which caused men to all love forswear
 And to all things they see, lay claim,
 So that instead of tools, to maim
 And kill they manufacture blades
 And so they put up barricades,
 And in the earth dug ditches deep,
 And built high walls wherewith to keep
 The gold which Avarice surrounds.

It is sad that we have time no more to read these classics. For they do not belong to a past era at all! On the contrary, one cannot come across a statement as contemporaneous as this pronouncement from a Middle English poet. This reveals the secret of the Indian economy today: the rich grow richer, the poor grow poorer! Look at Midas! He was such a kindly king, charitable, ready to help people in distress. He helped the priest of Bacchus who had lost control of himself due to excessive drinking. When Bacchus promises him a boon as a reward, Midas cogitates for a while and chooses gold. We have been familiar with this story since childhood and it never ceases to excite us. Fancy one of us touching this and that, and everything turns to gold! But if gold is here, can hunger be far behind for Midas? Midas learns the lesson on the evils of avarice very well:

He kept on touching things until
 From hunger he was nearly ill;
 That of which he was most in need
 Was food upon which he could feed.
 The cloth was laid, the table graced
 With food that was before him placed,
 His dish, his cup, his drink, his meat;
 But when he tried to drink or eat,
 Whatever to his mouth came near,
 Turned into gold, then it was clear
 That Avarice could make him die.

His repentant prayer makes him wholesome again. Now he turns his attention to the production of more food for that is the prime requirement of mankind. Gower seems to be peeping over our shoulder at the concrete-heavy, air-conditioned nightmare that modern man has created. With Midas, it will be a return to the rural heavens!

And then made laws that were replete
 With common sense. And his command
 Was that his people till their land,
 And always act in lawful ways,
 And that they should their livestock raise,
 And never seek to grow their store
 Of gold which is the source of war.
 For this is written, as we find,
 Before the time when gold was mined
 And coins were struck, no men did cheat,
 There was no fraud and no deceit.
 Then were there neither shield nor spears
 To fatten wars' rich financiers.

For a change, Book 7 brings us a good deal of science, philosophy and morality. The vastness of conception by Gower might have had an impact on Sri Aurobindo for him to think of writing an epic like *Savitri* which brings into its focus so much of human knowledge. No dull moments here as stories and lecturing go hand in hand together. Flattery is held up as the greatest danger one encounters, be he an ordinary fellow or Caesar himself. The priest of Venus is no mean orator indeed.

Book 8 brings us to the opening strands where we saw a lover in the confessional for having committed various amatory exploits. Adam and Eve had been created by God and had been blissfully happy. Then the serpent entered the Garden of Eden to tempt the couple. Eve ate the apple, Adam followed and how variously has this world done its best to destroy that pure emotion called love! Marriage taboos had to be evolved to prevent incest! One thing led to another. Gower gaily proceeds to give examples of lechery. One can understand his bringing in all this, for how else can he make a box-office hit with his *Confessio Amantis*? Caligula, the Daughters of Lot and a very long narrative (2000 lines!) of the life of Apollonius of Tyre. Enough, enough! How to gain true love? The poet addresses his question to Venus through Gaius. And miraculously, Venus appears beside him. Her long lecture to Gower can be summarised easily: There is no fool like an old fool!

You would be well advised, my son,
 To learn, not from this truth to run:
 Some things are best left in the past;
 What once was green grass does not last,
 But into sun-dried hay will turn.
 For you my counsel is to learn
 That you're too old for love to reach.

Gower the poet is confounded by a fantasy of famous lovers like Troilus and Cressida, Tristan and Isolde, Lancelot and Guinevere. Venus poses a challenging question to the poet caught in these million memories. "What is love?" The poet has no answer. But he is cured of infatuation which had led him helplessly over the hills and dales of worldly life.

John Gower was essentially a moralist, a self-appointed teacher of ethics to a people that would rather salute the seat of Bacchus. But he had chosen to write of love to satisfy contemporary taste. Probably this weakened the tautness of his narrative. The problem has been well summarised by Leguios and Cazamian who compare him to his great contemporary:

Gower, learned, industrious, and copious, is the typical average poet of his century. His writings are what Chaucer's might have been without Chaucer's genius.¹¹

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

11. *A History of English Literature*, p. 128.

If all is in truth Sachchidananda, death, suffering, evil, limitation can only be the creations, positive in practical effect, negative in essence, of a distorting consciousness which has fallen from the total and unifying knowledge of itself into some error of division and partial experience. This is the fall of man typified in the poetic parable of the Hebrew Genesis. That fall is his deviation from the full and pure acceptance of God and himself, or rather of God in himself, into a dividing consciousness which brings with it all the train of the dualities, life and death, good and evil, joy and pain, completeness and want, the fruit of a divided being. This is the fruit which Adam and Eve, Purusha and Prakriti, the soul tempted by Nature, have eaten.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 56)



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