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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

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

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

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Vol. LXVII

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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A GOD'S LABOUR

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air
Between the gold and the blue
And wrapped them softly and left them there,
My jewelled dreams of you.

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
Marrying the soil to the sky
And sow in this dancing planet midge
The moods of infinity.

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,
Too frail their ethereal stuff;
Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
The roots were not deep enough.

He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.

Coercing my godhead I have come down
Here on the sordid earth,
Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and birth.

I have been digging deep and long
Mid a horror of filth and mire
A bed for the golden river's song,
A home for the deathless fire.

I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night
To bring the fire to man;
But the hate of hell and human spite
Are my meed since the world began.

For man's mind is the dupe of his animal self;
Hoping its lusts to win,
He harbours within him a grisly Elf
Enamoured of sorrow and sin.

The grey Elf shudders from heaven's flame
 And from all things glad and pure;
 Only by pleasure and passion and pain
 His drama can endure.

All around is darkness and strife;
 For the lamps that men call suns
 Are but halfway gleams on this stumbling life
 Cast by the Undying Ones.

Man lights his little torches of hope
 That lead to a failing edge;
 A fragment of Truth is his widest scope,
 An inn his pilgrimage.

The Truth of truths men fear and deny,
 The Light of lights they refuse;
 To ignorant gods they lift their cry
 Or a demon altar choose.

All that was found must again be sought,
 Each enemy slain revives,
 Each battle for ever is fought and refought
 Through vistas of fruitless lives.

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
 And the Titan kings assail,
 But I dare not¹ rest till my task is done
 And wrought the eternal will.

How they mock and sneer, both devils and men!
 "Thy hope is Chimera's head
 Painting the sky with its fiery stain;
 Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead.

"Who art thou that babblest of heavenly ease
 And joy and golden room
 To us who are waifs on inconscient seas
 And bound to life's iron doom?

1. cannot — *SABCL*.

“This earth is ours, a field of Night
 For our petty flickering fires.
 How shall it brook the sacred Light
 Or suffer a god's desires?”

“Come, let us slay him and end his course!
 Then shall our hearts have release
 From the burden and call of his glory and force
 And the curb of his wide white peace.”

But the god is there in my mortal breast
 Who wrestles with error and fate
 And tramples a road through mire and waste
 For the nameless Immaculate.

A voice cried, “Go where none have gone!
 Dig deeper, deeper yet
 Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
 And knock at the keyless gate.”

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
 At the very root of things
 Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
 On the Dragon's outspread wings.

I left the surface gauds² of mind
 And life's unsatisfied seas
 And plunged through the body's alleys blind
 To the nether mysteries.

I have delved through the dumb Earth's dreadful heart
 And heard her black mass' bell.
 I have seen the source whence her agonies part
 And the inner reason of hell.

Above me the dragon murmurs moan
 And the goblin voices flit;
 I have pierced the Void where Thought was born,
 I have walked in the bottomless pit.

On a desperate stair my feet have trod
 Armoured with boundless peace,
 Bringing the fires of the splendour of God
 Into the human abyss.

He who I am was with me still;
 All veils are breaking now.
 I have heard His voice and borne His will
 On my vast untroubled brow.

The gulf twixt the depths and the heights is bridged
 And the golden waters pour
 Down the sapphire mountain rainbow-ridged
 And glimmer from shore to shore.

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
 And the undying suns here burn;
 Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth
 The incarnate spirits yearn

Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss:
 Down a gold-red stairway³ wend
 The radiant children of Paradise
 Clarioning darkness'⁴ end.

A little more and the new life's doors
 Shall be carved in silver light
 With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
 In a great world bare and bright.

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,
 For in a raiment of gold and blue
 There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
 The living truth of you.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 534-38)

[Ed. note in *CWSA*: 1935-36. A late draft of this poem is dated as follows: "31.7.35 / Last 4 stanzas 1.1.36". There are four handwritten and two typed manuscripts.]

3. stair-way — *SABCL*.

4. darkness's — *SABCL*.

SOME LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

Enclosed is a long, perhaps too long controversy.¹ But the subject demands it. You may read it at one, two or three stretches. Please write an exhaustive reply, but in ink.

Nirod.

On the back the rational and logical result of your arguments. I shall write certain irrational answers on your MS — in ink.

You have won all along the line. Who could resist such a lava-torrent of logic? slightly mixed but still! You have convinced me (1st) that there never was nor could be an Avatar, (2) that all the so-called Avatars were chimerical fools and failures, (3) that there is no Divinity or divine element in man, (4) that I have never had any true difficulties or struggles, and that if I had any, it was all my fun (as K. S. said of my new metres that they were only Mr. Ghose's fun); (5) that if ever there was or will be a real Avatar, I am not he — but that I knew before, (6) that all I have done or the Mother has done is a mere sham — sufferings, struggles, conquests, defeats, the Way found, the Way followed, the call to others to follow, everything — it was all make-believe since I was the Divine and nothing could touch me and none follow me. That is truly a discovery, a downright knock-out which leaves me convinced, convicted, amazed, gasping. I won't go on, there is no space; but there are a score of other luminous convictions that your logic has forced on me. But what to do next? You have put me in a terrible fix and I see no way out of it. For if the Way, the Yoga is merely sham, fun and chimera — then?

[Here begins my typed letter. Sri Aurobindo's answer written in hand on the same sheets, was never sent. I first read it after it was discovered among some old papers of Sri Aurobindo in 1981.]

I have read your Essays on the Gita, Synthesis of Yoga, letter on Rama, and, though I am wiser, my original and fundamental difficulty remains as unsolved as ever. What is so simple to you, as everything is, appears mighty complex and abstruse to my dense intellect. So no alternative but to submit to a fresh beating.

What your view comes to, put in a syllogism, is this: Since I have done it and I am an Avatar, so every other blessed creature can do it.

1. A typed letter of five pages taking up the subject of Avatarhood.

This is idiotic. I have said “Follow my path, the way I have discovered for you through my own efforts and example. Transform your nature from the animal to the spiritual, grow into a higher divine consciousness. All this you can do by your own aspiration aided by the force of the Divine Shakti.” That, if you please, is not the utterance of a madman or an imbecile. I have said, “I have opened the Way; now you with the Divine help can follow it.” I have not said “Find the way for yourself as I did.”

*In the Essays on the Gita you say man “is ignorant because there is upon the eyes of his soul and all its organs the seal of . . . Nature, Prakriti, Maya . . . she has minted him like a coin out of the precious metal of the divine substance, but overlaid with a strong coating of the alloy of her phenomenal qualities, stamped with her own stamp and mark of animal humanity, and although the secret sign of the Godhead is there, it is at first indistinguishable.”*²

Does it follow that the coating cannot be dissolved nor the mark effaced? Then stamp the stamp of the chimera on all efforts at spirituality and catalogue as asses and fools all who have attempted to rise beyond the human animal — all who have tried to follow the path of the Christ, the Buddha; stigmatise as folly Vedanta, Tantra, Yoga, the way of the Jinās, Christ himself and Buddha, Pythagoras, Plato, and any other pathfinder and seeker.

*On the other hand you write that in “the Avatar, the divinely-born Man, the real substance shines through the coating; the mark of the seal is there only for form, the vision is that of the secret Godhead, the power of the life is that of the secret Godhead, and it breaks through the seals of the assumed human nature.”*³

Does it follow that the breaking through had not to be done or was a mere trifling impediment? The power of the form can be exceedingly great as every thinker and observer of life can tell you.

*After this you say that the Avatar’s descent is “precisely to show that the human birth with all its limitations can be made such a means and instrument of the divine birth and divine works . . . Even human sorrow and physical suffering he must assume and use so as to show . . . how that suffering may be a means of redemption.”*⁴ Well, Sir, it will have no go with me, my heart won’t leap up at such a divine possibility, such a dream of Paradise!

2. Centenary Edition, Vol. 13, p. 149.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

Your heart not leaping up does not make my statement a falsehood, a non-sequitur or a chimera.

My fellow-brothers may venture to reach there through such a thin hanging bridge, but if they do, I am afraid it will be into a fool's Paradise.

The fool being myself, eh? For it is my Paradise and it is I who call them to it.

The difficulties you face, the dangers you overcome, the struggles you embrace would seem to be mere shams. [Sri Aurobindo underlined "mere shams".]

Truly then what a humbug and charlatan I have been, making much of sham struggles and dangers — or, in the alternative, since I took them for realities, what a self-blinded imbecile!

Mother knew she was an Avatar at a very early age.

At what age? But I shall say nothing about the Mother — I cannot bring her into such arguments, only myself.

She was thus able to follow the path of travails through volcanoes and earthquakes. But if she says to me, "You can also do it," I will cry out, "Forbear, Mother, forbear."

Nobody asks you to go through volcanoes and earthquakes or to proceed unhelped. You are simply asked to follow the Leader and Guide with the Divine help and with courage, in the face of whatever difficulties come.

If I knew I was an Avatar (pardon my bold hypothesis) do you think I would cry or wail for fear of any amount of crashes and collisions or would it matter if I began with a nature with not a grain of spirituality in me? I would jump from peak to peak in somersaults, go down the abysses, rise up the steeps without fear of mortal consequences since I would know that I was the Divine.

Would you? I wish you had been in my place then! You would have been a hundred times more fit than myself, if you could really have done that. And how easily things would have been done! while I did them and am still doing them with enormous difficulty because I lead and have to make the path so that others may follow with less difficulty.

There could be no death or failure for me.

The Divine in the body is not subject to death or failure? Yet all those claimed to be Avatars have died — some by violence, some by cancer, some of indigestion etc. etc. You yourself say that they were all failures. How do you reconcile these self-contradictory arguments?

You say, “A physical and mental body is prepared fit for the divine incarnation by a pure or great heredity and the descending Godhead takes possession of it.”⁵

Like my heredity? It was “pure”? But of course I am not a divine incarnation. Only why put all that upon one whom it does not fit?

To his beloved children created in his own image the Divine says with gusto, “I send you through this hell of a cycle of rebirths. Don’t lose heart, poor boys, if you groan under the weight of your sins and those of your ancestors to boot. I will come down and take hold of a pure heredity with no coating around me and say unto you — come and follow my example.”

Who gave this message? It is your own invention. The Divine does not come down in that way. It is a silly imagination of yours that you are trying to foist on the truth of things. The Divine also comes down into the cycle of rebirths, makes the great holocaust, endures shame and obloquy, torture and crucifixion, the burden of human nature, sex and passion and sorrow and suffering, manifests many births before he reveals the Avatar. And when he does reveal it? Well, read the lives of the Avatars and try to understand and see.

Nobody ever said there was no coating — that is your invention.

Not a very inspiring message, Sir!

No, of course not — but it is yours, not any Avatar’s.

Jatakas tell us that in every life small or great, Buddha’s frontal consciousness was always above the level of others.

Jatakas are legends.

Ramakrishna and Chaitanya began yoga in their cradle, it seems.

Did they? I know nothing about it; but if they told you that! Anyhow one died by drowning and the other of a cancer.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

I don't know if Avatars ever play the part of the rogue or the eternal sinner. [Sri Aurobindo underlined "rogue or the eternal sinner".]

Krishna was a rogue and a sinner even in his Avatar life, if tales are true! Don't you think so?

Now about your absence of urge towards spirituality. Even though that sounds like a story, pray tell us how you could free your mind from all thoughts in 7 days or be established in Brahmic consciousness in a few days.

3 if you please. You are terribly inaccurate in your statements. It was simply through the Divine Grace, because it had been done by thousands before me throughout the centuries and millenniums, and the Divine did not want me to waste time over that; other things in the Yoga were not so damned easy!

And even apart from spirituality, what of your waiting for the gallows for your country's sake, with perfect equanimity? [Sri Aurobindo underlined "perfect equanimity".]

Who told you that? I was perfectly sure of release. But even so plenty of ordinary men did it before me.

What of your profoundly bold assertion that you would free the country by a Force which was under your feet?

Never said that, surely. Under my feet?

What of your brilliant career?

My career was much less brilliant than many others'. They ought to have progressed then farther in Yoga than myself, e.g. Mussolini, Lenin, Tilak, Brajendranath Seal, the admirable Crichton, Gandhi, Tagore, Roosevelt, Lloyd George etc. etc. All Avatars or all full of the essential principle!

If one has the essential principle, what does it matter if one has no urge towards spirituality? The inner consciousness is there.

All that does not apply to me alone. There are hundreds of others. The inner consciousness is not so rare a phenomenon as all that.

There are some people, I hear, who are to all external appearance debauchees or moral insolvents but whose psychic is much developed or “can be touched”.

That gives away the whole case. For mark that I have never asked the whole human race to follow me to the supramental — that is your invention, not mine.

Still you go on saying that what you have done is possible for me and not for Arjunas only to whom alone Krishna seems to have addressed the Gita. [Sri Aurobindo underlined “Arjunas only”].

What a waste of words and energy! Yet Krishna said “even Chandalas can follow my way.”

I prophesy that your message will reverberate in the rarefied atmosphere evoking a loud rebellious echo from human hearts.

I admit that you have successfully proved that I am an imbecile.

But if you say, “I come to raise you bodily by my divine omnipotence, not by my example,” I am all for it. If you insist that I follow your example, it would be as well to insist on my leaving you bag and baggage at once.

All this is a purely personal argument concerning yourself. Up to now you were making general assertions — so was I. I was concerned with the possibility of people following the Path I had opened, as Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Chaitanya etc. opened theirs. You were declaring that no human being could follow and that my life was perfectly useless as an example — like the lives of the Avatars. Path, life, example all useless — even Power useless because all have been failures. These are general questions. Whether X or Y is able or willing to follow the path or depends on divine Omnipotence only is a personal question. Even if X or Y does so, he has no right to pass a general decree of impossibility against others.⁶

There are some who claim that they are here and remain here by their soul’s call. But I am not one of those fortunate ones. Where they hear the soul’s call, I hear the calls of a thousand devils and if it were not for your love — well, no, — for your Power (which I firmly believe in), I would end up myself by being one of those devils. I hope you will believe that this is not a conceited statement.

It is very conceited. To be a devil needs a considerable personal capacity or else a great openness to the Beyond. If you had said, I can only be an ordinary human being, that might be modest.

6. Note that here Sri Aurobindo wrote X and Y in the MS; they are not editorial substitutions.

We don't mean to give you a compliment when we say these things.

Of course not. It is the reverse of complimentary, since you prove me to be an ignorant and mistaken fellow of an Avatar, who merrily wastes his time doing things which are of no earthly use to any human being — except perhaps Arjuna who is not here.

No, we say that the Sun is a thing apart, not to be measured by any human standards.

The Sun's rays are of use to somebody — you say all my acts and life and laborious opening of the way I thought I had made for spiritual realisation, are of no use to anybody — since nobody is strong enough to follow the path, only the Avatar can do it. Poor lonely ineffective fellow of an Avatar!

We respect him, adore him, lay ourselves bare to his light, but we do not follow him.

Who is this we? Editorial “we”?

Let me point out one or two facts in a perfectly serious spirit.

(1) It has always been supposed by spiritual people that divine perfection, similitude to the Divine, *sadrishya*, *sadharmya* is part of the Mukti. Christ said “Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect” — the very Divine himself, mind you, not a mere Avatar or luminous projection from him. His followers strive to be Christlike. Thomas à Kempis, meditating and striving, wrote a book on the Imitation of Christ. Francis of Assisi and many others arrived at Christlikeness. [Krishna in] the Gita insists on *sadharmya*, gives himself as an example, and tells Arjuna that many before him from ancient times reached to it. Buddha in teaching *karuna*, the eightfold path, the rejection of *sanskaras*, gave it as an ideal to all true followers of his path, thus placing before them not only his own path but his own example. All this is trash and humbug? Christ and Buddha were fools? Myself even a bigger fool? It is not a question of greatness — it is a question of acquiring a certain consciousness to which the way is laid open. It is not a question of acquiring cosmic omniscience and omnipotence, but of reaching the essential divine consciousness with all its *spiritual* consequences, peace, light, equality, strength, Ananda etc. etc. If you say that that cannot be done, you deny all possibility of spiritual perfection, transformation or any true Yoga. All that anyone can do is to lie helpless and wait for the divine Omnipotence to do something or other. The whole spiritual past of man becomes a fantastic insanity, with the Avatars as the chief lunatics. That is the materialist point of view; but I am unable to envisage it as a basis for *sadhana*. That example is not all, is true; I have not said it is; there is Influence, there is spiritual

help — but the truth of the Way and the Example cannot be belittled in this scornful fashion.

(2) You make nothing of the Divine in man. If there is no divinity in man, then there is no possibility of Avatarhood; also spirituality can just as well pass away into silence — it has no foundation here. If the divinity is there in man, it can break through its coatings. You admit that it can do it in debauchees and moral insolvents — that it can manifest in ignorant and uncultured men and women is a proved fact; the Gita itself declares that all *kinds* of men and women can follow its path. Whether X or Y⁷ does or does not [do] so does not depend then on these things and it is no use trying to bar the path to people because of either their ignorance or their immorality. To do so is to betray a bottomless ignorance of spiritual things. As to the possibility of awakening the psychic being, on what intellectual grounds or by what fixed ethical or rational rules are you going to fix that and declare “No entry here for you”? You cannot generalise in the way you try to do by an intellectual reasoning. The mystery of the Spirit is too great for such a puny endeavour.

March 6, 1935

(Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 1, pp. 165-74)

*

I thought whatever is necessary will grow of itself, either by growth of consciousness or by something else. Must one train oneself for things one after another? Why should they not open up like your painting vision?

It can or it may not. Why did not everything open up in me like the painting vision and some other things? All did not. As I told you, I had to plod in many things. Otherwise the affair would not have taken so many years (30).

(Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 204)

*

. . . Above all, you have the direct Intuition to fall upon.

I haven't — not just now at any rate. I am too busy handling the confounded difficulties of Matter. The material is subconscious and I would have to be subconscious myself to get its true intuition. I prefer to wait for the supramental.

April 4, 1935

(Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 205)

*

7. Here also Sri Aurobindo wrote X and Y in the MS.

Come down, Sir, — for heaven's sake give us something and make life more substantial and concrete. I am really beginning to doubt if things like divine Love, Knowledge, etc. can be brought down in me!

In the old days long before you came plenty of things were brought down — including the love. Hardly one could bear it and even then only in a small measure. Is it any better now, I wonder? it does not look like it. That is why I want the supermind first, — and especially the peace, the balance in an intensity unshakable. There are several who have been trying to push on with the intensities, but — . Well, let us hope for the best. For God's sake, peace, balance, an unshakable supramental poise and sanity first. Ecstasies and intensities of other kinds can come afterwards.

April 8, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 209)

*

The Divine writing, not the Divine Love, has made me a little peaceful. But the way you are hammering the "Supramental" on us in everything, in every problem, in every difficulty, as the solution to all riddles, panacea to all ills, one almost thinks that its descent will make all of us "big people" overnight . . . Without it, there is absolutely no chance of any achievement, it seems!

My insistence on the supramental is of course apo-diaskeptic. Don't search for the word in the dictionary. I am simply imitating the doctors who when they are in a hole protect themselves with impossible Greek. Peace, supramental if possible, but peace anyhow — a peace which will become supramental if it has a chance. The atmosphere is most confoundedly disturbed, that is why I am ingeminating "peace, peace, peace!" like a summer dove or an intellectual under the rule of Hitler. Of course, I am not asking you to become supramental offhand. That is my business, and I will do it if you fellows give me a chance, which you are not doing just now (you is not personal, but collective and indefinite) and will do less if you go blumming into buzzific intensities. (Please *don't* consult the dictionary, but look into the writings of Joyce and others).

April 9, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 210)

*

It is you who will bring down the Supramental, certainly. But my question was whether it will come anyhow, in spite of all our resistance.

I presume it will come anyhow, but it is badly delayed because, if I am all the time occupied with dramas, hysterics, tragic-comic correspondence (quarrels, chronicles, lamentations,) how can I have time for this — the only real work, the one thing needful? It is not one or two, but twenty dramas that are going on.

April 11, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 212)

*

I told him that it was you who wanted the Supermind for the earth, not we.

I don't see what is wrong in my aspiring for the Supermind in spite of knowing all my weaknesses. The Divine Grace is there on which we rely at every moment, and if the central sincerity is there, there is nothing wrong, I think, in entertaining such an aspiration.

It is true that I want the supramental not for myself but for the earth and souls born on the earth, and certainly therefore I cannot object if anybody wants the supramental. But these are the conditions. He must want the Divine Will first and the soul's surrender and the spiritual realisation (through works, bhakti, knowledge, self-perfection) on the way. So there everybody is right.

The central sincerity is the first thing and sufficient for an aspiration to be entertained, — a total sincerity is needed for the aspiration to be fulfilled. Amen!

April 15, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 216)

*

It seems something has happened today. You have achieved some great victory: the Mother had, at the evening meditation, an appearance sparkling like gold. On other days she looked as if she were tired of the job, and would like to give it up saying, "Oh, you sadhaks, you are all hopeless!" . . .

It would be very natural if Mother felt like that! Never has there been such an uprush of mud and brimstone as during the past few months — However the Caravan goes on and today there was some promise of better things.

April 19, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 220)

*

In one letter you wrote that you were able to push on; in another that the hostile forces were out of date. That was a year ago. When we read this we thought that it would be merry Christmas henceforth. But now I again feel a bit despondent because you speak of “the confounded atmosphere”, “the uprush of mud” and the attacks.

When I said “out of date”, I did not mean that they are not going on, but they ought not to be going on — they were only kept up by the sadhaks opening themselves to them and so retaining them in the atmosphere. I thought that was clear from what I said — but the sadhaks seem always to put a comfortable interpretation even on uncomfortable statements.

April 20, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 221)

*

It seems another victory has been won by you? Some people saw a red-crimson light around the Mother a few days back. What does it signify?

??? Great Heavens? which? who? But there is nothing new in that. It was coming down before Nov. 34, but afterwards all the damned mud arose and it stopped. But there are red crimson lights. One is supramental Divine Love. The other is the supramental physical Force.

May 14, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 242)

*

Please tell us something so that we may prepare ourselves in time to bear the pressure of the descent.

No pressure! I am simply trying to get out of the mud — in other words to see if the damned subconscious can be persuaded to subside into something less dangerous, less complexful and more manageable.

May 27, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 246)

*

Can you not tell us a few words on this subconscious? . . .

Of course the subconscious is universal as well as individual like all the other main parts of the Nature. But there are different parts or planes of the subconscious. All upon earth is based on the Inconscient as it is called though it is not really inconscient at all, but rather a complete subconscience in which there is everything but nothing formulated or expressed. The subconscious of which I speak lies in between the Inconscient and conscious mind, life and body. It contains reactions to life which struggle out as a slowly evolving and self-formulating consciousness, but it contains them not as ideas or perceptions or conscious reactions but as the blind substance of these things. Also all that is consciously experienced sinks down into the subconscious not as experience but as obscure but obstinate impressions of experience and can come up at any time as dreams, as mechanical repetitions of past thought, feeling, action, etc., as “complexes” exploding into action and event, etc., etc. The subconscious is the main cause why all things repeat themselves and nothing ever gets changed except in appearances. It is the cause why, people say, character cannot be changed, also of the constant return of things one hoped to have got rid of. All seeds are there and all sanskaras of the mind and vital and body, — it is the main support of death and disease and the last fortress (seemingly impregnable) of the Ignorance. All that is suppressed without being wholly got rid of sinks down there and remains in seed ready to surge up or sprout up at any moment.

May 28, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 247-48)

*

I noticed recently a very peculiar movement in me. I could no longer think of you — an absolute indifference, apathy was there. It seemed as if you were before me yet not there.

It looks like the subconscious — perhaps due to my writing about it? But also it may be that the subconscious has become my King Charles’s head and I see it everywhere.

What are these things cropping up? How will they end?

Let us hope, in the illumination of the subconscious and a glorious transformation!

June 4, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 254)

*

You have often spoken of the Man of Sorrows in connection with me. But I was a cheerful fellow at school and college. So I am afraid he is a contribution, partly at least, of your Yoga.

Not of my Yoga, but of the blasted atmosphere that has been created here by the theory that revolt, doubt and resultant sorrow and struggle and all that rot are the best way to progress. The Asram has never been able to get out of it, but only some people have escaped. The others have opened themselves to the confounded Man of Sorrows and got the natural consequence. But why the devil did you do it? The Man of Sorrows is a fellow who is always making a row in himself and covering himself with sevenfold overcoats of tragedy and gloom and he wouldn't feel his existence justified if he couldn't be colossally miserable — when he gets on people's backs he puts the same thing on them. Yoga on the other hand tells you even if you have all sorts of unpleasantnesses to live in the inner sunlight, your own or God's. At least most Yogas do except the Vaishnava — but the Yoga here is not a Vaishnava Yoga.

June 19, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 263-64)

*

They say that you are now handling the lower vital and so the general trouble. True?

Subconscious vital physical — the lower vital is irrational, but not so utterly “without reasons” as that.

July 8, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 271)

*

Some time back you wrote to me: “Never has there been such an uprush of mud and brimstone as during the past few months. However the Caravan goes on and today there was some promise of better things.” What about the uprush of mud? Has it settled down, and are people now floating in the flood of the Supramental?

It is still there, but personally I have become superior to it and am travelling forward like a flash of lightning, that is to say zigzag but fairly fast. Now I have got the hang of the whole hanged thing — like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his case to anybody but myself) and

am working it out figure by figure.

As for people, no! they are not floating in the supramental — some are floating in the higher mind, others rushing up into it and flopping down into the subconscious alternately, are swinging from heaven into hell and back into heaven, again back into hell ad infinitum, some are sticking fast contentedly or discontentedly in the mud, some are sitting in the mud and dreaming dreams and seeing visions, some have their legs in the mud and head in the heavens etc., etc., an infinity of combinations, while many are simply nowhere. But console yourself — these things, it seems, are inevitable in the process of great transformations.

August 16, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 287-88)

*

You say, "I have become superior to it and am travelling forward fast," but you have been always superior and been always travelling fast all your life. How is it going to affect us? [Sri Aurobindo underlined "always superior and been always travelling fast".]

Rubbish!

If my being able to solve the problem of the subconscious in the sadhana is of no importance, then of course it won't affect anybody. Otherwise it may.

From the condition of the people you describe, there isn't much hope left, nor does it show that your travelling fast has speeded them up.

That is of no importance at present. To get the closed doors open is just now the thing to be done and I am doing it. Speeding people through them can come in its own time when the doors and the people are ready.

What is this mathematical formula that you have all of a sudden found out? Let us have it in a tangible form, if possible . . .

I told you it was unintelligible to anybody but myself, so how the deuce do you expect me to give it to you in a tangible form?

August 17, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 288-89)

*

*The Darshan atmosphere and its influence seem to be waning away so soon!
Old friends or foes are stepping in!*

There is always an adverse movement after the darshan, the *revanche* of the lower forces. I had a stoppage myself, but I am off again riding on the back of my Einsteinian formula.

August 23, 1935

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 291)

* * *

Do tell me please if you are getting anything solid from this nebulous supramental. X tells me you have scaled and winged like lightning on its pinions. Have you really? Was it something like motion on a sort of marvellous Calm which seems like motion through some supramental jugglery of consciousness? Some enlightenment on this bewildering problem would be highly edifying even to the mentals and humans, you may be sure. Also, Y has to be gagged somehow. He talks of nothing but the supramental. And what am I to answer?

You have created your own “bewildering problem” by supplying your own data! There is nothing nebulous about the supramental, its action depends on the utmost precision possible. As for solidity, since I have got many solid things from much lower forces, I do not see why the highest ones should only give nebulosities. But that seems the human mind’s position, only what is earthy is solid, what is high is misty and unreal — the worm is a reality, but the eagle is a vapour!

However, I have not told X that I am scaling and winging — on the contrary I am dealing with very hard practical facts. I only told him I had got the formula of solution for the difficulty that had been holding me up since last November and I am working it out.

To return to the supramental — the supramental is simply the direct self-existent Truth-Consciousness and the direct self-effective Truth-Power. There can therefore be no question of jugglery about it. What is not true is not supramental. As for calm and silence, there is no need of the supramental to get that. One can get it even on the level of Higher Mind which is the next above the human intelligence. I got these things in 1908, twenty-seven years ago and I can assure you they were solid enough and marvellous enough without any need of supramentality to make it more so! Again, a calm that “seems like motion” is a phenomenon of which I know nothing. A calm or silence which can support or produce action — that I know and that is what I have had — the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for four months and wrote 6 1/2 volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc. etc. I have written since. If you say that

writing is not an action or motion but only something that seems like it, a jugglery of the consciousness, — well, still out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity and have also taken my share in keeping up an Ashram which has at least an appearance to the physical senses of being solid and material! If you deny that these things are material or solid (which of course metaphysically you can), then you land yourself plump into Shankara's illusionism, and there I will leave you.

You will say however that it is not the Supramental but at most the Overmind that helped me to these non-nebulous motions. But the Supermind is by definition a greater dynamic activity than mind or Overmind. I have said that what is not true is not supramental; I will add that what is ineffective is not supramental. And finally I will conclude by saying that I have not told *X* that I have taken possession of the supramental — I only admit to be very near to it or at least to its tail. But "very near" is — well, after all a relative phrase like all human phrases.

I don't know how you are to "gag" *Y*. You might perhaps try my two formulas, but it is doubtful. Or perhaps you might tell him that the supramental is silence — only, it would be untrue! So I leave you in your fix — there is no other go. At least until I have firm physical hold of the tail of the supramental and can come and tell the mentals and humans — no doubt in language which will be unintelligible to them, for they have totally misunderstood even the little I have already written about it.

23 August 1935

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 345-47)

*

I have been pondering over your letter [see preceding letter]. I trust I have grown wiser, not less so as a result of the irony in your letter in regard to us mental beings. But you have expressed yourself, willy-nilly, in the language which the mental has invented after all. So you are in no less of a fix than I.

Why should I be in a fix for that? I use the language of the mind because there is no other which human beings can understand, — even though most of them understand it badly. If I were to use a supramental language like Joyce, you would not even have the illusion of understanding it; so, not being an Irishman, I don't make the attempt. But of course anyone who wants to change earth-nature must first accept it in order to change it. To quote from an unpublished poem of my own:

He who would bring the heavens here
 Must descend himself into clay
 And the burden of earthly nature bear
 And tread the dolorous way.

23 August 1935

(*Ibid.*, p. 284)

* * *

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air
 Between the gold and the blue
 And wrapped them softly and left them there,
 My jewelled dreams of you.

The silver air is the spiritual realm. The gold is the supramental and the blue is the mind.

The “dreams” means all the unrealised expectations that have to be realised in future — these “dreams” are kept softly and lovingly protected for the possibility of their realisation.

26 July 1969

*

Sweet Mother,

(1) *It is said that “A God’s Labour” describes Sri Aurobindo’s own experiences on earth. Is that true?*

(2) *You have explained that “the ‘dreams’ means all the unrealised expectations that have to be realised in future”. In the last line of the stanza Sri Aurobindo says “My jewelled dreams of you”. For whom does the “you” stand?*

It is better to keep what Sri Aurobindo wanted us to understand: God speaking to his creation, the earth.

27 July 1969

(*More Answers from the Mother*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 17, pp. 357-58)

* * *

. . . Already for me, it was hard to touch the bottom of the Inconscient, but for others it would take an eternity.

It is something similar to what Sri Aurobindo has written in ‘A God’s Labour’.

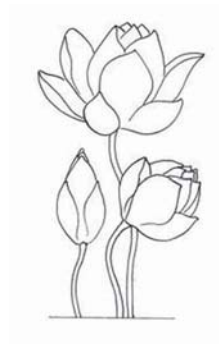
(From the Mother’s conversation of 11 November 1958 on the New Year’s message for the next year)

* * *

It is only divine love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine. The Gallio-like “Je m’en fiche”-ism (I do not care) would not carry me one step; it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping and unlamenting towards the goal.

April 1934

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 46)



**‘GRANT THAT I MAY BE NOTHING
BUT THY DIVINE LOVE . . .’**

May 9, 1914

JUST at the moment when I was feeling the imperious need of resuming these notes regularly so as to come out of this overwhelming mental inertia, my physical organism suffered a defeat such as it had not known for several years and during a few days all the forces of my body failed me; I saw in this a sign that I had made a mistake, that my spiritual energy had weakened, my vision of the omnipotent Oneness had been clouded, that some wrong suggestion had managed to disturb me in some way, and I bowed down before Thee, O Lord, my sweet Master, with humility, conscious that I was not yet ready for a perfect identification with Thee. Something in this aggregate which constitutes the instrument I can put at Thy service is still obscure and obtuse; something does not respond as it should to Thy forces, deforms and darkens their manifestation. . . .

A great problem came up before me and illness covered it with its veil and prevented me from solving it. Now that I am living once more in the feeling of Thy Oneness, the problem no longer seems to have any sense and I do not understand it very well any more.

It seems to me I have left something far behind me, it seems to me that I am slowly awakening to a new life. I would it were not an illusion and this deep and smiling peace had returned forever.

O my divine Master, my love aspires to Thee more intensely than ever; let me be Thy living Love in the world and nothing but that! May all egoism, all limitation, all darkness disappear; may my consciousness be identified with Thine so that Thou alone mayst be the will acting through this fragile and transient instrument.

O my sweet Master, how ardently my love aspires to Thee. . . .

Grant that I may be nothing but Thy Divine Love and that in every being this Love may awake, powerful and victorious.

Let me be a vast mantle of love enveloping all the earth, entering all hearts, murmuring in every ear Thy divine message of hope and peace.

O my divine Master, how ardently I aspire for Thee! Break these chains of darkness and error; dispel this ignorance, liberate, liberate me, make me see Thy light. . . .

Break, break these chains. . . . I want to understand and I want to be. That is to say, this “I” must be Thy “I” and there must be only one single “I” in the world.

O Lord, grant my prayer, my supplication rises ardently to Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 136-37)

K. D. SETHNA AND P. BRUNTON — CORRESPONDENCE & ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

(A Compilation)

(Continued from the issue of November 2014)

[The essay mentioned in Brunton's letter dated 12 June 1945, reproduced from *The Thinking Corner: Causeries on Life and Literature*, 1996, pp. 1-7. — Ed.]

THE FETISH OF THEORY

I am sometimes asked what my “theory” is about the writing of a poem. The question finds me at a loss how properly to understand it. For, about the writing of a poem I have no theory if by that term is meant any notion that a poem should be in a certain style and make use of a particular type of words and concern itself with a limited field of themes. I know a poem to be just this: intensity of vision, intensity of word, intensity of rhythm plus the act of being a harmonious whole. The language may be common or kingly, the style simple or complex, the thought plain or picturesque, the emotion day-to-day or once-in-a-blue-moon. It does not matter what theme is chosen, what level of consciousness explored, what personal bent followed in manner of expression. No doubt, a certain type of poem may appeal to me more — but not for purely poetic reasons: the substance may be more in tune with my mood of the moment, my general character or my outlook on life. As art, all types are for me enjoyable and legitimate so long as those three intensities fuse and work out a harmonious whole. I should be just as hard put to it to limit my aesthetic enjoyment of the “fairness” of the fair sex. How can I bind myself, say, to admire merely this or that shape of the feminine nose and feel that other shapes cannot be formed by an equally poetic line of bone and flesh? I can stir to an aquiline swoop upon my attention as well as to a straight thrust at my heart or a breath-taking beauty that goes to my head with a *retroussé* leap!

Nor have I any theory to the effect that true poetry is what is written effortlessly and without toiling and moiling. Poetry is often supposed to be born perfect at one stroke, a flawless uninterrupted outburst. The result of striving and straining is declared to be no poetry. But what does Dante say about his *Divina Commedia*? “*Si che m’ha fatto per piu anni macro*” — which means that his poem made him “lean through many a year.” If even a master-singer found that climbing Parnassian heights left hollows in his cheeks, what about less gifted folk? And the principal point is not how much you labour but what you produce thereby.

Aureoled flowers grow on the peaks of paradise: it is these that poets pluck, flowers that seem shining perfections, born without a moment's pain; but do you think they can be reached without the prodigious effort necessary to scale those peaks? To a few lucky ones the amaranthine blooms drop of themselves: the poet has only to open his palms and catch the glimmering charity. Others are not so blessed; but it is the same miracles they manifest, and these miraculous rhythms of beauty have to be considered, not the easy or arduous means employed to achieve them. Besides, some poets — especially those who receive their raptures easily — are content if their song-flowers come from heaven and do not worry whether they bring the full freshness and integrity of the altitudes. Though made of light, the petals in the act of being brought down to earth may bear stains and shadows left by the contact of mortal regions. No cheap sweat of the brain can wash them clean. The soul must travail and shed tears in order to restore that pristine perfection; and not many poets are willing to pass through this experience. Hence so very few create each time a living form of the highest radiance — a moulded flame without one flaw. Even Homer has his proverbial “nods”, Shakespeare the “unblotted” roughnesses bewailed by Ben Jonson, and Milton the wooden sublimities he puts into the mouth of his Jehovah — yes, even Milton the arch-artist, for unfortunately his sense of art often proved stronger than his sense of inspiration and he was satisfied if his blank verse rolled majestic word and rhythm without all of it having the same fire of life. This fire, this animating breath is what the poet has to cherish; but to make each atom throb and kindle, a sleeplessly creative self-criticism is called for, a luminous labour of heart and mind.

“Creative” and “luminous” — that is what striving and straining have to be. Poetry cannot come of intellectual effort. But all effort is not intellectual: one can endeavour to plunge into the ultra-intellectual “inwardness” from which poetry seems mysteriously to emerge: one can labour and sweat to curb the mechanical and manufacturing intellect and make oneself a receptive instrument for “inspiration”. Such labouring and sweating are often more than merely excusable: they are the *sine qua non* of the uniformly perfect, the necessary finishing touch that renders a piece of art supremely inspired everywhere.

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Inspiration is not easy to “crib, cabin and confine” in a rigid theory. Even as one may approach it variously, so too one may manifest it in various shapes. A clever friend of mine remarked yesterday, apropos of the multiply-wrought character of certain poems, that to him the idea or the thing was paramount and that he preferred natural and spontaneous speech to literary expression. I could not see eye to eye with him since I felt he theorised too rigidly and made a number of arbitrary assumptions. In the correct sense, to be literary is to use language for creating vision,

evoking emotion, building rhythm, in order to give a concrete state of being. To be literary is not to kill the stuff of an idea or a thing, but to set it living on our pulses. To be literary is not to be the opposite of “natural and spontaneous”: on the contrary, it is to turn speech warm and winged. Warmth and wingedness are not the attributes of simplicity alone: they belong just as much to complexity. Whether one elects to be simple or complex should depend on what one’s state of consciousness is. Either mode can be “natural and spontaneous”. Complex richness or grandeur becomes stiff and artificial only when the idea or the thing is itself *not* complexly coloured or stupendous. There must be equivalence and correspondence between sense and speech: that is the true meaning of naturalness and spontaneity in the first place. In the second, the true meaning is an unforced freshness, so that nothing, however intricately opulent or massive, appears heavy and laboured. Poetry may mix Ormuz with Ind, but it must work with a hand that is born regal. Poetry may heap Pelion upon Ossa, but it must bring an energy intrinsically gigantic. In short, its designs, formed swiftly or slowly, must bear the look of having been executed with sovereign ease. That look, accompanying limpid effects or effects that are elaborate, is the consequence of the poet’s tapping ultra-intellectual springs of creativity and that look is what proves naturalness and spontaneity. It has nothing essentially to do with writing without multiply-wrought ornament or magnitude or in a plain and straightforward manner.

There is no use in quoting in this connection Milton’s dictum, “Poetry must be simple, sensuous, passionate” and underlining the word “simple” with the purpose of confuting me. We must not set the simplicity Milton had in mind at loggerheads with the complexity under discussion. Decoration, richness, pomp, magnificence, multifoliate beauty — all these are not tabooed by Milton: the ban falls only on the pedantic and the ponderous — intellectual deadweight, logical mazziness — what is formed by putting parts together with an external constructive faculty instead of by a flowering out of the manifold from a vital creative centre. In short, simplicity is a synonym for the unforced freshness I have already spoken about. A contrast with complexity would come rather ill from Milton whose language no less than sentence-structure was far indeed from being plain and straightforward. It would come ill also because Milton was scholar enough to know that neither Aeschylus nor Pindar could be termed transparent or uncomplex. And he was too near the Elizabethan age to forget how gorged with metaphor linked to metaphor and how dazzling with picturesque piled-up epithets was the work of its supreme dramatists. Then there was, almost contemporary, the devious depth of Donne and the ingenious radiance of Crashaw. Had Milton lived in our own day he would have known and appreciated the whole Romantic Movement which, while markedly simple and direct on one side, was on the other luxuriant if not labyrinthine too. And he would have never been so foolish as to deny the *furor poeticus* to Francis Thompson in a passage like the following from *Sister Songs*:

Oh! may this treasure-galleon of my verse,
 Fraught with its golden passion, oared with cadent rhyme,
 Set with a towering press of fantasies,
 Drop safely down the time,
 Leaving mine isled self behind it far
 Soon to be sunk in the abysm of seas
 (As down the years the splendour voyages
 From some long-ruined and night-submerged star),
 And in thy subject sovereign's havening heart
 Anchor the freightage of its virgin ore;
 Adding its wasteful more
 To his own overflowing treasury.
 So through his river mine shall reach the sea.

Here is diction multiply-wrought in the extreme to a little masterpiece, effect added to exquisite and purple effect, a massing of rich details to disclose a single yet many-faced meaning, a running together of mutually illuminating images in a vivid complexity in which nothing is superfluous or awkward but everything apt and alive in conveying the poet's prayer that the verse to which his love for the child Viola Meynell had given substance and shape might survive his own death and, finding a place in the devoted heart of the man to whom she would belong in marriage, deliver its message to her most intensely and intimately.

*

Mention of images brings me to another bit of rigid theorising: recently a critic condemned a book of poetry as "jejune and claptrap" on the sole score that the writer was using "cheap and much-flogged symbolism and metaphor". The criticism, without definite quotations to prove the point, is shallow, for what is important is the way symbols are employed and explored, the novel depths caught out of particular metaphors. The angle and power of sight have to be estimated — the moved precision with which the words carry their suggestive glow has to be weighed — the rhythm lift by which the expressive effect goes home to the heart has to be measured. Once these things are found satisfying, we need make no bones about the symbolism being an old one, the metaphor familiar. If we read the *Iliad* in this year of grace 1945, with nearly three thousand years in-between crammed with poetic literature, we shall not find many new metaphors in it — nor, I suspect, did the ancient Greeks themselves, for all the similes were borrowed from familiar experience and were current in the unrecorded minstrelsy out of which the *Iliad* rose like a culminating blossom. But on that ground Homer does not become "jejune and claptrap": the splendour and nobility of his words, the swiftness and largeness of his rhythmic

tone as well as the “high seriousness” of his mind of which both his word and rhythm were the expressive body remain great poetry for the good reason that they are sufficient to constitute great poetry.

By a process of abstraction — that is, pulling an image out of its context — it is possible to make out even the most striking vision-effects to be “jejune and claptrap”. In poetry, the rose is an ancient symbol, both sacred and profane — it is also an ancient practice to talk of stars. I myself would advise a poet to avoid roses and stars because it is not easy to get new revelatory flashes out of them and one needs exceptionally superb language to make old revelatory flashes come through again to-day. But I would also advise a poet never to hesitate mentioning roses and stars if he could turn them to a new revealing significance, for the most profound test of originality is the distilling of such a significance from an ancient image or idea, just as the most astonishing feat of imagination is the sudden disclosure of a novel facet in scenes and experiences that are most familiar. A critic who is oblivious of this test has no acumen — he looks only at the superficialities and judges poetry with the abstract intellect and not the concrete understanding. To the abstract intellect, fire and flame, flower and fragrance, bird and bird-song, sea and wave are all stimuli to cry “Chestnut!” Yet these phenomena can be as bright and fresh to-day in poetry as they were when the first poet spoke of them, provided, of course, genuine insight catches them up into lovely and harmonious language. The whole haunting music of Yeats’s early verse could be dismissed as jejune claptrap with the charge that it is chockful of mystic roses and dim dreams and pale stars. But the fact stands that no more beautiful poetry has been written in the last fifty years. Yeats’s verse is lyricism of the highest order because he has conjured up his vision with a new poignancy of profound emotion, a new witchery of revealing atmosphere, a new evocativeness of exquisite sound. One would be mistaken in considering any image *per se*, without the subtle tone and “slant” and penumbra given it by the poet in his dealing with the theme in hand.

Criticism is a difficult and delicate affair, demanding a lot of plastic self-adjustment. Catholicity of taste and sympathetic acumen are indispensable and to make a fetish of any fixed theory is to maim one’s own mind.

[Brunton’s last letter to Sethna — Ed.]

Box 34, Station D, New York 3, U.S.A.
September 19, 1946

My dear Sethna,

I left India several months ago on such short notice that I had no time to say farewell; otherwise I would certainly have informed you. It took me some months to reach America, as I was ship-wrecked on the way and had to spend two months in Egypt,

waiting for another vessel.

However, the change of climate has greatly benefited my health, which was becoming very urgent.

The news from India is tragic — and now that there is an Interim Government, the internal peace which we had all hoped would follow that event, has not so far shown itself. And yet, given the cooperative spirit, the problems could surely have been ironed out.

You wrote me last year asking about the interest which Westerners are taking in the teaching of your Guru Sri Aurobindo. I know only from occasional book reviews in library journals, and from letters which I get from people I know, that more and more of his writings are being read and studied and appreciated every year. He is coming to be recognised as the authentic spokesman of modern Indian mysticism, as apart from the medieval type represented by the missionary swamis.

I was sorry to note that *All India Weekly* had become more of a competition journal than a literary one, so that your own articles disappeared, in the three issues which have reached me since April. Please let me know if you are likely to write for them again; otherwise I shall not renew my subscription. If you are not likely to do so, there are no doubt several other high class journals who would be glad to print your work — so please advise me should you change over to one of them, in order that I might subscribe to it.

I think of my peaceful life in Mysore against the vivid contrast of the frenzied existence here, and have to smile at all these millions of people running hither and thither when they are not engaged in going on strike. I shall soon have cleared up the business which keeps me here, and then retreat to California for the colder months.

However, the above will be my permanent mail address.

With kindest regards,

Paul Brunton

(Concluded)

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

ADDENDUM

I know [Paul Brunton]: he is a fine and earnest seeker who has found a certain light — initially with the help and grace of Raman Maharshi and afterwards with his own labour and the influence of other bearers of the spiritual truth. He did not leave Raman Maharshi in a spirit of quarrel. It is perhaps not even correct to say that he has left him. What he was extremely dissatisfied with was the clique of far from spiritual men who organise and control the place where Raman Maharshi stays. The Master of Tiruvannamalai does not take the place where he lives to be his own Asram: the so-called Asram is in the hands of others. What Paul Brunton could not also rest content with is the fact that Raman Maharshi, great Yogi though he is, does not answer to Brunton's search for an all-round Masterhood. If there is anybody who does answer to that search, it is Sri Aurobindo, and Brunton who has visited the Pondicherry Asram on more than two occasions knows it, but he is led by a certain stress of personality to stand on his own and work out specific lines along which his mind has travelled.

(K. D. Sethna, Bombay, 20.2.1947)

When someone has decided to consecrate his life to the seeking for the Divine, if he is sincere, that is to say, if the resolution is sincere and carried out sincerely, there is absolutely nothing to fear, because all that happens or will happen to him will lead him by the shortest way to this realisation.

That is the response of the Grace. People believe that the Grace means making everything smooth for all your life. It is not true.

The Mother

(*Words of the Mother – III*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 180)

THE DREAM DIVINE

(*'A God's Labour' or the Work of the Avatar*)

The Three Great Secrets

SRI KRISHNA, the Divine Master of the Gita, reveals three important secrets to the soul of humanity through Arjuna, the disciple beleaguered and perplexed within by the problem of action in this world. The first secret, the highest secret as it were, *rahasyam hyetaduttamam*, is the secret of God's Descent amidst our struggling humanity, to lead from the front and not, as He usually does, hidden behind the veils of Nature. This secret is revealed in the myths and legends of the Puranas, particularly the Vishnu Purana and the Bhagavata. The second secret, *guhyaatamam*, the deepest secret, is that within our mortal poverty there dwells an immortal element which, if awake, can lead us to a state of union with our Divine Source and Origin. This secret is found in the Yoga of the Vedas and confirmed in the Yoga of the Upanishads. But the third and, as it seems, the most secret, *sarvaguhyaatamam*, is the possibility of man's redemption from error and fear and sin merely by an act of surrender to the embodied Divine, the Avatara. This truth is hinted even in the Bible in these magical words, "I am the Truth and the Way", which, when taken in their deepest sense divested of the undercurrents and claims of an exclusive religion, act as a magical balm to the struggling soul of man on earth. It was however left to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to bring out the fullest significance of this Divine Act through which He is able to ensure a safe passage to the rest of mankind that is groping for the path. Sri Krishna, giving His own example to Arjuna, speaks of this incessant work in which He is engaged without which the worlds would rapidly rush towards perdition.

But there is a still greater secret that is not spoken as such but hinted. It is the secret of the Divine Sacrifice in Matter which opens the way for all subsequent descents. It is the secret embedded within each atom of existence without which creation itself could not be. The secret from which all others derive is therefore the secret of God's plunge into the darkness and Night, the Divine Sacrifice or the sacrifice of His divinity, His lapse from a state of All-Knowing, Omnipotent Wisdom to a state of utter oblivion. It is this act of supreme sacrifice that opens the possibility of earth's ascension towards the Supreme through man, the chosen intermediary for the union of Matter and Spirit. Earth aspires through man towards a higher state claiming Heaven as her right since she too is a goddess but unlike the other gods, she has chosen to sacrifice her divinity so as to do a work for God, to create an appropriate field for God's working upon Nature. Therefore she, the Earth goddess,

is also His chosen and favourite since not once but a number of times God assumes her forms and accepts to stay and breathe awhile her atmosphere, absorb her poison and release the nectars for those who share His space.

These three fundamental secrets assure the redemption of creation from its fallen state by a simple act of faith! Of course it is not a superficial belief in a particular doctrine or religion or even in a certain persona of God created by the ignorant priests but a faith that is the baptism of the soul and reveals this hidden truth of which the words of the scriptures are merely hints and shadows. These three secrets are the logical consequence of the secret of secrets, the first act of God so to say, the act of His becoming Matter. It is because He has entered into a state of self-oblivion that a passage and possibility is created for all subsequent Divine descents as beast and man, beautifully conjured in the Indian concept of the ten incarnations of God. Again it is because He has become this earthly substance we know as physical matter that there is a possibility of this matter becoming Divine through a reversal of the process. And finally by a certain soul-memory of this greatest of all events that gave birth to space and time and all that is contained in them, a sudden veil is rent that hangs between our ego and the true Self that we actually are. It becomes the source of endless hope. It makes us aware that the Power that can free us from the clutches of Ignorance and error lies within us. Concealed in the spaces of our soul, hidden within the crypts of matter there sleeps the absolute Power of God. It is there in the atom and clod; it drifts in the stars and its hidden purpose drives the ignorant movements of life and creation. This one central liberating Truth from which all other truths emerge as a natural sequel is described in the vision of the Vedas and Upanishads as the sacrifice of the Divine in Matter. This truth is secret to our ordinary waking consciousness involved and engaged as it is with the surfaces of life. But to a deeper vision of the soul, it is the most fundamental truth worth knowing without which life and creation would be meaningless, even our most purposive movements devoid of any significance and meaning. But once we become aware of these three secrets or at least of the central one, the secret of the Divine Sacrifice as it is often mystically called, then life and creation suddenly assume another sense and purpose and our own life becomes a meaningful journey, a part of that great Becoming, a rhythm of the rapturous dancer. We become aware of our own life as a drop or a wave on the infinite ocean of luminous Peace and Bliss in whose heart there sleeps an absolute Wisdom and Power.

The Mother reveals this mystic symbol more directly:

Q) Is there any connection between the Feast of the Assumption in the Catholic Church and the date of Sri Aurobindo's birth?

Yes. And he has also said it himself. The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is the divinisation of Matter. And this is the aim of the last Avatar.

(CWM 8, p. 269)

Elaborating this last secret, the Mother reveals:

Certain prophets in the past have had this apocalyptic vision but, as usual, things were mixed, and they did not have together with their vision of the apocalypse the vision of the supramental world which will come to raise up the part of humanity which consents and to transform this physical world. So, to give hope to those who have been born into it, into this perverted part of human consciousness, they have taught redemption through faith: those who have faith in the sacrifice of the Divine in Matter will be automatically saved, in another world — by faith alone, without understanding, without intelligence. They have not seen the supramental world nor that the great Sacrifice of the Divine in Matter is the sacrifice of involution which must culminate in the total revelation of the Divine in Matter itself.

(CWM 9, pp. 300-01)

The Great Sacrifice

It is this greatest of all secrets, this central truth which is revealed to earth and man in Sri Aurobindo's poem 'A God's Labour'. It is the mystic side of the story of creation. For indeed there is the way of seeing things through human eyes, the eyes of Ignorance, limited to a few surface events whose laws the mind tries to analyse and decipher. But we end up catching only some vague hints and superficial laws of physical matter while the deeper truths remain unseen and unknown. Some are satisfied with this superficial view of life and find comfort in its smallness and safety in its littleness. But there are others who seek further and wish to go deeper into the mystery called life. It is to these that Sri Aurobindo lends His seer vision and reveals the secret truth that is at work in the heart of creation.

The first Divine Descent referred to as the 'Great Sacrifice' becomes henceforth the prototype of successive descents of the Divine upon Earth beautifully conjured in the *Pauranic* image of the Earth crying for help since the burden of darkness has become too heavy for her to bear. Her cry is not just a cry for deliverance but a yearning for change, a longing and an aspiration for Light and Truth and Harmony and Love, a prayer for the redeeming touch of the Divine Grace which is felt by Matter as the hand of Divine Benediction. In response to her prayer the Divine Himself comes down to intervene in the paths of birth and death, to turn the tide of Time towards the Right and the Light, to vanquish the load of darkness that weighs heavy upon her heart and to open the path to Light and Bliss and Immortality. But for this the Divine has not merely to descend into matter and be present there as an impersonal Presence or a universal Power of Light and Truth but go one step further and identify Himself with the darkness of matter itself so that the battle can be fought and worked out within His lonely heart. Earth, by this very divine act becomes

a special place, a special formation as it were, where the Divine descends again and again and works out the purpose for which creation came into being and life was born and mind sprang into action and the soul in man looked out through the recesses of thought and feeling and speech and impulse and action. The cry of Earth for redemption and the response of the Divine Benediction and His great assurance and promise of deliverance echoes and resounds in the dumb void of Matter. In Man it becomes conscious, for man is that meeting point between the Earth's aspiration and the Grace, the chosen instrument through which the Earth seeks her liberation and transformation. In fact, we may even say without any exaggeration that one clear sign of our humanity is not so much the form we inherit from the animal past but that we become conscious of the anguish and the cry that springs forth from the deep bosom of Earth. We also become aware of the response of the Divine Grace and His touch that stills the cry and gives hope to our hearts. 'A God's Labour' reveals to us God's answer to Earth in response to her anguish. He lays bare before her His heart of Love and the dreams He nurtures and works to realise and fulfil in her, the long suffering and thereby the greatest among gods and goddesses. For while other Gods act from their realms, living content in their splendour, our Earth is born out of a state of sacrifice and Love. She embodies these two greatest powers because she chose to renounce her divinity and thereby accomplish a work for God. She is the greatest and therefore to her is given the greatest work and the greatest promise:

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air
 Between the gold and the blue
 And wrapped them softly and left them there,
 My jewelled dreams of you.

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
 Marrying the soil to the sky
 And sow in this dancing planet midge
 The moods of infinity.

But the work is not easy, the dreams of God need a soil that is ready. Our Earth matter is still hard and the Light that God sends here does not stay for long. Great Masters have come and shown the way. They bring a great Light and Peace, they gift glimpses of the great Self hidden from our sight and yet only for a moment in eternity the mood of the fortunate is lifted and mates with the beauty and bliss of the Divine spheres. The Light dances awhile amidst a select and prepared humanity and then returns towards its Source plunging the Earth once again into the darkness and gloom.

There is another strategy of the Divine as well. He comes down not only as the Divine Master in a human form with a Teaching that shows the path towards the Light but actually becomes the Path. He not only reveals to man how he may ascend

and unite with the Divine Consciousness within and above but also takes the first step and unites His Consciousness with Earth and humanity. By this union and communions of the Divine with our clay He makes it easier and possible for us to walk the way. In other words while the Masters come and show us the way towards uniting our consciousness with the Divine, the Avatar unites His consciousness with ours and spares us the labour. He does the work for us. All that is needed is that we accept and acknowledge with gratitude and faith and thereby let the union spread like a contagion in the very stuff of our being and substance.

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,
 Too frail their ethereal stuff;
 Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
 The roots were not deep enough.

He who would bring the heavens here
 Must descend himself into clay
 And the burden of earthly nature bear
 And tread the dolorous way.

Coercing my godhead I have come down
 Here on the sordid earth,
 Ignorant, labouring, human grown
 Twixt the gates of death and birth.

But there is something that resists, this something in man born with the advent of the mind does not easily accommodate or allow the Light to stay and do its work.

I have been digging deep and long
 Mid a horror of filth and mire
 A bed for the golden river's song,
 A home for the deathless fire.

I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night
 To bring the fire to man;
 But the hate of hell and human spite
 Are my meed since the world began.

For man's mind is the dupe of his animal self;
 Hoping its lusts to win,
 He harbours within him a grisly Elf
 Enamoured of sorrow and sin.

The grey Elf shudders from heaven's flame
 And from all things glad and pure;
 Only by pleasure and passion and pain
 His drama can endure.

All around is darkness and strife;
 For the lamps that men call suns
 Are but halfway gleams on this stumbling life
 Cast by the Undying Ones.

Man lights his little torches of hope
 That lead to a failing edge;
 A fragment of Truth is his widest scope,
 An inn his pilgrimage.

The Truth of truths men fear and deny,
 The Light of lights they refuse;
 To ignorant gods they lift their cry
 Or a demon altar choose.

The Plunge into the Abyss and the Seeds of a New Creation

The story of creation is no doubt a series of challenges but the challenges that each species faces are mostly from without. The environment is too overwhelmingly strong and the species has to adapt against a number of odds. Once it adapts or rather in the very process of adaptation it evolves new capacities and possibilities. But with man a new challenge appears. The adaptation is not only without but also within, the resistance and the forces that oppose our survival are lodged within the human breast. Perhaps they have come for a final resolution since the Divine too dwells here, in the human heart, *manusim tanum asritam*, as the Gita puts it. Drawn to this Presence within many forces come, rising from our subconscious depths for a final change. This resistance revealed at several places in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings finds an almost autobiographical description in 'A God's Labour'. It describes how the Divine accepts the burden of creation, takes upon Himself the darkened state of man and Earth, digs deep into the darkest layers where the filth and waste of the ages lies as falsehood drawing everything into its bog and mire. This thankless labour is of course rewarded at the end when, having gone into the very depths of the darkness, He discovers the stream of a New Life that awaits Him there.

A voice cried, "Go where none have gone!
Dig deeper, deeper yet
Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
And knock at the keyless gate."

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
At the very root of things
Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
On the Dragon's outspread wings.

I left the surface gauds of mind
And life's unsatisfied seas
And plunged through the body's alleys blind
To the nether mysteries.

I have delved through the dumb Earth's dreadful heart
And heard her black mass' bell.
I have seen the source whence her agonies part
And the inner reason of hell.

Above me the dragon murmurs moan
And the goblin voices flit;
I have pierced the Void where Thought was born,
I have walked in the bottomless pit.

On a desperate stair my feet have trod
Armoured with boundless peace,
Bringing the fires of the splendour of God
Into the human abyss.

He who I am was with me still;
All veils are breaking now.
I have heard His voice and borne His will
On my vast untroubled brow.

The gulf twixt the depths and the heights is bridged
And the golden waters pour
Down the sapphire mountain rainbow-ridged
And glimmer from shore to shore.

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
 And the undying suns here burn;
 Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth
 The incarnate spirits yearn . . .

The Mother encountered this deep resistance in humanity and the stream of New Life, the Supramental life that runs as a constant undercurrent below the darkest nether regions and the densest subconscious layers. She later recounted this in one of Her experiences:

I found my message for the 1st of January. . . . It was quite unforeseen. Yesterday morning, I thought, "All the same, I have to find my message, but what?" I was absolutely . . . like that, neutral, nothing. Then yesterday evening at the class (*of Friday, November 7*) I noticed that these children who had had a whole week to prepare their questions on the text had not found a single one! A terrible lethargy! A total lack of interest. And when I had finished speaking, I thought to myself, "But what is there in these people who are interested in nothing but their personal little affairs?" So I began descending into their mental atmosphere, in search of the little light, of that which responds. . . . And it literally pulled me downwards as into a hole. . . .

And I had the impression . . . It was not an impression — I saw it. I was descending into a crevasse between two steep rocks, rocks that appeared to be made of something harder than basalt, *black*, but metallic at the same time, with such sharp edges — it seemed that a mere touch would lacerate you. It appeared endless and bottomless, and it kept getting narrower, narrower and narrower, narrower and narrower, like a funnel, so narrow that there was almost no more room — not even for the consciousness — to pass through. And the bottom was invisible, a black hole. And it went down, down, down, like that, without air, without light, except for a sort of glimmer that enabled me to make out the rock edges. They seemed to be cut *so steeply, so sharply* *Finally, when my head* began touching my knees, I asked myself, "But what is there at the bottom of this . . . this hole?"

And then, down into this hole . . . I still see what I saw then, this crevasse between two rocks. The sky was not visible, but on the rock summits I saw . . . something like the reflection of a glimmer — a glimmer — coming from 'something' beyond, which (*laughing*) must have been the sky! But it was invisible. And as I descended, as if I were sliding down the face of this crevasse, I saw the rock edges; and they were really black rocks, as if cut with a chisel, cuts so fresh that they glistened, with edges as sharp as knives. There was one here, one there, another there, everywhere, all around. And I was being pulled, pulled, pulled, I went down and down and down — there was no end to it, and

it was becoming more and more compressing. It went down and down . . .

“At the very bottom of the inconscience most hard and rigid . . .” Because generally, the inconscience gives the impression, precisely, of something amorphous, inert, formless, drab and gray (when formerly I entered the zones of the unconscious, that was the first thing I encountered). But this was an inconscience . . . it was hard, rigid, coagulated, as if coagulated to resist: all effort slides off it, doesn’t touch it, cannot penetrate it. So I am putting, “. . . most hard and rigid and narrow” (the idea of something that compresses, compresses, compresses you) “and stifling” — yes, stifling is the word.

“ . . . I struck upon an almighty spring that cast me up forthwith into a formless, limitless vast, generator of all creation.” It was . . . yes, I have the feeling that it was not the ordinary creation, the primordial creation, but the *supramental* creation, for it bore no similarity to the experience of returning to the Supreme, the origin of everything. I had utterly the feeling of being cast into the origin of the supramental creation — something that is already (how can it be expressed?) objectified from the Supreme, with the explicit goal of the supramental creation.

(From a conversation with a disciple on 8 November 1958)

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(Mother arrives with a new change in her message for January 1, 1959: instead of “an almighty spring that cast me up forthwith into a formless, limitless Vast, generator of the new world”, Mother puts “a formless, limitless Vast vibrating with the seeds of a new world”)

The objectification of the experience came progressively, as always happens to me. When I have the experience, I am absolutely ‘blank,’ like a newborn baby to whom things come just ‘like that’. I don’t know what is happening, and I expect nothing. How much time it has taken me to learn this!

There is no preliminary thought, preliminary knowledge, preliminary will: all those things do not exist. I am only like a mirror receiving the experience, the simplicity of a little child learning life. It is like that. And it is the gift of the Grace, truly the Grace: in the face of the experience, the simplicity of a little child just born. And it is spontaneously so, but deliberately too; in other words, during the experience I am very careful not to watch myself having the experience so that no previous knowledge intervenes. Only afterwards do I see. It is not a mental construction, nor does it come from something higher than the mind (it is not even a knowledge by identity that makes me see things); no, the body (when the experience is in the body) is . . . like that, what in English is called *blank*. As if it had just been born, as if just then it were being born with the experience.

And only little by little, little by little, is this experience put in the presence of any previous knowledge. Thus, its explanation and its evaluation come about progressively.

It is indispensable if one doesn't want to be arbitrary.

So in fact, only the final wording is correct, but from the point of view of the 'historical' unfolding, it is interesting to observe the passage. It was exactly the same phenomenon for the experience of the Supramental Manifestation. Both these things, the experience of November 7 and of the Supramental, occurred in the same way, identically: I *was* the experience, and nothing else. Nothing but the experience at the time it was occurring. And only slowly, while coming out of it, did the previous knowledge, the previous experiences, all the accumulation of what had come before, examine it and put it in its place.

This is why I arrive at a verbal expression progressively, gropingly; these are not literary gropings — it is aimed at being precise, specific and concise at the same time.

When I write something, I don't expect people to understand it, but I try to avoid the least possible distortion of the experience or the image in this kind of 'shrinking' towards expression.

What is this spring?

The spring? It means exactly this: in the deepest depths of the Inconscient is the supreme spring that makes us touch the Supreme. It is like the Supreme making us touch the Supreme: that is the almighty spring. When you arrive at the very bottom of the Inconscient, you touch the Supreme.

So that is the shortest path!

Not the shortest path! Already for me, it was hard to touch the bottom of the Inconscient, but for others it would take an eternity.

It is something similar to what Sri Aurobindo has written in 'A God's Labour'.

Was it the Supreme at the very bottom of the Inconscient who cast you up directly to the Supreme?

Yes. Because at the very bottom of the Inconscient is the Supreme. It is the same idea as the highest height touching the deepest depth. The universe is like a circle — it is represented by the serpent biting its tail, its head touching its tail. It means that the supreme height touches the most material matter, without any intermediary. I have already said this several times. But that was

the experience. I didn't know what was happening. I expected nothing and . . . it was stupendous — in a single bound, I sprang up! If someone had had his eyes open, I assure you he would have had to laugh: I was bent over, like this, more and more, more and more, more and more, my head was just about to touch my knees when suddenly — vrrrr! Straight, straight up, my head upright in a single bound!

But as soon as you want to express it, it escapes like water running through your fingers; all the fluidity is lost, it evaporates. A rather vague, poetic or artistic expression is much truer, much nearer to the truth — something hazy, nebulous, undefined. Something not concretised like a rigid mental expression — this rigidity that the mind has introduced right down into the Inconscient.

This vision of the Inconscient . . . (*Mother remains gazing for a moment*) it was the *mental* Inconscient. Because the starting point was mental. A special Inconscient — rigid, hard, resistant — with all that the mind has brought into our consciousness. But it was far worse, far worse than a purely material Inconscient! A 'mentalised' Inconscient, as it were. All this rigidity, this hardness, this narrowness, this fixity — a *fixity* — comes from the presence of the mind in creation. When the mind was not manifested, the Inconscient was not like that! It was formless and had the plasticity of something that is formless — the plasticity has gone.

It is a terrible image of the Mind's action in the Inconscient.

It has made the Inconscient aggressive — it was not so before. Aggressive, resistant, *obstinate*. That was not there before.

Yes, that's it. It was not an 'original' Inconscient. It was a mentalised Inconscient. With all that the mind has brought in in the way of *opposition* — of resistance, hardness, rigidity.

It would be interesting to mention this.

Because the starting point, precisely, was to look into the mental unconsciousness of these people. It was the mental Inconscient. Well, the mental Inconscient *refuses* to change — which is not true of the other one; the other is nothing, it doesn't exist, it is not organised in any way, it has no way of being, whereas this one is an *organised* Inconscient — organised by a beginning mental influence. A hundred times worse!

This is a very interesting point to note.

It is not the experience, which I had once before, of the original Inconscient. The experience I had this time is of the Inconscient that has undergone the influence of the Mind in creation. It has become . . . It has become a *far* greater obstacle than before. Before, it did not even have the power to resist, it had nothing, it was truly unconscious. Now it is an Inconscient organised in its refusal to change!

It was a very new experience.

That's where we are.

And this almighty spring is the perfect image of what is happening — what must happen, what will happen — *for everyone*: suddenly, one is cast forth into the vast.

(A conversation with a disciple on November 11, 1958)

It is interesting to note that the greatest resistance to the hoped-for, willed-for change does not come from the beasts and birds, plants and flowers but from those who are seemingly at the apex of the pyramid of life, from Man, the brilliant intermediary! And among men too those with a simple faith respond spontaneously whereas those who have a rather developed intellect are the toughest to change. Of course, once they change, the result is far superior, but the greatest resistance comes from the mind. The mind not only veils but distorts the Truth. It not only covers but falsifies the incoming Light. It not only distracts us from hearing the Divine Voice that calls us from the still depths of our inmost heart but actively diverts it by mixing doubt and despair, distrust and denial in the texture of our thoughts and feelings, will and impulses, actions and sensations. The Mother speaks of this too in one of Her conversations with a disciple:

It is likely that the greatest resistance will be in the most conscious beings due to a lack of mental receptivity, due to the mind itself which wants things to continue (as Sri Aurobindo has written) according to its own mode of ignorance. So-called inert matter is much more easily responsive, much more — it does not resist. And I am convinced that among plants, for example, or among animals, the response will be much quicker than among men. It will be more difficult to act upon a very organised mind; beings who live in an entirely crystallised, organised mental consciousness are as hard as stone! It resists. According to my experience, what is unconscious will certainly follow more easily. It was a delight to see the water from the tap, the mouthwash in the bottle, the glass, the sponge — it all had such an air of joy and consent! There is much less ego, you see, it is not a conscious ego.

The ego becomes more and more conscious and resistant as the being develops. Very primitive, very simple beings, little children will respond first, because they don't have an organised ego. But these big people! People who have worked on themselves, who have mastered themselves, who are organised, who have an ego made of steel, it will be difficult for them.

Unless they go beyond all this and have enough spiritual knowledge to be able to make the ego surrender . . . in which case the realisation will naturally be much greater — it will be more difficult to accomplish, but the result will be far more complete.

(From a conversation with a disciple on June 6, 1958)

The Word of Hope and the Great Promise

And yet there is hope. What else can there be when God is the Guide! Whatever the difficulties, however formidable the challenges, however distressing and seemingly hopeless the circumstances, the end is bound to be a sure victory of the Divine in man. This faith, this certitude, *kalyanasraddha*, all must carry sheltered within their hearts, protected against a thousand voices that deny. As Sri Aurobindo reveals in *Savitri*:

His failure is not failure whom God leads;
Through all the slow mysterious march goes on:
An immutable Power has made this mutable world;
A self-fulfilling transcendence treads man's road;
The driver of the soul upon its path,
It knows its steps, its way is inevitable,
And how shall the end be vain when God is guide?

(p. 339)

This is the message of hope that we find as the closing note of the poem we are looking at. Yet we may be tempted to ask, but how will the change come about when all that we see in the present state is darkness, confusion and chaos? The Divine strategy is revealed here to us, His method hinted at. It is not systems and organisations that He changes, though these too bear the change as a consequence. The real change that the Divine Advent brings about is in man himself, in the children who come successively. They are automatically freed as it were of the burden of the past. They also automatically breathe a purer air and share a new atmosphere, a new energy and a new consciousness that has been established upon earth as a result of the Divine Advent.

This inner side of the Divine Work that the Avatar is called upon to do is revealed to us in *Essays on the Gita*. Normally we make the mistake of thinking that the Avatar comes for some great outer action. But what we fail to see with our outward gazing intellect is that the outer action is only a secondary consequence of the much deeper inner action that the Avatar accomplishes, conducting revolutions with His silent will, destroying armies of darkness and falsehood even while He sits unarmed in the battlefield of life. The Light that He carries within His breast, the Peace that He brings as solace to the suffering Earth radiates from the corner of a small room and spreads like the Sun over the whole world until all is steeped and fulfilled in His Glory and Grace. All that is needed then is a little opening, a little receptivity, a little devotion and faith and the work of centuries is done effortlessly in a few years' time:

The Gita lays stress upon the struggle of which the world is the theatre, in its two aspects, the inner struggle and the outer battle. In the inner struggle the enemies are within, in the individual, and the slaying of desire, ignorance, egoism is the victory. But there is an outer struggle between the powers of the Dharma and the Adharma in the human collectivity. The former is supported by the divine, the godlike nature in man, and by those who represent it or strive to realise it in human life, the latter by the Titanic or demoniac, the Asuric and Rakshasic nature whose head is a violent egoism, and by those who represent and strive to satisfy it. This is the war of the Gods and Titans, the symbol of which the old Indian literature is full, the struggle of the Mahabharata of which Krishna is the central figure being often represented in that image; the Pandavas who fight for the establishment of the kingdom of the Dharma, are the sons of the Gods, their powers in human form, their adversaries are incarnations of the Titanic powers, they are Asuras. This outer struggle too the Avatar comes to aid, directly or indirectly, to destroy the reign of the Asuras, the evil-doers, and in them depress the power they represent and to restore the oppressed ideals of the Dharma. He comes to bring nearer the kingdom of heaven on earth in the collectivity as well as to build the kingdom of heaven within in the individual human soul.

The inner fruit of the Avatar's coming is gained by those who learn from it the true nature of the divine birth and the divine works and who, growing full of him in their consciousness and taking refuge in him with their whole being, *manmayā mām upāśritāḥ*, purified by the realising force of their knowledge and delivered from the lower nature, attain to the divine being and divine nature, *madbhāvam*. The Avatar comes to reveal the divine nature in man above this lower nature and to show what are the divine works, free, unegoistic, disinterested, impersonal, universal, full of the divine light, the divine power and the divine love. He comes as the divine personality which shall fill the consciousness of the human being and replace the limited egoistic personality, so that it shall be liberated out of ego into infinity and universality, out of birth into immortality. He comes as the divine power and love which calls men to itself, so that they may take refuge in that and no longer in the insufficiency of their human wills and the strife of their human fear, wrath and passion, and liberated from all this unquiet and suffering may live in the calm and bliss of the Divine. Nor does it matter essentially in what form and name or putting forward what aspect of the Divine he comes; for in all ways, varying with their nature, men are following the path set to them by the Divine which will in the end lead them to him and the aspect of him which suits their nature is that which they can best follow when he comes to lead them; in whatever way men accept, love and take joy in God, in that way God accepts, loves and takes joy in man. *Ye yathā mām prapadyante tāms tathaiva bhajāmyaham.*

The Divine changes the very foundation of Matter by infusing into it a little more of the spiritual consciousness that the Avatar brings into play by the very fact of the Divine Embodiment. Even after He departs from the material scene, Matter is left quivering with the vibrations of the Spirit; the stamp of the Avatar's consciousness substance is left forever on the Earth and henceforth it can never be the same. Each child born after the work accomplished by the Divine advent is over automatically partakes of this change, a change not only in his inner being or in the general psychological constitution of the human race but a change in the very material that all subsequent souls would naturally inherit. This is the Divine strategy, something that no force of opposition has the power to eliminate or thwart forever since it is an imprint not only on the soul of the race but upon its very material substance. This new stamp of the Divine touch upon Matter has the power to negate the blindest forces of heredity and mutate us. His signature becomes a sanction for the forces of a new and diviner order to enter and infuse Matter with their glow and transform our animality into a vehicle of our newborn divinity. The gift that the Avatar brings for earth is not only spiritual but also material. It is a New Birth not only in the soul of humanity but also in its body. Or to put it very simply He changes the children who are yet to come as is symbolised in the mythical account of Krishna where the Avatar born as a little baby in the prison house of Kansa is changed, granted a new parentage and a new space to flower and grow. The coming children too will be released from the prison house of our little egos and breathe a vaster, freer air, sporting with the skies, competing with the gods in their wisdom and power and aspiring to be one with the sun. They will come down to Earth through a new passage connecting the Golden Sun of Light and Truth and Bliss with the red soil of Earth. Their feet placed firmly upon the mosaic floor of earthly life, their thoughts will reach out to the golden realms where the sunlit future is being shaped for earth and men. These will be the real harbingers of the change and not the governments and constitutions and parliaments and ministries. It is under the mounting pressure of Light and Truth from these children that the worn-out machinery and old habits of Nature and the outdated laws made by man will change:

Down a gold-red stairway wend
The radiant children of Paradise
Clarioning darkness' end.

A little more and the new life's doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.

And we have this description in *Savitri*:

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
 Forerunners of a divine multitude,
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life.
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality.
 Into the fallen human sphere they came,
 Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,
 Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,
 Bodies made beautiful by the spirit's light,
 Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
 Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,
 Approaching eyes of a diviner man,
 Lips chanting an unknown anthem of the soul,
 Feet echoing in the corridors of Time.
 High priests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
 Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways
 And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods
 And dancers within rapture's golden doors,
 Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
 And justify the light on Nature's face.

(pp. 343-44)

The All-Transforming Power

Well, we might ask, what is the Power which He brings, that accomplishes this longed-for miracle? What is the method that He uses? His method is very simple, but one that only the very strongest can choose: the Power that He brings is a power that only the rarest of the rare can bear. It is simply this that instead of running away from the darkness and the difficulty into some elusive nirvana, He goes closer and closer to the very abode of Darkness from where it finds its strength and support. He draws the resistance even closer and provides it the one chance of redemption through His heart's embrace so that the knot of separation that is the source of all pain is dissolved

by this union. He is not repelled by the opposition but draws even closer to it until He makes it also so much part and parcel of Himself that it has no other choice left except to melt and dissolve in the wide all-transforming Power of His Love.

And by this very act of a supreme and sublime Love He builds the bridge, rather becomes the bridge between what is and what yet must be, between what was and what is yet to be born, between what needs to change and the desired change. This is the Great Secret, the inside story of the Divine Embodiment upon Earth, the hidden mystery of the Divine Incarnation that the Mother reveals to us:

But if you want to know or understand the nature of the Force or the Power that enables or brings about this transformation — particularly where evil is concerned, but also with ugliness to a certain extent — you see that love is obviously the most potent and integral of all powers — integral in the sense that it applies in all cases. It is even more powerful than the power of purification which dissolves all bad will and which is, as it were, the master of the adverse forces, but which has not the direct power of transformation. The power of purification first dissolves in order to allow the transformation afterwards. It destroys one form in order to be able to create a better one, whereas love need not dissolve in order to transform; it possesses the direct power of transformation. Love is like a flame that changes what is hard into something malleable and even sublimates this malleable thing into a kind of purified vapour — it does not destroy, it transforms.

In its essence, in its origin, love is like a flame, a white flame which overcomes *all* resistances. You can experience this yourself: whatever the difficulty in your being, whatever the burden of accumulated error, ignorance, incapacity and bad will, a single *second* of this pure, essential, supreme love dissolves it as in an all-powerful flame; a single moment and a whole past can disappear; a single instant in which you *touch* it in its essence and a whole burden is consumed.

(CWM, Vol. 10, pp. 72-73)

This is the story of ‘A God’s Labour’, the story of God’s work in the heart of creation and His Labour of Love that is ever engaged day and night in pulling material creation out of its torpor and inertia and changing it bit by bit in the divine image of the Glory and Splendour that is sealed within its silent spaces. It is through this act of supreme sacrifice and sublime Love that He is able to give expression to the deep and profound truths hidden in the voiceless bosom of earth. It is because God becomes human that humans can aspire and hope to become one with God. This union of man with God or rather and in the deepest sense of Earth with the Supreme, is the dream that the Divine has seen for Earth. This dream, more real than all the so-called concrete realities of life, has lasted through all the ups and downs of creation; it has lasted through a number of dissolutions, *pralaya*, and “returns after

every phase of denial and skepticism”. This is His secret plan carefully hidden in the deeper folds of creation beyond the lights of a moonlit mind of the spiritual skies.

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,
 For in a raiment of gold and blue
 There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
 The living truth of you.

This dream awaits its discovery by every earth-born creature. It pushes us from within and above, from behind and without through the pressure of circumstances or the pressure of a deeper longing that seizes man. It survives a million tortures of the flesh and “rises from the pyre and the grave”. For it is a dream of the Divine, of the Eternal and embedded within the immortal soul and today or tomorrow, through smooth waves of Time or across rough and turbulent seas it is bound to realise itself one day. For the moment must come of the Transcendent Will that moves creation hidden and covered and deflected through a million forces and contradictory wills. It is the hope for the future, the one panacea of our long suffering earth, the much awaited, hoped for Victory:

One Day
The Little More

One day, and all the half-dead is done,
 One day, and all the unborn begun;
 A little path and the great goal,
 A touch that brings the divine whole.

Hill after hill was climbed and now,
 Behold, the last tremendous brow
 And the great rock that none has trod:
 A step, and all is sky and God.

(CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 542)

ALOK PANDEY

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of November 2014)

Chapter: XXXVIII

Trekkers of a Different Path — Dark and Dangerous (2)

None of us had the right to exclude from the deliberations of the Congress anybody who pitched his ideal so high as the complete independence of his mother country. . . No assembly in India could be called national which precluded by virtue of his creed a man of purity and of the absolute disinterestedness and high patriotism of the nation as Aurobindo Ghose.

Lala Lajpat Rai¹

THIS passage from Lajpat Rai, written after a convention of the National Congress held by the Moderates at Allahabad on the 18th and 19th of April 1908 where it resolved to go back to its old goal of “colonial self-government” achieved through “constitutional means” as well as to bar the Nationalists from influencing the forum, shows the place Sri Aurobindo had come to occupy in the minds of even such leaders who were not committed to the Nationalist idealism, Rai being foremost among them. Hence, if Sri Aurobindo dreamed of stepping back from the limelight, leaving that pedestal to Bipin Chandra Pal who completed his term in jail on the 9th of March, he was not likely to succeed.

Sri Aurobindo planned an impressive reception for Bipin Chandra and wrote to some of the leading figures in politics to contribute to a purse to be presented to the celebrity. He received Bipin Chandra on the 10th of March when the latter alighted from the train at Howrah station amidst a tumultuous welcome accorded by thousands of people. Sri Aurobindo was present at both the major receptions organised in his honour, the first one in the city on the 28th of March and, on the 5th of April at Uttarpara, the suburban town on the Ganga that was to become inextricably associated with Sri Aurobindo’s name because of his famous Uttarpara Speech delivered after his own release from Alipore Jail, a little over a year later.

Alas, there was no chance for Sri Aurobindo to relax after his hectic tour of Western India. He spent at least three days at Pabna attending the Bengal Provincial Conference of the National Congress on the 11th and 12th and the District Conference on the 13th of February 1908. The ideals of a national system of education and the need for establishing schools for promoting them seem to have been the thrust of

his speeches at both these events. After the engagements featuring Bipin Chandra were over he spoke at several meetings at Chetla (8th April), Pantir Math (10th April), Baruipur (12th April) and Kalighat (15th April), all in and around the city of Calcutta. On the 17th he proceeded to Kishorganj in Eastern Bengal to attend the Mymensingh District Conference of the Congress spread over three days, from the 18th till the 20th. He spoke there on the 18th and declared that the true practice of Swaraj must begin from the village.²

All the while he had to keep the ever-growing readership of the *Bande Mataram* aware of the ideals of Nationalists in simple terms. The day the aforesaid Allahabad Convention began the newspaper reminded its readers:

If we look to the pros and cons of the controversy between Conventionalists and Nationalists, we shall be placed in a better position to understand the real aim of the Moderates in putting the barrier of a creed between themselves and the people. In the first place, a part of the quarrel is over ultimate ideals: the Conventionalists are for the declaration of Colonial Self-Government as the goal of our efforts, the Nationalists for Swaraj without any qualification.³

While Sri Aurobindo was totally preoccupied with tours and writings in order to keep up the new awakening that had come about in the wake of the Surat split, Barindra Kumar and his group were pursuing their policy of using violence against the rulers. Barindra Kumar was in the habit of telling his followers that their proposed actions had Sri Aurobindo's sanction whereas the fact was, Sri Aurobindo, after giving his opinion on a proposal if at all it was referred to him, did not insist on its execution as suggested by him, nor did he interfere with its course.

Some people in those days, C. C. Dutt in particular, subscribed to the impression and circulated it that the revolutionary youth brigade functioning from its citadel at the Muraripukur Gardens was well-known to Sri Aurobindo or its members were in close touch with him. But that was not true. Long afterwards, in his evening talks with Nirodbaran and other disciples, Sri Aurobindo clearly stated:

I had nothing to do with them. It was all Barin's work. I never knew who these boys were and never saw them. Only once Barin brought a troop of them to my house but they all waited below. It is true that Barin used to consult me or Mullick for any advice. But the whole movement was in his hands. I had no time for it. I was busy with Congress politics and *Bande Mataram*. My part in it was most undramatic.⁴

When told that according to Barin he was "the leader and the brain of the movement", Sri Aurobindo clarified:

My connection with the movement began before I openly joined politics. Okakura started the revolutionary movement at Calcutta, but there was always a quarrel going on among the members. When I came to Calcutta, I came in contact with the party. They had no organisation at all. Their main programme was to beat some magistrates, and quarrels were going on. So I organised them and reconciled their quarrels and went back to Baroda. Again a quarrel broke out, again I came and reconciled them; the whole thing then went into Barin's hands. Terrorism was only a subordinate movement. It could have been important if the armed revolution would have come, the revolution for which we wanted to prepare the whole country, but I was too busy with the open political movement to prepare the country in that way. This terroristic movement was to prepare the young men with some sort of a military training. . . . Otherwise it was never my idea that by throwing a few bombs we could overthrow the British Government. And that probably was the reason for the split among them. P. Mitra was for the original idea while Barin was for this terrorism. I was never in direct contact with the movement nor with the young men and didn't know them. Only in jail did I come in contact with them, especially Nolini, Bejoy, etc.⁵

It becomes obvious from this that Sri Aurobindo did not know even about the unfortunate explosion on the hills near Deoghur that killed a brilliant boy, Prafulla Chakravorty, in the presence of Barindra Kumar, Nolini Kanta and Ullaskar as they were testing the efficacy of a bomb of their own make towards the end of 1907.

But no doubt the young men enlisted at Muraripukur — four or five to begin with but their number increased to about twenty, most of them residing there and some day-scholars, were inspired idealists. Even though only a few of them were found to have been swayed superficially and they either broke down, like Naren Gossain, before the spectre of the gallows or turned cynical later in life, like Hemchandra Kanungo, most of them were well-aware of the consequence of their actions and were prepared to face them. They intended their daring attack on the representatives of the British Raj to prove to the masses that the pillars on which the colonial structure rested were no more solid than clay. They also believed that the elimination of some notoriously anti-Indian elements would make the people feel avenged for the brutal oppression unleashed on them by the rulers. The well-read ones among the youths were sure that even stray acts of violence would indirectly create an atmosphere that would facilitate the nation-wide armed resurgence of their dream. Unfortunately they were not quite conscious of the facts that the quality of weaponry in the hands of the Raj was improving rapidly and that the Raj had started playing the most pernicious and treacherous communal card, among other divisive methods, that would delay and damage the lofty goal of independence, though it would fail to halt its passage.

It is a miracle that the inmates of the Gardens did not fall sick. The environment

was dirty and infested by a combined anarchy of mosquitoes and flies, and was a permanent exhibition of insect species. These primeval and original denizens of the Gardens must have been thrilled and over-active with their new-found human victims rich with warm patriotic blood.

The inmates cooked their food by turn — rice and *dal* and, if there was no other vegetable, a few potatoes boiled along with the rice. Each one had an earthen dish and a coconut-shell for a cup which they had to clean in one of the two multi-purpose ponds dominated by frogs and snakes — their swimming pools and their faithful source of water for drinking and cooking despite the thriving plethora of weeds.

Barin was then a ferocious *brahmachari*. Hence not a scale of fish, not even a scrap of onion had any eligibility to enter the Gardens. Chilli too was strictly forbidden. That kept our expenses low.⁶

More or less confident of themselves though they were, Barindra Kumar had a fresh brainwave. Probably a bit of Yogic power could supplement their stock of strength. Or, maybe, as Upendranath Bhandopadhyay, the leading theoretician of the group suspected, something more subtle could be the cause for the leader to look up to Lele the Yogi:

We were working at great speed, but I felt somewhat lacking in strength within. How far is the shore of the sea I am sailing on? . . . Where am I dragging all these boys along? The path was growing darker. I did not know how Barin's mind was working. I had never seen him retracing his steps from any daring adventure. But he too, I felt, at times withdrew into himself, anxious to tap some hidden strength. Probably it would be good to depend on something else to make our burden a bit light. Hence he called the Sadhu from Gujarat.⁷

Vishnu Bhaskar Lele duly arrived in the last week of February and was put up with Sri Aurobindo at his Scott's Lane residence where the latter had shifted only a few days before the guest's arrival. The household consisted of Sri Aurobindo, Mrinalini Devi, Sarojini Devi and Abinash Bhattacharya. Sailen Basu joined them later, at Bhattacharya's initiative.

Deviating a little from the line of narration regarding the activities of the Muraripukur group, let us have a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo's life-style during this time as recorded by Sri Aurobindo's confidant and the de facto manager of the establishment, Abinash Bhattacharya:

I used to keenly observe his daily life. So many visitors would descend on him. He had given up the principalship of the National College and was editing

the *Bande Mataram*. But he was always in a state of meditation. While with the visitors he talked smilingly but again withdrew into himself and was engrossed in silence. If someone came for obtaining some article for the *Bande Mataram*, he would ask him to wait and begin writing. Sometimes he looked at the paper and sometimes he did not, but wrote on. His pen or pencil never stopped. After writing a few pages he would ask, "This much should do, isn't that so?" I would say "Yes," and pass the papers to the messenger. It can well be imagined how difficult a task it could be for such a man to run a family. He never bothered about his food or clothes, was satisfied with whatever was available. The soles of his shoes had developed holes, but he did not care. He never worried about running the household; I had to do all the worrying. The monthly allowance of Rs. 150/- he used to receive from the college — not always though — had stopped. I had to borrow from the respectable Srijut Hemendra Prasad Ghose and used to try to pay back to the extent possible. Whoever came in contact with Sri Aurobindo — all — were simply charmed by his innocent child-like laughter and conduct. Sometimes I would take him to task smilingly and he would laugh loudly. It was at this time that Vishnu Bhaskar Lele arrived accompanied by one of his disciples. . . .⁸

The quality of their dishes had an elevation in honour of the guest: potatoes were added to the menu of rice and pulse! In consultation with Mrinalini Devi, Abinash managed to add drops of ghee in the dishes laid for the guest and his host.

Sri Aurobindo seems to have enjoyed a few leisurely moments with Lele, visiting the Belur Math and Kalighat. But Abinash did not like Lele visiting the Gardens and trying to distract the revolutionaries from their path. It was too much for him to observe Lele initiating Mrinalini Devi into meditation. What would be the future of revolution with such developments? He protested, but Mrinalini Devi silenced him, saying that she must try to follow her husband as closely as possible!

But disappointments were in store for Lele. He found out that Sri Aurobindo was no longer following the programme of Yoga prescribed by him. Little did the Yogi understand or little did his former initiate reveal to him that he, the initiate, had crossed the scope of any guidance by any Yoga-genius however great. What awaited him was Infinity's beckoning.

Lele's other disappointment concerned his sponsors, Barindra Kumar and his comrades. Before long he found out their motive. There was no question of his helping them in their dangerous mission that appeared to him as too absurd. He was certain of freedom coming to India, but not the way these misguided youths dreamed of. He had lively arguments with them, but none yielded to the other's point of view.

Lele felt that several of the youths were excellent stuff for Yoga. He tried to persuade them to follow him. He would impart to them the necessary Yogic training

that would facilitate their growth into purposeful leaders.

At least two of the youths were influenced enough to give his advice a try. One was Upendranath. He refers to Lele as the Sadhu and writes:

Said the Sadhu: “Look, boys, I know what I am saying. The goal of your activities will be reached, but not through the method you have chosen. I have come to know this through twenty years of my Sadhana. Such will be the situation all around that the country will spontaneously come under your charge. All you have to do is to formulate a scheme for administration. Let some of you come with me. Should your Sadhana fail to yield any direct result, you could come back.”

After the Sadhu left us for the day, we had a serious exchange of arguments among us. Barin shrugged violently and said, “Impossible! I will never give up the work. Redeeming India without bloodshed! — that is a ridiculous dream of his! I accept his other propositions, but not this one!”

But my mind had been sufficiently softened by the Sadhu. What’s wrong with giving his proposal a trial? . . . I took a decision to follow the Sadhu, accompanied by one or two boys. Once again the Sadhu came to persuade Barin, but Barin had never had the good habit of listening to any advice. The desperate Sadhu told him at last, “Look here, terrible danger will befall you, before long, if you do not give up this path!”

Said Barin, waving his arms, “They will hang us, is that all? But aren’t we ready to face that?”

“What will happen is worse than death!” said the Sadhu with a shrug.

The dialogue ended. The Sadhu decided upon the date of his return. But as the day neared, my feet, it seemed, refused to leave the Gardens. It had not been very difficult to desert my wife and son and my home, but how could I escape from these youths who had come leaving behind them the love of their parents, the prospects for their future and had given up all attachment to their life? . . . The appointed day came, but I could not accompany the Sadhu.⁹

Upendranath not only disappointed Lele but, at the very last moment of his departure, also snatched away from him the solitary recruit the Yogi had had.

Here is an extract from the inimitable narrative of Sureshchandra Chakravarti, a most faithful follower of Sri Aurobindo:

The atmosphere of the Gardens was that of an Ashram and Prafulla Chaki was growing up as a Sadhak. Barindra Kumar used to take classes on the Gita and the Upanishads; the history of the Russian Revolution, that of the resurgence of Italy and the life and activities of Garibaldi and the history of the fall and rise of India were taught by Upendranath Bandopadhyay. Nobody had the

desire to turn into a guru; all, attached to one another by a bond of love, were advancing to face death. Simultaneously they were collecting arms and ammunition and money and were trying to tell people that it was through a revolution that India must be liberated.

Prafulla Chaki used to fall into such deep trance that at times blows had to be administered to wake him up. He used to accompany us to Khidirpur Grand Hotel and Presidency Court etc. in order to find a suitable opportunity to kill Kingsford. We two would hold each other in our common grief for Kingsford, the poor fellow who had come here crossing the seven seas for the sake of livelihood but whom we must kill, with regrets though!

Indeed, many among the youths of that era were like that in their nature: one would hesitate even to inflict pain on a tree by detaching a branch from it, would shy away from killing an insect, but would not hesitate to kill a human being or plunder a treasury for the sake of the country's liberation. . . .

As Lele told them that the path they followed could not lead to their goal, Bibhuti Sarkar and a few others revolted against him. . . .

Prafulla Chaki wished to know from Lele how to obtain better results in Sadhana. Lele advised him to accompany him to Haridwar and Prafulla agreed . . .

When Prafulla took leave of us was a sad moment indeed! We embraced each other and wept. Lele-ji, along with Prafulla, proceeded to the Scott's Lane residence of Sri Aurobindo to bid goodbye to him. We, while shedding tears, appealed to Upendranath. He rushed to Sri Aurobindo's abode. Prafulla was waiting on the ground floor. Upendranath whispered to him about the futility of his following Lele in search of knowledge and inspired him to get away immediately. When Sri Aurobindo came down along with Lele to see the latter off and Barin too reached there for the same purpose, Prafulla was to be seen nowhere.

"Somebody must have led him astray," complained Lele-ji. Sri Aurobindo smiled. . . .

Upendranath who had become almost a shadow of Lele for the past few days, saved Prafulla from Lele's clutches.

To our great rejoicing Prafulla was back in the Gardens.¹⁰

This was the Prafulla Chaki who, along with Khudiram Bose, would enter a few weeks later the Roll Call of Honour for Martyrs in India's struggle for freedom.

(To be continued)

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Each new dawn brings the possibility of a new progress.

We move forward without haste, for we are sure of the future.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 74)

“THE WORLD-REDEEMER’S TASK”

THE poem, ‘A God’s Labour’ is in essence the vision, mission and experience of Sri Aurobindo. It is an embodied experience of the avatar’s *tapasya* captured in poetic rhythms, announcing the Truth of tomorrow. This autobiographical poem is extremely dense, highly symbolic and suggestive — every word and image depicts a mystic experience behind it: each phrase captures an adventure of consciousness. All through there is a strong rhythmic movement, an intense poetic sensibility and the intuitive turn of phrase bordering on *paśyanti vāk*. It is the “seeing-word” because it reveals the seer-poet’s creative powers.

‘A God’s Labour’ is the world-redeemer’s effort and experience etched in a few strokes of light. Although strewn with metaphysical ideas such as:

Coercing my godhead I have come down
Here on the sordid earth,
Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and birth. . . . (SABCL 5: 99)

this poem is not mere compressed thought-substance. For the critic, Sri Aurobindo’s “spiritual seeing” may seem to be more of philosophical abstractions which do not much help the inquisitive reader. Lines such as —

I have pierced the Void where Thought was born,
I have walked in the bottomless pit. . . .

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
At the very root of things
Where the grey Sphinx guards God’s riddle sleep
On the Dragon’s outspread wings. (Ibid.: 101)

may seem lines from a meta-philosophical treatise but for Sri Aurobindo these and many such lines in this poem, burdened with mystic experiences and insights, are concrete and embodied psycho-spiritual realities. Sometimes, these spiritual intuitions could be misinterpreted as poetic fancy or considered to be aesthetic expressions by those who do not have a true understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s inner work. “To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction,” emphasises Sri Aurobindo. (SABCL 29: 735-36) In connection with his magnificent and profound epic, *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo had written: “. . . what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced . . .”. (Ibid.: 794)

The same statement could be very aptly applied to this poem, ‘A God’s Labour’ too, for, every line and word in it has the impact of the power and authenticity of a deeper and conclusive experience. Nevertheless, it would be easier for the reader to understand the undercurrents and nuances of the imagery in this poem if he/she were to know the basic philosophy and vision of Sri Aurobindo. However the journey of discovering the inner work of the Redeemer itself requires a preparation from the reader in terms of a looking inward.

Oftentimes poetry is written as a recollection of a state of consciousness, or as the British poet noted, poetry is the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . recollected in tranquility”. But this poem does not seem to be in any manner a ‘recollection’ for, a ‘recollection’ is an act of memory and it loses the original force of the inner experience when it is translated into poetic rhythm and imagery. This poem seems to be a direct transcript of his actual level of consciousness and *sadhana* during 1935 — the year this poem was penned. The inner state of consciousness that the poet was constantly living in during this year is captured and given the poetic turn and stamp reflecting every battle and issue in his aeonic work which is, in the poet’s own words, “a revolt against the whole universal Nature”. (Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*, p. 334)

He was, however, fully aware, as he wrote in a letter to a disciple on 23rd August 1935, that “anyone who wants to change earth-nature must first accept it in order to change it.” (CWSA 35: 284) The same truth is admitted in these lines:

He who would bring the heavens here
 Must descend himself into clay
 And the burden of earthly nature bear
 And tread the dolorous way. (SABCL 5: 99)

What is experienced and felt in his spiritual self as well as in his inner physical and mental being is the struggle of the world-redeemer who would have to bear “the burden of earthly nature” and “tread the dolorous way”. It is obvious from another letter that he had “accepted” the earth-nature and was solely working to “change” it by the Supramental consciousness and force which he was seeking to bring down not for his own salvation or his spiritual emancipation, but for “the earth and souls born on the earth”. (CWSA 35: 282-83)

Perhaps, we may never understand the invisible battles that Sri Aurobindo had waged to change the “earthly nature”, the results and secrets which he had obtained. It seems that Sri Aurobindo left his body without revealing his secrets. But, of one thing we are absolutely sure, for he himself has revealed it: “I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits.” (SABCL 26: 124) In support of Sri Aurobindo’s stand, the Mother said, “There is always the possibility of escaping

and going elsewhere. Many people have done that. They have gone elsewhere, into another, more or less subtle world. There are millions of ways of escaping, you see; there is only one way of staying, which is to have courage and endurance, to accept all the appearance of disability, powerlessness, incomprehension — the appearance of, yes, a negation of the Truth. But if one does not accept, it will never be changed. Those who want to remain great, luminous, strong, powerful, and so on and so forth — well, let them, they can be of no help to the earth.” (*Mother’s Agenda*, 6: 261)

Yes, Sri Aurobindo accepted the “negation of the Truth” and focused his consciousness on the earth consciousness, making his own body the centre of the work of transformation: “One man’s perfection still can save the world.” (*Savitri*, Bk. VII Canto V) He knew that if the new power, the Supermind, could be made active within the terrestrial body, that is, if it actually touches one body at least, then it would settle itself in the earth consciousness and devise its own means of expression — its own new form that would express it in all its radiance and luminosity — as was done by the Mind principle when it was infused into Life millions of years ago. This is what Sri Aurobindo achieved, even at the holocaust of his own body, to pull down the new Consciousness and Force on earth and hook it permanently, as it were.

“I am at present engaged in bringing the Supermind into the physical consciousness,” Sri Aurobindo told a disciple, “down even to the sub-material.” (A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks*, p. 484) The physical is by nature inert and does not want to be rendered conscient. It offers much greater resistance as it is unwilling to change. One feels as if one is ‘digging the earth’, as the Veda puts it. The “digging” seems to be the work of all those who have tried the transformation of the physical — a process that started in the Vedic times and is now being continued by Sri Aurobindo:

I have been digging deep and long
Mid a horror of filth and mire (*SABCL* 5: 99)

Sri Aurobindo had taken the plunge through “the body’s alleys” to bring the Supramental consciousness into its very cells. His central effort was to fix it in the physical for he was convinced that “if something is definitely gained on the physical plane, there is a more lasting and complete fulfilment than when it is on the mental or vital alone.” (*CWSA* 35: 337) Until and unless the consciousness is realised on the level of the physical nothing is permanent or stable. “Only the body can understand,” said the Mother, and it is the body alone that can perceive the next species, for, the new Consciousness is working itself out in the body and not only on the mental or vital levels. The new Consciousness is a formidable power and our mind and vital together cannot truly support it. What is required is the solid *terra firma* of the body, of conscious Matter, which alone has the capacity to develop itself, to bear the force and pressure of the new Consciousness. For the body to understand

is to have the capacity of execution, obtained through the contagion of example. For, “to understand” for the body means “to be able to do”, explains the Mother.

Indeed, without transforming the mind and the vital, one cannot attempt any transformation of the physical. “You know,” explained the Mother to a student, “these very petty limits of thought are things which ought to disappear before you can even attempt to transform your body. If you still have these very petty ideas . . . there is not much hope that you could begin the least process for the transformation of your body.” (MCW 9: 132) The transformation of the body is in fact the last thing to be taken up: the hunting down of the “falsehood of the body”, illness, unconsciousness, old age, comes only in the last level, when the formation of the higher stages, the mental and the vital, is already over and when the rest of the being lives in the Truth, is established in the Truth. It would be an error to imagine that one can undertake the Supramental yoga before having climbed all the other rungs of consciousness.

This “digging” must have lasted very long for, even in March 1937, Sri Aurobindo refers to it and writes: “I am not soaring and soaring — I am digging and digging.” (CWSA 35: 364) This digging is, as seen earlier, into the very subconscious — the subconscious of the body, the vital and the mind! The subconscious is a universal and at the same time a very disorganised level of consciousness that accumulates all the “habits” and *sanskaras* of earth’s past. Clearing it, refining it is perhaps as impossible a task as the one Hercules was given to cleanse in one night the Augean stables! And the first reactions of this digging into the dark alleys of the Inconscient and the Subconscious are predictably those of a huge revolt that Sri Aurobindo refers to in his letter: “The subconscious difficulty is *the* difficulty now — because the whole struggle in the general sadhana is now there. It is in the subconscious, no longer in the vital or conscious physical that the resistance is all massed together.” (CWSA 35: 341)

It may be because of the pulling down of the Supramental consciousness and force that the Subconscious region and the vital forces rose up *en masse* trying to obstruct the descent. In the poem itself, this revolt, this “upsurging of subconscious mud” (CWSA 35: 342) is described as —

How they mock and sneer, both devils and men!
 “Thy hope is Chimera’s head
 Painting the sky with its fiery stain;
 Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead. . . .

“Come, let us slay him and end his course!
 Then shall our hearts have release
 From the burden and call of his glory and force
 And the curb of his wide white peace.”

(SABCL 5: 100-01)

These “devils and men” who revolt are indeed the beastly forces of the Inconscient. They cannot tolerate the “sacred Light” of the Superconscient. They want to put an end to the Redeemer, the bringer of the Light and Consciousness. They have done it before:

Mortality bears ill the eternal’s touch:
 It fears the pure divine intolerance
 Of that assault of ether and of fire; . . .
 Inflicting on the heights the abysm’s law,
 It sullies with its mire heaven’s messengers: . . .
 It turns against the saviour hands of Grace;
 It meets the sons of God with death and pain.

(*Savitri*, Bk. I Canto 1)

This time too they want to “slay” the Saviour so that they can have their sway over the world of men and rule the earth indefinitely. “One can’t advance a single step without their throwing their shells and stink-bombs” (CWSA 35: 336) reiterated Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo refers to this “mock and sneer” in one of his letters, written on 10 February 1935:

Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption, — I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others.

(CWSA 35: 282)

In the midst of this gruesome battle and fury, the protagonist hears a voice:

A voice cried, “Go where none have gone!
 Dig deeper, deeper yet
 Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
 And knock at the keyless gate.” (SABCL 5: 101)

The advice of the “voice” to “dig deeper” gives a clue that it is only on reaching the hidden dormant bottom-most level of the Inconscient that one can connect to the Superconscient: the Above and the Below are bridged! Sri Aurobindo’s relentless battle was on obviously for years together for even after ten years of writing this poem, he reveals in a letter of April 1944 that his *sadhana* had come down to the level of the Inconscient. Hence, the real struggle was to break the primordial “changeless habits” of the body which get riveted in the triple layer of the human being. Moreover, unless and until the sempiternal habits are transformed, revamped,

“re-grooved” on the physical level nothing permanent can take place. “Salvation is physical”, the Mother used to say, when she was in the thick of the “monumental battle” trying to “re-tread” the fixed habits of the “mechanical repetitions of Nature”. She reiterated that “When it comes to the body, and you want to make it take one single step forward . . . everything starts grating: it’s like stepping on an anthill.” (Satprem, *The Mind of the Cells*, p. 68)

What Sri Aurobindo had expressed in 1944, that his work was going on at the level of the “grim foundation stone”, the Inconscient, was experienced by the Mother too in 1953:

Death isn’t inevitable, it is an accident which has always happened until now (or seems to have always happened), and we have gotten it into our head to conquer and overcome this accident. But that means such a dreadful and gigantic fight against all the laws of nature, all the collective suggestions, all the earthly habits, that unless you are a fearless warrior ready to go through anything, you had better not start the battle.

(Satprem, *The Mind of the Cells*, p. 69)

In fact the labour of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo has been to transform this “habit” of the physical to succumb to death and falsehood. And this transformation, the unveiling of Death, is possible only with the Supramental light penetrating the Inconscient which is the storehouse of universal habits of the physical, vital and mental consciousness. Therefore, it is imperative to enter the “bottomless pit” with the Supramental “beam” and come to know “the inner reason of hell”!

Sri Aurobindo was assured of his faith:

I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth-evolution. If greater men than myself have not had this vision and this ideal before them, that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth-sense and Truth-vision. . . .

(CWSA 35: 281)

It is with this certitude of his Truth-sense and Truth-vision that Sri Aurobindo took up the task of opening the way to “a development of divine consciousness here” for he knew that that is “to be the final sense of the earth-evolution”. When one travels in a difficult, uncharted terrain it is very likely that one encounters dangers and threats. But Sri Aurobindo was on a mission:

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
 Marrying the soil to the sky
 And sow in this dancing planet midge
 The moods of infinity. (SABCL 5: 99)

And nothing could stop him, not even if all “Hell” burst on him. We marvel at the dauntless spirit of Sri Aurobindo who takes up this journey to conquer the undiscovered realms of consciousness and is ready to face all the consequences if his endeavours fail. His effort of “marrying the soil to the sky” is difficult and dangerous. Yet he knows that if his labour of love and compassion for mankind can succeed it would create the possibility of a new creation and for that he is ready to make all sacrifices.

The Redeemer has “the iron will” to break the resistance of the Subconscient and to conquer the “Titan kings”:

All that was found must again be sought,
 Each enemy slain revives,
 Each battle for ever is fought and refought
 Through vistas of fruitless lives.

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
 And the Titan kings assail,
 But I cannot rest till my task is done
 And wrought the eternal will. (SABCL 5: 100)

The descent “into clay” and the “world’s dark” is essentially the avataric labour, though not of the avatars known and accepted till now. It is in particular the avataric work and mission of Sri Aurobindo who has been commissioned by the Divine Fiat to

. . . build a rainbow bridge
 Marrying the soil to the sky

or, as he wrote to someone in 1936,

No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy, I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things — in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it. (CWSA 35: 360)

Sri Aurobindo goes through the monumental battle even at the cost of a thousand “gaping wounds”:

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
 And the Titan kings assail, . . .

All around me now the Titan forces press;
 This world is theirs, they hold its days in fee;
 I am full of wounds and the fight merciless.
 Is it not yet Thy hour of victory? (SABCL 5: 146)

Relentless and indomitable, the protagonist battles these beastly forces with the strength of “the god” in his “mortal breast” —

Who wrestles with error and fate
 And tramples a road through mire and waste
 For the nameless Immaculate. (SABCL 5: 101)

Even though in battle in the mire and waste the protagonist has not lost his deeper contact, the power of “the Unknowable”:

Although consenting to mortal ignorance,
 His knowledge shared the Light ineffable.
 A strength of the original Permanence
 Entangled in the moment and its flow,
 He kept the vision of the Vasts behind:
 A power was in him from the Unknowable.

(Savitri, Bk. I Canto 3)

With this strength of the Permanence in him, “the hour of victory” was bound to be near:

All veils are breaking now.
 I have heard His voice and borne His will,
 On my vast untroubled brow. (SABCL 5: 102)

Sri Aurobindo had set out “To bring the fire to man” and to build “A home for the deathless fire” and for that he did “pass to the other shore of falsehood’s sea”, (Savitri, Bk. VI Canto 2) entered “the world’s dark to bring there light”, (*Ibid.*) and succeeded in “bringing the fires”:

Heaven’s fire is lit in the breast of the earth
 And the undying suns here burn;
 Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth
 The incarnate spirits yearn

Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss . . . (SABCL 5: 102)

This concrete experience clearly indicates that “Heaven’s fire” has been lit in the darkest chamber of the earth and what was assumed to be impossible has been made possible. What was a prayer has become a reality:

Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless the children of Time. . . .
 Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life beatitude’s kiss.

(*SABCL* 5: 584)

Not only does Sri Aurobindo establish Bliss in the Abyss but he can foresee the dawn of a new spiritual age, a life divine upon earth. Once he has travelled through “Hell the world to save”, he has prophetic visions of the New Race, that of the Superman, that is awaiting on the luminous borders of the occult earth:

Down a gold-red stair-way wend
 The radiant children of Paradise
 Clarioning darkness’s end. (*SABCL* 5: 102)

The same vision of the descent of the New Race is elaborated in *Savitri*:

I saw the Omnipotent’s flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth; . . .
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality. (Bk. III Canto 4)

“A gold-red stair-way” and “the amber stairs” are descriptive of the golden path of the Supermind for the “radiant children of Paradise” and “the sun-eyed children” to descend on earth in their destined hour. “Paradise” surely is not the one that is alluded to in religious scriptures and literature but it is the new paradise of a transformed earth. These “children” and “the massive barrier-breakers” announce the end of “darkness” and the beginning of a new Earth when —

This mortal life shall house Eternity’s bliss,
 The body’s self taste immortality.
 Then shall the world-redeemer’s task be done.

(*Savitri*, Bk. 6 Canto 2)

God's labour is done though till now only on the subtle physical level. Sri Aurobindo has rediscovered the secret of the Vedic Rishis — the “great passage”, *mahas pathah*, the world of “the unbroken light” and the *swar* at the bottom of the Inconscient, “the well of honey covered by the rock”. Like the Angirasas who shattered the mountain rock with their cry and “made in us a path to the Great Heaven” discovering the Sun dwelling in the Darkness, Sri Aurobindo has discovered the Supermind above in the great Heaven, the upper hemisphere, and the Supermind below, under “the grim foundation stone”, in “the bottomless pit”.

As a consequence of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's god-like “labour” the

. . . new world is *born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new* world which is *born*. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled — where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in . . . (MCW 9: 149)

The unbeliever and the sceptic might comment that all these hopes of transformation of the body and the vision of the New Race is tall talk, that it is phantasmagoria. To him Sri Aurobindo replies:

My faith and will are for the now. . . . I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world . . . which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster. (SABCL 26: 167, 169)

The Mother too replies in the same vein —

. . . it is possible *because* it has never been. It is the new world and it is the new consciousness and it is the new Power, it is possible, and this is and will be more and more manifested *because* it is the new world, *because* it has never been. It will be *because* it has never been. . . .

It is beautiful: it will be because it has never been — *because* it has never been. (MCW 11: 317)

Similar is Sri Aurobindo's promise, as expressed in *Savitri*:

A new creation from the old shall rise,
A Knowledge inarticulate find speech,
Beauty suppressed burst into paradise bloom,
Pleasure and pain dive into absolute bliss. (Bk. III Canto 3)

The protagonist, who had started his labour with “My jewelled dreams of you”, of the earth between “the gold and the blue” — between the Supramental and the mental — has fulfilled his dream by bringing down the “truth-conscious world” (*Savitri*, Bk. II Canto 2) wherein “mortal life” houses “Eternity’s bliss”. He hopes — and in his hope there is a promise — that on this new Earth shall walk the “living truth of you” — the body of beauty and bliss of the Mother. That is to say, it is the first prototype of the Superman worked out by the Mother in her own physical body and left behind in the subtle realms and which, when the moment arrives, will be visible even to the non-believer.

But when will that moment come when “the little more” and “the new life’s” doors are “carved in silver light . . . in a world bare and bright”? That will be

when a sufficient number of conscious people feel without doubt that there is no other choice. . . . Everything past and present must first appear as an absurdity that has to go — only then can it happen, not before.

(Satprem, *Mother or The New Species*, p. 40)

Anyone can belong to that “sufficient number of conscious people” on condition that he/she takes the decisive step in one’s consciousness. This decisive step is as simple as having a faith in the bright future of humanity. It is only to open one’s eyes to this possibility. If a sufficient number of conscious people believe it is possible, then it will be probable and everything will be feasible! The only impossibility is to think that it is not achievable: it blocks the path completely and we sink into the old fossilised perception. If we do not believe in this possibility it would be like the reptile which would have stubbornly remained a reptile dried up in its swamp and never made the transition to the land-roaming creatures. But for those of us who do want to make the transition, we have only to open the Doors of a new Perception, a new Possibility and the Doors of a new World would open ajar, the one that the Mother has described so very graphically.

This is the secret: we approach the Future with a faith in our heart and a resolution in our soul. And, “If earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now.” (*SABCL* 17: 9) This is the promise held out by Sri Aurobindo to all adventurers of this new consciousness.

ANANDA REDDY

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The Avatar: the supreme Divine manifested in an earthly form — generally a human form — for a definite purpose.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 18)

A GOD'S LABOUR

(At the outset, a word of caution. Mystic poetry by its very nature is written by and for something higher and deeper than the mind and intellect and to limit its explanation and understanding to the mind and intellect would be to cut out its very heart. However, as Sri Aurobindo says, "The critic can help to open the mind to the kinds of beauty he himself sees and not only to discover but to appreciate at their full value certain elements that make them beautiful or give them what is most characteristic or unique in their peculiar beauty." [*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA Vol. 27, p. 664] Let me hasten to add, I am not a critic, far from it, but in some such spirit is this article offered.)

In his short poem, 'A God's Labour', consisting of 31 stanzas and 134 lines, Sri Aurobindo writes about the problems and pitfalls faced by all avatars and prophets who come to bring light, knowledge and truth to this ignorant and dark world. Humanity bites the hand that comes to save and puts to the cross the Saviour, for it is too much in love with its own ignorance, falsehood and darkness and values not the gifts that the divine messenger brings. It would rather toil in its mire and mud than breathe the rarefied air of the heavens, for humanity cannot accept or endure too much of the heavenly light and bliss, and it soon turns its back on them, content with its own suffering and pain and travail. In a way, 'A God's Labour' is the tale of all the avatars and prophets, it is the story of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, of all they have done to bring light and love and knowledge to this darkened, ignorant and inscient world, of the formidable difficulties and foes they have faced and of how little humanity has known and valued the priceless gifts they have brought to the earth.

Stanzas 1 to 3

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air
 Between the gold and the blue
And wrapped them softly and left them there,
 My jewelled dreams of you.

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
 Marrying the soil to the sky
And sow in this dancing planet midge
 The moods of infinity.

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,
 Too frail their ethereal stuff;
 Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
 The roots were not deep enough.

The poet begins with the poet's dreams of gold and blue, of the Supramental and Krishna consciousness, gathered in the silver air — the spiritual realms, wrapped softly and left there, his jewelled dreams of divinisation of the earth, awaiting their time of manifestation when the earth would be ready to receive them. He has dreamt of linking earth to heaven, 'Marrying the soil to the sky', with a rainbow-hued multicoloured bridge (the myriad and infinitely varied and coloured creation), so as to lift this insignificant and small speck of dust called earth, this 'dancing planet midge', to the rarefied air of the heavens, linking it to the 'moods of infinity', bringing down that divine and transforming light to this darkened world, so as to open these human eyes to the vision of the infinite. In the words of another poet, William Blake:

To see a world in a grain of sand
 And heaven in a wild flower,
 Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
 And eternity in an hour.

(*'Auguries of Innocence'* by William Blake)

But the gap between the earth and heaven was too great. Too frail and delicate was the heavenly stuff and too splendid and bright was the heavenly light and it could not find in the earth's atmosphere a sufficient receptivity to fix its roots, to manifest itself; as the poet says,

Too frail their ethereal stuff;
 Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
 The roots were not deep enough.

In his magnum opus, the epic poem *Savitri*, the same thought is expressed by the poet:

Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,
 Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range.

. . . Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,

. . . Only a little the god-light can stay:

(p. 5)

Stanzas 4 to 7

He who would bring the heavens here
 Must descend himself into clay
 And the burden of earthly nature bear
 And tread the dolorous way.

Coercing my godhead I have come down
 Here on the sordid earth,
 Ignorant, labouring, human grown
 Twixt the gates of death and birth.

I have been digging deep and long
 Mid a horror of filth and mire
 A bed for the golden river's song,
 A home for the deathless fire.

I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night
 To bring the fire to man;
 But the hate of hell and human spite
 Are my meed since the world began.

In stanzas 4 to 7, the poet states a great spiritual truth when he says that the bringer of light and truth must himself descend into the mud and mire, into this world of darkness and falsehood and must take on the ignorant human personality and suffer the pangs of earthly life. He must himself 'tread the dolorous way', the distressing, painful, sorrowful way, if he is to lead this world towards light and truth, he must himself take on the burden of human nature and be, not only the son of god, but also the son of man, in order for the son of man to become the son of god by following him. It is only when the avatar takes on the human nature and the outer human personality of mind, life and body that humanity can relate to him, can come into contact with him, for otherwise the gap in the consciousness is too great and there would not be any meaningful exchange between them. In *Savitri* also the same truth is expressed:

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

The Vedas call this the Sacrifice of the Purusha, but Sri Aurobindo more appropriately calls it the Sacrifice of the Divine Mother, when he writes in his book *The Mother*:

In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.

(CWSA, Vol. 32 p. 17)

The poet says that coercing, forcing his godhead, that vast and infinite consciousness of a god, into this infinitesimal human body and consciousness, he has come down on this dark and sordid earth and taken on the ignorant and labouring human personality and entered the portals of birth and death,

Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and birth.

Taking on the outer human personality of mind, life and body, requires the taking on also of the sub-conscious and the inconscient, for it is through them that the outer personality has evolved and it is the sub-conscious and the inconscient which is still, in some way, the predominant influence on it.

The poet says that he has been digging deep and long amid the horrors of filth and mire which is the inconscient and the sub-conscious, for without changing and transforming them, it is a vain chimera to think of transforming the mind, life and body complex. The poet has been digging in the inconscient to make a river bed for the golden waters to flow, 'a bed for the golden river's song', the river of supramental consciousness and force and also to build a home in the inconscient for the deathless fire, Agni, the divine aspiration and will, the divine portion in us, 'A home for the deathless fire.'

The poet has suffered and laboured in Matter's night, the inconscient, to bring the divine light and consciousness to mankind, 'To bring the fire to man;' but as is its wont, mankind in return has given him only hatred, jealousy, suffering and pain for his troubles. From time eternal it has honoured the son of god by putting a crown of thorns on his head or stoning him to death, and always it has been only the 'hate of hell and human spite' that have been his rewards.

Stanzas 8 to 9

For man's mind is the dupe of his animal self;
 Hoping its lusts to win,
 He harbours within him a grisly Elf
 Enamoured of sorrow and sin.

The grey Elf shudders from heaven's flame
 And from all things glad and pure;
 Only by pleasure and passion and pain
 His drama can endure.

In the next two stanzas, the poet elucidates and highlights the reason for mankind's violent opposition to the sons of god. He says that the mind of man is dominated by his vital and rajasic ego of desires, ambitions and lust, 'man's mind is the dupe of his animal self', always seeking to fulfil its desires, 'Hoping its lusts to win', and embedded in his breast is a grisly elf, a frightful, mischievous being, who loves drama, sorrow, sin and tragedy. This grisly, grey elf is the inconscient's remnant in us and it passionately opposes and repulses all things divine, all movements towards the divine,

The grey Elf shudders from heaven's flame
 And from all things glad and pure.

It loves the dualities of pleasure and pain, love and hatred, joy and sorrow, etc. and the drama that accompanies them, for thus only can it exist. It is only by facing and overcoming this grey elf, the symbol of the dark concealed hostility lodged in our breast that one can securely walk the divine path; and this battle all have to face, all who desire the divine life. Echoing the same thought in *Savitri*, the poet says:

A dark concealed hostility is lodged
 In the human depths, in the hidden heart of Time
 That claims the right to change and mar God's work.
 . . . This hidden foe lodged in the human breast
 Man must overcome or miss his higher fate.
 This is the inner war without escape.

(pp. 447-48)

Stanzas 10 to 13

All around is darkness and strife;
 For the lamps that men call suns
 Are but halfway gleams on this stumbling life
 Cast by the Undying Ones.

Man lights his little torches of hope
 That lead to a failing edge;
 A fragment of Truth is his widest scope,
 An inn his pilgrimage.

The Truth of truths men fear and deny,
 The Light of lights they refuse;
 To ignorant gods they lift their cry
 Or a demon altar choose.

All that was found must again be sought,
 Each enemy slain revives,
 Each battle for ever is fought and refought
 Through vistas of fruitless lives.

The poet in describing the human condition says that all around humanity is darkness and strife for what the mind of man takes as the sun of truth, all its yardsticks and lamp-posts are in reality only half-truths and partial, faint and brief lights of gods cast on this stumbling human life,

. . . For the lamps that men call suns
 Are but halfway gleams on this stumbling life
 Cast by the Undying Ones.

The mind of man by its very nature can only see the truth in its parts and not as a whole, and since it cannot perceive the whole truth; the actions based on this partial truth are bound to be limited and prone to error.

The little torches of hope that man lights and fills his life with invariably lead to a failing edge, to disappointment and disillusionment and distress, for a fragment of the truth, partial and not the whole truth, 'is his widest scope', the maximum his mind can achieve, the highest it can attain, and therefore a travesty of the truth; and thus, an inn, a wayside rest house, a half-way stop, becomes for him the end of the pilgrimage, an 'inn his pilgrimage.'

Man in his ignorance and ego denies the ultimate truth, fears it, 'The Truth of

truths men fear and deny'. The divine light man refuses and rejects because in his ignorance he is identified with his ego and his outer personality and thinks that the extinction of the ego will mean his own extinction; whereas in truth this is an opening to a vaster and newer life in the divine truth. These ignorant men choose to pray to ignorant gods, the gods of the vital and the mental worlds or worse, some may even choose to accept the devil and the demon as their god,

To ignorant gods they lift their cry
Or a demon altar choose.

Stanzas 14 to 18

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
And the Titan kings assail,
But I dare not rest till my task is done
And wrought the eternal will.

How they mock and sneer, both devils and men!
"Thy hope is Chimera's head
Painting the sky with its fiery stain;
Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead.

"Who art thou that babblest of heavenly ease
And joy and golden room
To us who are waifs on inconscient seas
And bound to life's iron doom?"

"This earth is ours, a field of Night
For our petty flickering fires.
How shall it brook the sacred Light
Or suffer a god's desires?"

"Come, let us slay him and end his course!
Then shall our hearts have release
From the burden and call of his glory and force
And the curb of his wide white peace."

In stanzas 14 to 18, the poet refers to the action of the hostile forces, 'the Titan kings', who are opposed to the advent of truth and light and knowledge on this earth and who take this earth as their own proper field, to be enjoyed and toyed with as they wish. The main weapons these hostile forces use are half-truths, falsehood

and lies; through these they try to create doubt in the mind and fissures in the faith. The poet says he has a thousand wounds from the fight with the dark forces, but they continue to attack still, 'And the Titan kings assail'. But he cannot rest till the divine work entrusted to him is done and the divine will is fulfilled, 'And wrought the eternal will', which is the establishment of the divine rule on earth.

The hostile beings and ignorant men fooled by the half-truths and half lies, mock and sneer and make fun of the divine worker, 'How they mock and sneer, both devils and men!' They tell him that his hope for the divinisation of the earth is a dream, a figment of the imagination, an illusion, that it is a chimera's head painting the sky with its fiery breath and that his work is bound to fail and lie unfinished, 'Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead'. Chimera, according to Greek mythology, was a monstrous fire-breathing hybrid creature composed of parts of three animals — a lion, a snake and a goat, in short a mythical creature without any reality.

They taunt God's messenger and challenge his heavenly truths and certitudes and the coming of Truth's reign, 'Who art thou that babblest of heavenly ease', questioning him and his message of the coming of the supramental life of 'joy and golden room'. They describe themselves as waifs, homeless and abandoned creatures, floating on the sea of inconscience and ignorance, ever 'bound to life's iron doom', the irrevocable law of death and fate.

According to these hostile beings, the earth is theirs, 'This earth is ours, a field of Night', a place of ignorance and darkness, meant for their enjoyment and rule, for the fulfilment of their petty egoistic desires and ambitions and lusts, for their 'petty flickering fires'. They doubt the earth's ability to become divine and its willingness and capacity to bear and retain the divine light and fulfil god's vision for it,

How shall it brook the sacred Light
Or suffer a god's desires?

The hostile forces will go to any extent to stop the divine worker, even to the extent of taking his life and putting a stop to the divine work, 'Come, let us slay him and end his course', so as to get relief from the divine glory and force which the divine worker represents and brings with him. The divine light and consciousness is anathema to the hostile beings and they cannot bear it, are oppressed by it and seek relief by any means from it. They want to be free of the restrictions which the divine peace and force and light impose on them, so as to carry on their undivine work without hindrance, and 'the curb of his wide white peace.'

Stanzas 19 to 25

But the god is there in my mortal breast
 Who wrestles with error and fate
 And tramples a road through mire and waste
 For the nameless Immaculate.

A voice cried, "Go where none have gone!
 Dig deeper, deeper yet
 Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
 And knock at the keyless gate."

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
 At the very root of things
 Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
 On the Dragon's outspread wings.

I left the surface gauds of mind
 And life's unsatisfied seas
 And plunged through the body's alleys blind
 To the nether mysteries.

I have delved through the dumb Earth's dreadful heart
 And heard her black mass' bell.
 I have seen the source whence her agonies part
 And the inner reason of hell.

Above me the dragon murmurs moan
 And the goblin voices flit;
 I have pierced the Void where Thought was born,
 I have walked in the bottomless pit.

On a desperate stair my feet have trod
 Armoured with boundless peace,
 Bringing the fires of the splendour of God
 Into the human abyss.

From stanza 19 to 25, the focus moves to the divine messenger and the work he has to do. The poet begins by asserting that god resides in his mortal breast, one who wrestles and overcomes all error and fate, all the resistance and hurdles put up by the unconscious and the adverse forces, and cuts a path through mire and waste, through these hurdles, for the divine to arrive,

And tramples a road through mire and waste
For the nameless Immaculate.

A voice tells him to dig deeper and deeper into the very heart of the inconscient and to go where no one has gone before, to the very foundation of the inconscient, the bedrock of this earthly existence, to 'knock at the keyless gate'. If death, ignorance, falsehood have to be effaced from this earth, if the earthly life has to become the life divine, it is necessary that the inconscient be transformed, for it is here that death, ignorance and falsehood have their roots. Till now, the Overmind was the highest plane of consciousness which had its influence upon this earth, but it was not sufficiently strong or powerful to transform the inconscient and no concerted or organised effort was made to transform it. It is only the supramental consciousness which has the power to transform the inconscient and that is the work the poet is referring to in this poem.

At the very root of things, in the heart of the inconscient, the poet sees a falsehood planted. Stanza 21 is full of occult imagery and occult mysteries. The dragon's outspread wings represent the vast outreach of the inconscient (according to the Vedas, above our limited human consciousness, there is an ocean of super-consciousness and below it an ocean of the inconscient). The grey Sphinx symbolically represents the iron law of doom and death and fate, the eternal negation, the falsehood planted at the very root of things. But what is the 'God's riddle' hidden in the inconscient that the Sphinx guards? We get a clue of this from a talk of the Mother, where she says:

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

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

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

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

(CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 332-33)

This is God's riddle or secret asleep in the depths of the inconscient.

Going deeper and deeper, the poet leaves behind the superficial trinkets and showy ornaments of the mental worlds, 'surface gauds of mind', passes through the insatiable and unending desires of the vital worlds, 'life's unsatisfied seas', and then plunges through the murky and darkened physical worlds, 'through the body's alleys blind', to the sub-conscious and the inconscient worlds, the nether regions. It is here in the sub-conscious and the inconscient that he finds the source of all the earth's miseries, as he says, 'the inner reason of hell'. He has gone through the dumb earth's heart of darkness and ignorance and falsehood and heard the dreadful cry of hell, 'her black mass' bell'. He has seen the source, the bottomless pit, from where all the earth's agonies originate.

The inconscient is an infernal place where very powerful and dreadful beings, 'The Titan kings', rule and hold sway. There is no end to their devilishness and just one look of theirs can be fatal. They take on many shapes and forms and are adept at confusing the mind with logic and scriptures. As it is stated in *Savitri*:

Appalling footsteps drew invisibly near,
Shapes that were threats invaded the dream-light,
And ominous beings passed him on the road
Whose very gaze was a calamity:

(p. 205)

However, all divine workers have to pass through this infernal passage, for the route to the heavens lies through it. The only protection here is the divine name and remembrance and sincerity and purity. Once again in *Savitri* we find:

Here must the traveller of the upward Way —
For daring Hell's kingdoms winds the heavenly route —
Pause or pass slowly through that perilous space,
A prayer upon his lips and the great Name.
. . . Only were safe who kept God in their hearts:

(pp. 210-11)

This is the bottomless pit where the poet has walked, piercing the void, the *Shunya*, from where thought was born, 'I have pierced the Void where Thought was born', surrounded on all sides by dreadful dark denizens of those nether regions, murmuring their defeatist mantras,

Above me the dragon murmurs moan
And the goblin voices flit.

On this stairway to hell, 'a desperate stair', the poet has trod, protected by the divine name and the divine remembrance in the heart and the armour of the divine peace: 'Armoured with boundless peace', fulfilling his appointed task of bringing the divine light and consciousness into the depths of the human abyss,

Bringing the fires of the splendour of God
Into the human abyss.

Stanzas 26 to 31

He who I am was with me still;
All veils are breaking now.
I have heard His voice and borne His will
On my vast untroubled brow.

The gulf twixt the depths and the heights is bridged
And the golden waters pour
Down the sapphire mountain rainbow-ridged
And glimmer from shore to shore.

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
And the undying suns here burn;
Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth
The incarnate spirits yearn

Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss:
Down a gold-red stairway wend
The radiant children of Paradise
Clarioning darkness' end.

A little more and the new life's doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,
 For in a raiment of gold and blue
 There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
 The living truth of you.

The last six stanzas, from 26 to 31, refer to the fulfilment of the divine worker's task and the poet's dream: — the establishment of the golden rainbow bridge between the heights and the depths, between the supramental world and the nether fields, so that the supramental consciousness flows unhindered into the depths, gradually transforming it.

The poet has realised his oneness with the divine and all the veils are being removed, even that of the inconscient and the sub-consciousness. He has heard the divine command and borne the divine's will on his vast calm brow and as a result of his 'God's labour' the gulf between the depths and the heights is bridged and the golden waters, the supramental consciousness, pour down the rainbow-ridged sapphire mountain and shine from shore to shore, from end to end.

Heaven's fire, the fire of divine knowledge, aspiration and will is lit in the breast of earth and the undying suns, the supramental consciousness and light, burn here on the earth. Through the opening made in the earth consciousness, 'a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth', the incarnate spirits, those at the vanguard of humanity, those at the forefront spiritually, yearn like flames, straight upwards, to the kingdom of truth and bliss, the divine kingdom.

From the other side, above, the radiant, shining children of heaven, the supramental beings, slowly step down the gold-red stairway, 'Down a gold-red stairway wend', the stairway connecting the supramental to the earth, proclaiming and foretelling the end of the rule of darkness and the inconscient, of falsehood and ignorance on the earth, 'Clarioning darkness' end'.

In the penultimate stanza, the poet prophesies that soon, 'A little more', and the new life's door, the divine life, shall be established on the earth, be carved in the silver light, with its golden (aureate) roof, the supramental world and mosaic floors as the base and this world will become a world of light and truth, 'a great world bare and bright'.

The poet finishes in the same manner as he began. His dreams have turned into reality and he says that he will leave them in their silver (argent) air, for soon, clad in garments of gold and blue, 'in a raiment of gold and blue', there shall walk on the earth, embodied supramental beings, the living truth of the divine.

There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
 The living truth of you.

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Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 32 — *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*

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'Auguries of Innocence' by William Blake

The Divine, being all-powerful, can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth. It is only if it is part of the world arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that avatarhood has any meaning.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 18)

THE POEM AND THE EPIC: HARBINGERS OF THE SUPRAMENTAL

AFTER coming to Pondicherry in 1910, Sri Aurobindo studied deeply the scriptures and entered into the profound inner regions. It was a Jnana yoga which immediately followed his untiring Karma yoga for achieving India's political liberation. But this too was a hard and demanding work, the preparing of the base for a truer life. He has described it all in his poem, 'A God's Labour'. It speaks of his attempt at waking up his fellowmen to the Next Future, of transforming earthly life into a divinised existence.

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
Marrying the soil to the sky
And sow in this dancing planet midge
The moods of infinity.

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,
Too frail their ethereal stuff;
Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
The roots were not deep enough.

This is not a poem about an incarnation that withdraws after attempting in vain to raise humankind to a higher plane of consciousness. No incarnation is a failure. Each helps in preparing the soil for a new, a taller and healthier crop. The poem is actually about the resistance of the human clay, its refusal to be moulded into a better form. Of Sri Aurobindo the "poet of yoga", K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes:

It is not simply the transformation of the psyche or of the mind — that is, perhaps, not so very difficult to achieve — but of the vital, of the physical, of the subconscious, of the inconscient. It is in 'A God's Labour' that Sri Aurobindo has described in its entirety his integral Yoga of man's and earth's transformation.¹

A late draft of this poem is dated 31-7-1935. The poem opens to underline the vast spaces that lie between a vision and the actual moment when the vision becomes a reality. When the vision of a glorious future rises before a human worker, things may seem easy enough to work out. A little push here, a little pull there and things

1. *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History* (1985), p. 616.

will take shape! Interestingly enough the Divine has no illusions about the human clay which is capable of infinite resistance. The Avatar is a direct portion of God, the human form is just a necessary cloak. Being divine in his essential personality he yet has to proceed with the work of transformation under the conditions of the earth.

‘A God’s Labour’ is a description of this painstaking process of transformation. The god who is born among humankind, an ‘avatar’, one who has descended from the Supreme though aware of his origins, needs to undergo the travail imposed by the laws of the earth. The question necessarily arises: If the Lord chooses to descend, he can easily make this world perfect, incorruptible! Why then the tragedy and evil, the battle and the suffering? Why, oh why should we go through this Kurukshetra and this hell, if the Divine is come amidst us to lead us to bliss?

However, if we were to gain bliss at the drop of a hat, would we value it? Would we then take up the sorrow and struggle in time so that humanity can reach out to the Life Divine? Therefore is it that the Imperishable descends among this perishable humanity, experiences the human emotions of sadness and betrayal in time, and leads us by pointing out the glorious possibilities of the Next Future.

The Avatar is always a dual phenomenon of divinity and humanity; the Divine takes upon himself the human nature with all its outward limitations and makes them the circumstances, means, instruments of the divine consciousness and the divine power, a vessel of the divine birth and the divine works. But so surely it must be, since otherwise the object of the Avatar’s descent is not fulfilled; for that object is precisely to show that the human birth with all its limitations can be made such a means and instrument of the divine birth and divine works, precisely to show that the human type of consciousness can be compatible with the divine essence of consciousness made manifest, can be converted into its vessel, drawn into nearer conformity with it by a change of its mould and a heightening of its powers of light and love and strength and purity; and to show also how it can be done. If the Avatar were to act in an entirely supernormal fashion, this object would not be fulfilled.²

Sri Aurobindo says that the Gita itself does not spend much time on the process of avatarhood. There is no need, for that is not its object. The object of the work is the manner in which the Avatar leads “the man who has risen to the greatest heights of mere manhood, to the divine birth and divine works.” We may even take it that ‘A God’s Labour’ is the Sutra (aphorism) for which the *Essays on the Gita* is the Bhashya (commentary). The poem deals with two main characters: The Omniscient God and the all too human man. Man is not without immortal longings but he is

2. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, Book One, Chapter XVI, pp. 164-65.

entrenched in prakriti, the love for his body, “*dehatmabhimana*”. The attempt to link the human and the divine repeatedly fails, but one cannot give up! The Divine descends repeatedly to help man who finds it difficult to get release from the earthly attractions which hold him in thrall, as we see in the telling image in ‘A Tree’ by Sri Aurobindo:

A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.

This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.³

What we find in Sri Aurobindo’s description of the problems faced by an Avatar in his *Essays on the Gita* as also the canto ‘The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain’ in the epic *Savitri*, are an elaboration of the dramatic monologue, ‘A God’s Labour’. It has anguish writ large but not hopelessness. The Omnipotent is a flaming warrior and can never afford to be despondent! (Indeed, there is a spark of the divine within each one of us, it goes through this struggle when entrenched in the body, and this is why we get those rare glimpses of a brave new world in our lives. Some among us decide to walk towards the felicitous vision and gain entry too.) The balance sheet though cannot be too satisfactory. Which makes Rishi Narad say in *Savitri*:

His work is a trickle of splendour in a long night;
He sees the long march of Time, the little won;
A few are saved, the rest strive on and fail:
A Sun has passed, on earth Night’s shadow falls.
Yes, there are happy ways near to God’s sun;
But few are they who tread the sunlit path;
Only the pure in soul can walk in light.
An exit is shown, a road of hard escape
From the sorrow and the darkness and the chain;
But how shall a few escaped release the world?
The human mass lingers beneath the yoke.⁴

‘A God’s Labour’ gives a complete picture of the concept of Avatar, how the descent and the consequent sufferings are part of the tremendous evolutionary adventure.

3. *Collected Poems*, p. 207.

4. *Savitri*, p. 448.

He who would bring the heavens here
 Must descend himself into clay
 And the burden of earthly nature bear
 And tread the dolorous way.

Coercing my godhead I have come down
 Here on the sordid earth,
 Ignorant, labouring, human grown
 Twixt the gates of death and birth.

But this is done willingly, out of love for his creation, to help the upward evolution of man. This means he will have to bear the barbs of the very people whom he has come to save, but then that is how it is. Every Avatar has gone through such “curses of the crowd”. Rama, Krishna, Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Did not the Mahatma Kuthumi suffer on the spike for no fault of his? Man is so rigidly bound by his nature that he turns away from Dharma, as Sri Aurobindo records in ‘A God’s Labour’:

For man’s mind is the dupe of his animal self;
 Hoping its lusts to win,
 He harbours within him a grisly Elf
 Enamoured of sorrow and sin.

The grey Elf shudders from heaven’s flame
 And from all things glad and pure;
 Only by pleasure and passion and pain
 His drama can endure.

When the poem was written, Sri Aurobindo had spent a quarter of century in deep yoga. By then a fair number of disciples had been drawn to him and the Mother was in charge of the growing Ashram. Sri Aurobindo says in his *Kara Kahini* that it was when he was in the Alipore Jail and had to live amongst people condemned as thieves and criminals that he realised the presence of nobility and goodness at the very centre of darkness. God dwells in all!

During my stay in the Alipore jail I ate, lived and went through the same hardship and enjoyed the same ‘privileges’ with the other convicts, my fellow nationals, the peasants, iron-mongers, potters, the *doms* and the *bagdis*, and I could learn of the ways of the Lord who dwells in everybody, this socialism and unity, this sense of nationwide brotherhood had put its stamp on my life’s dedication (*jivan brata*). . . .⁵

5. *Tales of Prison Life*, pp. 21-22.

To make a point from my Aurobindonian studies which I find now to be stretching towards sixty years, I can say that, 'A God's Labour' has helped me a lot when negotiating the idea of incarnation. The first reaction I had when taking up *Savitri* for my research was that this was a very romantic story. Probably, because I was myself very young, I found the story deeply touching. This is how it should be, I told myself. It was only when I was reading the epic poem carefully with my guide (who was fortunately my father, Srinivasa Iyengar), I came to understand gradually that here Savitri was accepting pain not for mere romance (though that is the base) but because she represents a divine action, indeed she is the Divine. Going back to 'A God's Labour' helped in getting my bearings right. Though I had an enviable background, I had no experience with the kind of philosophic-mystic poetry in English at that time. As a student of English literature, the closest I had come to mystic poetry was in the metaphysical poems of John Donne and Andrew Marvell as also in a couple of poems by William Wordsworth.

In *Savitri* it was all in a mass and often difficult to follow the thread. I had to summarise the verse paragraphs a few times to remember the progression of the argument and also to seek linkages in philosophy of the East and the West. These were but academic exercises which still kept me in awe of the situation of a Princess being projected as an Avatar. She was not an unfamiliar figure for my Hindu household and was certainly an unusual epic heroine but then slowly but surely I was able to understand why Sri Aurobindo had portrayed her so. The poem was a help to get back to *Savitri* now and then and relate to the heroine. I guess I drew nearer to Death by trying to understand the two stanzas:

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
 And the Titan kings assail,
 But I cannot rest till my task is done
 And wrought the eternal will.

How they mock and sneer, both devils and men!
 "Thy hope is Chimera's head
 Painting the sky with its fiery stain;
 Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead. . . ."

The juxtaposition of the Man of Sorrows, the Dwarf Titan and the Mental Man in *Savitri* when presenting the triple soul-forces could be understood when one reads in the poem,

"Who art thou that babblest of heavenly ease
 And joy and golden room
 To us who are waifs on inconscient seas
 And bound to life's iron doom?"

“This earth is ours, a field of Night
 For our petty flickering fires.
 How shall it brook the sacred Light
 Or suffer a god’s desires?”

Between the poem and the epic, Sri Aurobindo’s years of silent yoga were illumined for the student. There was a perfect movement in this yoga. The Poorna Yogi accepts the seemingly impossible situation but moves forward as did Sri Aurobindo. Aswapathy’s travels were illumined by the concluding stanzas of this superb record. After the long journey into night in this poem we step into a radiant world in the last stanzas:

Down a gold-red stair-way wend
 The radiant children of Paradise
 Clarioning darkness’s end.

A little more and the new life’s doors
 Shall be carved in silver light
 With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
 In a great world bare and bright.

The Great Faith that is established in the epic comes from this vision which is re-stated in *Savitri*:

I saw the Omnipotent’s flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
 Forerunners of a divine multitude,
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life.
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality.⁶

The Poem and the Epic: both are Harbingers of the Supramental, the Two Swans of Faith and Hope.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

6. *Savitri*, pp. 343-44.



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