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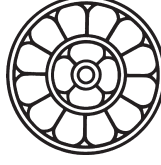
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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No. 3

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE BIRTH OF THE WAR-GOD¹

(Blank Verse Rendering of Part of Canto II)

But now in spheres above whose motions fixed
Confirm our cyclic steps, a cry arose
Anarchic. Strange disorders threatened Space.
There was a tumult in the calm abodes,
A clash of arms, a thunder of defeat.
Hearing that sound our smaller physical home
Trembled in its pale circuits, fearing soon
The ethereal revolt might touch its stars.
Then were these knots of our toy orbits torn
And like a falling leaf this world might sink
From the high tree mysterious where it hangs
Between that voiceful and this silent flood.
For long a mute indifference had seized
The Soul of all; no more the Mother of forms
By the persuasion of her clinging arms
Bound him to bear the burden of her works.
Therefore with a slow dreadful confidence
Chaos had lifted his gigantic head.
His movement stole, a shadow on the skies,
Out of the dark inconscience where he hides.
Breaking the tread of the eternal dance
Voices were heard life's music shudders at,
Thoughts were abroad no living mind can bear,
Enormous rhythms had disturbed the gods
Of which they knew not the stupendous law,
And taking new amorphous giant shapes
Desires the primal harmonies repel
Fixed dreadful eyes upon their coveted heavens.
Awhile they found no form could clothe their strength,

1. Around 1916-18, Sri Aurobindo made three separate translations of parts of the first two cantos of Kalidasa's epic *Kumarasambhava* under the title *The Birth of the War-God*. The first rendering, which breaks off after the twentieth verse, is in rhymed stanzas. The second rendering is a translation of the first canto in blank verse; verses 7-16 were translated in a different order from the original. The third, expanded version includes several long passages that do not correspond to anything in Kalidasa's epic. It may thus be considered practically an independent poem by Sri Aurobindo.

No spirit who could brook their feet of fire
Gave them his aspirations for their home.
Only in the invisible heart of things
A dread unease and expectation lived,
Which felt immeasurable energies
In huge revolt against the established world.
But now awake to the fierce nether gods
Tarak the Titan rose, and the gods fled
Before him driven in a luminous rout.
Rumours of an unalterable defeat
Astonished heaven. Like a throng of stars
Drifting through night before the clouds of doom
Like golden leaves hunted by dark-winged winds,
They fled back to their old delightful seats,
Nor there found refuge. Bent to a Titan yoke
They suffered, till their scourged defeated thoughts
Turned suppliant to a greater seat above.
There the Self-born who weaves from his deep heart
Harmonious spaces, sits concealed and watches
The inviolable cycles of his soul.
Thither ascending difficult roads of sleep
Those colonists of heaven, the violent strength
Of thunderous Indra flashing in their front,
Climbed up with labour to their mighty source.
But as they neared, but as their yearning reached,
Before them from the eternal secrecy
A Form grew manifest from all their forms.
A great brow seemed to face them everywhere,
Eyes which survey the threads of Space, looked forth,
The lips whose words are Nature's ordinances,
Were visible. Then as at dawn the sun
Smiles upon listless pools and at each smile
A sleeping lotus wakes, so on them shone
That glory and awoke to bloom and life
The drooping beauty of those tarnished gods.
Thus with high voices echoing his word
They hymned their great Creator where he sits
In the mystic lotus, musing out his worlds.
"Pure Spirit who wast before creation woke,
Calm violence, destroyer, gulf of Soul,
One, though divided in thy own conceit,

Brahma we see thee here, who from thy deeps
 Of memory rescuest forgotten Time.
 We see thee, Yogin, on the solemn snows,
 Shiva, withdrawing into thy hush the Word
 Which sang the fiat of the speeding stars.
 They pass like moths into thy flaming gaze.
 We adore thee, Vishnu, whose extended steps
 To thee are casual footprints, thy small base
 For luminous systems measureless to our mind,
 Whose difficult toil thy light and happy smile
 Sustains, O wide discoverer of Space.
 To thee our adoration, triune Form!
 Imagining her triple mood thou gav'st
 To thy illimitable Nature play.
 When nothing was except thy lonely soul
 In the ocean of thy being, then thou sowedst
 Thy seed infallible, O Spirit unborn,
 And from that seed a million unlike forms
 Thou variously hast made. Thy world that moves
 And breathes, thy world inconscient and inert,
 What are they but a corner of thy life?
 Thou hast made them and preservest; if thou slayst
 It is thy greatness, Lord. Mysterious source
 Of all, from thee we drew this light of mind,
 This mighty stirring and these failings dark.
 In thee we live, by thee we act thy thoughts.
 Thou gav'st thyself a Woman and divine,
 Thou grewest twain who wert the formless One,
 In one sole body thou wert Lord and Spouse
 To found the bliss which by division joins,
 Thou bor'st thy being, a Spirit who is Man.
 All are thy creatures: in the meeting vast
 Of thy swift Nature with thy brilliant Mind,
 Thou mad'st thy children, man and beast and god.
 Thy days and nights are numberless aeons; when
 Thou sleepest, all things sleep, O conscient God;
 Thy waking is a birth of countless souls.
 Thou art the womb from which all life arose,
 But who begot thee? thou the ender of things,
 But who has known thy end? Beginningless,
 All our beginnings are thy infant powers,

Thou governest their middle and their close,
 But over thee where is thy ruler, Lord?
 None knoweth this; alone thou knowest thyself.
 By thy ineffable identity
 Knowledge approaches the unknown. We seek
 Discoveries of ourselves in distant things.
 When first desire stirred, the seed of mind,
 And to existence from the plenary void
 Thy seers built the golden bridge of thought,
 Out of thy uncreated Ocean's rest
 By thy own energy thou sprangest forth.
 Thou art thy action's path and thou its law;
 Thou art thy own vast ending and its sleep.
 The subtle and the dense, the flowing and firm,
 The hammered close consistency of things,
 The clings of the atoms, lightness, load,
 What are all these things but thy shapes? Things seen
 And sensible and things no thought has scanned,
 Thou grewest and each pole and contrary
 Art equally, O self-created God.
 Thou hast become all this at thy desire,
 And nothing is impossible in thee;
 Creation is the grandeur of thy soul.
 The chanting Veda and the threefold voice,
 The sacrifice of works, the heavenly fruit,
 The all-initiating OM, from thee,
 From thee they sprang; out of thy ocean heart
 The rhythms of our fathomless words are born.
 They name thee Nature, she the mystic law
 Of all things done and seen who drives us, mother
 And giver of our spirits' seekings, won
 In her enormous strength, though won from her.
 They know thee Spirit, far above thou dwellest
 Pure of achievement, empty of her noise.
 Silent spectator of thy infinite stage,
 Unmoved in a serene tremendous calm
 Thou viewst indifferently the grandiose scene.
 O Deity from whom all deities are,
 O Father of the sowers of the world,
 O Master of the godheads of the law,
 Who so supreme but shall find thee above?

Thou art the enjoyer and the sweet enjoyed,
 The hunter and the hunted in the worlds,
 The food, the eater. O sole knower, sole known,
 Sole dreamer! this bright-imagined dream is thou,
 Which we pursue in our miraculous minds;
 No other thinker is or other thought.
 O Lord, we bow, who from thy being came,
 To thee in prayer. Is it not thou who prayst,
 Spirit transcendent and eternal All?"

Then to the wise in heaven the original Seer,
 Maker and poet of the magic spheres,
 Shedding a smile in whose benignancy
 Some sweet return like pleasant sunlight glowed,
 Sent chanting from his fourfold mouth a voice
 In which were justified the powers of sound,
 "Welcome, you excellent mightinesses of heaven,
 Who hold your right by self-supported strengths,
 The centuries for your arms. How have you risen
 Together in one movement of great Time?
 Wherefore bring you your divine faces, robbed
 Of their old inborn light and beauty, pale
 As stars in winter mists dim-rayed and cold
 Swimming through the dumb melancholy of heaven?
 Why do I see your powers dejected, frail?
 The thunder in the Python-slayer's hand
 Flames not exultant, wan its darings droop,
 Quelled is the iridescence of its dance.
 Its dreadful beauty like a goddess shamed
 Shrinks back into its violated pride.
 Varoona's unescaped and awful noose
 Hangs slack, impuissant, and its ruthless coils
 Are a charmed serpent's folds; a child can smite
 The whirling lasso snare for Titan strengths.
 In Kuver's face there is defeat and pain.
 Low as an opulent tree its broken branch
 In an insulted sullen majesty
 His golden arm hangs down the knotted mace.
 Death's lord is wan and his tremendous staff
 Writes idly on the soil, the infallible stroke
 Is an extinguished terror, a charred line
 The awful script no tears could ever erase.

O you pale sun-gods chill and shorn of fire,
 How like the vanity of painted suns
 You glow, where eyes can set their mortal ray
 Daring eternal splendours with their sight.
 O fallen rapidities, you lords of speed,
 With the resisted torrents' baffled roar
 Back on themselves recoil your stormy strengths.
 Why come you now like sad and stumbling souls,
 Who bounded free and lionlike through heaven?
 And you, O Rudras, how the matted towers
 Upon your heads sink their dishevelled pride!
 Dim hang your moons along the snaky twines,
 No longer from your puissant throats your voice
 Challenges leonine the peaks of Night.
 Who has put down the immortal gods? what foe
 Stronger than strength could make eternal puissance vain,
 As if beyond imagination amidst
 The august immutability of law
 Some insolent exception unforeseen
 Had set in doubt the order of the stars?
 Speak, children, wherefore have ye come to me?
 What prayer is silent on your lips? Did I
 Not make the circling suns and give to you
 My grandiose thoughts to keep? Guardians of life,
 Keepers of the inviolable round,
 Why come you to me with defeated eyes?
 Helpers, stand you in need of help?" He ceased,
 And like a rippling lotus lake whose flowers
 Stir to a gentle wind, the Thunderer turned
 Upon the Seer his thousand eyes of thought,
 The Seer who is his greater eye than these;
 He is the teacher of the sons of light,
 His speech inspired outleaps the labouring mind
 And opens truth's mysterious doors to gods.
 "Veiling by question thy all-knowing sense,
 Lord, thou hast spoken," Brihaspati began,
 "The symbol of our sad defeat and fall.
 What soul can hide himself from his own source?
 Thy vision looks through every eye and sees
 Beyond our seeings, thinks in every mind,
 Passing our pale peripheries of light.

Tarak the Titan growing in thy smile
 As Ocean swells beneath the silent moon,
 []²
 Discouraged from the godhead of his rays
 In Tarak's town the Sun dares not to burn
 More than can serve to unseal the lotus' eyes
 In rippling waters of his garden pools.
 The mystic moon yields him its nectarous heart;
 Only the crescent upon Shiva's head
 Is safe from the desire of his soul.
 The violent winds forget their mightier song.
 Their breezes through his gardens dare not rush
 Afraid to steal the flowers upon its boughs
 And only near him sobbingly can pant
 A flattering coolness, dreadful brows to fan.
 The seasons are forbidden their cycling round;
 They walk his garden-keepers and must fill
 The branches with chaotic wealth of flowers.
 Autumn and spring and summer joining hands
 [] him with their multitudinous sweets,
 Their married fragrances surprise the air.
 Ocean his careful servant brings to birth
 The ripening jewels for his toys; his mine
 Of joy is the inexorable abyss.
 The serpent-gods with blazing gems at night
 Hold up their hoods to be his living lamps
 And even great Indra sends him messengers.
 Flowers from the Tree of bounty and of bliss
 They bear; to the one fierce and sovereign mind
 All his desires the boughs of heaven must give.
 But how can kindness win that violent heart?
 Only by chastisement it is appeased.
 A tyrant grandeur is the Titan soul
 And only by destruction and by pain
 Feels in the sobs and tears of suffering things
 A crude reality of [] force.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 283-90)

2. Sri Aurobindo left some lines or parts of lines blank, apparently with the intention of returning to them later. Such incomplete portions are indicated by square brackets enclosing a blank of appropriate size.

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of February 2014)

RELATION BETWEEN THE MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN

True Relation with the Mother

What is our true relation with the Mother — the relation of the Mother and her child?

The relation of the child to the Mother is that of an entire, sincere and simple trust, love and dependence.

*

The relation of the disciple to the Guru in the Guruvada is supposed always to be that of worship, respect, complete happy confidence, unquestioning acceptance of the guidance. It is only in this Asram that another theory has sometimes been advanced and reached its height as a result of the *misapplication* or wrong extension of the relation with the human Mother (which in itself, rightly understood, was not to be discouraged as a phase) and also of certain other misunderstood notions — not only *abhimāna*, but egoistic unspiritual demand, hostile criticism, revolt, anger and other still more undesirable vital reactions (usually supposed to be foreign to the spiritual consciousness) have been put forward by some, admitted by many in practice, as a part of the Yoga! I do not see how such a method can lead to any good results in the spiritual life.

12 January 1932

*

The connection between myself and the Mother is always there, but my vital is interfering, colouring it and making it impure.

Yes, the connection is always there, in the self and in the psychic; but if there are obstacles in the mind, vital and physical, then the connection cannot be manifest or, if it is at all manifest, it is mixed with elements which make it imperfect and unstable. The true connection is the psychic and spiritual relation; the relation in the other

parts must be built up on this psychic and spiritual connection and then it can be permanent.

24 April 1932

*

One rule for you I can lay down, "Do not do, say or think anything which you would want to conceal from the Mother." And that answers the objections that rose within you — from your vital, is it not? — against bringing "these petty things" to the Mother's notice. Why should you think that the Mother would be bothered by these things or regard them as petty? If *all* the life is to be Yoga, what is there that can be called petty or of no importance? Even if the Mother does not answer, to have brought any matter of your action and self-development before her in the right spirit means to have put it under her protection, in the light of the Truth, under the rays of the Power that is working for the transformation — for immediately those rays begin to play and to act on the thing brought to her notice. Anything within that advises you not to do it when the spirit in you moves you to do it, may very well be a device of the vital to avoid the ray of the Light and the working of the Force. It may also be observed that if you open yourself to the Mother by putting the movements of any part of you under her observation, that of itself creates a relation, a personal closeness with her other than that which her general, silent or not directly invited action maintains with all the sadhaks.

All this, of course, if you feel ready for this openness, if the spirit moves you to lay what is in you bare before her. For it is then that it is fruitful — when it comes from within and is spontaneous and true.

18 May 1932

*

It was certainly true that you saw the Mother and she was teaching secrets to your inner being — for your inner being is in close relation with her. It is only by your opening yourself that this inner being can come out and change the relations of your external self with her, remove from it its sense of not being connected, its misunderstandings, wrong attitudes, confused movements. That is why I am always pressing on you to open and keep in touch with the Force — for it is your inner being that feels naturally in touch with it, — it is only the external and physical mind and vital that feel it is as if it were not real, not truly connected etc. etc. This you have experienced yourself more than once when the inner being came into the front.

3 November 1932

*

It is perfectly true that in your inner being there is nothing that stands between you and nearness to the Mother; but in your outer there are many reactions that make it difficult — and the chief cause of these reactions is the readiness with which your outer mind listens to the suggestions and accepts the reasonings and obeys the movements of the obscure ignorant physical Nature. That is why I want you to get rid of this habit of the outer mind and to recognise that it is the inner being which is the real truth of yourself and not this outer consciousness with its confusions which is a present fact but not your true permanent being.

9 December 1932

*

This morning I sent a letter to the Mother through X, but I have received no reply. Have I done something wrong? Waiting for a word from her I am suffering greatly.

The Mother replied to you through X that you could take the rest you wanted — at any rate she told him to tell you that; I hope he did so.

Feelings of this kind ought to be rejected always and there is nothing else to be done with them. The relation with the Divine, the relation with the Mother must be one of love, faith, trust, confidence, surrender — any other relation of the vital ordinary kind brings reactions contrary to the sadhana, — desire, egoistic *abhimāna*, demand, revolt and all the disturbance of ignorant rajasic human nature from which it is the object of the sadhana to escape.

26 April 1933

*

I am afraid you have allowed some old movement of the vital to come up and obstruct the work that was being done.

You know perfectly well that your inner being is near to the Mother, can feel her peace and force, can receive her thought, can respond and that that is the one thing that helps you. When you speak of the Mother seeming aloof to your senses, you are referring evidently to the physical nearness. You know very well what was the reason why it could not be for the time. But even there there was a great improvement recently and it was becoming possible and natural for you to approach the Mother physically without the old vital reactions, and the Mother was welcoming the change. This is not a time to allow the old reactions to come up and impede or throw back the progress made. Cast off this invasion, let your consciousness recover the quietness it was more and more gaining, let your soul go on growing as it was growing — throw out this reaction that impedes it. Let the Divine work in you and

establish in time the true outward and inward relation which is the only one that can satisfy and endure.

7 September 1933

*

Why do I get angry and make myself miserable when Mother proposes something I do not like, such as putting X with me in my house? If Mother herself wants it, why should I object and feel sorry about it?

It is desire and jealousy that are the cause of these movements. It prevents you from seeing that each is dealt with according to the needs and possibilities of his case. Your vital wishes on the contrary to impose a rule by which you shall get what the vital wants and if it does not, and if another gets it, you consider it a personal wrong and an injustice. So if something disagreeable to your vital, e.g. putting X, is suggested, you consider that because the Mother's proposal was disagreeable to you, therefore it was wrong. The whole thing is that — that you are putting a personal standard — the standard of your desires and feelings — as the measure of truth and right. Most men do that — almost all practically; but to do Yoga you must free yourself from that altogether. You are concerned only with yourself and the Divine; in your relations with the Divine you are concerned not with the Divine's satisfaction of your personal desires, but with being pulled out of these things and raised to your highest spiritual possibilities, so that you may become united with the Mother within and as a result in the outer being also. That cannot be done by satisfying your vital desires — to do so would only increase them and give you into the hands of the ignorance and restless confusion of the ordinary Nature. It can be done only by your inner trust and surrender and by the pressure of the Mother's peace and Force working from within and changing your vital nature. It is when you forget this that you go wrong and suffer; when you remember it you progress and the difficulties become less and less insistent.

13 September 1933

*

I have heard that the Mother gives flowers to those waiting for her on the stairs at noon. I feel I should try to be present there, to break my habit of shyness and to recognise her not only as the spiritual Mother but as the loving and compassionate human Mother as well.

The Mother is not giving every day, only from time to time. But why do you want to meet her as a "human" mother — if you can see the divine Mother in a human

body, that should be enough and a more fruitful attitude. Those who approach her as a human Mother often get into trouble by their conception making all sorts of mistakes in their approach to her.

2 May 1934

*

You are the Mother's child and the Mother's love to her children is without limit and she bears patiently with the defects of their nature. Try to be the true child of the Mother: it is there within you, but your outward mind is occupied by little futile things and too often in a violent fuss over them. You must not only see the Mother in dream but learn to see and feel her with you and within you at all times. Then you would find it easier to control yourself and change, — for she being there would be able to do it for you.

30 May 1934

*

The sadhak feels alone and suffers when he does not have the Mother's presence. Does the Mother likewise feel alone in the absence of her child? Is she more miserable than a human mother would be?

If that were the case the Mother would have to be in a profound state of million-fold misery all the time — for why should she be miserable only for the sadhak — why not for each soul that is wandering in the Ignorance? The child need not be miserable, but simply come back when the Mother calls.

24 September 1934

*

If one looks into his own heart, he cannot fail to find the Mother's smile there. Why go out of one's heart, then, and seek for her smile outside? Why are so many here burdened with difficulties, falls, attacks, gloom and despair? Is it not because they seek the external part of the Mother, her physical nearness, touch, etc., instead of going inside?

Quite right. To live inside is the first principle of spiritual life and from inside to reshape the physical existence. But so many insist on remaining in the external and their relation with the Mother is governed by the ordinary reactions of the external unspiritualised nature.

21 April 1935

*

You have written to some people about "an inner close relation" with the Mother. I want to know what is the truest and most real relation with her. Isn't the soul relation with her the only true one? What is the soul relation? How am I to recognise it?

An inner (soul) relation means that one feels the Mother's presence, is turned to her at all times, is aware of her force moving, guiding, helping, is full of love for her and always feels a great nearness whether one is physically near her or not — this relation takes up the mind, vital and inner physical till one feels one's mind close to the Mother's mind, one's vital in harmony with hers, one's very physical consciousness full of her. These are all the elements of the inner union, not only in the spirit and self but in the nature.

I do not recollect what I had written, but this is the inner close relation as opposed to an outer relation which consists only in how one meets her on the external physical plane. It is quite possible — and actual — to have this inner close relation even if physically one sees her only at pranam and meditation and once a year perhaps on the birthday.

29 June 1935

*

I don't feel any personal relation with the Mother. There lies the whole difficulty of the sadhana.

One has to become conscious by the awakening of the inner mind and vital — or best of all by the awakening of the psychic. It is quite possible for two persons to have a relation of which one is conscious and the other is not — his mental blindness or vital misunderstandings coming in the way. That is frequent even in ordinary life. Very often one becomes conscious of it only when he loses it (by the death of the other person or otherwise) and is then full of repinings for his blindness.

20 July 1935

*

This thought of yours that Mother cares for all as her children and does not care for you is evidently a quite groundless idea and does not rest on any solid basis. She is as affectionate in her love and care for you and in her way towards you as to any others and more than to most. There is nothing solid or specific that we can see on which the idea can rest. Certainly, it corresponds to no reality in the Mother's feelings.

But I have noted that this kind of idea *always* comes up in the minds of sadhaks and sadhikas (especially the latter) when they become despondent or listen to the

suggestions from outside them. Always they say the same thing as you, “You love and care for all; only for me you do not love and care. I am evidently unfit for the Yoga or you would not keep me far from you like that. I shall never arrive at anything. What is the use of my remaining here only to trouble you? What have I to live for?” But when the psychic being is well awake, then these thoughts, this despondency, these wrong notions are bound to go away. What you feel therefore is just this despondency and the wrong suggestions it brings; it does not correspond to any reality in the Mother’s feelings or behaviour towards you. It will go with the rest as the inner being, the soul in you comes more and more forward — for the soul in you knows that it loves the Mother and the Mother loves you; it cannot be blinded by the suggestions that deceive the mind and the vital nature.

Do not therefore remain in these thoughts that have no foundation but are only a mood of despondency or a suggestion from outside. Let the psychic being in you grow and the Mother’s force work. The relation of the child and the Mother is there in your soul; it will make itself felt in your mind and vital and physical consciousness till it becomes the foundation of the whole consciousness on which all the sadhana can be firm and secure.

26 July 1935

*

The connection between you and the Mother is there and has always existed. Inside it is very evident and, when you are in the psychic condition, that which is inside begins to work. It is only the physical mind that suggests the idea to the contrary because outward circumstances are still inharmonious and unfavourable. Do not allow these suggestions to sway you. Seek the connection within you in your psychic being; then even through the outward circumstances it will shine out and change all into oneness.

5 June 1936

*

My condition is changing so often; it is as if I were walking on hilly ground with plenty of ditches on the way. I am hardly out of one ditch and able to get a breath of fresh air than I find myself in another ditch. I often feel that I am hopelessly bad. I know that I would not feel this way if I knew myself to be the Mother’s. I pray, make me feel that. Open my eyes to see, or rather give me the eyes to see, for I seem to have lost them.

You know now what this depression and the feelings that come with it are — they are the recurrences of the old unconsciousness attempting to prevent the rapid or full flowering of the inner consciousness which was growing in you. You should

therefore not accept the suggestions of the depression or the idea of not being the Mother's. The eye within is growing — it is sure to be full and open after a time. It is why the old consciousness is trying hard to return and keep hold. You must get more and more to say no to its suggestions and efforts — so that the development may go more quickly.

July 1936

*

If a man feels, "I am the happiest child of the Mother", is it due to ego-feeling?

It depends on the source of the feeling. If it is true happiness, then it is not ego. If it is due to a feeling of superiority, then it is ego.

Inner Contact with the Mother

Let the inner contact with the Mother increase — unless that is there, the outer contacts if too much multiplied easily degenerate into a routine.

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Today while going to the Mother, I felt concentrated in the mind, with a will to get contact with the Mother. Then I found that my mind was opening to the Light. I saw flashes of golden light two or three times. In the morning I remained peaceful and quiet and later I saw the Light many times.

It was the contact with the Mother that originally brought the opening to the Light, the descent of the golden light, the wideness and the knowledge. The two things naturally go together or follow one on the other; it is a mistake to think that there is any incompatibility or opposition between them.

11 September 1931

*

On waking up this morning, I felt myself in contact with the Mother's consciousness; it gave me a good feeling and even Ananda. While meditating this morning, my mind opened up above and the contact deepened and I felt aspiration and peace. I have been able to progress and get experiences by keeping contact with the Mother's consciousness; but I have the idea that this contact is not enough to give me all the experiences I aspire for.

That is your mistake to think the contact is not enough. The contact with the Mother's consciousness will lead to *all* necessary realisations and the fulfilment of all true aspirations.

14 January 1932

*

In my waking consciousness I feel that I flow always in the stream of sadhana, but in my sleep I am quite a different person. I want to be changed in my sleep also. During sleep I want to keep in constant contact with the Mother. Is there any process or should I simply call her help before I retire to bed?

Aspire and want it always — that is the first thing. As for methods, perhaps it is best not to go to sleep straight in the ordinary way, but to meditate and through meditation pass into sleep.

At least before going to bed have a meditation.

13 September 1932

*

I was feeling very happy alone in my room, with an inner feeling of the Mother's consciousness. When I went to see X, I felt ill at ease and I lost the inner contact with the Mother. Mixing with people destroys the inner feeling, but I cannot always remain secluded. What is the best thing to do?

You have to learn to live in yourself with the Mother, in contact with her consciousness, and meet others only with your exterior surface.

9 April 1933

*

Today while engaged in work I felt a peaceful energy and something like ice touching my head. Then the knowledge came to me: "The Mother is always near us, though physically we do not see her, and she is removing all kinds of weakness with the touch of her affectionate hand. In every way she stands behind us secretly." This thing was like a feeling and a vision, almost like a realisation. Was it the psychic feeling of the Mother's presence in us?

It is a realisation attended with vision and feeling. It is the psychic and the mental together that produced it.

9 June 1933

*

The one thing that is most needed for this sadhana is peace, calm, especially in the vital — a peace which depends not on circumstances or surroundings but on the inner relation with a higher consciousness which is the consciousness of the Divine, of the Mother. Those who have not that or do not aspire to get it can come here and live in the Asram for ten or twenty years and yet be as restless and full of struggle as ever, — those who open their mind and vital to the Mother's strength and peace can get it even in the hardest and most unpleasant work and the worst circumstances.

October 1933

*

I would like the Mother to fix my timings as to what should be done at what time for the whole day. I will abide by whatever she determines for my progress.

To fix times is not possible or desirable — you must yourself organise your day in such a manner as to make the best use of it and let the Mother know how you do it.

I am ready to give up all my relations with everyone and be merged in the Mother alone. Please tell me what rules I should follow to overcome all obstacles. May Mother help me both inwardly and outwardly.

The most important thing is to be turned inwardly towards the Mother and to her alone. To avoid too many outward contacts is necessary only in order to help in this — but it is not necessary nor desirable to avoid all contacts with people. What is necessary is to meet these contacts with the right inner consciousness, not throwing yourself out — treating them as things of the surface — not getting attached to them or absorbed by them in any way.

28 October 1933

*

I wanted to ask you whether what I have said about my inner contact with the Mother is true or not. It may be that my vital mind is deluding me about this.

At any rate if you want the Mother's contact always, you must get rid of depression and the mental imaginations that bring it. Nothing comes more in the way than that.

3 January 1934

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No one need be jealous of anything or anybody, since each has his own point of contact which nobody else has — apart from what all have.

4 January 1934

*

You wrote to me that making Pranam to the Mother would bear fruit “if one keeps the right contact with her inwardly all day”. What exactly did you mean?

I meant the inner contact in which one either feels one with her or in contact with her or aware of her presence or, at the very least, turned towards her always.

18 March 1934

*

For a long time I was thinking of meeting the Mother but was hesitating to ask for an interview. Last night in dream I met her and had a talk with her. Was it the real Mother I met or some constructed figure of my dream-mind?

Of course, it was the Mother you met and the meeting must have been due to your thought about meeting her.

9 June 1935

*

If it is like that, it is probably because you are living outside, allowing yourself to be disturbed by outward contacts. One cannot find happiness of a lasting character unless one lives within. Work, action must be offered to the Mother, done for her sake only, without any thought for yourself, your own ideas, preferences, feelings, likes and dislikes. If one's eyes are fixed on these latter things, then at every step one gets some friction either in the mind or vital or, if these are comparatively quiet, in the body and nerves. Peace and joy can only become stable if one lives within with the Mother.

2 January 1937

The Right Way of Loving the Mother

The contact between mother and child means not only that the mother should love the child but that the child should love the mother and obey her. You want to be the true child of the Mother, but the first thing for that is to put yourself into her hands

and let her guide you and to follow her will — and not disregard it or revolt against her. You know all this perfectly well — why do you ignore it?

It is part of the true Mother's love not to do whatever the vital of the child demands, for she knows that it would be extremely bad for him. Do not obey the impulse of the vital, but follow rather your true perception and make yourself a channel for the will of the Mother — because her will is always that you should grow into your true being.

*

The love which is turned towards the Divine ought not to be the usual vital feeling which men call by that name; for that is not love, but only a vital desire, an instinct of appropriation, the impulse to possess and monopolise. Not only is this not the divine Love, but it ought not to be allowed to mix in the least degree in the Yoga. The true love for the Divine is a self-giving, free of demand, full of submission and surrender; it makes no claim, imposes no condition, strikes no bargain, indulges in no violences of jealousy or pride or anger — for these things are not in its composition. In return the Divine Mother also gives herself, but freely — and this represents itself in an inner giving — her presence in your mind, your vital, your physical consciousness, her power re-creating you in the divine nature, taking up all the movements of your being and directing them towards perfection and fulfilment, her love enveloping you and carrying you in its arms Godwards. It is this that you must aspire to feel and possess in all your parts down to the very material, and here there is no limitation either of time or of completeness. If one truly aspires and gets it, there ought to be no room for any other claim or for any disappointed desire. And if one truly aspires, one does unfailingly get it, more and more as the purification proceeds and the nature undergoes its needed change.

Keep your love pure of all selfish claim and desire; you will find that you are getting all the love that you can bear and absorb in answer.

Realise also that the Realisation must come first, the work to be done, not the satisfaction of claim and desire. It is only when the Divine Consciousness in its supramental Light and Power has descended and transformed the physical that other things can be given a prominent place — and then too it will not be the satisfaction of desire, but the fulfilment of the Divine Truth in each and all and in the new life that is to express it. In the divine life all is for the sake of the Divine and not for the sake of the ego.

I should perhaps add one or two things to avoid misapprehensions. First, the love for the Divine of which I speak is not a psychic love only; it is the love of all the being, the vital and vital-physical included, — all are capable of the same self-giving. It is a mistake to believe that if the vital loves, it must be a love that demands and imposes the satisfaction of its desire; it is a mistake to think that it must be either

that or else the vital, in order to escape from its “attachment”, must draw away altogether from the object of its love. The vital can be as absolute in its unquestioning self-giving as any other part of the nature; nothing can be more generous than its movement when it forgets self for the Beloved. The vital and physical should both give themselves in the true way — the way of true love, not of ego desire.

1 August 1931

*

What I want of you is not to love the Mother from a distance, but to become accustomed to feel her presence, her help, the working of her forces even when she is not physically present and this not only in your sleep or inward-drawn condition (which seems to be sufficiently easy for you) but in your waking consciousness whether in meditation or in ordinary hours. And this I want because it would give a great push to your Yoga. It would besides give a deeper meaning and power to your physical contact with her. I am sure that all this will come fully in time.

22 November 1931

*

I have been here for one and a half years but I know nothing of the sadhana. I meditate, but nothing happens in the meditation. I feel there is no love in me towards the Mother. What shall I do to feel this love?

Become truthful, pure, sincere, straightforward.

1 July 1935

*

Parts of my being are insisting on a physical expression of the Mother's love. Although at present there is no attack or depression, there is only dryness and dullness. Even if the sadhana returns and I get very high or deep experiences, they will be worth little so long as my love for the Mother does not return.

It is a mistake to think like that. The experiences prepare the different parts of the being for loving in the right way, so that it is not the soul alone that loves. So long as they are open to ignorance and ego they cannot receive and hold the love rightly.

23 October 1935

*

Both the love for the Mother which you feel so strongly and the other tendency of harmony and affection with those with whom you live or work come from the psychic being. When the psychic intensifies its influence, this love for the Mother becomes strong and is the main mover of the nature. But there is also a feeling of good will, harmony, kindness or affection towards others which also comes up and is not so much personal as the result of the soul's inmost relation to all souls who are children of the Mother. There is no harm in this psychic feeling, on the contrary it creates happiness and harmony — it is only the vital love between persons that has to be rejected because it draws away from full consecration to the Divine. But this helps the growth of the soul into the Mother's consciousness and helps the work and helps also the inner life to grow.

10 February 1936

Receiving What the Mother Gives

The Mother gives whatever is necessary for each one; she does not withhold what one requires and is capable of receiving. It is we who are not ready to receive what she gives.

Yes, Mother is always willing to give and nothing pleases her better than to see her children receiving what she has to give.

Telling the Whole Truth

The unwillingness to tell the whole truth, the wish to conceal or justify things is another general trait of human nature which is common in the Asram. It is perfectly true that to do that is to stand in the way of one's own progress, but the lower nature is strong and overcomes the *buddhi*. People also think that Mother will not know if they do not tell or at least she won't know the physical facts even if she can read the inner movements and they prefer to conceal or else to write in such a way that they may stand well in her eyes. This weakness like others can only go by the growth of the psychic and its taking hold of the mind and vital so that they will not be able to hide from themselves their own wrong movements or try to hide them from the Mother.

30 January 1936

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 448-64)

‘THE LAST VEIL WAS ALMOST RENT’

April 18, 1914

YESTERDAY morning the last veil was almost rent, the last stronghold of the blind and ignorant personality seemed to be on the point of yielding; for the first time I thought I had understood what true impersonal service was, and the obstacle separating me from the integral realisation seemed very fragile to me, and on the point of disappearing definitively. But the necessity of my outer duties tore me away from this beneficent and happy contemplation, and when I was obliged to return to the outer consciousness the veil closed again and now seems to me darker than ever. Why this fall into the inconscience of night after so great a light? . . .

O Lord, Lord, wilt Thou not then let me escape at last from ignorance and become one with Thee? Now that I have known and seen so well what the work upon the earth must be, could I not realise it? Am I then riveted to ignorance and illusion? . . .

Why, why this night after so great and pure a light? All my being is tense in a call of anguish!

O Lord, take pity on me!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 128)

A CONVERSATION OF THE MOTHER

(During the two preceding meetings, Satprem read to Mother several fragments of his manuscript on Sri Aurobindo.)

You have brought me a very strange experience.

The first time you read your manuscript, I called Sri Aurobindo to hear it. He was in the subtle physical and he listened. Yesterday when I sat down to listen, I thought, “It would be much better if he entered my brain because that way . . .” In fact, I called him; he entered my brain. It took some time; all through the beginning of the reading we were still two; then he came in more and more, more and more, more and more. . . . My head — my physical head — seemed to be swelling up! There was no longer space for anyone but him. It was the light . . . that dark blue light of mental power (but true mental power) in the physical — the tantrics use it, you always see it with X’s action, but I’ve never seen it this way before! My head was full, you know — full, full, not an atom of space to spare — I could feel it swelling up!

And this light was absolutely immobile — vibrationless, totally compact and . . . coherent. When I see X’s light, for example, there are always vibrations in it; it vibrates, vibrates, things are shifting about; but with this, not a single vibration, not one movement: a *mass* that seemed eternally immobile but which was (how to put it?) attentive, listening. It was a volume with the form of the head, as if ‘that’ had wholly taken over the head. It was full, so full, yet with no feeling of tension or of anything resisting, none at all; there was only a kind of immobile eternity — and *compact*, compact, absolutely coherent, no vibrations. And it increased, increased more and more, it became heavy, but with a very particular heaviness — not a weight, the feeling of a mass.

And within all this, I no longer existed. I seemed to vanish into a kind of trance, yet I was conscious — not ‘I’: the consciousness was conscious of what Sri Aurobindo was conscious of. And he was following the reading. But I couldn’t remember anything; at the time, it was impossible to observe. I can only describe it all to you now because the experience remained for at least an hour and a half afterwards; when I left here, I began to objectify it, to see what it was — aside from that, it was merely a *state* I found myself in. But in this state there was an awareness of what he was hearing, and at two or three places in your reading he seemed to be saying (I can’t be exact, I can only give the impression), “*Not necessary.*” In fact, that’s what made me call this passage ‘too philosophical’ (although when you first asked my opinion I was in a peculiar condition, nothing was active in me). With him, it was very clear, it was almost as if there were a certain number of words about

which he said, “*That, not necessary. That, not necessary.*” Not many, not often, but once in a while. Especially at the end (he was still there inside my head while you were talking), when you were saying that it’s necessary ‘to explain’ to people; there he very clearly said, “*No, not necessary.*”

But I was incapable of remembering or of registering anything — the only head present there was his.

It’s the first time this has happened to me.

Receiving his thought (thinking his thought, for instance) happens all the time, all the time, but this was different; it was a *presence* — A presence in the skull. And my skull seemed to gradually grow bigger and heavier, heavy with an unaccustomed power. And this stayed with me; oh, it stayed for a long, long time! Never before have I had this physically, never this kind of power, a material power of thought-force — material thought-force in the brain.

One sees glimpses of it. I told you I’ve often seen it with X. I also saw it with another tantric who came here (someone said to be greatly renowned in the North) — this sort of very well organised mental power, a mental-physical power. But it was always vibrating or intermittent or partial, passing flashes or fluctuating formations. Here it wasn’t that; it was a feeling of eternity.

Normally one would have said that my body was in trance; yet it could move, it could speak — since I did speak to you; but nevertheless, it was a peculiar feeling (which I still have somewhat), like having a head too large for my body. It’s not painful or disagreeable, but I’m not used to it.

After our meeting yesterday, as soon as I saw clearly and could objectify it, I immediately ‘sent’ all this to you (I didn’t write because I had no time, but I ‘told’ it all to you), for I felt that, not knowing what had happened, you might have thought I wasn’t listening, or I don’t know what!

No, no! I felt that what I had written wasn’t ‘it’.

But it was a formidable experience! Formidable. And really proof that this book interests him.

But I have to do all last week’s work over.

Why? Don’t you like it?

The thread is missing. It’s not ‘it’.

You know, he was so pleased the first day you read to me! I was seeing his force, his power inside it, and it was golden; a kind of power of propulsion was there. But of course, I know nothing at all about what you read to me yesterday; I was a bit

overwhelmed by this experience! It's the first time I've had it.

For a long, long time I have been asking for . . . When I would say, "Lord, take possession of this brain," I expected something of the sort, but I was expecting it with the supramental light (which, partially and momentarily, I have had). But this! It was really . . . I don't know what he did with my brain — not brain, my mental power. Probably during that period he absorbed it (I suppose that's what happened because there was no sense of difference). My impression was that as a result of this the physical cells were going to develop materially and be transformed (I think it will happen — I had a sort of assurance that it will). Because now, as I'm talking to you, I'm looking at it and I see — the effect is still there: no longer with the same overwhelming power, but the effect is there and it gives a sort of . . . (it can't be compared to anything physical) . . . a sort of warmth; it's not *heat*, but *warmth*. Everything is seized by it, both ears (*Mother touches her head*), everything — here, there, all around! Tremendous. And this immobility! As soon as one stops, it is immor . . . (*Mother cuts off her word*), it is eternity.

It is truly bringing *that* down here [into Matter].

Well then, are you going to read the rest to me or not?

No, Mother, I feel I have to do it all over. I don't have the thread. I just have scraps here and there, bits and pieces — I don't have the thread.

But is this thread so very necessary? Because the last time you read (I can't pinpoint exactly where), Sri Aurobindo seemed to intervene each time any of those habitual coherences of reason intruded, things you probably inserted precisely in order to join passages together and make them comprehensible. It was at these junctures (I can't remember them exactly) where he would occasionally say, "*Not necessary, not necessary. That can go, that can go.*"

Afterwards, I tried to understand (I tried to identify enough to be able to understand) and I got the feeling that he finds it will be much more powerful if you don't follow normal logical lines (I'm elaborating a bit — it wasn't quite like this); rather, if you like, it is better to be prophetic than didactic — fling abroad the ideas, ploff! Then let people do what they can with them. I felt he was viewing this not only from the essential standpoint, but from the standpoint of the public, and he wanted to ensure that it doesn't become tiresome — at all costs, don't let it be tiresome. It can be bewildering, but not tiresome. Let them be hurled right into things . . . strange and unknown things, perhaps, but . . . For instance (this is my own style, you can take it for what it's worth), it would be better for people to say, "He's a madman," than to say, "He's a boring sermoniser." And all this was coming with his sense of humour, the way he has of saying, for example, that folly is closer to the Divine than reason!

I don't know, I didn't hear the beginning, but certainly everything dealing

with physical events [of Sri Aurobindo's life] will be expressed in a very reasonable and normal style so that there will be no danger of people saying, "He's a half-cracked visionary!" I don't know, the first part of what you read to me was so good! Gusts of golden light kept coming. Perhaps you wanted to explain too much. You don't know what happened?

Yes, it's precisely this need to explain.

He seems to find it unnecessary!

Above all, he would like the end to be brief. That's something I felt from the very first day — let the end surge up and leave you in suspense; above all, don't try to be reasonable. An upsurge of light like a door bursting open onto a very luminous and unknown future, but with no attempt to make it tangible and approachable. I am sure of this — this impression of a closed door (people live behind doors, you know), and then abruptly the door is flung wide-open on an explosion of light and . . . you are left there: sit down, look, contemplate — and wait for the moment to be ripe for venturing forth.

Above all, have no ambition to make anyone understand anything whatsoever.

But you have to make people understand the work of Sri Aurobindo — what he came to do, what his work is!

But this really is what he came to do — it's like . . . an upside-down volcano.

An eruption, an explosion.

He casts forth the seeds; and then, for those who can gather them up, comes the slow and lengthy labour.

(silence)

When one follows the curve of his last writings, one sees very clearly that after having sown the seeds (yes, it's like a great seeding of light) and even after having said, "This is to be realised now," well, the further he went on in his work, the more he continued to work towards this realisation, the more he saw all the stages that had to be crossed, the more he . . . saw all that, well, the more he used to say, "Don't imagine this will happen to you all at once. Don't think this path is an instant miracle."

After speaking of the descent of the Supermind, he said that an *intermediary* must be prepared between our present mental state (even the most elevated higher mind) and the supramental region, because if one entered directly into Gnosis, well, it would produce such an abrupt change that our physical constitutions would be unable to support it — an intermediary is needed. The experiences I've had make me absolutely convinced of it; twice the supramental world took veritable possession

of me and both times it was as if the body — truly the physical body — was going to completely disintegrate, due to . . . what you could almost call the opposition of the two conditions.

And yesterday again I clearly saw . . . (*Mother touches this mass in her head*). My eyes are full of it . . . my eyes are full, you know, and I see that as it works to settle itself in here, it produces this little vibration — a twinkling of vibrations — which seems to be indispensable for it to enter into this Matter.

But what's interesting is that it produced neither headache, nor malaise, nor anything of the kind; yet neither was there any great joy or satisfaction. It is . . . the words we use always take on a pejorative tone and spoil it, but the difference between our habitual way of functioning and this new way is something so tremendous and overwhelming that an adaptation is evidently required. And he always said that the adaptation would at first be a diminution, and that only gradually could one regain the original purity. That's just how it is.

But it's not the time to say all this, *mon petit!*

. . .

(*silence*)

What he has actually done is this: he seems to have poured over the world — with the power of the Origin — the new Possibility; “The time has come for *this*,” ploff ! . . . Now let us be quiet and see how things evolve.

(*silence*)

Indeed, he is so very much *here*.

Two or three days ago, in one of those moments when you feel a little stupid (‘little’ is an understatement!), I said to myself, “Yes, how good it was when I used to feel him with me all the time. In this period now, I no longer feel him.” Then he told me so clearly, so positively, “*You don't feel me because I am you.*”

And I saw that it was true, that the identification was established in such a . . . detailed way, one could say, that there is no longer the joy — a joy of feeling like this (*gesture of being embraced*).

(*silence*)

Now I understand! He used to tell me, “*You alone have the endurance,*” and oh, *mon petit*, what endurance it takes!

But how to speak of all this to people! How to speak of it? They are a million miles away.

Simply awaken hope in them — the Hope. A hope based on the certainty of an

experience. You know, if they could imagine the Supreme Himself coming and saying, “Listen now, I’m here to tell you that this is the way it is, get ready.”

Always, always, the first reaction of people on earth has been to say, “He’s mad.”

But what of it!

And precisely because a large part of the book is reasonable enough, artistic, well-expressed and well-presented, it can afford a few pages (there need not be many), a few pages that are like a leap into sheer madness!

I see, I am looking at all that, sparkling . . .

So if you want to read something to me, I’m listening — I have come to hear.

No, Mother, I have to catch hold of the thread.

You have to catch hold . . . yes.

Well then, concentrate, call it! Make an invocation, call it in — it is *there*, contact it. That is the thread to catch — not in the head.

But that’s just it, you see, before working I always become completely silent and in that silence there is nothing. I could stay like that for hours!

Yes, indeed, *mon petit!*

But nothing comes!

Well?

Well, after a certain length of time — because after all, time passes — I have to work . . .

Ah, but perhaps that’s not the way!

Then, obviously, I catch hold of some idea — sometimes it’s the right idea, sometimes it isn’t.

It’s not so much a question of an idea being right or not but of the vibration of the Force.

If I say all this it’s because I see to what extent Sri Aurobindo views this book as an important tool for world-wide work — from the beginning he has taken it seriously. And he is so very much *here* that it seems to me . . . not at all impossible that he *himself* is stimulating the expression.

It’s not so much a question of ideas, because all that is quite fine.

Read your final page to me. I don't care about the coherence of ideas. Read the final page for me to see whether I feel that same Force in it.

Yes, but I will have to redo all that precedes it.

You are going to do it all over? But it doesn't matter. You know what the logic of a book means to me!

You see, when I want a *true* impression of a book, I open it at random; then I look at the first page, the last page — sometimes I read the ending, then I go back to the beginning — it doesn't matter where. What I want to know is whether the Force is there.

Ordinary logic . . . Read! Anywhere, the middle of a sentence, it doesn't matter!

(after the reading)

I would like to go over it all again.

But isn't what you call the 'thread' going to make the whole thing heavy?

A thread is missing. I don't know, some people can write in bits and pieces, here and there, but not me. If I don't feel that everything behind me is completed, I can't go ahead. I need to have a flow.

Listen, think it over . . . Because I'm not so sure. When I see, I see segments: a blank, another segment, a blank (*Mother seems to sketch a kind of diagram in space*), then an apotheosis at the end — your ending is magnificent.

It's not necessary for the whole book to proceed in the same way. The most revelatory part can be in segments (you know, just as it comes). The thread is an invisible one — the link of a Presence — otherwise it comes in bursts, and that has a lot of force.

All you've read to me now is quite fine, and it would certainly be less fine if something were there connecting it all up.

To me it's clear that some segments are unsuitable.

Unsuitable or incomplete?

Unsuitable.

Well, then take them out! Why not? It may be contrary to logic, even to higher logic, but what do we care!

I will try to see . . . If I catch the thread, it will be all right — but I must catch it.

You have to concretely feel that Sri Aurobindo's full Power of expression is there (I don't mean the words, it's not a question of words), but the power to transmit knowledge (not mental knowledge, experience). It's constantly there. So . . . an attentive silence — but be very patient, because as soon as the Force comes, something begins to stir in the mental regions. Then there is also a sort of *eagerness* to seize hold — and it ruins the thing.

I have noticed that the true inspiration doesn't come when one is very, very anxious, nor even when you have a very intense aspiration, but (how to put it?) . . . when you succumb in a smile, and it all goes blank. Then there's nothing; but if you know how to curb impatience (simply delighting in His beatitude, even if ages pass — delighting in His beatitude), then suddenly, when you least expect it — flash! That's *it!*

This has happened to me very, very often — suddenly, poff! And with such certainty!

Mother, give me one single indication. Don't you think I should cut out what I read to you yesterday? It would be a relief if you told me.

I don't think so, *mon petit!* I don't think so. I can't tell you for sure because I'm not the one who heard it — you know what I mean? No memory is operating. Were you to ask me to repeat a single word of what you have written, I couldn't do it — yet I listened to you.

I have a sort of vision in my head of parts of sentences, three or four words where the impression was what I told you: "*Not necessary.*" But it was a very minor thing. It was more an attitude, an attitude in the expression. But it wasn't disturbing.

I keep feeling that Sri Aurobindo wants the conclusion to be swift; and I myself (probably not with his power of comprehension) have a vision, a sort of feeling coming from a great height above, that the most important part of the book should be very abrupt — like breaking through a door, flinging it wide-open, and emerging in a rush of light. That's all. Now keep quiet and see what happens.

October 15, 1961

THE MOTHER

**“VESPERTIDE” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

VESPERTIDE*

They ask me: Was she not your life’s joy-breath?
Will not pained love a war of music wage,
Beholding ruthless destiny uncage
On her winged vision the monstrous claw of death? . . .
My grief is hushed by calm cloud-flowerage!
The hour hangs, wondering on its nameless age —
For it is both sky-evening and earth-night!
Strange waters glimmer, flecked with wandering white,
Like some enormous missal’s cloistered page!

Amid such hues of solemn ecstasy
I loved her form ensouled with mauve dream-mist:
O I was ever twilight’s rhapsodist,
Seeing in her but spirit of wave and sky!
Her mystic smile — lo there its mood unspent
In the cloud’s heart of shine and shadow blent!
Deathless to me the deep earth-heaven trance
Of her far-calling sorrow-splendoured glance —
A dim wave-world of floating firmament!

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

It is quite good — throughout.

12 April 1933

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

* A poem of 1926 re-composed.

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of January 2014)

Chapter: XXX

Into the Limelight — the Reluctant Step

It can probably be said without the least hesitation that Aurobindo was the Brahma of the revolutionary movement — detached and silent. But the sparks his pen used to throw initiated to the fiery hymn whomsoever they touched.¹

The “Brahma” — the creator of the then movement — however, remained elusive, and as far as possible, reclusive. The brightest among those who shone in the forefront of the Swadeshi and Anti-Partition movement was Surendranath Banerjea (knighted in 1921).

Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925) belonged to the Indian Civil Service, qualifying himself for the position along with the noted author R. C. Dutt. But while serving as an Assistant Magistrate he was dismissed from the service accused of some error in his judgment. After teaching English at some colleges he founded a college by himself (Ripon College, now known as Surendranath College) and taught there. Beginning with a Membership of the Corporation Council, he became more and more active in politics and was elected President of the Indian National Congress twice. He also owned and edited the newspaper the *Bengalee*. But “His faith in the justice of the British had never slackened,” says an authentic biographical sketch of his.²

Sri Aurobindo, in the fifth instalment of his very first series of political writing after settling down at Baroda, ‘New Lamps for Old’ in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, had strongly criticised Banerjea’s description of the British House of Commons as “the greatest representative assembly in the world, the palladium of English Liberty, the sanctuary of the free and brave”.³

But Sri Aurobindo admired his qualities and said,

Whatever differences of opinion we may have with Babu Surendranath, we have always recognized him as the leader of Bengal, the one man among us whose name is a spell to sway the hearts of millions.⁴

It was rather unfortunate that Surendranath should be enamoured of building a personality cult for himself and let himself undergo a coronation-like ceremony. Commented the *Bande Mataram*:

There is a limit to everything. There is also a limit to hero-worship and to self-laudation. It seems to us that limit was passed in the extraordinary proceedings of the Pandits' meeting which deified Babu Surendranath Banerji, and in the undignified effusion of the report which appeared in Babu Surendranath's own paper the *Bengalee*. A regular "*abhishek*" ceremony seems to have been performed and the assembled Brahmins paid him regal honours as if he had been the just and truthful Yudhishtira at the Rajasuya sacrifice. If Babu Surendranath wishes to be the king of independent Bengal, he should surely conquer his kingdom first and then enjoy it. Even Caesar refused the crown thrice; but Surendra Babu has no scruples. He accepted his coronation with effusive tearfulness; in the touching language of the *Bengalee*, "his mighty voice shook and he got choky".

*

But the thing passes a joke. . . . We do not like to see him making himself publicly ridiculous. . . . Such performances are rather likely to diminish his prestige than increase it.⁵

Hemendra Prasad Ghose who was on the staff of the *Bande Mataram* has left behind him an invaluable personal diary. He did not mean to publish it; hence it provides us with uninhibited impressions about the situation and the leaders of his era. The first two of the following passages are from his diary notations of 21st and the rest are from that of 22nd September 1907:

They are contemplating to hold a public meeting to express sorrow and indignation at the incarceration of Babu Bipin Chandra Pal. Surendranath is to preside and he is deferring the date.

Surendranath can no longer march with the nation. But he would not retire. Indeed, he is retarding the progress of the nation . . .

Yesterday I wrote something about Surendranath lagging behind in the onward march of the nation.

Surendranath is not a man of strong principles and straightforward honesty. He is swayed by those around him and succumbs to his surroundings. . . . The

moderates are afraid — afraid lest they incur the displeasure of bureaucracy. So their attitude is easily explained.⁶

Hemendra Prasad's diary of 24th September 1907 says:

A meeting was held in Green Park to express sympathy with Sjt. Bipin Chandra Pal. Surendranath presided partially. He came late, delivered an unfortunate (sic) speech and left placing Sjt. Krishna Kumar Mitra in charge of the chair. His speech was most unfortunate and out of place. He only laid stress on the difference of opinion with Bipin Chandra.

How we wish he had not been asked to preside!⁷

For the sake of history it may not be out of place to record a rather curious fact at this point of our narration. We have seen earlier how when Abinash Bhattacharya and Barindra Kumar handed over a copy of an article by Sri Aurobindo, "No Compromise" in 1905 to Surendranath, he looked stunned reading it and asked who the author was, "for no Indian, no Bengali could write that kind of English containing such arguments supported by facts". Coming to know that the author was Aurobindo Ghose, he said, "Yes, none but he could have written such an article," as stated by Abinash Bhattacharya.⁸

One of the revolutionaries, Jyotish Chandra Roy who was convicted by Magistrate Kingsford in what was known as the Jugantar Assault Case, informs us:

I had seen in the Chinsura Provincial Conference in 1909, or thereabout, with what awe and esteem Surendranath regarded this great soul who was none other than Rishi Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry of the recent past.⁹

There had been several meetings between Surendranath and Sri Aurobindo on crucial issues, the last one probably being on the eve of the unforgettable Surat session of the Congress. But it is intriguing that in his autobiography entitled *A Nation in Making* bearing the sub-title "Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life" even though the famous leader refers to so many well-known, known and even little-known persons, he meticulously avoids any mention of Sri Aurobindo. What is surprising, he did not feel such an omission to be absurd and unnatural.¹⁰

Was he under the delusion that those mentioned by him will become immortals and Sri Aurobindo should not be granted that status by him? Could it be that he suffered from a fearful inhibition? It is for the readers to interpret.

Despite his sincere unwillingness, Sri Aurobindo would be obliged to address public meetings, which were invariably large, as time passed. For example, he was "pressed by the people to speak" to a gathering of 4000 on the 14th of December 1907 at the College Square. That could very well have been his first public speech

in Calcutta; the next day, at a meeting at Beadon Square, even after several eloquent speeches had been delivered by well-known orators, “the audience would not rest till they heard Sjt. Aurobindo Ghose speak” — though he could do so only in English — writes Hemendra Prasad in his diary on 15 December 1907.¹¹

There were frequent clashes between the citizens and the police during the first half of October in the city of Calcutta because of the latter’s resistance to Swadeshi actions by volunteers and massive protest meetings against political arrests. It was during this time that the Scottish statesman James Keir Hardie (1856-1915), the pioneer of the labour movement in Britain and the first leader of the Labour Party in the House of Commons arrived in Calcutta. On the 6th of October 1907 he paid a visit to the *Bande Mataram* office. But he could not find anyone from the editorial staff. Let us turn once again to Hemendra Prasad’s diary:

After this, Sjt. Aurobindo Ghose, Shyamsundar Chakravarty went to see him at the Spencer’s Hotel. But as they were dressed in dhoties the manager hesitated to let them in. So they left and wrote a note all about it to Mr. Hardie who called on them at 12, Wellington Square.¹²

Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram* of 8 October 1907:

The visit of Mr. Keir Hardie to Bengal, so much feared by the English papers, has come and gone and the reactionist Press has taken care that it should create the right sort of sensation in England so that whatever he may tell of the carefully-hidden truth about the “unrest” in India may be discredited beforehand. We have been watching these manoeuvres with some amusement, mingled with a kind of admiration for the sheer bare-faced impudence of the lies which these amiable gentry are administering so liberally to a willing British public. Anything is good enough for British consumption, and accordingly Anglo-India sets itself no limits in the grossness and incredibility of the inventions it circulates. Mr. Hardie’s presence is responsible for the riots, for the Union Jute Mills strike, for every development of the political struggle which has occurred since the formidable Labourite set foot on Indian soil. . . . We have met and talked with Mr. Keir Hardie and we found him a strong, shrewd-witted man possessed of a great deal of clear common sense. He is a Labourite and a Socialist. As a Labourite he will do whatever he thinks best in the interests of Labour; as a Socialist, the interests of whose creed are bound up with the progress of internationalism, he may take Indian questions with a greater sincerity than the Cottons and Wedderburns. But as we said before in our article on Keir Hardie, to suppose that he can do anything for us is a delusion. India like other countries, must work out her salvation for herself, and the less she trusts to foreign help, the swifter will be her deliverance.¹³

For some time past communal elements had become active in East Bengal and their mischief grew more audacious since the beginning of 1907. Contemporary reports point at the Nawab of Dacca directly encouraging it and nobody doubts the encouragement he received from the colonial administration. Most of the shopkeepers were Muslims and the boycott of foreign goods was naturally resented by most of them. Added to it was a rumour that the Nawab had been insulted. According to a well-researched work by a noted historian:

On 21 April Muslims attacked a mela near Jamalpur (Mymensingh district). A Hindu was drowned while trying to flee, and a Durga image was smashed. On the night of 27-28 April there was a clash involving the use of firearms between a group of volunteers (some of whom had come from Calcutta) and the Muslims in Jamalpur town. This was followed by a panicky flight of most Hindu householders. . . . Property, mainly of Hindu landlords, shopkeepers and mahajans, was this time the principal target, though there was also considerable destruction of images and some cases of rape and attempted forcible conversion.¹⁴

The volunteers from Calcutta to which the historian refers were young men inspired by the dream of freedom and among them was Sudhir Sarkar, aged seventeen. His reminiscences give us rare glimpses of Sri Aurobindo's life and conduct at this period of time:

When news reached Calcutta that idols of Durga had been smashed in the temples of Jamalpur, seven of us started at once for the place, intending to teach the miscreants a lesson. There was a big meeting, a gathering of thousands. Fighting flared up and we had to use firearms to defend ourselves. My six companions were arrested and after going through excruciating hardships, I managed to reach Calcutta. There I received, from known and unknown alike, many a pat on the back for being plucky. Detailed reports of our exploits were published in newspapers. . . . Perhaps because I qualified myself through this examination, I became trustworthy in the eyes of the seniors; at any rate I was promoted to the next higher grade. I was directed to stay in Sri Aurobindo's house and to look after him.

I continued my studies there. I felt greatly honoured for the privilege of being able to stay with such a great and learned man, one who was so gentle and quiet, one who had sacrificed so much.¹⁵

Sri Aurobindo was then living in a house at Choku Khansama Lane, with Mrinalini Devi and his sister Sarojini Devi. The household was run by his faithful lieutenant Abinash Bhattacharya. The young Sudhir obviously was lodged in the same house. He, whose assigned duty was to look after Sri Aurobindo, suffered

from malaria himself. It had by then become indispensable for Sri Aurobindo to withdraw from Calcutta for a while, for reasons of health. In fact he was seriously ill. It was decided to spend some time at the house of his maternal grandfather at Deoghar. But he was not prepared to leave an ailing Sudhir behind. He took the young man in his entourage consisting of Mrinalini Devi, Sarojini Devi and a cook. Writes Sudhir Kumar:

A large thick cotton carpet was spread on the floor and we all slept on it. Sri Aurobindo used to type on long foolscap paper his rendering of the Mahabharata in verse form. Dr. Pranakrishna Acharya treated me. One day I had an acute attack of fever. I shivered very much and felt thirsty and nauseous. The typed sheets lay nearby. I vomited and what was thrown up sprayed onto them. Sri Aurobindo's serene face did not betray any sign of dismay, nor did he show any haste in trying to save his manuscripts. Slowly he rose and set out to clean up the mess. I felt awfully mortified. Gratitude melted my interior. Never had I known such love and compassion — not even in my own family. I expected to hear at least some exclamation as reflex action, such as "Oh, he spoils things!" Hadn't I been blamed many times for mistakes committed unwittingly? But no, nothing of that sort came out of him. Nothing perturbed his serene face. All the while I was with Sri Aurobindo — for about a year — I never heard from him, not even once, anything like, "Don't!", not to speak of an order or advice. If I went too far in anything, he would keep quiet — not by looking grave, but as if he did not take note of my word or action — being absorbed in something else! It was not a gesture of absentmindedness indicating his looking down on me. Whatever mischief I did he remained the same. Looking back I realise the truth in the belief that a high mind embraces everything while a small mind sees defects everywhere and becomes blinded by them.¹⁶

Glancing through the records and reminiscences of that time we find that several different amazing aspects of Sri Aurobindo's personality were revealed to several people. But so far as his physical personality was concerned, we read a no less amazing revelation courtesy the memoirs left by a biographer of Motilal Ghose, the Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Though Motilal Ghose tried to steer a middle path between the Nationalists and the Moderates, his residence was the meeting place of the former on many occasions. Tilak cooked his own food in a corner of the verandah and shared his host's room. While the curious children around the house, which included the biographer, were fascinated by Tilak's pointed Maratha slippers and Kharparde's twenty-two yard-long turban, what attracted them to Sri Aurobindo were his "curls!"¹⁷

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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We believe, therefore, that Divine Power is behind the movement, that the Zeitgeist, the Time-Spirit, is at work to bring about a mighty movement of which the world at the present juncture has need, that that movement is the resurgence of Asia and that the resurgence of India is not only a necessary part of the larger movement but its central need, that India is the keystone of the arch, the chief inheritress of the common Asiatic destiny.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 471)

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND SRI AUROBINDO: THEY RE-LIT THE TORCH OF INDIAN HEROISM

INDIA has been a land of heroes and heroines. Physical strength backed by spiritual power and humanism has been the image of Mother India. Whether it was Viswamitra defying Fate to save the innocent Sunahshepa, the intrepid Shivaji resisting Aurangzeb's suzerainty or Lakshmibai of Jhansi confronting the British forces of Sir Hugh Rose, the red badge of courage has been worn by millions who had followed such Indian leaders. Unfortunately, the British rule in India emasculated the Indian power by alienating the Indians from their heritage. According to Sri Aurobindo English education and culture placed the masses in a swoon:

British rule, Britain's civilizing mission in India has been the record success in history in the hypnosis of a nation. It persuaded us to live in a death of the will & its activities, taking a series of hallucinations for real things and creating in ourselves the condition of morbid weakness the hypnotist desired, until the Master of a mightier hypnosis laid His finger on India's eyes and cried "Awake". Then only the spell was broken, the slumbering mind realised itself and the dead soul lived again. (*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 1104)

The Master of the mightier hypnosis was, of course, Swami Vivekananda. Sri Aurobindo also added in the essay:

Our only hope of resurgence was in some such great unsealing of the eyes to the Maya in which we existed and the discovery of some effective mantra, some strong spiritual impulse which should have the power to renovate us from within. For good or for evil the middle class now leads in India, and whatever saving impulse comes to the nation, must come from the middle class, whatever upward movement begins, it must initiate and lead. But for that to happen the middle class must by a miracle be transfigured and lifted above itself; the natural breeding ground of the bourgeois, it must become the breeding ground of the Samurai. (*Ibid.*, pp. 1107-08)

Swami Vivekananda, the intrepid warrior in realms social and spiritual, was also an initiator of the transformation in the political field. He was the first to discover in the 'Bande Mataram' song a mantra to wake up his slumbering nation. An ardent fan of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Ananda Math*, Swami Vivekananda had great regard for the novelist who used to meet Sri Ramakrishna. From the writings of Swami Vivekananda it is obvious that in imaging the nation as a Mother, a Shakti,

he was deeply inspired by the song in Bankim's novel. His own writings dealing with India as Mother Shakti deeply influenced the Bengali youth of his day. For instance, his younger brother Bhupendranath Datta, Abhinash Bhattacharya and Sri Aurobindo's younger brother Barindra founded the magazine *Jugantar* as the voice of the Anushilan Samiti of Bengal, a revolutionary organisation on the lines of Bankim's ideas. Bhupendranath wrote in his biography of Vivekananda:

The primary object of Swami Vivekananda was nationalism. To arouse the sleeping lion of India and to put it on its proper pedestal was his life's mission. His national ideal was the ideal of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya as depicted in the revolutionary novel *Ananda Math* . . . while Swamiji was guest of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, it was agreed that while Tilak would work for nationalism in the political field, Swami Vivekananda would work for nationalism in the religious field.

Though Swami Vivekananda concentrated his attention on the Math and the Mission, this ideal of a free India founded by a sannyasi brotherhood was never far from his attention. When he went to East Bengal a year prior to his passing, several young men met him in Dacca in the first week of April. One of them, Hemachandra, says that there were several meetings and Vivekananda advised them to get the rajahs of India together to gain freedom from foreign domination. He also told them to read Bankim's novels to gain a proper perspective of love for one's motherland, and thus sowed the seed of revolutionary action in the psyche of the Bengali youth.

Meanwhile, the 21-year-old Sri Aurobindo had returned to India in 1893 after a stay of fourteen years in England as a student. Swami Vivekananda's triumph in America made the young sannyasi the icon of the Indian masses. Sri Aurobindo realised that India's heroic age had not withered, after all. He had been nurtured in the ideals of "liberty, equality and fraternity" in the West. For him Vivekananda's advent was most welcome. Swami Vivekananda's mastery of the English language and his using it to present Indian philosophy and yoga must have fascinated Sri Aurobindo. He too would travel in that pathway later on, though his approach to philosophy would not be the same as Vivekananda's. But Vivekananda's desire for a free India and how it called for complete self-sacrifice, may be seen in his references to the Swami in his writings. The work of the Math and the Mission had begun by the time Sri Aurobindo had got accustomed to the Indian conditions and he realised that this is how Swaraj had to be won. Why beg for power from our foreign rulers? The way taken by the Congress leaders would take the nation nowhere. Vivekananda had criticised the Congress for not making any attempt to help the Indians in distress but always hankering after power. When Aswini Kumar Datta asked him why he had no faith in the Congress, Swami Vivekananda answered bluntly:

Do you think merely passing a few resolutions will bring you freedom? I have no faith in that. The masses must be awakened first. Let them have full meals and they will work out their own salvation . . . the essence of my religion is strength . . .

Sri Aurobindo's speeches and writings during his active political involvement harked back to Bankim and Swami Vivekananda. Bankim was a Rishi who had given the mantra 'Bande Mataram'. Sri Aurobindo often spoke of the Upanishadic parable of two birds which was a favourite of Vivekananda. He also acknowledged the brotherhood-idea initiated by Vivekananda to help the nation:

A new kind of association came into being. That was the association which stood by labour and service and self-sacrifice, whose object of existence was to help the poor and nurse the sick. That was the flowering out of the Hindu religion. That was what Swami Vivekananda preached. That was what Ashwini Kumar Dutta strove to bring into organised existence. That was what the Ramakrishna Mission, the Little Brothers of the Poor at Barisal tried to effect.
(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 74)

Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902. Sri Aurobindo knew that though he had passed from the physical plane, the Vivekananda Action continued to motivate the Indians. As he wrote in *The Vedic Magazine* (1915):

Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definitive work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, "Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children."

(*Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 662)

By 1905 Sri Aurobindo who had been carefully watching the blossoming of the Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission had prepared the document *Bhawani Mandir*. The inspiration of Vivekananda (and the 'Song of the Sannyasin') in its foundational ideas is palpable:

A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, the Mother, among the hills. To all the children of the Mother, the call is sent forth to help in the sacred work.

. . .

What is it that so many thousands of holy men, Sadhus and Sannyasis, have preached to us silently by their lives? What was the message that radiated from the personality of Bhagawan Ramkrishna Paramhansa? What was it that formed the kernel of the eloquence with which the lionlike heart of Vivekananda sought to shake the world? It is this that in every one of these three hundred millions of men from the Raja on his throne to the coolie at his labour, from the Brahmin absorbed in his *sandhya* to the Pariah walking shunned of men, GOD LIVETH. We are all gods and creators, because the energy of God is within us . . . (*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 6, pp. 79, 84)

Indeed, both aspects had to be taken up together, a chain of secret societies working to overthrow the British rulers and the members of the society bringing succour to the marginalised and the poor in India. The Bhawani Mandir Scheme is no day-dream for already the Sri Ramakrishna Mission was being organised in that manner though it avoided political involvement. Swami Vivekananda had given prime importance to a temple of Sri Ramakrishna, the fount of spiritual power. The next step was getting together everyone, from prince to pauper, for all were equals, carrying the god within. Finally, India had to rise for the sake of the world's future. These three steps are reflected in Sri Aurobindo's Scheme. When the Bhawani Mandir Scheme speaks of a temple to the White Bhavani, one cannot overlook the spiritual experiences Swami Vivekananda had in the Kshir Bhavani temple in the Himalayas which resulted in his immortal poem, "Kali, the Mother":

Thou Time, the All-Destroyer!
Come, O Mother, come!
Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in Destruction's dance,
To him the Mother comes.

Again, the Sri Ramakrishna Math readily comes to our mind when Sri Aurobindo speaks of a Math with a new Order of Karma Yogis, "a nucleus of men in whom the Shakti is developed to its uttermost extent, in whom it fills every corner of the personality and overflows to fertilise the earth. These, having the fire of Bhawani in their hearts and brains, will go forth and carry the flame to every nook and cranny of our land." Our mind harks back to Vivekananda's mantric statement: "Strength is life, weakness is death". The third thing needful for those who converge to the Bhawani Mandir is a Vedantic outlook recognising the spiritual oneness of man, "the knowledge which when vivified by Karma and Bhakti delivers man out of all fear and all weakness."

Sri Aurobindo was not a mere arm-chair philosopher and had plunged into

action, travelling widely to wake up Indians with his speeches and editing the spirited *Bande Mataram*. The first step in the kind of sacrifice that a Bhawani Mandir called for was a personal gesture. Unlike Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo was married to the beautiful and loving Mrinalini. He wrote to her a letter in which he mentions three madnesses that hold him in thrall, and each calls for the sacrifice that would make him a true sannyasi. “The first one is this. I firmly believe that the accomplishments, genius, higher education and learning and wealth that God has given me are His. I have a right to spend for my own purposes only what is needed for the maintenance of the family and is otherwise absolutely essential.” Secondly, he wants to have “the direct vision of God”, reminding us of Vivekananda’s days as Narendra. Finally the desire that was no doubt deep in the depths of Vivekananda’s heart, to work for India’s political freedom:

I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her, I worship Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother’s breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength, — I am not going to fight with sword or gun, — but the strength of knowledge.

Hadn’t Swami Vivekananda already shown the way to do it? Yoga! It is now history that the Bhawani Mandir scheme could not be implemented. Sedition trials, imprisonment, self-exile in Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo’s life had taken a major turn away from surface political work. He had to work for the freedom of man now, not merely the Indian. For human unity, not just national unity. Even here, we see the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda in a big way for the Swami always averred that India’s Vedanta held the secret of unifying the human family:

The other great idea that the world wants from us today . . . is that eternal grand idea of the spiritual oneness of the whole universe. I need not tell you today, men from Madras University, how the modern researches of the West have demonstrated through physical means the oneness and the solidarity of the whole universe; how, physically speaking, you and I, the sun, moon, and stars are but little waves or wavelets in the midst of an infinite ocean of matter; how Indian psychology demonstrated ages ago that, similarly, both body and mind are but mere names or little wavelets in the ocean of matter, the Samashti; and how, going one step further, it is also shown in the Vedanta that behind that idea of the unity of the whole show, the real Soul is one.

Sri Aurobindo’s works like *The Ideal of Human Unity* give us an idea of Swami Vivekananda’s Action on the Indian thinkers who came after him. In fact, Sri Aurobindo’s

celebrated Independence Day message to the nation on 15th August spoke in these terms about the oneness of mankind and “the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race . . .” (*Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 475)

Such is the natural movement from politics to a global Vedantic unity in the thought-processes of Swami Vivekananda. Sri Aurobindo sought to go further when he dreamed of “a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.” (*Ibid.*)

This evolutionary step upwards was the result of a closely reasoned argument recorded in Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine* and his own yoga that has been brought to us in his books: *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Supramental Manifestation* and *Record of Yoga*. He felt that unless the present mental consciousness was transcended to reach a higher level (as already there has been an evolution from matter to life and mind), global unity would remain a dream. Was there a chance of evolving higher than the mind? Even as he meditated upon this problem while undergoing one year’s solitary imprisonment in the Alipur Jail, he was faced with a stoppage, a kind of mental block.

Interestingly, here also Swami Vivekananda’s influence has been indicated by Sri Aurobindo himself. Sri Aurobindo has recorded this vision:

He (Vivekananda) didn’t say ‘Supermind’: Supermind is my own word. He just said to me, ‘This is this, this is that’, and so on. That was how he proceeded — by pointing and indicating. He visited me for 15 days in Alipur jail and until I could grasp the whole thing, he went on teaching me and impressed upon my mind the working of the Highest Consciousness — the Truth-Consciousness in general which leads towards the Supermind. He would not leave until he had put it all into my head. (Quoted in K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History* (1985), p. 372)

India has thus been a land of heroism — physical, spiritual — from times immemorial and to our own times when Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo showed us the way. It is a land with Nature’s riches, a *bhoga bhumi*, a land of *tapasya*, a *yoga bhumi*. Also, a land of total self-sacrifice, a *tyaga bhumi*. Salutations, Mother India! Vande Mataram!¹

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

1. In his talk delivered at Cambridge on 17th December, 1894, Swami Vivekananda spoke of the need for a new civilisation that would bring together “the Roman’s organisation, the power of the Greek’s wonderful love for the beautiful, and the Hindu’s backbone of religion and love of God.” He said: “And let me tell you, this should be done by women. There are some of our books which say that the next incarnation, and the last (we believe in ten), is to come in the form of a woman.”

It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo actually posited a woman Avatar in his epic poem, *Savitri*.

ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA RAY — IV

(Continued from the issue of January 2014)

P. C. Ray, The Industrialist

ON the occasion of Prafulla Chandra Ray's 70th birth anniversary, the great Jagadis Chandra Bose began his tribute to Ray with the following words ([7], p. 5):

Sir P. C. Ray has produced a deep impression in his dual capacity as a pathfinder and originator of work of great utility. From the earliest days he exhibited a special faculty for carrying out original investigations of a high order. It is impossible at the present time for others to realise the numerous difficulties and obstacles that confronted him. But these were never able to stand in the way of reaching the goal he had set before him; on the contrary they served as a stimulus to awaken to the utmost his latent powers.

In his long and distinguished career as a scientific investigator, . . . he has not only made important contributions in advancement of science, but has also evoked the true spirit of research among his disciples, many of whom now occupy very prominent positions in the scientific world. Such an achievement in the lifetime of one man is indeed remarkable but Sir P. C. Ray has done a great deal more.

He was one of the first to realise the importance of Indian industries for the economic advancement of the country. With this object in view he risked the very little he possessed; and the venture started in this modest way has now grown into perhaps the most successful chemical industry in the whole of India. By his personal faith and enthusiasm he has succeeded in enlisting for this work the whole-hearted devotion of his collaborators.

Among modern Indians, P. C. Ray was not only the pioneer of chemical research, he was also the pioneer of the chemical industry. The venture referred to by J. C. Bose is the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works Ltd.,¹ popularly known as "Bengal Chemical". At a time when the aspirations of the Bengali middle class were limited to (usually petty) Government jobs under an alien administration or to the practice of law, P. C. Ray emphasised and demonstrated the importance of trade, commerce and industry. He impressed upon the youth of Bengal to shake off

1. The name of his company is somewhat long; but Ray decided on this name after considerable deliberation; he was particular that his enterprise must represent both the chemical and the pharmaceutical sides.

their lackadaisical attitudes, to understand the dignity of work, and to take up industrial and manual labour. He cautioned that “no political renaissance is possible without the full development of the intellectual and industrial resources of the country” ([4], p. 173). Bengal Chemical not only provided employment to some science graduates, it inspired a spirit of self-sufficiency in the society. It also triggered other industrial efforts. To anyone venturing in industry or business, P. C. Ray would advise ([1], p. 159):

- Do not give up, persevere.
- Have a sound apprenticeship before taking the plunge.
- One cannot succeed without zeal, ceaseless effort and dedication.

Valuable guidelines from the Acharya — to be constantly remembered in any serious pursuit, material or spiritual!

From his early life, Prafulla Chandra had been a witness to the frequent famines and the growing poverty in the country. The historian in Prafulla Chandra was keenly aware that, prior to the British rule, there flourished in India highly developed and opulent industries, the product of which were in great demand among other nations. During the colonial rule, Indian industries had been destroyed in the interests of British manufacturers. Under an alien rule hostile to native industries, people had lost the driving power, the initiative, to take up any venture.

Alarmed at the growing unemployment in Bengal, P. C. Ray felt the urgency of reviving the lost spirit of industrial enterprise. He realised that, in the absence of industries, people would perish of poverty. He knew that, for successful industrialisation, science had to be harnessed, *creatively*, by the Indian manufacturers. His Bengal Chemical demonstrated how to put scientific knowledge to industrial use. As he observes in his autobiography ([6], p. 92):

The history of the gigantic progress of industry achieved in Europe and America is a history of the triumph of researches in the laboratory. In Bengal the one thing needful was not so much the establishment of Technological Institutes as the initiative, the dash, the pluck,² the resourcefulness in our youths that go to the making of a businessman or an entrepreneur or a captain of industry.

The one major factor for the heroic triumph of Bengal Chemical was the spirit of innovation, scientific and otherwise, of the Acharya and his team. We now give a few glimpses of the flow of events and ideas at the inception of Bengal Chemical.

2. One is reminded of the statement of Swami Vivekananda: “What my nation wants is pluck and scientific genius.” (*Complete Works*, Vol. VI, p. 363)

From the very beginning of his professional career at Presidency College, P. C. Ray noticed the occurrence of numerous raw materials scattered around in various locations of Bengal. He wished to make use of this bounty for commercial productions and “bring bread to the mouths of the ill-fed, famished young men of the middle classes” ([6], p. 92). As a realistic first step, he considered the possibility of producing items which could be manufactured in Bengal on a small scale, would find a ready market, would not require a big capital, and which would not interfere with his academic duties. He first thought of extracting citric acid from lemon juice but soon realised that the project would not be commercially viable. He then hit upon the idea of going in for drugs, chemicals and pharmaceuticals with the added objective of making India self-sufficient in these crucial items. Many chemicals and chemical products which can be manufactured in India were being imported and consumed at a high cost; Ray realised that there was a good opportunity for indigenous production of the basic chemical ingredients of the pharmaceutical industry. With a meagre capital of Rs. 700, saved from his (then) paltry salary, Ray commenced his industrial venture. Ray decided to begin with the manufacture of sulphuric acid, the “mother of all other industries” ([6], pp. 93-94).³ But, in his own words ([6], p. 94):

When I began my preliminary trials, I had no previous experience in this line to guide my path nor any tradition to follow, — no mariner’s compass to help me to steer my course.

D. Waldie and Co. of Cossipore (a suburb of Calcutta) had begun to manufacture sulphuric acids and other mineral acids on a large scale and initially they supplied Ray his requirements. Ray found out that most of the other local manufacturers were able to produce sulphuric acid and its by-products only on a miniature scale, through primitive and wasteful methods. He would soon take charge of one such acid factory (at Sodepur near Calcutta) and apply his scientific knowledge to produce the acid in a more efficient way. He was assisted in this venture by Chandrabhusan Bhaduri, the demonstrator at Presidency College “who had an instinctive insight into problems involving chemical engineering” ([6], p. 96) and his younger brother Kulbhusan Bhaduri, a gold medalist and M.A. in Chemistry.

Ray also started preparing sulphates of iron and phosphates of calcium. For the former, he could obtain large quantities of scrap iron at a negligible cost. Cattle-bones, the main raw-material for producing phosphate of soda, were also easily available in Calcutta. Ray’s first experiment of producing a large mass of bone-ash for preparing the superphosphate of lime by burning a pile of cattle-bones was performed in a plot of land at Maniktala near Muraripukur “destined to be the scene of the

3. Ray once quoted the German chemist Liebig’s statement that “the industrial progress of a country was measured by the output of its Sulphuric Acid” ([4], p. 143). A visit to a large sulphuric acid plant in Glasgow had also convinced Ray of its significance.

famous bomb manufactory of the ‘Partition of Bengal’ anarchists’ days” ([6], p. 98).⁴

Having solved the problem of locally manufacturing the required chemicals on a large scale, Ray commenced the production of pharmaceutical drugs in 1893. From the beginning, he was very particular about the quality of his products. However he had to wait for ten years before he could implement his scheme of chemical and pharmaceutical production on a much bigger scale, with an adjunct “acid” unit. In the meantime, he plunged into a study of books and journals to understand the intricacies of pharmaceutical preparations. Ray gives an instance ([6], p. 103) of how his studies supplemented his practical efforts in the field. Initially, his preparation of a syrup of iodide of iron used to turn slightly brown⁵ whereas the corresponding imported drug kept its light green colour intact for a considerable time. One day, while browsing a journal, Ray came across the hint for solving the problem — a minimum quantity of hypophosphorus acid added to the ferrous iodide solution acts as an excellent preservative. This helped him retain the light green colour for any length of time.

Initially, Ray had the up-hill task of selling his medical products. The local dealers in drugs insisted that while *Bilati* (imported) drugs from reputed firms commanded a ready sale, *Deshi* (indigenous) drugs would be refused by the customers. At that difficult juncture, Ray got valuable support from his batchmate Dr. Amulyacharan Bose, a successful medical practitioner. Dr. Bose too was “full of patriotic impulses” and had the realisation that unless new employment opportunities (like the scheme envisaged by Ray) were opened out to the middle-class youth, there would be economic ruin bringing about a national disaster. Dr. Bose not only fetched some capital for Ray’s enterprise, he launched a vigorous campaign among the medical fraternity in favour of Ray’s products. Ray remarks ([6], p. 104):

There is perhaps some point in the saying: “set a thief to catch a thief.”

Doctors with nationalist feeling like Dr. Radha Gobinda Kar,⁶ Dr. Nilratan Sircar and Dr. Suresh Prasad Sarbadhikari began to prescribe the drugs manufactured by Ray’s enterprise.

4. P. C. Ray describes the burning incident ([6], p. 98): “. . . [the bones] were piled up as in a brick-kiln, and set fire to late in the evening. At midnight the entire mass was ablaze and the policeman of the beat ran to the spot and suspecting some foul play exclaimed ईहाँ क्यालास् जलाताहै — *ihñā kyā lās jalāta hai* — a corpse is being cremated (in the wake of a murder). In order to disabuse him of this notion a pole was thrust into the burning pile, and only when clusters of loose bones came out, was the policeman convinced of the bona fide of the transaction and went on his way.”

This fire would usher an industrial resurgence in Bengal. In the very next decade, the same site would be a witness to the activities of revolutionaries (and visits of the police) whose flames would engulf the whole nation.

5. This was due to the ferrous iron absorbing oxygen from the air and getting slightly oxidised to the ferric state and also due to the iodide liberating minute traces of iodine.

6. Dr. Kar, along with Dr. Sircar, founded the Carmichael Medical College, now renamed R. G. Kar Medical College.

Ray had begun with the standard (western) pharmaceutical preparations then in vogue. Dr. Bose, who had an instinctive faith in the therapeutic properties of the traditional Ayurvedic drugs, gave a new direction to Ray's enterprise. Consulting several *Kavirajas*, Dr. Bose collected for Ray the formulae and recipe for Ayurvedic preparations and Ray's unit began to produce these drugs. Again, Dr. Bose undertook a regular campaign in favour of these drugs, himself taking the lead in using them in his prescriptions. Indeed, it was found that an indigenous syrup like *Vasaka* acted more effectively than the corresponding universal medical syrup. The newly introduced indigenous drugs began to make headway in the market. The efficacy of these drugs was explained in modern scientific terms. At the Indian Medical Congress in Calcutta (1898), Ray's unit displayed their preparations of Indian drugs which attracted the attention of doctors from different parts of India. A strong representation was made by the Council of the Medical Congress urging the official recognition of some of these drugs, and the British Pharmacopoeia authorities finally included them in the "Addendum".⁷ A section of the doctors made it a point to include the preparations of Ray's unit in their prescription whenever possible. Thus Bengal Chemical of P. C. Ray (the author of *History of Hindu Chemistry*) demonstrated the merits of some of the indigenous Ayurvedic medicines.

Orders for drugs from Ray's unit began to increase. After performing the exacting college duties,⁸ Ray used to "migrate" every afternoon, at 4.30 p.m., from his college laboratory to the pharmacy's laboratory to work at a stretch from 4.30 p.m. till 7 p.m., clearing all files. A strenuous life; but Ray remarks ([6], p. 106):

When work is coupled with a keen sense of enjoyment it does not tell upon your health; the very idea of locally manufacturing pharmaceutical preparations, which hitherto had to be imported, acted like a tonic.

However misfortunes befell his young venture. Satischandra Sinha (M.A. in Chemistry and husband of Amulyacharan's sister), who was giving valuable assistance to Ray in producing chemicals and checking their quality, succumbed to an accidental poisoning by hydrocyanic acid leaving behind his aged parents and a young widow. P. C. Ray could not help but feel personally responsible for the tragedy,⁹ as Satischandra had forsaken the legal profession to plunge heart and soul

7. The use of some of the indigenous drugs in place of the corresponding official drugs was strongly recommended by O'Shaughnessey (the Irish physician who introduced the telegraph in India) as early as in 1841, and subsequently by Kanai Lal Dey and Udochand Dutt (cf. [6], pp. 104-05).

8. Recall that, during this time (the period from the mid-1890s), P. C. Ray was also deeply involved in research on nitrites (he discovered mercurous nitrite in 1895) and the painstaking research on ancient Indian Chemistry, apart from his heavy teaching duties.

9. Writes P. C. Ray ([6], p. 108): "The deep anguish of mind of Amulya and myself cannot be described. We felt as if we were personally responsible for the loss of a valuable life. Thirty-two years have elapsed since the tragic incident; but as I write these lines, a shudder, like an electric shock, passes through my frame."

in Ray's infant concern. Ray had already lost his father in 1894 and had to arrange for an amicable clearance of his father's debts by the sale of a portion of his family estate. The sulphuric acid factory at Sodepur was in a bad shape needing capital which Ray did not have and, reluctantly, Ray had to scrap it incurring some losses (though gaining in experience which would prove to be a valuable asset later). Finally, Amulyacharan contracted the infamous plague (1898) while treating a patient and passed away.

Withstanding all these blows, Ray continued his activities with "a grim, dogged determination" and Bengal Chemical registered a steady growth. Its reputation increased rapidly. As funds were needed (the capital stood at about Rs. 3000 in 1901), Ray decided to convert it into a public limited liability company. The company named "Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Company Ltd." was formed in April 1901 by P. C. Ray, along with Chandrabhusan Bhaduri, Bhutnath Paul, Dr. Kartick Chandra Bose, Charu Chandra Bose and the widows of Amulyacharan and Satischandra ([8], p. 73). Bhaduri introduced innovations and procured modern devices like steam pans, disintegrators, vacuum stills, filter presses, enabling production on a large scale. Bhutnath Paul, proprietor of a large medical store (Messrs B. K. Paul and Co.), took care of the business side. A patriotic person, Bhutnath Paul had encouraged and helped Ray during his initial struggles in the pharmaceutical field. Being a medical man, Dr. K. C. Bose filled the void created by the demise of Amulyacharan.

Within a year, the Company attained a capital of Rs. 23,500 and began to recruit men of extraordinary administrative ability, intellect and technical acumen, the most prominent among them being Rajsekhar Bose (the famous writer "Parashuram") and Satis Chandra Dasgupta. Rajsekhar Bose (M.A. in Chemistry) joined Bengal Chemical as a chemist in 1903 and soon became its Manager and Secretary. Under his leadership, Bengal Chemical would establish itself as a flourishing house of research and manufacturing. An important quality of Bose was his exceptional ability of training others. He retired in 1933 but continued to be on the Board of Directors till his death (1960). Dasgupta was the Factory Superintendent for many years; he retired in 1925 to join Gandhiji's national movement.

From the first decade of the 20th century, Bengal Chemical began to materialise P. C. Ray's vision of a large-scale industrial establishment. New land was acquired at Maniktala (in Calcutta). With the benefit of Ray's experience at the Sodepur factory, a large sulphuric acid plant was set up at Maniktala during 1904-07.

Dr. Morris Travers, the first Director of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc, Bangalore), visited the Chemical Works during the construction period. In a report to the Calcutta University, Travers observed that the construction and management of the Works was done by former students of P. C. Ray from the chemistry department of Presidency College. He wrote ([6], pp. 110-11):

The design and construction of the sulphuric acid plant and of the plant required for the preparation of drugs and other products involved a large amount of research work of the kind which is likely to be of the greatest service to this country and does the greatest credit to those concerned.

A bird's eye-view photograph of the Maniktala factory, printed in P. C. Ray's textbook on Chemistry (1909), created an enthusiastic stir among the public in those early days of chemical industry in India. It must have, in a subtle way, inspired more youngsters to take up chemical research and industry-related activities, at least in Bengal.

When, as a young man with D.Sc. from Edinburgh, Ray was desperately seeking a job in the Education Department, the Director of Public Instruction (DPI) of the colonial Government had made the snide remark that if he were such a clever chemist he could probably start industries himself and employ others as assistants on the salary of a DPI ([4], p. 171). Ray achieved that and much more. Ironically, during the First World War (1914-18), the British Government itself would approach Ray's enterprise for supplies for its war efforts! The request was made not directly but through the President of the London Chemical Society. Ray, who had a cherished relation with the Society, readily obliged and supplied large quantities of sulphuric acid, nitric acid, sodium thiosulphate, caffeine, fire extinguisher (devised by Dasgupta), surgical cotton, etc.

In spite of the apathy of the colonial Government to the difficulties faced by industries in India in the aftermath of the War, Bengal Chemical continued to prosper and expand. In the early 1920s, a huge sulphuric acid plant was set up at Panihati (in the North Parganas district of West Bengal). Later, branch factories were established in Bombay (1934-38) and Kanpur (1949).

Sir John Cumming had observed in 1908 ([6], p. 111):

The Bengal Chemical & Pharmaceutical Works, Ltd., is one of the most go-ahead young enterprises in Bengal. . . . The enterprise shows signs of resourcefulness and business capacity, which should be an object lesson to capitalists of this province.

As P. C. Ray put it ([5], p. 318):

The Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works have shown what Indian intelligence and local training can do, and they should be considered the true pioneers of a new industrial era in which enterprise is not supported by the charity of the Government or of unpractical philanthropic enthusiasts, who have more money to spend than ideas about the development and growth of industry and commerce. Tata has shown us what enterprise plus capital can

do; the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works have shown India what enterprise plus resourcefulness can do. They are both wonderful examples to an eager nation . . .

Apart from Bengal Chemical, P. C. Ray patronised several industries, many of which were established at his initiative. To mention some of the industrial and commercial ventures with which he was associated: Bengal Potteries, Bengal Canning and Condiment, Bengal Enamel Works, Bengal Salt Manufacturing Company, Bengal Paper, Bengal Steam Navigation, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Cotton Mills at Khulna (now in Bangladesh), National Tanneries, a weighing machine manufacturing unit (Bharati Scales and Engineering Company), the publishing house Chuckerverty, Chatterjee and Company Ltd,¹⁰ Khadi Pratisthan, etc. With the increasing scarcity of other employment opportunities, Ray's enterprises came as a godsend for the youth of Bengal. But, though an industrialist, P. C. Ray raised his voice against relentless capitalism and mechanisation and the ruin of village life (cf. [6], pp. 379-94).

P. C. Ray represented a blending of the simplicity of the East with the vigour of the West. As G. J. Fowler remarked ([7], p. 396):

In Sir P. C. Ray we have a representative of what is best in Eastern and Western civilisation. . . .

. . . by his business acumen and energy he has been able from small beginnings to build up the most successful enterprise in manufacturing chemistry in India. He may therefore claim to be able to meet the active Western world on its own ground.

Having thus won by his own efforts personal freedom and a measure of wealth, he has chosen, not the path of ostentation or display, but of simplicity and charitable service. In this he follows the best traditions of the East.

Though Acharya Ray advocated the use of modern science for practical applications and the creation of wealth, he did not get carried away by everything that goes in the name of science. An anecdote narrated by Dr. P. C. Ghosh ([8], p. 260) vividly illustrates the Acharya's attitude in this regard. One morning, at the

10. Acharya Ray encouraged three of his former students, Ramesh Chandra Chakravarti, Mukunda Lal Chakravarti and Ahindranath Chatterjee to start a publication and book-selling business. All of them belonged to the first batch of students (1910) taking the M.Sc. (Chemistry) degree of Calcutta University. The three friends began the business on a modest scale under the guidance of Acharya Ray who used to drop in to find out if they had any difficulty and gave advice whenever required. The enterprise, registered in 1919 as the Chuckerverty, Chatterjee and Co. Ltd., began to do very well and continues to flourish. Acharya's celebrated *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* was published by this Company. To get a feel of the atmosphere of the era, we mention here that Ramesh Chakravarti, who was of a religious bent and had retired from the Company (after serving for a number of years) to lead a secluded life, had returned from his seclusion for a time when the Company was not doing too well.

Khadi Pratisthana in Sodepur (near Calcutta), Mahatma Gandhi saw Acharya Ray cleaning his teeth in the traditional way with a *Neem* twig and remarked:

You are using *Neem* stick, but you manufacture tooth powder from the Bengal Chemical.

Straight came Acharya Ray's reply:

That is meant for the fools; we manufacture it, otherwise they would use foreign products.

The Acharya often reminded his associates, "We are Indians first, and Bengalis afterwards." While his own enterprises were based in Bengal, the cause of any indigenous commercial venture, whether from Bengal or from Bombay, was dear to his heart. We mention an incident in this connection narrated by Meghnad Saha ([8], pp. 211-12) which took place in a ship, run by the Scindia Steam Navigation Co.¹¹ Apart from P. C. Ray, Meghnad Saha and a few others like Dr. Jivraj Mehta of Bombay, Prof. N. K. Siddhanta of Lucknow and the anthropologist B. S. Guha, most other Indian passengers were young boys from Bengal, Punjab and other provinces going to England for study. A few British ICS officers, who were also in the same vessel, engineered a complaint regarding the quality of food and service on board and instigated the inexperienced Indian students to prepare a petition urging the shipping authorities to cancel the permit for the Indian company. When the students brought the petition to P. C. Ray for his signature, Ray asked them if they had ever travelled to Europe. They had not. P. C. Ray said:

My young friends, this is the seventh trip I am making to Europe, and before this I had travelled by the P. & O. and ships of other European companies; I

11. The Swadeshi Movement included efforts to revive the glorious tradition of ship-building and maritime activity in ancient India; but powerful British vested interests were determined to crush such enterprises. The Bengal Steam Navigation Company, started in 1905, collapsed in the face of paralysing obstacles. In several of his articles in the *Bande Mataram* during March 2008, Sri Aurobindo gave strong support to the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company, established by V.O. Chidambaram Pillai (1872-1936) at Tuticorin in October 1906, and condemned the shameless persecution of the Company by the British bureaucracy. Sri Aurobindo, who had hailed Chidambaram Pillai "for having shown us the first complete example of an Aryan reborn" (*SABCL*, Vol. 1, p. 797), described the Tuticorin navigation venture as "a step which meant the beginning of the end for the British commercial monopoly in India" (*SABCL*, Vol. 1, p. 803). (I am grateful to Prithwindranath Mukherjee for drawing my attention to the *Bande Mataram* articles.)

The Scindia Steam Navigation Company, founded in 1919 by Narottam Morarjee and Walchand Hirachand, was the first large scale Swadeshi shipping company. Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to this company in his columns on the Swadeshi movement in *Young India* and *Harijan*. The first ship of the company sailed for the UK on 5 April, 1919. It was a crucial step in Indian shipping history. 5 April is therefore observed as The National Maritime Day. In the next issue we shall recount an anecdote about an inland steam navigation company with which Acharya Ray was involved.

can assure you that the food and other arrangements here are as good as on any British or other foreign boat.

After a long argument, the boys realised their mistake. With their consent, P. C. Ray tore the petition to pieces and threw it into the sea.

The Acharya remembered with gratitude people who helped him. Dr. P. C. Ghosh recalls ([8], p. 260) that, acknowledging the contributions of Rashbehari Ghosh, Acharya Ray used to say:

Had there been no Rashbehari Ghosh, there would have been no Bengal Chemical today.

We end this part by recalling another eye-witness account of the Acharya's reverence for other idealists, narrated by Monoranjon Gupta, a sub-editor of the weekly *Sanjibani* edited by Krishna Kumar Mitra.¹² Sometime in 1927, Gupta mentioned to the Acharya that, in spite of economic difficulties, the weekly continued to observe the vow taken by its editor K. K. Mitra of not accepting advertisements for foreign soap. Hearing this, the Acharya looked at Gupta's face "with steadfast eyes and breathed a sigh". Slowly, he said ([3], pp. 85-86):

If possible, please see the advertisement of Bengal Chemical's Syrup Vasaka and Hypolime in the old files of *Sanjibani*. Krishnababu had helped us enormously; for, those were at a nominal cost.

(To be continued)

AMARTYA KUMAR DUTTA

12. Krishna Kumar Mitra (1852-1936) was a renowned Brahmo leader, educationist, social reformer, journalist and Swadeshi activist. He married Lilavati, a daughter of Raj Narayan Bose (the maternal grandfather of Sri Aurobindo and one of the makers of modern Bengal). It was at his initiative that C. R. Das became the defence counsel of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case; it was at his residence at 6, College Square, that Sri Aurobindo stayed after his release in May 1909 till his departure from Calcutta.

K. K. Mitra hailed from the village of Baghil in Mymensingh (now in Bangladesh). His father had organised an armed resistance in the village against the oppressive English indigo planters. In 1883, Krishna Kumar launched the nationalist Bengali weekly *Sanjibani* to raise the latent nationalist consciousness of the people. The *Sanjibani* regularly published articles exposing the abominable exploitation and repression of tea-garden workers in Assam by the British owners, forcing the Government to provide some legal protection to the workers. Krishna Kumar took part in the agitation of the indigo farmers in 1890. He was active in the anti-Partition movement; he was one of the nationalists deported from Bengal in 1908.

Monoranjon Gupta mentions ([3], p. 148) that, in order to attract students to Chemistry, P. C. Ray used to visit the classes of some schools with bottles of aromatic chemicals, encouraging the students to inhale the fine fragrance in the bottles and assuring them that by the study of chemistry they will be able to produce such chemicals. And one of the schools that Acharya Ray used to visit for many years was the City School where K. K. Mitra taught for a long period. Mitra's daughter Kumudini edited a monthly journal *Suprabhat* which published P. C. Ray's famous article "The Bengali Brain and its Misuse" (reprinted in [5]); Sri Aurobindo's review of the article appears in *SABCL*, Vol. 3, pp. 432-33..

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Our sense of the greatness of our past must not be made a fatally hypnotising lure to inertia; it should be rather an inspiration to renewed and greater achievement.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 87)

A BOOK REVIEW

SRI AUROBINDO: Saga of a Great Indian Sage by Wilfried Huchzermeyer; DK Printworld, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 335. Price: Rs. 495.

WRITING a biography is never an easy task. The author has to take into account not only the chronology of outer events, the circumstances surrounding the birth and times of the person but also, he has to recognise and perhaps reconcile, a whole subjective side of human consciousness that is hidden from our sight and is not open to exploration through any external means or official documents. This is true of any man who has risen even a little beyond the ordinary. In fact, evolution within the human scale is often accompanied by an increasing complexity and thereby it becomes more and more difficult to understand and interpret a human being's actions as he ascends the human degree. If this is true of a human being who is above the average pitch, how much more difficult would it be to write about the life of someone whose experiences and realisations have gone far beyond even the extraordinary, whose genius has broken into other dimensions of Space and Time and going beyond these entered and breathed the atmosphere that is proper only to the Gods concealed to our mortal eyes! That is why in India an entirely different approach was used in writing about the life of a Seer and an Avatar. Historical data of outer life was fused with intuitive glimpses of his inner life, objectively verifiable information was supplemented with reliable anecdotes, outer events given the turn towards a deeper symbolic interpretation. Such an approach was not to turn history into a legend or merely to weave an impossible myth but to give the fullest possible account of the life of someone who had risen far beyond the human in his thoughts and feelings, will and impulsions and whose experiences had transcended the limitations of the senses. The Mother reveals to us while commenting on an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo as to how incomplete and even distorted historical and scholarly versions can be:

. . . Sri Aurobindo, who had made a thorough study of history, knew how uncertain are the data which have been used to write it. Most often the accuracy of the documents is doubtful, and the information they supply is poor, incomplete, trivial and frequently distorted.

. . . On the other hand, in the legendary accounts of things which may never have existed on earth, of events which have not been declared authentic by "official" knowledge, of wonderful individuals whose existence is doubted by the scholars in their dried-up wisdom, we find the crystallisation of all the

hopes and aspirations of man, his love of the marvellous, the heroic and the sublime, the description of everything he would like to be and strives to become.
(CWM, Vol. 10, p. 62)

Another difficulty arises when we try to infer the state of consciousness, the inner motives and springboards of the action of an Avatar — the Divine-becoming-human, or even of a ‘spiritually awakened and realised’ man based on a critical and analytic study of his outer behaviour. While such behaviouristic and analytical models of human beings are very much part of the mainstream Western thought, such a model of man has never been prevalent in India where the approach is to understand things from within outward, to interpret and understand the outer behaviour by referring to the inner state and not vice versa. The outer life was a scaffolding within which the inner man was developing, or to put it in another way, it was the inner being of man that gave value and significance to a man’s outer deeds and therefore the one true way to know about someone was to get in touch with the person’s inner being through intuition, through love, through service. The task of the biographer was to be the catalyst for bringing about this inner contact between the consciousness of the reader and the subject of his biography, at least to inspire the reader with the state of consciousness that the subject represented. This was the Indian sense of objectivity. The author narrated his vision of the subject to give a comprehensive and living image but refused to interpret, letting his readers draw their own inspiration from the consciousness of the person. Such is the method used in the *Bhagwata* and *Ramayana*, among many other similar accounts of the life of saints and seers. As Sri Aurobindo recounts at the very beginning in the *Essays on the Gita*:

Such controversies as the one that has raged in Europe over the historicity of Christ, would seem to a spiritually-minded Indian largely a waste of time; he would concede to it a considerable historical, but hardly any religious importance; for what does it matter in the end whether a Jesus son of the carpenter Joseph was actually born in Nazareth or Bethlehem, lived and taught and was done to death on a real or trumped-up charge of sedition, so long as we can know by spiritual experience the inner Christ, live uplifted in the light of his teaching and escape from the yoke of the natural Law by that atonement of man with God of which the crucifixion is the symbol? If the Christ, God made man, lives within our spiritual being, it would seem to matter little whether or not a son of Mary physically lived and suffered and died in Judea. So too the Krishna who matters to us is the eternal incarnation of the Divine and not the historical teacher and leader of men.

(CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 15)

He continues to emphasise this inner reality of the spiritual man as revealed in the Gita:

Arjuna, voicing the average human mind, asks for some outward, physical, practically discernible sign of this great Samadhi; how does such a man speak, how sit, how walk? No such signs can be given, nor does the Teacher attempt to supply them; for the only possible test of its possession is inward and that there are plenty of hostile psychological forces to apply. Equality is the great stamp of the liberated soul and of that equality even the most discernible signs are still subjective. "A man with mind untroubled by sorrows, who has done with desire for pleasures, from whom liking and wrath and fear have passed away, such is the sage whose understanding has become founded in stability." He is "without the triple action of the qualities of Prakriti, without the dualities, ever based in his true being, without getting or having, possessed of his self." For what gettings and havings has the free soul? Once we are possessed of the Self, we are in possession of all things.

(Ibid., p. 102)

The Mother adds:

Whether Krishna existed or not in a human form, living on earth, is only of very secondary importance (except perhaps from an exclusively historical point of view), for Krishna is a real, living and active being; and his influence has been one of the great factors in the progress and transformation of the earth.

(CWM, Vol. 10, p. 61)

All this needs to be taken into account while valuing any work on the life of any of the luminously great, but even more so with regard to the life of Sri Aurobindo whose many-sided genius, synthetic spiritual thought, writings as if they were scanning distant horizons and unknown lands, works that range from being the spearhead of the early part of Indian Revolution when the movement was yet groping for its soul to an occult spiritual action during the Second World War, creative inflows of Light using his pen to establish new standards in poetry and spiritual literature while at the same time revealing the deep profound truths of the ancient classics. His life as a journalist, as an educationist, a philosopher, revolutionary, poet; his works in the field of politics, particularly of the Renaissance of India, his manifold relations with friends, wife, comrades, disciples and devotees and with his spiritual collaborator, the Mother, all defy an easy and simple understanding. Sri Aurobindo, like Krishna, cannot be put into a slot; like Shiva he carries within himself the powers that can save and uplift the world as well that which can help the struggling soul to escape from the bonds of illusion that are wrapped around his

eyes. The scope and breadth of his writings can perhaps be compared only with another great Indian seer, Vyasa. Such being the scope of his life that fills one with awe and wonder and inspiration, it is difficult to find any single biography that can do justice to all sides, even of his most external life. Among those that have been a reasonable attempt to fathom the mystery of his unfathomable personality, we have a few such as those by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Satprem and, Rishabchand, all three directly inspired by Sri Aurobindo himself. The later biographers have a much more difficult task. They have had no personal contact with the Master and no claim to such an inspiration. Yet this deficiency can be covered up, partially at least through faith in the vision and devotion in the heart or perhaps a spiritual and seeing intelligence that can penetrate behind appearances and pluck the meaning hidden behind the tangled knots of events and circumstances surrounding a life.

The present biography under review falls into the latter category. Though the biographer had no direct personal contact with the Master, his inner being is surely open enough to cover all the aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life with a clarity and comprehensiveness that can only come as a gift of Grace.

After all most of the facts of Sri Aurobindo's life are already well-known by now and any reader who has read some of his earlier biographies is well-conversant with most of the things that have been known or said about his life and work. The difference however comes in the way each one looks at these 'facts', the way each one strings them together, the angle and tilt of his vision and the sieving out of the chaff and preserving that which is of perennial value to the reader. The external facts of life, the superficial recordable data has to be complemented by catching the inner thread that runs behind as a parallel track and gives the meaning and justification of each event and episode in a story whose further ends are lost to our external sight. Facts are after all mere husks of truth. The biography under review tries to draw a healthy balance between the inner and the outer, between the observable phenomenon and the reality it represents, between the complexity of events that often mark the life of a many-sided greatness and the beauty of the Divine unfolding through these events and circumstances.

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To start with, the book is spread out over 17 chapters dealing with important phases, significant events and main works of Sri Aurobindo's life. The narrative is kept brief and simple yet succinct and just enough to give to the reader the essence. The focus while giving these brief narratives is to give us a glimpse into Sri Aurobindo's personality or to introduce the reader to the vast scope of his life and works without burdening him with unnecessary facts and figures. The emphasis is also on taking cues from Sri Aurobindo's life as an example, to retrace the path for us so that we too may try to follow in his footsteps, if possible. Take for example, Dinendrakumar

Roy's account that captures something of his subject's personality, almost bringing him close to us with this passage:

Sitting in a chair before a table, undisturbed by the terrible biting of the mosquitoes, Aurobindo read at night until one o'clock by the light of a 'jewel lamp'. I saw him sitting there for hours at a stretch, his eyes glued to the page, his attitude unchanging, like an ascetic rapt in contemplation, oblivious of the world. I don't think he would have noticed if the house caught fire.

(*Sri Aurobindo: Saga of a Great Indian Sage*, p. 19)

Or again referring to his marriage to Mrinalini Devi, the author quotes a more recent document titled *Shruti Smriti* where the author Manmohan Gangopadhyaya discussed the possibility of celibacy with Sri Aurobindo in the context of married life.

Sri Aurobindo is said to have made a very clear statement that he had been practising celibacy all the time.

(*Ibid.*, p. 21)

Not only does the author bring the Master close to our vision but is able to inspire and challenge and invite us on a great journey where the human and the Divine walk close to each other in a single body. We too can, then, holding it as an example bring the Godhead out from our material shell and its obstinate conditionings openly into the outward play thereby transmuting our life into a Life Divine. After all, that is the real significance and purpose of Sri Aurobindo's life, not as a freak phenomenon but even in its unusualness, even in its high and extraordinary pitch, it does not lose the human touch but exalts it to its divine peaks and turns our human states into their divine equivalents. For instance, while speaking of Calcutta and Alipore, the author brings to us some touch of the state of consciousness in which Sri Aurobindo dwelt even while he was an undertrial prisoner at the Alipur jail. The author starts by quoting Sri Aurobindo's own words and then goes on to lead us to the inner state that took him over turning him into a seer and a sage:

All the while he regards the loneliness of solitary confinement a great challenge . . . But after a while Sri Aurobindo discovers an absolute inner freedom and has a feeling that even twenty years of loneliness would not have the power to shake him. Increasingly he sees God's hand in all outer circumstances and the darkness begins to recede; all that happens in the world appears to express the infinite Grace. Right in the midst of hell he refuses to negate God's omnipotence and recognises hidden intentions of the Supreme which are beyond human understanding.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 72-73)

The author then sums it up beautifully through an experience of *Tales of Prison Life* leaving us speechless and wondering at Sri Aurobindo's luminous words spoken with such a spontaneous simplicity:

Just as a child sleeps, secure and without fear, on the lap of his mother, so I remained on the lap of the World-Mother.

(*Ibid.*, p. 73)

For a biographer to truly succeed in his daunting task he should be not only inspired and admire his subject but should be actually somewhere, in some essential part of his being, in love with the subject. For in the end it is only through love that we can enter into that deep oneness with another that brings a complete understanding of all that moved within his human heart and all that clamoured for expression within his human mind. Above all, and especially when we write the biography of a seer, a mystic or a yogi we should be able to carry to our readers the sense of the divine within him.

The biography under review fairly succeeds on all these counts. The author is evidently not just in sympathy but in love with his subject. And therefore he is able not only to help us appreciate and admire the subject but to fall in love with him. And the beauty of it all is that he is able to do this without losing sight of the objectivity needed in reporting the events and circumstances of the subject's life. The author's objectivity is seen in the fact that through the nearly 300 plus pages of the book he hardly gives his own views and opinions. He lets the facts flow with natural ease while at the same time taking care not to submerge us in a mass of data under which the soul and life of the subject, in fact the person himself gets buried. This makes the reading at once easy and interesting.

Another interesting thing is that the author is able to make the best use of the material available to describe certain inner states and subjective conditions that his subject would experience even in some outer situations. Commendably he quotes the following lines from *Savitri* to show what 'perhaps refers to the first meeting' between the incarnate dual Power, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo:

A moment passed that was eternity's ray,
An hour began, the matrix of new Time.

(*Ibid.*, p. 399)

This is followed soon thereafter with an interesting report of Nolini-da on the meeting and Sri Aurobindo's experience of it. It is well known through the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* and certain statements by Her as to what She experienced at Their first meeting. But what is not so generally known is what Sri Aurobindo experienced:

He said he had never seen anywhere a self-surrender so absolute and unreserved.
(*Ibid.*, pp. 145-46)

Thus at the very start of the chapter on ‘Meeting with Mother’, the author prepares us for the sublime task that the two had come to do together rather than engage in frivolous speculations and meaningless discussions on the nature of their relationship.

Similarly he draws from the Mother’s diary titled *Prayers and Meditations* to describe her state, her background experiences, culminating in the great meeting. The author displays the same maturity of thought while giving the background of the book *Foundations of Indian Culture*. He presents us the context without bias about who Mr. Archer was and why Sri Aurobindo went on to write this classic on Indian Culture at such length. Even while maintaining an objective approach so as to appeal to a wider audience, the author rightly understands that to appeal to one group does not mean denouncing another. He would rather bring out the truth of both sides and put each in its rightful place to form a coherent whole. This helps immensely since otherwise the average reader may well be lost a maze of contradictory information. The author takes upon himself the role of a moderator rather than of an opinionated omnibus writer claiming knowledge of any and every subject. This maintains the objectivity of the biography since there is very little of personal opinions especially on subjects in which the author is not an expert. However at the same time the author takes care to fill any gaps that may occur in the reader’s mind by adding his own little insight given his deep and longstanding engagement, reading and understanding of the subject of his biography. This healthy balance is seen throughout the book. Thus for instance, while speaking of the Poems, the author observes:

Apart from his correspondence, Sri Aurobindo also composed a large number of mystical poems in the 1930s reflecting inner experiences, which he was constantly having. However, to appreciate them we require a spiritual ‘antenna’ as is also the case with *Savitri*. Without that, we may not have access to his poetry, we may perhaps consider it outdated, as do some modern critics. But those who are open to his verses regard many of them as timeless creations.
(*Ibid.*, p. 215)

This is true objectivity where even seemingly objective and contrary statements have been put in context and in the right place. He then goes on to take up one of the poems ‘Rose of God’ as a sample to bring in some novel aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic creations that may not always conform to the conventionally traditional. One can only congratulate the author for this approach.

An important aspect of the book is the inclusion of a few separate chapters that deal specifically with certain events of tremendous significance from Sri Aurobindo's perspective. Thus for example there is a whole chapter dedicated to a brief but succinct description of the Second World War where we see some genuine research by the author into the subject comparing some of Sri Aurobindo's statements with historical facts. It is well-known in Sri Aurobindo circles that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo intervened in the Second World War with their spiritual force in favour of the Allies, especially using Winston Churchill as a receptive instrument. But can this subtle and occult truth be objectively verified or does one simply pass it off as a subjective claim? Here the author brings in some interesting facts quoting from Churchill's speeches:

I sometimes have a feeling, in fact I have it very strongly, a feeling of interference. I want to stress that I have a feeling sometimes that some guiding hand has interfered. I have the feeling that we have a guardian because we serve a great cause, and that we shall have the guardian so long as we serve that cause faithfully.

(Ibid., p. 235)

So too, the author compares Sri Aurobindo's prophetic statements on the Cripps Mission with what is described in the Oxford History of India as below:

So the golden moment passed and with it the last real chance of establishing a united independent India. The rejection of the offer was the prelude to the partition of India.

(Ibid., p. 238)

One wonders why these two very interesting historical documents from Sri Aurobindo's perspective have not been quoted in some other seemingly researched biographies. Whatever be the reason for their omission, the author of the present biography does a remarkable and commendable job in bringing out the subtle aspects of outer phenomenon through objective historiography.

While dealing with Sri Aurobindo's writings, the author gives a brief background to stimulate the reader's interest into further delving into Sri Aurobindo's writings. The selections are carefully done and are quite comprehensive. The short commentary that follows, mainly to contextualise the writings and stress upon a particular point here and there is done with a sensitivity that brings more clarity in the mind of the reader. But the crown is that the author adds deservedly a separate chapter on *Savitri*, since Sri Aurobindo regarded this epic poetic creation of his as his most important work from many angles. It is Sri Aurobindo's gift to mankind the full importance and impact of which is yet to be understood. Though only a very brief introduction

to the epic it does sensitise the reader to the sublime nature of this incomparable work.

As with any biography dealing with the life of a great person, it is important to take a look at the aftermath that followed his departure from the earth-scene. With regard to Sri Aurobindo, any biography would be incomplete if it ended in December 1950 and did not take the reader through the continuing progress of the mighty work of transformation initiated, prepared and achieved by Sri Aurobindo. The last two chapters of the book are rightly dedicated to this aspect. The author gives us very briefly a key-hole glimpse into the Supramental Descent that followed, an occult spiritual event that can be considered in a way the successful culmination of the work he had undertaken, at least the first decisive step towards it. What follows next are short but comprehensive narratives on the Yoga of physical transformation undertaken by the Mother, the formation of Auroville and the Mother's departure.

The author truly displays an innate ability of filling the ocean in a small vessel by intuitively catching the essence of an event and bringing it out in bold relief to make it easy and interesting for his readers. Gifted with a unique ability to blend the material with the spiritual, the author takes the help of an interesting anecdote to bring home this subtle point that the Mother continues to watch over Her children, the Work they had undertaken and the Destiny of Earth for which they suffered and sacrificed so much:

On 15 August she gave her last darshan, under great difficulties, to 8000 sadhaks and visitors from the terrace on the eastern side of the Ashram. Thereafter she withdrew more and more and spent most of her time in trance. When an attendant asked her why she was always keeping her eyes closed, she replied: "Because I can see everything with my eyes closed." (*Ibid.*, p. 270)

At the very end of the book the author has done a great service by adding 31 historical photographs. In a separate section he has included 10 recent photographs — of the Ashram, Auroville and Pondicherry. A very brief chapter follows with Sri Aurobindo's quotations on India and some quotes of other prominent personalities on Sri Aurobindo and His Work. A page on the meaning of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's symbols, the chronology of events, and a glossary of some Sanskrit terms makes the book a complete package. As if to make sure that nothing is left out, the author adds the web address for Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's books for those who wish to go further on their own. He is not like a teacher who imposes his own doctrine and ideas about who Sri Aurobindo is but merely suggests, hints, indicates and eventually points the way towards a direct personal engagement with the greatest Seer-Mystic of our Age.

Beautifully done with a consciousness that is sensitive, this book of 335 pages costing Rs. 495 is a real treat.

It needs however to be mentioned that surely no one can cover all the aspects and dimensions of Sri Aurobindo's life. His saga is an unending epic of the triumph of the Spirit over Matter, of the embodied Divine over the human nature, something that cannot ever be captured adequately in words. It would perhaps need a seer with the vision of a Vyasa to recount the inner and outer details of Sri Aurobindo's life. Yet until then we are fortunate to have among our present humanity authors like Wilfried Huchzermeyer whose previous short biography of the Mother and the present biography of Sri Aurobindo will do a great work in inspiring many and opening some doors on the divine enigma that Sri Aurobindo is and the Infinite Light and Compassion that took an earthly form and manifested in his earthly persona. It will serve as a beautiful and comprehensive introduction for all readers interested in Sri Aurobindo's life, his work and thought.

ALOK PANDEY

Most ways of Yoga are paths to the Beyond leading to the Spirit and, in the end, away from life; Sri Aurobindo's rises to the Spirit to redescend with its gains bringing the light and power and bliss of the Spirit into life to transform it. Man's present existence in the material world is in this view or vision of things a life in the Ignorance with the Inconscient at its base, but even in its darkness and nescience there are involved the presence and possibilities of the Divine. The created world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion to be cast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvâna, but the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this material Inconscience is to be manifested progressively the Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest term yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the highest of which it is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and forces. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one's true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body. To realise this possibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo

*(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest,
CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 10)*

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of January 2014)

VII

THE next figure of speech on our list is the epigram. Now this is a figure of speech most suitable for witty prose — not so suitable for poetry or for serious prose. It involves a contradiction within the same sentence. The reader should be told here and now that I have arranged these three figures in ascending order of complexity and brevity. Thus an antithesis can be quite a long sentence, but the sentence is neatly divided into two halves, or several such units as in the sentence quoted. The epigram is slightly more complex because here the contrast is inherent in a sentence which is not divided. This makes the sentence more striking and, well, epigrammatic. A favourite example is Wordsworth's "The child is the father of the man". This sentence has an inherent contrast within itself, without any mutually contrasting clauses within. Now here is one from our writer, but it is not a conscious or deliberate epigram as those, for example, like Wilde or writers of that ilk. The writer, in all seriousness, is stating a fact. It is I who, with my dwarf-like intellect, am construing it is an epigram:

. . . perfection is only the first step, the physical basis.¹

He is talking of rhythm in poetry and regards metrical rhythm as only the first step. But we usually think that perfection (whether in metre or anything else) is to be obtained after much labour, that it is the crowning achievement of any endeavour. From this point of view the sentence is epigrammatic.

There are others in that wonderful book, *The Hour of God*. This is a profound book. Great mystics who record their spiritual experiences are few and far between. St. John of the Cross, Dame Juliana, St. Teresa are a few of them. They have all written in language that is simple. He is talking about how God is accessible to everyone:

To the materialist He disguises Himself in matter. For the Nihilist He waits ambushed in the bosom of Annihilation.²

1. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), pp. 23-24.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

Now about the oxymoron. This is a figure of speech in which contrast is present, not in parallel clauses or in a sentence, but in just a phrase: an epithet and a noun. I have already said that I have arranged the figures in this group in ascending order of brevity and pithiness and this is the last. The usual example in books of rhetoric is Milton's "By merit raised to that bad eminence." Here Satan is eminent, but it is an evil eminence, so there is contradiction within this phrase. Even more obvious is the use of two oxymorons in one line by Francis Thompson in his *The Hound of Heaven*: "Their traitorous trueness, their loyal deceit." We can find quite a few examples of this attractive figure in our writer:

. . . realism is in fact a sort of nether idealism. . .³

We usually associate idealism with something lofty and elevated, and here it is being described as "nether" so the phrase is an oxymoron. Incidentally, the entire sentence itself can be regarded as an example of epigram. There is another a few pages later, though it is one that some readers may not regard as an oxymoron at all, but take it in their stride:

And this delight is not merely a godlike pastime; . . .⁴

Now "godlike pastime", I am sure, had not been intended as an oxymoron by the writer. We Indians regard everything in the universe, indeed the universe itself, as divine *līlā*, so we not only take the phrase in our stride, but we do not even notice any contradiction in it. But I can well imagine a Roman Catholic reader, or a Jewish one, being shocked at the idea that God can be associated with pastimes. It would seem to be a sacrilege to such serious-minded readers. Here we have a curious case of how the difference in the reader's outlook can influence a highly technical matter like rhetoric.

(To be continued)

3. *The Future Poetry*, p. 7.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

RATRI RAY

It was Meredith who taught me that the epigram is the soul of style, and Plato who whispered that rhythm is its body.

Sri Aurobindo

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

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of January 2014)

6. A Vibrant Stylus

FROM now onwards we get to have better documentation about the lives of English poets though all of them do have mysterious corners which remain in the dark. What made Geoffrey Chaucer a poet? Actually he came from a family of businessmen, specialising in selling wine. However, relentless philology traces the family to shoemaking (Fr. 'chausseur') though this does not affect our regard for the works of this rich merchant of medieval times. Chaucer's father, John Chaucer married a rich lady, Agnes Copton. Geoffrey Chaucer was born perhaps in 1343. Amazingly for us, Geoffrey's life is well documented in spite of the uncertainty over the year of his birth. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and innumerable books on him give us plenty of information.

We find him in 1357 employed in the service of the Countess of Ulster, Elizabeth, as a page. He is still in his teens. By 1359 he is in France taking part in the early phases of the Hundred Years' War and becomes a prisoner too! Thus, very early in his life Chaucer has begun to pile up his hard disc with varied experiences. 1367 sees him already in royal service and married to Philippa. Soon he rises in the favour of John of Gaunt, the third son of King Edward III. When Richard II succeeded Edward III, Chaucer became quite prosperous and was very much in demand for trade negotiations and even for diplomatic work. He was even the comptroller of the customs of wool in the Port of London for a while.

When he became justice of the peace for Kent in 1385 and an elected knight of the shire of Kent, it was great news for him. But after this we have only dark indications of a fall in his fortunes, the death of his wife Philippa and an occasional return to modest prosperity. But no matter. He was born to be a creative artist. All experience was grist to his mill, including the manner in which he was robbed by highwaymen. He died in 1400 and now rests in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Going through the guesswork-game of much of the biographical material about Chaucer is certainly interesting, though we do not need them. His great works contain his message, and with such inspired writers, it is the message that counts, not the incidents in their brief life on earth. Fortunately he was not only a significant poet, but a prolific one too. There were other scholars and poets who contributed to medieval English literature like John Wycliff, the translator of the Bible and John Barbour who wrote *Bruce*. But Chaucer towers over them all.

It is Chaucer's distinction that he turned impartial, eager and clear-sighted eyes not only on the past, which his books discovered to him, but also on all the society of his time, on foreign countries, and on every class in his own country. His work reflects his century not in fragments, but completely. More than this, he is often able to discern permanent features beneath the garments of a day, to penetrate to the everlasting springs of human action. His truthful pictures of his age and country contain a truth which is of all time and all countries.¹

High praise indeed. As with some rare prolific authors, prolificity did not prey upon Chaucer's creative energy when we read his works at this distance of time. He seems to have begun his innings as a translator from French. His interest in French literature was life-long, and *Roman de la rose* appears to have been his favourite. Not exactly approved of by the moralists of his time, the poem speaks of love in its several facets and often breaks into allegory. Very popular, it was translated as *The Romaunt of the Rose* into Middle English. Chaucer who knew French well must have been happy reading and re-reading the original. In fact, for long the English version was considered to have been the work of Chaucer but the idea has been discarded now. Whether he was the translator of the French poem or not, it is very clear that the work influenced him deeply. His love idylls spring from the French breeze. He was prepared to be influenced as much by French as by Italian as well. He was attracted by the allegory, by the versification, by the usage in these literatures which he found woefully absent in his own King's English.

Save the frail octosyllabic line already in use, he had himself to forge all instruments. He imported the decasyllabic line from France and, under Italian influence, made it pliable. It became the heroic line which was the surpassing vehicle of the great poetry of England.²

In the middle years of the twentieth century when I sat with my notebook open in the class, Chaucer was taught by a lecturer who knew a little French but no Italian. She repeated what she found in the books and we took down and managed to memorise the stuff. But when I came to *The Future Poetry* some years later, I heard the authentic voice of one who knew both French and Italian to give us the assurance that French and Italian influence helped Chaucer achieve transformations in English poetry. Our lecturer had not read Sri Aurobindo and so we saw Chaucer's presence as an individual's achievement. However, *The Future Poetry* made it clear to me how each new phase of a great literature comes to being by some unstoppable external influence. According to Sri Aurobindo,

1. Leguois and Cazamian, *A History of English Literature*, p. 129.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

. . . here we have a remodelling of the whole plan under foreign teaching. Chaucer gives English poetry a first shape by the help of French romance models and the work of Italian masters . . .³

At the same time, Chaucer was not a mere imitator. He used the foreign models but subsumed them in the characteristics of his nation's native genius. Sri Aurobindo sums up Chaucer in the clear light of his own readings in French, Italian and English literatures:

It is an easy, limpid and flowing movement, a well-spring of natural English utterance without depths in it, but limpid and clear and pure. It is a form just fitted for the clear and pleasing poetic presentation of external life as if in an unsoiled mirror. At times it rises into an apt and pointed expression, but for the most part is satisfied with a first primitive power of poetic speech; a subdued and well-tempered even adequacy is its constant gift. Only once or twice does Chaucer, as if by accident, strike out a really memorable line of poetry; yet Dante and Petrarch were among his masters.⁴

What a sharp sting in the tail to conclude the paragraph! But is greatness all? Genius burns itself, glowing as a brilliance. Obviously Chaucer was more like the life-giving, life-saving homely hurricane lamp! The foreign literatures did a needed job of quickening the native genius. Chaucer was a busy officer but he did not forget the muses. There was talent in him, he realised, and he did not want to hide it. The first of his works to gain the mark of good literature was *The Book of the Duchesse*, an elegy marking the death of Blanche, wife of Chaucer's patron, John of Gaunt. A reading of the poem suggests that here was a dependable genius, one who was close to the emotions of the everyman. Naturally, Chaucer has cast the elegy in the form of a dream-vision, a familiar genre for the medieval poets. Today good translations of Chaucer's works are available and so it is no problem to peer over the writing pad of this first great poet of England. The opening conveys the mind's rebellion at what has happened and how the mind rules over the body which cannot rest:

I wonder and wonder, by the light of the moon, how I stay alive, for I can hardly sleep at all, day or night. I have so many idle thoughts, all for lack of sleep, that, I swear, I care about nothing at all — whether anything comes or goes. There is nothing dear nor despised for me — it's all alike to me — joy or sorrow, it doesn't matter. For I feel nothing about anything, as if I am some

3. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 65-66.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

sort of dazed thing, always on the brink of falling over; for sorrowful visions and images are always and everywhere fully in my mind.⁵

Languidly we listen to the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone. Sri Aurobindo must have read the Greek myth in its medieval garb with familiar ease, I tell myself — another tale of a young lady mourning the loss of her husband who appears and disappears in her vision. Grieved, she drowns herself. They are turned to halcyon birds by the gods. A tale of death that would recur in Sri Aurobindo's works repeatedly as a question: why these illogical partings? Chaucer is reading about the Greek couple when he falls asleep and finds himself in a room full of paintings, an incalculable joy for a lover of Greek mythology.

And the truth be told, my chamber was carefully decorated with pictures, and with glass were all the windows brightly glazed, not a flaw in any of them, so that to behold them it was a great joy. For the entire story of Troy was wrought in the glasswork thus: of Hector and of King Priam, of Achilles and of King Lamedon, and also of Medea and of Jason, of Paris, Helen, and of Lavinia. And on all the walls were painted with fine colours the entire Romance of the Rose, both text and gloss. My windows were all shut, and through the glass the sun shone upon my bed with bright beams, with many pleasant golden streams. And the sky was so fair, blue and bright, the air was clear and truly temperate, for it was neither too hot nor too cold, and there was not a cloud in the sky.

The poem has 1334 lines. Awake within the orbit of his vision, the poet realises that a hunt is on and it is that of Octavius (also known as Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire), so he too joins it. On the way he meets a knight dressed in black composing an elegy for his lost lady.

I am by sorrow so much undone
That I get joy forever none,
Now that I see my lady bright,
Whom I have loved with all my might,
Is from me dead and is gone.

Alas, death, what so ails thee,
That thou wouldn't have taken me,
When thou took my lady dear,
That was so fair, so fresh, so free,
So good that all may well see
Of all good folk she had no peer!

5. All translations from *The Book of the Duchesse* quoted in the essay are by Gerard NeCastro.

Sri Aurobindo's narrative, 'Love and Death' is also on this theme but Ruru is a tapasvin and has no time for wailing in sorrow nor does he indulge in a sentimental recollection of his lost love. Ruru burns with anger at this treachery of Fate, a rare dignity measuring his thoughts and words:

And his heart cried in him as when a fire
 Roars through wide forests and the branches cry
 Burning towards heaven in torture glorious.
 So burned, immense, his grief within him; he raised
 His young pure face all solemnised with pain,
 Voiceless. Then Fate was shaken, and the Gods
 Grieved for him, of his silence grown afraid.⁶

Back to Chaucer. The poet goes to the knight and their conversation is typical of medieval times, courtly love in its many shades. The knight is "so agreeable, so very knowledgeable and reasonable" for all his sorrow. He speaks of how Dame Fortune has betrayed him again and again:

Whatever rises, she knocks down. I liken her to the scorpion, a false, flattering beast, for with his head he makes merry, but as he is flattering you, he will sting and envenom you. Fortune is the hostile charity, who is always false and seems true. So she turns her false wheel around, for it never remains stationary — at one moment you are being served at the table, at another you are a servant standing by the fire. She has blinded many: she is an enchantress, who seems to be one thing and is another.

The chess game is used as an extended simile, with the knight playing the game with Dame Fortune. Actually it is a veiled account of the knight's dalliances in youth, and finding his true love, a beautiful and kindly lady who was called 'White'. The editor tells us that it is the meaning of 'Blanche', the name of John of Gaunt's wife. The poet's eulogy goes on and on and must have brought melancholic joy to the readers of his time. There is then the courtship and the knight is patient. At last the marriage and a brief happiness. The knight rides away after assuring the poet that this paragon of his is no more. The poet wakes up and bids us farewell: "This is so strange a dream that I will, in the course of time, attempt to put this dream into rhyme as best I can, and do so soon." Considering the subject, *The Book of the Duchesse* does not weary us, probably because it tells a straightforward story and is generously garnished with references to Greek and Biblical mythology. By the time we conclude reading this poem, we find that Sri Aurobindo's assessment of Chaucer is quite accurate.

6. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 119.

For his times, Chaucer was a fine conduit, relating the past and retelling myths to make them familiar to his readers. A short poem, 'Anelida and Arcite' speaks of a good wife and a bad husband. Chaucer says the original legend is in Latin. Names from Greek mythology pepper the poem. Anelida was the young queen of Armenia, a chaste and beautiful girl. She was married to the Theban knight, Arcite. Was Chaucer giving a lesson to his audience on the in-laws and byways of morality and the behavioural patterns of men and women? Unfortunately, Arcite was jealous, evil, false, crooked.

All you prudent women, take example here from Anelida and false Arcite; because she wished to call him 'dear heart', and was so meek, therefore he loved her little. The nature of man's heart is to delight in what is held back, so may God save me! For he desires what he cannot have.⁷

Sad at the ways of Arcite who has become entangled with another woman, Anelida sends him a letter of complaint. How men act and dissemble to gain a lady's hand and then cast her away, having gained their desire!

Alas! Where is your noble gentleness, your words full of delight and humility, your devotion so humble, your watchfulness and your attentiveness to me, whom you called your mistress, your sovereign lady here in this world? Alas! And would you concede neither words nor kindly looks for me in my heaviness?⁸

Certainly there is metal more attractive in another short poem of Chaucer, 'The House of Fame'. An allegory, the poem is cast as a dream-vision but is eminently contemporaneous, not only in the fourteenth century when Chaucer wrote it, but even reflects our own times! He seems to have drawn inspiration from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In the opening lines of his poem, Dante speaks of his own visionary experience:

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear.

7. Translated by Gerard NeCastro.

8. Translated by Gerard NeCastro.

So bitter is it, death is little more;
 But of the good to treat, which there I found,
 Speak will I of the other things I saw there.⁹

In the same way, Chaucer finds himself in the Temple of Venus. The entire story of Aeneas is represented on the walls which indicates Chaucer's closeness to Virgil's *Aeneid*. From here a Golden Eagle carries him to the House of Fame where he is able to hear the cacophony of human voices from below. The poet describes the sounds with excitement:

Like the beating of the sea against hollow rocks, when a tempest engulfs the ships, to a man who stands a mile from there and hears the roar. Or else it is like the last mutter after a thunder-clap, when Jove has struck the air. But it makes me sweat for fear.¹⁰

He sees the great writers of the past here: Virgil, Sir Lucan, Sir Claudian. Famous writers of all lands come here and bow to Goddess Fame. She dispenses her judgement amidst a maddening crowd. Almost everyone wants fame without having worked for it! Then there is an amazing presentation of the House of Rumour:

And the noise that I heard there went on for the entire world like the roar of the stone which is shot from the catapult. This whole house was made of twigs, yellow, green, red, and some white, such as men whittle for these cages, or make into these wicker baskets for carrying bread or to be carried on the back or by a horse; so that with the gusts and the whirring of the twigs, this house was full of squeaks and creakings and much commotion. And this house also had as many entries as there are leaves on trees in the summer when they are green; and still in the roof one could see a thousand holes, and more yet, to let out the sound easily.

For spreading rumour there is no division of day and night. No porter is there to control people or their speech:

And all the corners of the house are full of whisperings and prattling of war, of peace, marriages, rest, labour, journeys, abidings, of death, life, love, hate, accord, enmity, of praise, learning, of gains, of health, sickness, of buildings, of fair winds, tempests, pestilence of man and beast; of various changes of estate for men and nations; of trust, fear, jealousy, wit, profit, folly, of plenty,

9. Translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

10. All translations from *The House of Fame* are by Gerard NeCastro.

and of great famine, of ruin, of cheap times and dear; of good or ill government, of fire, of various events.

It is a huge house, this House of Rumour where everyone is engaged in transmitting information without seeking verification.

Thus every word went from mouth to mouth in all directions, always increasing, just as a fire will kindle and spread from a spark thrown amiss, until a whole city is burned up.

A very, very interesting and dramatic presentation which suddenly breaks off. The pity of it! Fortunately, I have *Savitri* in my hands that indicates how rumour-mongering leads to abominable destruction:

Intoxicated by a burning breath
 And amorous grown of a destroying mouth,
 Once a companion of the sacred Fire,
 The mortal perishes to God and Light,
 An Adversary governs heart and brain,
 A Nature hostile to the Mother-Force.
 The self of life yields up its instruments
 To Titan and demoniac agencies
 That aggrandise earth-nature and disframe:
 A cowed fifth-columnist is now thought's guide;
 His subtle defeatist murmur slays the faith
 And, lodged in the breast or whispering from outside,
 A lying inspiration fell and dark
 A new order substitutes for the divine.
 A silence falls upon the spirit's heights . . .¹¹

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

11. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 224-25.



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