

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE
24 APRIL 2014

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00
For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00
Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

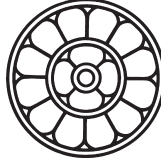
Annual: \$35 or Rs. 1,400.00
For 10 years: \$350 or Rs. 14,000.00

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70 or Rs. 2,800.00
For 10 years: \$700 or Rs. 28,000.00

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

Subscribers are requested to mention their subscription number in case of any enquiry. The correspondents should give their full address in BLOCK letters, with pin code.



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.



All Rights Reserved. No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

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

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVII

No. 4

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
THE LINE OF RAGHOU	...	273
SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER	...	275
<i>The Mother</i>		
“ABSOLUTE CONSCIOUSNESS, TRUE OMNISCIENCE, KNOWLEDGE”	...	289
TWO PROCESSES	...	290
<i>K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)</i>		
K. D. SETHNA AND P. BRUNTON —		
CORRESPONDENCE & ADDITIONAL MATERIAL	...	297
<i>Manoj Das</i>		
SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI		
CHAPTER XXXI: ON THE EVE OF A RADICAL TRANSITION	...	302
<i>Amartya Kumar Dutta</i>		
ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA RAY — V	...	309
<i>Sachidananda Mohanty</i>		
THREE WOMEN AND FOUR DESTINIES	...	322
<i>Shyam Kumari</i>		
LALITA, THE FRIEND OF SRI RADHA	...	330
<i>Ratri Ray</i>		
RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE — VIII	...	337
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED		
7. HOMAGE TO LEGENDARY WOMEN	...	339

THE LINE OF RAGHOU

TWO RENDERINGS OF THE OPENING*

To the Two whose beings are involved together like word with sense for the boon of needed word and sense, to the Parents of the World I bow, the God above all Gods, the Goddess Mountainborn.

Of little substance is my genius, mighty is the race that sprang from the Sun, yet would I fondly launch in my poor raft over the impassable sea.

Dull of wit, yet seeking the poet's crown of glory I shall win for my meed mockery alone, like a dwarf in his greed lifting up arms for the high fruit that is a giant's prize.

And yet I have an access into that mighty race, even through the door of song the ancient bards have made, such access as has the thread into some gem that the point of adamant has thrud.

Therefore though slender my wealth of words, yet shall I speak of the Raghous' royal line, to that rashness by their high virtues urged that have come to my ear.

They who were perfect from their birth, whose effort ceased only with success, lords of earth to the ocean's edge, whose chariots' path aspired into the sky;

They of faultless sacrifices, they of the suppliants honoured to the limit of desire, punishing like the offence and to the moment vigilant.

Only to give they gathered wealth, only for truth they ruled their speech, only for glory they went forth to the fight, only for offspring they lit the household fire.

Embracers in childhood of knowledge, seekers in youth after joy, followers in old age of the anchoret's path, they in death through God-union their bodies left.

Let only good minds listen to my song, for by the clear intellect alone is the good severed from the bad; 'tis in the fire we discern of gold, that it is pure or that it is soiled.

1 – 10.

*

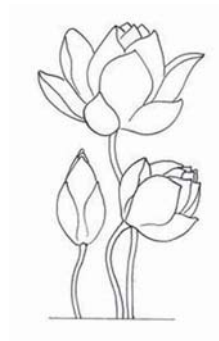
For mastery of word & sense I bow to the Pair closewedded as word to sense, the parents of the world, the Mountain's child and the Mighty Lord. Wide is the gulf between the race born of the Sun and a mind thus scantily stored! I am one that in

* Sri Aurobindo translated the first ten verses of Kalidasa's *Raghuvansha* independently on two different occasions, first in Baroda sometime around 1900-05 (he headed this translation "Raghuvansa") and later in Pondicherry around 1912 (he headed this translation "The Line of Raghau / Canto I"). — Ed. note in CWSA, Vol. 5.

his infatuation would cross in a raft the difficult ocean. Dull of wit, yet aspiring to poetic glory I shall expose myself to mockery like a dwarf who in his greed lifts up his arms to a fruit meant only for the giant's grasp. Yet into the story of this race a door of speech has been made by the inspired minds of old and through that I can enter as a thread can pass through a gem which the diamond's point has bored. Therefore this tale of the Raghus, the kings pure from their birth, they who left not work till work's fruit appeared, they who were masters of earth to the ocean's bound & their chariots journeyed even to the heavens, ever according to the ordinance they offered to the sacrificial flame and honoured ever the suppliant with his whole desire, they meted the punishment of the guilty by his offence, their eyes were wakeful to the hour, riches they gathered only to give and spoke little that they might speak nought but truth & conquered only for glory, were householders only to prolong the race, in childhood students of knowledge, in youth seekers after enjoyment, in old age pursuers of the sage's path & in their end left by Yoga their bodies, — the tale of this line I will tell though meagre my wealth of speech, for I am impelled to this rashness by their virtues that have touched my ear. The wise should lend ear to it who are cause that good is discerned from bad, for it is by fire that the purity of gold is marked or else the darkness of its alloy.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 307-08)



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of March 2014)

RELATION BETWEEN THE MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN

Psychic Relation with the Mother

YOUR dream was certainly not a mere dream or an imagination, but a true experience. It expressed the relation between your psychic being and the Mother.

That relation is always there; it is prevented from filling up the whole vital and physical consciousness by the old habitual movements that return upon the lower vital and physical and by the assent some part of the mind, when it is obscured, gives to these movements. Do not allow your mind to give this assent, and do not allow any demand to rise in your vital, for it is usually some vital demand or disappointment of demand that is the occasion for these returns.

The whole mental, vital and physical consciousness will then begin to be filled with the permanent relation which is natural to the psychic part of you. There would then be no serious difficulty or disturbing struggle.

26 April 1932

*

Throughout the day my vital has wept. It feels that the Mother is unsympathetic to it and laments that it is deprived of her affection. It stumbles at her silence; it shrinks at her neglect.

All that is simply the unregenerated vital which is full of ego and desire and demand and therefore of dissatisfaction, complaint, false ideas and self-made sorrow.

But there is another movement in me which wants to avoid all such sorrows and joys and just depend on the Mother. It does not want anything from her, but wants to give itself to her, and prays to her to come down and uplift it. This movement is in the heart. Its principal feature is surrender.

What you write here is an exact description of the psychic being and its relation to the Mother. That is the true relation. If you want to succeed in this Yoga, you must take your stand on the psychic relation and reject the egoistic vital movement. The psychic being coming to the front and staying there is the decisive movement in the

Yoga. It is that which happened when you saw the Mother last — the psychic being came in front. But you must keep it in front. You will not be able to do that if you listen to the vital ego and its outcries. It is by faith and surrender and the joy of pure self-giving — the psychic attitude — that one grows into the Truth and becomes united with the Divine.

26 February 1933

*

You wrote that when I saw Mother last time my psychic being was in the front.

No. I said it came out as the result of your last coming to Mother — I meant by that what Mother put there. It was evident to me afterwards by your condition.

Now I remember my inner state at the time, but I do not recall anything special in it. When I met Mother I was simply quiet and a little dependent on her.

That was enough to allow Mother to work. It is when the vital demands, complains, becomes sorrowful and tragic that difficulty is created.

27 February 1933

*

How can I know the Mother's will? If I feel that it is inconvenient to do something, does it mean that it is against her will?

How can your convenience or inconvenience be the indication of the Mother's will? You have to develop the psychic feeling which distinguishes the truth from the falsehood, the divine from the undivine.

11 April 1933

*

Do love and faith have the same meaning? I feel that where there is faith in the Mother, love is also there. Without the faith, there is no love; without the love, there is no faith. Am I right?

Not always. There are plenty of people who have some faith without love, though they may have a certain kind of mental bhakti, and plenty who have some love but no faith. But if it is the true psychic love, then faith goes with it, and if there is the entire faith, then the psychic love becomes soon awake.

Speaking with X, I said: "Where there is faith in the Mother, there is love as well."

You are right — if it is the soul's faith, the soul's love — but in some there is only a vital feeling and that brings, when it is disappointed, revolt and anger and they go away.

8 May 1933

*

What kind of feeling is it that gets satisfaction and Ananda only in seeing the Mother?

It is psychic.

What kind of feeling is it that gets satisfaction and Ananda only in remembering the Mother?

Psychic.

What kind of feeling is it that gives a wound in the heart on hearing anything against the Mother?

Psychic.

What kind of feeling is it that makes one feel the Mother's presence in the heart, even though one is physically far from her?

Psychic.

How shall I be able to judge that I am in the full state of psychic love?

By the absence of ego, by pure devotion, by submission and surrender to the Divine.

9 May 1933

*

When all is calm and quiet I feel a depth in my heart; a sweet feeling wells out constantly, equally for all. It goes up to the Mother continuously. There is a sense of sweet relation with the Divine. It softens all the being — it is calm, quiet, full of sweet peace and satisfaction.

That is the psychic love.

26 October 1933

*

From the morning there has been a feeling of nearness to the Mother, almost as if there were no difference between us. But how can that be possible, as there is such a great gulf between her and me? I am on the mental plane and she is on the highest Supramental.

But the Mother is there not only on the Supramental but on all the planes. And especially she is close to everyone in the psychic part (the inner heart), so when that opens, the feeling of nearness naturally comes.

11 December 1933

*

Why do I not feel love and Ananda every time I see the Mother?

As for the love and Ananda, it depends on the psychic coming up.

29 July 1934

*

For two days there was an intense love for the Mother and for you; the whole being was possessed with this love. Then there was only a partial effect of it — a high and deep reverence for the Master and the Mother and a happiness that no worldly pleasure can give.

That was obviously psychic.

I often mark that when an inner love springs out for the divinity, tears follow.

These are psychic tears of devotion etc.

25 August 1934

*

A visitor was leaving the Asram today. When the Mother finished the Pranam ceremony and began to go up the stairs, this lady began to weep. Was it due to her psychic coming in front for a while?

It is not a question of the psychic coming in front. She has a psychic being which is awake and has long been in connection with the Mother on the inner plane.

28 August 1934

*

During my turn at darshan, the consciousness was simply held in a spell and thrilled. It was quite wonderful and brought my psychic in front. What is this thrill that passes through my whole body and makes the adhar still for a time?

Of course it is the thrill of the Mother's touch coming from above and felt by the psychic and vital together.

28 August 1934

*

Can there be a conscious contact with the Mother through the psychic being in the heart before the psychic comes forward fully?

Yes. The psychic is always there.

21 September 1934

*

That which calls is your own psychic being whose place is deep inside behind the heart-centre. Many people feel at times the call for the Mother going on from there. It comes more easily in sleep or in a half-waking condition because then the surface mind is not active so that what is going on within in the inner being can manifest itself.

29 October 1934

*

When I spoke of "loneliness", I meant that some part of the being feels that although the Mother loves me very much, I am unable to love her — as if there were no element of love in my nature.

It can't be the psychic in that case. The psychic never feels that it cannot love the Divine.

4 December 1934

*

If the present intensity prolongs itself, I hope that within a few days you will see my whole nature engrossed only in feeling, thinking, acting round the word "Mother".

That would of itself be the psychic state.

5 December 1934

*

I pray: "Dear Mother, either give me psychic love or give me death. Let no third thing come to me. This is my final resolution."

This is altogether the wrong attitude. It is once more the vital coming in — it is not a psychic attitude. If in asking for the psychic love, you take an attitude that is vital not psychic, how do you expect the psychic to come?

2 March 1935

*

My consciousness is concentrated only on the Mother's heart, as if it were there in her and one with her. It thinks only of oneness with her; it says, "I am there in her and I must be there. I need nothing else — that is enough." It does not allow any other thought, not even higher or spiritual thoughts. How do you look upon this attitude?

The attitude is good for the awakening of the psychic and the inner being generally. But if higher experience comes, it should not be stopped.

12 March 1935

*

Am I right that for the last four years my psychic is always active and in front? Can the Mother now deal with me without any consideration of upsetting my nature parts?

If your psychic is in front and active, i.e. busy changing and controlling the mind, vital and physical, how is it that there is an upsetting of your nature by the Mother's dealings with you? If the psychic is in front and active, it would immediately tell any part of the nature that wanted to get upset, "Whatever the Mother does or decides must be accepted with surrender and gladness. The mind must not believe that it knows better than the Mother what ought to be done, the vital must not want the

Mother to act according to its wants and preferences. For such ideas and desires belong to the old nature and have no place in the psychic and spiritual. They are the errors of the ego." And if it had the control of the nature, the upsetting would at once cease or fade away. Indeed if it had full control, such upsets would be impossible. It must be assumed therefore that the psychic may have been exerting some influence on the being, but that its control is far from complete or that the vital has risen up and covered the psychic and suspended its influence. But if the psychic is fully in front, not veiled or not merely emerging, then it would be impossible to cover it up altogether — there could only be at most an upsetting on the surface while within all remained quiet, conscious and devoted.

2 July 1936

*

When I called down the Purity from above, the whole being was filled with Peace and Purity and I felt the Mother's Presence in the heart. An intense aspiration rose from the heart, from below, in fact, from all parts of the being. The heart was filled with adoration for the Mother; there was devotion and genuine surrender.

That is one of the most important things for the psychic opening and the inner relation to the Mother.

I pray for Purity and Peace above all. With these I am sure of union with the Mother. Am I not correct?

Yes.

I pray for your observations regarding this psychic experience. Was it not psychic?

Yes, certainly, it was a psychic opening and at the point emphasised, which is very important — the opening to the higher Purity.

14 July 1937

The Vital Element of Love

As for the *eagerness* to see the Mother, it depends on the nature of the feeling. If there is no demand or claim in it, no dissatisfaction when it is not fulfilled, but only the feeling of the will to see her whenever possible and the joy of seeing her, then it

is all right. Of course no trace of anger or jealousy must be there. The vital has also to participate in the sadhana, so the mere fact that there is a vital element does not make the thing wrong, provided it is a vital element of the right kind.

6 December 1931

*

Yesterday I found a picture of a pretty peacock, which I cut out and put on the envelope with my letter to the Mother. But in answer Mother sent me an envelope with a picture that seemed meaningless to me. Then I got confused in my thoughts and feelings. I thought, why did the Mother not understand what I wanted to say? Like this I lost connection with the true attitude and felt all wrong and in confusion.

It is again your own misunderstanding that you have erected between yourself and the Mother. The picture-flower which she sent to you in return for your peacock is the pomegranate-flower, the flower of Divine Love and I do not know what better answer you could have expected. Yet merely because you could not recognise it in its reduced picture form, you jumped to the conclusion that the Mother had not understood you or else that she refused to make any response to you. This with still worse feelings was what you used to do when she was giving flowers and it was because of this violent and ignorant wrong reaction that she had to stop giving flowers to you. How can you expect any answer to your expression when you meet the answer in this way? It is quite true that there is still behind your reaction or associated with it a measure of vital demand and expectation of return and the old want of confidence. The movement may have come from the psychic but around it there was this vital mixture. You must first learn, therefore, to give yourself without demanding a return and you must learn to accept the Mother's action, whatever it may be, without judging it, since it is repeatedly proved that in judging you put an ignorant misconstruction upon it. The inmost being, the psychic, accepts without question, because it has faith in the Divine; by that psychic acceptance the soul opens, the mind clarifies, the vital is purified and enlightened and a spiritual change becomes possible.

3 May 1932

*

What you have felt is a revival or return on you of the lower vital with its demands and desires. Its suggestion is, "I am doing the Yoga, but for a price. I have abandoned the life of vital desire and satisfaction, but in order to get intimacy with the Mother — instead of satisfying myself with X and the world, to satisfy myself and get my

desires fulfilled by the Divine. If I do not get the intimacy of the Mother and immediately and as I want it, why should I give up the old things?" And as a natural result the old things start again — "X and Y and Y and X and the wrongs of Z." You must see this machinery of the lower vital and dismiss it. It is only by the full psychic relation of self-giving that unity and closeness with the Divine can be maintained — the other is part of the vital ego movement and can only bring a fall of the consciousness and disturbance.

20 June 1933

*

It will not do to indulge this restless vital movement. It is not by that that you can have the union with the Mother. You should aspire calmly — eat, sleep, do your work. Peace is the one thing you have to ask for now — it is only on the basis of peace and calm that the true progress and realisation can come. There must be no vital excitement in your seeking or your aspiration towards the Mother.

20 October 1933

*

Though I know the Mother is giving me divine things from deep within, my lower nature wants her love and affection to be expressed outwardly. Help me to get rid of this vital demand for some outer expression by the Mother.

That is what you must get rid of — the demand of the vital in the relation with the Mother. It has been the cause of much disturbance and several frictions, for behind it is a claim of the ego. The psychic relation is the true relation, the psychic gives itself without any demand asking only for love and surrender and union with the Divine, and even in that the asking is not a vital demand but an aspiration.

28 November 1933

*

Why does one feel so happy after seeing the Mother? The whole day is filled only with her. Is it because the nature of vital love is to feel happy and satisfied when it gets something?

There is no harm in the vital love provided it is purified from all insincerity (e.g. the self-importance etc.) and from all demand. To feel joy in seeing the Mother is all right, but to demand it as a right, to be upset or in revolt or abhiman when it is not given, to be jealous of others who get it — all that is demand and creates an impurity which spoils both the joy and the love.

13 September 1934

*

Up to now my effort towards the Self has progressed rapidly, but inside I am dry as an empty coconut shell. When love, emotion, bhakti come, my vital consumes them and leaves my heart like a desert. Even when there are no vital demands, I hardly feel the Mother's love, though my heart is yearning for it. If the Mother approves, let my psychic be in full activity.

How do you expect the psychic to be in full activity with these things there and not thoroughly rejected? Moreover if the love comes forward in full, what is to prevent the selfish vital taking hold of it and making demand on demand on the Mother which she will certainly refuse to satisfy — as so many have done and afterwards revolted because “the Mother does not love them” — otherwise she would do whatever they want?

2 March 1935

*

When a physical manifestation of the Mother's love is absent, I cannot remain unmoved.

This demand for a physical manifestation of love must go. It is a dangerous stumbling-block in the way of sadhana. A progress made by indulgence of this demand is an insecure progress which may any moment be thrown down by the same force that produced it.

8 October 1935

*

I have heard that some ladies have so much love for the Mother that they are even ready to die for her! But they can love her only when she makes a manifestation of her love. This is not, then, a self-existent love — for when the physical love is absent, a few go so far as to revolt, to weep or to fast.

It is self-love that makes them do it. It is just the same kind of vital love that people have outside (loving someone for one's own sake, not for the sake of the beloved). What is the use of that in sadhana here? It can only be an obstacle.

15 October 1935

*

It is not possible for my sadhana to go on without devotion and love. I am ready to give up desires and demands if that will put me on the side of love and devotion.

Love and devotion depend on the opening of the psychic and for that the desires must go. The vital love offered by many to the Mother instead of the psychic love brings more disturbance than anything else because it is coupled with desire.

8 September 1936

*

If you have no abhiman against the Mother, that also is surely very desirable. Abhiman, disturbance, etc. may be signs of life but of a vital, not of the inner life. They must quiet down and give room for the inner life. At first the result may be a neutral quiet, but one has often to pass through that to arrive at a more positive new consciousness.

2 January 1937

*

Why am I suffering? Why am I so far from the Mother? How can I get over this?

Reject the suffering. Reject every vital movement that would take you away from the Mother.

Cling close to her always with your inner being — without demand or question, in perfect faith.

*

There are always in a sadhak two sides of the nature, one that wants the Divine, the other that wants only its own way and will and expects the Divine to satisfy it. When you were in the first, the Mother was always close to you and you were happy; when you indulged the second, then all went wrong. Your mistake recently has been to indulge this second part too much. But you can always recover the constant closeness of the Mother in your inner being and happiness and progress in the sadhana. But to do so you must make it a point to give your love without asking for anything at all except the inner nearness — for unless you do that very strongly, it will be difficult for you to get rid of the other tendency and change the demanding vital part in you.

*

We find that by meeting the Mother or being in her presence we come out of depression and experience the ecstasy of joy. Does this take place by a psychic meeting or a meeting on the inner vital level?

It depends on whether it comes by drawing vital force from her or simply by the joy of seeing her or by receiving something from her. In the two latter cases it is usually psychic or psychic-vital, in the former it is vital.

Devotion or Bhakti for the Mother

When the Mother looked at me this evening from the terrace, I felt a deep upsurge of devotion towards her. It is this I have hungered for, and so long as I feel this bhakti I feel as though I have little else to desire. Grant that I may have the ahaitukī bhakti. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the desire for bhakti is not a desire at all. So I trust I am not making any bargain by desiring it — as bhakti is of the essence of the Divine, to ask for it must be legitimate, no?

The desire for the Divine or of bhakti for the Divine is the one desire which can free one from all the others — at the core it is not a desire, but an aspiration, a soul need, the breath of existence of the inmost being and as such it cannot be counted among desires.

28 December 1932

*

How can I have pure bhakti for the Mother?

Pure worship, adoration, love for the Divine without claim or demand is what is called *śuddha bhakti*.

From which part does it manifest?

From the psychic.

How can I unravel the confusion I feel between self, mind, vital and physical, and how to distinguish them?

One has to separate oneself in thought from mind and vital and body and look at these as not oneself but only outer instruments or movements of nature. In the end one begins to be aware of something behind them which is the real self, the true being.

*

Is psychic bhakti perfect devotion?

It is the basis of perfect devotion.

How can I develop psychic bhakti?

By sincere aspiration.

What is the character of psychic bhakti, mental bhakti and vital bhakti for the Mother? How to recognise them?

The psychic is made up of love and self-giving without demand, the vital of the will to be possessed by the Mother and serve her, the mental of faith and unquestioning acceptance of all that the Mother is, says and does. These however are outside signs — it is in inner character quite recognisable but not to be put into words that they differ.

Is there no place for mental and vital devotion in this Yoga?

Who says there is not? So long as it is real devotion, all bhakti has a place.

28 April 1933

*

It is always a mistake to attach importance to what others say — it is enough to have true devotion and the right attitude towards the Mother. You need have no apprehension of this kind at all.

28 April 1933

*

How to get pure and complete devotion?

Get quiet first — then from the quietude aspire and open yourself quietly and sincerely to the Mother.

15 November 1933

*

Mother, in spite of my thousand and three imperfections, this one sense remains in me — that you are my mother, that I am born from your heart. It is the only truth I seem to have realised in all these six years, but I thank you very much that I have been enabled to feel this much at least.

It is an excellent foundation for the other truths that are to come — for they all result from it.

17 September 1934

*

My meetings with the Mother, instead of being occasions for giving and receiving love, joy and happiness, bring fear! There must be something wrong in my nature.

It is the old vital with its ego which comes up again and again. It refuses to follow the higher being and be as the true bhaktas are who ask nothing and are content with all that the Mother does or does not do, because whatever she does must be good, since she is the Mother. You must impose the truth on this vital part.

6 May 1935

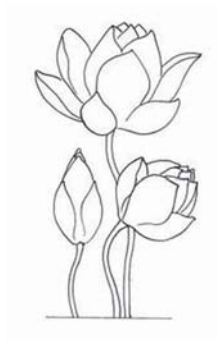
*

Do not allow mental anxiety to harass you. Wait on the working of the Mother's force which will open the lotus of the heart. In the light from above devotion will blossom in you.

25 October 1936

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 464-78)



“ABSOLUTE CONSCIOUSNESS, TRUE OMNISCIENCE, KNOWLEDGE”

April 19, 1914

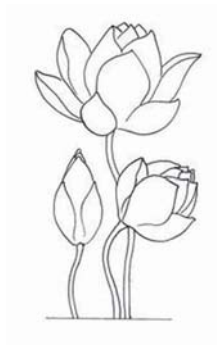
THERE is a great difference between being in the midst of active work, of external action, while keeping one's thought constantly fixed on Thee, and entering into that perfect union with Thee which leads to what I have called “absolute Consciousness, true Omniscience, Knowledge”. When one acts, though with the thought fixed on Thee, one is like a blind man walking on the road with a sense of direction, but knowing nothing about the path he is following and how, precisely, one must walk so as to neglect nothing. In the other case, on the contrary, there is the clear vision in full light, the utilisation of the least occasion, the plenitude of action, the maximum result. And if the first attitude is indispensable before acquiring the other, yet at no moment must one cease working, making an effort to attain perfect communion.

But my heart is in peace, my thought free from impatience, and I entrust myself to Thy will with the smiling confidence of a child.

May Thy peace reign over all. . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 129)



TWO PROCESSES

Sweet Mother,

When I read the Veda I thought I understood that the Rishis, finding the passage blocked above (since they would fall into ecstasy and lose their hold over the body), set out to find the Supermind by the downward path.

But reading Sri Aurobindo, I seemed to understand the opposite: that first he rose up, and then made the Light re-descend to open the passage, and that the pressure of the Light from above is what opens the doors below, in Matter.

I would like to understand the process.

With all my love,

November 6, 1961

Satprem

* * *

This has confronted me with a problem . . .

You are asking about the process, aren't you?

Yes.

My impression from the Veda is not the same as yours. You say that when they reached the heights they went into trance and then tried the other method. When I read the Veda . . . at least what Sri Aurobindo translates for us, because otherwise I have no direct knowledge. . . .

But they say nothing about this.

I know my own experience and I can speak of it in detail; and according to what Sri Aurobindo told me, it was the same for him — although he *never* wrote of it anywhere. But since it has been my experience, I naturally feel that it's the simplest method.

There is also what Théon and Madame Théon used to say. They never spoke of 'Supermind', but they said the same thing as the Vedas, that the world of Truth must incarnate on earth and create a new world. They even picked up the old phrase from the Gospels, 'new heavens and a new earth', which is the same thing the Vedas speak of. Madame Théon had this experience and she gave me the indication (she didn't actually teach me) of how it was to be done. She would go out of her body and become conscious in the vital world (there were many intermediary states, too, if one cared to explore them). After the vital came the mental: you consciously went out of the vital body, you left it behind (you could see it) and you entered the

mental world. Then you left the mental body and entered into. . . . They used different words, another classification (I don't remember it), but even so, the experience was identical. And like that, she successively left twelve different bodies, one after another. She was extremely 'developed', you see — individualised, organised. She could leave one body and enter the consciousness of the next plane, fully experience the surroundings and all that was there, describe it . . . and so on, twelve times.

I learned to do the same thing, and with great dexterity; I could halt on any plane, do what I had to do there, move around freely, see, observe, and then speak about what I had seen. And my last stage, which Théon called '*pathétisme*', a very barbaric but very expressive word, bordered on the Formless — he sometimes used the Jewish terminology, calling the Supreme 'The Formless'. (From this last stage one passed to the Formless — there was no further body to leave behind, one was beyond all possible forms, even all thought forms.) In this domain [the last stage before the Formless] one experienced total unity — unity in something that was the essence of Love; Love was a manifestation more . . . 'dense', he would always say (there were all sorts of different 'densities'); and Love was a denser expression of That, the sense of perfect Unity — perfect unity, identity — with no longer any forms corresponding to those of the lower worlds. It was a Light! . . . An almost immaculate white light, yet with something of a golden-rose in it (words are crude). This Light and this Experience were truly wonderful, inexpressible in words.

Well, one, I was there (Théon used to warn against going beyond this domain, because he said you wouldn't come back), but there I was, wanting to pass over to the other side, when — in a quite unexpected and astounding way — I found myself in the presence of the 'principle', a principle of the human form. It didn't resemble man as we are used to seeing him, but it was an upright form, standing just on the border between the world of forms and the Formless, like a kind of standard. At that time nobody had ever spoken to me about it and Madame Théon had never seen it — no one had ever seen or said anything. But I felt I was on the verge of discovering a secret.

Afterwards, when I met Sri Aurobindo and talked to him about it, he told me, "It is surely the prototype of the supramental form." I saw it several times again, later on, and this proved to be true.

But naturally, you understand, once the border has been crossed, there is no more 'ascent' and 'descent'; you have the feeling of rising up only at the very start, while leaving the terrestrial consciousness and emerging into the higher mind. But once you have gone beyond that, there's no notion of rising; there's a sense, instead, of a sort of inner transformation.

And from there I would re-descend, re-entering my bodies one after another — there is a real feeling of re-entry; it actually produces friction.

When one is on that highest height, the body is in a cataleptic state.

I think I made this experiment in 1904, so when I arrived here it was all a work

accomplished and a well-known domain; and when the question of finding the Supermind came up, I had only to resume an experience I was used to — I had learned to repeat it at will, through successive exteriorisations. It was a voluntary process.

When I returned from Japan and we began to work together, Sri Aurobindo had already brought the supramental light into the mental world and was trying to transform the Mind. “It’s strange,” he said to me, “it’s an endless work! Nothing seems to get done — everything is done and then constantly has to be done all over again.” Then I gave him my personal impression, which went back to the old days with Théon: “It will be like that until we touch bottom.” So instead of continuing to work in the Mind, both of us (I was the one who went through the experience . . . how to put it? . . . practically, objectively; he experienced it only in his consciousness, not in the body — but my body has always participated), both of us descended almost immediately (it was done in a day or two) from the Mind into the Vital, and so on quite rapidly, leaving the Mind as it was, fully in the light but not permanently transformed.

Then a strange thing happened. When we were in the Vital, my body suddenly became young again, as it had been when I was eighteen years old! . . . There was a young man named Pearson, a disciple of Tagore, who had lived with me in Japan for four years; he returned to India, and when he came to see me in Pondicherry, he was stupefied. “What has happened to you!” he exclaimed. He hardly recognised me. During that same period (it didn’t last very long, only a few months), I received some old photographs from France and Sri Aurobindo saw one of me at the age of eighteen. “There!” he said, “That’s how you are now!” I wore my hair differently, but otherwise I was eighteen all over again.

This lasted for a few months. Then we descended into the Physical — and all the trouble began. But we didn’t stay in the Physical, we descended into the Sub-conscious and from the Sub-conscious to the Inconscious. That was how we worked. And it was only when I descended into the Inconscious that I found the Divine Presence — there, in the midst of Darkness.

It wasn’t the first time; when I was working with Théon at Tlemcen (the second time I was there), I descended into the total, unindividualised — that is, general — Inconscious (it was the time he wanted me to find the Mantra of Life). And there I suddenly found myself in front of something like a vault or a grotto (of course, it was only something ‘like’ that), and when it opened, I saw a Being of iridescent light reclining with his head on his hand, fast asleep. All the light around him was iridescent. When I told Théon what I was seeing, he said it was ‘the immanent God in the depths of the Inconscious’, who through his radiations was slowly waking the Inconscious to Consciousness.

But then a rather remarkable phenomenon occurred: when I looked at him, he woke up and opened his eyes, expressing the beginning of conscious, wakeful action.

I have experienced the descent into the Inconscient many times (you remember, once you were there the day it happened — it had to do with divine Love); this experience of descending to the very bottom of the Inconscient and finding there the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Presence, under one form or another. it has happened quite frequently.

But I can't say that my process is to descend there first, as you write. Rather, this can be the process only when you are *already* conscious and identified; then *you draw down* the Force (as Sri Aurobindo says, 'one makes it descend') in order to transform. Then, with this action of transformation, one pushes [the Force into the depths, like a drill]. The Rishis' description of what happens next is absolutely true: a formidable battle at each step. And it would seem impossible to wage that battle without having first experienced the junction above.

That is my experience — I don't say there can't be others. I don't know.

One can realise the Divine in the Inconscient rather quickly (in fact, I think it can happen just as soon as one has found the Divine within). But does this give the power to *transform directly*? Does the direct junction between the supreme Consciousness and the Inconscient (because that is the experience) give the power to transform the Inconscient just like that, without any intermediary? I don't think so. I simply haven't had that experience. Could all these things I've been describing be happening now if I didn't have all those experiences behind me? I don't know, I can't say.

One thing is certain — as soon as one goes beyond the terrestrial atmosphere, beyond the higher mind's 'highest' region, the sensation of 'high' and 'low' totally vanishes. There are no longer movements of ascent and descent, but (*Mother turns her hand over*) something like inner reversals.

I think the problem arises only when you try to see and understand with the mental consciousness, even with the higher mind. I am telling you this because, as soon as I got your letter, I replied with what I'll read to you now; then I was immediately faced with something I couldn't formulate, the kind of thing that gives you the feeling of the unknown (all I knew was my own experience). So I did the usual thing — became 'blank,' turned towards the Truth; and I put the question to Sri Aurobindo and further, asking if there were something to be known, that it be told to me. Then I dropped it, I paid no more attention. And only as I was coming here today was I told — I can't really use the word 'told,' but anyway, what was communicated to me concerning your question was that the difference between the two processes is purely subjective, depending upon the way the experience is registered. I don't know if I can make myself clear. . . . There is 'something' which is the experience and which will be the Realisation; and what appears to be a different, if not opposite, process is simply a subjective mental notation of one *single* experience. Do you follow?

That's what I was told.

Now I'm going to read you my reply — it's the first reaction (when something comes, I stay immobile; then an initial reaction comes from above my head, but it's only like the first answering chord, and if I remain attentive, other things follow; what I have just told you is what followed). My immediate written response is based upon my own experience as well as upon what Madame Théon told me and what Sri Aurobindo told me. (*Mother reads*)

It is by rising to the summit of consciousness through a progressive ascent . . . that's what I meant just now by 'leaving the body', but without going into details,

that one unites with the Supermind. But as soon as the union is achieved, one knows and one sees that the Supermind exists in the heart of the Inconscient as well. When one is in that state, there is neither high nor low. But *generally*,

I emphasised this to make it clear that I am not making an absolute assertion

it is by *re-descending* through the levels of the being with a supramentalised consciousness that one can accomplish the permanent transformation of physical nature.

This can be experienced in all sorts of ways, but what *we* want and what Sri Aurobindo spoke of is a change that will never be revoked, that will persist, that will be as durable as the present terrestrial conditions. That is why I put 'permanent'.

There is no proof that the Rishis used another method, although, to effect this transformation (if they ever did) they must necessarily have fought their way through the powers of inconscience and obscurity.

Yes, the Rishis give an absolutely living description of what you experience — and experience continually — as soon as you descend into the Subconscient: all these battles with the beings who conceal the Light and so on. I experienced these things continually at Tlemcen and again with Sri Aurobindo when we were doing the Work — it's raging quite merrily even now!

As soon as you go down there, that's what happens — you have to fight against all that is unwilling to change, all that dominates the world and does not want to change.

(*silence*)

After reading your letter, I had a very strong feeling that you put the problem like

that because you were considering it from a mental plane, which is the only plane where it exists; if you go beyond, there are no more oppositions or problems. These things are subtle, you know, and as soon as you try to formulate them, they elude you — formulation deforms.

What I mean is that it's not necessarily in trance, in another world, that one gets the supramental consciousness. . . .

No.

It's something the Rishis realised with eyes wide open, in day-to-day life, if I understand rightly.

I don't know how they did it. . . .

But I myself have never had it in trance, and neither did Sri Aurobindo — neither of us ever had trances! I mean the kind of trance where contact with the body is lost. That's what he always said, and one of the first things I told him when we met was, "Well, everybody talks about trance and samadhi and all those things, but I have never had them! I have never lost consciousness." "Ah," he replied, "it's exactly the same for me!"

It depends upon the level of development, that's what Théon used to say: "One goes into trance only when certain links are missing." He saw people as made up of innumerable small 'bridges', with intermediary zones. "If you have an intermediary zone that is undeveloped," he said, "a zone where you are not conscious because it's not individualised, then you will be in trance when you cross it." Trance is the sign of non-individualisation — the consciousness is not awake and so your body goes into trance. But if your consciousness is wide awake you can sit, keeping full contact with things, and have the total experience. I could go out of my body with no need of trance, except when Théon wanted me to do a particular work. That was a different business — the vital force (not the consciousness, the vital force) had to go out for that work, so the body had to go into trance. But even then . . . For instance, very often when I am 'called' and go to do something in response, my body does become still, but it's not in trance; I can be sitting and, even in the middle of a gesture, suddenly become immobile for a few seconds. But I was doing another type of work with Théon — dangerous work, at that — and it would last for an hour. Then all the body's vital energy would go out, all of it, as it does when you die (in fact, that's how I came to experience death).

But it isn't necessary to have all those experiences, not at all — Sri Aurobindo never did. (Théon didn't have experiences, either; he had only the knowledge — he made use of Madame Théon's experiences.) Sri Aurobindo told me he had never really entered the unconsciousness of samadhi — for him, these domains were

conscious; he would sit on his bed or in his armchair and have all the experiences.

Naturally, it's preferable to be in a comfortable position (it's a question of security). If you venture to do these kinds of things standing up, for instance, as I have seen them done, it's dangerous. But if one is quietly stretched out, there is no need for trance.

Besides, according to what I've been told (not physically), I believe that the Rishis practised going into trance. But I suppose they wanted to achieve what Sri Aurobindo speaks of: a *physical* transformation of the physical body permitting one to *live* this consciousness instead of the ordinary consciousness. Did they ever do it? . . . I don't know. The Veda simply recounts what the *forefathers* have done. But who are these *forefathers*?

But surely this supramental consciousness is something to be found in the body?

When one has these experiences, like the ones I've had in the subtle physical, for example, the body is certainly in trance — but the part having the experience doesn't *at all* feel deprived or lacking in anything. The experience comes with a fullness of life, consciousness, independence, individuality. It's not like going out in trance to accomplish a work and feeling linked to the body — it's not that: the body no longer exists nor has any reason to! It's simply not there. And it's a nuisance to go back into it — 'what is this useless burden!' you wonder. As a result, if this experience becomes permanent, you live in a world that's just as concrete, just as real and just as *tangible* as our physical world, with the same qualities of duration, permanence and stability.

It's very difficult to express, because as soon as we notice it. . . .

While having this experience, you are free (as I said, the body no longer exists, it has even no reason to exist, and you don't think of it), and you have just as concrete an *objective* functioning — even more so! It is more concrete because you have a *much clearer* and more tangible perception of knowledge than ordinary physical perception; our ordinary way of understanding always seems so hazy in comparison. It's not the same phenomenon as going off into trance and being linked to the body, depending upon it for expression, and so forth.

But a certain work [of adaptation] is required to express this experience, and the first impression upon returning is that there's no way to do it. It simply doesn't correspond to anything.

THE MOTHER

(A conversation of 7 November 1961)

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

(A Compilation)

[In 1986 K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) published in Mother India eight of Paul Brunton's letters addressed to him, — letters which were still with him and "found in an old file". Some of his answers had been published earlier, modified and enlarged as essays in the first edition of The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo (1968, reprinted 1992). The essays as such had seen the light of day even earlier in Mother India. In the present compilation Mother India combines Brunton's letters and Sethna's essays. Some matter of interest has been added. Sethna's introduction to these eight letters gives the reader an insight into their relationship. — Ed.]

[K. D. Sethna's introduction, "Some Letters from Paul Brunton" published in *Mother India*, May 1986, pp. 290-298. — Ed.]

SOME LETTERS FROM PAUL BRUNTON

PAUL BRUNTON became famous on the publication of his book, *A Search in Secret India*, which was followed by many others which also were widely read. He was instrumental in making Ramana Maharshi known all over the world. In the 30's Brunton asked permission to visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He was allowed on condition that he would write nothing on Sri Aurobindo: the Ashram did not want publicity. Knowing his own ability to make the Ashram popular in the world's eyes, he was greatly amazed at the restriction put on him, but he has stuck to the order throughout his life and confined himself in his books to making general statements of his admiration for Sri Aurobindo with no view to popularisation or propaganda.

During his stay in the Ashram he became very friendly with K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) and the friendship continued beyond his stay. One of the important statements he made to Sethna was: "The pictures I had seen of Sri Aurobindo had not prepared me for the surprise I had when I stood before him at darshan. Immediately I recognised a figure I had seen in one of my visions. Sri Aurobindo had appeared to me at a time when I had to make a decision and he had helped me to take the correct course." The Mother told Sethna later that she had found Brunton a man who had an opening and a freedom on the mental plane which had made it

possible for him to come into occult contact with physically unseen people. Brunton paid two visits in all to the Ashram. His secretary, Miss Margaret Oddwinkle, decided to become a member of it. She was accepted by the Mother and, on request, received a new name — “Pavita” — by which she was known ever after.

Sethna met Brunton a third time in Bombay and his interview was published in the Bombay weekly newspaper *Blitz*. This was at the time when Hitler had attacked Russia in World War II. The interview dealt with that event as well as with spiritual topics and recorded Brunton’s high opinion of Sri Aurobindo’s world-vision. A correspondence went on between him and Sethna at intervals over two or three years. Some letters from the former have been found in an old file and are here offered to the readers of *Mother India*. Four letters of Sethna’s have already been published in his book, *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, under the titles: “Sri Aurobindo and the Philosophers”, “Aurobindonian Viewpoints” (in two parts) and “The War behind the War”.

Brunton published a review of Sethna’s book of poems *The Secret Splendour* in a Bangalore periodical, *New Thought*, edited by a brother of the well-known novelist R. K. Narayan. The last that was heard of Brunton was that he was living in Switzerland and the man who had met him described him to Sethna as a very calm and compassionate person. This was several years ago.

[In “Some Old Letters from Bombay to an Ashramite”, *Mother India*, August 1985, pp. 532-33, K. D. Sethna mentions Paul Brunton and his promise to write a review of *The Secret Splendour* — Ed.]

Two days back Paul Brunton arrived in Bombay from Kashmir where he had been the guest of the Mazdaznans, the American sect claiming to practise the secret wisdom of the ancient Zarathustrians. Appropriately it was founded by a man who called himself Otto Zaradusht Hanish — an impressive-faced dynamic clever leader who, to my mind, has a streak of strong personal ambition and a desire to be hailed as an illumined Guru when all that he has is a vigorous learned and organisational intellect, with a bit of “vital” magnetism. There are several such personalities in America at present. . . .

To return to Brunton, I sent him a copy of my book, *The Secret Splendour*, along with a letter; I did not ask to see him as I thought he must be overburdened with interviews. A reply came post-haste, wanting me to go over and meet him. I went, of course, and we had a very pleasant pow-wow. It was just as of old when he had come to the Ashram on a visit. He was very appreciative of my poems and promised to write a review of the book. We discussed his new views on spiritual things — he has in the press a big volume called *The Hidden Meaning Beyond*

*Yoga*¹ or something like it. By Yoga he means the discipline of meditation, which results in one's remaining enclosed in one's trance or one's inner life without any active or dynamic touch upon the common world of men and women. He has evidently moved in the Aurobindonian direction, but has not yet stirred to Sri Aurobindo's vision of an utterly new world — the Supramental — to be realised here and now.

18.6.1941

*

[Paul Brunton's book review published in *Indian Thought*, Bombay, 1941, and later reprinted in *Jame-shed*, reproduced here from a typescript. — Ed.]

THE SECRET SPLENDOUR BY K. D. SETHNA²
(Published by the Author: 47 Warden Road, Bombay.)

K. D. Sethna is a rising star in the Indian literary firmament who is well worth watching. With this slim volume of nearly one hundred pages he makes his debut to the larger world but I have been familiar with his work since the time, several years ago, when he showed me at Pondicherry the yet unprinted manuscripts which were then being privately circulated among a few lovers of poetry.

Whether he writes of Nature's nocturnal beauty or of man's tender love for woman, a single immortal theme runs right through his finely-spun phrases: the quiet quest of communion with the Overself, the profound aspiration to reach the Ineffable. An exalted spiritual awareness is manifest throughout the stanzas which are here strung together. In the words of his final poem:³

If each delightful cadence
Mark not a flight to Thee,
My fancy's airiest radiance
Profanes its own mute core of mystery!

One is impressed by the picturesque words and Pre-Raphaelite metaphors in which the poet sets off his thought or limns his vision. He is a poet for the artists. But music is lacking and melody is absent. Sethna does not sing; he gazes, enthralled, at gorgeous visions and writes down what he sees.

1. *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, 1941. — Ed.

2. *The Secret Splendour* — "Poems seeking a new intensity of vision and emotion, a mystic inwardness that catches alive the deepest rhythms of the Spirit"; 1941, Re. 2-8 net, Hard Cover, pp. 96.

The poems can be found in *The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)*, 1993 edition, sections "The Secret Splendour" and "Overhead Poetry — Poems with Sri Aurobindo's Comments". — Ed.

3. "Ultima" — Ed.

The poem which I preferred most — not, be it frankly confessed, because it was necessarily the best but because I adore eventides and make their vigil my religion — was the one called “Sun-Spell”. This is how it opens:

In cloud-suspense the faint breeze died;
 A deep glow spread on every side:
 The firmamental hush came down,
 A mirrored soul of aureate brown
 Subduing each form-shade to one
 Pervasive ecstasy of sun.

His pages are not simple; they are as complex as his highly-cultured mind. They are luxuriously ornate and jewelled with costly gems. They carry an air of aristocratic distinction.

I had not bargained to behold
 A rhythm of cerulean gold
 Nor with an aching mouth impress
 Calm firmamental nakedness!⁴

Here is a powerful verse from “Himalaya”:

The tides of gold and silver sweep the sky
 But bring no tremor to my countenance;
 How shall sun-rise or moon-ebb lure, when I
 Have gripped the Eternal in a rock of trance?

And then this swift descent to “Modern Love”:

Amid the whining of the saxophone
 And the swift whisper of the dancing feet —
 Amid the music’s strangle-throated moan
 And hundred swinging bodies’ colour-heat,
 She lures me with far world-triumphant lips
 As though in one brief thrill of ecstasy
 A wandering voice of epic destiny
 Haunted the rhythmic swaying of her hips.

4. “Earth-Heaven” — Ed.

Sethna's work will be welcomed by all those who appreciate poetry of high quality, clad in fine print and paper to match. This volume will assure his status in the front rank of contemporary Indian writers. I hope its reception will encourage him to produce another soon.

Paul Brunton, Ph.D.

(To be continued)

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

On both occasions when Paul Brunton saw you, he had the impression of you as a Chinese sage. In the early days of my stay here, you struck me as a king of Hungarian gypsies! And when I say Hungarian, I mean the Magyar element which I suppose has mid-Asiatic characteristics. Do these ideas point to some occult truth or some outstanding fact of previous birth?

Confucius? Lao-Tse? Mencius? Hang-whang-pu? (Don't know who the last was, but his name sounds nice.) Can't remember anything about it. As for the Hungarian gypsy, I suppose we must have been everything at one time or another, on this earth in some other cycle. But I am not aware of any particularly Magyar or Chinese element in me. However, when I came here, I was told I looked just like a Tamil sannyasi and some Christians said I was just like Christ. So it may be.

More seriously, Brunton seems to have thought I was Lao-Tse. Maybe, I can't say it is impossible.

7 December 1936

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA Vol. 35, p. 56)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of March 2014)

Chapter: XXXI

On the Eve of a Radical Transition

Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dream, indifferent to the means.

Henry W. Nevinson (1907)¹

ON his return to Calcutta at the end of November 1907, leaving Mrinalini Devi behind at Deoghur, Sri Aurobindo was put up at Raja Subodh Mullik's residence, 12 Wellington Square. Illness had left him weak but he seems to have resumed his activities in full. There was an important meeting of the leading nationalists at the Raja's place on the 4th of December where obviously they decided upon the strategy to be followed at the Midnapore (now Medinipur) conference of the district Congress which was going to be provincial in nature for all practical purposes and, more importantly, discussed what to anticipate at the forthcoming Surat session of the National Congress and the agenda to be followed by the Nationalists there.

Barindra Kumar and Charu Chandra Dutt (I.C.S.) and their group were meanwhile carrying on their own agenda of shaking the British administration through violent means. Even though Sri Aurobindo was not involved in their programme at all and we have earlier seen his negative attitude towards such ventures, he could not have avoided reflecting on the aftermath of their actions, for often their leaders swore by his name. A chapter or so later we will focus on this line of covert development taking place more or less parallel to the overt efforts by the Nationalists to turn the Congress into an effective forum for attaining freedom. A letter from Sri Aurobindo to Mrinalini Devi written on the 6th of December speaks of the excessive pressure of work on him and that too immediately after a period of convalescence:

Here I do not have even a moment to spare. The burden of writing is on me, the burden of things concerning the Congress is on me, the burden of resolving the problems of the *Bande Mataram* is on me. I feel unable to cope up with it all.²

Sri Aurobindo appealed to Mrinalini Devi who felt restless at Deoghur, to muster calm and confidence and to bear with the situation so that his trouble and anxiety were not increased. He concluded the letter informing her that he was leaving for Midnapore the next day and on his return would proceed to Surat, to be back in Calcutta on the 2nd of January.

It is significant that despite all this demand and pressure on his time, his extraordinary calmness would strike even an unsuspecting visitor as an unforgettable experience. A young man, Nagendra Kumar Guharoy went to meet Raja Subodh Mullik for some work. He received a bonanza:

A friend introduced me to the Raja and I bowed to him. He was in a large cushioned sofa. Tall, fair, well-built and handsome, he deserved the epithet Raja. Through a slight alteration of Kalidasa's, it could be said that he had a large heart keeping with his physical stature. He pointed at a sofa facing him and asked me to sit down.

"Have you heard of Aurobindo Ghose?" he asked me. "Yes, Sir," I said with great eagerness. The Raja pointed at the one who sat beside him. At once I left my seat and went near him and bowed down to him. He was engrossed in a book. Raising his eyes from the book he only cast a glance at me. Just as one would be lost in endless joy and wonder if suddenly one found before him the human incarnation of a being from the sphere beyond senses, I had the same overwhelming feeling.

His clothes showed no sign of care. His dhoti and shirt and shoes were ordinary . . . he sat calm, peaceful and serene, his eyes luminous, his look deep. The day remains unforgettable because of my first Darshan of Aurobindo. Luck smiled on me. Along with the Raja, I met, unexpectedly, my god.³

Facts show that the Midnapore Conference (7th and 8th December) practically anticipated the sequence of the tumultuous scenes the historic Surat Congress would present. By this time Sri Aurobindo had become the acknowledged leader of the Nationalists — or the Extremists as they were often called — and he led the group to Midnapore. The local leader of the young volunteers was Satyendranath Bose, a nephew of Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose and a staunch nationalist.⁴ Sri Aurobindo learnt from him that his efforts to persuade the President-elect, a local Moderate leader named K. B. Dutt to highlight the ideal of Swaraj had failed. In the opening session of the conference it was observed that the Magistrate as well as the District Superintendent of Police with his force were present, obviously to create some fear among the delegates so that they remained submissive to the Moderate leadership. The President continued reading his address, yet another essay in the tradition of complaint and appeal to the British administration, when the volunteers, armed with lathis, demanded a statement on Swaraj.

“... a vehement clash between the two parties” took place.⁵ Hemendra Prasad Ghose’s diary dated the 9th of December says,

The inevitable schism has taken place at Midnapore. The Moderates headed by Surendranath Banerjee wanted to have it all their own way. . . .They threatened the audience with the presence of the D.S.P. The result was the secession of the Extremists who held a separate conference. This is the beginning only.⁶

The irony is that the presence of the Magistrate and police had been requested by Mr. Dutt. A correspondent wrote in Surendranath Banerjee’s the *Bengalee* that the police were present on their own. In its issue of 13th December the *Bande Mataram* debunked the claim, saying:

He [the correspondent] says that the Magistrate was not invited but came to the meeting apprehending a row. We ask who gave the Magistrate the information that there was likelihood of a row? Who wrote the letter which the Magistrate declared to be Mr. K. B. Dutt’s and which was in Mr. K. B. Dutt’s handwriting? What was the object of the letter if not to invite the presence of the Magistrate and the police to overawe Mr. K. B. Dutt’s opponents? It is possible that none formally invited the officials. Why then were the volunteers informed that the Magistrate was coming and they must give up their lathis? It is entirely untrue that the “rowdiness of a section of the meeting nearly culminated in a disturbance,” in the sense of a resort to violence. There was plenty of shouting and confusion, but never any likelihood or the appearance of a likelihood of a resort to violence. The only violence was the assault on a delegate by the Moderates on the second day.⁷

While the conference was breaking up, not far from Midnapore, the Lt. Governor, Sir Andrew Fraser’s train was on the verge of being blown up. Though damaged it survived the attack and the Governor was safe. Writes Surendranath Banerjee in his autobiography:

About the same time, almost on the same day, this attempt was made, the District Conference that met at Midnapore was sought to be wrecked, and by some of those men upon whom there was a strong suspicion of being associated with the anarchical movement. Mr. K. B. Dutt, the President of the Conference and a recognised leader of the Midnapore district at the time, was repeatedly interrupted in the course of his speech. I was invited as a guest and was surprised to witness a spectacle so unusual. Through the joint efforts of Mr. Dutt and of myself, aided by the good sense of the audience, we succeeded at last in restoring

order and resuming the business of the Conference. But what happened was to me a revelation, and it was the augury, the precursor of a similar scene enacted on a larger scale in the Surat Congress held a month later.⁸

The Moderates claimed that they commanded the majority at the Midnapore conference, but several accounts of the event show that the Nationalists were in the majority. In fact the latter voluntarily left the main venue to avoid any further conflict:

The Nationalists, though forming the majority, seceded from the Midnapore Conference and held an independent Conference with Sri Aurobindo as the President.⁹

It had been decided that the next annual conference of the Indian National Congress would be held at Nagpur. But the Moderate leadership that was at the helm of the organisation, arbitrarily decided to shift the venue to Surat. The reason was obvious to all concerned. Nagpur was a stronghold of Nationalists whereas Surat was still dominated by the Moderates. The Nationalists could only protest, but they were in no position to alter the revised schedule. They could only try to mobilise the presence of a good number of Nationalist delegates at the event. Travel in those days was an arduous task; most of the average Congressmen had only enough to make their ends meet. The *Bande Mataram* of 13th December carried this appeal (extract):

We call upon Nationalists in Calcutta and the Mofussil, who are at all desirous of the spread of the Nationalist principles and Nationalist practice all over India, to make ready at whatever inconvenience and, if they find it humanly possible, go to Surat to support the Nationalist cause. We are aware of the tremendous difficulties in our way. Surat is far-distant, the expenses of such a journey are almost prohibitive, for only a small percentage of our party are men of means, and the time for preparation is almost nil. And yet we must go. What is a Nationalist good for if he cannot make up by his enthusiasm and energy for his other deficiencies, if he cannot make nothing of difficulties and turn the impossible into the possible? It is to sweep away difficulties and to strike the word impossible out of the Indian's dictionary that our party has arisen. . . . For we are going not as holiday sightseers making a national occasion an excuse for a Christmas jaunt and we do not demand comfort on the way or luxuries when we arrive. We must go as poor men whose wealth is our love for our Motherland, as missionaries taking nothing with them but the barest expenses of the way, as pilgrims travelling to our Mother's temple. We have a great work to do and cannot afford to be negligent and half-hearted. Be sure that this year, 1907, is a turning-point of our destinies and do not imagine that the session of the Surat Congress will be as the sessions of other years.¹⁰

From Midnapore Sri Aurobindo was back at Raja Subodh Mullik's house in Calcutta probably on the 10th of December and in a meeting at the Raja's residence on the 11th it was resolved to make a determined effort to make the Surat Congress a meaningful session. Indeed, it became both meaningful and memorable. The great Congress split would also mark a radical transition from Swadeshi to Swaraj.

But of that, later. Let us have a look at a very different sort of British journalist's interview with Sri Aurobindo on the 20th of December. Henry W. Nevinson (1856-1941) was not only different from, but also an exception to his professional kind in India. He was in genuine sympathy with the Indian aspirations. He reached India in October 1907 on behalf of the *Manchester Guardian*, an influential newspaper. His reports covering the Indian situation annoyed the Governor General, Lord Minto so much that he wrote to Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, on 6 May 1908, soon after the arrest of the Alipore Conspiracy accused:

I wish we could put people like Nevinson in the dock with the wretched creatures we have arrested.¹¹

Extracts from Nevinson's account of his meeting with Sri Aurobindo:

When I reached the house in a large square where the meeting was to be held, I found it dark and apparently empty. A Hindu servant let me in, and after a time Mr. Aurobindo Ghose appeared alone. He had not expected me, because the letter about my coming had been stopped, no doubt by the postal spies, as he said nearly all his letters were. He had no special reason to complain of that, nor did he complain; for the letters from one of the most respected public men in England to a member of the Viceroy's Council had recently been opened in Bombay, and English people who were friendly with Indians in Calcutta told me even their letters from home were tampered with in the same way. . . .

He was a youngish man, I should think still under thirty. Intent dark eyes looked from his thin, clear-cut face with a gravity that seemed immovable, but the figure and bearing were those of an English graduate. . . . Having served the Gaekwar of Baroda for a time in the education of that progressive State, he came to Calcutta, and was now the leader of the Nationalists, or young Extremists who regarded even Mr. Tilak as touched with the cautious moderation of the past. One of his brothers, a poet of some standing in English, was Professor of English Literature at the Presidency College in Calcutta University, and I found him there teaching the grammar and occasional beauties of Tennyson's "Princess", with extreme distaste for that sugary stuff. Another brother was supposed to belong to a different branch of the Extremists.

Aurobindo's purpose, as he explained it to me, was the Irish policy of Sinn Fein — a universal Swadeshi, not limited to goods but including every

phase of life. His Nationalists would let the Government go its way and take no notice of it at all. They hoped nothing from reforms; all the talk about Legislative Councils and Indian members and the separation of Judicial and Executive functions was meaningless to them. They did not spend a thought upon it. In fact, the worse the Government was, the more repressive it became, and the less it inclined to reform, so much the better for the Nationalist cause. He regarded the Partition of Bengal as the greatest blessing that had ever happened to India. No other measure could have stirred national feeling so deeply or roused it so suddenly from the lethargy of previous years.

“Since 1830,” he said, “each generation had reduced us more and more to the condition of sheep and fatted calves.”

He lamented the long peace, leading to degeneracy and effeminate ways. Under it the ordinary people had sought only after prosperity and material comfort, while the thoughtful men spent their time in aesthetic circles, admiring Shelley and Swinburne, or imitating them. The more English a man was the more he counted himself successful, and the life-blood of nationality had run thin. But all this torpor and smug contentment had been rudely interrupted by the disguised blessings of Lord Curzon’s errors. Indignation had again created patriotism when apparently it was dead, and the new party’s whole policy was aimed at carrying forward the work that Lord Curzon had so successfully begun for the revival of national character and spirit. For this purpose of building up a race worthy of a great name they proposed to work on the three lines of a national education, independent of Government but including the methods of European science; a national industry, with boycott of all foreign goods except the few things that India could not produce; and the encouragement of private arbitration, in place of the law-courts, for the settlement of disputes.

But behind these simple means a deeper spirit was at work. Aurobindo Ghose had already, I think, formed the project of developing out of the Congress, or in place of the Congress, a nationalist and democratic body that would prepare the country for self-government and, indeed, act within limits as a true Indian Parliament quite apart from the Anglo-Indian system. . . .

Where the consciousness of timidity exists among a people, the first duty of a patriot is to remove it at all costs. So in the columns of his paper and in his rare speeches Aurobindo Ghose was insisting especially on the necessity of courage: “Courage,” said a leader in *Bande Mataram*, “is your principal asset. Heroism, says Emerson, feels and never reasons, and therefore is always right. If you are to work out the salvation of your country, you will have to do it with heroism. You have voluntarily cut yourselves off from outside help to develop strength from within. Darkness will hem you round, disappointments will cross your path, slander will pursue you from behind, but you are to depend on yourselves, and yourselves alone. You must press on and not allow yourselves

to be dragged back by encumbrances in the name of unity. You have your only guide in the loftiness and spirituality that make their heaven in the thought of the wider light and purer happiness that you may bring to our country by long force of vision and endeavour. The rapturous contemplation of a new and better state for your country is your only hope. What great element is wanting in a life guided by such a hope?"¹²

Long afterwards, on 3rd January 1939, Sri Aurobindo in the course of a conversation, recollected:

I met Nevinson twice: once in Bengal at Subodh Mullick's house. I was very serious at that time. I met him again when I was President of the National Congress at Surat. Then also I could not laugh, being the President! So he said about me: The man who never laughs.¹³

Sri Aurobindo had also appreciated Nevinson's penetrating intelligence and quick intensity.¹⁴

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

1. Henry W. Nevinson: *The New Spirit in India*; Indian reprint; Metropolitan Book Co. Delhi.
2. Translated from Sri Aurobindo: *SABCL*, Vol. 4, p. 323.
3. 'Devata-Viday': Reminiscences by Nagendra Kumar Guharoy in *Galpa Bharati*.
4. It is this Satyendra Nath who would, along with Kanailal, finish off the approver Naren Gossain inside Alipore Jail during the conspiracy trial.
5. Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes . . .*; CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 61.
6. Sri Aurobindo Archives, Pondicherry.
7. Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*; CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 788.
8. S. N. Banerjea: *A Nation in Making*; Oxford University Press.
9. Jyotish Chandra Ghose: *Life-work of Aravindo*.
10. Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*; CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 787.
11. Manoj Das: *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the 20th Century*; Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
12. Henry W. Nevinson: *The New Spirit in India*.
13. Manoj Das: *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the 20th Century*.
14. Sri Aurobindo: *Karmayogin*; SABCL, Vol. 2, p. 286.

ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA RAY — V

(Continued from the issue of March 2014)

P. C. Ray, The Patriot and Nationalist

In his Farewell Address to the students of the Bengal National College on 23 August 1907, Sri Aurobindo says:

If you will study, study for her [*the Mother's — India's*] sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service. You will earn your living that you may live for her sake. You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice.¹

As one revisits the life of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, one is reminded of the above message of Sri Aurobindo. An intense love for the country and her people was the fountain spring from which flowed the various streams of the Acharya's activity. Indeed, patriotism vibrated through every fibre of his being. This patriotism was “not loud but deep”.

As a teenager

An early indication of Prafulla Chandra's nationalist spirit can be seen from his decision, as a teenager in 1879, to join the institution founded by the great Vidyasagar (in spite of it being a new College with inadequate facilities), because it was a *national* institution and because a great Nationalist leader (S. N. Banerjee) was a teacher in that College. When literature and philosophy monopolised the attention of his contemporaries, Prafulla Chandra decided to go abroad to study science, in spite of his deep fascination for literature and history, as he believed that the key to the country's progress was in the field of modern science and technology.

As a student at Edinburgh

While a B.Sc. student at Edinburgh University, Prafulla Chandra demonstrated his intellectual courage and patriotic vigour when he took part in an essay competition on the topic ‘India before and after the Mutiny’ and wrote an essay that was highly

1. *Bande Mataram: Early Political Writings*, SABCL, Vol. 1, pp. 516-17.

critical of the British rule in India. Prafulla Chandra got his article printed and published as a book in 1886; the printed version was prefaced by an appeal addressed to the students of the university. The appendix of the book contains a short article on Scientific and Technical Education in India.

Three sentences from Prafulla Chandra's book will give an idea of the daringly outspoken factual analysis by a young man studying in Britain for a degree course of a British University:

The lamentable condition of India at present is due to England's culpable neglect of, and gross apathy to, the affairs of that Empire. ([5], p. 11)

A government which can squander 10,000,000 pounds on "palatial" barracks, but which cannot spare a farthing for laboratories, should forfeit the title of a civilised government. ([5], p. 132)

The Indian Government is essentially a tax squeezing machinery and not a government for the people. ([5], p. 134)

He sent a copy to John Bright (1811-89), the great British parliamentarian. In the covering letter, Prafulla Chandra drew Bright's attention to the annexation of Burma by the British and the additional burden imposed upon the Indian taxpayer in the form of an increased duty on salt. In his reply, Bright endorsed the article of the young student and expressed this hope ([8], p. 554):

You write what is true on the Indian question and I trust your effort will yield some fruit.

Bright authorised Prafulla Chandra to use his letter in any way he liked and Prafulla Chandra took the opportunity to spread some awareness — he sent Bright's letter to the press. The papers published an item with the headline "John Bright's letter to an Indian student". Reuter flashed the following passage from Bright's letter ([6], p. 64):

I regret with you and condemn the course of Lord Dufferin in Burma. It is a renewal of the old system of crime and guilt, which, we had hoped, had been for ever abandoned. There is an ignorance on the part of the public in this country and great selfishness here and in India as to our true interests in India. The departure from morality and true statesmanship will bring about calamity and perhaps ruin, which our children may witness and deplore.

Nation-building through Science and Education

After his return to the country, his Government service as a professor at Presidency College prevented P. C. Ray from taking a direct part in active politics. In any case,

his temperament and fragile health were perhaps not suited for a turbulent political life. But a nation-builder in the truest sense, he integrated his dedication to science with his love for the country. As he expressed in a letter (1921) to Smt. Basanti Devi, wife of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das ([6], p. 233):

. . . in serving my favourite science I have only one idea in my mind, namely, that through her I should serve my country.

While a student at Edinburgh, Ray used to feel sad that while “every civilised country including Japan was adding to the world’s stock of knowledge”, “unhappy India was lagging behind”. He dreamt of a time when India would also be able to make significant contributions. Fifty years later, Ray would have the satisfaction of seeing the dawning of a new era when the people of India “have taken kindly to the zealous pursuit of different branches of Science” ([6], p. v). As expressed in ([3], p. 144), P. C. Ray “was very much at the centre of this immense transformation as an architect, model, witness and spokesperson”.

We must also remember that it was his patriotic zeal (combined with his passion for history and chemistry) that made P. C. Ray undertake the most painstaking work of collecting materials on the history of ancient Indian chemistry, from sources which were not easily accessible, and documenting them systematically. He writes at the end of the Preface of Vol. II of his *History of Hindu Chemistry* ([6], p. 164):

The Hindu nation with its glorious past and vast latent potentialities may yet look forward to a still more glorious future, and, if the perusal of these pages will have the effect of stimulating my countrymen to strive to regain their old position in the intellectual hierarchy of nations, I shall not have laboured in vain.

Thus, while P. C. Ray might not have been openly involved in the historic freedom movements for the *political* independence of India, all his academic and commercial activities were efforts towards the country’s *intellectual* and *economic* resurgence and independence. Keeping this aim, he chose the path of constructive work rather than an open confrontation with the alien Government. For, at the formative stages of creating strong centres of scientific research and industrial enterprises, P. C. Ray had to take care that political turmoil did not come in the way of realising the scientific and commercial rejuvenation that he was attempting. In fact, Ray even saw the colonial encounter, in spite of its shortcomings, as an opportunity for the resurrection of India’s greatness.²

2. To appreciate Ray’s position, one may recall an utterance of Swami Vivekananda (cf. *Prabuddha Bharata* 1930, p. 528): “You have not the capacity to manufacture a needle and you dare to criticise the English, — fools! Sit at their feet and learn from them the arts, industries and the practicality necessary for the struggle of existence.”

An episode at Presidency College illustrates Ray's prudent nationalism of utilising, to the fullest extent, all facilities under the colonial dispensation. Lord Rayleigh, the eminent scientist and the mentor of J. C. Bose, once visited the College and J. C. Bose took him round the College laboratory. The then Principal of the College took exception, asking Bose on what authority he "received outsiders into the Laboratory". Rabindranath Tagore was deeply hurt at the insult to J. C. Bose and urged him to resign and work in a new laboratory; Tagore planned to raise the money for the proposed laboratory from a generous donation promised by the Maharaja of Tripura. But Acharya Ray persuaded his friend and colleague against such a hasty step. Ray doubted whether it would be possible to provide comparable facilities at the new laboratory because of the sheer cost. Further, he pointed out that the Presidency laboratory was a property of the Indians as it had been built and equipped from the money extracted from India, not from England. Ray bluntly told Bose that his resignation would amount to "taking one's meal on the bare floor because of dissatisfaction at the action of the thief" ([9], pp. 175-76).

As a representative of the University of Calcutta at the Congress of the Universities of the Empire (1912), P. C. Ray argued for the proper recognition of the degrees from an Indian University and for an increase in the opportunities of admission of the Indian students to post-graduate courses in British Universities. Again, in his evidence before a Public Service Commission, he effectively highlighted the failure of the Government to recognise merit among the qualified Indian youth.

P. C. Ray and National Education

P. C. Ray was associated with the National Council of Education, Bengal ([9], pp. 209-10). The National Council was established on 11 March 1906 by Satis Chandra Mukherjee to organise a system of education — literary, scientific and technical — on national lines and under national control. It started the Bengal National College and School on 14 August 1906. This is the College which Sri Aurobindo joined as the first Principal (for a mere Rs 150) resigning from his Baroda College job (of Rs 710). Although, because of his job in a Government College, P. C. Ray could not become a formal member of the National Council during its inception, he influenced it with his ideas and ideals while remaining in the background. He helped in framing the syllabus, the course of studies, the scheme of examination and served as a paper-setter and examiner in Chemistry. After his retirement from Government service, he formally became a member of the National Council of Education in 1919. He served as the President of the Council from 1924 till his death in 1944. The Chemical Engineering building of the Council (now part of Jadavpur University) was named after him in 1952.

P. C. Ray and the Nationalist Movements

While P. C. Ray toiled for the development of the intellectual and industrial resources of his country, he was aware that, without political independence, an economic salvation of the country was not possible, that justice was not to be expected from foreign rulers and that, without favourable economic and administrative conditions, the pursuit of knowledge would only cause frustration of an enormous magnitude.

Ray was fully sympathetic to *all* the three types of political agitations: the constitutional approach of the Moderates (comprising protests, prayers and petitions), the non-violent non-Cooperation movements, and the movements of the revolutionaries. He had a deep affection for both Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose; in fact, he had an admiration for the political stalwarts of *all* generations from *all* the three streams, ranging from the early Moderate leaders like S. N. Banerjee and G. K. Gokhale to the firebrand patriots of later years. As he said ([9], p. 224):

I have a really high opinion of young men like Subhas, Sasmal,³ Prafulla Ghosh⁴ and those who have made sacrifices for their motherland following Tilak, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Deshabandhu and others. Such examples of self-sacrifice are great assets.

Though, being in Government service, Ray could not join the anti-Partition movement, he watched it steadily from his “recess in the laboratory” and “his heart went out to it”. From his days at the Science College, when he was freed from the shackles of Government service and when a young generation of talented scientists had already been formed, P. C. Ray’s involvement with political and nationalist movements increased. He was in regular contact with political leaders like C. R. Das. He was present at the public meeting addressed by C. R. Das at Calcutta’s

3. Birendranath Sasmal (1881-1934), a barrister, was known as ‘Deshapran’ for his sacrifices in political and social work. To give a few examples: in response to Gandhiji’s call, he left his lucrative profession to plunge into the Non-Cooperation Movement; he defended (without fees) the accused in the Chittagong Armoury Raid case; he played a pivotal role as a relief worker during the Midnapore floods of 1913, 1920, 1926 and 1933. He was a close associate of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das.

4. Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh (1891-1983), the first Chief Minister of West Bengal, was a prominent Gandhian freedom fighter and social worker. After an illustrious academic career in which he obtained the Doctorate degree from Calcutta University (1920) for his chemical research on synthetic and natural dyes, Prafulla Ghosh became the first Indian to be appointed Deputy Assay Master of the Calcutta Mint. In 1921, Dr. P. C. Ghosh resigned from this secure Government job to join the Non-Cooperation Movement. During the freedom struggle, he suffered imprisonment several times. While in jail, he wrote his highly acclaimed Bengali book *Prachin Bharatiya Sabhyatar Itihas*, a compact, insightful and informative account of the history of ancient Indian civilisation. During his student days, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh had come in contact with revolutionaries like Pulinbehari Das. He remained a bachelor and an uncompromising idealist throughout his life. In his later years Dr. P. C. Ghosh became involved in the study of Sri Aurobindo.

Town Hall in 1919 to protest the infamous Rowlatt Act. Requested to speak, Ray declared that though a man of the laboratory, there arise occasions which demand that he should leave his test-tube to attend the call of the country. During the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1924, the Acharya declared ([6], p. 228):

Science can afford to wait but Swaraj cannot.⁵

In spite of his severe health problem, P. C. Ray made frequent tours (1921-26) throughout India supporting the cause of the National Schools which had sprung up, of *khaddar*, and campaigning against untouchability. His contact with politics increasingly became so intimate that he was invited to preside over several district and provincial political conferences. However, though an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, even an advocate of the *charkha*, the Acharya had cautioned against Gandhiji's blunders like involvement with the Khilafat movement ([9], p. 96):

We must not allow our loyalty to the mother country to be swamped by the wave of extra-territorial patriotism. India must not be a spoke in the Khilafat wheel gyrated from Istanbul. The *Swaraj* of India must be our one all-compelling goal . . .

People who were close to P. C. Ray could see how he used to be touched by the bravery, determination and sacrifice of the revolutionaries. Hemendra Prasad Ghosh⁶ witnessed Ray's deep sorrow when the police discovered the bomb factory at Muraripukur⁷ and arrested its workers. "Have the police been able to arrest all the members of the party?" was the enquiry of a concerned Ray when he learnt of the police search and subsequent arrests ([9], p. 174).

It is now known that P. C. Ray used to provide shelter and other help to revolutionaries, for days. Indeed, in the Government files, his name is recorded as a "revolutionary in the garb of a scientist" ([9], p. 272). It is also said that P. C. Ray assisted revolutionaries with ideas regarding preparation of explosives; this has been

5. It is not that the frail P. C. Ray, then in his sixties, was neglecting his research work in chemistry. His research on sulphur compounds around this period appears in journals like the *Journal of the Chemical Society* (London), *Journal of the Indian Chemical Society* and *Nature* (UK).

6. Hemendra Prasad Ghosh (1876-1962) was a renowned journalist and writer. Along with Sri Aurobindo, Bepin Chandra Pal, Shyam Sundar Chakravarti and Bejoy Chatterjee, he was on the editorial staff of the *Bande Mataram*.

7. The secret bomb manufacturing factory of the group of Bengal revolutionaries led by Barindra Kumar Ghosh and Ullaskar Dutta, the discovery of which led to the historic Muraripukur Bomb Case (or Alipore Bomb Case) during 1908-09. The Government tried to implicate Sri Aurobindo and he was arrested from his residence; he was acquitted and released after a trial lasting a year. Recall that Muraripukur was also the site of P. C. Ray's first major experiment in producing a large mass of bone-ash for preparing the super phosphate of lime required for his pharmaceutical venture. (see *MI* April 2014, pp. 235-36)

reported after his death by people who were directly involved ([2], p. 53). But, as Hemendra Prasad Ghosh says ([9], p. 168), the true history of Acharya Prafulla Chandra's contribution to the Independence movement will never be told, for this history is in part the history of underground movements "which must remain necessarily a mystery hidden and lost".

The Acharya's admiration for the great "Bagha Jatin" (Jatindranath Mukherjee) is mentioned by Prithwindranath Mukherjee (grandson of Bagha Jatin) in the book *Sadhak Biplabi Jatindranath* and the article 'Mahapralay'. He writes:⁸

Police records show Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray's eagerness to distribute the *Jugantar*, informing the editor that Jatindra Mukherjee [Bagha Jatin] knew him personally.

At that juncture, the publication of *Jugantar* was managed directly by Jatindranath Mukherjee. A student of the Acharya (Bibhuti Chakrabarti) manufactured bombs under Jatindranath's leadership. In an e-mail to this author, Prithwindranath Mukherjee informs: "Thanks to Acharya's admiration for Jatindranath, several thought-leaders of the future collaborated with him: Meghnad Saha, Sailen Ghosh, Jatin Seth, Jnan Ghosh, Rasiklal Datta, Jnan Mukherjee, Sisir Mitra, Bidhu Ray, Bires Guha, Nilratan and Jibanratan Dhar."⁹ In Part II of this article, we had mentioned some of these illustrious students of the Acharya.

A few Anecdotes

Meghnad Saha, who imbibed his keen interest in ancient history and archaeology from his *guru* Acharya Ray, narrates an anecdote ([9], p. 212) which brings out P. C. Ray's sensitivity regarding the contributions of ancient Indians. Once, in an address at Lahore University, P. C. Ray was describing the chemical processes practised by ancient Indians. A young Englishman, a college teacher who had just arrived in India, was in the audience. P. C. Ray was annoyed by the sneering expression of the Englishman. After describing an ancient apparatus, Ray took in his hand a lump of *makaradhwaaja*, resublimed mercury sulphide used as a traditional Indian medicine, and which was sometimes prescribed even by European physicians. And then remarked:

8. overmanfoundation.wordpress.com/2011/10/

9. Arun Chandra Guha writes in *First Spark of Revolution* (Orient Longman (1971), p. 98): "The first batch of young scientists who gathered around Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray came almost exclusively from the ranks of the revolutionaries. Meghnad Saha, Satyendranath Bose, Jatin Sett, Sailen Ghose, Rasik Lal Dutt, Jnan Ghose, Jnan Mukherji, Sisir Mitra, Bidhu Roy, Bires Guha and others were all directly or indirectly connected with the revolutionary organisation."

Look here, my friends, with such crude apparatus, the Indians, two thousand years ago, used to prepare such a fine chemical and used it to alleviate human sufferings, and this at a time when the ancestors of our friend over there were eating raw berries and wearing raw hides.

The Englishman was to become a great admirer of Sir P. C. Ray and his other Indian friends.

We mention another episode ([9], p. 174) which shows how the Acharya protected national interests with nationalist self-respect. P. C. Ray was the patron of a tiny steamer company which owned one passenger steamer that plied on the river Kapatakhsi and served his native village. A rich European company tried various means to crush the tiny company but the Acharya's resourcefulness overcame all difficulties.¹⁰ Unable to throttle the local company, the European concern made a proposal to buy the company. An interview was arranged at the Acharya's room between the Acharya and a representative of the European company. The European representative arrived at the appointed time. The Acharya who was lying in bed, reading Macaulay's *History of England*, asked him to take his seat. When the representative broached the proposal to purchase the Indian company's vessel, the Acharya replied:

I have a counter-proposal to make. You are a big concern with hundreds of steamers serving many lines. Ours is an insignificant concern with only one vessel and serving a short line. Why not let us alone by leaving the line to us? We shall be grateful to you.

Unprepared for such a rebuff, the representative continued to argue and tried to explain that, having fought the Indian company for many years, they could not give up their line as their prestige would be at stake. The Acharya retorted:

You talk of prestige! You have come here only for exploiting the resources of the country. And what of our prestige? We are sons of the soil, the steamer serves my own village and the neighbouring villages. If we sell our concern to you the loss to our prestige will be irreparable. Do you see that?

The European representative returned, crest-fallen.

This fighting spirit can be seen in Acharya Ray even in his old age, when he had retired from public life. In 1941, the British Association for the Advancement of Science adopted a Charter of Scientific Principles in which fascism was con-

10. The reader may also recall the anecdote about the Scindia Steam Navigation Company (and the accompanying footnote) in Part IV of this article in the March issue of *Mother India*, p. 241.

demned, but not imperialism. We quote below excerpts from the letter the 80-year-old ailing Acharya wrote to Sir Richard Gregory, President of the Association ([9], p. 175):

Indian scientists would, however, take this opportunity to point out to the scientists of Britain and of other countries that the object of science for the promotion of human welfare is not only frustrated by Fascism but also by Imperialism as it operates, for instance, in India and other dependencies of Britain.

The Acharya cites instances:

Industrialisation which is essential for the prosperity and strength of a nation in the modern age has been persistently opposed and even recently the Government of India has refused to support the growth of the automobile industry in India and the Secretary of State for India has spoken in Parliament against the manufacture of internal combustion engines in this country.

Relationship with the Government

P. C. Ray never failed to condemn the glaringly unjust Government policies that were detrimental to the flowering of the efficient and meritorious Indian youth. Raw English graduates of ordinary qualifications would be appointed in the Provincial Educational Services with high salaries while experienced Indian professors of proven merit were made to rot as subordinates with relatively lower salaries. At every possible opportunity, Ray would criticise the policy, accusing the Government of squandering the poor taxpayer's money to provide employment to the undeserving unemployed from Britain. His presidential address at an annual session of the Indian Science Congress, where he made a strong articulation of his protest against the unjust Government policies, had created quite a stir at the time and was effective in advancing the cause of Science in India ([7], p. 43). He made similar tirades, in appropriate forums, against the Government apathy towards the development of Indian industries. As a member of the All-India Chemical Service Commission, he fearlessly recorded his opinions in a note of dissent.

In spite of P. C. Ray's vehement criticisms of its policies and the reports of his involvement with the revolutionaries, the British Government valued P. C. Ray as a chemist. P. C. Ray too would provide constructive suggestions to the Government when approached. In his reminiscences, Satya Sundar Deb (of Bengal Potteries) mentions ([9], p. 157) an incident showing the high esteem in which the Acharya was held by some of the British rulers. One day, while he was with the Acharya at the Science College, a large envelope was brought to the Acharya containing a

letter from the Earl of Ronaldshay, the then Governor of Bengal. It was a request to the Acharya from the Governor to meet him at the Government House at his convenience and to explain to him what is “Ghosh’s Law” (discovered by the Acharya’s illustrious student J. C. Ghosh). Again, when Lord Ronaldshay, as the Rector of the University of Calcutta, wanted to express his reservations about the University restricting itself only to post-graduate teaching (and not taking up undergraduate teaching), he made an admiring reference to P. C. Ray in a convocation speech ([7], p. 16):

But the University is handicapped in having to confine its teachings to post-graduate students. Let me illustrate what I mean. So long as the University is thus restricted, a teacher of eminence like Sir P. C. Ray has no chance of bringing his influence to bear upon any but mature students who have already obtained their degrees. That constitutes a loss . . .

The British Government bestowed on P. C. Ray honours like the Companionship of the Indian Empire (CIE)¹¹ in 1912 and the Knighthood in 1919. Unlike Tagore, Ray did not renounce the Knighthood. He felt that, while he did not have as much international stature as the Poet to make a strong impact by refusal of Knighthood, such a hasty action could jeopardise the future of the budding scientists associated with Ray; it could also be detrimental to the interest of Bengal Chemical which, in turn, would adversely affect his fellow countrymen. For a person living the life of ascetic denial, exhausting almost all his earnings in donations (as we will see in the next part), there was no question of any personal attachment to such Government awards; in his long autobiography, there is no mention of the Knighthood.¹²

It is due to the dignified cordial relation that he maintained with the Empire (though not refraining from strong criticisms), that Ray had the protective ambience where fugitive revolutionaries could seek shelter ([9], pp. 272, 279). Thanks to Ray, young men involved in the freedom movement could go abroad for higher studies in spite of adverse police reports. Bires Guha, for instance, could eventually get his passport due to the combined efforts of Acharya Ray and Sir Edward Greaves,

11. P. C. Ray was aware that the police used to keep a watch on him for his contact with the revolutionaries. It is said that, after being conferred the CIE, he once remarked to a high official of the police, in his witty style, “Now you will not be able to do anything to me. I am placed higher than you. You are CID but I am CIE.” ([4], p. 116)

12. Sunit Kumar Ghosh, a grand-nephew of P. C. Ray, mentions ([9], p. 264) that when he met the Acharya after he was titled “Knight”, the Acharya remarked that, instead of leaving him in daylight, the honourable Government wants to plunge him into the darkness of the “night”!

the then Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University.¹³

When the colonial Government resorted to an oppressive reign in Bengal, the birthplace of the Swadeshi movement in the first decade of the 20th century, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, as a member of the Legislative Council, counselled the Government to adopt a conciliatory approach. One can see from his speech how the example of a personality like P. C. Ray helped Gokhale in presenting the case for the state. Emphasising that the Bengalis are “in many respects a most remarkable people in all India” and that “they have great qualities which are sometimes lost sight of”, Gokhale said ([6], p. 124; [9], p. 168):

In almost all the walks of life open to the Indians the Bengalees are among the most distinguished. Some of the greatest social and religious reformers of recent times have come from their ranks. Of orators, journalists and politicians, Bengal possesses some of the most brilliant . . . take science or law or literature. Where will you find another scientist in all India to place by the side of Dr. J. C. Bose or Dr. P. C. Ray or a jurist like Dr. Ghose or a poet like Rabindra Nath Tagore? My Lord, these men are not mere freaks of nature. They are the highest products of

13. Bires Chandra Guha (1904-62), one of the most distinguished alumni of Calcutta University, belonged to a family of freedom fighters of Barisal — the great Aswini Kumar Datta was his maternal uncle. Inducted into the revolutionary Jugantar party at the age of 11, Bires joined the Non-Cooperation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi (1921) for which he was imprisoned for a month and expelled from Presidency College, Calcutta. Completing B.Sc. (Hons.) in Chemistry from St. Xavier’s College (1923) and M.Sc. in Organic Chemistry from Calcutta University (1925), and after a fruitful year of research in Chemistry under the guidance of Acharya Ray, Bires Guha was preparing to go to England with Tata Memorial Scholarship (1926) when his passport was cancelled due to the adverse police report.

Future events will give an idea of the historical importance of the Acharya’s successful intervention in getting Bires his passport for going abroad. After his Ph.D. and D.Sc. from London University under Sir J. C. Drummond, a leading biochemist, Guha moved (1930) to the Cambridge Biochemical Laboratory which was at the peak of its glory under the leadership of Nobel Laureate Sir F. G. Hopkins, the father of British Biochemistry. Apart from Hopkins himself, Guha interacted with a galaxy of brilliant visiting scientists including the Hungarian Nobel Laureate Szent-Györgyi and the American biochemist C. G. King (both were involved in the discovery of Vitamin C).

With such a strong foundation, Guha made life-long prolific and pioneering research on vitamins and nutrition at the Bengal Chemical (1932-35) and Calcutta University (1936-43 and from 1953 till his untimely death), shaped the Food and Nutrition policy of the Govt. of India as the Chief Technical Adviser to the Dept. of Food (from 1944), and contributed immensely to the development of biochemical research and education in India. During the devastating Bengal famine of 1943, when there was a tremendous scarcity of milk and protein, Guha saved the lives of numerous infants by his preparation of artificial vegetable milk with almost the full nutritive value of cow milk; he also prepared protein substitutes by isolating proteins from grass and leaves and demonstrated means of blending such protein with human diet. B. C. Guha was a Founding Member of the Indian Institute for Medical Research (now named Indian Institute of Chemical Biology) at Calcutta and contributed to the Damodar Valley Corporation (from 1948). Dr. Bires Guha was married to Dr. Phulrenu Guha (1911-2006), the illustrious freedom fighter and social worker, whose wise counsel and devoted guidance channelised his creative energies to research and national development. For more details on his life and work, see the article “Bires Chandra Guha — Father of modern biochemistry in India” by I. B. Chatterjee and D. P. Burma, *Current Science* Vol 87(6), 25 Sept 2004, pp. 823-30.

which the race is regularly capable; and a race of such capability cannot, I repeat, be put down by coercion.

In fact, as a veritable embodiment of the high ideals of ancient India, the life and work of P. C. Ray itself served as a reminder of the greatness of his nation. This can be seen in the numerous tributes to P. C. Ray from his international contemporaries, which eventually flow into a salutation of India! For instance, while referring to the spirit of dedication and humility in P. C. Ray, Prof. F. G. Donnan remarked ([8], p. 66):

I found then and afterwards that the words modesty and devotion could best describe the personality of Sir P. C. Ray. From the great Buddha onwards through the stream of time, these qualities of mind and spirit have ever been the characteristic of the great leaders of Indian thought and Indian ideals.

The agony of the patriot

P. C. Ray was fond of quoting the following lines of Wordsworth (cf.[6], p.411; [9], p. 82) which possibly may give us a feel for Ray's agony at the misery of the once-glorious India:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
 The earth, and every common sight
 To me did seem
 Apparell'd in celestial light,
 The glory and the freshness of a dream.
 It is not now as it hath been of yore; —
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day,
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more. . .

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
 Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

(To be continued)

AMARTYA KUMAR DUTTA

References

1. Moni Bagchee, 'Acharya Prafullachandra' (in Bengali), *Jigyasa* (1961).
2. Monoranjon Gupta, *Prafullachandra Ray: A Biography*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (1971).
3. J. Lourdasamy, *Science and National Consciousness in Bengal*, Orient Longman (2004).
4. Achintya Kumar Maity, *Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray* (in Bengali), Granthatirtha (2010).
5. Prafulla Chandra Ray, *India Before and After the Mutiny* (1886), reprinted by Readers Service (2007).
6. Prafulla Chandra Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* (Vol. 1), Chuckerverty, Chatterjee and Co., Ltd., Calcutta (1932), reprinted by The Asiatic Society, Kolkata (1996).
7. *Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray and his many-sided Activities*, Chuckerverty, Chatterjee and Co., Ltd., Calcutta (1924).
8. *Acharya Ray Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta (1932).
9. *Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray Birth Centenary Souvenir Volume*, Calcutta University (1962).

*But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more.
All can be done if the god-touch is there.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 3)

THREE WOMEN AND FOUR DESTINIES

Rereading the Life of Mrinalini Devi

Prologue

FOLLOWERS of Sri Aurobindo know that Mrinalini Devi who was preparing to come to Pondicherry, following the consent of Sri Aurobindo in 1918, fell a victim to the widespread influenza that was raging then in Bengal. We also know from the letter of Mrinalini's father Bhupal Chandra Bose that, after Sri Aurobindo's departure for Pondicherry, she had become a close disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, who addressed her affectionately as *Bau-Ma* (daughter-in-law in Bengali) since the Holy Mother regarded 'Sri Aurobindo as her son'.

The sad and sudden passing of Mrinalini Devi before her time in the 32nd year of her life on 17 December 1918, will always strike us as a particularly cruel blow delivered by the hand of destiny. She was a companion who doted on her husband, admired his steadfast sacrifice and dedication to the cause of the nation. She spent brief but memorable periods with him at various places: Baroda, Nainital and Calcutta, among others. She was blessed to have correspondence with Sri Aurobindo that revealed the inner working of his mind and consciousness. But for her, we would not have come to know of the 'madnesses'¹ as spelt out in his letters to her.

Mrinalini's father, Bhupal Chandra Bose (born 1861) graduated from Calcutta University in 1881 and, going by his own account, received an agricultural training as a State scholar at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, England. He entered Government service in 1888 and served as an Agricultural Officer for 28 years in Bengal and Assam before retiring in 1916. He settled down at Ranchi after his retirement.

Mrinalini was born on 6 March 1887 in Calcutta, and spent her childhood there. She received her early education from a private tutor, and after her father's transfer to Shillong was sent to the Brahmo School at Calcutta where she lived as a boarder until the time of her marriage. At the school she became a close friend of

1. A reference to a letter by Sri Aurobindo (30 August, 1905) in which he refers to his three madnesses: 1) "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. The rest must be returned to God." 2) ". . . by whatever means I must have the direct vision of God." 3) ". . . while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter — a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers — 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."

Miss Swarnalata Das, several years her senior in age. Mrinalini's second close friend, in later life, was Miss Sudhira Bose, later known as Sister Sudhira in the Sri Ramakrishna Circles, who worked as a teacher at the Sister Nivedita School, Calcutta.

As Bhupal Chandra Bose recounts in his 'Reminiscences', Sri Aurobindo first met Mrinalini at the house of her uncle S. J. Girish Chandra Bose in Calcutta. The marriage took place in April 1901. She spent time with Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, and later with his maternal relatives at Deoghar [now in Jharkhand], and with her parents at Shillong [now in Meghalaya]. She was present with her husband at the time of his arrest at 48, Grey Street in May 1908 and always aspired to join Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. Alas, that was not to be. Fate willed otherwise.

After her passing, following her wish, her mentor at Calcutta, Sister Sudhira disposed of her ornaments. The proceeds of roughly 2000 Rupees, with Sri Aurobindo's permission, were made into a trust for the education of poor and destitute girls. Some items, intimate in nature, were sent to Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry.

Mrinalini who shares the same name as that of the spouse of Tagore, remains for her qualities of the head and heart, and her sense of unflinching dedication, a highly revered figure in the Aurobindonean circles. This is not to minimise the world of human sorrow, longing and loss that must have been her constant companion in life. After all, even the Avatars go through human ordeals of pain and suffering as the inescapable part of the human condition.

To understand Mrinalini Devi better we need to turn our attention to three small books that I would like to recommend to fellow seekers. These are: *Nivedita As I Saw Her* by Sarala Bala Sarkar, first published in 1914, rpt. 1999; *Sister Nivedita Girls' School*, Calcutta; secondly, *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother: Life and Teachings* by Swami Tapasyananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; and finally, *Sister Sudhira* by Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana. All three personalities played a crucial role in the life of Mrinalini Devi. They were mentors who were a source of inspiration to her. By the ideals they cherished and by the conduct of their daily life, they sustained Mrinalini as she must have battled her aloneness and longings steadfastly. Sri Sarada Devi and Nivedita certainly offer us the example of the ideal. Outstanding women as both were, though perhaps not of the same ranking, both took inspiration from Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and carved out a path for themselves.

Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother

We learn from Swami Tapasyananda's book that Sarada Devi was born on 22 December 1853 in a poor but cultured Brahmin family of Bengal in the village of Jayarambati in Bankura district, situated about sixty miles to the west of Calcutta.²

2. Swami Tapasyananda. *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother: Life and Teachings*, p. 1. Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2009.

She was the eldest daughter of Ramachandra Mukherjee and Shyamsundari Devi. She had no formal schooling and taught herself to read and write Bengali in later years. She got married to Gadadhar, as Sri Ramakrishna was known then. A child bride, she grew up in the village and at the age of eighteen, accompanied by her father, in March 1872, travelled to Dakshineswar Temple at Calcutta to meet the ailing Sri Ramakrishna. Barring brief intervals, she remained by his side till the Master passed away in 1886. Swami Tapasyananda sums up her character thus:

The type of personality into which she was shaped through that training was one characterised by inexhaustible patience and peace, extreme simplicity combined with dignity, a non-turbulent but compelling spiritual fervour, a loving temperament that knew no distinction between friend and foe, and a maternal attitude of a spontaneous type towards all that charmed and brought under her influence everyone who came near her.³

She lived in ‘a small room in the northern side of the temple compound’, with a clear view of Sri Ramakrishna’s room. It was a ‘small low-roofed room of about nine and a half feet by eight with a verandah four and a quarter feet wide surrounding it. Besides being her living room, it served as her provision store, kitchen and reception room as well.’⁴

We go through several sections of the book such as ‘Spiritual and Secular Training’, ‘The Mother as a True Sahadharmini’, ‘The Shodosi Pooja’, ‘Relationship of Mutual Love and Respect’, ‘Pilgrimage to Brindavan’ [after the Master’s passing], ‘Life at Kamarpukur and After’, ‘The Exalted State of the Mother’s Mind’, ‘Pilgrimage to Rameswaram’, and see the remarkable manner in which Sri Sarada Devi led her life in a selfless manner, gave succour and initiation to the many who sought her out as their Guru and mentor. It is this heavenly personality that gave spiritual succour to Mrinalini Devi in her time of need.

Sister Nivedita

Next comes *Nivedita As I Saw Her* by Sarala Bala Sarkar, translated into English by Probhati Mukherjee. The book was earlier serialised in *Samvit*, the journal of Sri Sarada Math and is closely associated with the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission’s Sister Nivedita Girls’ School. Saralabala had close contacts with Sister Nivedita on account of her association with the School founded by her mentor. She had in this book presented, in her own words, an intimate portrait of the Sister’s life.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Sarala Bala writes that right from the time Nivedita came to India in January 1898 till 13 October 1911 when she left the world, her one purpose in life was to take care of the poor, needy and the destitute. Her compassionate self knew that no progress of India was possible without the welfare and upliftment of Indian women. One of the main tasks she took up was to see that young girls and women grew up with ‘truth, friendliness and noble ideals.’ She took up a vow of renunciation and completely abandoned all sense of self. Aptly named ‘Nivedita,’ (the Dedicated One), she started a small school in Bosepara Lane. She lived here with Sister Christine and carried out her mission.

Nivedita identified principally four sets of people who stood for the transformation of India: ‘social progressives’ who seek ‘the destruction of ancient social customs’, ‘political activists’ who advocate the ‘adoption of a western political system’, the third who believe in the need to ‘revitalise the various religious centres’ and the fourth who enunciate the removal of economic grievances from the body politic. Nivedita suggests that beyond all the four lay the question of the resurgence of Indian culture, a new renaissance that is all-inclusive and would embrace all sections of Indian society. Two things, she said, were necessary to carry this out: an intense love for the motherland and a love for every Indian irrespective of caste, creed or community. Next came the importance of education that seeks ‘the enhancement of our innate abilities through self-effort’, and through sacrifice without a sense of egoism or desire. She wrote: ‘For the person in whose heart knowledge reigns, education is no longer a process of acquiring external information; it becomes an inner experience of that which was previously not experienced.’⁵ Nivedita was convinced that her school would be the nucleus for the right kind of education for Indian women. She welcomed girls of all backgrounds.

Nivedita’s views are well captured in two of her books, *The Web of Indian Life* and *The Master as I Saw Him*. She ran the school with Sister Christine and Sudhira Devi. She gave preference to the running of the school and minimised all personal expenses. This took a toll on her and she became anaemic day by day. The school faced a financial crunch and when no funds came despite her best efforts and despite public appeals in the press, she was finally forced to close it down. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his article, ‘Sister Nivedita’ that ‘she did not maintain the school on funds received either from the public or from excess money. It was run completely on her sacrificing her own means of existence.’⁶

Art, mathematics, history, flower painting, *alpana*, clay modelling — Nivedita taught all these with devotion to the young girls. Her classroom addresses were direct and inspired. As Sarala Bala recalls:

5. Sarala Bala Sarkar. *Nivedita As I Saw Her* (Translated into English by Probhati Mukherjee) p. 15. Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls’ School, 1999.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

How often have we seen Nivedita in deep absorption at some thought! If any talk of India arose, she would become deeply meditative and say to the girls, “Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Mother! Mother! Mother! India’s young girls, you must all repeat, Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Ma! Ma! Ma!” That India was the soul of her soul, the heart of her heart, even so dear and sacred to her, it cannot be expressed in mere words.⁷

Nivedita was fond of the Bengali language. One day she asked the students to state the word, ‘line’ in Bengali. She was disappointed when none could reply until one came forward with the word ‘*rekha*’. Her joy knew no bounds. She started repeating the word over and over again, ‘*rekha, rekha, rekha*’.⁸ She took the students on excursion to nearby places including to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and the museums. She narrated to them the stories of her visit to pilgrim places like Badrinath and Kedarnath.

Although Nivedita spoke of the importance of conjugal love and the responsibility of the wife, she underlined the fact that the devoted wife Gandhari never compromised ethical principles. Gandhari did not say to Duryodhana, “May you be victorious, my son.” Instead, she said, “Where there is dharma, there is victory.” Nivedita signed her name invariably as ‘Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.’

When Sri Sarada Devi came to visit the *Udbodhan House* in Bagh Bazar, Calcutta, Nivedita used to be overjoyed. Visits by the Holy Mother to her school were special occasions that drew the best in her. With the passing of Nivedita, Sister Christine managed the affairs of the school and continued to face a great deal of hardships. The latter passed away on 27 March 1930 in New York.

Sister Sudhira

At the instance of Sister Nivedita and Swami Vivekananda, the ‘Ramakrishna School for Girls’ was opened at No. 16, Bosepara Lane, near Sri Sarada Devi’s residence near Bagh Bazar.

The daughter of Ashutosh Bose and Elokshi Devi of aristocratic background, Sudhira had three sisters and two brothers, her eldest brother Devabrata became a revolutionary and later became a disciple of Sri Sarada Devi. He edited the Bengali monthly, *Udbodhan* for a few years. He later joined the Advaita Ashram of Mayavati in the Himalayas and became the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, the official journal of the Ramakrishna order. He encouraged Sudhira to be an independent and self-

7. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

8. *Sister Sudhira*, p. 31.

respecting girl. Not interested in marriage, she joined the Nivedita School near Bagh Bazar in Calcutta in 1906 when she was about sixteen or seventeen.

From the Advaita Ashram he wrote to his sister:

You need a lot of patience and faith in yourself. You have to nourish love. How? Making your heart vast by faith and patience, always and everywhere, make a strong inward resolution that in any case 'I will love'; whether or not I receive, I will give it. When going about my daily work with every breath, I will love, come what may. Don't pay attention to whether anything happens as a result, from all you hear about. Power or Samadhi or self-knowledge, love is the only thing that matters. Love is the only thing to get.⁹

A number of revolutionaries were inspired by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda order. Many of them, including Jivantara, Nalinikanta Kar, Devabrata and others, received the spiritual sustenance for carrying out nationalist activities from the Ramakrishna Mission.

Sudhira had a special relationship with the Holy Mother: Sri Sarada Devi always enquired about Sudhira's welfare as she did of Mrinalini. Sudhira did her best to earn extra money by giving singing lessons to rich households. Thus she spent the money for the upkeep of her girls in the school. Speaking of Sri Sarada Devi, Sudhira wrote in a letter:

How can I tell you who Holy Mother is? Thinking of her one feels as though one has entered heaven. When we are Mother's daughters, what have we to fear? Her strength is working in us. We are fortunate that we have got a place at her holy feet. Yogis and devotees do so many austerities to get her Darshan; while we just by her grace have come to be known as her daughters. Indeed, it is only by her grace that we have become worthy of being her daughters.¹⁰

Sudhira's association with Mrinalini Devi forms a significant chapter in her life. She knew Mrinalini as her neighbour in her childhood days at Hatibagan. At the time of Sri Aurobindo's arrest by the police, it was Sudhira who came to Mrinalini's rescue in 1908. Sudhira would take Mrinalini to Nivedita's school and she would be treated very well by the children as the revered wife of Sri Aurobindo.

Introduced to Ma Sarada Devi, Mrinalini was welcomed most enthusiastically by the Holy Mother. She said to Mrinalini:

9. Some of the page references are not given in the book.

10. Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana. *Sister Sudhira*, p. 39. Calcutta: Sri Sarada Math, 2012.

Do not be restless my child; it is no use being anxious. Your husband has totally taken refuge in God. By Thakur's blessings he will be out [from jail] since he will be found not guilty. But don't insist that he should have a family life. That small mindedness is not for him.¹¹

Sri Sarada Devi advised her to always read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and visit her regularly. She thought that no initiation was necessary since Mrinalini was already under the guidance of Aurobindo.

Mrinalini visited Sri Aurobindo in jail in the company of her father. The letters that Sudhira exchanged with Mrinalini throw light on their close bonding and the importance both attached to spiritual guidance in life.

In her letter dated 30 July 1910, for instance, addressed to Menu (Mrinalini) after Sri Aurobindo had reached Pondicherry, Sudhira reflects upon the need to set up an Ashram under the guidance of Sri Sarada Devi for spiritual-minded women. A letter written from Benares speaks of her own spiritual growth and advises Menu to be in constant touch with Holy Mother in a spirit of surrender.¹² Sudhira helped many young women like Parul to escape from their painful lives of being child brides and to seek refuge in the Nivedita School.

Sudhira and Christina developed some differences with Nivedita regarding the running of the school. On 13 April 1911, Christina left for Mayavati in the Himalayas.¹³ Despite Nivedita's entreaties, Sudhira did not return to the school as can be made out from Nivedita's diary notings dated 18 July and 1 September 1911. Soon Nivedita left for Darjeeling to improve her health. In October 1911, succumbing to her illness, she passed away at Darjeeling. Full of remorse, Sudhira fell ill. Ma Sarada Devi took personal care to see that Sudhira recovered and travelled to Benaras, Mathura and Brindavan on pilgrimage. All the while, she remained true to Sri Ramakrishna. Later she travelled to Shimla and stayed for a while with her brother Priyavrata.

In 1914, with the support of the trustees of the Belur Math, a boarding house for women called the Matri Mandir was set up in 1914 at a rented building at 68/2, Ramakanta Bose Street. The boarding was home to young women who wished to dedicate their lives for the spiritual cause. Ma Sarada Devi stayed here for a month in a room upstairs. The building was an attempt to build a Math for women.

In 1917, Sudhira took the initiative for setting up an old Women's section at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service in Benares. In 1918, Nivedita's school became a part of what came to be known as the Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School. In 1919, Sudhira was asked to start a girls' school in Comilla in East

11. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Bengal. Similar schools were set up in Hatibagan and Bally in Hooghly. These became the nucleus for the future Sarada Math of the Ramakrishna order.

In 1918, Sudhira lost two of her closest friends: Devabrata and Mrinalini. Devabrata passed away at the young age of 39. Mrinalini was given permission by Sri Aurobindo in 1918 to come to Pondicherry, when she suddenly fell ill. Realising that her end was near, she handed over her jewellery to Sudhira for the creation of a trust for girls' scholarship to a poor student of the Nivedita Girls' School. Meanwhile, Ma Sarada Devi too fell ill and passed away on 21 July 1920.

The Holy Mother's departure was a big loss for Sudhira. On a journey to Benares, the latter met with an accident and fell from the train. Despite the best medical treatment at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service at Benares, she left the earthly abode at the age of 32.

Epilogue

Thus, the lives and destinies of three outstanding women in colonial Bengal intertwined with each other through divine dispensation. They were three iconic women who carved out paths for themselves in the field of education, women's emancipation and spirituality in colonial Bengal. As has been noticed, each of them also played a pivotal role in the life of Mrinalini Devi. Through the example of their lives and through their teachings, they inspired Mrinalini to live a life of courage and fortitude. Rereading Mrinalini's life through the prism of the three narratives thus gives us insights hitherto unavailable; they add new meaning to the lives of outstanding spiritual women.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

Note: Readers will benefit greatly by reading Nirodbaran's excellent address (later published in the book form, *Mrinalini Devi: A Talk*) delivered on the occasion of Mrinalini Devi's Birth Centenary.

Sincere thanks to the Principal of the Sister Nivedita School, Kolkata for gifting me the book on Sister Sudhira; to Anurag Banerjee of the Overman Foundation, Kolkata and Anuradha of the The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi for going through the text and making useful suggestions.

LALITA, THE FRIEND OF SRI RADHA

[Note: I have compiled this reminiscence based on several interviews with Lalita in 1979. This is her story, although the language and the arrangement are mine. — SK]

I CANNOT truthfully say which was my most memorable moment with the Mother. This is because all of us who had lived in the Ashram in those early days have known many such moments. There were only a few of us at that time, and we enjoyed a rare intimacy with her.

I give some instances below which have left an indelible mark on my consciousness, and which may perhaps be of interest to others who came later.

It was in February 1928, the occasion was my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. On the eve of Darshan day, the Mother called me in the morning to the Meditation Hall upstairs and after a few words, she slipped a string of pearls over my head. Then she gave me a pale-gold satin sari with a border of gold and silver sequins. The sari was quite new; I had offered it to her soon after my arrival in the Ashram on December 16th, 1927.

“You must wear these when you come tomorrow for Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan,” she said with her charming smile.

“Wear these Mother?” I asked in astonishment. “But why?” I had been looking forward to wearing a simple cotton sari like the other sadhikas.

“Because it is my wish,” answered the Mother and smiled as only she could.

I did not know what more to say, for if such was her wish, I would certainly obey. I fell at her feet and embraced them with all my heart’s love.

*

A couple of months after this the Mother called me and asked if I knew manicuring. I said, “Yes, Mother,” because I knew it only too well.

“Then you will come on Friday and manicure my nails,” she said.

Thus every Friday became a heavenly day for me, the fragrant memory of which is impossible to forget.

At that time there was only one storey atop the Ashram building and everything took place either on the ground floor or the first floor. The second storey came much later. At the end of the Meditation Hall there is the small room which was then used by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for giving Darshan. Against the wall of this room there was a couch with some cushions. Mother used to sit on this couch with her legs stretched out in front of her, and I used to sit quite close to her on the carpet.

She would give me one of her hands as well as the manicuring articles, then closing her eyes she would gradually go into a deep trance.

After finishing her nails of that hand, I would sit very still, holding her hand, till she came out of trance. Then with a sweet smile, she would give me her other hand and while I was doing it, she would recount to me her vision or experience if it had anything to do with me. I learned a great deal from her in this way, even about my past lives when I had been with her.

If I had anything to ask or to say to her, this was my chance to do so. Still, I rarely bothered her with questions. When I told her that I did not seem to know much about yoga or real sadhana, she only smiled and assured me that it was she who was doing the sadhana and so I was not to worry about it.

Time was of no consequence in those golden days, and just as she had written in her *Prayers and Meditations*, “And the hours pass away like dreams un-lived.”

After the manicure was over and I had made my pranam to her, she would lead me to the door of the Meditation Hall, holding me so close to her at times, with her hand round my waist and mine round hers. We were just two very intimate friends, or rather she was Radha and I was her companion Lalita, as Sri Aurobindo had written when he so graciously changed my name.

Then Mother would open the door and let me out, with a sweet, “*Au revoir*” or a kiss on my forehead.

How could I forget these moments? I would go home in a trance of ecstasy and live in their memory till the next Friday came again.

People wondered why I never spoke to anybody, never even cared to look at or want to know anybody. My sweet and dearest Mother was everything to me and I had no need of anything else.

Those were the days when our sadhana was on the higher planes. But then she became very ill and everything had to be changed after that.

*

Somebody had written some very nasty things about me to Mother or Sri Aurobindo. And as was her habit, she had told me about it. I do not remember who it was. But a strange thing happened soon after.

The very person who had complained about me had to seek my assistance to convey something to the Mother. And I was requested to pray for her kind intervention.

“What?” said the Mother in surprise when I spoke to her about it. “He said those bad things about you, and now you come to ask me to help him?”

“Oh!” I said, “I had forgotten that completely.”

Mother was so pleased to hear this that her whole face lit up with a wondrous sweetness which I have never forgotten. “This is the right thing to do, my child,”

she said. “You must never nurse a grudge or ill-feeling against anybody,” and it made me feel very happy.

*

It was my birthday, but I do not remember which year it was. At that time there was a lot of talk about fairies in the Ashram because there was an English lady, Miss Maitland, with us who was said to be in communion with a fairy. I was very interested; I could not understand how fairies could live with people. So when I went to the Mother on my birthday and the topic came up, I asked her about it. I told her that since my childhood I had felt the presence of fairies, especially in the garden of the Town Hall where we were living because my father was its custodian. But as I grew up, I dismissed this feeling as childhood imagination and fancy. But it never left me completely, and whenever I was alone and among trees and flowers, on hillsides or in forests, something opened like a flower in me. Then a part of me seemed to jump out and dance and play among the trees and flowers. When I was small and if nobody was looking, I would run and dance among the trees and flowers and bathe in waterfalls and enjoy myself greatly. But my mother was very orthodox, and never approved of a young girl indulging in such things. So I had to be alone. After I joined the Ashram many years later, I was suddenly awakened from my sleep one night by a gentle knocking on my door — rat-a-tat-tat! was what I heard and I saw small creatures making this noise and enjoying themselves. But when they found that I had awakened they ran away. “Could these be fairies, Mother dear?” I asked.

“Yes,” Mother answered, “but there are fairies of two kinds: those that are playful and mischievous, and those that are helpful. The latter can even arrange a drawer for you if you ask them. But it is not easy to keep their presence. You must be free of all low movements. You must have a harmonious being, full of beautiful thoughts and feelings. The slightest discord will drive them away. And as for vulgarity, they can never stand it. Refinement is essential if you want them to come near. Ugliness will drive them away. That is why they live far away from human habitation and close to nature.”

“Does everybody feel as I did Mother?” I asked. “Whenever I have told people about it, they looked at me in such a way as to say, ‘You seem to be a bit queer in the head.’”

Mother laughed and said that I felt like that because the origin of my being was in fairyland. But as fairies have no evolving psychic beings, they have to combine with a suitable psychic being if they want to approach the Divine.

I was very excited to hear this, but the Mother warned me not to go and tell everybody about it. Besides, what are gnomes and fairies now when we have to concentrate on the Divine, and on changing ourselves! But these little creatures did not leave me for a long time. Whenever I was alone and doing some stitching or

embroidery for our dearest Mother, they would be near me, hiding my thread or needle or scissors. And one day I asked Mother whether they actually carried away these articles somewhere to hide them from me. “No,” she said, “they merely put a veil of obscurity over them so that you cannot see them. The next time they do this, you just say loudly, ‘I will tell Mother about this,’ and they will stop teasing you.” And that is just what I did, and they disappeared gradually after that.

Later, as the years passed, I understood why Mother had told me what she did, and it helped me greatly to understand certain movements in my nature which would have otherwise worried me and caused some distress. I was always very grateful to her for this clarification.

*

When it was decided that I must leave the Ashram for some time, because of circumstances beyond my control and also because of the necessity of working out certain things in me that were a great obstacle to my progress, the Mother was extremely gracious to me. At the time of my departure, I was all alone with her in her dressing room where I used to work. Mother came and placed round my neck a garland of *tulsi* beads, just as she had placed a string of pearls round my neck at the time of my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo.

“Since you must go,” she said, “you must go like a crusader, carrying the torch of Truth with you. Keep it burning always, and do not let it be extinguished.”

“Yes, Mother,” I said sobbing, for it was very difficult to leave her. Then I made my pranam to her; and when I rose, I saw for the first time some tears in Mother’s eyes. They were not because of the parting, but because she could see what great suffering was in store for me, a thing about which I was totally ignorant. Such was her unbounded love.

“If you stay there for good,” she said, “your soul will leave the body.” Then I begged of her never to forget me. And she said, “That is not possible, my child.” And throughout my time outside the Ashram, she has constantly kept me in touch with her, and so has my Lord, Sri Aurobindo.

My soul did on several occasions try to leave the body, just as Mother had said. And each time she was informed about it, it was made to continue its earthly experience by which it has greatly profited. And no matter what I may say or do, I can never be sufficiently grateful to my beloved Divine parents for this.

*

In those early days I used to prepare some *ragi* biscuits for Sri Aurobindo and take them to Mother at four o’clock in the afternoon. This was also a chance for me to ask her anything I wanted to know. So one day I said to her, “Mother dear, I have

a bad cold.”

“Ah!” Mother said in surprise. Then smiling sweetly she added, “You are in good company, Sri Aurobindo also has a cold.”

We both laughed at this, and then I asked, “But what is the remedy?”

“Oh, the remedy,” Mother said, and was silent for a long moment. Then looking far away she continued, “Every morning after your bath, sit in front of an open window with the sunlight falling over your body, and pray to the Lord like this, ‘Fill my being with Thy Light.’ Then draw in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Next, say, ‘Fill my being with Thy Love,’ and repeat the breathing exercise. Then lastly say, ‘Fill my being with Thy Life,’ and once again breathe like this.” The Mother demonstrated it to me. “And your cold will disappear in no time.”

I was very happy to learn this, and I never doubted the Mother’s word at any time. So the very next morning I started with this wonderful remedy, and indeed my cold was cured very rapidly.

*

One day Mother said to me, “You must not keep thinking of your past. Whatever you said or did, or whatever you were in the past is of no importance now. And it must be left behind and forgotten. What matters now is the future. Look always in front of you, and not behind. Think of the glorious future that has to be, and not of the dead past.”

“But how shall I make this a living thing in my daily life? Is it only by throwing away the past in all my thoughts?” I asked.

“Well, that is a way. But here is another. When you take your bath every morning,” she said, “tell yourself that with each mug full of water that you pour over your body, you are washing away the past. And finally when you come out of your bath, say to yourself, ‘I am a new being. I am reborn.’ If you do this everyday with sincerity, you will soon forget what you were, and strive to be what you must become.”

After this I followed my beloved Mother’s advice and threw away my past in such a way that I could not remember many things. And people were surprised at the loss of my memory. But what did things or people matter to me? The only thing that mattered was my sadhana, and the way that my sweet Mother wanted me to do it.

*

Shortly after my arrival at the Ashram in 1927, I told Mother that I was very much attached to a cup of tea first thing in the morning. “Is that so?” Mother said, “then wait a minute.” She went inside and brought and gave me a fine box of tea.

“Take this and make use of it.”

I was very very surprised, for I thought that Mother would give me a scolding which would help me to get over this attachment. But the Divine has its own ways of curing us.

I took the box home and said to myself that I would open and use it when necessary. Day after day passed but I felt no desire to have any more tea. Still I kept the box with me, in case I felt that craving once again. But it seemed to have disappeared for good, so I finally took the box back to Mother and gave it to her saying, “Mother dear, you seem to have taken away the desire for the cup of tea in the morning, which was so essential to me once. So I have brought this back to you.”

Mother was very pleased to hear this and with one of her sweetest smiles she said, “When I give something like this to a person, I also give the power to overcome the attachment. And I am glad you were able to do it.”

I fell at her feet and embraced them with all my love and gratitude.

*

One day I was very upset about something. I don't remember what it was, but evidently it was something trivial. So when I went to Mother that afternoon, I told her all about it, and probably shed a few tears also.

The Mother was surprised to see me in this most unyogic condition, but being so sweet and compassionate, she did not scold me. She only smiled and said after a while, “My dear child, the next time you feel like this, go and sit on the sands of the seashore in the evening. Look at the vast expanse of water in front of you. See how it stretches to the far horizon. Watch the hundreds of waves which come playfully to the shore, and then recede. Let your consciousness become as wide as the ocean.

“Then look up at the great expanse of sky above you. Think of the infinity of space in which the stars move. Each star is a world by itself, and there are millions and millions of them. They are so far away that it has taken hundreds of years for their light to reach us. And you know how great is the speed of light!

“You must have noticed the Milky Way in the sky. How many stars are there that we have seen? And how many millions of them which perhaps we shall never see even with our latest telescopes!

“Think of all these wonders in time and space which are nothing but a small part of the infinite manifestation of the Divine. And He is so much greater than all this, He whom we are here to realise, and with whom we have to unite in consciousness. Just think of all this and you will soon feel the absurdity of your small troubles and forget them.”

I felt so uplifted to hear all this from our sweet Mother that I forgot my troubles and even laughed at them. And Mother was very pleased and sent me away with her

Blessings and a bouquet of tiny roses the significance of which is ‘*Tendresse*’.

From that very evening, I did exactly what I was told. I not only sat at the seashore, but stretched myself on the sands and gazed at the beautiful stars overhead (for at that time, there was quite a bit of sand on the seashore, the sea was not so close as it is today). And as I gazed at the stars day after day, a strange thing happened. I saw them moving in the skies. They were moving at a fast pace, yet so harmoniously. And so vast was the space that separated them, that the movement seemed to make very little difference to their positions. I looked again and again to make sure that I was not imagining things, but they were distinctly moving.

*

I once asked Mother how I could speak of loving others when my love was given to the Divine.

Mother looked up. She was silent for a moment and then said, “You know how the Christians have a way of saying ‘love in Christ’? So, you can also say, ‘love in the Mother’.”

Thereafter I have had no problem. For me it is one Love, the Mother’s Love, and I share it with all. In loving, I emanate Mother’s Love, and in loving others I love the Mother in them.

SHYAM KUMARI

LIFT ME HIGH

Lift me high and still more high,
Such is my heart’s perennial cry.

Beyond this swirl and grind of things
Raise me upon soul’s luminous wings.

Let me breathe an air divine
For which all day and night I pine.

I would in silent rapture move
Above life’s long and ignorant groove.

Pull me beyond all mortal yearning —
A flame of prayer within me burning.

Lalita

(*Lift me High* — *Poems by Lalita*, All India Press, Pondicherry, 1977, p. 1)

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of March 2014)

VIII

THE next group of figures to be taken up will be the ones based on construction. These are specially applicable to prose of all kinds. The trouble is, there are so many of them. Even after omitting quite a few I find nine on my list. All of these can be found in our writer. In fact that is the reason I have selected them. Besides these, there are some more which I shall discuss under the head 'miscellaneous'. The list goes like this:

Climax, Anti-climax or Bathos,
Rhetorical Question or Interrogation or Adjuration,
Hyperbaton or Inversion, Syllepsis,
Isocolon or parallelism.
Parison, Enthymeme, Polypoton.

We are all familiar with climax — the arrangement of words, phrases or clauses in ascending order of importance. The stock example is the sentence "*Veni, vidi, vici*" (I came, I saw, I conquered) which is usually ascribed to Julius Caesar though actually it had been said by Pompey. The sentence also contains an asyndeton, which is another figure that can be put within this group, and, of course, alliteration.

The reader might remember that Demetrius has given us a fourth kind of prose style, the Forcible. When discussing this variety he takes climax as a figure of speech conducive to this style. We find many examples in our writer. When dealing with metaphors we had come across a sentence to which we were to return. Let us do so now. The topic is rhymed verse — verse, not poetry:

. . . it is nothing more than an effective jog-trot of Pegasus, a pleasant canter or a showy gallop.¹

So the divine horse starts with a jog-trot, speeds up to a canter and finally takes our breath away with a showy gallop and we have the figure of speech: 'climax'. In a more serious vein, here is a full sentence:

1. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), pp. 26-27.

Live in his being, shine with his light, act with his power, rejoice with his bliss.²

Prose artists tend to arrange words in groups of three leading towards a climax. In the example just quoted, there are four units! When reading this book I am constantly lost in admiration of the style while other things may pass over my head.

Anti-climax, as the name implies, is the opposite of climax. Here words and phrases are arranged in an order of descending importance; this is intended to produce ridicule or humour. But when the anti-climactic effect is not intended, what we have is called Bathos. Our writer is too consummate an artist to be bathetic (as Wordsworth often is). Whenever he uses anti-climax it is done deliberately:

It is beautiful poetry; it satisfies the aesthetic sense, the imagination and the ear; but there the charm ends.³

The middle part of the sentence contains an anti-climactic arrangement (“the ear” coming last), but it is the last damning clause that produces the true anti-climactic effect. Again, more seriously:

Be free in thyself, and therefore free in thy mind, free in thy life and thy body.⁴

In this sentence the arrangement may seem to be anti-climactic, with the least important coming the last. But if one keeps in mind the idea of transformation of the body, we are better placed to grasp the meaning, so no contempt or scorn is implied. Now look at this sentence:

Be one with God and all beings; live in thyself and not in thy little ego.⁵

Here is the advice of the *mukta purusa*, an exhortation to be free of the bondage of the ego, the terms in descending order are God, all beings, thyself and finally the ego, that petty thing that needs to be cast away.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

2. *The Hour of God*, p. 11.

3. *The Future Poetry*, p. 27.

4. *The Hour of God*, p. 9.

5. *Ibid.*

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of March 2014)

7. Homage to Legendary Women

INDIA is rich in epic heroines. They are all on such a high pedestal that we cannot but worship them. Even minor heroines like Sukanya and Dhanyamalini exude a rare grace in their appearances. India does not elevate to the status of a heroine women who exhibit any bad quality or commit acts of moral turpitude. This is the lesson I learnt from childhood onwards and much, much later it would culminate in getting introduced to Savitri, the self-empowered heroine of Sri Aurobindo.

But even as a student when the spiritual heroine of Sri Aurobindo was not known to me (I knew only the *Mahabharata* legend), Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* made me wince. It was all no doubt interesting, new tales always capture the imagination of a teenager, and here were dramas to sigh over, dream about and get nightmarish visions at times. For a wanderer in the classical literatures of the West topped off by Chaucer and Shakespeare, a fascination for these ancient women was natural, and now we know why Sri Aurobindo wrote in his letter dedicating *Love and Death* to Manmohan Ghose which contains a fascinating comparative study of legends from Greece and India. Of course ancient Europe had given great heroes and heroines, but surely Manmohan Ghose cannot dismiss the Indian characters as "lifeless patterns of moral excellence"! Sri Aurobindo writes:

I who have read their tale in the swift and mighty language of Valmekie and Vyasa and thrilled with their joys and their sorrows, cannot persuade myself that it is so. Surely Savitrie that strong silent heart, with her powerful and subtly-indicated personality, has both life and charm; surely Rama puts too much divine fire into all he does to be a dead thing, — Sita is too gracious and sweet, too full of human lovingness and lovable-ness, of womanly weakness and womanly strength! Ruaru and Priyumvada are also types and ideals; love in them, such is the idea, finds not only its crowning exaltation but that perfect *idea* of itself of which every existing love is a partial and not quite successful manifestation.¹

From this (written in the closing years of the 19th century) we can imagine the amount of in-depth reading Sri Aurobindo must have achieved as a student in Eng-

1. *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 131-32.

land. For the likes of me who was as far away from England as from Greek and Latin literature, *The Legend of Good Women* was welcome reading. But the heroines, were they 'good women' by my standards of upbringing on the *Ramayana-Mahabharata*? For "this work is all drawn out of another cask, of ancient story".

It is a dream vision again, and the chaste heroine Alceste and the God of Love command Chaucer to describe some great heroines. Both of them are in gorgeous garments. Alceste may be described as the Greek Savitri. Alceste and the God are followed by several women. These are the 'good women'; but Alceste is the best of all, is the refrain: "Alceste comes, who makes all this pale and vain." Then the God of Love notes the presence of Chaucer and reprimands him for describing women in a poor light. Hasn't he written a poem on Troilus and Cressyde? How can anybody revile these women? They were also good in their own light:

For they were so true to their love that, rather than take a new mate, they chose death in various manners, and died just as the story will relate. Some were burned, some had their throats cut, and some were drowned, because they would not be false. For they all kept their maidenhood, or else widowhood or wedlock. And this was not done for devoutness, but for true virtue and purity, and so that men should put no blame on them. And yet they were heathen, all of them, who so sorely dreaded all disgrace. These women of old so guarded their good name that I believe men shall not find in this world a man who could be so true and kind as was the least woman in those days.²

I guess Chaucer has a point. Anyway, having obtained Alceste's blessing, Chaucer begins with Cleopatra of Egypt. She who was "as fair as the rose of May" desired the Roman hero Antony and he reciprocated her love. There were complications. Antony had married the great Caesar's sister. Now he deserted her for Cleopatra.

Octavian came in leading the Roman army and Antony was defeated. He committed suicide. Cleopatra's love, however, would not let her accept the situation. She had Antony's body embalmed and placed it in a shrine. Next to the hearse she dug a pit and filled it with snakes. Having announced that she could never give up her love for Antony, she leapt into the pit cheerfully and was stung to death. Chaucer adds with finesse that "this is truth of history; it is no fable."

Next in the list is Thisbe and Pyramus and Chaucer says he is retelling Ovid in this case. They could not even meet for a thick wall was raised between them and our poet inserts a live image: "Cover the coals and the fire is hotter; forbid love, and it is ten times as raging." They decide to elope and die in a tragic situation not unlike that of Romeo and Juliet. We get to have a slightly merrier legend in the next 'good

2. Translations from *The Legend of Good Women* cited in the article are by Gerard NeCastro.

woman', Dido of Carthage. A tragedy, again, from the *Aeneid*. Though 'love' is used in season and out of season by Chaucer, what it all boils down to is not much different from mere physical passion. After the fall of Troy Aeneas fled his native land, begins Chaucer, taking us to the narrative of Virgil. Aeneas came to Carthage ruled over by its founder-queen, the beautiful Dido. She pitied that so noble a hero should be now a helpless wanderer. "Before long her heart pitied his woe, and with that pity love also came." Dido's love was not a passing thing and she offered all of herself to him. But Aeneas was not worthy of such trusted love. Having enjoyed her company and wealth, he cheated her though by then she was carrying his child: "... one night he let her lie sleeping and stole away to his followers, and as a traitor he sailed forth toward the great land of Italy. Thus he left Dido in woe and pain; and there he wedded a lady named Lavinia." As for Dido, when she came to know of the Trojan's treachery, she stabbed herself to death and fell in the flames she had prepared.

In Sri Aurobindo's epic narrative of the last day of Troy, Aeneas is still a hero, not sly and selfish. The poet weaves together his favourite concepts of dawn, doom and the Greek spirit when Aeneas speaks to Thrasymachus on the last day of Ilion:

"Busy the gods are always, Thrasymachus son of Aretes,
Weaving Fate on their looms, and yesterday, now and tomorrow
Are but the stands they have made with Space and Time for their timber,
Frame but the dance of their shuttle. What eye unamazed by their workings
Ever can pierce where they dwell and uncover their far-stretching purpose?
Silent they toil, they are hid in the clouds, they are wrapped with the midnight.
Yet to Apollo I pray, the Archer friendly to mortals,
Yet to the rider on Fate I abase myself, wielder of thunder,
Evil and doom to avert from my fatherland. All night Morpheus,
He who with shadowy hands heaps error and truth upon mortals,
Stood at my pillow with images. Dreaming I erred like a phantom
Helpless in Ilion's streets with the fire and the foeman around me.
Red was the smoke as it mounted triumphant the house-top of Priam,
Clang of the arms of the Greeks was in Troya, and thwarting the clangour
Voices were crying and calling me over the violent Ocean
Borne by the winds of the West from a land where Hesperus harbours."³

An early training in English literature from the Old English period onwards, is indeed a great help when studying Sri Aurobindo. His Greek and Latin studies get new and softer shades with English works that were a conduit to take the classics to the modern age. Further on, Chaucer takes up the terrible, blood-spattered legend

3. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 343-44.

of Medea of Colchis who was betrayed by her husband Jason who had already wedded and deceived Hypsipyle. Lucrece is another heroine who commits suicide when she is ravished by the Roman Prince Sextus Tarquinius. Then follow Ariadne who was betrayed by Theseus, Philomela by her brother-in-law Tereus who raped and mutilated her, Phyllis whose tragedy was caused by Demophon and the little-known tale of Hypermnestra who honoured her marriage bond with Lynceus. Hypermnestra's tale is another instance of a *pativrata* of the Indian kind. Chaucer writes of her:

The Fates, whom we call Destiny, ordained for her that she should be compassionate, steadfast, wise, and true as steel, as these women well agreed. For though Venus gave her great beauty, she was so compounded by the influence of Jupiter that tenderness, and fidelity, and fear of disgrace, and preservation of the good name of her wifehood — these all seemed to her to yield happiness on earth.

Hypermnestra who was the daughter of Aegyptus married her cousin Lynceus, as it had been her father's wish. It was a grand wedding. It was on their nuptial night that the horrible truth was revealed to her by her father. Aegyptus had arranged the marriage with a deliberate intention and now he gave her a sharp knife and advised her to hide it in the folds of her garment:

And when your husband has gone to bed, cut his throat in two while he sleeps. For in my dreams I am warned that my nephew shall be my slayer, but which nephew I know not; therefore I wish to be safe. If you say no, by Him that I have sworn, we two shall have a quarrel, as I have said.

Hypermnestra was caught in a deadly dilemma as she sat near her sleeping bridegroom. "Alas! And shall my hands be bloody? I am a maiden, and, by my nature and my appearance and my clothes, my hands are not shaped for a knife, to tear any man from his life. What the Devil do I have to do with this knife? And shall I have my throat cut in two? Then I shall bleed, alas, and perish; and this thing must necessarily have an end, either he or I must die."

She prefers to die and wakes up Lynceus who makes his escape. Left behind, the young girl bravely faces her end. How was she killed by a frustrated Aegyptus? We have no clue as Chaucer's retelling breaks off at this point. Ten virtuous ladies in *The Legend of Good Women*. At one point we are tempted to rename Chaucer's work as *A Legend of Faithless Men!*

From this heavily myth-encrusted work, it is a fine change to go to Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*. Eulogised by Legouis and Cazamian as "this burning, harmonious, and swiftly moving poem", the work is an adaptation of the Boccaccio

tale 'Il Filostrato', and deals with a single story, the tragedy of Troilus, the son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba. In the legend he is killed by Achilles. There really isn't much about him but later on he became the centre of a tragic love tale when he was involved in a love affair with a fickle-minded beauty, Cressida. Chaucer takes up the earlier versions for study but transforms the narrative to suit his taste and times. When we read Legouis and Cazamian on the subject, we are able to glimpse the trend of Sri Aurobindo's own retelling of Greek myths.

It is strange that Chaucer, faced with a Latin author, deals with him exactly as an English dramatist of the Renaissance would have done. He does what Shakespeare was to do again and again. He accepts and preserves, almost intact, the tragic elements of his theme and the sentimental beauty of the youthful leading characters, but everywhere he rearranges, transforms or creates anew, the character-studies.⁴

The two critics also say that Chaucer attempted these themes but brought them under the Kentish skies; however, for his masterpiece *The Canterbury Tales*, he turned to an entirely English scenario, which is the same with Sri Aurobindo who gave us plenty of Western literature passing through an Indian pen. He gave us poems, *Perseus the Deliverer* and *Ilion*, but also turned towards totally Indian themes like *Vasavadatta*, 'Ahana', and of course, *Savitri*. He was thorough with his Chaucer studies as is revealed in his brilliant critique in *The Future Poetry*:

The first early motive and style of this poetry as it emerges in Chaucer strikes at once an English note. The motive is a direct and concrete poetic observation of ordinary human life and character. There is no preoccupying idea, no ulterior design; life, the external figure and surface of things is reflected as near as possible to its native form in the individual mind and temperament of the poet. Chaucer has his eye fixed on the object, and that object is the visible action of life as it passes before him throwing its figures on his mind and stirring it to a kindly satisfaction in the movement and its interest, a blithe sense of humour or a light and easy pathos.⁵

Troilus and Cressida projects the legend of a fickle woman, just the opposite of women like Hypermnestra, Lucrece and Cleopatra. Of the five cantos in the work, the first is about Troilus' love. It was a deep, clear feeling with the Greek hero. At first, the love was returned with as much joy by Cressida as we note in the second canto. However, there is calculation in her love:

4. *History of English Literature*, pp. 143-44.

5. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 66.

And moreover I have known for a long time gone
 his character is good, and he's not foolish.
 Nor a boaster, men say, certain he's none:
 he is too wise to enter into vice:
 nor will I ever him so cherish
 that he may boast of it, with just cause:
 he will never bind me to such a clause.⁶

Pandarus, the uncle of Cressida who brings them together warns her against adultery.

. . . that for her to take a man in hand,
 and him her love and dear heart call,
 and then make a fool of him and more, —
 I mean by loving another all the while —
 she shames herself and him beguiles.

Now, the reason why I tell you all this,
 you know yourself, as well as any might,
 how your love all fully granted is
 to Troilus (one of the worthiest knights
 in the world), and to him your troth plight,
 so that, unless he wronged you, you could
 never be false to him while live you should.

Pativrata-dharma could not have been put in any better way! In today's speed-directed culture, the long-winded passion of Troilus and the dense argumentation of Cressida may seem artificial and tiresome, but those were the days of leisure for the educated. They had no television or radio to amuse themselves. These long poems of courtly love were welcomed with open arms by the rich and Chaucer's writing gave contemporary twists which may have made the reader or listener nod in assent or sigh in dissent. After the night of joy dawn breaks. We have the Chaucerian down-to-earth version of the material dawn:

But when the cock — public astrologer —
 began to beat his breast, and then to crow,
 and Lucifer, the day's messenger,
 began to rise, and his beams to throw,
 and eastward rose (to him who might it know)
 Fortuna Major . . .

6. Translations from *Troilus and Cressida* cited in the article are by A. S. Kline.

But Troy is abandoned to the Greeks. Cressida's father Calchas who has gone to the Greek side negotiates the exchange of Priam's counsellor Antenor for Cressida's safety. When she comes to the Greek side leaving behind Troilus and her plighted word, she accepts Diomedes as a lover. After some time Troilus realises the deception. He throws himself full-heartedly into the war and gets killed. As for Cressida, she is not made of the stuff of self-sacrifice for pursuing the *ignis fatuus* of love in an endangered land. As noted earlier, her brain has always had an ascendancy over her heart, and she chooses the safety of a Greek bosom:

Turning over in her soul up and down
the words of this forceful Diomedes,
his great rank, and the peril of the town,
and that she was alone, and in need
of friends' help: so began to breed
the reason why (truth to tell)
she fully decided there to dwell.

So much for the will-o'-the-wisp called love where fickle persons like Cressida are concerned. Interestingly the poem makes a spirited defense of using English for writing, though the subject is Greek. It was a prophetic sight indeed that helped Chaucer remain true to his mother tongue though he was aware of its dialectical variations that might create problems in disseminating the work:

And because there is such great diversity
in English and in writing of our tongue,
so I pray God that none mis-write thee,
nor mis-scan you through default of tongue.
And read, wherever you be, or else sung,
that you are understood I God beseech.

Surely, the prayer has been answered! Chaucer also took care to dedicate it to his fellow-poet Gower and another friend named Strode with becoming humility:

O moral Gower, this book I direct
to you, and you, philosophical Strode,
to warrant, and where need is, to correct,
in your benignity and zeal's good.

As with such unique poets, Chaucer's was an extraordinary genius who gave us an *avatamsaka kāvya* in his *Canterbury Tales*. Now to this book loved by the Indian student of English for is not our culture all about *tīrtha-yātrā*, seeking the spiritual unity of mankind?

(To be continued)



an honest business for honest people

With Best Compliments from:

S. N. Sunderson & Co.

1, Deshbandhu Gupta Road
Post Box No. 5713
New Delhi - 110 055

Telephone: 23612728, 23612776 Fax: 011-23620632
e-mail: snsdl@vsnl.net snsunderson@gmail.com

Our Lines of Business:

- ***Limestone and Dolomite***
- ***Coal Handling Agents***

Branches at:

**Kolkata, Dhanbad, Katni, Jukehi, Niwar, Varanasi, Asansol, Ranchi,
Bilaspur, Nagpur, Ramgarh, Khelari, Manindergarh,
Mumbai, Guwahati and Puducherry**

Completed 88 years on Basant 2014



KANTILAL & CO. (BOMBAY)

ESTD. 1947

**EXPORTERS * IMPORTERS * RICE MILLERS
(GOVERNMENT OF INDIA RECOGNISED EXPORT HOUSE)**

All can be done if the God-touch is there.

Savitri, Sri Aurobindo

Janmabhoomi Bhavan
3rd Floor, 11/12, Janmabhoomi Marg, Fort
MUMBAI - 400 001 (INDIA)

Tel: 2282 8600 / 2282 8787 / 88 • Fax: (91-22) 2282 8888 2282 3441
e-mail: kantibom@bom3.vsnl.net.in



Karnataka Plascom engineers private limited

**Injection Moulding of Industrial Components
from Engineering Plastics**

Works: #235 T, Bommasandra Indl. Area
3rd Phase, Hosur Road
Bangalore - 560 099
Phone: 91-80-7831289, 7832567



WITH

BEST

COMPLIMENTS

FROM

SARIA CHARITABLE TRUST

301 Harsha House,
Karampura Commercial Complex,
New Delhi - 110 015

*“Generosity is to find one’s own satisfaction
in the satisfaction of others.”*

THE MOTHER

Blue Star Diamonds Pvt. Ltd.

Tower “C” 9010,
Bharat Diamonds Bourse,
Bandra-Kurla Complex,
Bandra (East)
Bombay - 400 051 (India)
