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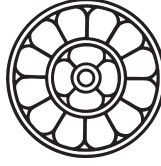
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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A correction:

In the October 2015 issue, in chapter XLVI of Manoj Das's series "Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi", Krishna Kumar Mitra was referred to as the elder son-in-law of Rishi Raj Narain. He was actually the Rishi's youngest son-in-law.

The author regrets the error.

KAMADEVA

When in the heart of the valleys and hid by the roses
The sweet Love lies,
Has he wings to rise to his heavens or in the closes
Lives and dies?

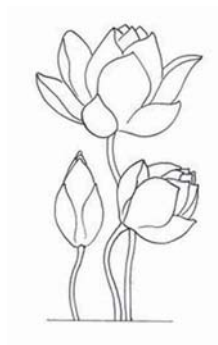
On the peaks of the radiant mountains if we should meet him
Proud and free,
Will he not frown on the valleys? Would it befit him
Chained to be?

Will you then speak of the one as a slave and a wanton,
The other too bare?
But God is the only slave and the only monarch
We declare.

It is God who is Love and a boy and a slave for our passion
He was made to serve;
It is God who is free and proud and the limitless tyrant
Our souls deserve.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 540)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

PART THREE EXPERIENCES OF THE INNER CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS

SECTION ONE: EXPERIENCES ON THE INNER PLANES

Chapter One Experiences on the Subtle Physical, Vital and Mental Planes

Subtle Physical Experiences

Is it [*a strong and rapid heartbeat that shakes the whole body*] the physical nerves and heart — or in the subtle body? Often one feels a shaking and vibration of the subtle body and can feel as if heartbeats there, but if not experienced, it impresses as if it were a material phenomenon.

*

It is evidently in a subtle world, not the physical that you move; that is evident from the different arrangement of things, by such details as the third arm and the book marker removed yet there; but they show also that it is a subtle world very near to the physical; it is either a subtle physical world or a very material vital domain. In all the subtle domains the physical is reproduced with a change, the change growing freer and more elastic as one gets farther away. Such details as the lameness show the same thing, — the hold of the physical is still there. It is possible to move about in the physical world, but usually that can only be done by drawing on the atmosphere of other physical beings for a stronger materialisation of the form — when that happens one moves among them and sees them and all the surroundings exactly as they are at that time in the physical world and can verify the accuracy of the details if immediately after returning to the body (which is usually done with a clear consciousness of the whole process of getting into it) one can traverse the same scene in the physical body. But this is rare; the subtle wandering is on the contrary a frequent phenomenon, only when it is near to the physical world, all seems very material and concrete and the association of physical habits and physical mental movements with the subtle events is closer.

Vital Experiences

The place where you were [*in a dream*] is as much a world of fact and reality as is the material world and its happenings have sometimes a great effect on this world. What an ignorant lot of disciples you all are! Too much modernisation and Europeanisation by half!

These things are meetings on the vital plane, but very often in the transcription of what happened some details get in that are contributed by the subconscious mind. I rather suspect all that about X was such a contribution. The rest seems all right. The writing on the forehead means of course something that is fixed in you in the vital plane and has to come out hereafter in the physical consciousness.

*

You are too physically matter of fact. Besides you are quite ignorant of occult things. The vital is part of what European psychologists sometimes call the subliminal and the subliminal, as everybody ought to know, can do things the physical cannot do — e.g. solve a problem in a few minutes over which the physical has spent days in vain etc. etc.

What is the use of the same things happening on both planes; it would be superfluous and otiose. The vital plane is a field where things can be done which for some reason or other can't be done now on the physical.

There are of course hundreds of varieties of things in the vital as it is a much richer and more plastic field of consciousness than the physical, and all are not of equal validity and value. I am speaking above of the things that are valid. By the way, without this vital plane there would be no art, poetry or literature — these things come through the vital before they can manifest here.

*

At this stage you have only to watch the experiences and observe their significance. It is only when the experiences are in the vital realm that some are likely to be false formations. These of which you write are simply the common experiences of an opening Yogic consciousness and they have to be understood, simply.

Here it is the breaking up of the small surface vital into the largeness of the true or inner vital being which can at once open to the Higher Consciousness, its power, light and Ananda. There is also begun a similar breaking of the small physical mind and sense into the wideness of the inner physical consciousness. The inner planes are always wide and open into the Universal while the outer surface parts of the being are shut up in themselves and full of narrow and ignorant movements.

*

It is plain. The lower being (vital and physical) was receiving an influence (mental light, yellow) from the thinking mind and higher vital which was clearing it of the old habitual lower vital reactions: very often in the sadhana one feels the inner being speaking to the outer or the mind or higher vital speaking to the lower so as to enlighten it.

*

These things that come [*in dreams*] to frighten you are merely impressions thrown on you by small vital forces which want to prevent you (by making you nervous) pushing on the sadhana. They can really do nothing to you, only you must reject all fear. Keep always this thought when these things come, “The Mother’s protection is with me, nothing bad can happen”; for when there is the psychic opening and one puts one’s faith in the Mother, that is sufficient to ward these things off. Many sadhaks learn, when they have alarming dreams, to call the Mother’s name in the dream itself and then the things that menace them become helpless or cease. You must therefore refuse to be intimidated and reject these impressions with contempt. If there is anything frightening, call down the Mother’s protection.

The heat you felt was probably due to some difficulty in the force coming down below the centre between the eyes where it has been working up till now. When such sensations or the unease you once felt or similar things come, you must not be alarmed, but remain quiet and let the difficulty pass.

What you had before that, the moonlight in the forehead, was this working in the centre there between the eyebrows, the centre of the inner mind, will and vision. The moonlight you saw is the light of spirituality and it was this that was entering into your mind through the centre, with the effect of the widening in the heart like a sky filled with moonlight. Afterwards came some endeavour to prepare the lower part of the mind whose centre is in the throat and join it with the inner mind and make it open; but there was some difficulty, as is very usually the case, which caused the heat. It was probably the fire of tapas, Agni, trying to open the way to this centre.

The experience of being taken up into the sky is a very common one and it means an ascent of the consciousness into a higher world of light and peace.

The idea that you must go more and more within and turn wholly to the Mother is quite right. It is when there is no attachment to outward things for their own sake and all is only for the Mother and the life through the inner psychic being is centred in her that the best condition is created for the spiritual realisation.

*

Your series of experiences are very interesting by the constant (though interspaced) development they illustrate. Here two new significant elements have been added to the previous substance of the experience. The first is the very precise localisation of the uprush of the consciousness from the pit of the stomach — that is to say, from above the navel, the movement itself starting from the navel or even below it. The navel-centre (*nābhi-padma*) is the main seat of the centralised vital consciousness (dynamic centre) which ranges from the heart level (emotional) to the centre below the navel (lower vital, sensational desire centre). These three mark the domain of the vital being. It is therefore clear that it was your inner vital being which had this experience, and its intensity and vehemence was probably due to the whole vital (or most of it) being awake and sharing in it this time. The experience itself was psychic in its origin, but was given a strong emotional-vital form in its expression. I may add, for completeness, that the centre of the psychic is behind the heart and it is through the purified emotions that the psychic most easily finds an outlet. All from the heart above is connected with the mental-vital and above it is the mind with its three centres, one in the throat (the outward-going or externalising mind), one between the eyes or rather in the middle of the forehead (the centre of vision and will) and one above, communicating with the brain, which is called the thousand-petalled lotus and where are centralised the highest thought and intelligence communicating with the greater mind planes (illuminated mind, intuition, overmind) above.

The second new significant feature is the self-manifestation of the inner mind; for it was your inner mind that was watching, observing and criticising the vital being's psychic experience. You found this clear division in you curious, but it will no longer seem curious once you know the perfectly normal divisibility of the different parts of the being. In the outer surface nature mind, psychic, vital, physical are all jumbled together and it needs a strong power of introspection, self-analysis, close observation and disentanglement of the threads of thought, feeling and impulse to find out the composition of our nature and the relation and interaction of these parts upon each other. But when one goes inside as you have done, we find the sources of all this surface action and there the parts of our being are quite separate and clearly distinct from each other. We feel them indeed as different beings in us, and just as two people in a group can do, they too are seen to observe, criticise, help or oppose and restrain each other; it is as if we were a group-being, each member of the group with its separate place and function, and all directed by a central being who is sometimes in front above the others, sometimes behind the scenes. Your mental being was observing the vital and not quite easy about its vehemence, — for the natural base of the mental being is calm, thoughtfulness, restraint, control and balance, while the natural turn of the vital is dynamism, energy thrown into emotion, sensation and action. All therefore was perfectly natural and in order.

As for the experience stated it was probably in the vital plane and such suddennesses and vividnesses of experience are characteristic of the vital — but they are not lasting, they only prepare. It is when one has got into contact with what is beyond mind and vital and body and risen there that the great lasting fundamental realisations usually come.

Influence or Possession by Beings of Other Planes

The case of the girl in question seems to be of a fairly common kind. In one way or another a certain subtle faculty is awakened by which there is contact with some other plane of consciousness and its beings, usually with the vital or larger “life” worlds behind the material plane. These experiences are often of little value, trivial and full of misleading conceptions, messages or suggestions; the inexperienced *voyant* or seer adds to them the formations and delusions of his own subliminal mind. It is only by training and experience that one can arrive at an elimination of these errors and establish the true use of the subtle faculties. These powers are often enough dangerous to their unexperienced or indisciplined possessor and the hysteria of the girl in question was obviously the result (a result that happens in many cases) of her allowing some being of the vital plane to delude and influence her. This kind of thing has no connection at all with the spiritual or psychic experience of the Rishis and sages; it is rather akin to the experiences of mediums and others in Europe.

*

It seems that you do not pay sufficient attention to the instructions that are sent to you from here. You were specially warned not to allow anything to take possession of you. But in relating one of your experiences repeated for several days you speak of something that was taking possession of you, even obliging you to make incoherent noises, and yet you say you do not know whether it was good or bad or what kind of force it was! It is evident from your description that it was a vital force trying to take violent possession of the body. Nothing can be more dangerous than to allow this kind of loss of control and intrusion of an alien influence. In your present condition of ignorance, the vital being not yet sufficiently open, the psychic not yet sufficiently awake, a hostile power can easily intrude and pass itself off as the divine Force. Remember that no personality and no power is to be allowed to possess you. The divine Force will not act in this way; it will work first to purify, to widen and enlighten and transform the consciousness, to open it to Light and Truth, to awaken the heart and the psychic being. Only afterwards will it take gradual and quiet control through a pure and conscious surrender.

*

I have omitted all this time to reply to your letter forwarding your friend's statement about his experiences. I am not very sure of its significance. The "double" voice is a frequent phenomenon; it happens very often when one has been long repeating a mantra that a voice or consciousness within begins to repeat it automatically — also prayer can be taken up in the same way from within. It is usually by an awakening of the inner consciousness or by the going in of the consciousness more deeply within from its outward poise that this happens. This is supported in his case by the fact that he feels himself halfway to trance, his body seems to melt away, he does not feel the weight of the book etc.; all these are well-known signs of the inner consciousness getting awake and largely replacing the outer. The moral effects of his new condition would also indicate an awakening of the inner consciousness, the psychic or psychic-mental perhaps. But on the other hand, he seems to feel this other voice as if outside him and to have the sense of another being than himself, an invisible presence in the room. The inner being is often felt as someone separate from or other than the ordinary self, but it is not usually felt outside. So it may be that in this state of withdrawal he comes into contact with another plane or world and attracts to himself one of its beings who wants to share in his sadhana and govern it. This last is not a very safe phenomenon, for it is difficult to say from the data what kind of being it is and the handing over of the government of one's inner development to any other than the Divine, the Guru or one's own psychic being may bring with it serious peril. That is all I can say at present.

*

All the other circumstances which you relate¹ are normal and would be the phenomena of an invasion of Ananda occupying the whole instrumental being while the silent inner being within remains separate as it does usually from all that comes from outside. The circumstance that is not clear is the Presence. There is nothing to indicate who or what it is. If it were an undesirable vital Presence producing a vital joy, there would usually be vital phenomena which would enable you to detect their origin, but these are not apparent here. In the circumstances the only course is to observe the experience without accepting any occupation of the being by what comes, taking it as only an experience which the inner being looks on as a witness, until the point that remains veiled is made clear.

P.S. There are several possible explanations but I do not speak of them as that might influence and interfere with the pure observation of the experience by bringing in a mental suggestion.

*

1. *This letter and the four that follow it were written to the same person. — Ed.*

I have read your letter and I have also read it to the Mother. My conclusion about the experience — I had suspended judgment till now — is the same as hers.

We consider that it will be wiser for you to be on your guard about it in future. In the first place it cannot be the Buddha — the Buddha's presence would bring peace but could never give this kind of Ananda. Next, the suggestion based on an old subjective feeling of yours seems to be thrown on you to make you more readily admit some *emprise* that the experience is a means of establishing on you. Again the feeling you have that the Ananda is more than you can bear is a sign not favourable to the experience; you suppose that it is a want of adaptation that gives you the feeling, but it is more likely that it is because it is something foreign thrown on you through the vital with which the psychic being in you does not feel at home. Finally, it is not safe to admit while you are doing the Yoga here another influence, *whatever it may be*, which is not ours or part of the movement of this sadhana. If that takes place anything might happen and we would not be able to protect you against it because you would have stepped out of the circle of protection. You have hitherto been proceeding on a very sound line of development; a diversion of this kind which seems to be on the vital level might be a serious interference. No trust can be put on the beauty of the eyes or the face. There are many Beings of the inferior planes who have a captivating beauty and can enthrall with it and they can give too an Ananda which is not of the highest and may on the contrary by its lure take away from the path altogether. When you have reached the stage of clear discernment where the highest Light is turned on all things that come, then experiences of many kinds may be safely faced, but now a strict vigilance must be exercised and all diversions rejected. It is necessary to keep one's steps firmly on the straight road to the Highest; all else must wait for the proper time.

*

For the eyes, that experience had got a certain hold and it was not to be expected that it would altogether disappear all at once. These things try to persist, but if the refusal is firm and unchanging, they fade away after a time or cease. The lessening of the intensity of the ananda is already a sign that the rejection is having its effect. You have only to persist and after a time the vital consciousness will be free.

*

I have no doubt that the action of this force once rejected will disappear in time. It is something with which you have been brought into contact, not something intimate to yourself to which part of your being is naturally responsive. That is shown by the inability to catch what the being who manifested wanted to convey to you. It seems to have been an onslaught, as you say, an attempted invasion by force and ruse. It

is quite true that when there is the opening to the Light, the adverse Forces as well as the lower forces become active when they can do so. The consciousness of the seeker has come out of its normal limits and is opening to the universal as well as upwards to the Self above and they take advantage of that to attempt an entrance. Such onslaughts however are not inevitable and you are probably right in thinking that you caught it in the atmosphere of X. He has made experiments of many kinds in the occult field and there one comes easily into contact with forces and beings of a darker nature and one needs a great power and light and purity — one's own or a helping Power's — to face them and overcome. There are also deficiencies or errors in one's own nature which can open the door to these beings. But the best is if one can have nothing to do with them; for the conquest of the forces of the lower nature is a sufficiently heavy task without that complication. If the work one has to do necessitates the contact and conflict with them, that is another matter. In your case I think this has been something of an accident and not a necessity of the development of your sadhana.

*

No, there was no special concentration or call from the Mother at that time. It was at a time when she never sees anyone, so evidently she would not have put such a force upon you, nor does she usually exercise her power in this way. You did well to resist the impulsion. It is always necessary to keep the inner perception and will clear, conscious and in perfect balance and never to allow any force of impulsion, however it may present itself, to sweep without their discerning consent the vital or the body into action. Whatever appearance they may assume, such forces cannot be trusted; once the discriminating intelligence gives up its control, any kind of force can intervene in this way and a path is opened for unbalanced vital impulses to be used to the detriment of the sadhana. A psychic or spiritual control replacing the mental would not act in this way, but whatever intensity or ardour it may give, would maintain a clear perception of things, a perfect discrimination, a harmony between the inward and the outward reality. It is only the vital that is swept by these impulses; the vital must always be kept under the control of the intelligence, the psychic or when that becomes dynamic, the higher spiritual consciousness.

An Experience on the Mental Plane

The vision you had was of the mental plane and symbolic. It symbolised not so much your own position as the general difficulties which lie in the way of one's going deep inside into the psychic centre and living there. The *maidān* full of light was the inmost psychic centre; the dark place in between represents the veil of

ignorance created by the gulf between this inmost psychic and the outer nature. The chakra turning round and round which prevents the approach from one side (the mental side) is the activity of the ordinary mind; when the mind becomes quiet, then it is easier. The serpent is the vital energy which covers up the psychic and prevents approach from another (the vital) side. Here again if the vital becomes quiet, then the approach is easier.

The blows on the forehead were perhaps the working of a force to open the centre there — for there between the eyes is the centre of the inner mind, will and vision. All these centres are closed in the ordinary consciousness or else only very slightly open on the surface. If the inner mind centre opens, then the peace etc. from above can enter easily into the mind and afterwards into the vital and both mind and vital will become quiet.

The difficulty about the two parts of the mind is one that everybody has when the tendency to go within begins. It is solved in this sadhana by a sort of harmony being established by which even in doing one's work and keeping the necessary outer activities one can still live within in the fullness of the inner life and experience.

Rely on the Mother always. These things are the first beginnings of Yogic experience and the difficulties of the mind and vital (which are not the old ones you had but simply the ordinary difficulties of the adjustment and harmonisation of the different parts of the being) will get solved of themselves.

* * *

Chapter Two **Exteriorisation or Going Out of the Body**

The Experience of Exteriorisation

The experience you had was that of exteriorisation or going out of the body. The consciousness went up and remained above the body for a time. The feeling or vision of oneself in the form of an egg is frequent in such cases. It is not always so, for many go out in an individualised consciousness with an awareness of a subtle body, subtle thought, subtle sensation etc. and move about in the vital or even in the physical world till they come back to the body. But when one begins, the vital body is at first a little vague and the consciousness also with the result that all is at first dim and unorganised. The serpent must be the Kundalini force which had left its coiled sleeping position in the Muladhara and taken the lengthened one in which it joins the embodied consciousness with the consciousness above.

The power of exteriorisation is one that can be used for many purposes by the Yogi when it has been developed.

*

It was a partial exteriorisation, part of the consciousness going out to the scene and surroundings described by you while the rest remained in the body and was aware both of the normal surroundings and, by communication or indirect participation, of what the other was experiencing. This is quite possible and for that no form of trance or loss of external consciousness is necessary. As for the cause of such an experience, it does not depend at all on one's own ordinary mental or other interests; it comes by a sort of attraction or touch from someone who is there on the scene and who feels the need of sympathy, support or help of some kind, a need so strong that it forms a sort of call; it is very usually somebody quite unknown and it just depends on whom the call happens to touch because he is open at the time and receives the vibration and has the capacity to answer. Usually there is a sort of identification of consciousness with that of the person calling so that one can see the surroundings and the things happening through him. It is the physical that becomes nervous at these experiences and this must be overcome; as the inner mental, vital, physical consciousness opens to things behind the thick physical veil all kinds of experiences may happen that are strange to the physical mind and its tendency to be apprehensive or nervous at these things must disappear. It must be able to face even formidable things without fear.

*

A feeling like that of the shock and the stopping of the breath for a second and as if of falling down comes to many when the consciousness for a moment or a longer time exteriorises itself (goes up out of the body); the shock comes from the going up of the consciousness or from the return into the body. The Mother used to have that hundreds of times. It is not anything physical (the Doctor, as you say, found nothing). When this movement of the consciousness is more normal, the feeling will probably disappear.

*

You must have gone out of your body leaving it unprotected and there was an attack which you got rid of after coming into the body. This part of the head from the ears down to the neck is the seat of the physical mind — the centre of the physical or externalising mind is in the throat joining the spine at the back. It was an attack on the physical mind.

Going Out in the Vital Body

It looks as if it were an exteriorisation² in which she goes out in her vital body. When one does so consciously and at will, it is all right, but this unconscious exteriorisation is not always safe. The important question is what effect it has on her. If she comes out of it strong and refreshed or quite normal, there is no cause for distress or anxiety; if she comes out exhausted or depressed, then there are forces that are pulling her out into the vital world to the detriment of her vital sheath and it should not continue.

*

It is clear that when you go out of your body like that you pass into a vital plane and as you are constantly attacked there and have fear, it is not desirable.

It seems to me I have explained all that to you before. Everybody goes out into the vital world in that way, but it is not indispensable to the sadhana to have these experiences and it is better to postpone them till you have the truly helpful experiences — such as those narrated in a recent letter — and can build up a strong consciousness which can enter any plane without fear or danger.

*

As to your experience about the inkstand. When the vital being goes out, it moves on the vital plane and in the vital consciousness, and, even if it is aware of physical scenes and things, it is not with a physical vision. It is possible for one who has trained his faculties to enter into touch with physical things although he is moving about in the vital body, to see and sense them accurately, even to act on them and physically move them. But the ordinary sadhaka who has no knowledge or organised experience or training in these things cannot do it. He must understand that the vital plane is different from the physical and that things that happen there are not physical happenings, though, if they are of the right kind and properly understood and used, they may have a meaning and value for the earth life. But also the vital consciousness is full of false formations and many confusions and it is not safe to move among them without knowledge and without a direct protection and guidance.

*

2. The correspondent reported the case of a woman who, without willing it, entered into a state of trance at any time, even while writing or talking with someone. — Ed.

Your three experiences related in your letter mean that you are going out in your vital body into the vital worlds and meeting the beings and formations of these worlds. The old man of the temple and the girls you saw are hostile beings of the vital plane.

It is better not to go out in this way, unless one has the protection of someone (physically present) who has knowledge and power over the vital world. As there is no one there who can do this for you, you should draw back from this movement. Aspire for perfect surrender, calm, peace, light, consciousness and strength in the mind and the heart. When the mental being and psychic being are thus open, luminous and surrendered, then the vital can open and receive the same illumination. Till then premature adventures on the vital plane are not advisable.

If the movement cannot be stopped, then observe the following instructions:

(1) Never allow any fear to enter into you. Face all you meet and see in this world with detachment and courage.

(2) Ask for the protection of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother before you sleep or meditate. Use their names when you are attacked or tempted.³

(3) Do not indulge in this world in any kind of sympathy such as you felt for the old man in the temple or accept such suggestions, e.g., that he was your spiritual preceptor, which was obviously false since you could have no other spiritual preceptor than Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It was because of this sympathy and the accepted suggestion that he was able to go inside you and create the pain you felt.

(4) Do not allow any foreign personality to enter into you, only the Light, Power etc. from above.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga* — III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 191-208)

3. Sri Aurobindo refers to himself in the third person here and below; he wrote this letter to be sent over the signature of his secretary. — Ed.

THE CYCLE OF SOCIETY

Modern Science, obsessed with the greatness of its physical discoveries and the idea of the sole existence of Matter, has long attempted to base upon physical data even its study of Soul and Mind and of those workings of Nature in man and animal in which a knowledge of psychology is as important as any of the physical sciences. Its very psychology founded itself upon physiology and the scrutiny of the brain and nervous system. It is not surprising therefore that in history and sociology attention should have been concentrated on the external data, laws, institutions, rites, customs, economic factors and developments, while the deeper psychological elements so important in the activities of a mental, emotional, ideative being like man have been very much neglected. This kind of science would explain history and social development as much as possible by economic necessity or motive, — by economy understood in its widest sense. There are even historians who deny or put aside as of a very subsidiary importance the working of the idea and the influence of the thinker in the development of human institutions. The French Revolution, it is thought, would have happened just as it did and when it did, by economic necessity, even if Rousseau and Voltaire had never written and the eighteenth-century philosophic movement in the world of thought had never worked out its bold and radical speculations.

Recently, however, the all-sufficiency of Matter to explain Mind and Soul has begun to be doubted and a movement of emancipation from the obsession of physical science has set in, although as yet it has not gone beyond a few awkward and rudimentary stumblings. Still there is the beginning of a perception that behind the economic motives and causes of social and historical development there are profound psychological, even perhaps soul factors; and in pre-war Germany, the metropolis of rationalism and materialism but the home also, for a century and a half, of new thought and original tendencies good and bad, beneficent and disastrous, a first psychological theory of history was conceived and presented by an original intelligence. The earliest attempts in a new field are seldom entirely successful, and the German historian, originator of this theory, seized on a luminous idea, but was not able to carry it very far or probe very deep. He was still haunted by a sense of the greater importance of the economic factor, and like most European science his theory related, classified and organised phenomena much more successfully than it explained them. Nevertheless, its basic idea formulated a suggestive and illuminating truth, and it is worth while following up some of the suggestions it opens out in the light especially of Eastern thought and experience.

The theorist, Lamprecht, basing himself on European and particularly on German history, supposed that human society progresses through certain distinct psycho-

logical stages which he terms respectively symbolic, typical and conventional, individualist and subjective. This development forms, then, a sort of psychological cycle through which a nation or a civilisation is bound to proceed. Obviously, such classifications are likely to err by rigidity and to substitute a mental straight line for the coils and zigzags of Nature. The psychology of man and his societies is too complex, too synthetical of many-sided and intermixed tendencies to satisfy any such rigorous and formal analysis. Nor does this theory of a psychological cycle tell us what is the inner meaning of its successive phases or the necessity of their succession or the term and end towards which they are driving. But still to understand natural laws whether of Mind or Matter it is necessary to analyse their working into its discoverable elements, main constituents, dominant forces, though these may not actually be found anywhere in isolation. I will leave aside the Western thinker's own dealings with his idea. The suggestive names he has offered us, if we examine their intrinsic sense and value, may yet throw some light on the thickly veiled secret of our historic evolution, and this is the line on which it would be most useful to investigate.

Undoubtedly, wherever we can seize human society in what to us seems its primitive beginnings or early stages, — no matter whether the race is comparatively cultured or savage or economically advanced or backward, — we do find a strongly symbolic mentality that governs or at least pervades its thought, customs and institutions. Symbolic, but of what? We find that this social stage is always religious and actively imaginative in its religion; for symbolism and a widespread imaginative or intuitive religious feeling have a natural kinship and especially in earlier or primitive formations they have gone always together. When man begins to be predominantly intellectual, sceptical, ratiocinative he is already preparing for an individualist society and the age of symbols and the age of conventions have passed or are losing their virtue. The symbol then is of something which man feels to be present behind himself and his life and his activities, — the Divine, the Gods, the vast and deep unnameable, a hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. All his religious and social institutions, all the moments and phases of his life are to him symbols in which he seeks to express what he knows or guesses of the mystic influences that are behind his life and shape and govern or at the least intervene in its movements.

If we look at the beginnings of Indian society, the far-off Vedic age which we no longer understand, for we have lost that mentality, we see that everything is symbolic. The religious institution of sacrifice governs the whole society and all its hours and moments, and the ritual of the sacrifice is at every turn and in every detail, as even a cursory study of the Brahmanas and Upanishads ought to show us, mystically symbolic. The theory that there was nothing in the sacrifice except a propitiation of Nature-gods for the gaining of worldly prosperity and of Paradise, is a misunderstanding by a later humanity which had already become profoundly

affected by an intellectual and practical bent of mind, practical even in its religion and even in its own mysticism and symbolism, and therefore could no longer enter into the ancient spirit. Not only the actual religious worship but also the social institutions of the time were penetrated through and through with the symbolic spirit. Take the hymn of the Rig Veda which is supposed to be a marriage hymn for the union of a human couple and was certainly used as such in the later Vedic ages. Yet the whole sense of the hymn turns about the successive marriages of *Suryā*, daughter of the Sun, with different gods and the human marriage is quite a subordinate matter overshadowed and governed entirely by the divine and mystic figure and is spoken of in the terms of that figure. Mark, however, that the divine marriage here is not, as it would be in later ancient poetry, a decorative image or poetical ornamentation used to set off and embellish the human union; on the contrary, the human is an inferior figure and image of the divine. The distinction marks off the entire contrast between that more ancient mentality and our modern regard upon things. This symbolism influenced for a long time Indian ideas of marriage and is even now conventionally remembered though no longer understood or effective.

We may note also in passing that the Indian ideal of the relation between man and woman has always been governed by the symbolism of the relation between the *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (in the *Veda Nri* and *Gna*), the male and female divine Principles in the universe. Even, there is to some degree a practical correlation between the position of the female sex and this idea. In the earlier Vedic times when the female principle stood on a sort of equality with the male in the symbolic cult, though with a certain predominance for the latter, woman was as much the mate as the adjunct of man; in later times when the *Prakriti* has become subject in idea to the *Purusha*, the woman also depends entirely on the man, exists only for him and has hardly even a separate spiritual existence. In the Tantrik Shakta religion which puts the female principle highest, there is an attempt which could not get itself translated into social practice, — even as this Tantrik cult could never entirely shake off the subjugation of the Vedantic idea, — to elevate woman and make her an object of profound respect and even of worship.

Or let us take, for this example will serve us best, the Vedic institution of the fourfold order, *caturvarṇa*, miscalled the system of the four castes, — for caste is a conventional, *varṇa* a symbolic and typical institution. We are told that the institution of the four orders of society was the result of an economic evolution complicated by political causes. Very possibly;¹ but the important point is that it was not so regarded and could not be so regarded by the men of that age. For while we are satisfied when we have found the practical and material causes of a social phenomenon and do not care to look farther, they cared little or only subordinately for its

1. It is at least doubtful. The Brahmin class at first seem to have exercised all sorts of economic functions and not to have confined themselves to those of the priesthood.

material factors and looked always first and foremost for its symbolic, religious or psychological significance. This appears in the Purushasukta of the Veda, where the four orders are described as having sprung from the body of the creative Deity, from his head, arms, thighs and feet. To us this is merely a poetical image and its sense is that the Brahmins were the men of knowledge, the Kshatriyas the men of power, the Vaishyas the producers and support of society, the Shudras its servants. As if that were all, as if the men of those days would have so profound a reverence for mere poetical figures like this of the body of Brahma or that other of the marriages of Suryā, would have built upon them elaborate systems of ritual and sacred ceremony, enduring institutions, great demarcations of social type and ethical discipline. We read always our own mentality into that of these ancient forefathers and it is therefore that we can find in them nothing but imaginative barbarians. To us poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy, imagination a plaything and caterer for our amusement, our entertainer, the nautch-girl of the mind. But to the men of old the poet was a seer, a revealer of hidden truths, imagination no dancing courtesan but a priestess in God's house commissioned not to spin fictions but to image difficult and hidden truths; even the metaphor or simile in the Vedic style is used with a serious purpose and expected to convey a reality, not to suggest a pleasing artifice of thought. The image was to these seers a revelative symbol of the unrevealed and it was used because it could hint luminously to the mind what the precise intellectual word, apt only for logical or practical thought or to express the physical and the superficial, could not at all hope to manifest. To them this symbol of the Creator's body was more than an image, it expressed a divine reality. Human society was for them an attempt to express in life the cosmic Purusha who has expressed himself otherwise in the material and the supraphysical universe. Man and the cosmos are both of them symbols and expressions of the same hidden Reality.

From this symbolic attitude came the tendency to make everything in society a sacrament, religious and sacrosanct, but as yet with a large and vigorous freedom in all its forms, — a freedom which we do not find in the rigidity of "savage" communities because these have already passed out of the symbolic into the conventional stage though on a curve of degeneration instead of a curve of growth. The spiritual idea governs all; the symbolic religious forms which support it are fixed in principle; the social forms are lax, free and capable of infinite development. One thing, however, begins to progress towards a firm fixity and this is the psychological type. Thus we have first the symbolic idea of the four orders, expressing — to employ an abstractly figurative language which the Vedic thinkers would not have used nor perhaps understood, but which helps best our modern understanding — the Divine as knowledge in man, the Divine as power, the Divine as production, enjoyment and mutuality, the Divine as service, obedience and work. These divisions answer to four cosmic principles, the Wisdom that conceives the order and principle of things, the Power that sanctions, upholds and enforces it, the Harmony that creates

the arrangement of its parts, the Work that carries out what the rest direct. Next, out of this idea there developed a firm but not yet rigid social order based primarily upon temperament and psychic type² with a corresponding ethical discipline and secondarily upon the social and economic function.³ But the function was determined by its suitability to the type and its helpfulness to the discipline; it was not the primary or sole factor. The first, the symbolic stage of this evolution is predominantly religious and spiritual; the other elements, psychological, ethical, economic, physical are there but subordinated to the spiritual and religious idea. The second stage, which we may call the *typal*, is predominantly psychological and ethical; all else, even the spiritual and religious, is subordinate to the psychological idea and to the ethical ideal which expresses it. Religion becomes then a mystic sanction for the ethical motive and discipline, Dharma; that becomes its chief social utility, and for the rest it takes a more and more other-worldly turn. The idea of the direct expression of the divine Being or cosmic Principle in man ceases to dominate or to be the leader and in the forefront; it recedes, stands in the background and finally disappears from the practice and in the end even from the theory of life.

This *typal* stage creates the great social ideals which remain impressed upon the human mind even when the stage itself is passed. The principal active contribution it leaves behind when it is dead is the idea of social honour; the honour of the Brahmin which resides in purity, in piety, in a high reverence for the things of the mind and spirit and a disinterested possession and exclusive pursuit of learning and knowledge; the honour of the Kshatriya which lives in courage, chivalry, strength, a certain proud self-restraint and self-mastery, nobility of character and the obligations of that nobility; the honour of the Vaishya which maintains itself by rectitude of dealing, mercantile fidelity, sound production, order, liberality and philanthropy; the honour of the Shudra which gives itself in obedience, subordination, faithful service, a disinterested attachment. But these more and more cease to have a living root in the clear psychological idea or to spring naturally out of the inner life of the man; they become a convention, though the most noble of conventions. In the end they remain more as a tradition in the thought and on the lips than a reality of the life.

For the *typal* passes naturally into the conventional stage. The conventional stage of human society is born when the external supports, the outward expressions of the spirit or the ideal become more important than the ideal, the body or even the clothes more important than the person. Thus in the evolution of caste, the outward supports of the ethical fourfold order, — birth, economic function, religious ritual and sacrament, family custom, — each began to exaggerate enormously its proportions and its importance in the scheme. At first, birth does not seem to have been of

2. *guṇa*.

3. *karma*.

the first importance in the social order, for faculty and capacity prevailed; but afterwards, as the type fixed itself, its maintenance by education and tradition became necessary and education and tradition naturally fixed themselves in a hereditary groove. Thus the son of a Brahmin came always to be looked upon conventionally as a Brahmin; birth and profession were together the double bond of the hereditary convention at the time when it was most firm and faithful to its own character. This rigidity once established, the maintenance of the ethical type passed from the first place to a secondary or even a quite tertiary importance. Once the very basis of the system, it came now to be a not indispensable crown or pendent tassel, insisted upon indeed by the thinker and the ideal code-maker but not by the actual rule of society or its practice. Once ceasing to be indispensable, it came inevitably to be dispensed with except as an ornamental fiction. Finally, even the economic basis began to disintegrate; birth, family custom and remnants, deformations, new accretions of meaningless or fanciful religious sign and ritual, the very scarecrow and caricature of the old profound symbolism, became the riveting links of the system of caste in the iron age of the old society. In the full economic period of caste the priest and the Pundit masquerade under the name of the Brahmin, the aristocrat and feudal baron under the name of the Kshatriya, the trader and money-getter under the name of the Vaishya, the half-fed labourer and economic serf under the name of the Shudra. When the economic basis also breaks down, then the unclean and diseased decrepitude of the old system has begun; it has become a name, a shell, a sham and must either be dissolved in the crucible of an individualist period of society or else fatally affect with weakness and falsehood the system of life that clings to it. That in visible fact is the last and present state of the caste system in India.

The tendency of the conventional age of society is to fix, to arrange firmly, to formalise, to erect a system of rigid grades and hierarchies, to stereotype religion, to bind education and training to a traditional and unchangeable form, to subject thought to infallible authorities, to cast a stamp of finality on what seems to it the finished life of man. The conventional period of society has its golden age when the spirit and thought that inspired its forms are confined but yet living, not yet altogether walled in, not yet stifled to death and petrified by the growing hardness of the structure in which they are cased. That golden age is often very beautiful and attractive to the distant view of posterity by its precise order, symmetry, fine social architecture, the admirable subordination of its parts to a general and noble plan. Thus at one time the modern litterateur, artist or thinker looked back often with admiration and with something like longing to the mediaeval age of Europe; he forgot in its distant appearance of poetry, nobility, spirituality the much folly, ignorance, iniquity, cruelty and oppression of those harsh ages, the suffering and revolt that simmered below these fine surfaces, the misery and squalor that was hidden behind that splendid façade. So too the Hindu orthodox idealist looks back to a perfectly regulated society

devoutly obedient to the wise yoke of the Shastra, and that is his golden age, — a nobler one than the European in which the apparent gold was mostly hard burnished copper with a thin gold-leaf covering it, but still of an alloyed metal, not the true Satya Yuga. In these conventional periods of society there is much indeed that is really fine and sound and helpful to human progress, but still they are its copper age and not the true golden; they are the age when the Truth we strive to arrive at is not realised, not accomplished,⁴ but the exiguity of it eked out or its full appearance imitated by an artistic form, and what we have of the reality has begun to fossilise and is doomed to be lost in a hard mass of rule and order and convention.

For always the form prevails and the spirit recedes and diminishes. It attempts indeed to return, to revive the form, to modify it, anyhow to survive and even to make the form survive; but the time-tendency is too strong. This is visible in the history of religion; the efforts of the saints and religious reformers become progressively more scattered, brief and superficial in their actual effects, however strong and vital the impulse. We see this recession in the growing darkness and weakness of India in her last millennium; the constant effort of the most powerful spiritual personalities kept the soul of the people alive but failed to resuscitate the ancient free force and truth and vigour or permanently revivify a conventionalised and stagnating society; in a generation or two the iron grip of that conventionalism has always fallen on the new movement and annexed the names of its founders. We see it in Europe in the repeated moral tragedy of ecclesiasticism and Catholic monasticism. Then there arrives a period when the gulf between the convention and the truth becomes intolerable and the men of intellectual power arise, the great “swallowers of formulas”, who, rejecting robustly or fiercely or with the calm light of reason symbol and type and convention, strike at the walls of the prison-house and seek by the individual reason, moral sense or emotional desire the Truth that society has lost or buried in its whited sepulchres. It is then that the individualistic age of religion and thought and society is created; the Age of Protestantism has begun, the Age of Reason, the Age of Revolt, Progress, Freedom. A partial and external freedom, still betrayed by the conventional age that preceded it into the idea that the Truth can be found in outsides, dreaming vainly that perfection can be determined by machinery, but still a necessary passage to the subjective period of humanity through which man has to circle back towards the recovery of his deeper self and a new upward line or a new revolving cycle of civilisation.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 5-14)

4. The Indian names of the golden age are Satya, the Age of the Truth, and Krita, the Age when the law of the Truth is accomplished.

‘. . . NOTHING BUT THEE, OUR SOLE REAL EXISTENCE’

May 22, 1914

When we have discerned successively what is real from what is unreal in all the states of being and all the worlds of life, when we have arrived at the perfect and integral certitude of the sole Reality, we must turn our gaze from the heights of this supreme consciousness towards the individual aggregate which serves as the immediate instrument for Thy manifestation upon earth, and see in it nothing but Thee, our sole real existence. Thus each atom of this aggregate will be awakened to receive Thy sublime influence; the ignorance and the darkness will disappear not only from the central consciousness of the being but also from its most external mode of expression. It is only by the fulfilment, by the perfection of this labour of transfiguration that there can be manifested the plenitude of Thy Presence, Thy Light and Thy Love.

Lord, Thou makest me understand this truth ever more clearly; lead me step by step on that path. My whole being down to its smallest atom aspires for the perfect knowledge of Thy presence and a complete union with it. Let every obstacle disappear, let Thy divine knowledge replace in every part the darkness of the ignorance. Even as Thou hast illumined the central consciousness, the will in the being, enlighten too this outermost substance. And let the whole individuality, from its first origin and essence to its last projection and most material body, be unified in a perfect realisation and a complete manifestation of Thy sole Reality.

Nothing is in the universe but Thy Life, Thy Light, Thy Love.

Let everything become resplendent and transfigured by the knowledge of Thy Truth.

Thy divine love floods my being; Thy supreme light is shining in every cell; all exults because it knows Thee and because it is one with Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 151-52)

IS SRI AUROBINDO NEW?

A LETTER

[This letter was first published in 1947, after being seen by Sri Aurobindo. The essential thesis of it still holds and needs to be underlined. It does not suffer because Sri Aurobindo himself has left his body. Apropos of this act of his on December 5, 1950, the author's booklet, The Passing of Sri Aurobindo: Its Inner Significance and Consequence, which was fully approved by the Mother, may be read. For immediate concentrated light we may refer the reader to the Messages of the Mother soon after December 5 and to the following two. One is dated 8 December 1950: "The lack of receptivity of the earth and men is mostly responsible for the decision Sri Aurobindo has taken regarding his body. But one thing is certain: what has happened on the physical plane affects in no way the truth of his teaching. All that he has said is perfectly true and remains so. Time and the course of events will prove it abundantly."¹ The other Message came in 1953: "Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his own body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary."² The present letter is concerned to set forth the essence of "the realisation" whose pursuit constitutes the ultimate form in which Sri Aurobindo's teaching is "new".]

The western world is often declared to be so engrossed in its new materialism that it cannot listen to any of the old spiritual messages. In a similar way the eastern world seems at times so engrossed in its old spirituality that no spiritual message that is new reaches its mind.

There are some good reasons for this unprogressive tendency. First, the spirituality of the past is really immense and its hold, therefore, cannot help being great. Second, civilisations that are, like India's, very old and have still a living continuity with their past develop an intent look backwards. Third, the accustomed meanings of spiritual terms have got impressed on our minds with such prolonged force that new complexions given them are liable to be overlooked. I was hoping, however, that there would be more than a handful who might keep on the *qui vive* for the genuinely new in spirituality and be subtle enough to understand it when it got explained in various ways and with a marvellously illuminating style as has happened in a book like *The Life Divine*. But if you declare that you have given

1. *Words of the Mother*, CWM 2nd Edition, Vol. 13, p. 7.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 9 [12 April 1953].

days and nights to the consideration of Sri Aurobindo's vision and yoga and yet found nothing new, I am brought to the verge of despair. How shall I strike upon your eyes the novel shades of his thought, the original turns of his experience? Perhaps it is best to concentrate on presenting his newness under one aspect that would be the most spectacular, the most sensational.

To say that Sri Aurobindo is new is, of course, not to deny the many common factors between him and the Indian rishis and yogis that are gone. He stands grounded in India's colossal experience of God, and from the God-experience of no other country could he lead on to what is his own individual contribution to spirituality. In fact, the starting-point of his contribution is not anything unknown to the ancient scriptures: the Creative Consciousness of the eternal and infinite Divine putting forth the world-play and taking part in it for a various expression of Himself by purifying and illuminating our mind and life-force and body. In Vaishnavism and Tantricism the ideal of God's self-expression in our nature was the most openly held. But everywhere a definite irreducible quantity was recognised in which no self-expression of the Divine could take place. And that is why, on the most external plane, the fact of death was accepted as inherent in earth-existence. The triple formation of mind, life and body that makes up earth-existence was regarded as never capable of perfection and so always to be dropped after a time. Perfection abided somewhere beyond, whither the soul was bidden to rise, either to stay there for ever or to return after a while for the sake of suffering humanity. Birth was either to be escaped from or accepted in an endless series: in both cases no birth could be such as to allow absolute perfection of the mind-life-body formation. Disease and decay and deathwards-progressing old age were always inevitable: even the hathayogis who commanded extraordinary powers of reinforcing the ageing physical system by subtle vital energy never claimed even as a possibility a complete partaking by the body in a divine physicality which by the presence of the immortal consciousness and substance would not ever die by age or disease or stroke or accident.

You must admit that since the body is our characteristic vehicle of earth-existence there can be no entire self-manifestation of the Divine here without this vehicle being thoroughly divinised and changed into stuff of the immortal divine being with its incorruptible illumination and imperishable bliss and power. No so-called natural law or necessity should compel this body to suffer disease and grow aged and finally die or remain open to accident and be a victim to "crass casualty". Disease and old age and the death consequent upon them or due to sudden violent circumstance are a stamp of undivinity — they are in the body what ignorance and falsehood and obscurity are in our mental and vital consciousness. A divinised being on earth is one in whom not merely the mental and vital consciousness but also the physical instrument has been changed into divine and therefore fully illumined and immortal and immune substance. Indeed, no such change can be wholly effected in the former without a corresponding change in the latter — unless

they stand aloof from it and do not associate themselves with it for God's manifestation on earth. As there is the association indispensable for manifesting God on earth, the imperfection of the body would interfere with the perfect working of the mental and vital elements for terrestrial purposes. Hence it follows that, so long as the body's imperfection is accepted as in the last resort irremediable, there can be no vision by any yogi of integral transformation.

And if you give close thought to the matter you will observe that, so long as an irreducible quantity of imperfection is acknowledged, a tremendous hiatus is caused between the Divine and earth-existence. All, says the ancient wisdom, is the Divine. But if all is the Divine, then all can manifest divine values perfectly in an evolutionary scheme like our earth's: there cannot be an irreducible quantity of the imperfect in man's career through time. Once the quantity is granted in spite of the process of evolution, we automatically make a division in ultimate being: there is the Divine and there is the undivine which cannot wholly express and be transformed into divine values. To fight clear of this dualism arises the theory of *māyā*, Illusion. Whatever holds the irreducible quantity of the imperfect cannot really exist — it must be a hallucination, a strange non-being that yet seems to have existence. The only thing to do for the seeker of “the one entire and perfect chrysolite”, the innate idealist in man wanting the Absolute, the Flawless, the hundred per cent Divine, is to get rid of this illusion and pass into the formless and nameless samadhi, Nirvana, Nirguna Brahman. If we are told that something undivinisable is present in the world-elements, we may yet choose to work for the world and look upon the world as valuable because there are also so many God-expressive parts in it, but the deepest self in us will always feel discontented, unappeased, impatient and know that not here is the Grand Terminus of the soul's evolution, the scene of its integral fulfilment. And in the long run the countries where this deepest self is most active will yield, in spite of all theories of the world as *līlā* or God's play, to the theory of the world as *māyā*.

India is overshadowed by the *māyā* theory not just because India has lost her ancient vigour: it is also because India is irrepressibly influenced by the deepest self and that perfection-haunted dweller within cannot accept as real whatever fails to admit of total divinisation. Nothing save extreme Shankarite *sannyāsa*, nothing save extreme Buddhistic *tyāga* can be the logical result for a spiritual aspirant who accepts an undivinisable factor in our nature's constituents. The pull towards the Beyond, towards utter rejection of the world for a supra-cosmic status cannot be helped — and really should not be opposed if the Divine, the wholly Perfect, is our goal. And yet even Shankara and Buddha with their illusionist attitude were drawn to world-work, to some effort at manifestation of the Spirit, at irradiation of our nature by the Secret Splendour. Here also is an instinct that is innate. But it can have justification only if our nature is really capable of divine irradiation. Between the instinct to withdraw to the Beyond because of our nature's ultimate residue of the

undivinisable with its consequent Mayic emptiness and the instinct to illumine our nature as much as possible as though it were something real and not Mayic — between these two instincts the fight must go on, with a trend more and more towards the former because the allure of the aloof Perfection to the dreamer in us of spiritual plenitude is greater than that of the world-intimate imperfect shedding of manifesting light. This fight is the history of Indian spirituality in the past. It can end only if a NEW vision is both entertained and practised — the vision of complete illumination down to the very cells of the body — the vision of the body's utter divinisation!

Can you aver that such a vision has been in the past? Can you quote to me any yogi who has said as the Mother has said: "Physical death is no part of our programme"?³ Where in any scripture is the assertion that the completely God-realised man has a body which is no longer subject to disease, decay and death and that this body need not be given up because of the operation of any so-called Nature's law or necessity? Great yogis are declared to leave the body and depart from life, at will; but this they do in anticipation of the stroke of death and the body they leave is no intrinsically incorruptible substance but generally the seat of some disease or other — cancer of the throat in Ramakrishna, asthma and diabetes in Vivekananda, blood-poisoning in Dayananda. Even that champion hathayogi, Pavhari Baba, whom Vivekananda was at times sorely tempted by his own ailments to consult and take as master, gave up his corporeal frame because of some affliction that had overtaken it. Never in the past has there been any vision of the thoroughly divinised body, immune even from accidents, as the external support for an integrally divine manifestation. If that vision put forth by Sri Aurobindo is not NEW, and revolutionarily NEW at that, tell me what significance the word NEW has!

You may be sceptical about the probability of so radical a transformation or even argue that it is not desirable. But how can you say that what Sri Aurobindo is asking for is old? Most certainly the transformation he has in mind is not "a statement in another language of the age-old cry of the mystic". It does not stand for merely a purified saintly life — not even for the magnificent selflessness of a Gautama. It is something no mystic has ever wholly dreamed of in a practical positive manner, though some intuition of it has always been vaguely at work behind all our efforts at manifesting the Divine. Despite that faint intuition, no mystic has dared to place in the forefront a transformation such as Sri Aurobindo wants. They may employ the same term but his meaning cannot be theirs. This is so because no mystic had the full organised wide-awake knowledge of what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind or Truth-Consciousness, nor the active effective experience of its mighty alchemic process. There is a tendency to think that Supermind means only "above the mind"

3. It must be understood that life's perpetuation for the sake of an unending activity of the unregenerate human ego is not the immortality aimed at. In fact, any perpetuation as such is not desired: what is desired is the Divine in the body and the Divine's inherent deathlessness as part of the body's realisation of Him.

and coincides with what other seers have discovered to be divine levels of being, higher than the mind yet lower than the “Ultimate Transcendent Reality”. The Latin word “super”, as used by Sri Aurobindo, has a particular significance which emerges with unique force once we look at his table of what is above the mind. He speaks of the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind, the Overmind, and then the Supermind. The word “super” does not indiscriminately cover all these levels. It acquires, as distinguished from the word “over”, a shade of utter supremacy, and in his expositions the Supermind does not do service for merely the highest level of being below the “Ultimate Transcendent Reality” but is part and parcel of that Reality: only it is the part that is turned towards creation, towards the bringing forth and harmonisation of the truths implicit in the Transcendent for world-play.

There are many terms both in western and eastern mysticism which appear on the surface to contain the essence of the Aurobindonian Supermind, but they basically do not. Take the “Nous” of the Neo-Platonists. The Supermind is not this Nous: it is the consciousness of which the Neo-Platonic Nous is a weak, vague and diffuse description. All the planes above the mind are spiritual ones and are the play of a luminous unity in a diversity of delight: there is natural to them what I have called in a poem of mine “the shining smile of the one Self everywhere”, they form a pattern and harmony whose wavering reflex and echo we find in our universe. All of them, therefore, are Nous — the consciousness whose multiple singlehood is the formative archetype of things here. The apex of this consciousness is the Overmind. I cannot tell whether Plotinus had a glimpse of the Overmind: perhaps it was his glimpse of it that he put into the poetic account in his *Enneads* of the ecstatic interfusion of glorious God-forms in the spiritual world. But all this does not identify Nous with the Supermind. Just as the Overmind, the world of the greatest Gods, seems to be the archetype of our universe, so also the Supermind is the archetype of the “overmental” plane. In other words, as compared to life here the Overmind is perfection; but, as compared to what is still beyond, the Overmind is imperfect Nature rounded off in general without a flawless balance and harmony between the One and the Many. The Overmind is not Ignorance: it is Knowledge, yet it is Knowledge on the way to being Ignorance. So the Neo-Platonic Nous is very distant from being “supramental” — and the proof is simply this: complete conscious awareness of the Supermind must mean the awareness and revelation of the chief secret of the Supermind, namely, that man’s entire nature, down to his material substance, can be divinised in an immortal perfect existence on earth. Nor would such awareness and revelation stop short of a spontaneous effort to divinise and immortalise the earth-sheath. The Supermind’s essence is the power it possesses to effect a total and integral divinisation. That power could never have been plumbed before, nobody ever thought it possible to produce so fundamental a change. Not merely is Plotinus’s Nous ruled out: even the Vedas and the Upanishads and the Gita were not acquainted with any direct dynamic realisation of the Supermind in

relation to terrestrial Nature. They have grand hints and glimmerings of it: the Vedas' *Satyam Ritam Brihat*, The True, the Right, the Vast — the Upanishads' *Vijñāna*, the all-comprehensive Knowledge — the Gita's *Purushottama* with *Parā-prakriti*, the Supreme Being with His Super-Nature. But no radically transforming intimacy with it was present. To be uplifted into it in a trance or to be lost in it and pass through its golden gate into the supra-cosmic Unknown or else to work under its glowing guidance from afar and above is not the same thing as to ascend to it and live in it with one's physical eyes open and bring about its progressive descent — as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do.

The constant day-to-day living in the light of the Supermind and the supramental descent into our whole constitution in order to shape a divine mind, a divine life-force, a divine body: this is the aim and the decisive condition of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. But there is a long and difficult way to go, a hard task of self-consecration, self-purification, self-discipline, a development on many lines and an opening to the Divine Shakti and Her working on all the planes to be carried through before this decisive condition can be reached. That an opportunity may be given to others for this long training and process and a nucleus formed of seekers after this great transformation, Sri Aurobindo has let an Ashram grow around him. In this nucleus the seekers have to grow out of the habits and tendencies created by the past opposite trends of human existence, the clinging to the egoistic life and its ignorance and the revolt against life and finally the satisfaction with a half and half spiritual effort and realisation, and so make themselves fit for the final movement of an integral and supramental Yoga. A successful formation of such a nucleus is evidently a necessary preliminary condition for the work Sri Aurobindo has undertaken for the world since he aims not only at an individual realisation but at a great collective descent of the highest truth into life and a new power on the earth for the liberation and perfection of mankind.

I may point out further that it is this yoga's newness that is responsible for the length of Sri Aurobindo's labour. Though forty years have passed since he set forth on the *via mystica* and though all the achievements of Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga seem compassed and though on the one hand the Nirvana of Buddha and on the other the Tantric awakening of all the occult chakras in the body appear to be realised, Sri Aurobindo still declares that his labour has not come to its end. Do you imagine that a spiritual genius like him has to continue for forty years to nearly attain what others have got within half a dozen years or so? Surely it is clear that he is at a mighty unparalleled job: there is an obvious case for considering his goal momentarily new. The period of time taken depends, where spiritual geniuses are concerned, on what their goals are and the goal of Sri Aurobindo is not reached yet because that stupendous thing — the integral descent of the Supermind — has not shown itself utterly in the most outer physical. What has already happened, however, is more significant than anything in the history of Indian spirituality, for

only the last steps in the top-to-toe descent remain and not even the first extraordinary steps that lead to these last have been taken by anyone hitherto. Even before the last hundredth step there must be the sovereign entry into the Supermind with its clear vision of total transformation: can you point to any yogi or rishi who gives signs of that clear vision, leave aside indications of the practice of the full dynamics of the supramental descent? Is there any wonder the disciples of Sri Aurobindo say that this path is new and different?

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(K. D. SETHNA)

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second revised and enlarged edition, 1992, pp. 63-71.)

The experience you had is of course the going inside of the consciousness which is usually called trance or samadhi. The most important part of it however is the silence of the mind and vital which is fully extended to the body also. To get the capacity of this silence and peace is a most important step in the sadhana. It comes at first in meditation and may throw the consciousness inward in trance, but it has to come afterwards in the waking state and establish itself as a permanent basis for all the life and action. It is the condition for the realisation of the Self and the spiritual transformation of the nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 1015)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

Chapter: XLVII

A Foreboding Funeral

For a tear is an intellectual thing,
And a sigh is the sword of an Angel King,
And the bitter groan of the martyr's woe
Is an arrow from the Almighty's bow.

— William Blake¹

Rarely had any occurrence shaken the pillars of the colonial government so much as the elimination of Gossain right amidst the strict security measures maintained in Alipore Jail. He was their biggest single hope, the one fellow whose statements, if they had been accepted after cross-examination, would have sealed any chance of escape for their prize catch, their dreaded enemy, Sri Aurobindo.

At first the administration imagined the daring deed of Satyen and Kanai to be the prelude to some more aggressive plan in the offing. By and by it became clear that even though the incident must have gladdened all their accused friends in jail as well as the people in general, it had been designed by the two who executed it, with the assistance of no more than three or four friends inside and outside. The stages of the incident could be outlined thus: The revolvers had been gathered at Chandernagore and despatched into the prison through the efforts of Motilal Roy. Kanai and Satyen pretended to be indisposed and got admitted in the hospital wing of the prison. As they professed their inclination to become approvers and sought a private meeting with Gossain, the latter was brought to the hospital. It was in the veranda of the hospital wing that the two began shooting at him as he ran downstairs to save himself. The victim fell down on the brink of a drain and died. Kanai and Satyen offered no resistance and were captured.²

In the memoirs of one of the revolutionary youths of the time, we find a version of the incident that runs like this:

Not even Sri Aurobindo knew about the plot. Satyendranath informed Gossain that he was no longer able to bear the ordeals his life encountered in jail. Thus the authorities concerned arranged for the two to meet frequently. The simple-minded Irish doctor in charge of the hospital informed Sri Aurobindo that Satyen, it appeared, was going to turn witness for the prosecution. Upendra

and Hemchandra promised to keep an eye on Satyen as if they had taken the doctor's confidential report seriously. But what they did was this: without Sri Aurobindo's knowledge they informed all their compatriots that Sri Aurobindo had passed an order prohibiting anybody from seeking admission in the hospital and that those who were there must come back forthwith.³

Needless to say, they took recourse to such cautions in order to facilitate the execution of the plot.

Despite a meticulously planned operation, Kanai and Satyen had to face an unexpected challenge from two European "convict overseers", Higgins and Linton, who grappled with Kanai and Satyen respectively. Both were foiled, Higgins losing the top of his thumb to a bullet from Kanai. Wrote the *Indu Prakash*:

The Bengal anarchists may be considered to be the most romantic lot in the whole anarchist world . . . they simply cast into the shade Russian and Spanish desperadoes; quick in action, quick in revenge, smart in overpowering powerful European warders, and smart in getting rid of an approver.⁴

Commenting on the principle followed by the anarchists, the paper said that it was "better to let go half a dozen spleen-cracking Europeans than allow a traitor to escape."⁵

The physical chaos inside the prison compound settled down with the prisoners locked up in separate cells and the rolling of the heads of some officials, but the incident sucked sleep out of scores of eyes for months to come. Panic chilled the air around the court as well as the police and other administrative establishments.

The Times of London reported on November 12, 1908:

Threatening letters are being scattered broadcast in Calcutta, Mr. Eardley Norton, the Crown Counsel in the Alipore case being the principal recipient of the documents.⁶

And this is what Eardley Norton himself wrote:

In the committing Magistrate's Court Counsel for the Crown received his first letter threatening to blow him out of existence. When the Court rose I went up to the Dock and asked Barindra if he approved this promise for my extermination. He courteously informed me that there was no personal objection to myself but that I was an obstruction to justice from the point of view of the accused and that much as he would regret my disappearance he could not forbid it. Then, thrusting aside my insignificance, — for after all, as he reminded me, I was but 'small fry', a mere parasite — he ventured to predict that those behind

the scenes would fly at higher game, a Commander-in-Chief and a Viceroy. I pointedly objected that Britons would no more consent to being intimidated than they would to being slaves, and that there was an indefinite number of noblemen to whom the position of a Viceroy and his emoluments would more than overcome the dread of assassination. Barindra assured me that the supply would in time prove insufficient to meet the demand. He spoke without heat, not as one directing murder but as a philosophic politician in mental touch and sympathy with the view of his countrymen. Long after, his sagacity was exemplified by the attack at Delhi on Lord Hardinge. The epistolary threats against me multiplied — they provided an infinite variety of death — unpleasant references were made to bombs, revolvers, and knives. My junior was so alarmed that he declined to drive to Court with me in my car and reached his end by circuitous approaches which daily changed their course. He has since died and I survive. In the Sessions Court my unknown enemies varied the sameness of their terror by sending me letters without stamps. I declined to pay for the notices of my impending dissolution but my friend Shamsul Alum, my right-hand Police officer (who was subsequently shot in the corridors of the High Court . . .) indignantly paid the postage himself and thereby accumulated a mass of instructive literature illustrated by diagrams.⁷

Kanai jovially made a clean breast of his deed but declared that he alone was responsible for it and Satyen was in no way involved. He added that he was fully aware of the consequence of his action and he knew how to face it.

Both were awarded death, but Satyen was influenced to appeal against it. He did not have the slightest reluctance to climb the steps of the gallows, but was told that there was nothing wrong in using law to his advantage, if possible, since Kanai had already paved the way for it.

As expected Satyen's appeal was dismissed in spite of the fact that three out of five jurors declared him not guilty. The High Court did not allow his case to be sent to the Privy Council.

Kanai was hanged on the 10th of November 1908, at 5 a.m. (Some sources put the time as 6 a.m.) Let us look into an authentic account of the day's happenings left by Upendrachandra Bhattacharya, partly gathered on the spot from those concerned and much of it witnessed by himself. To remind the readers, he was the younger brother of Sri Aurobindo's assistant Abinash Bhattacharya, arrested along with the former. (The present author has taken the liberty of shortening the passages originally in Bengali. Words put within brackets are the present author's):

He (Kanai) requested the jail doctor who did his routine health-check to wake him up at 3 a.m. since usually he slept till 4 a.m. Although the doctor did not wish to disturb his peaceful sleep, he woke up by himself, took a bath and

finished his prayers. Then he read from the *Gita* and the *Bhagavatam* and suggested that he could be led to the gallows. There was still half an hour to go before it struck five. But the last wish of the convict had to be fulfilled.

I had no sleep . . . We reached the prison a little before five. Many people had already gathered there by then. They included Jatin Mukherji (later to become famous as 'Bagha Jatin'), Ras Behari Bose, Naren Bhattacharya (later famous as M. N. Roy) and Bipin Bihari Ganguly. Kanai's elder brother, Ashutosh Dutt, was escorted by Amarendra Chattopadhyay (the radical young leader who would organise Sri Aurobindo's reception at Uttarpara). Ashutosh Babu had been granted permission to receive Kanai's dead body.

The Jail Superintendent was Irish. Kanai's courage charmed him. Climbing the gallows-platform Kanai examined the rope. He then descended and talked joyfully with those present. As it struck five he took off his spectacles and handed it over to the doctor. "Please pass it on to my brother," he said . . .

The death-bell rang and Kanai was no more.

Peeping through the doors I saw hectic activities inside. The jail-superintendent, the jailor and the doctor – all of them pressed handkerchiefs to their eyes as they sat down around a table to finish the paper works. Some European women passed by, waving black handkerchiefs. Then the doctor came closer to Ashutosh Babu and suppressing his surging tears, said, "Please don't mind; I have to work for a living, after all . . ."

"In what way are you at fault?" Ashu Babu, his face gloomy, consoled him.

"Many a hanging have I witnessed, but never had I known nor will I know again anything like this. I feel blessed." He took a long breath and resumed, "The joy with which he lived those few days after the judgment for his execution was delivered, had never been seen by me in any convict, European or of any other race. He had a sound sleep and he woke up by himself at 3 a.m. and took a bath and prayed and read the *Gita* and the *Bhagavatam*. With steps firm and fearless he climbed the execution platform."

Then the doctor handed over Kanai's spectacles to Ashutosh Babu, overwhelmed with respect for the departed soul and said, "He instructed me to give this to you."

We who heard their exchange stood stunned.

The jail authorities delivered Kanai's body at 7 o' clock. The crowd burst into shouts of "Bande Mataram". Many had brought bouquets and garlands. The martyr's body was decorated with them. Many were eager to shoulder the bier.

The procession began its journey (towards Keoratala cremation ground, near Kalighat) accompanied by patriotic songs and thousands came rushing to participate in it. The worship of Mother Kali at Kalighat was interrupted as all the flowers, the sandalwood paste and vermilion were diverted to Kanai's mortal

remains. The shops at Kalighat became empty of these items. Volunteers tried to make separate lines of men and women, but it was impossible to control the rush. It became 11.30 for the bier to reach the cremation ground. It was afternoon when the prince of the Bengali youth was laid on a huge heap of sandalwood sticks (purchased through contributions collected on the spot) bathed in ghee.⁸

Of several reports of the event, let us look at one more:

After the body had burnt out, the small remains of the bones were broken to pieces and carried off as relics. The ashes could not be thrown into the Ganges because a great number of people produced containers including silver boxes and filled them with the residue. Pinches [of the ashes] were done up into paper parcels possibly for despatch to moffussil admirers. Local flower vendors vied with each other to offer their wares free of cost to do honour to the dead.

In the afternoon a procession was formed at College Square to march through the streets with the song, *jabe jabe jiban chole*, while women had been producing tremendous blasts on their conch shells. An old man sang:

Forget the love of all that is dear,
Forego the world's worry and care,
Close in sleep thy shining eyes!
Where no darkness prevails or no tear,
Where glory decks the hero's bier,
Up Kanai, up to Paradise!⁹

How deeply, how truly, were the masses in sympathy with the revolutionaries? The following reports, not from any Indian newspaper but from *The Times* of London, could help us in forming an answer. *The Times* of November 12, 1908, wrote (with dateline 11 November):

It seems that the scene at the cremation of Kanai who was hanged yesterday for the assassination of Gossain, the approver, was even more extraordinary than appeared from the first account. The body was carried through the streets with the face uncovered and the thousands who pressed around the cortege, gazed upon the features of the 'murdered Kanai', while Purdah women followed in closed carriages. Hundreds of rupees were collected round the burning ghat in order to enrich the burning pyre, and there was a general rush to gather portions of the ashes, which were carried away in vases of silver and gold, while fragments and bones were preserved for despatch as relics to other towns.¹⁰

The Times of November 14 wrote:

Anglo-Indian press opinion lays greater stress on the demonstration which was made at the funeral of Kanai, who was hanged for the murder of approver Gossain in Alipore gaol, than on the recent outrages. The procession traversed entirely the Bengali quarter. . . . The *Basumati*, a leading newspaper, writes: — coins and paddy were strewn along the entire route. Ladies of every household along the line of procession loudly demanded a view of the dead, so the corpse was uncovered, and the cavalcade halted at almost every third house.

The Statesman denounced the demonstration in the strongest terms. It says: — “We have here a new fact of disquieting character. For the first time there has been made manifest, by a not inconsiderable section of the public, a feeling of open sympathy with anarchist propaganda.”

The journal warns the loyalists that unless they bestir themselves, the Government will probably act as if they had no existence. If healthy public opinion does not suppress disorder, the Government will have no alternative but to undertake the task, and it will not be too particular as to the means employed.¹¹

The spontaneous grand show of love and adoration exhibited for Kanai surprised the administration. His funeral proved more fearsome than his deed. The administration would not allow a repetition of that foreboding spectacle. It decided to cremate Satyen's body inside the jail compound. They did so on the 21st of November 1908, early in the morning. A friend of the revolutionaries, A. C. Roy, who presented himself before the jail gate along with a few others, stated:

A white man in uniform, a Superintendent of Police, came near me and said, “You can go now. The thing is over. Satyendra died bravely. Kanai was brave, but it seemed Satyendra was braver.” Then came a sergeant who said, “When I went to his cell to get him to the gallows, he was wide awake. When I said, ‘Satyendra, be ready,’ he answered, ‘Well, I am quite ready,’ and smiled. He walked steadily to the gallows. He mounted it bravely and bore it cheerfully. A brave lad.”¹²

The Times of 20th November wrote:

A Bengali correspondent of *The Englishman* writes that students bitterly resented the order of the authorities that the cremation of the remains of Satyendra, the second murderer in the Gossain case, shall take place within the gaol precincts after his execution. They stated that in any case demonstrations will take place and the women will blow conches the whole day, which will be observed as a

day of mourning . . . the Viceroy has refused to grant a reprieve pending an appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.¹³

The Times of 21st November wrote:

The local government, acting on standing orders has refused to forward the petition of Satyendra to the King, and the gaol Superintendent has been directed to carry out the execution as ordered.

The vernacular journal the *Basumati* says: — “No Bengali will be present at the execution, only white men. What sort of justice is this? The dead bodies should be disposed of according to religious custom, otherwise our religious rites will be tampered with. The punishment of criminals ends with their death. With that also ends the connection of the authorities with the criminal.”

Late this evening the extremists made an extraordinary attempt to outflank the government's orders with regard to the cremation of Satyendra, by constructing an effigy of the condemned man which it was intended to carry to the riverside in procession tomorrow. The Joint Magistrate, however, immediately issued orders prohibiting the public from taking part in the procession, and the police were busy all night posting up notices to this effect in the streets of the city and the suburbs.¹⁴

The Times of November 23rd wrote:

Satyendra was hanged this morning (21st). A strong force of armed police is guarding the precincts of the gaol, and the cremation of the body is now proceeding. There has been no disturbance.

[From a later despatch:]

A large crowd, composed mostly of women, spent the day at Kowratullah, on the riverside, hoping that the ashes of Satyendra would be brought there after the cremation. The gaol authorities, however, refused to allow the ashes to be taken away. It appears that Satyendra's mother made an appeal to Lord Morley to stay the execution, but the Secretary of State replied that he saw no reason to interfere with the orders of the Viceroy.¹⁵

From a despatch of November 22nd:

Although there were no demonstrations to speak of during the daytime yesterday, in connection with the execution of Satyendra, students came out in large numbers in the southern quarter of Calcutta, in the evening, forming

procession and singing a new version of the 'Bande Mataram' hymn to the effect that they would not be deterred from doing their duty. Thousands of gallows were erected, and fasting was observed and in many private houses and students' hostels effigies of Satyendra were burned secretly, with all the rites and customs usual at Hindu cremations. A large procession started from College Square, but on the Police making their appearance the demonstrators dispersed, only to collect again in Grey Street, whence they continued their march through various streets and lanes."¹⁶

Kanai and Satyen were hailed as martyrs by the youth all over Bengal and outside. Copies of the only photograph of Kanai clicked through the initiative of the aforementioned Upendrachandra and released to the market in the morning on the 12th November kept selling uninterrupted through a few outlets till the police raided the printing press in the afternoon of the 13th and confiscated the remaining five thousand copies. By then twenty-three thousand copies had been sold.¹⁷

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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[A lecture by Professor Karl Lamprecht, delivered by him during his tour of America in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1904, later translated and published in a book *What is History?*

Sri Aurobindo refers to Lamprecht in the first chapter of *The Human Cycle*. See pp. 930-31 of this issue.]

WHAT IS HISTORY?

THE GENERAL COURSE OF GERMAN HISTORY FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

For some months now I have been in the midst of this nervous, rushing American life. From every side one is impressed by the sense of vastness, of incalculable possibilities. I have peered into new forms of historical existence, which, though I may not altogether comprehend them, have yet been suspected and vaguely felt. Still the effect of this vastness, the impression it makes upon the mind, was hardly dreamed of before I left Europe three months ago.

But I wish to speak to you of the old world, not of the new; and not simply of the passing things of this old world; rather of its recent progress won by strenuous effort in a particular field, that of historical science — possibly also of some labour of my own in this field. It is with the greatest diffidence that I venture in this company of trained specialists to treat historical problems of the first importance to us all. But after all, Uhland's line holds good for every German, — "The brave Swabian knows no fear." And as for the historian there is always one recourse open to him if he would make himself more easily understood, the one that was originally his first weapon: he can examine his subject and begin to describe.

And so let me introduce to-day the problems of recent historical science, of which I shall speak again in later lectures, by telling you the story of my own people, from about 500 B.C. up to the present time. "The story of the German nation in one hour?" I hear you ask. Yes, in one hour. And it depends a little on the nature of the questions that will occupy us in a later lecture (taking it for granted that the venture can be made), how the story can be told in a single hour.

In the last centuries before, and the first after, the birth of Christ we meet with the Germans, for the most part our common ancestors, in a psychic condition which on closer view is very amazing to us of later growth. Their imagination, to begin with this most symptomatic of all psychic functions, rich in accordance with the output of their strength, does not show itself in any poem, any drama, any musical composition, any piece of sculpture or painting. And yet it is active in the highest

degree. It includes, at bottom, all the above-named kinds of imaginative activity at one and the same time; there was no song that was not accompanied by gesticulation and plastic pose of the body, as by a musical handling of language; no solemn function that did not take a poetically musical form; no creation of plastic art in which mimic *motifs* suggesting speech and modulation had not made themselves felt. With this universality of imaginative activity, its forms of expression are of course always accompanied by all the lofty elements of existence; as, for instance, birth, betrothal, marriage, death; the primitive economic life of the household, — of justice, morality, — the changes of nature in spring and autumn and the feelings they call forth; above all, in the great festivals of intercourse with the gods. “Here were the gods themselves accounted as present on solemn occasions; they were greeted with joy and escorted to the villages and the dwellings of the people; they were offered hospitality and accompanied on their way. Sometimes a youth, sometimes a maid, was deemed worthy of the honour of representing in human form the superhuman; and where they fell short of such bold materialisation, they at least led forth in solemn procession animals dedicated to the gods. The divinity was received with high honours when for the exercise of his divine calling on earth he became visible to human sense. Who has not heard of the chariot of the god of plenty, Nerthus, which, drawn by kine, went through the land in spring to take possession of the newly awakened earth? At every fresh landmark there greeted him the solemn procession of husbandmen, and to the accompaniment of rhythmic movements were attuned the songs of praise and gladness.”¹

What was the underlying element of this wonderful psychic attitude, of this primitive unity of imagination, — which, though occasionally interrupted, was yet appearing everywhere, — with its influence evident in all phases of existence?

To this period, to the Germans of the little tribal communities, of which there were about a hundred in the nation, to the warrior who lived contentedly in the setting made by the natural organisation of his race, and in the fulfilment chiefly of genealogic duties, — to him the world was not yet something conceivable, capable of portrayal, but only such as he saw before him, and hence the image of it in his mind was simple, palpable. No matter what important affair of life had to be dealt with psychically, it was not described in definite terms and made fast by convictions. It was reproduced allegorically, and its meaning repeated in psychic functions which expressed it externally by means of symbols. Let us describe otherwise this condition so foreign to our comprehension and therefore not easily accessible. The mental scaffolding of any sort of idea, or any sort of volition, was at once personified in a significant action, and appeared symbolised in the forms of an imaginative activity whose influence was as yet little refracted in rays. Thus intuition and thought coincided, and mental culture, the psychic existence of the time, took a symbolic form.

1. K. Lamprecht, *German History*, Vol. I, 3rd ed., 1902, p. 177.

Symbolism, therefore, in the sense just described, is the true mark, the characteristic peculiarity of these earlier periods of history. To this, as to all central phenomena, all single psychic activities are subordinate: thinking resolved itself into analogous conclusion, the proper intellectual function of symbolism; volition found expression in transactions before the court and the community, in the form of an elaborately developed symbolic jurisprudence; lastly, the emotions in their most exalted form, religion, put their stamp on the forms of the intuitive philosophy just described. And as the main functions, so were its derivations symbolic in their most important and permanent developments, — language, art, philosophy, morals, and customs. Legal symbolism took hold of morals; indeed, the latter was completely controlled by it. Philosophy melted into mythology, which transformed the most important phenomena of nature and human life into a world of gods, who lived behind these phenomena, creating and guiding them, — an exalted type of visible reality. Art, limited to simple cloth patterns, was made to express that element of the world of phenomena which, earliest of all, took shape in the minds of men, — rhythm, movement; and in moments of conscious exaltation, language fell in with this rhythmic usage in its peculiar Germanic fashion, by an interweaving of the parts, and by a heavy stress not so much on the beautiful in form as on significance of the contents.

Therefore, however difficult it may be to distinguish from among the meagre information of this time the earlier and later tendencies of development, there existed a great unity of the psychic life. And we can see how it finds expression in a particular personal ideal, whose acts in turn reacted powerfully upon the general thought of the community. In this world of symbolic life the individual vanishes; he becomes at once the actor in a universal psychic life, becomes part of the whole, a coequal member of a community side by side with others of the same standing.

It is, in fact, what distinguishes the external Germanic culture. We see the nation without a bond that could hold it together politically become divided into a great number of tribal communities, — of clans. The approach toward intellectual equality of individuals brought no tendency to a closer union of the whole, as is certainly required by a division of labour and by labour unions; and this was favourable to a differentiation of individual activities in the later stages of culture. Still, the tribal communities turn out to be not simple but complicated formations. They consist in a number of hundreds; and in these the German actually lived. And the hundreds bear distinctly a genealogic character, are at bottom great families or clans. In the family, therefore, is the German quite at home; it encircles him with its uninterrupted life, and within this he is accounted only a specimen, not an individual; he is subject to the system of blood vengeance with the psychic point of view which puts every individual on exactly the same level; in his personal preferences, in friendship and enmity, he is bound by the bonds of family life; he appears to the

outsider, and according to our views also in purely personal matters, as if he were interchangeable with any of his equals, as if he were but a function.

And this contraction, or rather almost complete negation, of what we call personality, in the natural division of the family, shows the manner in which the individual can be made use of in the building up of a state, in the constitution of the tribal community. The state is the army, and citizenship is comradeship, — comradeship in the sense of complete subjection to the whole; in the sense of an almost complete loss of personality even for the prominent hero.

Upon this comrade-like and natural connection is based the most modern of all these institutions, the home of an agricultural unit.

According to families and hundreds land is apportioned out as booty among comrades; hence the form taken by primitive farming strongly resembles communism. After all these impressions, can we wonder that the Romans thought the Germans in appearance scarcely distinguishable from each other, with great similarity of physiognomy? that their greatest ethnographer, Tacitus, founded on this similarity in outward appearance the definite statement of a “*gens propria et sincera et tantum sui similis*”?

But two or three centuries after Tacitus this little world was set in motion not only externally, but psychically. And five to six centuries later we find a markedly new psychic attitude, which lasts on into the eleventh century, and which is distinguished from the earlier in all respects, — a radical distinction. What did not the migration of nations mean for the German? The breaking up of an old, the opening up, if not at once constructing, of a new world. The German language still bears in its broadest features, in the adoption of expressions for a better management in house and garden, in meat and drink, the ineradicable traces of the influences which emanated from the satiated culture of the empire into whose long-cherished peace the Germans burst with destruction in their hands. But side by side with these more common and even to-day occasionally controllable results, appear a countless number of the finer influences, perhaps on that account the more effectual in their operation on the Germanic soul. From the sad moral and intellectual conditions in the Merovingian kingdom, as in the Germanic dominions on the Mediterranean, we see that in the first place an almost complete dissociation of the psyche took place. What had been ordered and was pleasing in the eyes of the Lord came to naught. What had been significant with transcendently symbolic conceptions passed away. Like a rushing flood carrying ruin upon ruin with it, the fierce waves of a foreign culture burst in, destroying what existed; these are far from being easily controlled and brought within new spheres of restraint. Only very gradually a new element eliminated itself and quiet is restored. And there appears above the floods of this older culture now vanishing, and finally oozing away altogether, a new world, a type not essentially Roman, but a derived Germanic culture brought up to a higher level.

Let us view this new culture a little more closely. The older age had known as its chief signs of imaginative activity, and at the same time, artistic reproduction of the physical and psychic world of phenomena, the dirge and embroidery. In the dirge they celebrated the deeds of the heroes by giving expression, mimic, musical, and poetic, to their feelings, as Tacitus reports of Armenius, "*canitur adhuc barbaras apud gentes*". In the embroidery they had seized and held fast in the field of plastic art the rhythmic *motifs* of movement. In the place of these forms of imaginative activity we see, since the migration of nations, other forms appear and flourish in certain internal changes down to the eleventh century, — the epic and the so-called symbolic decorative style. The oldest form of the epic is the heroic song, of which we have one still preserved in the "*Hildebrandslied*", from the pre-renaissance, the ninth century, a tale of the great deeds of a hero, recited with voices uplifted and accompanied by gesticulations, a tale brief, terse, and almost dramatic in form. Such a form could only have developed in the time of the migration; the oldest names belong to the migration, the bearers of which are known to us in abundant tradition. But since the eighth, if not the seventh, century this form, already decaying, yields to another, the legend-song, which tells of great men and bold deeds, but with loving minuteness of detail in later times, not seldom with almost the precision of anecdote — very near in its whole conception to reality, which it reflects poetically. This is a form which flourished in the last centuries of the age with which we are now concerned, the height of its development being reached about the year 900 A.D. Later there arises the tendency to become more circumstantial; it is marked by a taste for animal-lore, and ends on the one side in the realistic rime chronicle devoted to the handling of the present, on the other in the jest-poem of the thirteenth century, as characterised by Gottfried Hagen's "Book of the Town of Cologne", and, though in Latin, by "Discourses on Marvels" by Casarius von Heisterbach, as also by the thousand legends of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

This development of the epic runs parallel in plastic art with that of symbolic decoration. Here we see how the embroidery pattern of the former age gradually took on animal shapes till snakes, quadrupeds, and birds come to be represented, though very much distorted in movement.

And then we can observe how, out of the transition forms, the animal gradually emerges and becomes plain to us; in the beginning they appear only in general outlines, typical, however, in a positive sense of the word, so that quadruped and bird and fish — but not special families of these species — may be distinguished. But after the seventh and eighth centuries, as if bursting out of a protecting husk, certain types emerge from these representations of universal kinds; out of the quadruped, a dog or a deer; out of the bird, a goose or an eagle. Even these were by no means conceived realistically, as one would be led to expect from the heraldic designs of the age. Faint traces of something new appear, which, in the course of the tenth century, blossom out into a glorious art, — plant decoration. The typical

rendering of the moving animal is followed by that of the immovable, — the vegetable; again we note the general forms, so that leaf and stalk, though not of a particular species of tree or plant, become recognisable, whereas the actuating *motif* of the decoration of the preceding age finds expression in the most graceful, wavelike movements of branches and twigs. Here also, in the course of the eleventh century, a more pronounced individualisation sets in. Tree, bush, and plant, weedlike and slender upspringing forms, can be distinguished, till, in a time closely following, even flowers and trees — and amongst the trees, oaks and birches — stand out; the taste of the time finally rises high enough to choose for the tone of the object represented the local colour rather than one taken at random, vivid and garish, and which in animal decorative work advances to the proportionally marked realism of the present-day heraldic figures.

One recognises at once in how nearly parallel courses plastic art and poetry have developed, which, indeed, in these centuries were represented within the national development only by epic and decorative art. To one of the first periods of heroic song and animal decoration, there followed a second of the legendary lay and plant ornament, and the feature uniting them is that of an increasing nearness to reality, even when, at the close of the whole age, they first succeed in reproducing the symbols of the world of phenomena rather than that of individuals.

But is this feature not the same that distinguishes the whole imaginative activity of the new period from that of the preceding, prehistoric, Germanic age, except that the dividing line between the time before and after the migration is more marked than that of the seventh to the ninth century? For if the artistic conception of the world of facts had not advanced, even as far as to represent roughly the animal in motion, could it master anything besides the *motif* for movement in itself?

We have a fair example of this when a child, before the age at which he reproduces man and beast, draws with the pencil nothing but representations of movement, the strokes which are due to the unconscious, rhythmic guidance of his hand, and yet characterises them as certain definite animals, — cats, dogs, horses, etc. If the reproduction of the psychic world be not advanced to the point of narration, must not this appear in the symbolic recital of the feelings of the hero, and in the pathetic reproduction of these feelings by means of the dirge? It was the correspondence of these feelings with the representation, that characterised primitive symbolism, just as the correspondence of visible movement, with the personal rhythm of the artist, belongs to this time. The following age, which we may now call that of symbolism, brings the resolving of feelings and movements into a shape of which the essence and kind appear in general outlines; it gives us the epic and decorative art.

With these observations, rather minute and detailed, we have recognised at once the fundamental difference of the earlier and later periods. The prehistoric ages embraced centuries of unconscious living in and with nature, whether it be the nature of the external physical life of phenomena, or the inward stirrings of the

psyche. In the later ages man begins to give forth from himself these phenomena in a slow dawning of consciousness, he begins to appreciate them as objective facts given from out of the ego, and starting from this appreciation he learns to dominate them as an objective. This is a stage in the evolutionary process which has come in the course of German development, and the single phases of which form the period of the more strictly national growth.

But was the prehistoric age really so entirely unconscious of the nature of things and of the psyche? Is its separation from later ages absolute? All historical experience forces us to answer these questions in the negative. If we could know the conditions of still earlier ages of Germanic life than the so-called prehistoric age, we should find that there was an even greater unconsciousness of certain aspects of things, and it is only in its character as the earliest known period that the prehistoric age appears absolute, — from which we have to calculate as with a given thing that cannot be further resolved into parts.

If we return to the period of the third to the eleventh century, to the age of symbolism, a more careful scrutiny shows that all further phenomena of this time, internal and external, depend on the character of the psychic essence as we have known it hitherto.

Is there need now to say that persons and things lived and behaved after the very simplest fashion? The statesman and warrior was a hero first, according to the ideal of the oldest epic song, and later, according to the demands of tradition and the art of poetry. The Teuton, just becoming the German, begins to appear as a type and to recognise himself as belonging to a peculiar race, at the same time plastic art had advanced to the complete reproduction of organic types. And these are the poles, hero and nation, within which developed the political history of the period treated, — a development and vitalisation of psychic qualities which are never understood without a deep knowledge of historical culture. Hence at the time of the self-recognition, since the beginning of the ninth century, say, the Romance and Germanic nations begin to grow up independently, each drawing sustenance from the great Carolingian power. Political history resounds again with heroic deeds and heroic song; diplomatic transactions bear the impress of the personal relation between hero and hero; the relations of the Papacy to Charlemagne are regulated by the promises of the Carolingian monarch that he would always continue loyal to St. Peter, and the traditions of the foreign policy of this time would have become epic in form if the Church, in keeping with the idea of Catholic succession, had not turned men's attention toward the work of the annalist. For what do we learn of Charlemagne through the national epic? Campaigns against the heathen and the Moslem, expeditions to Jerusalem, and a thousand other things which tradition, in so far as it corresponds to reality, rather surrounds with numberless illusive suggestions, than expresses in plain words.

But between the individual and the national commonwealth, when it is, for the

first time, built up from internal forces, even though weakly propped, there appear a thousand forms of activity that plainly show the coming in of a new period to succeed that of symbolism. The individual breaks the bonds of tutelage, if not of the family, at least of the clan; he gains more freedom, though, according to our view, he is still subordinate to the old influence to a marked degree. He begins, however, to manage for himself economically, in an organisation which bears the stamp of communistic and clannish domination; in political matters he is freer still. The state of the old tribal community with its close military comradeship exists no longer; it has given place to a more extended state-system. And over this there stretches, at least in the last centuries of this period, the one great national state. This new and greater state is not, properly speaking, a creation of the people out of their own resources, but a formation which is due in large measure to admiration for the splendour of the Roman Empire, therefore it takes the name of an empire, and its great head surrounds himself with all the known forms and ceremonies of the departed Caesars, which is the reason it could never be of lasting benefit to the people living under it. Yet the emperor succeeded in buttressing up this state by winning to its support the one growing nation it embraced, so that it outlived even the times of symbolism. It was characteristic of this period that moral standards were still determined by the earlier notions of restraint, though to moderns they might appear free enough; it was possible, therefore, to found upon this primitive morality an enduring relationship between the state and the nation: it was the principle of loyalty so characteristic of the Germans. Out of this grew feudalism, that unique system which depended so much upon the sense of devotion to one's superior — a system which proved to be one of the most enduring known to European history.

The period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries brought a tremendous social change; from early mediaevalism we pass to late mediaevalism, out of the age of the typical to the conventional psychic life.

Would this new period which continues on into the fifteenth century appear in the light of a mass-psychological treatment (which deals radically and comprehensively with the narrower range of German history) as a period equally well defined and distinguished by real force and breadth of inner human interest, with that of symbolism?

One may well doubt it, for a survey of German history leaves the question open whether these centuries are not to be considered as a last epoch, a transition period from the age of types to that of individualism, embracing the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Be that as it may, in German history this period is so full of life and so crowded with activity, that from the artistic point of view it would in any case be advisable to consider it by itself.

In order to come to a better understanding of the period, it would be well in this instance not to start with the statement of the psychic core of the new time, but

with matters of its more external, economic, and political nature. Thus two great series of events demand our attention: one of which reaches back into the period just discussed — the development of territorial rule; the other is that of the early city life and conditions.

The first settlement of the Germans was in homesteads and villages; peasant conditions were everywhere quite similar even to the extent of an almost equal distribution of the land, and thus things remained for a long period. But during the rule of the later Merovingians there began the breaking up of this comparatively fixed condition. There arose an aristocracy of great landowners, far superior to the great mass of average owners; and to be a large landowner was to be at the same time a territorial ruler; because for uniform cultivation of great tracts of land a rational economic life is necessary, which can only be reached by the employment of capital, which first makes its appearance in the higher stages of civilisation. Great landed estates at the period now under consideration could only be made to pay by farming out the land to others. But these others, before the day of fairly plentiful capital, could not become independent farmers under contract of periodic payment for the land in use, but must meet their obligations by serving in person and paying in kind. Hence came their personal dependence on the lord of the soil, and, in consequence, their political standing became that of the serf. The development was not that of great landownership and subletting, but of territorial lordships and serfdom.

It was a process that had vast psychic consequences. A social change began to take place, in the course of which the favoured lord of the soil had leisure to take up intellectual pursuits, to live more intensely from the psychic point of view. It was a state of things which embraced at least a part of the clerical landowners, above all, the monasteries, say, from the ninth and tenth centuries on.

And this movement runs parallel with, and was alike cause and result of, a genuine acceptance of Christianity. How extraordinary had been those earliest stirrings of Christian piety: a spirit of asceticism expressed in the strangest castigations of the flesh and a faith in the miraculous which, limited by no consciousness of causality, thought it could remove mountains! And yet how mighty were the results of this spiritual current! It burst forth similarly in France and Italy and swelled the tide of living waters on the waves of which the awakening lust of dominion of the popes of the eleventh century was borne onward till it exceeded in importance that of the old western primate of the Roman curia. Then Gregory VII, with wonderful political foresight, formulated the programme of this power, and making use of the reform movement which had spread in the meantime, raised it, especially in Germany, with heavy pressure on the temporal powers to be the acknowledged system of the Church.

During this time a change had taken place in the domain of territorial supremacy and serfdom; and this gave a political basis to a new intellectual life. The landlords had not been content with developing under their control a uniform class of farming sub-tenants. With the serfs bound to them by the obligations of service, they had

classified these duties in grades and in this way set going a new movement. Hence there arose above the inferior cultivators a caste of superiors pledged to military service, who kept aloof from the lower order, strove to form a degree of nobility in vassalage, gradually developing the ideal of the horseman, the military retainer. These are the good times of the rise of Ministerialism, the golden age of the first Stauffer period, when a Frederick I, with the help of his vassals, subjected northern Italy financially, and a Henry VI, with the same help, found himself able to rule over southern Italy and Sicily. But at a critical moment of German political history, when full of hastily formed plans for a campaign in the East and for the founding of imperial power along the Mediterranean, he died in the prime of life, to the great sorrow of the nation.

These were all events which must have aroused the great masses of the people and given them new conceptions of things; above all, the Ministerials. What could seem unattainable when vassals of the empire, whose children received the Emperor's permission to marry, might become counts, princes, and dukes in the new wonderland, Italy? All life had apparently become an adventure, and the more so because in the process of the development of territorial rule, even the subordinate peasants grew to be economically independent and responsible beings. And out of the villages of the fatherland thousands and thousands of the youngest and best suited for colonising purposes were sent into the East, into the countries beyond the Elbe, and along the Danube, to found that new Germany which composes two-fifths of the national possessions of the present time.

These are events which followed each other in rapid succession. Having an agrarian basis, they were at once the forerunners of a last purely agrarian culture, the culture of the days of chivalry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

But these were not the exclusive tendencies of the time. Side by side with them other equally important events were occurring, out of which a primitive financial system, an early *Bürgertum*, an early town culture, arose. It is impossible to show here in detail in what manner this second series of developments took shape, because almost every one of the known or supposed events has been variously described and estimated. To enter into a criticism of these statements and judgments would mean a reversal of the entire economy of these lectures, even if the remarks could be kept quite general. In such a case, moreover, our present conclusions would have to be tested by scrutinising comparison with the results of careful investigation in similar fields outside the sphere of Western Europe, which, so far as the Germans are concerned, has not been done. So that in this connection it may suffice to say that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the towns had been by no means unimportant in mutual reaction with the above-mentioned changes of territorial rule, which had permitted a surplus to be produced, and so led the way to a primitive formation of capital. These towns, with their early patriciate, with their commercial guilds and industrial unions, arose as a noticeable element of new national life, and

in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries developed for the first time a really middle-class culture.

If at this juncture we review the results of the great economic and political events of the new period, they can be summed up in the two words, chivalry and bourgeoisie. But who, at the sound of these words, will not think at once of the great intellectual value associated with them? Here, on the one side, we have the times of knight-errantry and armed bands equipped for gallant adventure; on the other, resound the songs of Walther von der Vogelweide, — songs which tell of German customs and of the kingdom's pitiable plight; we have again the graver lines of Wolfram von Eschenbach; and Hartmann von Aue tells his tale with the flowing ease and grace of his wonderfully adaptive rhythmic measure. And the ideas thus made known to us in lyric and epic poetry, and which serve a many-sided didactic purpose, also find expression in plastic art. In miniatures we are shown the knight and the lady in the gracefully conventional pose of the time, — a mass of delicate lines of beautifully falling drapery enfolding the form, which with all its power seems born for self-abnegation. And from lofty pedestals there look down upon us statues telling of a satiated existence, as, for instance, in those of the choir of Naumburg Cathedral of the later years of the period of love-minstrelsy, no longer adorned with the conventional smile alone, but rather showing the slight beginnings of portraiture, — already tending toward a more realistic expression. It is at once the period of clumsiness and grace, the latter becoming in the end the permanent element which marked the Romanesque (transition) style in architecture. With it came the decorative principle already strongly felt; *e.g.* the heraldic lion and the wreath of rue, from which sprang the virginal Gothic style, with its delicate features of early purely naturalistic decoration in imitation of the lesser plant forms. This period is followed by another not less important, — that of the early bourgeoisie. The town families gradually free themselves from the influences of chivalry which at first held them fast. Gottfried von Strassburg ceases to sing in his amorously frivolous way; the poetic prose of a pious mysticism resounds yet louder. For the old pietism of a formal asceticism, the religious fashion of the tenth and eleventh centuries, is past. It was superseded by contemplation and a belief in the working of miracles by human agency. So that a higher and final form of *Gebundenheit* gains sway; in a rapture of self-abnegation the soul tries to approach into the presence of God. Still the cares of this world remain as before, and out of these comes progress. Poetry descends to satire and farce and lends itself to coarsest and realistic description, however much in the folk-song the spirit of prehistoric times is retained. And plastic art, lending itself to the rapid development of Gothic architecture, begins in sculpture and painting to reproduce in detail the visible world, — almost to a primitive mastery of portraiture; it even attempts, by a tentative linear perspective, to create space for the third dimension, and also to produce local colour effect, chiefly in a complementary use of unbroken tones.

It is a new epoch; a thousand signs announce it. And it is clear that chivalry and citizenship, knight and burgher, turn away from the older forms of expression and hence from the soul of the period of symbolism. But do they understand the world actually and individually in the sense of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of the Reformation and the Renaissance? Emphatically, no! Men are still separated from that great day by a world of progress.

Granted that men are no longer “typical”, still less are they already “individual”; they move in the intermediate stage of the conventional. Political and social forms show it. Neither knighthood nor middle class of the fourteenth and a part of the fifteenth centuries is free, but both are still in the leading-strings of the social forms of chivalry, and given over to superficial ideals of education. There arises here a tendency to emphasise the “maze”, to be moderate as contrasted with the coarser outbursts of the primitive passion of the tenth and eleventh centuries. But this moderation is at first only superficially understood, and expresses itself in rules of etiquette. The burgher is socially freer than the peasant of his time; but their convivial habits are subjected to regulations compared with which the archaic drinking customs of the German student of to-day appear as the height of voluntary caprice. And how restrained by convention is every effort of the imagination! Nothing is more characteristic than that men are not acquainted with the individual portrait, and the literary portrait in the form of biography and autobiography is almost unknown.

However, the psychic stirrings of the age press on to a progressive freedom. The fifteenth century rushes on like a torrent to where its waters fall into the abyss of a deeper and broader river-bed. The current becomes confused, whirlpools form; nearer and nearer is heard the roar of the cataract, till at last clouds of foam dash upwards as in a veil and, at the same time, proclaim the presence of the cataract. In fact we approach, in the course of the fifteenth century, one of the most marked phases in the course of German national development: the age of individualism beginning to dominate the nine succeeding generations, — to the middle of the eighteenth century. And with it commences what we call modern times.

It is an age that can here be briefly described because it is better known. The true centre of its first period is the deliverance from the bonds of pietistic, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical conventions of the Middle Ages, while its second stage is dominated by the victory of the *lumen naturale*, of reason, in the movement which bears the name of the *Aufklärung*, and at the same time by the first great development of the natural sciences. In what consists the principle that unites these two phases internally? Can it be characterised as an entire emancipation of reason to the full limit of its present active intellectual potentiality? Is it a question of a complete breach with the earlier time, and with its articles of faith? A rationalisation of the world without exceptions?

It is evident that in the development of thought a new stage has been reached. The analogical conclusion, the conclusion following on the comparison of only two things, even in the later Middle Ages, often the conclusion of even scientific thought,

is no longer considered sufficient; accumulated experience demands comparisons which can be extended to a great number of objects. The inductive conclusion grows out of analogy, and causality expels the miraculous. But it is a process which in the course of the whole period is by no means closed.

As the mark of transition to a higher form of causal consciousness, these centuries experienced the horrible reactionary movement of the persecution of witches. Again and again mechanical science, then in its beginnings, had to assert itself with considerable strength against the idea of the miraculous. And as late as the eighteenth century even wide-awake minds believed in the uncanny power of good and evil spirits. It was, therefore, only a step forward to a higher causal consciousness which took place, not emancipation. Hence the most conservative among the new confessions and churches, the Lutheran, felt impelled to preserve intact the idea of the Sacrament as necessary for Christian salvation. Hence the more advanced Reformed Church did not at once take the final step of complete secession. And for the same reason even natural science continued to work in complete harmony with the highest conceptions of the Christian revelation, in particular with the conception of God as the extreme limit of thought.

If by means of all these phenomena this period is sharply divided off from the years following 1750, it is clear, on the other hand, what its gains signify compared with earlier psychic conditions. Above all, the individual, now a child of God, has free intercourse with his Heavenly Father, limited only by the mediation of Christ. There was no longer any mediation through the clergy and the host of mediaeval saints, confessors, and penitents. And still more, the individual, thrown back on himself, looked round him for the first time with unfettered gaze in this glorious and fruitful world. By the simple light of reason he tried to illuminate it; a natural law arose, a natural religion, and the doctrine of a common-sense education.

It is true that at the same time, under an increasingly one-sided development of the functions of a rapidly growing reason, the imaginative and poetic side of the mind and soul was neglected; indeed, even the development of the will was retarded. So that the individual appeared by himself — isolated — as a microcosm separated from all others. But were not the results stupendous, nevertheless? The *Aufklärung* of the eighteenth century is indisputably marked by a pronounced levelling, a characteristic style of its own, which, properly speaking, was the sum total of the results of the period, and which, because in itself homogeneous, continues to work itself out with unabated strength in our minds to-day, far more than the majority of people suspect.

And, at least in the beginning, this new, later so purely intellectual, psychic life was alive and distinctly progressive in all other directions. The political history of the sixteenth century shows, in spite of all its conditioning by religious motives, a clearness in the working out of the will, which is lost later only in the increasingly complicated cunning of an intellectualistic diplomacy. In poetry it comes out in a

reproduction of the psychic life which deals with satire of a realistic nature, on the socio-psychic side and with attempts at the psychic drama, on the individualistic side. In plastic art, especially in the true understanding of painting, the advance is extraordinary; linear perspective is developed almost to the point of a perfect mastery of its details; the light problem, at first very summarily considered, is, by the Dutch schools of the seventeenth century, at least in certain conditions of simple phenomena, artistically handled, and in the world of colour we have accordingly a richness which had hitherto never been dreamed of.

If we inquire about the immediate causes of all these phenomena which we class together under the name of an individualistic psychic life, an almost exclamatory answer is forced upon us. What incredible upheavals of material and political culture, what extensions of the moral and mental horizon, have not the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought about! In the towns from the fourteenth century on, under the fertilising influence of the nation's new connection with the great currents of the world's trade, an economic impulse was given which was second to nothing in the nineteenth century, and probably superior. And corresponding to this one sees a thousand new political phenomena, — the development of an early spirit of adventure; the breaking up of the socialistic character of the trade and craft unions; a shifting of the lines of caste in the old patriciate and guilds; the development of menial work in the shape of domestic service and apprenticeship; the formation of a proletariat; the upheaval of constitutions; the striving after the levelling process of a new policy and a coarse communism. Outside of the cities spring up numerous states which first assume the *rôle* of a patriarchal, then rationalistic, absolutism; dissatisfaction prevails among the people, and social revolutions come and go without effect; a reactionary servitude is finally forced on the lower classes, the duration of which would only be determined by the weakness or strength of the classes involved. Out of all this there developed a class of nobles which, carried away with the foreign ideal of *l'homme du monde*, sought the court of their gracious sovereigns, but without cherishing any state policy of their own. Add to this those events of universal significance, — the voyages to the Indian seas, the discovery of America; the acquaintance with the peculiar mediaeval culture of Peru and Mexico; the acceptance of the Copernican system; the discoveries of Galileo; Huygens's investigations; Newton's explanation of the orbit of the planets; and finally Leibnitz's views of the world of nature and of history, and we have some of the dynamic forces underlying the new age.

These were impulses which brought to the universal psychic life, particularly of the earlier years of the new epoch, an untold amount of new stimuli, new possibilities of association, new developments of the will, new fields for the imagination. And we can well understand how they at first brought confusion. Not a new illumination, rather a dissociation of the existing psychic world was the first consequence. In the chaos of the struggle between old and new the intellect staggered,

the passions became overheated, the conscience was disturbed, and untold conflicts occurred between existing and growing rights. But nevertheless, between the cracks and crevices of an exploded culture, the new civilisation steadily pushed its way forward, though at first misunderstood, laughed at, ridiculed; in the plastic and graphic arts there appears a new naturalism, a science of the *lumen naturale* arises, and a belief in the filial relation to God which nearly approached transcendentalism takes the place of the old more dependent faith. And when these new phenomena had somewhat developed, new psychic values appear. Who would now wish to dispense with God's Word as seen in Luther's mind and doctrine? who would leave out of the count the new knowledge of the state and nature, of man and the world? As men became conscious of the new values, they used them industriously in accordance with the harmonious development of a cultural life which appeared to them infinitely higher than the old. A new psychic ideal rose victorious over the dissociative soul processes of the early time; the new idealism in art accepted the naturalistic gains of the time and applied them in its own way. New philosophies came to the front, and all the phenomena of this new world so transformed by science and discovery are subjected to them, and pietistic ceremonials grew out of the soil of the old as well as the new churches. In fact, the picture of a psychic revolution rises up before us, exorcised into existence by means of a new material and social culture, and a marked extension of the intellectual horizon; it is, moreover, the picture of contented accomplishment of victory won by the undisputed powers of the mind.

Quite different appear at first sight the processes which, about the middle of the eighteenth century, made the transition from the individualistic period to that which goes by the name of the age of Subjectivism, a new and more extended socio-psychic period. It is a period in which creative work still goes on; for such personalities as Herder and Goethe, Schiller and Kant, still live with and in us. This epoch, the first part of which begins with the appearance of the so-called sentimentality, continues on through the *Sturm und Drang*, Classicism and Romanticism, Realism and degenerate Imitation, down to the seventies of the nineteenth century, to be followed by the beginnings of a second subjective period, the psychic phenomena of our own time.

This new age was introduced by no sort of visible revolution. By the middle of the sixteenth century, at latest, the great international highways of trade had been turned aside from Germany. Central Europe sank economically into a lethargy, while the states and countries along the Atlantic coast began to rise economically. Hamburg and the Netherlands were the only German states to profit by this change. The decline of the German character, above all of the German middle class, now sets in; it was hastened, and in a certain sense brought to a close, by the terrible losses of the Thirty Years' War. The age of powerful stimulus and universal historic achievement by the nation was past. People withdrew within themselves, and the

sinking level of national culture gave rise to an invasion of Germany for generations to come of a foreign civilisation with all its disorganising effects.

But among all these characteristic phenomena there was formed, about 1650, the substratum of a new culture and of a future higher psychic existence. The middle-class citizen was deprived of an undivided interest in his economic calling, yet not impoverished; living partially on capital which escaped the destructive hand of the Thirty Years' War, he commanded many hours of leisure, and he made use of them for his own spiritual and intellectual improvement. Hence the rise, by degrees, of the greater part of the so-called cultivated class, who about the year 1700 had spread over all parts of Germany, the more important because, besides the purely bourgeois professions, the greater part of brainworkers, officials and savants, and not a few of the nobility contributed to its rise. It was not the purely political, rather, in many respects, it was a purely intellectual, soil of a new psychic life corresponding with the essential spirit of the time, to which were added more and more, chiefly by means of reading, an incalculable amount of new stimuli.

The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed the rise in Germany of more than two hundred and fifty newspapers and magazines suited to the needs of an educated public. And what was not discussed in these magazines! Everything which was of interest to this age of improvement, — poetry and philosophy, the latter after the methods of Leibnitz, and things more practical and political, too. In the course of a thousand communications the curtain was drawn aside and the events and conditions of Europe began to come again into full view. The public was taught to search the globe with its gaze even to the farthest horizon of the ethnographical world.

There were stimuli from which arose by degrees a new psychic disposition; the more so as it allied itself with strong reactionary feelings against the bald intellectualism of the dying age. It is true that every period at its close tends to intellectualise the new achievements of its culture. Thus the later Middle Ages end with rationalisation of the Gothic architecture in a flamboyant style; in music there was hardly anything left but counterpoint thematic work; and philosophy wound up in scholasticism. But the individualistic period, which is characterised by an innate leaning toward the cult of reason, inclined to this rationalisation, seeking especially an understanding of the innermost soul-phenomena. What was more natural than that the reaction on the other hand should be the more pronounced and lead straight on to the new period? Pietism, sentimentality, Storm and Stress, are some of the elements belonging here. They freed from long servitude the functions of the psychic life which sought a response in another psyche in feeling and will. Now they burst forth with enthusiasm and introduced the new period of Subjectivism. Now these were the psychic functions which first characterise the personality of the time as subject-matter. Its emotional life develops from the cult of friendship of the earlier days down to the all-embracing national enthusiasm of the nineteenth century; and

just as, from its cult of the will, arises at first the idea of the genius of power (*Kraftgenies*), so later follows the iron policy of Bismarck.

Thus we come to recognise with great clearness — for there are thousands of sources of tradition — the process of the transition from one age to another, and the impetus of psychic dissociation whence are derived the complete and characteristic *dominant* of modern times. We can see how individuals who are in the full current of the movement are subject to countless new stimuli, and, being particularly susceptible to them, are not at first able to control this overwhelming influence. Again we see how they change psychically. Being, so to speak, no longer their own masters, they become too easily open to suggestion, whether it be that they, if of a tolerably creative nature, succumb to auto-suggestion, and become thereby a prey to the exaggerated conception of their own achievements, or yield to the stress of sentimental negation and romantic irony, to “*Weltschmerz*” and pessimistic tendencies; or, be it that they, inclining to socio-sensations, are influenced by the new phenomena of the psychic life to such a degree that their judgment degenerates into the cult of genius, and their will becomes automatic in the direction of personal capricious imaginings and incomplete solutions of these moral problems which, with the appearance of every new psychic life, burst forth in overwhelming waves. But where such a strong and nearly pathologic action of new influences do not occur, we see the personality constantly weakened; with the self-sacrificing spirit of the investigator of new things, they yield completely to the new stimuli in order to master them.

These are conditions which chiefly characterised the years of 1750 to 1780, and again from 1800 to 1810 and even later. In them, just through this renunciation and readiness for suggestion, we gain a new, deeper insight than ever before into the world of nature and spirit. In art the first transitions to a realistic control of light appear; in poetry the more profound systematising of the altruistic affectives, and, as the functions of the will are gained, these find expression chiefly in the new psychological drama; in the mental sciences the “folk soul”, the popular psyche, is revealed, which sets in motion expeditions into the domain of socio-psychic investigation, and with this discovery there runs parallel the endeavour to place psychology in general as a pure science outside of the domain of metaphysical influence. The beginnings of marked improvements in jurisprudence and politics are at once evident; the conception of individuality as a socio-psychical element leads to a new conception of public life, which, by means of the intermediate stage of personal control, is to work itself up to the constitutional forms of *coöperative* work for all. And legal procedure no longer appears as the fruit of a constitution imposed from above, but as the result of the operations of the popular mind.

A new life such as this bursts forth in a thousand shapes, and there was no side of the national development from the lowest to the loftiest that was not enriched by it.

The years are fast drawing near which will gather into sheaves the luxuriant, growing seedlings and store them safe in the granaries of national progress. After the Storm and Stress come the Classicism of Schiller and Goethe, the philosophy of Kant, and the state-reforms of Prussia following the collapse of the year 1806. Romanticism, which developed out of the long-continuing undercurrents of the Storm and Stress at the end of the eighteenth century, was succeeded by the Realism of the thirties and the political unification of the nation as wrought out in the years 1848 and 1866 to 1870. Men began to understand themselves, and also this new subjective existence, which, so unmistakable and real, had grown out of the time of psychic dissociation of the earlier years of the century. And with it the great idealistic phenomena of the period began: the immortal creations of Schiller and Goethe, Ideal philosophy, realistic natural science, the unification of the nation to an economic life of unheard-of significance, the political and constitutional formation of the empire.

We have now reached our goal. The period just described, that of Subjectivism since the seventies of the century just past, must inevitably be followed by another just beginning. And that cannot now be discussed in full. But it is hoped that the contents of this lecture have been such as to give us a general survey of the development of the Germans as a nation. Another question has been raised, and all the more definitely, for we have advanced into later times with increasing material at command: this will claim our attention at our next meeting. The question of greatest general interest, which arises here not only for Germany but also for other countries, is whether similar psychic processes mark their historical development, such as those described under the terms Symbolism, Typism, Conventionalism, Individualism, and Subjectivism.

It is plain, therefore, that we are now confronted with the problem of the psychic mechanism of the periods of culture. That such a question can be put, appears evident from the materials now available. How is it to be answered, and how solved? The next lecture will be an attempt to show this by means of the material already in use, as well as by taking into consideration the latest socio-psychic changes.

KARL LAMPRECHT

(*What is History?* Macmillan, 1905, pp. 39-88)

SOCIAL PROGRESS AND STAGES OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION

The explanation of social development which Sri Aurobindo has given in *The Human Cycle* is, as he himself has said, a psychological or subjective explanation. But he does not use the term “subjective” in the limited sense in which the recent Western sociologists use it. He uses it in its fundamental sense of relating to self or consciousness, without in any way limiting the connotation of ‘self’ or ‘consciousness’ to any particular mode or level of existence. By ‘self’ Sri Aurobindo means fundamentally the Conscious Being which expresses or manifests itself in many modes and grades. It is individual but also communal; it is universal but it also transcends the universe. It is personal and also impersonal, in the sense that it exists even when the limited ego-personality is dissolved. This self has also many levels of its manifestation in the cosmos which form a hierarchical gradation of a series of involutionary steps culminating in the Inconscient. Evolution is the reverse process by which the self ascends from the Inconscient to the Superconscient through the successive stages of Matter, Life, Mind and Spirit. These stages are universal grades; there are universal planes of Matter, Life, Mind and Spirit. They are “subjective” in the sense that they are expressions of the self on various levels of its manifestation. They are not “subjective” in the sense in which the scientists use the word, for they are not the creations of a personal or individual consciousness. In fact, the individual or the personal consciousness is itself a formation of the universal grade or grades to which it belongs.

* * *

If we consider the idea of progress in the light of the above meaning which Sri Aurobindo gives to the word “subjective”, then it becomes clear that the objection of the recent sociologists to equate social evolution with social progress cannot stand, because our judgments of value by which we determine progress no longer remain subjective in the sense of being arbitrarily personal and relative, nor do they remain incapable of comparison as superior and inferior for want of a valid impersonal objective standard demanded by the social scientist. Our values and ideals are, in Sri Aurobindo’s view, the expressions of our subjective consciousness, but as consciousness is not merely personal but also universal, impersonal and general, so our values and ideals also, though subjective, are not entirely personal and arbitrary but also universal, impersonal and general. There is, no doubt, always a personal and communal element in our values and ideals, but they also contain within them an impersonal and universal principle of which they are diverse

formations. Also, as consciousness is graded in a series of hierarchical levels through which evolution ascends from lower to higher stages, so also our values, being expressions of consciousness, can be correspondingly graded in a hierarchical series through which the social evolution progresses upwards from lower to higher levels. There is thus, in Sri Aurobindo's view, no necessity to distinguish evolution from progress for, unlike the recent sociologists, he provides a common criterion for both — a criterion which though "subjective" is in no sense arbitrarily personal or communal. To him evolution in its essence is necessarily a progressive development of consciousness, though not in a straight line but, as explained in the previous chapter, in ascending cycles.

* * *

In *The Human Cycle* Sri Aurobindo has formulated three major stages of social evolution based on this subjective criterion: (1) the infrarational stage in which society lives predominantly in the needs and interests of its physical and vital consciousness; (2) the rational stage in which society is more and more governed by the rational ideals of the mental consciousness; and (3) the suprarational or spiritual stage in which society increasingly moulds its life and institutions in the truths of the spiritual consciousness.

In this ascending scale of social evolution each stage is governed by the values and ideals which are the natural expressions of the level of consciousness attained by society at that stage, or rather the same values take different forms at different stages of evolution. The ethical, aesthetical and religious values prevailing in the infrarational society are inferior to the ethical, aesthetical and religious ideals that prevail in the truly rational society. So also the ideals and values of the rational society are inferior to those of the suprarational or spiritual society.

This is the criterion which Sri Aurobindo provides for the comparison of individual and social values and ideals. It is a subjective criterion based on the fundamental truth of self or consciousness, but it is a perfectly valid standard free from all narrow limitations of the superficially conceived objective standard of the recent sociologists.

The concept of progress is teleological, implying a purposive development directed towards a goal or an ideal of perfection. The only true measure of a higher or lower stage of social progress is its nearness to or distance from the goal of perfection. According to Sri Aurobindo, "self-realisation is the sense, secret or overt, of individual and of social development."¹ Social progress, therefore, can truly be measured only by this criterion of self-realisation. The higher the level of self realised by a society in its development, the greater will be its progress.

1. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 73.

Sri Aurobindo thus provides the same subjective criterion of self-realisation for both evolution and progress. The scientists make a distinction between the two because they study only the external physical side of evolution and, leave out its more important inner side of consciousness or self. But the external physical evolution is only the means or the instrument for the expression of the inner consciousness or self. Even in the external physical evolution a higher or lower stage can be truly judged by its suitability or capacity for expressing a higher or lower level of consciousness, a higher or lower grade of self and not by any other criterion. The self, one in essence yet multiple in manifestation is, in Sri Aurobindo's view, the key of individual and social evolution as well as the touchstone of its progress.

* * *

We have seen that, in Sri Aurobindo's view, social development is an evolutionary cyclic movement progressing upward by stages. In *The Human Cycle* Sri Aurobindo has initially traced the whole social cycle through a sequence of five stages, named respectively symbolic, typical, conventional, individualist or rational and subjective. These names were adopted by him from an eminent German historian, Karl Lamprecht, who was the first social thinker in pre-war Germany to put forward a psychological theory of history and social development. This theory seems to have struck Sri Aurobindo as remarkable, not because he found its standpoint wholly acceptable, but because it signified an initial departure from the materialistic-economic conception of history and social development which so powerfully dominated the socio-historical thought in Europe till the first decades of the present century, due to the importation of the ideas of modern scientific materialism in the study of history and sociology, of which Marx's theory of historical materialism was the culminating point.

Sri Aurobindo, however, found that Lamprecht's theory, though it was original and based upon a luminous truth, was yet not bold enough to break away entirely from the powerful hold of the prevailing materialistic-economic conception of history and society. It was also too rigidly formal in its scientific analysis and classification of social phenomena which are far too complex and variable to admit such rigid formal systematisation. Because of these limitations this theory of the social cycle could not explain "what is the inner meaning of its successive phases or the necessity of their succession or the term and end towards which they are driving".² It failed therefore to illumine "the thickly veiled secret of our historical evolution".³

Finding Lamprecht's theory thus quite inadequate for a truly psychological interpretation of social evolution, Sri Aurobindo has entirely left it aside after only a

2. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 6.

3. *Ibid.*

brief mention of it in the opening chapter of *The Human Cycle*, and has not referred to it at all afterwards throughout the whole book. But he found the names of the stages of the social cycle given by Lamprecht to be psychologically very suggestive, and has therefore adopted them in “their intrinsic sense and value”⁴ for the initial statement of his own original psychological theory of social evolution.

But after completing this initial statement of social evolution in the first few chapters of *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo has given up even these names of the stages, and in the remaining chapters of the book has used his own names which are more apposite for conveying the full psychological significance of his own conception of the stages of the social cycle.

In these later chapters Sri Aurobindo has again traced the entire course of social evolution through a sequence of three stages, which he has named successively infrarational, rational and suprarational or spiritual. For an adequate understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s explanation of social evolution it is necessary to accept this later sequence of three stages as basic. The earlier sequence of five stages, the names of which were adopted from Lamprecht’s theory, can easily be correlated with it, for Sri Aurobindo includes in the infrarational stage of the later sequence the first three stages — symbolic, typical and conventional — of the earlier sequence; the rational stage is common to both the sequences, while the last suprarational stage of the later sequence is a wider extension of the subjective age of the earlier sequence.

An explanation of the essential principles determining the distinctive character as well as the progressive development of the three stages of this later basic sequence is therefore sufficient for comprehending Sri Aurobindo’s theory of the social cycle. . . .

KISHOR GANDHI

(*Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the New Age*,
Sri Aurobindo Society, 1965, pp. 81-87)

4. *Ibid.*

Clarity of knowledge and inner self-vision, subjugation of the ego, love, scrupulousness in selfless and dedicated works, are the four wheels of the chariot of Yoga. One who has them will progress safely on the path.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 840)

THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

THE MOTHER AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

PRINCIPLE AND AIM

One day, sometime in the early 1950's, as the Mother came out of the tennis courts after her game, she saw the girls who were playing basketball but could not recognise them. When I asked her, "But why, Mother? You know these girls. You don't ask when the boys are playing." She said, "I do not see the physical but the psychological state of people. You Indian girls have no individuality. So, what I see is a mass without distinction." And then, came her assurance, "But, now I have come, so, things will change."

Another day, she asked me how my game had been that day. I told her, "Mother, we had basketball this evening. I am quite fit, you know. But when I was running, it was as if I was being obstructed by something. Really, Mother, I could hardly move the way I normally do." Her answer was most unexpected: "It is the negation, and the conviction of the whole collective notion of what a woman should do and not do — you came across that. *That* was the obstruction you felt."

It was in 1926 that Sri Aurobindo retired and the Mother was given the responsibility of guiding this small community of men and a few women who had gathered here around Sri Aurobindo to follow the *sadhana* of the integral yoga. The whole outlook underwent a change. The Mother took care of the inner development of the *sadhaks* and always her watchword was "Progress and Perfection" — not only of the internal human nature but also of the external being. Every individual member of the collectivity was assigned a physical work; this was to be done in the spirit of service to the Divine. She guided them all towards an ideal of "acceptance of life"; it was not a "rejection of life" as is the common practice of most spiritual paths, but a totally new approach, a life of self-giving which included all the activities, and doing them all as an offering to the Divine. That was the true way: it was an absolutely new experiment.

The goal set before the aspiring *sadhaks* of the small self-sufficient community that was the Ashram included the transformation of physical nature itself. In all actions and activities that involved the physical consciousness, the body had to feel that all its acts were done to serve a higher purpose.

And a truly exceptional aspect of this experiment was that men and women were given the same status and opportunities.

The physical activities in the Playground also began with that. A simple

beginning had been made. Then, Pranab, a young man of 22, came to the Ashram. He was interested in physical fitness and had trained as a boxer. He became the chosen instrument to give shape to the Mother's vision and an organisation came into being which would in time become the Department of Physical Education in the Ashram.

In her article 'Four Austerities and Four Liberations' which appeared in the February issue of the *Bulletin of Physical Education* in 1953, the Mother says:

The basic programme will be to build a body, beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful in its activities and resistant in its health and organic function. . . . One must build up nerves of steel in a system of elastic and strong muscles, so that one is capable of enduring anything whenever it is indispensable.

(*Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Physical Education*, p. 94)

This is the ideal, the goal of physical education here.

An outline of the aim of physical education was presented in the very first issue of the said journal in February 1949. We find there an important statement:

. . . given sufficient training, there is no essential difference in what a woman or a man can do and it is only a long tradition and a collective suggestion that is responsible for the fact that at present women are normally physically inferior to men. Once this false idea has been completely uprooted, and with equal treatment of both sexes from an early age, there will be no difference in their average performance. (p. 18)

The Mother had said once to some young people:

For God's sake can't you forget that you are a girl or a boy and try to become a human being? (*CWM*, Vol. 12, p. 290)

And to the question, "What roles should man and woman play in our new way of life?" she replied:

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

When she was asked to speak on the 'education in sports' and the 'psychological basis on which our activity is based here' in the Ashram, she said:

. . . And if, as I said in the beginning, Nature has made a difference in her expressions in order to satisfy her needs and realise her motives, it does not follow that we must obey her blindly. If our needs and motives are of another kind and if we do not recognise that the physical purposes as they are conceived by Nature are the final and absolute ends, then we can try to develop consciousness on another line. . . .

My children, I have told you, repeated in all tones and in all modes: "If you wish truly to profit by your stay here, try to look at things and understand them with a new eye and a new understanding based on something higher, something deeper, something wider, something more true, something which is not today but will be one day. And it is because we want to build this future that we have taken a special attitude."

(Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Physical Education, pp. 144-45)

That is why in the physical education programme as envisaged and practised here, the same activities are offered to both boys and girls. The Mother explains:

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

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

This, in those times, was an unimaginable and daring concept of the Mother. Let us once again recall the date. It was in 1949, when in India, girls of 14 or 15 discarded their childhood attire and changed to wearing saris and marriage was imminent.

The Mother was far ahead of the time. In those days the monthly menstruation cycle of the girls was quite a 'hush, hush' affair. No one should know about it. But she explained to the girls:

You have been taught surely that one peculiarity of the mammal is that the female conceives the child, carries it and builds it up within herself until the moment when the young one, fully formed, comes out of the body of its mother and lives independently.

In view of this function Nature has provided the woman with an additional quantity of blood which has to be used for the child in the making. But as the use of this additional blood is not a constant need, when there is no child in the making, the surplus blood has to be thrown out to avoid excess and congestion.

This is the cause of the monthly periods. It is a simple natural phenomenon, result of the way in which woman has been made and there is no need to attach to it more importance than to the other functions of the body. It is not a disease and cannot be the cause of any weakness or real discomfort. Therefore a normal woman, one who is not ridiculously sensitive, should merely take the necessary precautions of cleanliness, never think of it anymore and lead her daily life as usual without any change in her programme. This is the best way to be in good health. (*CWM*, Vol. 12, pp. 291-92)

The girls therefore participated in all the different activities of physical education during this condition. A girl used to have lot of pain during the first two days of the cycle. Her lips would often assume a bluish tinge. However she continued all her activities. Once she had to run a 800m race in this state. She started her race with pain and discomfort in her body. Half-way through the race she suddenly felt very light, and she completed the race. On completion of the run she realised that she had no pain at all! According to the Mother, many of these symptoms in older girls were often results of the subconscious psychological condition in the body.

Pranab-da writes:

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

Guided by the Mother, he writes in his article:

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

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

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

(*Sport Spirit* Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 4)

Barely 25 years after the statement by the Mother and her assurance, we were thrilled with the Indian women's hockey team winning the gold in the Asian Games held in Delhi. I remember how happy I was and told myself inwardly, "See, Mother, how your work has started evolving on the material plane. How I wish you were there to see it!" In India now, we see how much the attitude of the girls has evolved. We find them pursuing vocations which were previously considered to be exclusively the domain of men. How successful are they now in ever-widening fields of endeavour. How could this change come about in such a short time in India, with our conservative social ways? For me, this is conclusively the result of the work the Mother has done, and we believe, is still doing. I remember her promise: "But now I have come and things will change."

In 1949 due to the increase in the number of members joining the physical education activities, some classification according to age and sex was done. The *Bulletin of Physical Education* states:

The classification is only temporary in respect of groups C (young boys), D (young men) and E (ladies) where there is a differentiation according to sex.

Later on, the groups will be mixed and the classification will be only according to age and capacity. This, however, comes in the future plan.

(February, 1949, p. 14)

Pranab-da writes:

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

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

We quote again from an article in the *Bulletin of Physical Education*, under the title 'Physical Education Schemes: Minor Changes':

When we had started the scheme, about four years back, we had grouped all children, boys and girls, of between 8 to 10 years of age, into the Group B, and we had given the same training to the boys and girls of the group without making any difference whatever. It was hoped that with children of this age we could succeed in removing from them the idea of the difference in physical capacities between the sexes. We also hoped that when this group moved into the next higher group — the group C, which is at present only a boy's group

— that they would move as one body. This would have brought us one step nearer our goal — which is to make all the groups mixed. We were, however, not quite successful in this.

We found that the girls could not entirely rid themselves of the idea of their physical inferiority nor the boys of their superiority. The boys did not quite like being grouped with the girls and the girls were diffident in learning all the things taught to the boys. (April, 1949, p. 36)

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

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

Slavery

No law can liberate women unless they liberate themselves.

What makes them slaves is:

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

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

Men also have three slaveries:

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

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

(CWM, Vol. 14, p. 289)

In our system children from age 6 to 16 years have the same uniform and follow the same programme of physical education. Initially, for the athletics competitions, all the participants were grouped based solely on their standard or performance; and one could see the little niece of about 12 competing in a running race of 80m with her aunt who was older than her mother! Later on, for various reasons this pattern was discontinued.

The general approach is explained in the *Bulletin*:

The Scheme of Physical Education followed here is to provide facilities and give as much opportunity as possible for all members of the Ashram, and particularly for the children, to train and develop themselves physically in an organised and disciplined way, under correct guidance and in the right method. (February 1949, p. 14)

Here is another important observation:

There are the different ideas which underlie the aim of the work in each group, but through all the groups, from the smallest to the biggest, it is sought to encourage a fearless sincerity and frankness, abolishing all crooked dissimulation. (*Ibid*, p. 16)

For the Mother, physical education was not a means of developing the body only. When done with the right attitude, it was a powerful help in developing character as well.

Another very new concept of the Mother was:

All education of the body should begin at birth and continue throughout life. It is never too soon to begin nor too late to continue.

(*CWM*, Vol. 12, p. 12)

Thus we find that a very large number of the members of the Ashram belonging to all age-groups participating in physical activities. The Mother said:

Of all the domains of human consciousness, the physical is the one most completely governed by method, order, discipline, process. (*Ibid.*)

This again is a new concept given by her to us. Sports and exercises are not just activities to pass time and satisfy our fancy or our desire. These activities are to be followed rigorously with the aim of attaining the goal of physical perfection as envisaged by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Thus, in our programme the activities continue all seven days of the week, specially for the growing children. The older members have the option of choosing their particular form of activity, that which suits them best.

According to the Mother the aim is not just excellence, but the development of all the possibilities of the body. That is why the programme of physical education includes different disciplines: Gymnastics, Athletics, Aquatics, various Games and several Combative sports. Each helps to develop different qualities and capacities both physical and mental.

Pranab-da, the director of physical education writes:

Physical fitness lays the foundation of physical perfection. . . . When a systematic physical education is followed in conjunction with an observance of all the rules of health, that is to say, suitable food, sleep and rest, personal and environmental hygienic conditions, activities appropriate of self-expression and inner quietude and calm it produces physical fitness with all its components. But each particular type of exercise and method of moving the body helps one to acquire a special quality of physical fitness, and there are as many kinds of skill as there are exercises and body movements. Therefore, for the attainment of physical perfection, an elaborate arrangement has been made . . . and trainees are advised that, instead of participating in one or two items only, they should, as far as possible, and to the extent of their capacities, build their body to their utmost perfection through an integrated system of physical education.

(The Role of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, pp. 4-5)

In a message in 1966, the Mother said:

It might be better to remind you that we are here for a special work, a work which is done nowhere else.

We want to come in contact with the supreme consciousness, the universal consciousness, we want to bring it down in ourselves and to manifest it. But for that we must have a very solid base; our base is our physical being, our body. Therefore we have to build up a body solid, healthy, enduring, skilful, agile and strong, ready for everything. There is no better way to prepare the body than physical exercise: sports, athletics, gymnastics, and all games are the best means to develop and strengthen the body. (CWM, Vol. 12, p. 276)

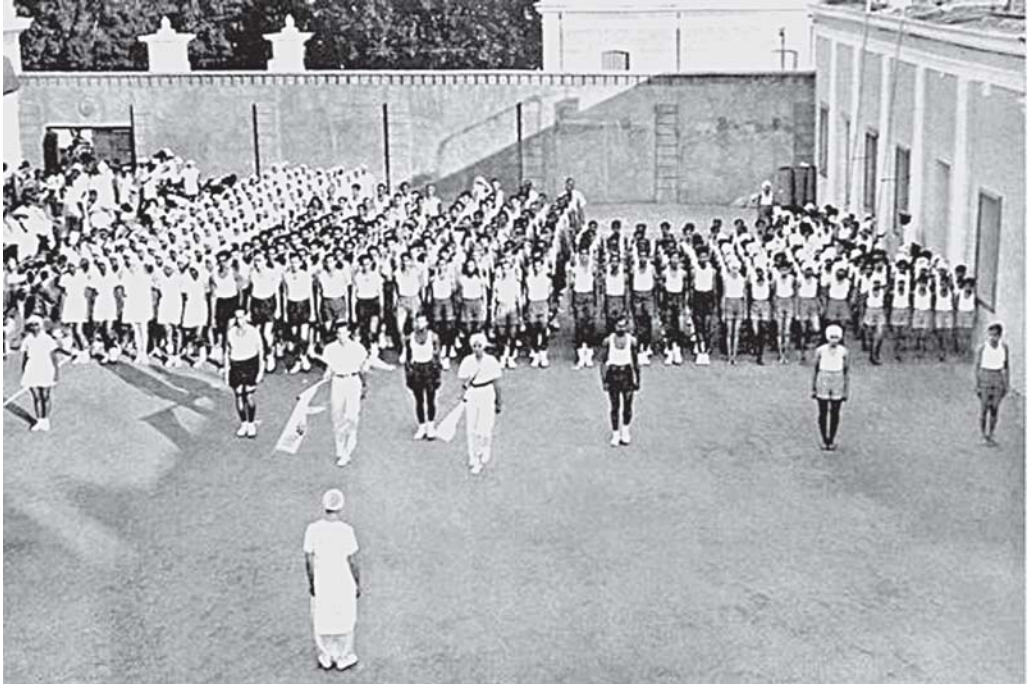
We quote again from Pranab-da:

Like the other parts of the human being, the body too has to pass through four stages in order to attain perfection. The being has first to be conscious, then to acquire control, then to achieve mastery and finally to effect transformation. This work has to be fully accomplished in every part of the body, in every functioning of it and even in each of its cells. Then one day, “the physical consciousness and physical being, the body itself must reach a perfection in all that it is and does which now we can hardly conceive. It may even in the end be suffused with a light and beauty and bliss from the Beyond and the life divine assume a body divine”.

(The Role of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, p. 7)

In this series of articles, we will present mainly our experiences and the exceptional occasions of the members of the girls’ group with the Mother in the

Playground. We have also included some general observations to give a more complete picture of those years — 1946-1958 — when the Mother was physically present in the Playground every day, guiding, inspiring, teaching, blessing all those who came to her.



The Mother in the Playground, receiving the salute of all the groups. 2.12.1950

THE BEGINNING

Now we start our story.

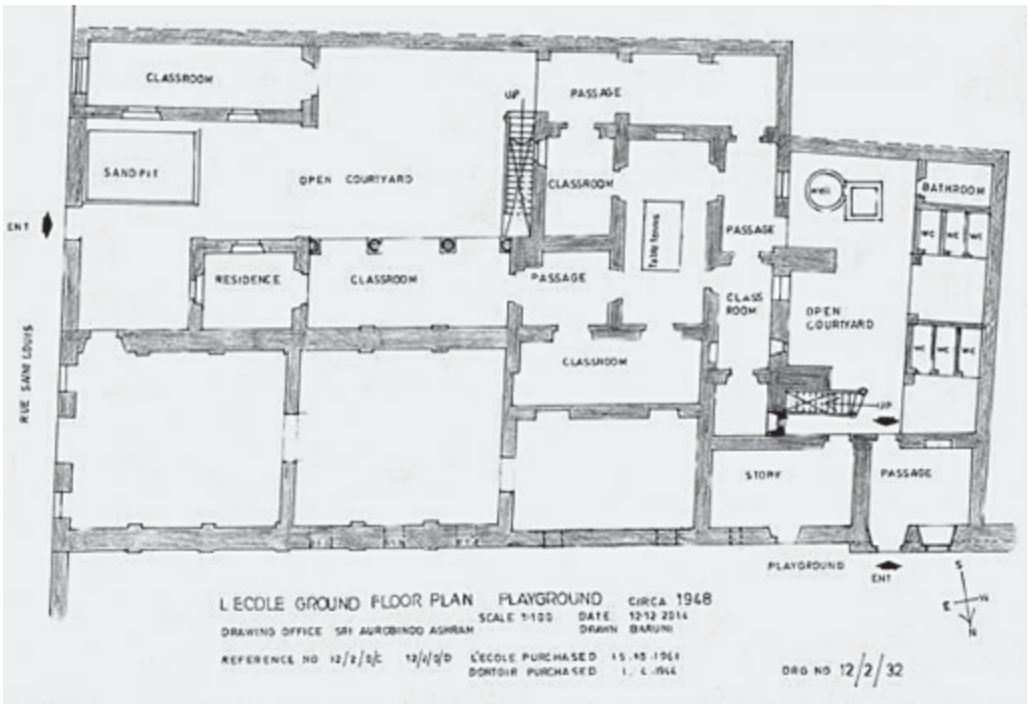
By 1942 some families had begun coming to the Ashram; these included children. The Mother decided to start a school for them.

Apart from the main gate of the present Playground on Saint Louis street, there is another, a smaller one, further to the south, leading to the body-building area of the Gymnasium. This gate normally remains closed.

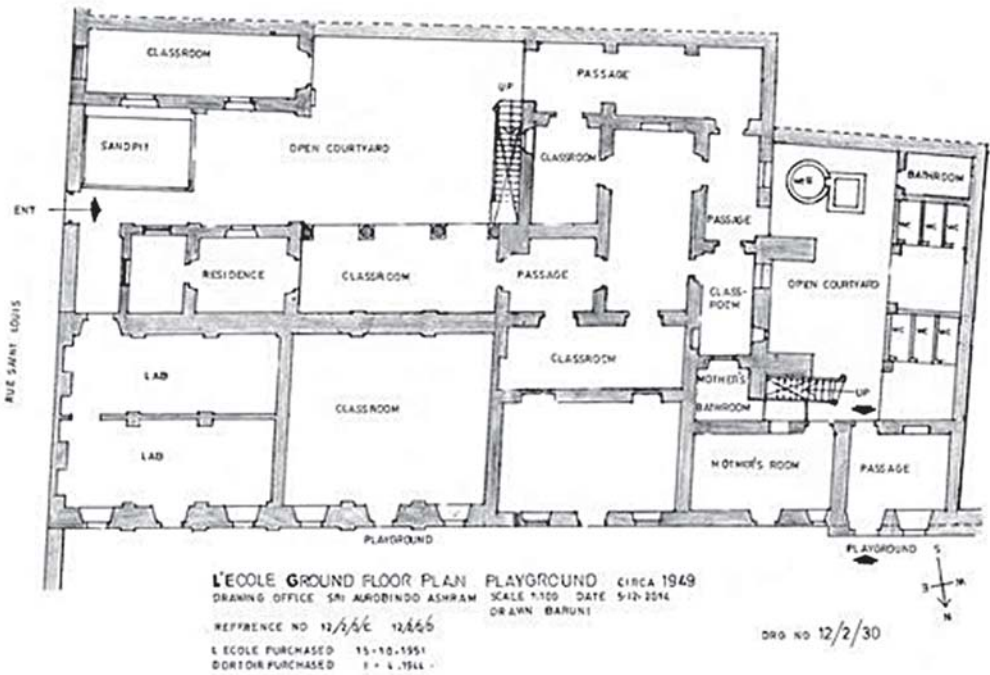
In 1943, this small gate was the entrance of a modest two-storied building. There was a small courtyard in front, with one narrow room on the southern side and another one on the northern side. These two rooms, along with the entrance gate formed the eastern side of the compound. This was the place where the School

first started functioning on the 2nd of December 1943.

The ground floor of the building was used for the Kindergarten classes. A sand pit was made ready beside the southern room. Facing the courtyard on the western side stood the house itself. There was a narrow staircase leading to a verandah with three rooms on the first floor where older children (about 10-12 years of age) had their classes. There was another verandah on the western side too and a narrower staircase. After their class, the children played in this courtyard. The younger ones played in the sand pit, making hills and castles decorating them with flags. Pebbles were strewn around the pit. Others played hide-and-seek or chasing games and would be running about all over the place. In the evenings the older girls sometimes tried some jumps and the young boys did long jump, or high jump: a rope held by 2 persons serving as the bar. Some even attempted ‘pole vault’.



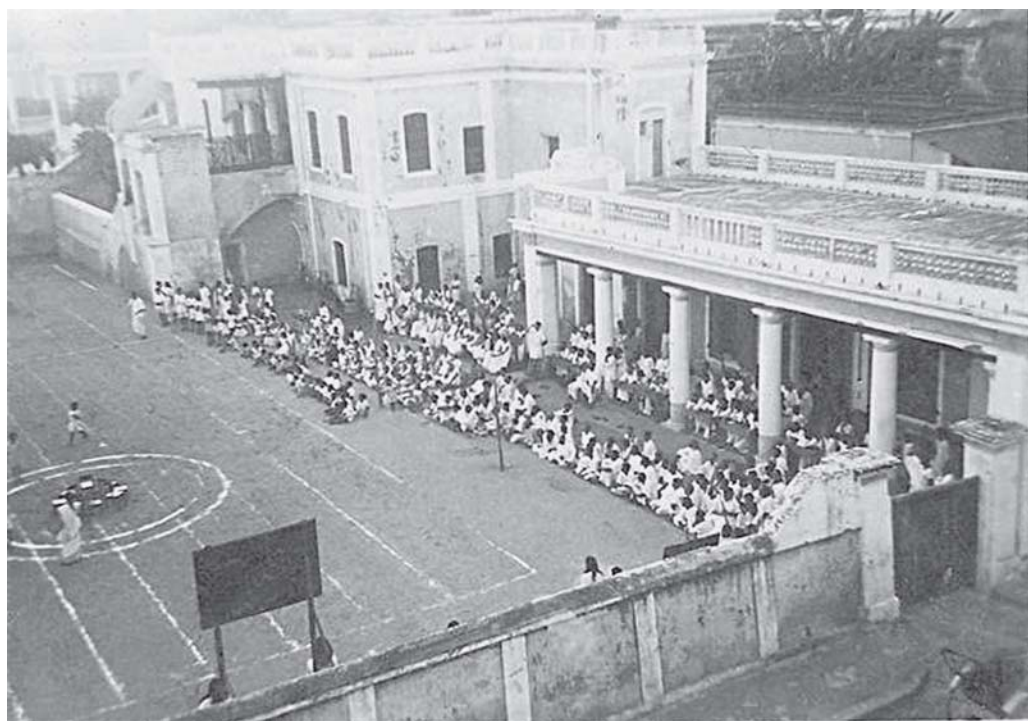
Ground-floor plan of the old School building in 1948. Note the sand-pit near the gate which opens to Saint Louis street. The room on the opposite side was the care-taker's room. Other rooms around it were used for the children of the Kindergarten. The opening on the opposite wall leads to a series of rooms which were the godown, a structure on the next property, on the northern side. This had another larger opening to the east which served as the main gate leading to Saint Louis street. We see a table-tennis table kept in one of the rooms. On the north-west is the connecting passage between the School courtyard and the Playground which was on its northern side.



Ground-floor plan of the old school area in 1949. The table-tennis table is no longer here. All physical education activities for the children have been shifted to the 'Guest House'. The plan shows the small room on the western side now modified to serve as the Mother's bathroom. The godown facing the Playground in 1948 is now converted into a classroom and a laboratory and their doors and windows open onto the Playground. The previous opening of this building on the eastern side leading to the road has been blocked and this area is now connected with a door to the School courtyard.

In April 1944, the house 'Maison Dubreuil' at 3 Law de Lauriston street was purchased. It was a two-storied building, which was converted into a 'Dortoir' — the Mother's Boarding House — where the first batch of young children started living. The Playground plot which was to the south of this building was purchased along with the Dortoir. It was a rectangular plot, measuring 50m x 16m. There was a big pond in this plot which was filled up by its earlier owner when this place was used for drying groundnuts. On the southern side was the wall of the next building as well as some large rooms that were used as godowns for storing groundnuts. On the northern side a continuation of the building of the Dortoir extended to a small room and also a big hall on the ground floor. Later, school classes for the older children were also held in this hall. This formed the northern boundary of the area.

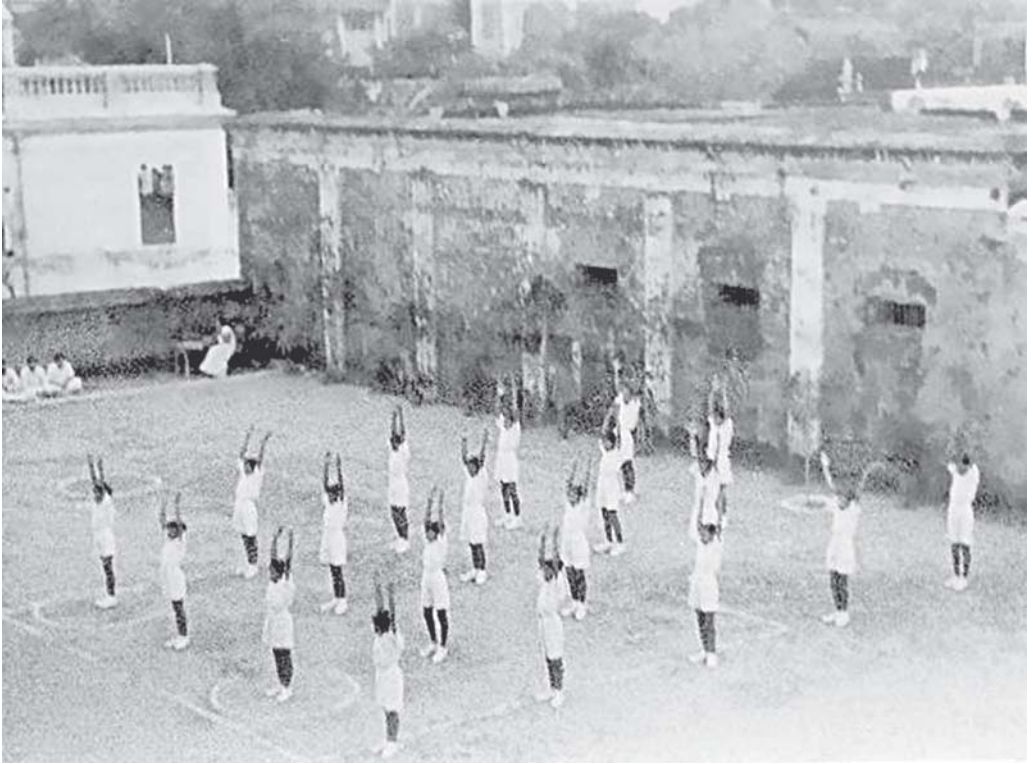
There was a wooden gate on the south of the hall and a brick wall extending from north to south formed the eastern boundary of the area opening onto Saint Louis street. On the west, a boundary wall separated it from the next house which belonged to the Ashram. It was the 'Guest House', where Sri Aurobindo had stayed with some of his disciples. It was in this house that the Mother met Sri Aurobindo when she first came to India in 1914. There were two Papaya trees in the south-western corner and two more on the northern side in a small open space between the main Dortoir building and its extension to the east. This area was adjacent to the School building. Once this property was acquired by the Mother, an opening was made connecting both properties and there was easy access from one area to the other.



1st May 1946. The Playground on the Annual Competition day. We see the main gate and a low boundary-wall on the eastern side. To the north is the double-storied Dortoir building, a hostel for resident students, girls and boys. Spectators are sitting on the open rectangular space in front of this building. It is here that the Mother's chair was placed for her first visit to the Playground to watch the demonstration of 2 December in 1946.

To the right is the continuation of the Dortoir terrace. There was a long hall below it which was used for School classes. The verandah in front has big round pillars supporting it. This narrow strip was used by different groups for various physical education activities.

This newly acquired space was used freely by the young students after school hours just as they liked. The young boys and girls pursued some physical activity or other, organised by a few elders of the Ashram. The boys played football or volleyball. The girls played croquet or some running games or tried to put a ball through the hoop fixed to the wall. Most of the activities were conducted on makeshift arrangements. There was as yet no proper organised programme.



Demonstration December 2, 1946. Boys' drill. The wall on the right is the southern side of the Playground which used to be the godown. There are a few openings higher up on the wall but no doors or windows. The white building seen beyond the low boundary wall on the eastern side is 'Nanteuil', a building across the street, where table-tennis was played. From some time in 1946 till the middle of 1948 the Mother would play table-tennis every evening. A boundary wall on the western side of the Playground separated it from the adjacent property, the 'Guest House'.



Acrobatics in the Playground, 1948. Note that by this time, the boundary wall on the east has been raised.

In the early days some young men, somewhat older than the ones who were admitted to the School, played football in the street; a little later they played in the passage of Bayoud House, now a Heritage Hotel on Rue St. Martin, opposite the library. When the present Playground was purchased they used this field for their game. Monsieur Benjamin, a local resident had joined the Ashram as a boy and had

a keen interest in football. On November 7 1945, he organised the football players' group. The Mother named the Ashram football team *Jeunesse Sportive de l'Ashram* (J.S.A.). Benjamin was the president of this organisation. A name was necessary as the Ashram football team participated in local tournaments which were held at the *Cercle Sportif* ground. The J.S.A. also played many friendly matches with other football teams of the town. As the Ashram did not then have its own football ground, Capitaine Bouhard (who was the head of Pondicherry Sports Association) allowed us the use of the Military ground (where the Indira Gandhi Stadium now stands) twice a week — one evening for the senior players and one morning for the Juniors. This was the only organised sporting activity we had then. Subir Kanta Gupta (Manjuda), who was one of the players then, recollects:

We were also very much interested in football. We played for the Ashram team in the local tournament. Once, a devotee from Cuddalore invited the Mother to witness a friendly football match between the Ashram team and a local team. The match itself had no importance, but the Mother's presence was most desirable. The next day the news of our match was printed in the newspaper. I read out the report to the Mother.

Participating in local tournaments was discontinued in 1953. However quite a few friendly football matches were played against other teams but they were all held in our grounds; and we did not lose a single match.

Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, or Pranab-da, also known as Dada to many of us, had visited the Ashram in 1942 but went back to complete his studies. Right from a young age he was attracted to boxing. In his college days he became a very good boxer. He had the opportunity to be coached by a few well-known boxers of Bengal of that time. One of them was Biren Chunder, who was a little older than Pranab-da and was himself a very good boxer and had become the champion in Bengal. Pranab-da got his training in Biren-da's club. Apart from boxing, he learned freehand exercises, exercises with weights, wrestling, asanas, Bratachari dance, (a type of folk dance popular in Bengal). He received his training in Marching and also learnt volleyball. When he joined college he founded a club, the Bibekanando Byayam Samiti, for young people, where children were encouraged to build a strong healthy body and follow a high ideal so that they could become worthy children of their motherland. After his graduation in 1945 he came back to Pondicherry and joined the Ashram. His four younger brothers and his mother had already settled here as inmates of the Ashram. Debu, one of his brothers, a student of the School, brought him to the new Playground. Here is an extract from Pranab-da's diary about his visit:

There was a shabby gate (This was the gate of the old school building). A little inside, in front of the gate there was a sand-pit. Earlier some boys were doing pole-vault there. Since Kunjabehari (a young inmate of the Ashram) had hurt his knee badly, the pole-vault had stopped. Instead, they were doing long jump. On the southern side of the Playground a few girls were playing croquet. Debu told me that it was the Mother's favourite game during her childhood. She was playing it on a hill-top in France. On the western side of the Playground some boys were playing circle-ball. Some boys were simply running and chasing one another. I was told to give a demonstration of shadow boxing and I did it. Then the boys told me to do some long jump. That also I did with them.

(*Sport Spirit*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 5)

After that, Pranab-da visited the Playground a few times and watched the activities of the children.

In 1945, some boys requested him to look after their physical training. The Mother was very happy to hear this and she gave her consent. Thus in June 1945 the Department of Physical Education started functioning with a group of fourteen boys. Pranab-da took charge of the physical education programme. He taught them Marching, Free Hand Drills, Tumbling, Pyramid Building, Long Jump, High Jump, Circle Ball, Football and even Kathi Dance and some Folk Dances. Soon after this first group of 14 boys was formed, about a dozen more children clamoured for sports and games.

Biren-da was invited by Pranab-da to visit the Ashram. He arrived here a few months after Pranab-da and stayed back in the Ashram.

He joined hands with Pranab-da and together they started building, brick by brick, from the foundation, this great and beautiful edifice — 'The Education of the Physical'.

(Prabhakar (Batti), *Among the not so Great*, p. 111)

Initially, Pranab-da took the boys' group and Biren-da took up the children's group. From 1946, it was the other way.

In July 1945, Pranab-da put up the very first physical-culture demonstration in the Playground with 14 boys. The programme included freehand drills, and human pyramids. In the office records of the year 1945, we find drawings by Jayantilal-da, one of the Ashram artists, of three pyramid formations. These sketches were made to explain to the Mother what was meant by 'human pyramids'.

Encouraged by the success of the casual demonstration by the 14 boys, Pranab-da ventured to put up a more elaborate demonstration. In the morning of December 2, 1945, there was a programme of cultural activities in the School Hall. In the evening, there was a demonstration of physical culture at the Playground. The



Pranab-da during Athletics competition 1951

programme was a grand success and the praises reached the Mother. When Dada went to the Mother for *pranam* in the evening, she gave him some small presents in appreciation and promised him that she would come to the Playground to see the programme the coming year.

Another annual sports event was introduced in 1946. It consisted of some athletics items and culminated on the first of May with the Novelty Races. We shall follow the developments of these activities a little later in our series.

Sometime in 1945 the Mother asked me to join the Playground activities. Very soon after that, when I went to offer my *pranams* to the Mother on the first floor of the main Ashram building, she suddenly asked me: “Do you love children?” I was a little taken aback. “Yes, Mother”, I said. I was perhaps a little diffident too. It was as if someone had found out a hidden secret in my heart! She turned to select some flowers for me from the tray to her right. And she said: “I shall give you the charge of the Playground when you are grown up” (*quand tu deviendras grand*). How



The Mother at the inauguration of the Boxing Ring in the Tennis Ground on 21.2.1952.
Biren-da, the coach is inside the Ring.

happy I was! “That means I shall grow taller! (My friends were already taller than I was.) Now, I shall also get taller!” I thought. She turned towards me, gave the flowers in my hand and patting the crown of my head said: “Not here, it is HERE!” She poked with her index finger, quite hard, twice, the spot just above the solar plexus and said: “*C’est ici* — it is here.”

Sumitra Nahar a young inmate of the Ashram was one of the senior students of the School and the girls’ group was under her supervision. We participated in the activities in our everyday attires: saris or frocks, and a few wore *salwar-kameez*. At that time the ground was used by young children, young men and the girls. There was no formal training given to the older girls. Pranab-da and Biren-da were seeing to the children and the boys’ group. The western half of the Playground was reserved for their activities. The eastern half was used on alternate days by the girls’ group and the young men. When the young men used half the ground, the narrow strip of open space in front of the main gate and the extension of this area till the Dortoir house on the western side were used for activities by the girls’ group. As the number

of young men was more than that of the girls' group, they often enjoyed the benefit of using the larger eastern portion while the girls were allowed to play in the narrower strip. However soon this arrangement changed, and the grounds were used equally by the young men and the girls on alternate days.

Sometime later, Sumitra Nahar requested the Mother to relieve her from the responsibility of the group in the Playground and the Mother asked me to take up the work.

THE GAMES WE PLAYED

We used to play all types of running games when we had the larger ground. Apart from *kabaddi*, *Shi-khela* (king and the fortress) etc. we had a host of other games such as the chain-game, *sat-tali*, *kho-kho* and English *kho* to name only a few. As more young girls joined the Ashram they naturally came for the physical education activities in the evenings. These new arrivals taught us the games they knew and that increased the variety of games we played.

We also played croquet. Croquet is a game which originated in France and by the middle of the 19th Century it became popular in Britain and America. It is a lawn game played on a rectangular court where iron hoops and a wooden peg are fixed firmly at specified distances. It is played with wooden balls and mallets. The ball is to be struck with the wooden mallet and made to pass through each hoop set in a particular pattern on the ground; after this, the player hits the wooden peg with the wooden ball and that completes the round. He then returns to the starting point. It is a game which needs a great deal of concentration and accuracy in hitting the ball. The game was taught by Nirmal-da, a young inmate of the Ashram, to the first batch of young girl-students. For us, who were not students because we had joined later, this was a totally new activity. We found in this game a new and interesting challenge. The old-timers like Sumitra, Amita, Lilou, Kumud to name a few, were very good players. Yet, some of us, like Minoo, Sujata, Maniben, picked up the delicate points of the game and were soon playing as well as the others. We came to know that it was the Mother's favourite game when she was young.

The Mother liked games where a great deal of concentration, accuracy of movement like aiming a target, was necessary.

Tara Jauhar, one of the earliest students of the School and a young captain of the children's group writes:

The Mother loved games of skill. One day she told me that we should introduce to the children games which demanded a certain amount of skill. To demonstrate the importance of developing this faculty she asked each of us (one after the other) to lift the cover of a crystal bowl and put it back without making any

sound. We all tried but it was only the Mother who replaced the cover without making a sound.

(*Growing up with the Mother*, pp. 140-41)

Tara also mentions a Japanese game, 'Jonchets':

. . . we played the game of 'Jonchets' — a Japanese game, which was the Mother's favourite. The game . . . was played with pretty little sticks, resembling matchsticks. We would hold them all together in our hand and then let go or, to make the game more difficult, we would arrange them on top of each other in a criss-cross manner. Each player, in turn would then pick up as many sticks as he could, without moving any other stick. If any stick, other than the one which was being picked up, moved, the player lost his turn. (*Ibid.*, p. 141)

The Mother encouraged the children to play it. It was a game where much concentration and fine skill were needed.

SOME GAMES PLAYED BY THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

There was a time when after her game of tennis the Mother would come to the Playground and accompanied by a few lady inmates she would walk fast a few times round the Playground. Priti Das Gupta in her Bengali book *Abismaraniya Muhurta* tells us that

. . . one day some tennis balls were brought and a basket was hung on a wall. The balls had to be thrown into the basket from a fixed distance. Then started the game. The Mother threw all her balls one by one into the basket. All of us had to throw six balls in this manner. Violette could throw in the basket three and on some other days, four. The Mother praised her. Sutapa could sometimes succeed in putting in two balls. But the Mother could always throw in the basket all the six balls. When she threw the ball her eyes and her concentration were worth watching. She threw her ball standing quite oblivious of her surroundings. This naturally brought to our mind the famous episode in the *Mahabharata* of Arjuna aiming unerringly at his target.

Sometimes, on rainy evenings, when tennis could not be played, the Mother would come to the Playground and with some of her companions she played darts. The dart board with the target of concentric circles would be hung on the wall of the long gymnasium. The Mother would stand at the required distance and throw the darts aiming the target. Generally Pavitra-da joined her for this game.

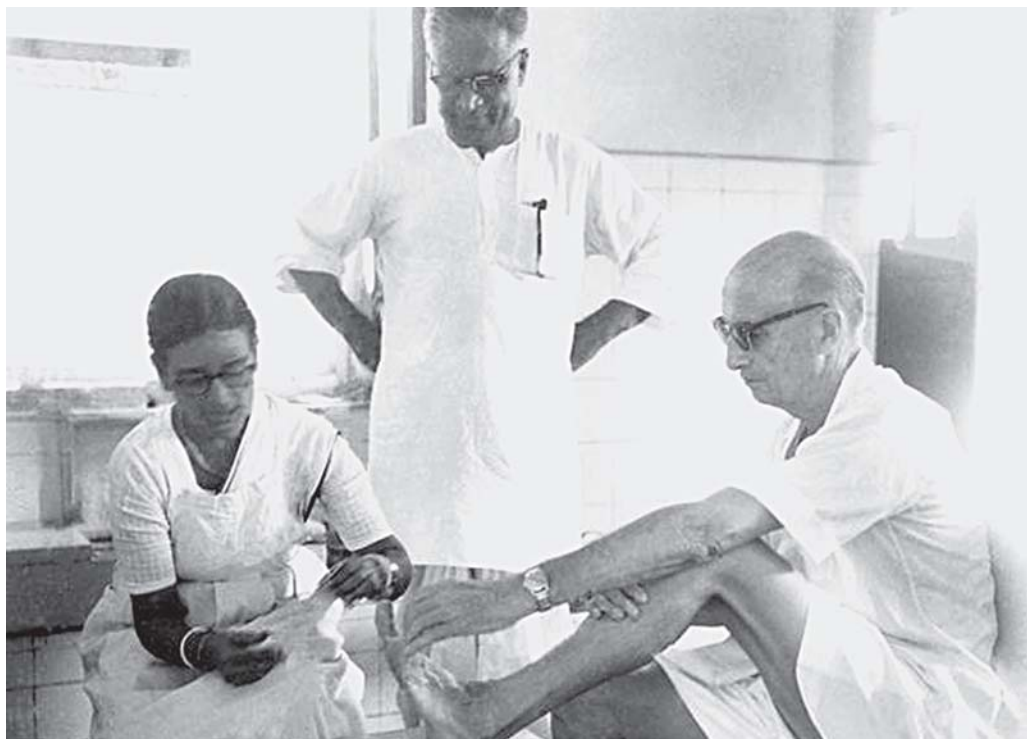
On one occasion when the Mother had walked down from her room in the Playground to the small room at the eastern corner where she held interviews, she found that the gentleman who had requested an interview had not yet arrived. The Mother asked a young man who was standing nearby, to get from the gymnasium one of the heavy wooden clubs used for body-building exercises. This was placed where the Mother was waiting. She walked from the club and measured a certain distance with her steps. Some tennis balls were brought from the store-room, and she began aiming at the tip of the club. This game continued till the gentleman arrived for his appointment!

THE MEDICAL CHECK-UP

The Ashram School was inaugurated on December 2 1943. In 1944 and 1945, a preliminary medical check-up for all the students was conducted by Dr. Nripendra in the school building. In October 1946 and in 1947 another medical check-up was conducted for all the participants — students as well as Ashram inmates — who had joined the physical education activities. It was done in the room situated on the southern side at the entrance of the school building which was used as a class room for the Kindergarten children. Dr. Dutsy, a French lady doctor examined the girls. The Mother was present all through the examinations. She was also present for the check-up conducted by Dr. Nripendra for the children and the boys. She herself noted down the observations on the medical report and signed each paper. The Mother would help the little ones undress or dress as needed during the check-up. Bhavatarini, one of our group members, remembers that after the examination was over she was fumbling while tying the strings of her pyjamas. The Mother called her near and helped her to tie the string. Both Priti-di and myself were rather thin and we were asked to remove our upper garment completely so that the Mother and the doctor could scrutinise our bare bodies! Though in many of the reports both for boys and girls, the comments were rather negative, such as ‘underweight’, ‘bad posture’, ‘rickety structure’ etc. quite soon some improvements were noted in the succeeding reports. This could have been due to the effects of the physical activities already started by the members and also the care with which the Mother fortified our daily food intake. She gave us fruits and butter in addition to our regular diet. To some whom she considered rather weak she gave in addition a packet of Swiss cheese. When the packet was over we had to inform her and she would herself get another one from her room. I remember that I used to get a sharp pain in the stomach regularly in the afternoon. She gave me some black chocolate and asked me to take a small piece from it as soon as I felt the onset of the pain. I was free of the pain after some time.

In 1948, one of the participants in a walking race from the old pier to the

Tennis ground suddenly collapsed after completing the race. The Mother instructed Dada that all participants in physical education must undergo a regular annual medical check-up.



Dr. Nripendra's dispensary — nursing sister, Dr. Nripendra, patient.

From the following year, Dr. Nripendra conducted the medical check-up in the Ashram Dispensary for all participants. This continued till 1952. Dr. Satyabrata Sen became a permanent member of the Ashram in 1951. In 1952 he helped Pranab-da prepare a proper medical check-up report form. I remember that one day Pranab-da called me to his office where they were both present. Dr. Sen checked my pulse rate and I was asked to step up and down on a low bench to Pranab-da's count. After it was over my pulse rate was again checked. They were trying out the Harvard Step-up test. A proper format for medical check-up was prepared and from the following year the medical report is noted in the proper format. Apart from general

measurements and observations of the doctor, the results of some special tests like the Crampton Test, the Schneider Test and the Harvard Step-up tests are used to assess the cardio-vascular efficiency of the participants. From 1953 the venue of check-up was shifted. Medical check-up for all members was conducted in a room of the present office of the Physical Education department. There was a table and a chair for the doctor, a height-measuring stand and a small spring weighing machine. Later on, a spirometer for measuring the vital capacity was added. A new good weighing machine soon replaced the small one. The Children's Dispensary was opened in 1967 and from then on the medical check-ups were conducted there.

From 1958 to 1969 Dr. Kamuben Patel, a lady doctor from Dar-es-Salaam and a devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo conducted the medical check-up for the girls. Many girls suffered from constipation and her standard treatment was "mashed banana in milk" every day and she came to be known amongst the girls as the doctor of mashed banana!

FIRST GROUPS FORMED IN 1946

In 1946 the members who took part in the physical education activities were grouped thus:

- Group A – little children
- Group B – somewhat older children
- Group C – young boys
- Group D – elderly men
- Group E – all the ladies

CHITRA SEN

(To be continued)

Rise into the higher consciousness, let its light control and transform the nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 839)



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