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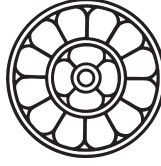
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIX

No. 1

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## I WALKED BESIDE THE WATERS

I walked beside the waters of a world of light  
On a gold ridge guarding two seas of high-rayed night.  
One was divinely topped with a pale bluish moon  
And swam as in a happy deep spiritual swoon  
More conscious than earth's waking; the other's wide delight  
Billowed towards an ardent orb of diamond white.  
But where I stood, there joined in a bright marvellous haze  
The mirrored moons with the long ridge's golden blaze.  
I knew not if two wakings or two mighty sleeps  
Mixed the great diamond fires and the pale pregnant deeps,  
But all my glad expanding soul flowed satisfied  
Around me and became the mystery of their tide.  
As one who finds his own eternal self, content,  
Needing naught else beneath the spirit's firmament,  
It knew not Space, it heard no more Time's running feet,  
Termless, fulfilled, lost richly in itself, complete.  
And so it might have lain for ever. But there came  
A dire intrusion wrapped in married cloud and flame,  
Across the blue-white moon-hush of my magic seas  
A sudden sweeping of immense peripheries  
Of darkness ringing lambent lustres; shadowy-vast  
A nameless dread, a Power incalculable passed  
Whose feet were death, whose wings were immortality;  
Its changing mind was time, its heart eternity.  
All opposites were there, unreconciled, uneased,  
Struggling for victory, by victory unappeased.  
All things it bore, even that which brings undying peace,  
But secret, veiled, waiting for some supreme release.  
I saw the spirit of the cosmic Ignorance;  
I felt its power besiege my gloried fields of trance.

But now its huge Enigma had a voice, a cry  
That echoed through my oceans of felicity.

A Voice arose that was so sweet and terrible  
It thrilled the heart with love and pain, as if all hell  
Tuned with all heaven in one inextricable note.

Born from abysmal depths on highest heights to float,  
 It carried all sorrow that the souls of creatures share,  
 Yet hinted every rapture that the gods can bear.  
 "O Son of God who cam'st into my blackest Night  
 To sound and know its gulfs and bring the immortal light  
 Into the passion of its darkness, castst thou man's fate  
 For thy soul's freedom and its magic are forfeit,  
 Renouncing the high pain that gave thee mortal birth  
 And made thy soul a seeker on the common earth?  
 When first the Eternal cast Himself abroad to be  
 His own unimaginable multiplicity,  
 Expressing in Time and shape what timelessly was there,  
 The mighty Mother stood alone in diamond air  
 And took into her that Godhead streaming from above  
 And worlds of her endless beauty and delight and love  
 Leaped from her fathomless heart.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 668-69)

*Note on the text:*

*No title in the manuscript. April 1934. Sri Aurobindo wrote the first part of this poem (down to "gloried fields of trance") on 25 April 1934 after Dilip Kumar Roy asked him for some lines in alexandrines (Sri Aurobindo Came to Me, pp. 226-29). In an accompanying letter, he explained how the caesura dividing the lines into two parts could come after different syllables. Dilip, noting that in Sri Aurobindo's passage there were examples of the caesura falling after the second, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth syllables, asked for an example of a line with the caesura coming after the third syllable. Sri Aurobindo obliged by sending him the couplet:*

*And in the silence of the mind life knows itself  
 Immortal, and immaculately grows divine.*

*On 28 April 1934, three days after Sri Aurobindo sent the first passage, his secretary asked him: "Can your last poem (in Alexandrines, sent to Dilip) be put into circulation?" Sri Aurobindo replied: "No. It is not even half finished." He wrote two more passages but never wove the three together into a completed poem. The editors have reproduced the passages as they are found in Sri Aurobindo's notebooks and loose sheets, separating the three passages by blank lines. (Ibid., p. 727)*

# **EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA**

## **PART THREE EXPERIENCES OF THE INNER CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS**

### **SECTION TWO EXPERIENCES OF THE INNER BEING AND THE INNER CONSCIOUSNESS**

#### **Chapter One The Inward Movement**

##### **The Importance of Inner Experiences**

The outer work is only half the matter. There is also the consciousness within which does the work and that must develop from the mental-vital to the spiritual-psychic. How can it do that without experiences? Also one can develop an intuitive consciousness which is helpful to the work.

\*

What you say about the outer being is correct; it must change and manifest what is within in the inner nature. But for that one must have experiences in the inner nature and through these the power of the inner nature grows till it can influence wholly and possess the outer being. To change the outer consciousness entirely without developing this inner consciousness would be too difficult. That is why these inner experiences are going on to prepare the growth of the inner consciousness. There is an inner mind, an inner vital, an inner physical consciousness which can more easily than the outer receive the higher consciousness above and put itself into harmony with the psychic being; when that is done the outer nature is felt as only a fringe on the surface, not as oneself, and is more easily transformed altogether.

Whatever difficulties there may still be in the outer nature, they will not make any difference to the fact that you are now awake within, the Mother's force working in you and you her true child destined to be perfectly that in all ways. Put your faith and your thought entirely on her and you will go through all safely.

\*

What you express in the letter is the right way of thinking and seeing. The self-will of the mind wanting things in its own way and not in the Divine's way was a great obstacle. With that gone the way should become much less rough and hard to follow.

The outer consciousness can grow in faith, fidelity to the Divine, reverence, love, worship and adoration, great things in themselves, — though in fact these things too come from within, — but realisation can only take place when the inner being is awake with its vision and feeling of things unseen. Till then, one can feel the results of the divine help and, if one has faith, know that they are the work of the Divine; but it is only then that one can feel clearly the Force at work, the divine Presence, the direct communion.

\*

So long as you live only in thoughts and other movements of the surface consciousness, you cannot be conscious in the Yogic sense. It is when the mind becomes quiet that the real (inner) consciousness comes out or the higher consciousness above the mind comes down. It is only then also that the inner physical being becomes active and brings an alert consciousness and an intuitive sense into the body. Also the higher thought and the inner will comes then only.

\*

The exterior being has to become aware of the inner — the veil between the inner and outer consciousness has to be removed, it is only then that a real Yogic consciousness begins. The outer has to be merely an instrument or channel for the inner to express itself and communicate with the outer physical world. The inner again has to have free communication with the universal on all the planes — it has to enter into the cosmic consciousness. The outer consciousness has to be remoulded and reshaped through the inner consciousness and the processes that must do it are the psychic by its influence and the higher consciousness by its descent. Naturally, in the process the outer being also will lose its separateness and become aware of and, in a way, unified with the universal.

### **Becoming Aware of the Inner Being**

It is not that anything has been taken from you, but as you say at the end, your being is seen by you in two parts. That is a thing that happens as the sadhana proceeds and must happen in order that one may have completely the knowledge of oneself and the true consciousness. These two parts are the inner being and the outer being. The outer being (mind, vital and physical) has now become capable of



quietude and it sits in meditation in a free, happy, vacant quietude which is the first step towards the true consciousness. The inner being (inner mind, vital, physical) is not lost but gone inside — the outer part does not know where — but probably gone inside into union with the psychic. The only thing that can have gone is something of the old nature that was standing in the way of this experience.

\*

The silence descends into the inner being first — as also other things from the higher consciousness. One can become aware of this inner being, calm, silent, strong, untouched by the movements of Nature, full of knowledge or light, and at the same time be aware of another lesser being, the small personality on the surface which is made up of the movements of Nature or else still subject to them or else, if not subject to them, still open to invasion by them. This is a condition that any number of sadhaks and Yogis have experienced. The inner being means the psychic, the inner mind, the inner vital, the inner physical. In this condition none of these can be even touched, so there has been an essential purification. All need not feel this division into two consciousnesses, but most do. When it is there, the will that decides the action is in the inner being, not in the outer — so the invasion of the outer by vital movements can in no way compel the action. It is on the contrary a very favourable stage in the transformation because the inner being can bring the whole force of the higher consciousness in it to change the nature wholly, observing the action of Nature without being affected by it, putting the force for change wherever needed and setting the whole being right as one does with a machine. That is if one wants a transformation. For many Vedantins don't think it necessary — they say the inner being is *mukta*, the rest is simply a mechanical continuation of the impetus of Nature in the physical man and will drop away with the body so that one can depart into Nirvana.

\*

In fact all these ignorant vital movements originate from outside in the ignorant universal nature; the human being forms in his superficial parts of being, mental, vital, physical a habit of certain responses to these waves from outside. It is these responses that he takes as his own character (anger, desire, sex etc.) and thinks he cannot be otherwise. But that is not so; he can change. There is another consciousness deeper within him, his true inner being, which is his real self, but is covered over by the superficial nature. This the ordinary man does not know, but the Yogi becomes aware of it as he progresses in his sadhana. As the consciousness of this inner being increases by sadhana, the surface nature and its responses are pushed out and can be got rid of altogether. But the ignorant universal Nature does not want to let go

and throws the old movements on the sadhak and tries to get them inside him again; owing to a habit the superficial nature gives the old responses. If one can get the firm knowledge that these things are from outside and not a real part of oneself, then it is easier for the sadhak to repel such notions, or if they lay hold, he can get rid of them sooner. That is why I say repeatedly that these things are not in yourself, but from outside.

### **The Piercing of the Veil**

The cry you heard was not in the physical heart, but in the emotional centre. The breaking of the wall meant the breaking of the obstacle or at least of some obstacle there between your inner and your outer being. Most people live in their ordinary outer ignorant personality which does not easily open to the Divine; but there is an inner being within them of which they do not know, which can easily open to the Truth and the Light. But there is a wall which divides them from it, a wall of obscurity and unconsciousness. When it breaks down, then there is a release; the feelings of calm, Ananda, joy which you had immediately afterwards were due to that release. The cry you heard was the cry of the vital part in you overcome by the suddenness of the breaking of the wall and the opening.

\*

The piercing of the veil between the outer consciousness and the inner being is one of the crucial movements in Yoga. For Yoga means union with the Divine, but it also means awaking first to your inner self and then to your higher self, — a movement inward and a movement upward. It is, in fact, only through the awakening and coming to the front of the inner being that you can get into union with the Divine. The outer physical man is only an instrumental personality and by himself he cannot arrive at this union, — he can only get occasional touches, religious feelings, imperfect intimations. And even these come not from the outer consciousness but from what is within us.

There are two mutually complementary movements; in one the inner being comes to the front and impresses its own normal motions on the outer consciousness to which they are unusual and abnormal; the other is to draw back from the outer consciousness, to go inside into the inner planes, enter the world of your inner self and wake in the hidden parts of your being. When that plunge has once been taken, you are marked for the Yogic, the spiritual life and nothing can efface the seal that has been put upon you.

This inward movement takes place in many different ways and there is sometimes a complex experience combining all the signs of the complete plunge.

There is a sense of going in or deep down, a feeling of the movement towards inner depths; there is often a stillness, a pleasant numbness, a stiffness of the limbs. This is the sign of the consciousness retiring from the body inwards under the pressure of a force from above, — that pressure stabilising the body into an immobile support of the inner life, in a kind of strong and still spontaneous *āsana*. There is a feeling of waves surging up, mounting to the head, which brings an outer unconsciousness and an inner waking. It is the ascending of the lower consciousness in the Adhara to meet the greater consciousness above. It is a movement analogous to that on which so much stress is laid in the Tantrik process, the awakening of the Kundalini, the Energy coiled up and latent in the body and its mounting through the spinal cord and the centres (*cakras*) and the Brahmarandhra to meet the Divine above. In our Yoga it is not a specialised process, but a spontaneous uprush of the whole lower consciousness sometimes in currents or waves, sometimes in a less concrete motion, and on the other side a descent of the Divine Consciousness and its Force into the body. This descent is felt as a pouring in of calm and peace, of force and power, of light, of joy and ecstasy, of wideness and freedom and knowledge, of a Divine Being or a Presence — sometimes one of these, sometimes several of them or all together. The movement of ascension has different results: it may liberate the consciousness so that one feels no longer in the body, but above it or else spread in wideness with the body either almost non-existent or only a point in one's free expanse. It may enable the being or some part of the being to go out from the body and move elsewhere, and this action is usually accompanied by some kind of partial *samādhi* or else a complete trance. Or it may result in empowering the consciousness, no longer limited by the body and the habits of the external nature, to go within, to enter the inner mental depths, the inner vital, the inner (subtle) physical, the psychic, to become aware of its inmost psychic self or its inner mental, vital and subtle physical being and, it may be, to move and live in the domains, the planes, the worlds that correspond to these parts of the nature. It is the repeated and constant ascent of the lower consciousness that enables the mind, the vital, the physical to come into touch with the higher planes up to the supramental and get impregnated with their light and power and influence. And it is the repeated and constant descent of the Divine Consciousness and its Force that is the means for the transformation of the whole being and the whole nature. Once this descent becomes habitual, the Divine Force, the Power of the Mother begins to work, no longer from above only or from behind the veil, but consciously in the Adhara itself, and deals with its difficulties and possibilities and carries on the Yoga.

Last comes the crossing of the border. It is not a falling asleep or a loss of consciousness, for the consciousness is there all the time; only, it shifts from the outer and physical, becomes closed to external things and recedes into the inner psychic and vital part of the being. There it passes through many experiences and of these some can and should be felt in the waking state also; for both movements

are necessary, the coming out of the inner being to the front as well as the going in of the consciousness to become aware of the inner self and nature. But for many purposes the ingoing movement is indispensable. Its effect is to break or at least to open and pass the barrier between this outer instrumental consciousness and that inner being which it very partially strives to express, and to make possible in future a conscious awareness of all the endless riches of possibility and experience and new being and new life that lie untapped behind the veil of this small and very blind and limited material personality which men erroneously think to be the whole of themselves. It is the beginning and constant enlarging of this deeper and fuller and richer awareness that is accomplished between the inward plunge and the return from this inner world to the waking state.

The sadhak must understand that these experiences are not mere imaginations or dreams but actual happenings, for even when, as often occurs, they are formations only, of a wrong or misleading or adverse kind, they have still their power as formations and must be understood before they can be rejected and abolished. Each inner experience is perfectly real in its own way, although the values of different experiences differ greatly, but it is real with the reality of the inner self and the inner planes. It is a mistake to think that we live physically only or only with the outer mind and life. We are all the time living and acting on other planes of consciousness, meeting others there and acting upon them, and what we do and feel and think there, the forces we gather, the results we prepare have an incalculable importance and effect, unknown to us, upon our outer life. Not all of it comes through, and what comes through takes another form in the physical — though sometimes there is an exact correspondence; but this little is at the basis of our outward existence. All that we become and do and bear in the physical life is prepared behind the veil within us. It is therefore of immense importance for a Yoga which aims at the transformation of life to grow conscious of what goes on within these domains, to be master there and be able to feel, know and deal with the secret forces that determine our destiny and our internal and external growth or decline.

It is equally important for those who want that union with the Divine without which the transformation is impossible. The aspiration could not be realised if you remained bound by your external self, tied to the physical mind and its petty movements. It is not the outer being which is the source of the spiritual urge; the outer being only undergoes the inner drive from behind the veil. It is the inner psychic being in you that is the bhakta, the seeker after the union and the Ananda, and what is impossible for the outer nature left to itself becomes perfectly possible when the barrier is down and the inner self in the front. For the moment this comes strongly to the front or draws the consciousness powerfully into itself, peace, ecstasy, freedom, wideness, the opening to light and a higher knowledge begin to become natural, spontaneous, often immediate in their emergence.

Once the barrier breaks by the one movement or the other, you begin to find

that all the processes and movements necessary to the Yoga are within your reach and not as it seems in the outer mind difficult or impossible. The inmost psychic self in you has already in it the Yogin and the bhakta and if it can fully emerge and take the lead, the spiritual turn of your outer life is predestined and inevitable. In the initially successful sadhak it has already built a deep inner life, Yogic and spiritual, which is veiled only because of some strong outward turn the education and past activities have given to the thinking mind and lower vital parts. It is precisely to correct this outward orientation and take away the veil that he has to practise more strenuously the Yoga. Once the inner being has manifested strongly whether by the inward-going or the outward-coming movement, it is bound to renew its pressure, to clear the passage and finally come by its kingdom. A beginning of this kind is the indication of what is to happen on a greater scale hereafter.

### **The Movement Inward**

The movement inward is all to the good — for going inward if one goes far enough brings one to the psychic. The more peace there is the better; even if it is only a little at first, that is so much gained. If the inward-drawing movement is held to, it will grow and the power to reject anger and other such movements will increase. It is this peace and inward psychic movement in you that we shall try for till it is done.

\*

It is rather a pity that the fear came in and spoiled the inward movement — for this inward movement is exceedingly important for the sadhana. The increasing frequency and completeness of the psychic consciousness in you coming in and replacing the ordinary one has hitherto been the most hopeful sign of progress — but the establishment of an inward movement would be a still greater thing; for its natural result would be to liberate the soul within and to give you a stand in the inner being so that you would be able to regard any fluctuations in the outer consciousness without being subjugated by them and without any interruption of the inner poise and freedom. But the movement is bound to come back and fulfil itself. It is very good that the help comes when you call and that you can shake yourself free — it is another sign of the psychic growth.

\*

It takes time of course to make the transition from one state of consciousness to another. The depth of feeling will come more and more as your consciousness draws back from the claim of external things and goes deeper in into the heart

region seeing and feeling from there with the psychic to prompt and enlighten it. Faith also will increase with that movement — for it is the outer intellect that is infirm or deficient in faith, the inner being in the heart has it always.

\*

That is quite natural [*an inward movement during the afternoon nap*]. The usual movement does not take place, but there is still a pressure habitual at the time under which the consciousness goes inside not into sleep but into some kind of samadhi in which a working takes place in the inner consciousness. As yet you have not developed the power of being conscious in this state nor the power of remembering what took place.

\*

It was probably not so much a sleep as a going inward under the pressure of the influence at the Pranam. In any case it was not a dream but an experience, an ascent into one of the higher ranges of consciousness above the mind — all of which have this character of vastness and peace everywhere.

\*

X's experiences are those which usually attend the withdrawal from the outer consciousness into an inner plane of experience. The feeling of coldness of the body in the first is one of the signs — like the immobility and stiffness of Y's experience — that the consciousness is withdrawing from the outer or physical sheath and retiring inside. The crystallisation was the form in which he felt the organisation of an inner consciousness which could receive at once firmly and freely from above. The crystals at once indicate organised formation and a firm transparency in which the greater vision and experience descending from the higher planes could be clearly reflected.

As for the other experience, his rejection of the waking consciousness evidently had the result of throwing him into an inner awareness in which he began to have contact with the supraphysical planes. What was meant by the sea of red colour and stars depends on the character of the red colour. If it was crimson, what he saw was the sea of the physical consciousness and physical life as it is represented to the inner symbolic vision; if it was purple red, then it was the sea of the vital consciousness and the vital life-force. Perhaps, if he had not stopped his sense of the Mother's presence, it would have been better, — he should rather, if he can, take it with him into the inner planes, then he would have had no occasion to fear.

In any case, if he wants to go into the inner consciousness and move in the

inner planes — which will inevitably happen if he shuts off the waking consciousness in his meditation — he must cast away fear. Probably he expected to get the silence or the touch of the divine consciousness by following out the suggestion of the Gita. But the silence or the touch of the divine consciousness can be equally and for some more easily got in the waking meditation through the Mother's presence and the descent from above. The inward movement, however, is probably unavoidable and he should try to understand and, not shrinking or afraid, to go to it with the same confidence and faith in the Mother as he has in the waking meditation. His dreams are of course experiences on the inner (vital) plane.

P.S. The dream about the Mahadeva image may mean that someone (not of this world, of course) wanted to mislead him and make him confuse some narrower traditional form of the past with the greater living Truth that he is seeking.

\*

The difficulty indicated by you in your last (long) letter indicates that you enter into the inner being and begin to have experiences there, but there is a difficulty in organising them or seeing them coherently. The difficulty is because the inner mind is not yet sufficiently habituated to act and see the inside things and therefore the ordinary outer mind interferes and tries to arrange them; but the outer mind is unable to see the meaning of inner things. When the outer mind is left outside altogether, the things inside begin to be seen vividly and clearly, but the inner mind not being active, either their coherence is not seen or the consciousness lingers in the confused experiences of the lower vital plane and does not get through to the deeper, more coherent and significant experiences. A development of the inner consciousness is needed — when that development takes place, then all will become more clear and coherent. This development will take place if, without getting disturbed, you quietly aspire and go on calling the Mother's Force to do what is needed.

Your call will always reach the Mother. If you remain quiet and confident, you will in time become aware of the answer. The more the mind becomes quiet, the clearer will it become to you and you will feel her working. From time to time you can write of your experiences; wherever an answer is needed, I will answer.

### **The Inner Consciousness and the Body**

It is the inner consciousness that you felt separated from the body, liberated from the identification with the body, and yet in touch with all the material surroundings. It is a very helpful experience — indispensable for the Yoga.

\*



It is that the consciousness is detaching itself from the body.<sup>1</sup> Usually in men it is identified with the body and bound to it — in Yoga it detaches itself and becomes free. The body is no longer felt as oneself, but as something not oneself, something that one carries with oneself or else as an instrument which one uses for certain purposes.

\*

If you went inside and lost consciousness of the outer world, it would be called a kind of samadhi — but this experience can be got in the waking state also. It is a liberation from body consciousness and an awakening into the spiritual wideness. At first it is usually felt as a void of all other things but consciousness alone or existence alone.

\*

The feeling [*in meditation*] of having no head usually means that the mental consciousness is no longer imprisoned in the head at the time — but silent and extended.

### A Transitional State of Inwardness

The condition which you feel is one which is very well known in sadhana. It is a sort of passage or transition, a state of inwardness which is growing but not yet completed — at that time to speak or throw oneself outward is painful. What is necessary is to be very quiet and remain within oneself all the time until the movement is completed; one should not speak or only a little and in a low quiet way nor concentrate the mind on outward things. You should also not mind what people say or question; although they are practising sadhana, they know nothing about these conditions and if one becomes quiet or withdrawn they think one must be sad or ill. The Mother did not find you at all like that, sad or ill; it is simply a phase or temporary state in the sadhana that she has experience of and knows very well.

\*

The condition [*of inwardness*] lasts often for a number of days, sometimes many, until something definite begins. Remain confident and quiet.

1. The correspondent wrote that sometimes he felt raindrops or sunlight falling on his body as if they were touching something other than himself; at other times he felt very light, as if he had no body at all. — Ed.



## **The Growth of the Inner Being and the Inner Consciousness**

What you feel as the new life is the growth of the inner being in you; the inner being is the true being and as it grows the whole consciousness begins to change. This feeling and your new attitude towards people are signs of the change. The seeing of inner things also usually comes with this growth of the inner being and consciousness; it is an inner vision which awakes in most sadhaks when they enter this stage.

It is also a characteristic of this inner consciousness that even when it is active, there is felt behind the action or containing it a complete quietude or silence. The more one concentrates, the more this quietude and silence increases. That is why there seems to be all quiet within even though all sorts of things may be taking place within.

It is also quite usual that what takes place in the inner consciousness should not express itself at present in the outer physical. It at first creates changes inside, but takes possession of the outer instruments only afterwards.

\*

The things you feel are due to the fact that the consciousness goes inside, so physical things are felt as if they were at a distance. The same phenomenon can happen when one goes into another plane of consciousness and sees physical things from there. But it is probably the first that is happening with you. When one goes quite inside, then physical things disappear, — when some connection is kept, then they become distant. But this is a transitory change. Afterwards you will be able to have the two consciousnesses together, be in your psychic in one part of yourself with all the experience and activities of the psychic being and nature and yet with your surface self fully awake and active in physical things with the psychic support and influence behind this outer action.

\*

It is a very good sign that when the thoughts and the attempt at disturbance come there is something that remains calm and cool — for that, like the psychic reply from within, shows that the inner consciousness is fixed or fixing itself in part of the being. This is a well-recognised stage of the inner change in sadhana. Equally good is the emerging of the self-existent Ananda from within not dependent on outward things. It is a fact that this inner gladness and happiness is something peaceful and happy at once — it is not an excited movement like the vital outward pleasure, though it can be more ardent and intense. Another good result is the fading out of the feeling that “the work is mine” and the power to do it with the outward consciousness not engaging the inner being.

The sense of release as if from jail always accompanies the emergence of the psychic being or the realisation of the self above. It is therefore spoken of as a liberation, *mukti*. It is a release into peace, happiness, the soul's freedom not tied down by the thousand ties and cares of the outward ignorant existence.

It was of course the Mother's face you saw in your vision, but probably in one of her supraphysical, not her physical form and face — that is also indicated by the great light that came from the form and rendered it invisible.

\*

I am glad to hear of the development you speak of in your dealing with others. It is a power proper to the Yoga consciousness that is developing in you, because the Mother's force is at work and is developing the inner consciousness. For it is one of the powers of this inner consciousness to bring about what it sees to be the right thing by simply communicating in entire silence to the consciousness of another. That is the true way of acting — through the power of the inner consciousness, its knowledge, vision and will. The other thing, the coming of what you want to see on the street, is another form of the same action of the inner conscious force. As for the anger it is evidently in process of control and elimination and its recurrences cannot fail to disappear after a time as the new consciousness increases.

### **Living Within**

There is an inner being in man of which he is not usually conscious; he lives in a superficial consciousness which he calls himself and which is normally concerned with outer things; one is aware of the inner being either not at all or only as something behind from which feelings, ideas, impulses, imperatives etc. come occasionally into the outer. When one ceases to be mainly concerned with outer and surface things one can go more inside nearer to this inner being and become aware of things other than the ego and the outer nature. One can become aware of the inner being and live in it and get detached from the hold of outer things, dealing with them from an inner consciousness (felt as separate from the outer consciousness) according to an inner truth of the soul and spirit and no longer according to the demands of the outer Nature.

\*

If one lives within, then it is the inner consciousness that one depends on, not the outer. The inner consciousness can then always go on independent of the outer state to which it gives attention only when it chooses.

\*

It is good. Fasten on the true thing, the concentration in the inner being and the inner life. All these outer things are of minor importance and it is only when the inner life is well established that the difficulties with which they are hampered can get their true solution. That you have seen several times when you went inside. To be too much occupied in mind with the outer difficulties keeps it externalised. Living inwardly you will find the Mother close to you and realise her will and her action.

\*

Do not allow outward events to disturb you or be the cause of suggestions. It is as with the words of people and the suggestions they raise which disturb uselessly the consciousness. Both should be rejected. Live in the inner consciousness which can remain in its own calm and light whatever happens outside.

\*

To remain within, above and untouched, full of the inner consciousness and the inner experience, — listening, when need be, to *X* or another with the surface consciousness, but with even that undisturbed, not either pulled outwards or invaded, that is the perfect condition for the sadhana.

\*

You must gather yourself within more firmly. If you disperse yourself constantly, go out of the inner circle, you will constantly move about in the pettinesses of the ordinary outer nature and under the influences to which it is open. Learn to live within, to act always from within, from constant inner communion with the Mother. It may be difficult at first to do it always and completely, but it can be done if one sticks to it — and it is at that price, by learning to do that that one can have the siddhi in the Yoga.

\*

It is a very serious difficulty in one's Yoga — the absence of a central will always superior to the waves of the Prakriti forces, always in touch with the Mother, imposing its central aim and aspiration on the nature. That is because you have not yet learned to live in your central being; you have been accustomed to run with every wave of Force, no matter of what kind, that rushed upon you and to identify yourself with it for the time being. It is one of the things that has to be unlearned; you must find your central being with the psychic as its basis and live in it.

\*

To be aware of one's central consciousness and to know the action of the forces is the first definite step towards self-mastery.

\*

In the things of the subtle kind having to do with the working of consciousness in the sadhana, one has to learn to feel and observe and see with the inner consciousness and to decide by the intuition with a plastic look on things which does not make set definitions and rules as one has to do in outward life.

\*

Yes. When one is in the right consciousness, then there is the right movement, the right happiness, everything in harmony with the Truth.

When there is the wrong consciousness, there is demand, dissatisfaction, doubt, all kinds of disharmony.

\*

It [*calmness*] is only the proper condition for receptivity. Naturally, it is the proper thing to do if you want to be receptive or become conscious of inner things. So long as the mind is jumping about or rushing out to outside things, it is not possible to be inward, collected, conscious within.

\*

Obviously to live in the silent Brahman, the best way is to live within where one can have the silence and resist all outward pulls. As much avoidance of outer pulls — contact does not matter, if there is no pull outward — as will help that, can be very helpful. It is only an entire seclusion that for occult rather than mental reasons is not altogether desirable unless one has already a great inner strength and poise.

### **Living Within and the External Being**

It is the past habit of the vital that makes you repeatedly go out into the external part; you must persist and establish the opposite habit of living in your inner being which is your true being and of looking at everything from there. It is from there that you get the true thought, the true vision and understanding of things and of your own self and nature.

\*

You must have somehow externalised yourself too much. It is only by living in one's inner consciousness and doing everything from there that the right psychic condition can be kept. Otherwise it goes inside and the external covers it up. It is not lost, but hidden — one must go inside again to recover it.

\*

When one comes out of the inner condition, one gets externalised in the outer consciousness. It is difficult for the outer nature to remain always within, its nature is to pull outward. But when this happens, one must learn to look quietly at what is happening, observe what the outer nature does but not identify with it, not feel that it is oneself that is doing that, but only something that one is observing, while one's real self is that which observes and that which goes within. If one can do that, then there is no disturbance and it is easier to go back again inward.

\*

As for the activity going on, it is so with everybody. What has to be done, is not to be upset by it, but to learn to live inside where one always feels the force — or even if one does not feel because the consciousness is covered up, it is still there and after a time dispels the covering and is visible again. Outside the imperfect activities will go on till the whole being is changed and that cannot be done in a day.

Your mistake is to get upset because the exterior being is still there with its imperfections. What you ought to do is not to mind too much, to aspire for changing it but not get upset, to have confidence that it will change in time and meanwhile to stand back from it, to live in the part of you that is open to the force and to regard the rest as you would a cut that has to be cleaned or anything else belonging to you but external.

\*

The large inner mind and the true vital having shown themselves are bound to get the mastery; but the old lower nature, especially the vital part of it, is bound to struggle for reaffirming its hold on the consciousness. To remain very firm and repel its attacks till they lose their strength, is necessary.

\*

The difficulty is that you attach so much importance to things that are of quite a small value. You behave as if to have or have not a table is something of supreme importance and worry and excite yourself so much about the rights and wrongs of the matter that you allow it to upset your whole peace of mind and make you fall

from the true condition. These things are small and relative — you may have a new table or you may not have a new table, neither way is of any very great importance and it makes no difference to the Divine Purpose in you. The one thing important is to increase calm and peace and the descent of the Divine Force, to grow in equality and inward light and consciousness. Outward things have to be done with a great quiet, doing whatever is necessary but not exciting or upsetting yourself about anything. It is only so that you can advance steadily and quickly. When you feel the Mother's Force about you, the peace closely round you that is the one thing of importance — these small outward things can be settled in a hundred different ways, it does not really matter.

\*

The entire dependence on the inner realisation and not on outward things for their own sake and the seeking of the Divine for the sake of the Divine and without any tinge of ego motive is indeed the most difficult thing for the mind even of the Sadhak to learn; but it is the essence of the highest realisation and the condition of a perfect self-finding.

\*

When you come to the Divine, lean inwardly on the Divine and do not let other things affect you.

### **Acting from Within on the Outer Being**

Detach yourself from the outer being; live in the inner; let the Force work from the inner being — it will change the outer being.

\*

It is on the surface that the transformation is done. One comes up to the surface with what one has gained in the depths, to change it. It may be you need to go in again and find it difficult to make the movement back quickly. When the whole being becomes plastic you will be able to make whatever movement is needed more quickly.

\*

Yes, that is right. Relying on outer methods mainly never succeeds very well. It is only when there is the inner poise that the outer movement is really effective — and then it comes of itself.

\*

The difference [*in learning something*] is when a thing is done with the inner mind and when it is done only with the outer brain. What you feel is the inner mind taking it up — then it becomes part of the consciousness and things are really learned — the working of the outer mind is always difficult and superficial.

It is evident that the inner being in you is beginning to come more and more forward. As it does so, these outer difficulties will be more and more pushed out and the consciousness will keep the peace and force at first in the greater part of it, afterwards in the whole.

\*

It is a wall of consciousness that one has to build [*against undesirable things*]. Consciousness is not something abstract, it is like existence itself or ananda or mind or prana, something very concrete. If one becomes aware of the inner consciousness one can do all sorts of things with it, send it out as a stream of force, erect a circle or wall of consciousness around oneself, direct an idea so that it shall enter somebody's head in America etc. etc.

\*

It is simply that you became conscious of the inner being and the inner world and rose up to a higher plane of being where the outer difficulties do not exist. The object of Yoga is to establish the inner consciousness and the higher being in you and by their strength change the outer existence.

### **The Double Consciousness**

The condition you describe in your work shows that the inner being is awake and that there is now the double consciousness. It is the inner being which has the inner happiness, the calm and quiet, the silence free from any ripple of thought, the inwardly silent repetition of the name. The automatic repetition of the mantra is part of the same phenomenon — that is what ought to happen to the mantra, it must become a conscious but spontaneous thing repeating itself in the very substance of the consciousness itself, no longer needing any effort of the mind. All these doubts and

questionings of the mind are useless. What has to happen is that this inner consciousness should be always there not troubled by any disturbance with the constant silence, inner happiness, calm quietude, etc., while the outer consciousness does what is necessary in the way of work etc. or, what is better, has that done through it — it is the latter experience that you have some days as someone pushing the work with so much continuous force without your feeling tired.

If you feel more quiet and the surrender feels more intense, then that is a good, not a bad condition — and if it makes the mind an empty room receiving the light, so much the better. Experiences and descents are very good for preparation, but change of the consciousness is the thing wanted — it is the proof that the experiences and descents have had an effect. Descents of peace are good, but an increasingly stable quietude and silence of the mind is something more valuable. When that is there then other things can come — usually one at a time, light or strength and force or knowledge or ananda. It is not necessary to go on for ever having always the same preparatory experiences — a time comes when the consciousness begins to take a new poise and another state.

### **The Inner Being and Calmness, Silence, Peace**

The calmness you feel is that of the inner being which remains the same whatever the surface experience. But the use to be made of these things is to liberate oneself from the desires and mental or vital sanskaras of the past so that one may be free to reach that greater Truth consciousness in which there is no need of an Adesh, for all one's action there is the direct conscious movement of the self-knowing Truth and the Mother herself is the doer.

\*

The absence of thought is quite the right thing — for the true inner consciousness is a silent consciousness which has not to think out things, but gets the right perception, understanding and knowledge in a spontaneous way from within and speaks or acts according to that. It is the outer consciousness which has to depend on outside things and to think about them because it has not this spontaneous guidance. When one is fixed in this inner consciousness, then one can indeed go back to the old action by an effort of will, but it is no longer a natural movement and, if long maintained, becomes fatiguing. As for the dreams, that is different. Dreams about old bygone things come up from the subconscious which retains the old impressions and the seeds of the old movements and habits long after the waking consciousness has dropped them. Abandoned by the waking consciousness, they still come up in dreams; for in sleep the outer physical consciousness goes down into the subconscious



or towards it and many dreams come up from there.

The silence in which all is quiet and one remains as a witness while something in the consciousness spontaneously calls down the higher things is the complete silence which comes when the full force of the higher consciousness is upon mind and vital and body.

\*

All experiences come in the silence<sup>2</sup> but they do not come all pell-mell in a crowd at the beginning. The inner silence and peace have first to be established.

\*

The consciousness from which these experiences come [*such as the division of the mind into an active surface mind and a silent inner mind*] is always there pressing to bring them in. The reason why they don't come in freely or stay is the activity of the mind and vital always rushing about, thinking this, wanting that, trying to perform mountaineering feats on all the hillocks of the lower nature instead of nourishing a strong and simple aspiration and opening to the higher consciousness that it may come in and do its own work. Rasa of poetry, painting or physical work is not the thing to go after. What gives the interest in Yoga is the rasa of the Divine and of the divine consciousness which means the rasa of Peace, of Silence, of inner Light and Bliss, of growing inner Knowledge, of increasing inner Power, of the Divine Love, of all the infinite fields of experience that open to one with the opening of the inner consciousness. The true rasa of poetry, painting or any other activity is truly found when these activities are part of the working of the Divine Force in you and you feel it as that and you feel in it the joy of that working.

This condition you had of the inner being and its silence, separated from the surface consciousness and its little restless workings, is the first liberation, the liberation of Purusha from Prakriti, and it is the fundamental experience. The day when you can keep it, you can know that the Yogic consciousness has been founded in you. This time it has increased in intensity, but it must also increase in duration.

These things do not "drop" — what you have felt was there in you all the time, but you did not feel it because you were living on the surface altogether and the surface is all crowd and clamour. But in all men there is this silent Purusha, base of the true mental being, the true vital being, the true physical being. It was by your prayer and aspiration that the thing came, to show you in what direction you must travel in order to have the true rasa of things, for it is only when one is liberated that

2. The correspondent wrote that although he was sometimes able to achieve silence of mind, experiences were not coming in the silence. — Ed.

one can get the real rasa. For after this liberation come others and among them the liberation and Ananda in action as well as in the static inner silence.

\*

I don't think it is at all owing to the suggestion from what I wrote in the letter that you got the experience [*of a deep spiritual peace*]. The fundamental reason of these things does not belong to the surface, it is in the depths — or on the heights, at any rate, in the inner being behind the veil of the frontal consciousness. The actual occasional cause of the spiritual experience, — the match that sets the fire, so to say, — may be something very slight and looking accidental on the surface, a chance word or happening or something else quite fortuitous in its appearance. The person also through whom it comes may seem very much like a fortuitous instrument. It is true that this is only in appearance; for things slight and seemingly fortuitous have a reason for happening as they do, but that reason too is not on the surface.

As for the experience itself it takes up the movement which had started in you a long time ago and was interrupted by the vital upheaval that brought you so much trouble and struggle. Only, there has been since a widening of the consciousness and a step forward which made this form of the experience possible. At that time you had not much appreciation for calm and peace — you hankered only after bhakti and Ananda. But calm, peace, shanti are the necessary basis for any establishment of other things. Otherwise there is no solid foundation in the consciousness; if there is only unrest and movement, bhakti, Ananda and everything else can only come and go in starts and fits and find no ground to live on. It must, however, be not a mere mental quiet, but the deep spiritual peace of the shantimaya Shiva. It was this that touched you (descending through the head) in this experience. For the rest it is a resumption of the piercing of the veil, the beginning of the power of inner experience as opposed to the lesser experiences of the surface, the opening of the inner being, which is necessary for bringing the Yogic consciousness. A certain amount of vital purification has taken place which made the resumption of this kind of experience possible.

You certainly need not be afraid of going into unconsciousness, for it is not unconsciousness that you would go into, but simply the *inner* consciousness, — that going quite inward which is the result of intense *dhyāna* and the beginning of a certain kind of *samādhi*.

### **The Inner Being and the Inmost or Psychic Being**

There is an inner being and an inmost being which we call the psychic. When one meditates, one tries to go into the inner being. If one does it, then one feels very well that one has gone inside. What can be realised in meditation can also become the ordinary consciousness in which one lives. Then one feels what is now the ordinary consciousness to be something quite external and on the surface, not one's real self.

\*

The inner being is composed of the inner mental, the inner vital, the inner physical. The psychic is the inmost — supporting all the others. Usually it is in the inner mental that this separation first happens and it is the inner mental Purusha who remains silent observing the Prakriti as separate from himself. But it may also be the inner vital Purusha or inner physical or else without location simply the whole Purusha consciousness separate from the whole Prakriti. Sometimes it is felt above the head — but then it is usually spoken of as the Atman and the realisation is that of the silent Self.

\*

It is not possible to distinguish the psychic being at first. What has to be done is to grow conscious of an inner being which is separate from the external personality and nature — a consciousness or Purusha calm and detached from the outer action of the Prakriti.

\*

The reason why she remembers nothing when she comes out of her meditation is that the experience is taking place in the inner being and the outer consciousness is not ready to receive it. Formerly her sadhana was mainly on the vital plane which is often the first to open and the connection of that plane with the body consciousness is easy to establish because they are nearer to each other. Even then however her body was suffering because of attacks from the hostile elements in the vital plane. Now the sadhana seems to have gone inward into the psychic being. This is a great advance and she need not mind the want of connection with the most external consciousness at present. The work goes on all the same and it is probably necessary that it should be so just now. Afterwards, if she keeps steadily to the right attitude, it will descend into the outer consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Letters on Yoga — III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 209-37)*

## **‘IT IS THYSELF I WANT TO BE AND THAT I AM . . .’**

**May 23, 1914**

O Lord, Thou of whom I would be constantly conscious and whom I would realise in the smallest cells of my being, Thou whom I would know as myself and see manifested in all things, Thou who art the sole reality, the sole cause and aim of existence, grant that my love for Thee may grow ever greater so that I may be all love, Thy love itself, and that, being Thy love, I may unite integrally with Thee. May this love grow more and more intense, complete, luminous, powerful; may this love become an irresistible urge towards Thee, the invincible means of manifesting Thee. May everything in this being become pure, profound, disinterested, divine love — from the unfathomable depths to the outermost substance. May the God with form who manifests in this aggregate be entirely moulded from Thy complete and sublime love, the love which is at once the source and the realisation of all knowledge; may thought be clarified, organised, enlightened, transformed by Thy love; may all the life-forces, solely impregnated by Thy love and moulded from it, draw from it irresistible purity and constant energy, power and rectitude. May this weakened intermediary being, take advantage of its weakness to reconstitute itself with elements entirely moulded from Thy love, and may this body, now a burning brazier, radiate Thy divine, impersonal, sublime and calm love from every pore. . . . May the brain be reconstituted by Thy love. Lastly, may Thy love overflow, flood, penetrate, transfigure, regenerate, animate all things, with the power, the splendour, the sweetness and force which are its very own. In Thy love is peace, in Thy love is joy, in Thy love is Thy servitor's sovereign lever of work.

Thy love is vaster than the universe and more lasting than all the ages; it is infinite, eternal, it is Thyself. And it is Thyself I want to be and that I am, for such is Thy law, such is Thy will.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 153-54)*

## THE CONVERSATION OF 31 DECEMBER 1954

*New Year's Eve. After a meditation, Mother distributes her New Year's Message to everyone.*

I am going to read the prayer to you in French — it is a message not a prayer — in French and in English. And then I have brought two of Sri Aurobindo's replies to questions which have not been published anywhere, and you will be the first to hear them. And then two . . . not poems, some lines; a very short little poem and just a stanza from another poem, which are a magnificent illustration of our message for the next year.

This message was written because it is foreseen that next year will be a difficult year and there will be many inner struggles and even outer ones perhaps. So I tell all of you what attitude you should take in these circumstances. These difficulties may perhaps last not only twelve months, that is, one full year, but perhaps fourteen months; and during these fourteen months you must make an effort never to lose the attitude about which I am going to speak to you just now.

In fact, I insist that the more difficult things are, the more you must remain quiet, and the more should you have an unshakable faith. Of all things this is the most important.

Usually, as soon as things become difficult, human beings get agitated, become irritated, get terribly excited and they make the difficulties ten times more difficult. So I am warning you right away that this is not to be done, that you must do the opposite; and what I am going to read to you is precisely what you must repeat to yourself as soon as you feel some anxiety or worry within you; you must remember what I am telling you today and remember it throughout the year. You can repeat it morning and evening profitably. Here, then.

Now, first in French:

*“Aucune volonté humaine ne peut prévaloir contre la Volonté Divine. Rangeons-nous délibérément et exclusivement du côté du Divin et la victoire finale est certaine.”*

Now here is the English:

*“No human will can finally prevail against the Divine's Will. Let us put ourselves deliberately and exclusively on the side of the Divine, and the Victory is ultimately certain.”*

Now I shall read to you two questions which were asked and Sri Aurobindo's answers. It's not that the questions express a very high state of mind, but I am afraid many people let themselves fall into this kind of mental state. And so I think the answers will be very useful to many people also.

Here's the first question:

*"It seems to me that the number of people in the world accepting the truth of our Yoga of Transformation would not be as large as those who accepted Buddhism, Vedanta or Christianity."*

Here is Sri Aurobindo's answer. Notice his humour. I draw your attention to his humour.

*"Nothing depends on the number. The numbers of Buddhism or Christianity were so great because the majority professed it as a creed without its making the least difference to their external life."*

*"If the new consciousness were satisfied with that, it could also and much more easily command homage and acceptance by the whole earth. It is because it is a greater consciousness, the Truth Consciousness, that it will insist on a real change."<sup>1</sup>*

The second one:

*"You have said that the aim of our Yoga is to rise beyond the Nirvana, but in the Ashram there are extremely few who have reached or have tried to reach even the Nirvana. To reach even the Nirvana one has to give up ego and desire. Could it be said that even a few sadhaks in the Ashram have succeeded in doing so? Surely everybody must be making some effort to do this. Why then are they not successful? Is it that after some effort they forget the aim and live here as in ordinary life?"*

The answer:

*"I suppose if the Nirvana aim had been put before them, more would have been fit for it, for the Nirvana aim is easier than the one we have put before us — and they would not have found it so difficult to reach the standard. The sadhaks here are of all kinds and in all stages. But the real difficulty even for those who have progressed is with the external man. Even among those who follow the old ideal, the external man of the sadhak remains almost the same even after they have attained to something. The inner being gets free, the outer*

1. Letter of 29 April 1934.

*follows still its fixed nature. Our Yoga can succeed only if the external man too changes, but that is the most difficult of all things. It is only by a change of the physical nature that it can be done, by a descent of the highest light into this lowest part of Nature. It is here that the struggle is going on. The internal being of most of the sadhaks here, however imperfect still, is still different from that of the ordinary man, but the external still clings to its old ways, manners, habits. Many do not seem even to have awakened to the necessity of a change. It is when this is realised and done, that the Yoga will produce its full results in the Ashram itself, and not before.”<sup>2</sup>*

This indeed is a programme for next year, my children. I hope that next year I shall be able to say that many have tried to make their external life the expression of their deeper aspiration. For the moment there are not very many.

Now, as we have spoken about difficulties, I am going to read to you two things which will give you just a little glimpse of what true consciousness is, that which is free from all difficulties, that which is above all conflicts.

The first one goes like this — you have read it perhaps but I don’t think you could have quite understood it. It is called

*ONE DAY  
The Little More*

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

*Hill after hill was climbed and now,  
Behold, the last tremendous brow  
And the great rock that none has trod:  
A step, and all is sky and God.<sup>3</sup>*

*Sri Aurobindo*

And then this:

*Even in rags I am a god;  
Fallen, I am divine;  
High I triumph when down-trod,  
Long I live when slain.<sup>4</sup>*

*Sri Aurobindo*

2. Letter of 30 April 1934.

3. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 109.

4. A stanza from “Life”, *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 95.

There we are.

Now, I said that if someone asks “reasonable” questions, I shall perhaps answer.

*What human will is at present particularly against the divine Will?*

You mean from what point of view?

All human will which is against the divine Will is an anti-divine will. That’s all. No matter where it manifests, even in you!

There are no party politics in the divine life, you know. (*Laughter*) There are only states of consciousness.

(*To a child*) You have a question to ask, you?

*No, Mother, will you explain the two poems?*

Explain? There is no explanation. They speak for themselves, very clearly. It cannot be explained — poetry. You must feel it and not reason about it. Poetic inspiration is beyond the reason. You must not bring it down into the domain of reason, because then it is spoilt. It is felt much more than . . . it can be understood by an inner contact much more than by words.

*Mother, why not twelve months instead of fourteen?*

Ah that, my child, you may ask . . . Well, there are people who believe in the stars, they will tell you, “Ask the stars.” It is like that! Why do you take a certain number of years to grow up? Because the nature of things is like that. Well, the nature of this conflict is like that. That is to say, a certain development of forces is necessary to obtain the result; and this development of forces extends over a given number of months approximately.

*Sweet Mother, here it is written: The final victory is certain.<sup>5</sup> If it is the divine Will, why is not each victory certain? . . .*

No, this is not what it means. It means that finally the Victory is certain. Whatever may be the course of events and the ups and downs and the difficulties and the different issues of the different conflicts, at the end of the curve one is sure of the Victory, for the Divine is sure to be victorious. It may take a longer or shorter time. I have said — in English I used “finally”: that finally no human will can prevail against the divine Will. Finally means in spite of everything . . . what we may call divine patience. In spite of all divine patience, there is a given moment when human will exhausts its strength and the divine Will prevails.

5. The child misunderstands the French sentence and takes it to mean this instead of “The Victory is ultimately certain.”



We always measure time by our small human duration; but naturally the divine forces do not have the same measure as ours, and what may seem to us long or uncertain is for them the most direct way, in spite of everything, to reach there. In the given set of circumstances it is the most direct way to reach the goal: this goal is the expression of the divine Will, whatever it may be. So what seems to us, for instance, a long, tortuous, uncertain road seems so because we do not see the whole picture, because we see only a very tiny part which is in our proportion. Our vision is very very short, very short behind, very short in front. I mean the ordinary human vision. For example, there isn't one man in a million who can say what is going to happen to him ten years hence, though he may make many plans and projects and try to organise his life; but he can't say with certitude what will happen, because his vision is very short. The divine vision is not like that.

It [human vision] is very short, very limited in space, very linear; this means that things follow one after another; while the vision of the Divine is a global vision which sees the problem in all its totality, not only on the surface but in the depths also, and contains all the elements of the problem and resolves it without neglecting any points. But man follows a straight line and all that escapes his straight line and which he does not care for would not be done if it were he who decided things; whereas the march of the Divine is a global march which takes in the whole universe in its entirety and goes forward on the most direct road in relation to this universe and this set of circumstances. And the most direct road may be circular, it is not necessarily a straight line.

*Mother, you said that next year will be a difficult year. Is it that . . .*

Ah, yes! Next year . . . in a few hours! (*Laughter*) So?

*Will it be a difficult year for the Ashram or also for India and the whole world?*

Generally. The world, India, the Ashram and individuals. Everyone according to his mode, naturally not in the same way for all. Some things will seem easier than others. But generally speaking it is — if you like I can tell you — it is the last hope of the adverse forces to triumph against the present Realisation. If one holds on fast during these months, after that they will not be able to do anything very much, it will be a crumbling resistance. That's it: it is essentially the conflict of the adverse forces, the anti-divine forces which are trying to push back the divine Realisation as much as they can . . . they hope, for thousands of years, you see. And it is this conflict which has come to its crisis. It is their last chance; and as those who are behind their external action are altogether conscious beings, they know very well that it is their last chance, and they will put all they can into it, and what they can is much. These are not ordinary little human consciousnesses. They are not human

consciousnesses at all. They are consciousnesses which, compared with human possibilities, seem to be divine in their power, their strength, even their knowledge. Therefore it is a terrific conflict and one wholly concentrated on the earth, because they know that it is upon earth that the first victory has to be won — the decisive victory, a victory which will determine the course of the earth's future.

Those who are noble-hearted and hold up their heads when things become dangerous, can be happy. It is an opportunity to rise above oneself. There we are.

*How can one change into the divine Will?*

How can one change *one's* will into the divine Will? I don't understand your question.

(Another child, repeating) *How can one change into the divine Will?*

Well, it's because it is not well expressed that I don't understand. Change, that is transform one's will into the divine Will? Is that what you want to say?

*Yes.*

Well, first you must want it. Afterwards you must have a great aspiration. And then you must continue to want it, and continue to aspire and not give way when difficulties come, and continue until you succeed. That's all. And then, a certain number of things are necessary, as for example not to be selfish, not to have a small narrow-mindedness, not to live with preferences, not to have desires, not to have mental opinions — many things. It is a fairly long process because you must change your ordinary nature. This is the first condition.

To break all the limits of one's mind, break all the desires of one's vital, break all the preferences of one's physical nature. After that one may hope to be in contact with the divine Will; and then, later, one must not only be in contact with it, but live integrally this Will, that is, be unified in all one's being: not have a single bit which goes on this side and another bit which goes on that. You must be entirely in one single will.

*Sweet Mother, when we are faced with a difficulty, does this mean that the Divine is trying to make us conscious of the defects of our nature?*

If you face it, yes. That is, as soon as you are in front of a difficulty, if instead of giving way like a coward you begin trying to conquer it, then you may be sure that the Divine is behind you. But if you are cowardly, the Divine will not be there. That is, your cowardice cuts you off from the Divine. But if you resist and want to conquer, you may be sure that the Divine will be there to help you. There's not the shadow of a doubt about it.

*But I want to know — if the difficulty comes — whether the Divine is trying to make us conscious that we have defects?*

Whether he deliberately puts difficulties in your path? No. That's not his way.

*No, I don't mean that. If a difficulty comes, does this mean that the Divine is trying to make us conscious of the defects of our nature, to show us that we have defects?*

No, but think of what you are saying. If by having a difficulty you become conscious, you see, it does not mean that the Divine created the difficulty to make you conscious; and your question seems to say that.

*Yes.*

But it isn't true. One can say from an altogether impersonal point of view that the adverse forces — which of course are responsible for all difficulties — that the adverse forces are tolerated in the world in so far as they serve to make the world completely conscious. This indeed is true. But it seems to me a very human way of putting it because it could be said that as long as the world is not perfectly conscious, this allows the existence of these adverse forces. That is, it conditions them. The world's unconsciousness conditions the existence of these forces. So, one can as well say this as say that the forces are tolerated so long as the world is unconscious. I don't know if you are following. These are two opposite ways of saying the same thing and neither is perfectly true. But both contain something correct, yet something which is quite different. And in fact, if one wants to say the thing exactly, one can only say, "Things are like that because they are like that."

This is the only way of not making a mistake. If you say, "The world is like that because it is like that", then here you are sure you are saying something approximately correct — approximately. But if you try to explain, you will see an atom in a world and will take this atom for an explanation. You would have to give all the explanations and even many others in order to approach the reality.

That's what I just said, you know: that the human mind is linear in its action. It sees ideas one after another. Naturally when one speaks it is even ten times worse. One is obliged to say one word after another and this becomes frightful. But most people, almost all human beings think linearly. They think one thing after another. They can't think of many things at once. Only very few individuals are capable of thinking of, say, about twenty things at the same time. You can try, you will see. You think things one after another, one after another. . . . The succession may be very fast, but it is a succession. It is a very different kind of vision and a very different functioning, not of the mind but of intellectual powers, which can see things in their totality and all at the same time. But even when you see them like

that, if you want to try to describe them, either by writing or speaking, you can't put down everything at the same time nor say everything at the same time; you are obliged to use one word after another, and so it necessarily becomes . . . it destroys the truth of the thing, it becomes linear, which means that the truest things cannot be said. Everything one says is always a diminution of the truth.

*Sweet Mother, if this year is difficult for us, what should we do?*

What should you do? Be very good (*laughter*), very good, very quiet, work well, be very obedient, do what you are told, and be regular at school. (*Laughter*) All this — it is very important.

*If we succeed in these fourteen months, Mother, then after that will it be easy or will it be as at present? Will it be easier to conquer the difficulties?*

That, my child, depends on you. If during these fourteen months you make much progress, you become very good and very reasonable, very conscious and very regular, after this it will be much easier. But if you spend your time in letting time pass without making any progress, you will find yourself in the same position where you now are, not better.

It is precisely a chance given to everyone to make progress. If he doesn't use it, so much the worse for him, he will remain where he is. And instead of being a conscious element in the world, he will be a cork upon the waters, tossed by circumstances. And with anything that happens, he will be carried away without having the least control over what is happening. Because the first thing necessary to have a control over events is to be absolutely conscious and master of oneself; and I think you are pretty far from this realisation — which means that you must make a great effort throughout this period and manage to become a little more conscious and a little more self-controlled. You must not think that suddenly it will be a beatific paradise where all your defects will disappear as by magic. It is not like that.

Your defects will disappear if you do what is necessary for them to disappear, not otherwise.

Else you may continue in the easier years with the same defects, and you will be the same little *X* who will not have changed.

Here we are, my children. I think that's enough.

Nobody has anything to say?

*Adjugé!*<sup>6</sup>

*Au revoir.*

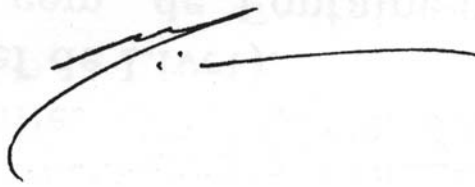
THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1954*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 6, pp. 453-64)

6. Sold! — as at an auction.

1955

No human will can finally  
prevail against the Divine's Will.  
Let us put ourselves deliberately and  
exclusively on the side of the Divine,  
and the Victory is ultimately certain



## THE NEW YEAR BEFORE US

(Reprinted from *Mother India*, January 1955, pp. 1-2)

Every year marks a deeper probing, by the descending Truth-Light, of the massive darkness at the base of earth's evolutionary being. More and more the supramental Force digs into Matter, grips its slumbering layers, and tears them open for the Light from above to meet the Light hidden below. An increasing victory is here, but every victory preludes a greater fight until the final overthrow of material resistance and the establishment of the Divine Truth in each cell and atom, transforming physical life.

We are now entering a new year close on the heels of a tremendous progressive piercing of the Inconscient by the Supermind on the fourth anniversary of those five days that are associated with the passing of Sri Aurobindo, the lying of his glorious body in state and the laying of it in a vault in the centre of the Ashram courtyard. It is as if on December 5 of 1954 the Mother plucked up to the transformative Light some of the lowest layers of the Inconscient. As a result of this invasion and uplifting, blind powers locked there have broken forth. These would tend to provide a broad ground, as it were, to forces already at work on the earth-plane to retard and repulse the Divine Presence incarnate amongst us.

We may, therefore, expect in the course of the commencing year an aggrandisement of hostility between the Truth that is descending and the Falsehood and Error and Ignorance standing in its way on a basis of primordial obscurity. Huge and multitudinous are the dangers — a possibility of attacks on all fronts, particularly on the physical — because time is running short for the enemies of the Divine and now is their last great chance. They will try their best to create a crisis for the evolving soul of man — perhaps even a catastrophe to all civilisation. Especially against the seekers of the Light we may expect their inner as well as outer strategy to be set. But, balancing the direr peril, there is also the vaster Grace ready to meet the seekers of the Light. And, although we must refrain from letting the dangers and the attacks be encouraged by an egoistic desire on our part to play the hero or by a morbid craving for their stimulus, we must never forget that every danger is only the mask from behind which Sri Aurobindo is calling us to a deeper self-fulfilment and every attack is an invitation to advance still farther the flag of the Divine Mother.

The power of the Truth is with us, preparing for us its kingdom on earth — and once the year of trials reaches its end what is prepared behind the veil will burst out in its true splendour: 1956 will be the golden harvest of the difficult sowing now in rocky soil. We have to hold on and never give way. Confusions and deformities unsuspected may raise their hideous hoods and hiss and dart at the Light. All that is

God-conscious in us may suffer a siege and there may occur breaches in our most solid defences. Doubts and denials may cast shadows over our inmost realisations — and the outer being may be put to severe tests. The body may moan under the burden of its problems. But nothing should shake the central certitude of ultimate victory. The Supreme Divine is ever by our side and the word of Her sweetness and strength will sound always in our hearts and if we listen we shall hear Her say to us under all hardships and conflicts: “Peace.”

Yes, “Peace” is the master-word, the sovereign panacea. The dull and massed obscurity on which the hostile forces will base themselves can be converted into spiritual value only by the advent of a profound peace. Profound peace is also the magic spell by which the rage of the hostile forces can be checked, scattered and annulled. Again, it is by profound peace that the various divergent and discordant parts of our complex nature can be held together and set in their true places according to the Divine Design. And profound peace is what will be ever ready to come to our aid because when the Mother plucked up some of the lowest layers of the Inconscient and held them to the descending Light she framed this mighty gesture in a crystalline atmosphere of peace boundless, invincible, all-sustaining. That peace was as if we could see and touch and taste it, as if it were some wonderful stuff with which our very bodies might be remade, some new immaculate matter intended to be sculptured into Spirit. If this peace could be ours, then indeed the strokes against us of the Spirit’s enemies would be but strangely guided chisel-smites shaping our physical substance anew. The blows meant to shatter us would be then directed by a hidden Artist of the Worlds to serve as a remoulding of us into perfection. Each attack then would miraculously change into a touch of transfiguring Grace, each difficulty grow a passage creatively hewn out towards a Beauty flawless and imperishable.

Let us call into ourselves the Supermind’s peace that the Mother has spread about us. Although the difficulties and the dangers be legion, let us not be obsessed by them or brood upon their blackness. Fear and awed remembrance of them can only feed the night into which they desire to engulf the earth. Knowing that they are there and steeling ourselves to their challenge, let us rather dwell constantly in the immense and luminous tranquillity that is the Mother’s protective sheath for our souls, her intimate unfailing embrace of her children. Aware at each moment of this gift of hers by which all difficulties turn to opportunities and all dangers become thrilling short-cuts to the great goal, let us move smiling into the future and discern in it the face of Sri Aurobindo awaiting us.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)



# **SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI**

*(Continued from the issue of December 2015)*

## **Chapter: XLVIII**

### **Trials, Tribulations and Laughter**

The nature of the case was a little strange. The magistrate, the counsel, the witnesses, the evidence, the exhibits, the accused, all appeared strange. Watching, day after day, the endless stream of witnesses and exhibits, the counsel's dramatic performance, the boyish frivolity and lightheartedness of the youthful magistrate, looking at the amazing spectacle I often thought that instead of sitting in a British court of justice we were on a stage in a house for drama or in some world of imaginative fiction.

Sri Aurobindo (Original in Bengali)<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's fate, so far as the Alipore trial was concerned, seems to have been decided on some supernal plane on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1908 itself, his thirty-sixth birthday, when under some weird inspiration Magistrate Birley refused permission to the Defence lawyers to cross-examine Naren Gossain, the approver. An over-zealous and anxious Birley took that legally questionable step so that nothing the unfortunate witness had already said would be disturbed or disproved in the course of the cross-examination demanded, though ostensibly he did so to save time. But, the Sessions Court decided that Gossain's statements were unacceptable because they had not passed the scrutiny by the Defence.

It was Gossain who had specifically pointed at Sri Aurobindo's involvement in the conspiracy, as tutored by the prosecuting brains, whereas other evidences amassed by them were vulnerable to opposite interpretations.

With Gossain gone, cases against several individuals had to be withdrawn.

A sudden and heavy curtain came down on the jolly togetherness of the prisoners in the aftermath of Gossain's murder. They were interned in separate cells — a despair for them. However, for Sri Aurobindo the rigour imposed was a bonanza. He plunged into his Yoga undisturbed.

But of that later. Let us for a while visualise a few sample scenes enacted in the court. A reading of the volumes of the court records of the case, more than a century later, gives one the impression that even well-tutored witnesses, who, it was expected,



would say things that would benefit the Prosecution in its effort to prove Sri Aurobindo guilty of waging war against the Crown, must have disappointed the authorities to a considerable extent. No witness seems to have spoken very convincingly when it came to connecting the prime accused with incitement to violence.

However, for biographers of Sri Aurobindo, they presented several valuable facts. For example, Shri Sukumar Sen, an affluent merchant enjoying a respectable status in society who was a share-holder in the Company floated for the *Bande Mataram*, stated:

Aurobindo and Bipin were appointed Joint Editors . . . The Directors or most of them did not want the sole control of Bipin Chandra Pal. Most of them wanted Aurobindo in preference to Bipin . . . Bipin refused to have anything to do with the paper unless he had sole control. I did not understand that at that time, but it transpired afterwards, in the course of a few days after the meeting. It was understood Bipin would not come unless he had sole control after the resolution appointing Joint Editors. Aurobindo was offered the sole Editorship, but he would not take it . . . I was chiefly concerned in getting Aurobindo's name printed as Editor. I gave orders in anticipation of getting his approval. He would not approve of it. He told me so and wrote a letter to Subodh, protesting against it. I saw the letter. In consequence of that his name was not published any more. I had his name published to further the interest of the paper . . . It is my opinion that Aurobindo was a very lovable man. So far as I observed, everyone felt it an honour to make him welcome and entertain him at their house. The Malliks regarded it as an honour for him to stay with them. Aurobindo often wanted to go and live by himself, but the Malliks would not let him go. The Malliks' house is a famous one. It is rich in art-treasures and other things. There is a portrait of George Washington there.<sup>2</sup>

The witness Sukumar Sen who was a close friend of the Mallik family, informs us that during one of his visits to Kolkata in 1905 Sir Sayajirao, the Maharaja of Baroda, had been given a reception by the Malliks. The Maharaja and the Malliks were on cordial terms. That explains how Subodh Mallik accompanied Sri Aurobindo, as we have seen earlier, when the Maharaja in his subsequent visit to the city invited Sri Aurobindo to meet him. Shri Sen, a frequent visitor to the mansion of the Malliks at 12 Wellington Square, also knew that the Gaekwar was anxious to have Sri Aurobindo back in his service, but Sri Aurobindo decided to serve the cause of "advancing National Education".

Shri Sen further presented his impression of Sri Aurobindo thus:

I knew he used to practise Yoga. He was rather reserved and of retiring disposition. He was a very gentle and mild-natured man. He is a vegetarian; he

won't touch animal meat of any kind. I knew Aurobindo and Subodh preferred to have men like Sir Gurudas Banerji and Dr. Rash Behari Ghose on the National Council of Education.<sup>3</sup>

Shri Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay, the celebrated educationist, one of the founding members of the National College, who succeeded Sri Aurobindo as its Principal, stated:

To my knowledge he never at all excited anybody to violence: he was hardly in the habit of speaking much.<sup>4</sup>

And the observation was echoed by a noted witness, A. C. Bannerji, Bar-at-Law:

I was on friendly terms with Aurobindo and met him on many occasions in private. We freely discussed public questions. To my knowledge, he never suggested recourse to violence; so far as I knew the man he was constitutionally incapable of doing so. He never suggested anything like it. I always thought him more a philosopher than a politician.<sup>5</sup>

There were numerous references made to Sri Aurobindo by witnesses, but hardly one that did not breathe a spirit of approbation when not of reverence. Jogendranath Sen, a lawyer of Midnapore (Medinipur) whose son Purna Chandra Sen was arrested along with the Murari Pukur group, was himself a Moderate leader and was expected to say something that would support the proposition that Sri Aurobindo was an extremist. But he asserted that the name "Extremist was given by our friend, *The Pioneer*. Aurobindo would call himself a Nationalist."<sup>6</sup>

We also come across facts minor in nature, but noteworthy. Sri Aurobindo's cousin, Sukumar Mitra, son of Krishna Kumar Mitra, stated:

Aurobindo was of a very religious disposition. Every morning he did *Pranayama*, that is, some kind of Yoga. When in Scott's Lane, he lived on fruits and rice only. In the morning he spent two to three hours on *Pranayama*. He was translating the Vedanta, but I do not know whether he was a Vedantist or not . . . His mother lives at Rohini. Aurobindo used to support her. He used to spend nearly all his money for charitable purposes.<sup>7</sup>

According to one Bipin Bihari Bose, a clerk at the office of the Inspector of Schools who looked after the Murari Pukur property, Sri Aurobindo had thought of selling it away and the gentleman looked for a buyer. That was in 1906. It was expected to fetch Rs. 7000.00. But the highest offer that came from a Coochbihar party was Rs. 5000.00. Nobody would pay more because it was under the occupation

of a troop of monkeys and nothing would grow on the land!<sup>8</sup>

Then Barindra Kumar and his followers trooped in. We never heard of the monkeys again.

Let us have a look at a few samples of court proceedings, including their headlines as they were reported in newspapers. (Mr. Das is Chitta Ranjan Das):

### **Royal Reception to Aurobindo**

(71<sup>st</sup> Day of the Trial)

After the tiffin interval, the examination of the witness, Balwant Rao, Constable, Nagpore, was resumed by Mr. Norton. Witness read out his Hindi report of an English speech delivered by Aurobindo Ghose at Nagpore.

*Mr. Norton:* Were songs sung at Nagpore singing the praise of Aurobindo Ghose?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* How many men were present at his speech?

*Witness:* 850 to 900 men were present.

*Mr. Norton:* Was Aurobindo driven from Silabari to the temple of Namaleli in a carriage of four horses followed by forty torches and a musical party?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* Were songs sung?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* You heard the sound of Bande Mataram?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* Were the acclamations shouting joy in the names of Aurobindo, Shyam Sunder Chakravarty, Srikrishna Khaparde, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* Were betels distributed?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* Is not this sort of pomp and pageantry displayed on occasion of a Raja's visit?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* Was not the carriage stopped on the way and the party garlanded?

*Witness:* Yes.

Mr. Das here raised his old question of all the above referred speeches being irrelevant.

*Mr. Das:* You have been a head-constable for last fifteen years?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Das:* You were an ordinary constable when you began your service?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Das:* What was your pay then?

*Witness:* Rs. 8/- a month.

*Mr. Das:* Up to what standard did you read?

*Witness:* I read up to the Entrance-failure. (*Laughter*)

*Judge:* Up to the standard of Entrance-failure! (*Renewed laughter*)

*Mr. Norton:* Is Entrance-failure a special Educational Standard in vogue in the Bombay Presidency?

*Mr. Das:* Who are Moderates?

*Witness:* Moderates are those who are always on the side of the Government.

*Mr. Das:* Extremists?

*Witness:* Extremists are those who attend meetings.

*Mr. Das:* At Nagpore the Moderates do not attend meetings?

*Witness:* No.

*Judge:* Perhaps there are none! (*Laughter*)<sup>9</sup>

### **An Irrelevant Question**

(72<sup>nd</sup> Day of the Trial)

Dattatreya Lakshman was being examined.

*Mr. Norton:* Did Aurobindo say in your hearing “We must try attain Swaraj”?

*Witness:* I don’t remember.

*Mr. Norton:* Did you know a person named Sarkar?

Mr. C. R. Das objected. Mr. Norton said that he was convicted for assaulting a Police Constable. That showed the cortege which followed Mr. Aurobindo Ghose in his triumphant progress.

Mr. C. R. Das said that his learned friend thinks that he can bring forward anything!

Mr. Norton objected to his learned friend’s introducing a personal element in every objection.

Mr. Das maintained that conviction could not be proved by word of mouth.

Mr. Norton said that it was a ridiculous proposition. He was entitled to prove the character of persons who drew Aurobindo’s carriage.

His Honour observed that the question was irrelevant. How could Aurobindo be responsible for the conduct of other persons?<sup>10</sup>

**“I Know Him Better”**(73<sup>rd</sup> Day of the Trial)

Babu Satish Chandra Mukherjee, a Professor of National College, being examined.

*Mr. Norton:* You said Mr. Aurobindo Ghose never preached violence. Have you ever heard Mr. Ghose speak?

*Witness:* Yes. He used to deliver lectures at the college.

*Mr. Norton:* Did you ever read the *Bande Mataram*?

*Witness:* Yes.

*Mr. Norton:* Were any of the articles pointed out to you as being contribution from Aurobindo?

*Witness:* No.

*Mr. Norton:* To your knowledge, has the *Bande Mataram* preached violence?

*Judge:* How can he connect Aurobindo with that?

*Mr. Norton:* But I can. I know him better.<sup>11</sup>

(This statement of Mr. Norton was eliminated in the ‘corrected’ version of this cross-examination published in the next day’s issue of *The Bengalee*.)

**“A King”**(144<sup>th</sup> Day of the Trial)

“Speaking of Aurobindo’s influence all over the country, Mr. Norton observed that Aurobindo was treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone. As a matter of fact, he was regarded as the leader not merely of Bengal but of the whole country. . . .”<sup>12</sup>

In our forming an impression of the sparkling drama and melodrama amidst trials and tribulations in the court, the following inimitable piece (originally in Bengali) of Sri Aurobindo’s reminiscence should be of great help. Devdas Karan who so prominently figures here was the Editor of *Medini Bandhav*, a newspaper published at Medinipur. He mentioned Drona, the Guru of the Pandava and the Kaurava princes, of the Mahabharata — an allusion that baffled Norton:

Though a few of the witnesses went against Mr. Norton, the majority provided answers in support of his leading questions. Among these there were few familiar faces. One or two we of course knew; of these Devdas Karan helped to dispel our boredom and made us hold our sides with laughter, for which we shall remain eternally grateful to him. In course of giving evidence he said

that, at the time of the Midnapore Conference when Surendrababu had asked from his students devotion to the teacher, *gurubhakti*, Aurobindobabu had spoken out: “What did Drona do?” Hearing this Mr. Norton’s eagerness and curiosity knew no bounds. He must have thought “Drona” to be a devotee of the bomb or a political killer or someone associated with the Manicktola Garden or the Student’s Store. Mr. Norton may have thought that the phrase meant that Aurobindo Ghose was advising the giving of bombs to Surendrababu as a reward instead of *gurubhakti*, for such an interpretation would have helped the case considerably. Hence he asked eagerly: “What did Drona do?” At first the witness was unable to make out the nature of the [silly] question. And for five minutes a debate went on. In the end, throwing his hands high, Sri Karan told Norton: “Drona performed many a miracle.” This did not satisfy Mr. Norton. How could he be content without knowing the whereabouts of Drona’s bomb? So he asked again: “What do you mean by that? Tell me what exactly he did.” The witness gave many answers, but in none was Dronacharya’s life’s secret unravelled as Norton would have liked it. He now lost his temper and started to growl. The witness too began to shout. An advocate smilingly expressed the doubt that perhaps the witness did not know what Drona had done. At this Sri Karan went wild with anger and wounded pride, *abhimanyu*. “What,” he shouted, “I, I do not know what Drona had done? Bah, have I read the Mahabharata from cover to cover in vain?” For half an hour a battle royal was waged between Norton and Karan over Drona’s dead body. Every five minutes, shaking the Alipore Judge’s Court, Norton hurled his question; “Out with it, Mr. Editor. What did Drona do?” In answer the editor began a long cock-and-bull story, but there was no reliable news about what Drona had done. The entire court reverberated with peals of laughter. At last, during the tiffin, Sri Karan came back after a little reflection with a cool head, and he suggested this solution of the problem, that poor Drona had done nothing and that the half-hour long tug of war over his departed soul had been in vain. It was Arjuna who had killed his guru Drona. Thanks to this false accusation, Dronacharya, relieved, must have offered his thanks at Kailasha to Sadashiva, that because of Sri Karan’s evidence he did not have to stand in the dock in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case. A word from the editor would have easily established his relationship with Aurobindo Ghose. But the all-merciful Sadashiva had saved him from such a calamity.<sup>13</sup>

*(To be continued)*

MANOJ DAS

## References and Notes

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Tales from Prison Life* (The passage quoted is translated from the Bengali by the present author.)
2. Deposition of P.W. No. 92; The Alipore Conspiracy Case documents.
3. *Ibid.*
4. P.W. No. 122; *Ibid.*
5. P.W. No. 105; *Ibid.*
6. P.W. No. 81; *Ibid.*
7. P.W. No. 87; *Ibid.*
8. P.W. No. 88; *Ibid.*
9. *The Bengalee*; Calcutta; 29.1.1909.
10. *Ibid.* 30.1.1909.
11. *Ibid.* 5.2.1909.
12. *Ibid.* 17.3.1909.
13. Sri Aurobindo: *Tales of Prison Life* (Translated by Sisir Kumar Ghosh. The present author has changed only two words to be more faithful to the original.)

*The sattwic nation will avoid the dead conservatism of tamasic communities, it will avoid the restless progress of rajasic nations; it will endeavour to arrive at a living and healthy stability, high, calm and peaceful, in which man may pursue undisturbed his nobler destiny.*

*The true sattwic community in which life shall be naturally regulated by calm wisdom, enlightenment and universal sympathy, exists only as an Utopia or in the Aryan tradition of the Sattwayuga, the Golden Age.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol. 17, p. 297)

## SONGS FROM THE SOUL

*(The Mother made this selection from Anilbaran's prayers offered to her. She termed the collection a "Spiritual dictionary".)*

### FAITH

Faith, it is said, can move mountains. The great and difficult task of raising human nature into the divine can be accomplished only by genuine and living faith.

A flame which flickers at every blast of wind cannot lead us very far. If we do not possess a living faith in our divine possibilities, we shall never rise above our human limitations. A faith which does not enter into every part of our being and does not influence all our life, all our thoughts and activities, a passive, weak and wavering faith is powerless to achieve anything great or glorious.

We must then keep the torch of true and pure faith brightly burning in us at all times. Whenever doubts and misgivings assail us, we must at once recognise them to be movements of falsehood, and sternly reject them. Whenever our flame grows weaker, we must open ourselves to the Divine Mother, who is the eternal source of all fire and light. Doubts and misgivings, desires and attachments to the lower life, egoistic ambitions and selfish narrowness and jealousy are great enemies of progress; we must rise above them and live continually in the pure consciousness of faith, light and devotion. A man becomes what his faith is. Living constantly in sincere faith and pure aspiration, we shall steadily and inevitably grow into the greatness of the divine life.

### TRANSFORMATION

The transformation of our nature cannot be achieved all at once by a miracle; that would contradict the very law of our evolution as sanctioned and determined by the Divine. We must go through a long and patient course of *sadhana* and bring out in a progressive self-fulfilment all our divine possibilities.

Old movements persist in us, which were once necessary for our development at a lower stage of life, but now must be wholly rejected, as they constitute a great obstacle to our further progress. They go on mechanically through sheer force of habit, and are supported by our ignorant mind. This *tamasic* inertia of our nature must be removed by constant seeking after true knowledge. Yoga is a conscious and deliberate process, and we must leave nothing to chance.



And in all our attempts to rise we have the fullest support of the Divine Mother; indeed it is through our evolution that she is fulfilling the will of her Divine Lord. So we need not at all be discouraged by obstacles and difficulties, however great and stupendous they may be. Nothing can stand against the Divine Grace, once it finds true conditions to work in us.

Depression and doubts are our greatest enemies, and they rise the more we allow ourselves to descend to the level of the ordinary consciousness. By a living, ceaseless aspiration we should always look up to the infinite glory of the divine life to which we are destined, and through the Grace of the Mother nothing will be able to resist our onward march.

## WILL

We do not realise how powerful our will is unless and until we consciously make the best use of it. We allow our will to lie dormant in us, and so live a poor, weak, miserable life.

By the exercise of resolute will we can conquer the strongest temptations, we can find our way out of most difficult situations, patiently bear the worst sufferings, and pass through most trying ordeals. The richest treasures of human life are opened to the man who has a strong, developed will, and who knows how to use it.

And it is the force of will in us which can be used as a lever to exceed and rise above humanity. Before sincere, clear, resolute will, all difficulties and obstacles on the path of the *sadhaka* disappear, as darkness before the burning torch. When the Buddha willed that, until he obtained the Truth, he would not budge an inch from his seat of *sadhana*, even if his body dried up and his flesh and bone and skin fell to pieces, at that very moment victory was assured to him. The will that was in the Buddha is waiting to be roused and awakened in every man to lead him triumphantly to his destiny.

This will in us, after all, is a derivative power, a reflection of Thy will in us, O Divine Mother, and this is the secret of its strength; it is here to take us back to Thee. Purified and transformed, when this will of ours will be identified and united with Thy will, it will become irresistible and all-conquering, and will be an effective instrument of Thy manifestation on the earth.

\* \* \*

We allow our will to run in all directions, impelled by desires, obscured by ignorance, torn by passions; hence it becomes weak and ineffective, and our greatest efforts often produce so poor results. We go on groping and stumbling in the world, and are baffled at every step.

To make our will really strong and effective, we have to free it completely from ignorance, egoism and attachments. Nothing can happen in this world unless it is willed by the Divine; and what is willed and decided by the Divine nothing on earth or anywhere can resist. We have to know this divine Will and put our own in harmony with it; then the highest force in the universe will be at our back, and all things, all obstacles will inevitably yield and bend before us.

Instead of blindly dealing with the forces at work, we have to know the central truth of all forces and movements, and exercise our will accordingly; we can get this knowledge and put our will in harmony with the divine Will by freeing our mind from all mechanical thoughts, all pre-conceived ideas and prejudices, and by sincerely opening it to the Truth above.

This union with the Divine is the true skill in work, and it becomes more and more complete and perfect as we grow in surrender and devotion to Thee, Mother Divine.

\* \* \*

We must not give any more indulgence to our lower nature; every time we yield to a lower impulse, we make it more difficult for us to conquer it; every lower suggestion that we reject leads us a step forward. We have a great and difficult task to achieve, we must not increase our difficulties by carelessness or slackness of our will.

In our *sadhana*, every moment we either gain something or lose something. Every lower movement, however small, insignificant or plausible, that we indulge in, takes us backward and gives a hold, a footing in us to the ever-watchful hostile forces. Even if we do not go lower and remain where we are, that is a loss of time and opportunity, because simply by keeping up our aspiration and silent will for transformation we can make steady progress every moment of our life.

Every victory that we achieve over our lower nature, helps us to know and realise the truth of our being, for in our true nature we are the masters and not the slaves of nature. Every temptation, however small, that we successfully resist strengthens our will, clears our intelligence, gives us true and genuine joy. Circumstances are constantly coming up where we can do or achieve something in the matter of our own transformation. We must always keep ourselves in close and intimate touch with the Divine Mother, so that every moment and with the help of every circumstance that we meet we can take a step forward towards divine life.

**SURRENDER**

“Make your surrender true and complete, then only will all else be done for you.”  
— *Sri Aurobindo*

My soul has taken the firm and irrevocable resolution to surrender myself to Thee, Mother Divine, but still I am far away from the perfection of my surrender.

I get touches and glimpses from Thee which fill me with light and joy; I live under Thy influence which helps me to purify and improve myself; Thou hast created all the conditions where I can calmly watch myself, control myself, turn myself always towards Thee; but my will is weak, my old habits are too strong, and I still allow the old self to have full play in me.

My thoughts and actions still rise from the lower nature; they go on as I take interest in them; I suffer the consequences as I still identify myself with them. Remove this weakness from my will, Mother, let me sternly turn away from the lower play and dedicate my life solely to the expression of Truth. Let me give up all my thought and action to Thee and be calm and pure and free from all care, all responsibility. Thou art the personal embodiment of Truth; in Thy Grace Thou hast created conditions for me where I can easily live a life constantly turned towards Thee; give me also the strength of will, Mother, by which I can make my life a constant, sincere devotion to Thee and to Thee alone.

\* \* \*

My surrender to Thee, Mother, is not a mere fancy or a passing whim. It has come from my inmost soul and shall be made complete and integral.

I know all the parts in me have not yet wholly submitted to Thee; I know they will not all surrender without a struggle; but they will ultimately have to submit and they are now evidently passing through the last phases of the struggle.

I shall always keep myself open to Thee, Mother, so that Thy light may enter into me and show up the recalcitrant parts; I shall again and again sacrifice them to Thee; I shall earnestly support all Thy work in me until my whole realm is made free and brought absolutely under Thy rule.

The arch rebel in me is my ego, which seems to have an everlasting life. With its army of desires, it hides under the cover of my ignorance and inevitably comes back to life as many times as it is apparently killed by Thy force in me. As long as a vestige, even a little seed of it will be left, so long it will revive again and again. Annihilate it completely, Mother, leaving no trace, no seed of it in me; I shall offer it to Thee again and again. Once this conquest is achieved, my soul's aspiration will be fulfilled, I shall find my highest life by completely merging myself in Thee.

\* \* \*

The requirement of surrender to Thee, Mother, is an indispensable condition of my own real peace and happiness.

Desires of the lower nature are pulling me in all directions, and that is the root of all trouble. My ordinary life is really a life of surrender to these blind hankerings of Nature. Let these utterly cease in me, let me surrender myself wholly to Thee, Mother Divine !

I shall not bother about work, I shall give up all idea of duty and responsibility, but shall allow Thy will to work in me unhampered. I shall not hanker after knowledge, but shall calmly receive whatever light comes from Thee. I shall not run blindly after the limited joys of the world, but shall gratefully accept whatever joy and pleasure comes directly from Thee. Entrusting my whole life into Thy hands, let me be free from all care and anxiety, from all effort and pain.

If one can cease to rely on the poor efforts of the ego and depend wholly on Thee, he can get infinitely more than the ego can ever bring. Yet the physical mind will not believe in the divine possibilities and will obstinately stand in the way of perfect surrender!

Let my silent devotion personally to Thee, Mother, increase more and more so that this obstinacy of the physical mind may melt away and I may surrender myself completely to Thee.

\* \* \*

It is not mere external surrender that is required; it is not sufficient that I cut off all my relations with the external world and depend wholly on Thee for all my worldly needs. That is a preparation, and external symbol of the inner surrender that is required so that the integral transformation may take place.

In my egoistic ignorance and blind habit, I think that unless I form plans with my mind I cannot do any work; that unless I reason and argue with my mind I cannot know anything; so a ceaseless activity goes on in the mind. So the body continues its old artificial movements thinking them to be indispensable for the realisation of *ananda*.

Now that I see Thee, Mother, assuming the direction and control of my movements from above and the organisation of *ananda* in me, I shall keep my mind and body passive and silent so that Thou mayest freely use them as Thy instruments. Henceforth, there shall be no initiative from me, no effort to know or to do or to enjoy anything. I entrust to Thee, Mother, all my activities and the whole responsibility for them. I shall only look up to Thee in silent love and devotion so that Thou mayest manifest Thyself in me in Thy own way.

\* \* \*

Those who can wholly depend on Thee, Mother, giving up all personal effort and initiative, Thou takest their entire charge and doest whatever is needful for them in Thy own perfect divine manner. Yet the ignorant human soul hesitates to surrender itself and tenaciously clings to the poor egoistic effort to which it is habituated.

Merely surrendering the external life will not do; the inner determination of every thought and feeling and action must be absolutely given up to Thee. Only then the surrender will be complete and Thou wilt take up the whole life into Thy own being, Thy own consciousness. This surrender is not easy and requires a determined *sadhana* with great patience and perseverance.

The pure consciousness of the Purusha is within us, it is sustaining all our life, it underlies all our thoughts and feeling and actions, yet we do not see it, do not recognise it, just as a blind man does not feel the existence of the light which covers and pervades him. The thoughts and habits of our lower consciousness constitute our blindness. When we are able to withdraw from the lower consciousness and turn towards the calm, immutable, silent, pure consciousness of the Purusha in us, only then it becomes possible to complete our surrender to Thee, Mother, who art the supreme Divine consciousness containing and pervading everything that is in the universe.

ANILBARAN

(*Songs from the Soul*, Amiya Library, Calcutta, 1946, pp. 1-14)

*And indeed at one stage in the Yoga it becomes necessary to refuse to accept as definite and final any kind of intellectual idea or opinion whatever in its intellectual form and to hold it in a questioning suspension until it is given its right place and luminous shape of truth in a spiritual experience enlightened by supramental knowledge.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 772)

# REALITY AND SELF ACCORDING TO VEDANTA AS EXPLAINED BY SRI AUROBINDO

## Introduction

Philosophical issues such as reality versus appearance, permanence versus change, and self versus not-self, have been examined by eastern and western philosophers as far back as the sages of Upanishads (700 BCE) in the East and Plato (400 BCE) in the West. In this article I will examine the issue involving reality and appearance, and I will present the views of Vedanta philosophy on this subject. The focus of the article will be on Ultimate Reality and its expression as the Self of the universe. In the discussion of Self I will examine the reality of universal Self as well as individual selves. Vedanta is very prominent among the Hindu schools of philosophy. There have been different interpretations of Vedanta by a few great scholars (*Acharyas*) of old time, and there are different schools of Vedanta based on their interpretations. Scholars of modern time also have their own view, and one of them is Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's view bases itself on the Upanishads, but he added a new evolutionary perspective to Vedanta philosophy.

I will first present a brief discussion about the philosophy of three major schools within Vedanta with regard to Reality and Self. Then I will present in detail Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Vedanta on this subject. I also will discuss Sri Aurobindo's own view on individual self.

## Reality and Self According to Traditional Vedanta Philosophy

Vedanta philosophies are based on three canonical works (*Prasthan-Traya*), which are Upanishads, Brahma Sutra, and Bhagavad Gita (or Gita). The Upanishads are the original source of Vedanta, which literally means "end of Vedas". The teachings of Upanishads were presented in a systematic manner in Brahma Sutras by sage Badarayana. The Brahma Sutras are also referred to as Vedanta Sutras. The sutras or verses of Brahma Sutra are very short and difficult to interpret. Several scholars of antiquity interpreted these sutras, and prominent among them are Shankaracharya (788-820 CE), Ramanujacharya (1055-1137 CE), and Madhvacharya (1299-1378 CE). I will refer to these three scholars as Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva respectively. There are several other scholars of yore who also have given their own interpretation of Vedanta. I will discuss only the views of Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva, which led to the development of the three major schools of Vedanta

philosophy — Advaita Vedanta (Non-dualism) of Shankara, Visishtadvaita Vedanta (Non-dualism of Qualified Brahman) of Ramanuja, and Dvaita Vedanta (Dualism) of Madhva. The views of these schools differ although they are based on the same sources. Advaita and Visishtadvaita represent ‘monism’ (or ‘non-dualism’) since one of its fundamental tenets is that there is a single principle that forms the reality of everything, or in other words this single principle is the essence of everything of the phenomenal world and also everything that is beyond the world. This single principle is Brahman. The metaphysical concept of Dvaita Vedanta is very different from the other two major schools since it is pluralistic, and it believes that every entity of the phenomenal world has its own unique substance or essence.

I will review briefly the metaphysical schemes of the three major schools of Vedanta including each school’s view on reality and individual self. All schools of Vedanta recognise that the ‘Ultimate Reality’, the source of the phenomenal world, is Brahman, which is self-existent, independent, immutable, and beyond causality. However, there is disagreement among these schools over the question whether Brahman is *saguna* (with qualities or attributes), or *nirguna* (without qualities or attributes), or both. This issue is closely related to that of personal and impersonal aspects of Brahman. In brief, it can be said that Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta recognises both *nirguna* (or impersonal) and *saguna* (or personal) aspects, but it emphasises the *nirguna* (or impersonal) aspect. Visishtadvaita and Dvaita schools recognise only the *saguna* (or personal) aspect. The three schools also disagree as to the reality of the phenomenal world and individual self and their relation to Brahman.

In Shankara’s metaphysical scheme Ultimate Reality is *Nirguna* Brahman. It transcends the phenomenal world in the sense that it is beyond space and time whereas the phenomenal world is in space and time. *Nirguna* Brahman is impersonal and devoid of qualities (*Nirguna*). It is undifferentiated pure consciousness. Shankara recognised *Saguna* Brahman as Ishwara or God. Ishwara is the personal aspect of the impersonal Brahman, and He is the creator and sustainer, *i.e.*, Lord, of the phenomenal world. However, the status of Ishwara and the phenomenal world in Shankara’s Vedanta is somewhat problematic. According to Shankara *Nirguna* Brahman is the sole Reality. In his view Ishwara and the phenomenal world are the appearance (*Vivarta*) of Brahman and this appearance is caused by Maya, which is the inscrutable power of Brahman. I would like to point out that Shankara acknowledged the reality of Ishwara and the phenomenal world, but he did not accept this reality as ontologically real (*Paramarthika Satta*). According to him the reality of Ishwara and the phenomenal world is practical reality (*Vyavaharika Satta*), and when knowledge is gained and ignorance is removed their reality is sublated.

With regard to an individual self Shankara’s view is similar to his view of Ishwara and the phenomenal world. He granted only pragmatic reality to individual selves (*Jiva*) and he did not believe that individual selves are truly real and eternal.



According to Shankara it is due to Ignorance (*Avidya*) that an individual being identifies himself with his ego formed by the psycho-physical organism and thinks that he is completely separate from Brahman. When his ignorance is removed he realises that his sense of individuality, or the empirical self, is merely an appearance, and he also realises his identity or non-duality with Atman, which is Brahman. Then he is liberated and loses his individuality. This realisation can occur even when one is alive, and at this status he is called *Jivan-mukta*, which means ‘free while alive’. Final freedom is gained after leaving one’s body. Shankara’s philosophy does not reconcile the difference between the multiplicity of the phenomenal world and Brahman.

According to Ramanuja there cannot be any undifferentiated and impersonal Reality, and he rejected Shankara’s philosophy of *Nirguna* Brahman. For him the Ultimate Reality is *Saguna* Brahman — Brahman with qualities. *Saguna* Brahman is Ishwara or God and not a formless identity. Ramanuja believed that the phenomenal world is real and is the manifestation or transformation (*Parinama*) of *Saguna* Brahman. According to him Ishwara, matter, and souls form a unity, but matter and souls exist as the body of Ishwara. Thus Ramanuja’s nondualism recognises the identity of matter and souls with God, but according to him matter and souls cannot become God. This concept is known as identity with a difference. His philosophy is called Visishtadvaita, which often is translated as Qualified Nondualism, but that translation can be misleading. The word ‘qualified’ does not refer to nondualism, and it actually refers to Brahman. According to Ramanuja Brahman is nondual and yet it is qualified by the world, which includes matter and individual souls. A better expression for his philosophy would be nondualism of qualified Brahman. Ramanuja believed that matter and souls are real, eternal, and are inseparable from God. They are one with God with regard to their essence or substance, but as modes (*Prakara*) of the spiritual substance of God, they are different from God.

Ramanuja’s view on individual souls is compatible with that of Bhagavad Gita, which is expressed in Verse XV. 7, which says, “It is an eternal portion of Me that becomes the Jiva in a world of Jivas.” Sri Aurobindo recognised this compatibility and made the following comment: “It is evidently this idea of the eternal individual which leads the Gita to avoid any expression at all suggestive of a complete dissolution, *laya*, and to speak rather of the highest state of the soul as a dwelling in the Purushottama, *nivasiṣyasi mayyeva*. If, when speaking of the one Self of all, it seems to use the language of Advaita, yet this enduring truth of the eternal individual, *mamāṁśaḥ sanātanaḥ*, adds something which brings in a qualification and appears almost to accept the seeing of the Visishtadvaita, . . .” (EG, p. 431, 1972) According to Ramanuja by appropriate spiritual practice, which includes contemplation of God with *bhakti* (love and devotion) and self-surrender, a soul can have a vision of God and be liberated from the wheel of *Samsara* after his body perishes. However, his individuality persists and he lives in the abode of God, which is called *Vaikuntha*,



where he enjoys eternal peace and happiness in the presence of God.

Madhva's concept of Ultimate Reality has similarities with that of Ramanuja. Both of them rejected Shankara's *Nirguna* Brahman. Both believed in *Saguna* Brahman who has personality, but there is a fundamental difference between their philosophies. Ramanuja believed that despite the fact that matter and individual souls are different from God they are modes (*Prakara*) of God's spiritual substance and are inseparable from Him. Madhva was a pluralist and he believed that every entity is made of a unique substance. Thus the world of matter and souls are made of substances which are different from that of God, and they are eternally separate from Him. He also believed that although matter and souls are separate from God they are entirely dependent on Him. According to Madhva individual souls are eternal, and no two souls are alike. Liberated souls maintain their individuality.

### **Sri Aurobindo's View on Reality Based on Vedanta**

Sri Aurobindo's views on Ultimate Reality, phenomenal world, and individual souls are based primarily on his interpretation of Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. He wrote detailed commentaries on Isha and Kena Upanishads, and Gita. He did not write any commentary on Brahma Sutras. He believed in nondualism but his views are different from the nondualism of Shankara and Ramanuja in some respects. He did not accept Shankara's interpretation of *Maya* as the power that creates illusion. He also rejected Shankara's view that the phenomenal world and individual selves are not really real.

In Sri Aurobindo's view Reality includes both spirit and matter and it is omnipresent. In his metaphysical scheme there is a gradation, or strata, of existence. At the summit, or highest level, is Brahman, which is the 'Ultimate Reality', the Absolute. At the other end is material existence. In between these two extremes there are many other strata or planes of existence. It is important to note that these strata form a continuum and they are not separated from each other. Brahman is pure Spirit and transcends the universe. It is self-existent, eternal, infinite, completely independent, and immutable. Sri Aurobindo believed that Brahman, the Absolute, is indeterminable in the sense that it cannot be defined completely. In his own words, "The Absolute is not limitable or definable by any one determination or by any sum of determinations; on the other side, it is not bound down to an indeterminable vacancy of pure existence." (LD, p. 316) Sri Aurobindo agreed with those who believe that certain truth-aspects of Brahman can be known through spiritual intuition, and these are self-existence, self-consciousness, and self-delight (or bliss), which in Sanskrit terms are Sat, Chit, and Ananda respectively. The consciousness (Chit) aspect includes in itself a force or power (Shakti). Since these aspects are always together the commonly used expression for the knowable Brahman is Sat-

Chit-Ananda, or Sachchidananda. [The expression Sachchidananda is not found in the Upanishads, but it can be found in the Puranas.] In Taittiriya Upanishad's Verse 2.1 Brahman is described as "the Truth, the Knowledge, and the Infinite".

Brahman has manifested itself as the phenomenal world using its consciousness-force (Chit-Shakti), which is *Maya* according to Sri Aurobindo's interpretation. *Maya* is the creative force of Brahman. It is the self-power of Brahman, *devatma-shakti*, as mentioned in Shvetashvatara Upanishad (Verse I. 3). For manifestation Brahman first takes the poise of unchanging Atman (Self), the Being, and then it expresses itself as the changing phenomenal world, the Becoming. In Sri Aurobindo's nondualistic view the unchanging (*Akshara*) Brahman, or Self, is not the sole reality; the changing (*Kshara*) phenomenal world also is real. The changeless and the changing are two modes of expression of Brahman. It is true that the phenomenal world is not self-existent and that it is derived from Brahman, but it is not an illusory appearance. The world is a real expression of the Brahman and is constituted by its substance or essence. Sri Aurobindo's view is fully supported by the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. A great saying (*Mahavakya*) of Upanishads is "*Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahman*" (Verse III. 14.1 of Chandogya), which means "All this verily is Brahman". The very first verse of Isha Upanishad says that whatever moves in the moving world is inhabited by God. The same message is found in Shvetashvatara Upanishad, which says with reference to Brahman, "You are woman. You are man. You are the youth and the maiden too. You are an old man tottering along with a staff. Being born you become facing every direction. You are the dark-blue bird; you are the green (parrot) with red eyes. You are (the cloud) with the lightning in its womb. You are the seasons and the seas. Having no beginning you abide through omnipresence. (You) from whom all worlds are born." (Verses IV. 3 and IV. 4) It should be clear that according to the Upanishads everything ranging from pure spirit to apparently inconscient (or unconscious) matter is the real self-expression of Brahman.

Sri Aurobindo's view of Reality is all-embracing or integral, and it accepts both Being and Becoming as real. He believed that Brahman is *nirguna* as well as *saguna*, i.e., *nirguno guni*. This view is supported by Bhagavad Gita. In Verse XIII. 14 of Gita the Supreme Person has been described as "*nirgunam gunabhoktr ca*" (free from qualities yet enjoyer of qualities). Sri Aurobindo recognised transcendent Brahman as the Ultimate Reality, but that recognition did not require the abolishment of either the universe or the individual. His philosophy harmonised 'many' with the 'One' and recognised unity in diversity.

Sri Aurobindo believed that the differences in the views of Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva as to the reality of individual selves and their relation with Brahman or God can be reconciled. From his own experience he found that there is a truth behind the views of Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva. He attributed the differences in their views to the spiritual experience of each, which focused on a specific aspect

of Reality and missed the more comprehensive experience.

### **Statuses of Self according to Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of Vedanta**

In the process of self-manifestation Brahman, or Sachchidananda, expresses itself in a variety of manners or modes, and assumes different postures or statuses. Sri Aurobindo wrote about a graded series of existence and an ascending series of substance. Brahman is present at each of the levels as Self (Atman). At the highest level of manifestation Sachchidananda is Supreme Self (Paramatman), which is transcendent with respect to the universe. It also is immanent in the universe, and at that level it is the universal or cosmic Self (Atman). The universal Self (Atman) has an individual status (Jivatman) as well. It is important to note that these statuses and modes exist simultaneously and they are intimately connected. The process of manifestation creates certain apparent dualities, which are difficult to reconcile. For example, one may wonder how the transcendent Supreme Self can also be the universal Self without giving up its transcendent status, or how can one Brahman become many existences of the universe without giving up its unity. Further, how can Self be immutable when its manifested forms are mutable, and how can it be impersonal and also personal? Sri Aurobindo repeatedly pointed out that the ordinary logic used for analysing the matters of phenomenal world is not applicable to Brahman or Self, which is beyond space and time. We need to rely on intuitive knowledge for comprehending these issues.

From a broad point of view there are three statuses of Self, which are transcendent, universal, and individual. Then within each of these major statuses there are variations of poise. I will first identify and examine the major statuses according to Vedanta philosophy, and later examine in detail various aspects of an individual self.

#### Transcendent Supreme Self (Paramatman), Purushottama, and Parameshwara (Ishwara)

At its highest status Self transcends the phenomenal world and universe, and it is called the Supreme Self, Paramatman. Paramatman is the highest poise of Brahman with regard to the manifested universe. It is the origin of the spiritual substance of all forces and forms of the universe; however, at this supra-cosmic stage it has not extended itself in time and space. It is timeless and spaceless. According to Sri Aurobindo the universe is a projection or an emanation of the Supreme Self, and individual beings of the universe also are emanations of Supreme Self.

There is some disagreement among the major schools of Vedanta on certain aspects of the Supreme Self. As I discussed in an earlier section Shankara placed more emphasis on the impersonal aspect, which is without qualities (*Nirguna*), whereas Ramanuja and Madhva did not accept Shankara's views on this issue.

Both Ramanuja and Madhva believed only in the personal aspect of Paramatman, which is with qualities (*Saguna*). Sri Aurobindo believed that Supreme Self has an impersonal as well as a personal aspect. Paramatman appears to be impersonal. The personal form of Paramatman is called Purushottama or Supreme Person. For Bhagavad Gita Purushottama is the highest goal for spiritual seekers. The Supreme Self is also the Lord of its own manifested Nature (*Prakriti*), and in this mode it is called Parameshwara, or Supreme God. It should be recognised that these three forms of Transcendent Self — Paramatman, Purushottama, and Parameshwara — represent different but equal aspects of Brahman.

Parameshwara is also Ishwara. In Sri Aurobindo's words Ishwara is "the Divine Being who is the master and creator of the universe." (LD, p. 351) Ishwara is supra-cosmic as well as intracosmic. He also inhabits and supports all individuality. Sri Aurobindo points out that Ishwara is the most comprehensive expression or aspect of Brahman. All aspects of Brahman are united in Ishwara. He is the Lord who rules the cosmos and is the Master of all works. Ishwara plays an important role in the philosophy and yoga of Gita, especially in Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. In Sri Aurobindo's words: "The Ishwara of the Yogins is one with the Brahman of the seeker of knowledge, one supreme and universal Spirit, one supreme and universal Godhead." (EG, p. 328) Gita in Verse XVIII. 61 says that Ishwara resides in the heart of every creature. Sri Aurobindo points out that Ishwara "is not the personal God of popular religions, a being limited by his qualities, individual and separate from all others". (LD, p. 352) Ishwara is much greater than a popular god, or *ista-devata*, of a worshipper. He is the God of gods.

### Universal Self (Atman)

Universal Self (or simply Self) is the self-extended mode of the transcendent Self (Paramatman) for the purpose of manifestation. It contains and supports all things and forms of the manifested world in its being, but it is not bound by any of them. It is immanent in the world as it is the essence of all things, and thus it is omnipresent. Self itself is not subject to time and space, but it supports time and space of the manifested world as figures of its consciousness. Sri Aurobindo repeatedly pointed out that according to Vedanta Self is in all things, all things are in Self, and all things are becomings of Self.

One of the fundamental teachings of Upanishads is that Self (Atman) is Brahman. There are many verses that declare the identity of Atman (Self) with Brahman, and also confirms that Self (*i.e.*, Brahman) is the reality or essence of everything. There is a series of verses in Chhandogya Upanishad, which describes how the sage Uddalaka Aruni taught his son Svetaketu the concept of Self. He used a variety of examples of material and living things of the world and declared that the subtle essence of all these is the Self or Atman. One of these famous verses,

which is repeated several times, is as follows:

Verse VI. 8. 7. That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That thou art, Svetaketu.

Universal Self (Atman) has two modes of existence. One is immutable and immobile (or static), and the other is mutable and mobile (or dynamic). Gita (Verse XV. 16) refers to these two modes as Akshara Purusha and Kshara Purusha respectively. The static and immutable universal Self, Atman, is the Akshara Purusha of Gita. The immutable Self does not directly participate in the activities of Nature although it silently supports them. It stands back, as it were, from the mutations and movement of Nature. It is indivisible and is the same in all existences and individual beings. There are many verses in the Upanishads and Gita that refer to universal Self, Atman. For example, in Gita's Verse II. 24 Self is described as "eternal, all-pervading, stable, immobile, and forever". Katha Upanishad's Verse I. 3. 13 describes some other characteristics of universal Self: "This Self is hidden in all beings and does not reveal Himself; yet the seers with subtle vision can see Him by a sharp and subtle understanding."

For Advaita (Non-dualistic) Vedanta of Shankara the realisation of the impersonal static and silent Self is the straight way to individual liberation (Mukti). Sri Aurobindo pointed out that an exclusive focus on the experience of silent Self can make the phenomenal world appear to be unreal, and this experience can lead to a negative approach to life and a life-shunning philosophy. Sri Aurobindo did not ignore the significance of the silent Self. In his view the experience of silent Self is important and essential for a spiritual practitioner, but there also is a dynamic mode of Self and that too must be experienced in order to get a complete understanding of Reality.

The dynamic mode of Self is the mutable Self, or Kshara Purusha, of Gita. It is hidden in the mutable phenomenal world, which is Nature, or Prakriti. Purusha and Prakriti are not separate principles and they are intimately connected. Prakriti is the power of Self or Purusha, and in the phenomenal world it is out in front with Purusha hidden in it. The phenomenal world is in 'time and space' and everything in it changes. However, the mutable forms of all objects and creatures of the phenomenal world, which Nature creates, are not empty forms. Self as Purusha dwells in all forms as their substance. In Verse XV. 13 of Gita Krishna said, "And entering this earth, I sustain by my power all beings." Nature is active and mutable, and the Purusha hidden in it reflects the mutations and movement of Nature. So this Purusha in Nature appears to be mutable, or Kshara, but the Purusha in its essence is not mutable. Kshara Purusha is the active or dynamic mode of Self. Sri Aurobindo explained in the *Essays on the Gita* (p. 423) that the mobility of Kshara Purusha occurs in the immobility or stability of Akshara Purusha. In his words, "These two

then are the two spirits we see in the world; one emerges in front in its action, the other remains behind it steadfast in that perpetual silence from which the action comes and in which all actions cease and disappear into timeless being, Nirvana.” (EG, p. 423) Sri Aurobindo also pointed out that for a complete realisation of the cosmic or universal Self “We have to see it not only as that which contains and inhabits all, but that which is all, not only as the indwelling spirit, but also as the name and form, the movement and the master of the movement, the mind and life and body.” (SY, p. 356)

### Individual Self (Jivatman)

The topic of individual self is of great interest not only to philosophers but also to common persons. To an individual person his possessing a self of his own seems obvious and certain. However, the reality of an individual self has been debated for a long time in Indian philosophies as well as in western philosophy. There also are several philosophical issues and questions related to individual selves addressed in eastern and western philosophies. In the following section I will present the Vedantic view of an individual self as expounded by Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva along with Sri Aurobindo’s view. Lastly I will present a few concepts of an individual self that represent Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to Vedanta philosophy.

### **Vedanta’s Concept of Individual Self as Explained by Sri Aurobindo**

Individuals experience their selves in different ways depending on the level of their spiritual development. Commonly an individual identifies himself with his ego. With spiritual experience he can experience self as Purusha and Jivatman. These are discussed in the following sections.

### Ego (*Ahamkara*)

The most common experience of an individual self is that of ego (*Ahamkara*). At the level of ego one feels that he is separate from others, and he does not have a sense of unity with others except perhaps with very near relatives. There is almost unanimous agreement among Indian philosophers that ego is a temporary construction of Nature (*Prakriti*) and that it does not represent one’s authentic or true self. However, ego serves a useful purpose. Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the sense of individuality created by ego helps to centralise a person’s experiences. In his own words: “The formation of a mental and vital ego tied to the body-sense was the first great labour of the cosmic Life in its progressive evolution; for this was the means it found for creating out of matter a conscious individual.” (SY, p. 341) Sri Aurobindo



also emphasised that ego must be discarded for spiritual advancement. In his own words: “The dissolution of this limiting ego is the one condition, the necessary means for this very cosmic Life to arrive at its divine fruition: for only so can the conscious individual find either his transcendent self or his true Person.” (SY, p. 341) Gita repeatedly pointed out that one’s ego is the primary cause of his suffering. According to Verse II. 71 of Gita one who acts without the sense of ‘my-ness’ (Nirmama) and ‘I-ness’ (Nirahamkara) attains peace.

Now the question that naturally arises is: if ego and ego-sense are not our true self, what is truly our individual self? The terms that are most widely used in Indian philosophy for an individual’s true self are ‘Jivatman’, and ‘Purusha’. These are different postures of the same entity and there are some differences. I will discuss each of these one by one.

### Jivatman (Jiva)

In everyday language of common persons Jiva refers to any living being. In Indian philosophy the term ‘Jiva’ is used to mean an individual self or ‘Jivatman’. However, there is disagreement among different schools of thought within Hindu philosophy as to what exactly a Jiva is composed of. According to some writers Jiva is the physical and psychological complex that we commonly think we are. This complex is made up of a gross physical body also called food sheath, and a subtle body made up of vital and mental sheaths. (Some writers include with these another body called causal body, or ‘Karana Sarira’.) Some others think that Jiva includes only the nonphysical bodies of vital and mental sheaths. According to these definitions Jiva is made up of Prakriti (Nature) and thus is not a spiritual entity. However, most scholars of Vedanta agree that Jiva is a spiritual entity and resides outside space and time. Prominent scholars of Vedanta differ in their views regarding the status of Jiva as to whether it is eternal or temporary, real or illusory.

In the beginning portion of the article I discussed the status of an individual self in the philosophies of Advaita Vedanta of Shankara, Visistha Advaita Vedanta of Ramanuja, and Dvaita Vedanta of Madhva. Shankara recognised that there is an individual self (Jiva) but it exists only as long as one lives in ignorance. When ignorance is removed Jiva realises that it is not different from the universal Self (Atman) and it merges with it. So according to Advaita Vedanta when true knowledge is gained the individual self, Jiva, ceases to exist as a separate entity. Ramanuja believed that Jiva is real and an eternal portion of Ishwara. He believed that an individual spiritual self in essence is identical with Self, but at the same time it is distinct from Self in some respects and it depends on God (Ishwara). The dualistic school of Madhva also treats an individual self to be eternal and real but constituted by its own unique substance. Thus for Madhva an individual self is different from

God as well as from other individual selves.

Sri Aurobindo believes in the reality and eternal status of an individual self. He frequently refers to Gita's Verse XV. 7, which says, "It is verily an eternal portion of Me that becomes the Jiva (living being) in the world of Jivas (living beings) and cultivates the six senses, including mind, which abide in Nature." Referring to this verse Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Essays on the Gita*: "This is an epithet, a statement of immense bearing and consequence. For it means that each soul, each being in its spiritual reality is the very Divine, however partial its actual manifestation of him in Nature. And it means too, if words have any sense, that each manifesting spirit, each of the many, is an eternal individual, an eternal unborn undying power of the one Existence. We call this manifesting spirit the Jiva, because it appears here as if a living creature in a world of living creatures, and we speak of this spirit in man as the human soul and think of it in the terms of humanity only." (EG, p. 430-31)

It is important to note that Jivatman is not a mutable entity as it is outside Nature (Prakriti), which constitutes the phenomenal world in time and space. Jivatman is immutable (Akshara). It is a pure subject and witness. It is spirit and superior to Nature. Jivatman is a portion of the Supreme Self in the sense that it is a partial manifestation of Self. According to Gita's Verse II. 20, "It is not born, nor does it die at any time; nor having once come into being it will not come into being again."

A Jiva is a centre of the universal Self (Atman). In Sri Aurobindo's view Self is multiple in Jiva. Jivatman is at once individual and universal. It feels its oneness with Universal Self (Atman) and Supreme Self (Paramatman), and it also feels oneness with other Jivatmans while maintaining its own individuality. Sri Aurobindo explained: "It [each Jivatman] is one, yet different [from other Jivatmans]. . . . Essentially one Jiva has the same nature as all — but in manifestation each puts forth its own line of Swabhava." (LY, Part 1, p. 280) Swabhava of an individual is his unique and true inner nature, which seeks expression in life. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "in Nature each of us has a principle and will of our own becoming." (EG, p. 502) Jivatman is the true individual self, the true person, and it presides over the development of an individual being in Nature from behind or above. It may be added that the experience of Jivatman by an individual is gained only at a high level of spiritual development.

### Individual Purusha (Soul or Conscious Being)

In a previous section in which I discussed Universal Self (Atman) I pointed out that Gita recognises two statuses of Self, which are immutable (Akshara) and mutable (Kshara). The immutable Self or Purusha is outside time and space although it supports the phenomenal world, which is in time and space. The mutable Purusha is hidden in Prakriti (Nature) of the phenomenal world. These two statuses of universal



Self are also applicable in the case of an individual self. Jivatman is the immutable individual self above or outside Nature, and Purusha is the individual conscious being, or soul, that participates in the mutations of Nature (Prakriti). Purusha is always present with Prakriti, and it is the substance of the personality of an individual person and remains hidden inside. Purusha is the person to whom the personality belongs. It should be noted that the personality of an individual Purusha changes, but the Purusha in itself, *i.e.*, in its essence, does not change.

Sri Aurobindo points out that although the Purusha of an individual is one “it adapts itself to the formations of Nature.” (LD, p. 896) This view is in agreement with that of Taittiriya Upanishad, which recognises different Purushas corresponding to different grades of an individual’s Nature. Taittiriya Upanishad refers to these different Purushas in Verses 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Section II. In the physical body of an individual person there is a Purusha, which is called Annamaya Atma (Self or Purusha), or physical self. Similarly there are Pranamaya Atma (Self or Purusha) and Manomaya Atma (Self or Purusha) in the vital and mental parts of an individual respectively. Several Upanishads refer to a central Self (or Purusha) at the core of one’s being, and it is referred to by different expressions. In Verses III. 7. 3 to 23 of Brhadaranyaka it is called inner controller or ruler (Atmantaryami). In Verse III. 14. 4 of Chandogya it is called the self within the heart (Atmantar Hridaye). Shvetashvatara refers to this as the person who is the inner self (Purusha Antaratma) in Verse III. 13. In Maitri it is called the elemental self (Bhutatma) in Verse III. 2. I will discuss more about the nature and role of Purusha in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy in the following section.

### **Individual Self and Soul in Sri Aurobindo’s Philosophy**

Sri Aurobindo agreed with the general concepts of Vedanta regarding the statuses of Self, which are Supreme Self (Paramatman), Universal Self (Atman) and Individual Self (Jivatman). However, he disagreed with the views of certain schools of Vedanta, which do not accept individual selves as eternal and real. He strongly rejected the extreme form of Advaita Vedanta known as Mayavada, which believes that the manifested world and its inhabitants are illusory. His philosophy goes beyond traditional Vedantic thought as it affirms an evolution of consciousness and a recovery of self-awareness in which an individual self, or soul, plays a very important role. In his own words, “It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery [of consciousness] is possible; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organised and capable of awaking to its own Reality. The immense importance of the individual being, which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. This importance can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and

both are powers of the Eternal.” (LD, p. 755) I already pointed out that Sri Aurobindo did not accept the view of some scholars of Vedanta who believe that when an individual attains enlightenment and goes beyond the consciousness of separative individuality, he will merge with the universal Self and lose his individuality. According to Sri Aurobindo a person can experience the universality of his self and its individuality simultaneously.

Recognising the importance of an individual being in his philosophy let us examine what Sri Aurobindo considers to be the true self or soul of an individual person. We have already stated that Sri Aurobindo repeatedly pointed out that the ego personality of a human being is not his true self, and he is in full agreement with traditional Hindu philosophy on this issue. He also pointed out that ego serves a useful purpose in organising and centralising a person’s experience of life. [In some contexts Sri Aurobindo refers to this ‘ego-self’ as ‘desire soul’.] According to Sri Aurobindo there is a real spiritual individual behind a person’s outer personality. This spiritual individual has two statuses. One of these statuses is that of ‘Jiva’ or ‘Jivatman’, which is outside space and time and is not in the mutable Nature. The other status is that of individual Purusha or conscious being, which is in Nature, and it supports an individual person’s Prakriti (nature).

An individual’s nature has several components or elements such as the physical body, vital energy, and mind. All these instrumental elements or powers are supported by corresponding Purushas about which I already wrote earlier. Sri Aurobindo points out that in addition to the instrumental elements there is a divine element in every person, which is its central Purusha or soul in the embodied life. Jivatman is the true central being, but it is outside space and time and is represented in Nature by what Sri Aurobindo calls psychic entity or soul. In his own words “The soul, representative of the central being, is a spark of the Divine supporting all individual existence in Nature . . .” (LY, Part 1, p. 267)

The psychic entity is the soul in essence and it is undifferentiated Divine consciousness. The psychic entity or soul gains a variety of experience from repeated births, and it attains individuality in human beings. The individuality or personality of psychic entity is what Sri Aurobindo calls ‘psychic being’, or Chaitya Purusha. A psychic being resides in the spiritual heart of a person and secretly participates in his life and continues to evolve. It is the inmost of all Purushas in Nature and it secretly supports the other Purushas. Psychic being plays a very important role in Sri Aurobindo’s integral yoga. In Sri Aurobindo’s words a psychic being “is a flame born out of the Divine and, luminous inhabitant of the Ignorance, grows in it till it is able to turn it towards the Knowledge.” (LD, p. 225) Psychic being is full of love and devotion for the Divine or God.

Sri Aurobindo explained in detail the differences between psychic entity (or soul), psychic being, and Jivatman in the *Letters on Yoga* and also in *The Life Divine*. In brief Jivatman is above the manifested life and it presides over the evolution

of psychic being and other Purushas, but it itself is unborn and does not change. A psychic being is the personality of psychic entity and is the primary representative of Jivatman in terrestrial life. Whereas Jivatman is the true central being of a person, the psychic being acts as the central being in the person's embodied life. Jivatman comes into being during the descending movement of the Supreme Self (Paramatman) leading to the manifestation of the phenomenal world. It is prior to the ascending movement of consciousness from matter. On the other hand a psychic being is formed in the ascending or evolutionary process and it is mutable, but it is immortal. After a person dies his psychic being goes to the psychic world where it assimilates past life's experience, and then it returns to terrestrial life and enters a new body at its birth for more experience and growth.

I mentioned earlier that Sri Aurobindo calls psychic being the Purusha in the heart or 'Chaitya Purusha'. This particular expression, however, is not used anywhere in either Upanishads or Gita. Gita refers to an individual self as Jiva (or Jivatman), and also as *Ksetrajna* or knower of the field, which is Purusha. However, there is nothing mentioned in Gita that corresponds exactly to psychic being. There are a few verses in Upanishads that refer to an embodied Purusha (soul), which is similar in concept to a psychic being. I referred earlier to a few verses from different Upanishads that mentions about an inner and central self. The following two verses refer more clearly to an embodied soul or psychic being.

Katha II. 3. 17. "The Purusha, the inner self, who is no larger than a thumb is seated always in the hearts of men. One must separate Him with patience from one's own body as one separates from a blade of grass its main fibre. Thou should know Him as the pure, the immortal, yea, as the pure, the immortal.

A similar verse is found in Shvetashvatara Upanishad, Verse III. 13:

The Purusha, the inner self, who is no larger than a thumb is seated always in the hearts of men. He is the lord of the knowledge framed by the heart and the mind. They who know that become immortal.

For ordinary people psychic being remains veiled under the outer consciousness and is not developed enough to influence the outer nature or personality. In such cases one of the other Purushas — mental, vital, and physical — takes the lead in controlling and/or influencing the outer nature. For many persons who have developed strong intellect it is the mind that becomes the leader. In such cases the mental Purusha is commonly mistaken as the central being or soul. Eventually, however, as further progress is made in the process of spiritual evolution, the psychic being becomes more developed and it begins to emerge in front and influence the outer personality. The emergence of psychic being is an important step forward in Sri Aurobindo's yoga.

## Concluding Remarks

For Hindu spiritual practice self-realisation is of utmost importance. Self may be realised and experienced in different ways depending on the spiritual path followed by a spiritual seeker, and a sound knowledge of the various statuses of Self helps a seeker understand his own experiences. However, the concepts related to Self can be difficult to understand and confusing because of different views held by various philosophers on this subject and also for different terms used to define various modes or statuses of Self. Sri Aurobindo has been very precise and consistent in his writings with regard to the definitions of various terms. In most cases his concepts and definitions are compatible with those of traditional Hinduism, but in a few cases he presents unique concepts based on his personal experience.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy places great importance on the role of an individual in the evolution of consciousness, and in this context the concept of psychic being is a valuable contribution to philosophy and spiritual practice. The emergence of psychic being is an essential step of the yogic path laid out by Sri Aurobindo, and usually it is followed by the realisation of Jivatman and Atman. The experience of Jivatman leads to the attainment of cosmic consciousness, which reveals the unity of all beings in the universe.

It must be kept in mind that the different statuses of Self are not completely separate from each other; they are unified intimately and exist simultaneously. Sri Aurobindo points out repeatedly that an individual being in the world is a becoming of Supreme Self (Paramatman), and the world too is a becoming of the Supreme Self. In his own words the true self of an individual person (Jiva) "is a universal being in its relations with others and with Nature and in its upward term a portion or the living front of a supreme transcendental Spirit." (SY, p. 282) When an individual person gets rid of his ego he can embrace and include the universe in his consciousness, and in doing so he does not abolish his spiritual individuality. Moreover, an individual's self, or soul, is connected with Supreme Self (Paramatman) not only because it is made of the same divine substance, but also because the Supreme Self in its personal form of Purushottama, or Ishwara, is present in the spiritual heart of an individual although he may not be aware of His presence due to ignorance. Gita repeatedly points out that "the Lord (Ishwara) is seated in the heart of all beings". (Verse XVIII. 61)

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ARUN CHATTERJEE

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*An increasing light of divine consciousness will make us close in soul and one by identity in our inmost being and spiritual substance with the Master of the world-sacrifice, — the supreme object of existence proposed by the ancient Vedanta . . .*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 134)*

# VEDIC SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

## 1

Reality is multi-dimensional; it is constituted of not just one plane but several planes of existence. And symbols are forms on one plane of Reality that represent the truths of another. The human person overtly belongs to the world of the physical, vital, mental, but essentially is a symbol of the real being within, — a symbol which is seeking to express increasingly the truth within. Everything in the world is a symbol of some higher reality. Symbols are not mere mental figures, they signify some element of higher truth and are charged with a living significance. Considering symbols in this light, it can be said that all forms are symbols. The universe itself is a symbol of Reality. It is difficult to reach Reality directly or comprehend it completely except through the agency of a form. And it is that form which can best represent the truth within which can manifest most the truth. At the present stage of our evolution, Reality, or the Supreme Truth, is concealed or, rather, imprisoned in the form. It is therefore difficult to contact Reality because the form is not yet ready to manifest it fully.

The Supreme Brahman which is beyond both the finite and the infinite, expresses itself continually in numberless ways, and manifests itself variously and multitudinously. Each form, as such, is expressive of an element or an aspect of the transcendent Truth. The universe is a progressive manifestation of Brahman; it is an endless process, an eternal progression toward perfect perfection — the forms constituting creation increasingly expressing and manifesting the Divine. Flowers, for example, increasingly manifest one dimension of Brahman, that is Beauty; likewise other forms reveal many other corresponding dimensions of the Supreme. It is only the human person who symbolises the Divine in his integral totality, and can if he consciously chooses, progressively manifest the Divine, perfectly and integrally. As the *Aitareya* Upanishad says, it is only the human form that was chosen by the *devās* as the fit abode to enter into and manifest fully their divinity and effectivity. When several other forms were arranged before them the *devās* were not ready to enter them, but when they were given the vision of the human form they all became exultant with joy, because it was verily that form which held out the promise of Brahman's most perfect and completest manifestation. And it is precisely for this secret reason that the Rishi envisions the Divine as having a human form. It is not in the anthropomorphising of the Divine that he was interested but in unravelling the spiritual truth of man's evolutionary nature.

A symbol, therefore, expresses an inner vision, a living subtle truth and a deeper experience. It is the natural body, an external and a tangible form of an inner

reality and truth which it symbolises, that is itself an intimate part of the experience of that truth. It has a living truth of itself that corresponds to the living truth it symbolises. There are various kinds of symbols:

(i) Those which are conventional such as the Vedic Rishis formed with objects taken from their surroundings, for example *go*, *aśva*, *uṣas* etc. The Rishis created them, vitalised them, idealised and spiritualised them and made them part of their realisations. They made them so very alive in as much as they appeared in their visions as images of spiritual experiences.

(ii) Those what we might call life-symbols; these are not artificially chosen, nor mentally interpreted in a deliberate way. They grow out of the surroundings and are derived from day-to-day life and then they begin to influence our normal way of life. To cite a couple of examples, ‘mountains’ is the symbol of the path of Yoga, and ‘journey’ involving many risks connotes a similar idea.

(iii) Those that have an inherent apposition and application, power and purpose of their own. To name, *ākāśa* is a symbol of the infinite, all-pervading eternal Brahman; *sun* is the symbol of supramental light, the divine Gnosis.

(iv) Those that are capable of intellectual interpretation. Numbers, geometrical figures and alphabets were taken as mental symbols by Pythagoras. Once accepted, they become active and useful in Tantra practices. A triangle in one position symbolises for the Tantrics the three lower planes, and in another position it is a symbol of the three higher ones.

(v) Those that are occultly vital and have a more intimate life of their own. For example, “The Cross is in Yoga the symbol of the soul and nature in their strong and perfect union, but because of our fall into the impurities of ignorance it has become the symbol of suffering and purification.”<sup>1</sup> The cobra is an emblem of Nature-Energy, and the many hoods are symbolic of its several powers, whereas the cobra covering the head with its hoods is a symbol of sovereignty.

(vi) And those that are psychic and spiritual and yield their significance only on identification with them. There are numberless realities which cannot be limited by those symbolic forms. They can be expressed only to some extent; supramental realities, for example, can be translated in symbolic terms in a limited way, for symbols do not exhaust their immeasurable truth.

Symbols are transcripts of realities, living notations of living truths. In a certain sense all things are the symbols through which we approach Reality. The Absolute defines itself to us through symbols; all forms are representative figures of the Infinite, symbolising the truth of the Infinite. All spiritual experiences, initially, are individual experiences, for mass experience of the Supreme is not the first method of Nature. It is one of Nature’s inscrutable ways — an inexplicable and extraordinary strategy — that reveals her secrets, to begin with, only to a single individual, her fond and

1. Sri Aurobindo, Cent. Vol. 17, p. 99.



consecrated lover, her chosen channel and instrument, the Avatar, then to a few others, the seers or the apostles. These in turn share their wealth of sublime experiences with a body of dedicated souls, the mystics, sages and saints. Nature does not broadcast her secrets to all and sundry. It is through the trust placed in him by his disciples that the *guru* shares his vision and wisdom with them; love, intimacy and devotion are the most effective media of inner instruction. Sometimes Nature bursts forth with a revelation for which humanity is least ready; at such times it only reveals a distant possibility towards the acceptance and manifestation of which humanity might take several millenniums. Such outbursts of revelations are generally treated as freaks of Nature and ignored. The experience of the mystics was communicated to the rest of humanity through a body of symbols; it was only later, for purposes of expansion and extension of the spiritual core experience, that there grew the system of knowledge, the creed and the discipline. The symbol is not only expressive of a higher reality, but an enriching aesthetic element and a physical means by which the seeker's aspiration is confirmed and activated.

Symbols and images express the phenomena of suprasensuous and suprarational experiences more concretely than the language manipulated by mere mind. Often they are accurate and living transcriptions of the intensity of the experience of mystics. They are legitimate in so far as they are true and delightful. Sri Aurobindo would even observe that spiritual consciousness would not be integrally spiritual without any aesthetic or emotional content. In the early stages of human society, whether culturally advanced or otherwise, we find a strongly symbolic mentality governing its life and thought. Symbols have always been associated, in its social stage, with widespread religious feeling. It is only in the individualistic stage of society, when intellect becomes the dominating factor, that symbols and images lose their virtue and utility. Symbols then represent to man those powers which he feels are behind and above him, hidden and mysterious, and from there influence and govern his life as well as the world around him.

In the Vedic age we see that everything was symbolic, something which the modern mind can neither understand nor appreciate. The institution of sacrifice, *yajña*, far from being a primitive propitiation ritual, was deeply symbolic and exercised a profound influence on the life of the Vedic society; it was only a later humanity which could not appreciate its intellectual and pragmatic approach to every aspect of life. *Yajña*, or sacrifice, had nothing to do with the propitiation of gods for the gaining of worldly prosperity or of paradise. It is indeed difficult for the mundane and practical mind to enter into the ancient spirit and realise the significance of symbols.

In the Vedic society both religious and social institutions were permeated with the symbolic spirit. The marriage hymn, in Rig-veda, of Surya daughter of the Sun, married successively with different gods, is profoundly symbolic and came to be used at a later stage as a hymn for the union of human couples. Usha is symbolic of



the growing spiritual aspiration in the seeker — the evolutionary awakening in man and his increasing illumination. She symbolises the golden light of the golden Truth that is manifesting more and more upon the earth. If this awakening and manifestation have to be made available to humanity, the truth of Usha needs to be integrated and blended with the truths of the many *devās* who are themselves the multiple powers of Aditi. While the divine marriage has a symbolic significance, the hymn does not enjoy the same mystical status in a later age, and is used more to embellish and eulogise the human union. This distinction marks the contrast between ancient mentality and the later one. In India, the ideal of relationship between man and woman has always been governed by the symbolism of the sublime relation between Shiva and Shakti, Purusha and Prakriti — the male and female divine principles in the universe. In the Vedic ideal the female was ‘as much the mate as the adjunct of man’, whereas in the Vedantic ideal with the realisation of the dependence of Prakriti upon Purusha in its cosmic functioning, woman is ‘conceived of not only depending upon man but entirely existing for him’. This inequality between the sexes is unsuccessfully sought to be corrected in the Tantric religion.

In the Puranic age the Rishi’s vision of the Divine is sought to be communicated in the figure of *Mahavishnu*; the form of Vishnu becomes a symbol of the Divine. This symbol, with the passage of time, became so vitalised, idealised and spiritualised that followers of Vaishnavism envisioned the Divine only as *Mahāvishnu* — the symbol thus becomes a part of the spiritual experience. A form that not only symbolises Reality, but expresses, and manifests it. These are not mental symbols worked out deliberately by the mind but participate in the experience of Reality. So too, the mystic sound *Om* is a symbol of the supreme Godhead; it is the body of Brahman. A lily, rose or butterfly, a peacock or nightingale are all bodies of Brahman, each manifesting an aspect of the total Truth. It is only the human form that embodies the quintessence of all the dimensions of the Divine. Though symbols get their body by the earth, they derive their rich content from an inner world. A rainbow or a sun-kissed mountain peak can transport us into a world of inner reality in the measure we are receptive to the truth they embody. Symbols rightly received and truly utilised can make the individual more and more activated in his faith, and make him deeply dynamic in his inner life.

The fourfold order, *caturvarṇa*, was a symbolic and typical institution in the Vedic age. Subsequently this gradually turned into a conventional institution and became crystallised and fossilised into our present day caste system. In the Veda symbols, images, similes and metaphors are used seriously and with a purpose to convey an aspect or element of Reality which the precise intellectual word could not express or communicate. The four orders are described in the Purusha-Sukta of the Rig-veda as having sprung from the body of the Divine Creator.

These orders represent Maheswari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati — Wisdom, Power, Harmony and Perfection respectively. Each individual is an

integral composition of these four constituents, with perhaps one as a preponderating element. Nonetheless, all the four are equal in worthiness and no one is inferior to the other in merit. These again are the four components of human psychology. Depending upon the dominant element the community was categorised into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. This division, based on the quality of psychology, at a later stage became crystallised and fossilised into the caste system. Human society, as such, was considered a living expression of the Divine Creator who otherwise expresses himself as the cosmic and supra-cosmic existence. Man, human society and the universe are therefore symbols and manifestations of the Supreme.

This symbolic stage of social evolution, which is mainly religious and spiritual, is gradually replaced by the psychological and ethical stage. In the latter even the religious and spiritual is subordinated to the psychological and ethical idea. Religion then becomes only a sanction for the ethical motive, the *Dharma*. This psychological or typical stage is responsible for the creation and induction of great social ideals — purity and piety, social honour and philanthropy, nobility of character, chivalry and obedience — which continue to dominate human life even in our own times, though more as a convention and tradition rather than a living reality. With the passage of time this stage naturally passes into the conventional stage of human society when the external expressions of the ideal become more important than the ideal itself. Thus, in the evolution of caste and in society, birth, parentage, education, family, profession and religious ritual came to assume greater importance. This stage is greatly responsible for increased formalisation, fixity of hierarchies, erection of rigid grades and obedience to formal authority. This, again, is followed by the individualised age of society, the Age of Revolt, that of Reason, Freedom and Progress. In passing through this, society has once again to come full circle and base itself in a new subjective age in order that man may discover a newer and greater integral dimension of himself. It is only then that man will perfect new symbols and images to express himself more fully and integrally.

*(To be continued)*

V. MADHUSUDAN REDDY

*(The Vedic Epiphany, Volume One, Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad, 1991, pp. 43-48)*

## **THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND**

*(Continued from the issue of December 2015)*

### **THE MOTHER'S FIRST VISIT TO THE PLAYGROUND: THE PHYSICAL CULTURE DEMONSTRATION IN 1946**

How excited we were that day! The Mother was to come to the Playground for the first time, on December 2, 1946 and watch the physical culture demonstration performed by the members of physical education section.

We knew that she used go for long rides in her car in the early 1930's, but after that she had not been out of the Ashram main building. It was almost unbelievable that the Mother would be coming out after so many years and that she would come to our Playground!

The Mother's chair was placed on the open space on the northern side beyond the boundary of the Playground, near the Dortoir building. The remaining narrow strip from the main gate and the verandah of the hall on the north was filled up with spectators.

The children's group, the boys group and young men were in their uniform — white shirts and white shorts. The girls' group had, as uniform, white long pyjamas and white blouse. While performing the Mass Drill, all the participants were placed in separate groups and stood in different formations. Each group was given a set of exercises and every group performed its own movements but all followed the same general rhythm given by Pranab-da. It is still vivid in our memory that our girls' group performed 'Kathi-Natch' very enthusiastically — it was a folk dance, with rhythmical movements and the striking in different ways of two small sticks we had in our hands.

It started raining during the programme, but the Mother sat to watch it through, while someone held an umbrella over her. As for us, oh! we were very happy to execute all our movements fully drenched!

The Mother liked the programme very much and she wanted Pranab-da to go ahead and sanctioned the purchase of basic equipment required for the Playground. Biren-da was sent to Madras for this purpose. On that occasion, a Vaulting Box, a Spring board, some pairs of Boxing Gloves etc. were bought.

### **EXERCISE CLASSES FOR THE GIRLS**

This physical culture demonstration was the first of its kind that we, the younger generation, were exposed to.

Our younger brothers, in their uniform of white shorts and shirts, did their 'Sokol' drill so well! We were just charmed to see their performance. Some of the members of our group approached the Mother to request Pranab-da to organise some regular physical culture programme for us too. Thus he started guiding our group of 32 girls. We did our activities in salwar-kameez, or in our white uniform as we were free to use either. Pranab-da taught us marching according to the British method which was a little different from what we learnt later. We remember how we would try even while walking during the day to practise arm swings, often getting it wrong — right arm forward when the right foot is forward and vice versa!

Pranab-da began teaching us freehand exercises on 5.12.1946. He gave us seven lessons. The last session was on 28.8.1947. He also taught us correct breathing through some exercises. The commands for the exercises were written in French and corrected by the Mother herself in some places. At that time the Mother was giving Pranab-da lessons in French and this too, perhaps, was a part of his French class.

He writes:

Formerly the health and physique of our girls was like that of the average girls of our country. In 1946 or 47, I made a fitness test for the girls. I included about nineteen tests to find out various physical capacities. The Mother was very much interested. She saw all the girls going through the tests with me. The performance was very poor. 'Push-ups' was one of the nineteen tests. Only one girl could do one pushup. The rest of the girls failed. Now so many girls can do push-ups. If I take the test now, I am sure that almost everybody will pass. They have made good progress in their physical capacities.

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

We remember that one evening we, the girls, were asked to assemble on the northern side of the Playground. The Mother came and took her seat. We were then called by Pranab-da. He asked us to do some simple calisthenics movements. These simple movements included some stunts, different types of balance and co-ordination, movements which required some strength of legs and arms, such as deep knee bends, and straight body push-ups. We were able to perform many of them. We did the deep knee bends which needed strength of the legs but we failed miserably to perform push-ups (*dunds*). This was the first time that we tried to do these. We did not have the required strength of the arms and shoulders. Only one of us, Maniben, performed well and another, Tapati, somehow managed to do it. The calisthenics movements were preliminary exercises preparing one to perform gymnastic movements.

## ABOUT VOLLEY BALL (TILL 1948)

In 1946 a new plot of ground was given on lease to the Ashram by the then Mayor, Dr. André. It was converted into a Volley-ball Ground where there were two courts. We used one and the young men played on the other. Now that we had two grounds, our programme was organised in such a way that the girls, the boys and the young men used the available facilities by turns.

The Mother appointed Chandubhai to be in charge of the game and also to be the coach for the girls' group. In those days the height of the net was similar to that for the men, so we learned to lift and place the ball or simply hit it over the net. There was no possibility for the girls to spike the ball as we see being done now-a-days. We often played volley-ball before the start of our group activities in the Playground. The Mother told us to use a scarf and cover our heads, specially the back of the neck to protect us from the strong heat of the afternoon sun.

Our Playground activities consisted only of games and exercises. In 1947, there was a suggestion to hold a Volley Ball match against the boys' group. Though it was our day for doing exercises and as our captain, Anu-ben, who conducted the class of free-hand exercises was absent for some reason, we decided to practise volley-ball instead of doing our exercises. We thought it was quite a simple matter. That day the young men's group was playing volley-ball in the Playground. We joined them and had a good practice for the match. The next morning, when I went up to the Mother, I found that she had a rather serious look. "You missed your exercises last evening," she said.

"Yes, Mother, Anu-ben was absent so we decided to play. We had good exercise."

"You are spoiling what I am trying to build up with Pranab and Biren!" was the Mother's reply.

It shook me. I realised that not following one's programme was indiscipline and the Mother never approved of indiscipline in any form. Discipline is the foundation of any serious work.

Regarding this aspect, when she was asked by someone,

Some people criticise the fact that we have too many rules in our physical education and that we impose too much discipline on the children,

she replied:

There can be no physical education without discipline. The body itself could not function without a strict discipline. Actually, the failure to recognise this fact is the principal cause of illness.

And she added orally:

Digestion, growth, circulation of the blood, everything, everything is a discipline, and if there is no discipline people immediately fall ill.

(Tara Jauhar, *Growing up with The Mother*, p. 80)

To one of my questions about students not finding regular physical exercises interesting, her answer was:

We are not on earth to follow our own sweet will but to progress.

Physical exercises are not done for fun or to satisfy one's whims, but as a methodical discipline to develop and strengthen the body.

The true wisdom is to take pleasure in everything one does and this is possible if one takes everything one does as a way to progress. Perfection is difficult to attain and there is always a great deal of progress to be made in order to achieve it.

To seek pleasure is certainly the best way to make yourself miserable.

If you truly want peace and happiness, your constant preoccupation should be:

“What progress must I make in order to be able to know and serve the Divine?”

(*Ibid.*, p. 81)

In 1947 two divisions *i.e.* junior and senior were made for the Volley Ball matches.

In 1948 there were again two divisions. In the junior section there were two teams of the girls of group E.

The teams of the E Group were as follows: 1) *Chitra* (Captain), *Sujata*, *Maniben*, *Amita*, *Mridula*, *Pushpa*. 2) *Kumud* (Captain), *Kusumben*, *Lilou*, *Light*, *Anjou*, *Bhavatarini*.

There were three teams of the young boys of group C.

The teams of the C Group were as follows: 1) *Manoj* (Captain), *Narayan*, *Barin*, *Nitindra*, *Arunkumar*, *Aravind*. 2) *Ranjit* (Captain), *Nirakar*, *Hriday*, *Aniruddha*, *Pratip*, *Bhanu*. 3) *Richard* (Captain) *Niranjan*, *Kuku*, *Nikhil*, *Amitabha*, *Sitaram*.

Both the teams of the girls reached the final round and played against each other.

## THE MOTHER VISITS THE VOLLEY-BALL GROUND

On 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of April, 1947, the Mother came to the Volley-ball Ground. She saw the matches played by the boys, the girls and the young men. She distributed silver badges to both the winners as well as the runners-up. In this tournament the winners and the runners-up also received cards painted by our artists and the name of the person and the position of the team were written on each card by the Mother herself. Ours was the runner-up team and we all received cards with the image of a volley ball on which a twig of the flower signifying “Hope” (*Clementis*) was painted.

Nirod-da remembers:

A Volley Ball match was arranged between two veteran teams. I was made the captain; we were playing the finals. The Mother was to distribute the prizes. We won. When as a captain I went to receive the prize, she said with a smile, “I didn’t know you could play so well.”

Puffed up with pride, I answered, “I play even better, Mother.”

She gave me the New Year’s diary with my name and her blessings written on it.

*(Memorable Contacts with the Mother, p. 67)*

In 1948 all the teams of the junior section played also with the teams of the senior section which had six teams. Needless to say, the juniors lost. Two teams managed to reach the second round. However playing with superior players improved our game.

Once, when we played a volley-ball match against the boys of group C there was quite a good deal of excitement about it especially from the other members of the boys’ group who were passing comments and encouraging rather loudly their friends on the field. The girls started scoring points often in quite unusual ways, such as the ball striking the top of the net, wobbling a little and then falling on the other side, leaving the boys no chance to return the ball! There were quite a few such instances and the girls won the game. When Mona Sarkar, the captain of the boys’ group, met the Mother the following day, she told him that they had lost the game due to the wrong, uncharitable behaviour of the boys who were present there! This made us aware that the attitude in which a game is played is also very important!

We remember again, that some years later, when the game of basket ball was introduced in our programme, the girls were playing the finals of the tournament and both teams were trying their level best to score, but in vain. There were many spectators: girls, young men and a few Ashramites. The spectators were encouraging the teams, or passing loud comments as happens during any interesting match. As no one could score, the excitement of the spectators went on rising, resulting in louder and louder shouting. The Mother was playing tennis in the adjacent ground.



She wanted to know what all this noise was about. The next morning when the Mother met some of these young men, she let them know in no uncertain terms her displeasure regarding the previous evening's incident!

Robi Ganguli remembers:

She just came out (from the Tennis courts) and saw us among others. The next day when I went to her, she slapped me saying, "So, you were also one of those mocking the girls!" No rowdiness lowering the consciousness would be tolerated by Her.

We remember well, the Mother sitting near the entrance on the eastern side of the Playground facing west, reading out to us the booklet, *Code of Sportsmanship* and then distributing the booklet to all the members. I remember how impressed I was on reading it. It made me aware that the qualities of a true sports person were not restricted to the boundaries of the playfield. It should be applied in life as well. Here is a passage from the booklet:

A good Sportsman is courteous

On the field he does not jeer at errors; he does not cheer at the opponent's defeat; he treats them as guests, not enemies. In school, he is considerate to the authorities, the fellow students, and the teachers. In life he is respectful to others; he treats them as he would be treated.

## **TABLE-TENNIS STARTS: THE MOTHER PLAYING TABLE-TENNIS**

The Mother started playing table-tennis in 1946 and continued playing till May 1948. Quite a large number of Ashram members actively participated in this game. Unfortunately, we could find no written record regarding this activity as the official records of the department of Physical Education start from the year 1949. So the sources of our information are a few written articles, and even more important for us, the reminiscences of those who participated at that time. We had four tables. Udar would write out the matches posted for the day for each table. The Mother would put her signature below that. These were regularly put up on the Ashram Notice-Board.

Sumedha gives us an interesting information regarding table-tennis which started in 1946:

The three Ganguli brothers, Amiyo-da, Kanak-da and Robi-da used to play Table-tennis on Manoranjan-da's (their brother's) dining table and would continue their game even when it was time for the meals. As a result, the meals



would be delayed. Manoranjan-da spoke about it to the Mother, Douce Mère. In France, Douce Mère used to play Tennis and knew about Table-Tennis. One of the brothers, Amiyo-da, asked the Mother if they could install a table in their house for the game. The Mother said, “Why not in Nanteuil? Then I can come and play too.”

The Mother asked Udar to make a table. The table was made in ‘Harpagon’, Udar’s workshop. Even the bats were made there. The bats the Mother used were made of plywood and had teakwood handles. Later the bats had rubber sheets on both sides. Still later, some bats made in England or France were presented to the Mother. The table was soon ready, and as per the Mother’s instruction it was kept in the northern verandah of ‘Nanteuil’, which is the house just opposite to the Playground. Once the table was in place, the Mother came to see the young men playing the game.

She liked the game and then on, every evening, at about 5.00 p.m., she came to Nanteuil by car. Pranab-da sat in front beside Pavitra-da who was at the wheel. The Mother sat in the back seat, accompanied by Chinmayee who sat on a small stool at the Mother’s feet. Pranab-da would go to the Playground to attend to the group activities, while the Mother with Chinmayee came to Nanteuil. Chinmayee would sit outside the hall while the Mother played. The Mother used to play in sari which was her evening attire. Some young men, good players all, Kanak Ganguly, Chandubhai, Arun Ganguli, Chandrakant and others would be present. She would ask them to play with her. These young men did not have routine physical activities like the other younger members. Many of them played only volley-ball. The Mother played also with others — Udar, Ali, Amiyo, Nirod-da, Kalyan-da, Robi Ganguli. She would stand on the western end of the table and the players would play with her from the other side. Spectators who gathered there would watch the game through the three high, broad doors which opened into the front courtyard, or, take their place in the hall on the south of the verandah where the Mother played.

Among the ladies, Sutapa (Piloo Vakharia), who had just joined the Ashram, was a National champion in mixed doubles. She was already an accomplished player and would be present during the Mother’s game. She too had a chance to play a few times with the Mother. Tehmi-ben, not a participant in this game, was once watching the Mother play and was taken aback when suddenly she was invited to play a game with the Mother! Tehmi-ben had played table-tennis way back in her college days!

Some of us, though novices, yet very enthusiastic about the game, would be present there before our regular physical education activities started, to watch the Mother play. Quite a few of us started picking up the game and progressed satisfactorily.

Amita remembers that once she had to play against Amiyo-da who had requested

the Mother to watch his first match of the League tournament. Naturally Amiyo-da won the game. But the Mother commented to Amita: “You placed some of your balls well.” Amita had scored the few points with these placings.

Here is an interesting episode about a French lady who always boasted that she was a very good player in her younger days and she looked down on us, the Indian girls, who according to her were not worthy of playing with her. Not only for this game, but in other fields of sports too, she said that she was a top-class achiever “in her younger days” when she was eighteen! One day the Mother asked Amita to be present during the Mother’s game. She had said that this lady would come. If the Mother found that this woman’s attitude towards the girls was better, then Mother would ask Amita to play. If the woman was still in her boasting mood, then the Mother would ask Robi to play. Finally, the Mother asked Robi to play and he beat her very easily. This lady was a doctor and taught hygiene in the School.

A little later, one more table was kept in Nanteuil. These two tables were reserved for the very good players.

Later on, a table was kept in the ground floor of ‘Michel’, a house on François Martin Street, where Sumitra, Suprabha and Rajsena-di with her three children lived. We started to play table-tennis on this table. Our regular playing hours began in the evening, after our Playground activities were over. We would get back home after our evening session in the group, have a light dinner and would then go for our games of table-tennis. From here, about 8 p.m., we would go to the Ashram building and wait for the Mother to come for the general meditation. My sister Amita and I wanted to do some extra practice to improve our game. When we asked the Mother for a coach she mentioned Chandubhai’s name. So every day I used to practise from 12 noon to 12-30 p.m. and Amita practised for the next half hour.

We had at that time received from our brother two table-tennis bats made in England and were very happy to use them.

Later still, as the number of players increased, another table was kept in ‘Fenêtre’, in Udar’s house. Some of us then played in this house. Each table had beside it a wooden box for bats and balls and a note book where each player wrote his or her name on his arrival to determine who would get to play next.

Amita remembers:

Some of us, Wilfy, Dayakar, Millie, Hriday and I, and may be one or two others, would continue playing even when most of the players had left. We invented a new version of the game and named it ‘triples’ where instead of two players there would be three on each side. We invented also ‘Rounders’ a game in which the players would stand around the table and one player sent the ball to the other side, immediately we went running round the table and any player who was in position to receive the ball would send it back to the other side. The ball had to be kept moving. That is how all who were present

would be in constant movement and would get a chance to hit the ball! How we enjoyed the last 10 minutes before the final closing time!

During the tournaments there used to be a keen competition between the players of the two houses!

Tournaments of singles, doubles, and mixed doubles were played. The Mother drew by lots the teams for mixed doubles. Each team played against her. The finals of all the tables were played on the 'second' table at Nanteuil in front of the Mother. In 1948 Maniben and Sutapa became the winners of the ladies doubles match and they had a chance to play with the Mother.

A table was kept in the School, this was meant for the younger students. In 1948 the Mother was once invited to see the final match of these children. Vijayendra, the winner of the match, remembers that the Mother had given him 2 balls that he still treasures as precious mementos.

Nirod-da remembers:

Table-Tennis had just been introduced in the Ashram. The Mother was taking part in it. I had also joined and was going for practice after my duty [*Nirod-da was one of the persons attending on Sri Aurobindo*]. She said to me, "It seems you play well: I would like to see how you play." The next day she saw and, on coming back, reported to Sri Aurobindo, "He plays quite well; he has a good promise."

(*The Mother — Sweetness and Light*, p. 79)

In Nanteuil a small wooden box, with accessories for the game used to be kept in the next hall, at the inter-connecting middle door. A cushion would be placed on this box for the Mother when she watched the games.

Ramakant Navelkar writes:

All the players to whom I spoke about the Mother's playing Table Tennis were of one opinion, they felt they were fortunate to have her Grace while playing with her in an atmosphere surcharged with Divine Joy. Those who watched these games also shared the same view.

(*Sport Spirit* Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 30)

Robi Ganguli shares his reminiscences with us:

During this period Sivaraman, the then Indian national champion, was invited to visit us and play some exhibition matches. He came to Pondicherry with his doubles partner, Panchapakesan. The Mother saw them play against our players. The first match was a doubles encounter between them and Kanak and Robi,

representing the Ashram. Kanak and Robi won the match. Then followed singles matches between Sivaraman and Kanak, and Panchapakesan and Amiyo. The visitors won the match but not easily. Sivaraman was impressed with the standard of our players and suggested that we participate in the national championships. Later Sivaraman visited the Ashram on two or three occasions, once with his mixed doubles partner Rukmani Devi. He was always helpful with his suggestions.

Chandarana of Bombay, another national champion, visited us several times. On one occasion, exhibition matches, were arranged at the Governor's house, where Chandarana played singles matches against Kanak and Robi. He won both the matches. However, during some practice sessions at Nanteuil, Kanak beat Chandarana several times.

Udar tells us:

In 1947 the Mother was nearly 70. To young M. Schumann (a young Frenchman, visiting Pondicherry), she seemed like a "great-great-grandmother".

After partaking of a frugal meal, she asked this politician whether he would like to play ping-pong, adding that she had heard that he played this game. The man was taken aback. He replied that he used to play it in his teens but had other things to do now. The Mother told him that it made no difference and swept him along. Running from one side of the table to the other, the "great-great-grandmother" beat the young man hollow.

We quote Udar again:

Those who played with her generally tried to return the ball well within her reach, in as easy a position as possible for her to hit it well. This required good control on their part and was of great value in their training, as the Mother herself commented one day.

She explained that the game was invented by the Chinese, who named it "ping-pong". It was then a very elegant game, usually played by the Mandarins. With beautiful gestures the Mother showed how the Chinese used to play it: first a Mandarin on one side hit the ball in such a way as to make it easy for the Mandarin on the other side to return it. This was 'ping'. The receiver then made a courtly bow and returned the ball in the same way: 'pong'. Then the first one bowed and returned it, and so on: a very courtly game indeed."

(Shyamkumari, *Beautiful Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, p. 60)

## THE MOTHER WATCHES CRICKET PLAYED BY OUR YOUNG MEN

On 16.2.47 at about 3.30 p.m. at the request of one of our cricket players, the Mother went to Sri Saravan's Football ground at Reddiarpalyam to watch our young men play cricket. She came back to Nanteuil at about 5 p.m. for her game of table-tennis.

## THE MOTHER STARTS COMING TO THE PLAYGROUND REGULARLY

From 17.4.1947, the Mother started to come to the Playground every day. She would come after her own game of table-tennis, and in later years, tennis, at 5.30 p.m. She left the ground at about 8.30 p.m. or sometimes even later. She had a very busy schedule here. A few of her activities were:

After coming to the Playground, she would first walk up to her small room on the southern side. There would be small groups of children all over the place doing some activity or other. On her way she sometimes stopped for a while in front of any one group and watched their activities for a few minutes. After entering her room she would soon come out and walk round the ground with a few lady inmates. She had sometimes played for a while some games with those around her. She took her French class here for the top grade of the school as also for younger children. Three days were fixed for teaching French to the little ones and another day for the next older group. She held interviews in the Playground. She was present for all the physical education competitions and for different programmes specially held on Darshan days in the Playground.

She would receive the salute of the groups during the march past before the regular Gymnastic Marching exercises performed by the elderly group of men. The ladies group could also participate in this activity. After that, she stood for the general concentration held at the end of group activities. It was a five to ten minutes silence when all the members stood in fixed formations in attention in front of the Mother. A meditation was held once a week when Ashram inmates and visitors would be present. She distributed toffees or groundnuts as *prasad* not only to the Group members but to everyone present in the Playground. There were many other activities like cinema shows, Christmas day celebrations which she attended. No wonder, she had hardly any time to herself for rest!

This small piece of land has even now an importance in the Ashram life, as it is hallowed by the physical presence of the Mother in the past.

On 9.12 1958 the Mother withdrew from all her external participation in the physical education programmes. . . . After 1958 and up to 1962, the Mother came to the Playground only on Darshan Days, went to the Sports Ground for

the rehearsal of the 2<sup>nd</sup> December programme and visited the Ashram Theatre to start the Christmas gifts distribution.

(*Sport Spirit* Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 10)

## SOME OF HER ACTIVITIES IN HER YOUNGER DAYS

Let us pause a little. How many of us know that in her younger days she was an enthusiastic and accomplished sportsperson? We have mentioned earlier her love for the game of croquet and her proficiency in it. Once, while watching the different groups performing their activities in the Playground, she commented to us that children could now participate in so many different types of physical activities, whereas during her younger days, skipping was the only activity for the girls. Do we not remember here her photograph with a skipping rope? In her younger days, the Mother not only pursued wholeheartedly painting, music, literature, science studies . . . she also participated in an entire range of them — dancing, jumping, games . . .

Sujata Nahar tells us:

Not only was Mirra a fast runner who easily outstripped her play-mates, but she was wonderful with a skipping rope, too.

One day I was skipping away all by myself when the Mother came and stood watching me. Becoming aware of her, I stopped. She then asked me, “How many times can you swing the rope in a complete circle in one jump?”

“Normally twice, Mother, at times thrice.”

She smiled, “Thrice? I did that normally. Generally I did four times. And with a little effort I could swing the rope five times in one jump.”

(*Mother's Chronicles*, Book One, p. 78)

In France she started playing tennis at a very young age.

Batti-da (Prabhakar) gives us some very interesting information.

Five of us young boys planned to walk to Gingee — 70 km away. This was the first time anyone from the Ashram had this idea . . . I asked the Mother. She was very enthusiastic. “Yes, yes — you must have good shoes,” of which we did not have any. The interesting part of the conversation . . . was something else. The Mother told me that she too had done some long distance walking in her youth. She said that she had walked . . . for 9 days over the Alps, from France to Switzerland! I have since heard that she has cycled all along the route taken by the ‘Tour de France’! That was our Mother mastering the Material Plane.

Pranab-da tells us:

The Mother once told me that she had gone round the whole of France on a cycle with some of her women-friends. They cycled through towns and villages and at sundown stopped to rest at some wayside inn. For courage, sustained effort, patience, mental strength and endurance, this enterprise of The Mother's was a great adventure indeed.

One evening, The Mother stopped with her friends in an inn. The room was dark. Her friends were sleeping unperturbed but the Mother was extremely alert. Late at night she noticed a black head silently peering through a gap in the door.

The Mother did not wake her friends so as not to frighten them. She called out in a hard and grave voice: "Who's there? Come out!"

There was such a power and intrepidity in that fearless voice that at once the scoundrel slipped out like a mouse in sheer fright.

*(I Remember..., p. 123)*

### ... AND LATER

Even here, we are told that when she settled in Pondicherry in 1920, she used to do exercises in the mornings regularly. Later on, we have seen her coming back from her game of tennis, walking fast taking a round of the Playground a number of times. She was above seventy then, whereas her young barely-thirty-year-old companions, the lady sadhikas, found it difficult to keep pace with Her. Pranab-da told us that when she stopped coming to the Playground regularly in 1958, she used to walk in her room for 30 minutes twice a day and after that, Pranab-da would make her do a few exercises. This programme continued till 1972.

### THE MOTHER PLAYS CROQUET

In 1947, croquet was one of the games we played in the Playground. Once, when the Mother came to the Playground she played a game of croquet with Minoo who was the champion in our previous annual meet. All of us stood around the area watching the Mother play. The next morning, when I went to her for my *pranam* in the Ashram as was our custom in those days to receive her blessings, she said, "You know, I was a good player in croquet. Nobody could beat me." Well, for me, it was nothing unusual. The Mother would naturally be always the best in everything. She looked at me again and said, "You know why?" She pointed at her stretched-out arm and said, "My arms are conscious. They know what is to be done." That was, I

think, too much of a mystery for me. What was she saying? For a moment, I just looked at her, bewildered. Then I blurted out, “What you say, *Ma*, sounds like a story to me.” “It is quite natural,” she said. “No one has as yet told you that the body can be conscious.”

True! — it was the first time I had heard that the body could be conscious. I just could not make out what it could be!

*(To be continued)*

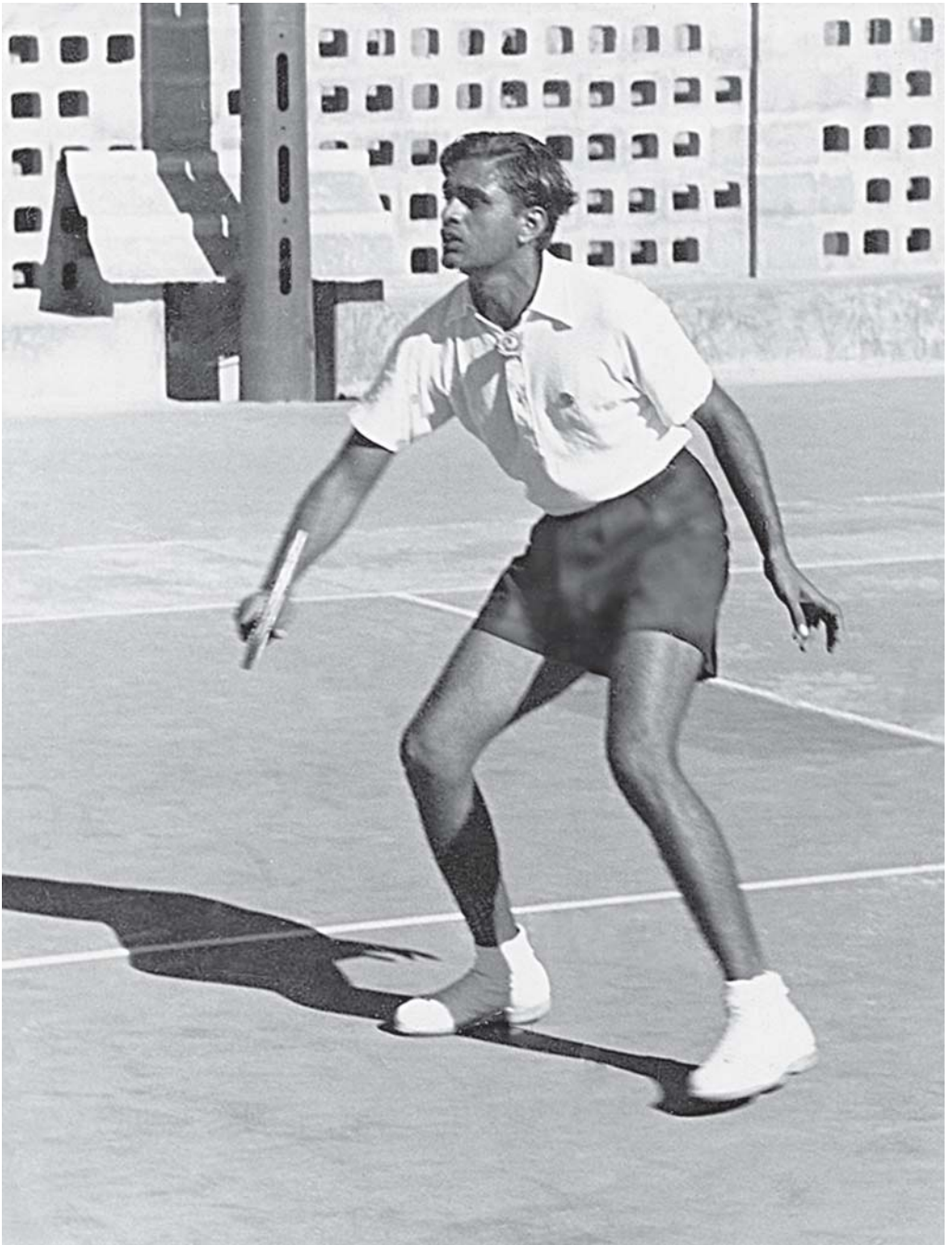
CHITRA SEN

*The heart, the will, the life and even the body, no less than the thought, are forms of a divine Conscious-Being and indices of great significance. These too have powers by which the soul can return to its complete self-awareness or means by which it can enjoy it. The object of the Supreme Will may well be a culmination in which the whole being is intended to receive its divine satisfaction, the heights enlightening the depths, the material Inconscient revealed to itself as the Divine by the touch of the supreme Superconscience.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p, 291)*





Chandubhai, coach for volley-ball and tennis





Girls playing volley-ball in the Playground



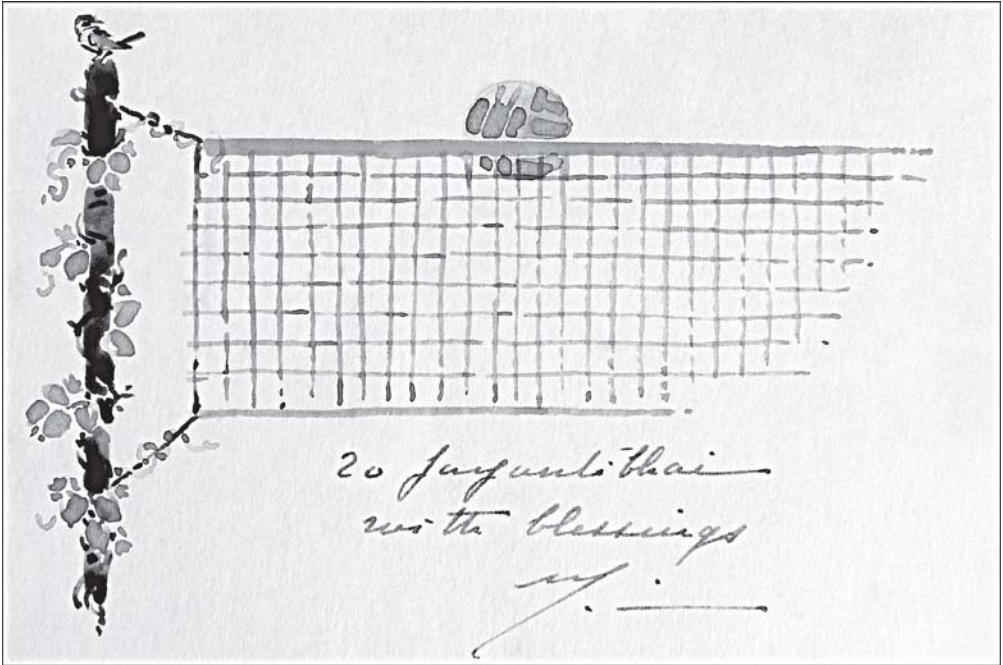
Girls playing a volley-ball match in the Volley-ball Ground





Silver badge distributed to the players by the Mother





Runner-up card hand painted by the artists

### CODE OF SPORTSMANSHIP

Keep the rules.  
 Keep faith with your comrade.  
 Keep your temper.  
 Keep yourself fit.  
 Keep a stout heart in defeat.  
 Keep your pride under in victory.  
 Keep a sound soul, a clean mind,  
     and a healthy body.  
 Play the game.

### A GOOD SPORTSMAN is courteous

ON THE FIELD he does not jeer  
 at errors; he does not cheer at the  
 opponent's defeat; he treats them as  
 guests, not enemies.

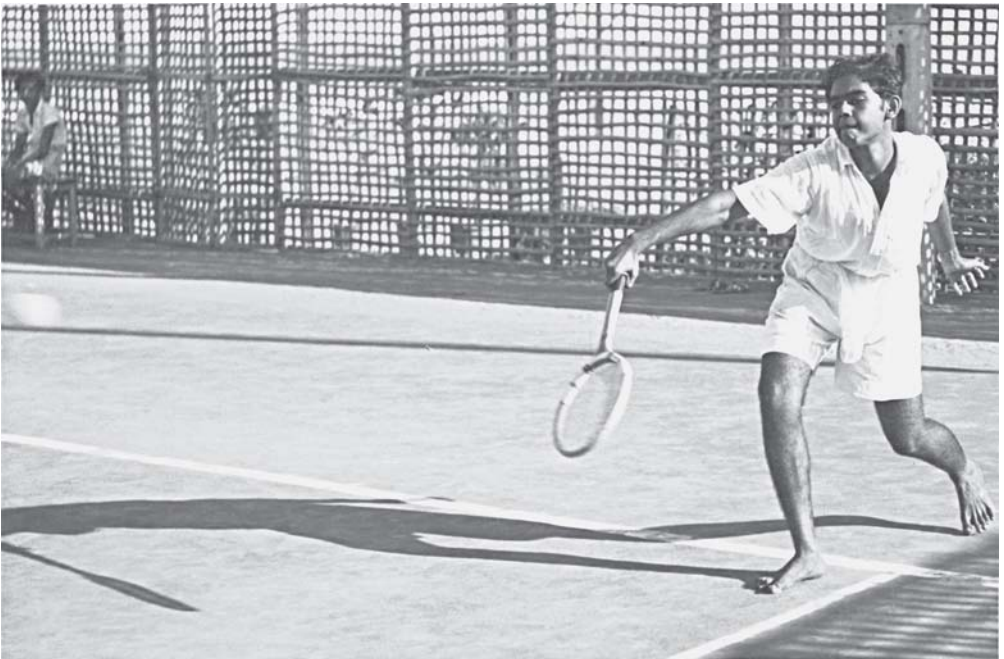
A page of the booklet, "Code of Sportsmanship"





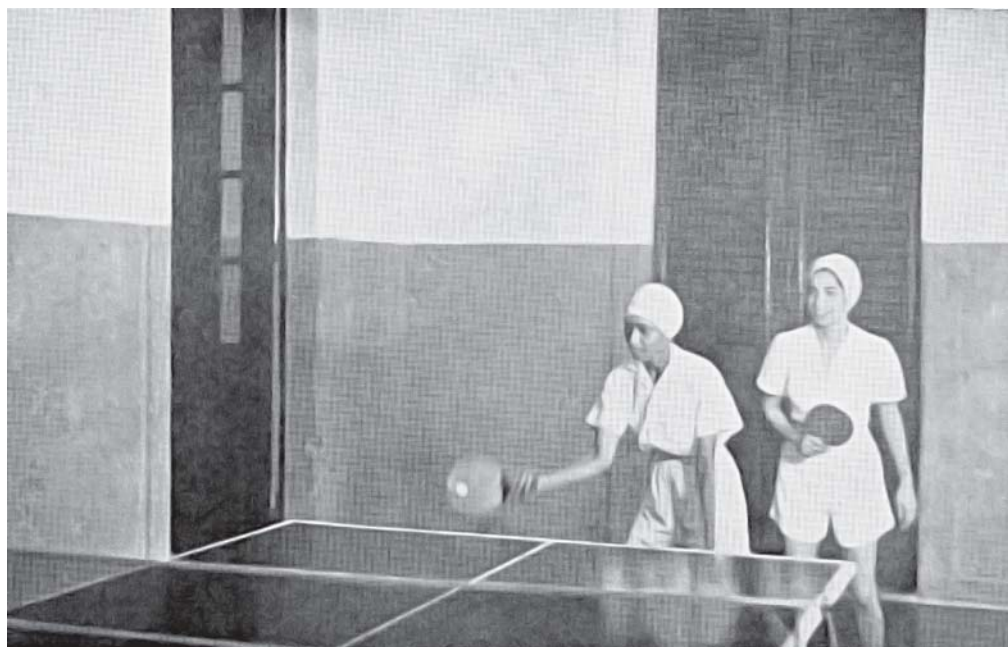


Table-tennis doubles Amiyo Ganguli and Kanak Ganguli



Robi Ganguli playing tennis





Winners in Ladies table-tennis doubles Maniben and Sutapa



1950 Table-tennis at Nanteuil — Amita





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