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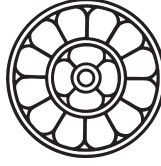
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIX

No. 11

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## URVASIE

*(Continued from the issue of October 2016)*

### CANTO II

But from the dawn and mountains Urvsie  
Went marvelling and glad, not as of old  
A careless beam; for an august constraint,  
Unfelt before, ruled her extravagant grace  
And wayward beauty; and familiar things  
Grew strange to her, and to her eyes came mists  
Of mortal vision. Love was with her there,  
But not of Paradise nor that great guest  
Perpetual who makes his golden couch  
Between the Opsara's ever-heaving breasts.  
For this was rapturous, troubled, self-absorbed,  
A gracious human presence which she loved,  
And wondered at, and hid deep in her heart.  
And whether in the immortal's dance she moved,  
A billow, or her fingers like sunbeams  
Brightened the harps of heaven, or going out  
With the white dawn to bathe in Swerga's streams,  
Or in the woods of Eden wandering,  
Or happy sitting under peaceful boughs  
In a great golden evening, all she did,  
Celestial occupations, all she thought  
And all she was, though still the same, had changed.  
There was a happy trouble in her ways  
And movements; her felicitous lashes drooped  
As with a burden; all her daily acts  
Were like a statue's imitating life,  
Not single-hearted like the sovran Gods.  
Now as the days of heaven went by in quiet  
And there was peaceful summer 'mid the Gods,  
In Swerga song increased and dances swayed  
In multitudinous beauty, jasmine-crowned;  
And often in high Indra's hall the spirits  
Immortal met to watch the shows divine

Of action and celestial theatre.  
 For not of earth alone are delicate arts  
 And noble imitations, but in heaven  
 Have their rich prototypes. So on that day  
 Before a divine audience there was staged  
 The Choice of Luxmie. Urvasie enacted  
 The goddess, Ocean's child, and Ménaca  
 Was Varunie, and other girls of heaven  
 Assembled the august desiring Gods.  
 Full strangely sweet those delicate mimics were;  
 Moonbeam faces imitated the strength  
 And silence of great spirits battle-worn,  
 And little hands the awful muniments  
 Of empire grasped and powers that shake the world.  
 Then with a golden wave of arm sublime  
 Ménaca towards the warlike consistory,  
 Under half-drooping lashes indicating  
 Where calm eternal Vishnu like a cloud  
 Sat discus-armed, said to her sister bright:  
 "Daughter of Ocean, sister, for whom heaven  
 Is passionate, thou hast reviewed the powers  
 Eternal and their dreadful beauty scanned,  
 And heard their blissful names. Say, unafraid  
 Before these listening faces, whom thou lovest  
 Above all Gods and more than earth and more  
 Than joy of Swerga's streams?" And Urvasie,  
 Musing with wide unseeing eyes, replied  
 In a far voice: "The King Pururavus."  
 Then, as a wind among the leaves, there swept  
 A gust of laughter through the assembled Gods,  
 A happy summer sound. But not in mirth  
 Bharuth, the mighty dramatist of heaven,  
 Passionate to see his smooth work marred and spell  
 Broken of scenic fancies finely-touched:  
 "Since thou hast brought the breath of mortal air  
 Into the pure solemnities of heaven,  
 And since thou givest up to other ends  
 Than the one need for which God made thee form,  
 Thy being and hast here transferred from earth  
 Human failure from the divided soul,  
 Marring my great creation, Urvasie,

I curse thee to possess thy heart's desire.  
Exiled from Swerga's streams and golden groves  
Thou, by terrestrial Ganges or on sad  
Majestic mountains or in troubled towns,  
Enjoy thy love, but hope not here to breathe  
Felicity in regions built for peace  
Of who, erect in their own nature, keep  
Living by fated toils the glorious world."  
He ceased and there was silence of the Gods.  
Then Indra answered, smiling, though ill-pleased:  
"Bharuth, not well nor by the fates allowed  
To exile without limit from the skies  
Who of the skies is part. Her wilt thou banish  
From the felicity of grove and stream,  
Making our Eden empty of her smiles?  
But what felicity in stream or grove  
And she not secret there? And hast thou taxed  
Her passion, yet in passion wouldst deface  
The beautiful world because thy work is vain?"  
Bharuth replied, the high poet severe:  
"Irrevocable is the doom pronounced  
Once by my lips. Fates too are born of song.  
But if of limit thou speakest and the term  
By nature fixed to the divorce of her  
From the felicity in which she moves,  
Nature that fixed the limit, still effects  
Inevitably its fated ends. For Fate,  
The dim great presence, is but nature made  
Irrevocable in its fruits. Let her  
To the pure banks of sacred Ganges wend.  
There she may keep her exile, from of old  
Intended for perfection of the earth  
Through her sweet change. Heaven too shall flash and grow  
Fairer with her returning feet though changed, —  
Though changed, yet lovelier from beneficence.  
For she will come soft with maternal cheeks  
And flushed from nuptial arms and human-blest  
With touches of the warm delightful earth."  
He said and Urvsie from the dumb place  
And thoughtful presence of the Gods departed  
Into the breezy noon of Swerga. Under

Green well-known boughs laden with nameless fruit  
And over blissful swards and perfect flowers  
And through the wandering alleys she arrived  
To heavenly Ganges where it streams o'er stones;  
There from the banks of summer downward stepped,  
One little golden hand gathering her dress  
Above her naked knees, and, lovely, passed  
Through the divine pellucid river on  
To Swerga's portals, pausing on the slope  
Which goes toward the world. There she looked down  
With yearning eyes far into endless space.  
Behind her stood the green felicitous peaks  
And trembling tops of woods and pulse of blue  
With those calm cloudless summits quivering.  
All heaven was behind her, but she sent  
No look to those eternal seats of joy.  
She down the sunbeams gazed where mountains rose  
In snow, the bleak and mighty hills of earth,  
And virgin forests vast, great infant streams  
And cities young in the heroic dawn  
Of history and insurgent human art  
Titanic on the old stupendous hills.  
Towards these she gazed down under eyelids glad.  
And to her gazing came Tilôttama,  
Bright out of heaven, and clasped her quiet hand  
And murmured softly, "Sister, let us go."  
Then they went down into the waiting world,  
The golden women, and through gorges mute  
Past Budricayshwur in the silent snow  
Came silent to Pururavus Urvasie.  
For not in Ilian streets Pururavus  
Sojourned, nor in the happy throng of men,  
But with the infinite and the lonely hills.  
For he grew weary of walls and luminous carved  
Imperial pillars bearing up huge weight  
Of architectural stone, and the long street,  
And thoughtful temple wide, and sharp cymbals  
Protecting the august pure place with sound;  
The battled tramp of men, sessions of kings,  
The lightning from sharp weapons, jubilant crash  
Of chariots, and the Veda's mighty chant;

The bright booths of the merchants, the loud looms  
And the smith's hammer clanging music out,  
And stalwart men driving the patient plow  
Indomitable in fierce breath of noon.  
Of these he now grew weary and the blaze  
Of kingship, its immense and iron toils,  
With one hand shielding in the people's ease,  
With one hand smiting back the tireless foe,  
And difficulty of equal justice cold,  
And kind beneficent works harmonious kept  
With terrible control; the father's face,  
The man's heart, the steeled intellect of power  
Insolubly one; and after sleepless nights  
Labouring greatly for a great reward,  
Frequent failure and vigorous success,  
And sweet reward of voices filial grown.  
These that were once his life, he loved no more.  
They held not his desire nor were alive,  
But pale magnificent ghosts out of the past  
With sad obsession closing him from warm  
Life and the future in far sunlight gold.  
For in his heart and in his musing eyes  
There was a light on the cold snows, a blush  
Upon the virgin quiet of the East  
And storm and slowly-lifting lids. Therefore  
He left the city Ilian and plains  
Whence with a mighty motion eastward flows  
Ganges, heroical and young, a swift  
Mother of strenuous nations, nor yet reaches  
Her musing age in ardent deep Bengal.  
He journeyed to the cold north and the hills  
Austere, past Budricayshwur ever north,  
Till, in the sixth month of his pilgrimage  
Uneasy, to a silent place he came  
Within a heaped enormous region piled  
With prone far-drifting hills, huge peaks o'erwhelmed  
Under the vast illimitable snows, —  
Snow on ravine, and snow on cliff, and snow  
Sweeping in strenuous outlines to heaven,  
With distant gleaming vales and turbulent rocks,  
Giant precipices black-hewn and bold



Daring the universal whiteness; last,  
A mystic gorge into some secret world.

He in that region waste and wonderful  
Sojourned, and morning-star and evening-star  
Shone over him and faded, and immense  
Darkness wrapped the hushed mountain solitudes  
And moonlight's brilliant muse and the cold stars  
And day upon the summits brightening.  
But ere day grew the hero nympholept  
Climbed the immortal summits towards the dawn  
And came with falling evening down and lay  
Watching the marvellous sky, but called not sleep  
That beat her gentle wings over his eyes,  
Nor food he needed who was grown a god.  
And in the seventh month of his waiting long  
Summit or cliff he climbed no more, but added  
To the surrounding hush sat motionless,  
Gazing towards the dim unfathomed gorge.  
Six days he sat and on the seventh they came  
Through the dumb gorge, a breath of heaven, a stir,  
Then Eden's girls stepping with moonbeam feet  
Over the barren rocks and dazzling snows,  
That grew less dazzling, their tresses half unbound  
And delicate raiment girdled enchantingly.  
Silent the perfect presences of heaven  
Came towards him and stood a little away,  
Like flowers waiting for a sunbeam. He  
Stirred not, but without voice, in vision merged,  
Sat, as one sleeping momentarily expects  
The end of a dear dream he sees, and knows  
It is a dream, and quietly resigned  
Waits for the fragile bliss to break or fade.  
Then nearer drew divine Tilôttama  
And stood before his silence statuesque,  
Holding her sister's hand; for she hung back,  
Not as an earthly maiden, cheeks suffused,  
Lids drooping, but as men from patience called  
Before supreme felicity hang back,  
A little awed, a little doubtful, fearing  
To enter radiant Paradise, so bright

It seems; thus she and quailed before her bliss.  
But her sister, extending one bright arm:  
“Pururavus, thou hast conquered and I bring  
No dream into thy life, but Urvasie.”  
And at that name the strong Pururavus  
Rose swaying to his feet like one struck blind;  
Or when a great thought flashes through his brain,  
A poet starts up and almost cries aloud  
As at a voice, — so he arose and heard.  
And slowly said divine Tilôttama:  
“Yet, son of Ila, one is man and other  
The Opsaras of heaven, daughters of the sea,  
Unlimited in being, Ocean-like.  
They not to one lord yield nor in one face  
Limit the universe, but like sweet air,  
Water unowned and beautiful common light  
In unrestrained surrender remain pure.  
In patient paths of Nature upon earth  
And over all the toiling stars we fill  
With sacred passion large high-venturing spirits  
And visit them with bliss; so are they moved  
To immense creative anguish, glad if through  
Heart-breaking toil once in bare seasons dawn  
Our golden breasts between their hands or rush  
Our passionate presence on them like a wave.  
In heaven bright-limbed with bodily embrace  
We clasp the Gods, and clasp the souls of men,  
And know with winds and flowers liberty.  
But what hast thou with us or winds or flowers?  
O thou who wast so white, wilt thou not keep  
Thy pure and lonely eminence and move  
For ever towards morning like a star?  
Or as thy earthly Ganges rolling down  
Between the homes and passionate deeds of men,  
And bearing many boats and white with oars,  
From all that life quite separate, only lives  
Towards Ocean, so thou doest human work,  
Making a mighty nation, doing high  
And necessary deeds, but, all untouched  
By action, livest in thy soul apart  
And to the immortal zenith climbest pure.”

But he, blind as from dazzling dreams, said low:  
 "One I thought spoke far-off of purity  
 And whiteness and the human soul in God.  
 These things were with me once, but now I see  
 The Spring a golden child and shaken fields.  
 All beautiful things draw near and come to me.  
 I dream upon a woman's glorious breasts,  
 And watch the dew-drop and am glad with birds,  
 And love the perfect coilings of the snake,  
 And cry with fire in the burning trees,  
 And am a wave towards desired shores.  
 I move to these and move towards her bosom  
 And mystic eyes where all these are one dream.  
 And what shall God profit me or his glory,  
 Who love one small face more than all his worlds?"  
 He woke with his own voice. His words that first  
 Dreamed like a languid wave, sudden were foam;  
 And he beheld her standing and his look  
 Grew strong; he yearned towards her like a wave,  
 And she received him in her eyes as earth  
 Receives the rain. Then bright Tilôttama  
 Cried in a shining glory over them:  
 "O happy lover and O fortunate loved,  
 Who make love heavenlier by loss! Ah yet,  
 The Gods give no irrecoverable gifts,  
 Nor unconditioned, O Pururavus,  
 Is highest bliss even to most favoured men.  
 And thy deep joy must tremble o'er her with soul  
 On guard, all overshadowed by a fear.  
 For one year thou shalt know her on the peaks,  
 In solitary vastnesses of hills  
 And regions snow-besieged; and for one year  
 In the green forests populous and free  
 Life in sunlight and by delightful streams  
 Thou shalt enjoy her; and for one year where  
 The busy tramp of men goes ceaseless by,  
 Subduing her to lovely human cares:  
 And so long after as one law observed  
 Save her to thee, O King; for never man  
 With Opsara may dwell and both be known:  
 Either a rapture she invisible

Or he a mystic body and mystic soul.  
 Reveal not then thy being naked to hers,  
 O virgin Ila's son, nor suffer ever  
 Light round thy body naked to her eyes,  
 Lest day dawn not on thy felicity,  
 Sole among men." She left them, shining up  
 Into the sunlight, and was lost in noon.  
 And King Pururavus stood for a space,  
 Like the entrancèd calm before great winds  
 And thunder. Then through all his limbs there flashed  
 Youth and the beauty and the warmth of earth  
 And joy of her left lonely to his will.  
 He moved, he came towards her. She, a leaf  
 Before a gust among the nearing trees,  
 Cowered. But, all a sea of mighty joy  
 Rushing and swallowing up the golden sand,  
 With a great cry and glad Pururavus  
 Seized her and caught her to his bosom thrilled,  
 Clinging and shuddering. All her wonderful hair  
 Loosened and the wind seized and bore it streaming  
 Over the shoulder of Pururavus  
 And on his cheek a softness. She, o'erborne,  
 Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay,  
 Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail,  
 Her naked arms clasping his neck, her cheek  
 And golden throat averted, and wide trouble  
 In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss.  
 Amid her wind-blown hair their faces met.  
 With her sweet limbs all his, feeling her breasts  
 Tumultuous up against his beating heart,  
 He kissed the glorious mouth of heaven's desire.  
 So clung they as two shipwrecked in a surge.  
 Then strong Pururavus, with godlike eyes  
 Mastering hers, cried tremulous: "O beloved,  
 O miser of thy rich and happy voice,  
 One word, one word to tell me that thou lovest."  
 And Urvasie, all broken on his bosom,  
 Her godhead in his passion lost, moaned out  
 From her imprisoned breasts, "My lord, my love!"

SRI AUROBINDO

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

*(Continued from the issue of October 2016)*

## **PART FOUR THE FUNDAMENTAL REALISATIONS OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA**

### **SECTION TWO THE PSYCHIC OPENING, EMERGENCE AND TRANSFORMATION**

#### **Chapter Two The Psychic Opening**

##### **The Meaning of Psychic Opening**

The psychic in the ignorant human being is always behind a veil and can act on the mind or vital but not in its own power, for that is limited and obscured by the instruments. A psychic opening means the removal of the veil and the increasingly direct action of the psychic.

\*

The present nature is ignorant and full of wrong actions and reactions. But there is a being within you, the psychic, which answers to the Truth and not to the Ignorance. If one turns to the Divine and becomes open, then this psychic being shows itself and gives to the nature the true thoughts, feelings, will, action. This is the first change to be made.

\*

What you feel is the true psychic opening and it is that for which you should always aspire and reject other things until it becomes your normal base of consciousness. Once that is there, it is possible to call down through it a strength from above which will make the vital strong and remove the weakness. Your sadhana is still too mental and therefore difficult and slow; it is the psychic opening that makes a more satisfying and rapid progress possible.

\*

It does not matter if strenuous meditation leads to experiences or not. Remember what I told you that it is the psychic growth and not experiences that are the road for you just now. That means three things — 1st, the drawing back from the vital ego and its perturbations to a quiet attitude of faith and surrender; 2nd, the growth of something within that sees what is to be changed in the nature and gives the impulse to change it; 3rd, the psychic feeling in sadhana which presses towards the growth of bhakti, feels it a joy simply to think, feel, write, speak of, remember the Divine, grows full of a quiet self-upliftment towards the Divine and lives in that more than in outward things. When the consciousness is full of these things altogether, i.e. when there is the full psychic state or opening, then experiences begin to come of themselves. The first two at least had started of themselves in you — let them grow and the third should necessarily follow. The psychic opening first, the higher consciousness and its experiences afterwards.

\*

What you desire about the self-giving free from demand is sure to fulfil itself when there is the full opening of the psychic.

\*

X has been always like that. It is the activity of his mind which is very restless; sometimes he gets a psychic opening and is all right, then the mind comes across and he becomes confused and miserable. Going away will not cure him; “thinking over things” will only make him more confused and lost. He is a man who can be rescued from all that only by a complete and permanent psychic opening, through the heart not the mind.

### **Conditions for the Psychic Opening**

It is good that you go back from this struggle towards the quiet foundation that helps the opening. All this struggling and confusion and harassing self-depreciation is the old wrong way of proceeding; it is mental and vital and cannot succeed; it is in the quiet mind that the opening must come. Then the psychic being, the soul in you, begins to come forward. The soul knows and sees the Truth; the mind and vital do not — until they are enlightened by the soul’s knowledge.

\*

Then only can the psychic being fully open when the sadhaka has got rid of the mixture of vital motives with his sadhana and is capable of a simple and sincere self-offering to the Mother. If there is any kind of egoistic turn or insincerity of motive, if the Yoga is done under a pressure of vital demands, or partly or wholly to satisfy some spiritual or other ambition, pride, vanity or seeking after power, position or influence over others or with any push towards satisfying any vital desire with the help of the Yogic force, then the psychic cannot open, or opens only partially or only at times and shuts again because it is veiled by the vital activities; the psychic fire fails in the strangling vital smoke. Also, if the mind takes the leading part in the Yoga and puts the inner soul into the background, or, if the bhakti or other movements of the sadhana take more of a vital than of a psychic form, there is the same inability. Purity, simple sincerity and the capacity of an unegoistic unmingled self-offering without pretension or demand are the conditions of an entire opening of the psychic being.

\*

If desire is rejected and no longer governs the thought, feeling or action and there is the steady aspiration of an entirely sincere self-giving, the psychic usually after a time opens of itself.

### An Experience of Psychic Opening

It was certainly an experience and as X very accurately described it an experience of great value, a psychic experience par excellence. A feeling of velvety softness within — an *ineffable plasticity within* is a psychic experience and can be nothing else. It means a modification of the substance of the consciousness especially in the vital emotional part, and such a modification prolonged or repeated till it became permanent would mean a great step in what I call the psychic transformation of the being. It is just these modifications in the inner substance that make transformation possible. Farther, it was a modification that made a beginning of knowledge possible — for by knowledge we mean in Yoga not thought or ideas about spiritual things but psychic understanding from within and spiritual illumination from above. Therefore the first result was this feeling “that there was no ignominy in not understanding it, that the true understanding would come only when one realised that one was completely impotent”. This was itself a beginning of true understanding, a psychic understanding, something felt within which sheds a light or brings up a spiritual truth that mere thinking would not have given, also a truth that is effective bringing both the enlightenment and solace you needed — for what the psychic being brings with it always is light and happiness, an inner understanding and relief and solace.

Another very promising aspect of this experience is that it came as an immediate response to an appeal to the Divine. You asked for the understanding and the way out and at once Krishna showed you both — the way out was the change of the consciousness within, the plasticity which makes the knowledge possible and also the understanding of the condition of mind and vital in which the true knowledge or power of knowledge could come. For the inner knowledge comes from within and above (whether from the Divine in the heart or from the Self above) and for it to come the pride of the mind and vital in the surface mental ideas and their insistence on them must go. One must know that one is ignorant before one can begin to know. This shows that I was not wrong in pressing for the psychic opening as the only way out. For as the psychic opens, such responses and much more also become common and the inner change also proceeds by which they are made possible.

\*

What was meant [*by “plasticity within”*], I suppose, was the psychic plasticity which makes surrender possible along with a free openness to the Divine working from above — plasticity within as opposed to the rigidity which insists on maintaining one’s own ideas, feelings, habitual ways of consciousness as opposed to the higher things from above or from the psychic within.

### **The Psychic Opening and the Inner Centres**

There is no doubt that the inner being and the psychic in you are opening and that the psychic is influencing all including the physical centre.

As to the centres. The psychic is placed behind the heart-lotus, the centre of the emotional being, the Anahata chakra — it is therefore the opening of the Anahata that is most important for the unveiling of the psychic. The Manipura (navel centre) and the Swadhisthana below it are the seats of the vital being, the Muladhara is the seat of the physical. The opening of the Manipura gives one the free play of the inner vital consciousness and it is very helpful, no doubt, for the influence of the psychic on the vital, but it is not the direct or first condition of the psychic opening itself. But so also the opening of the higher centres is helpful for the influence of the psychic on the mental being. All the centres have to open, because otherwise the inner consciousness is not opened out and liberated to its full working in all its parts.

There is however no invariable rule as to the order of the opening. By concentration on the heart centre that can open first liberating the psychic action, which is veiled by the emotional, into free play. In many there is first some opening of the vital centre and for a long time there is an abundant but unpurified play of



experiences on the vital plane. In the Tantric discipline there is a process of opening all the centres from the Muladhara upward. In our Yoga very often the Power descends from above and opens the Ajnachakra first, then the others in order. But it is perhaps the safest to open by concentration the heart-lotus first so as to have the psychic influence from the beginning.

The psychic cannot lose its consciousness in the enjoyment of experiences; when it is in free action, it has the unfailing discrimination of which you speak. It has besides no push to outward enjoyment, though it has Ananda. It is the vital that is carried away by enjoyment and carries away with it the mind and other lower parts — and it can also cover up the psychic; but then what happens is not that the psychic loses its own consciousness, which is impossible, but that the sadhak loses for the time being the full possession of the psychic consciousness. But it can always be recovered by a rectification of the wrong movement. But if one lives firmly in the psychic, there is not much danger of this aberration. What one must not do is to throw oneself out into the mind and vital; one must live within and from there command one's experience.

### **“Opening” and “Coming in Front”**

In using the expression “opening of the psychic” I was thinking not of an ordinary psychic opening producing some amount of psychic (as opposed to vital) love and bhakti, but of what is called the coming in front of the psychic. When that happens one is aware of the psychic being with its simple spontaneous self-giving and feels its increasing direct control (not merely a veiled or half-veiled influence) over mind, vital and physical. Especially there is the psychic discernment which at once lights up the thoughts, emotional movements, vital pushes, physical habits and leaves nothing there obscure, substituting the right movements for the wrong ones. It is this that is difficult and rare, more often the discernment is mental and it is the mind that tries to put all in order. In that case, it is the descent of the higher consciousness through the mind that opens the psychic, instead of the psychic opening directly.

\*

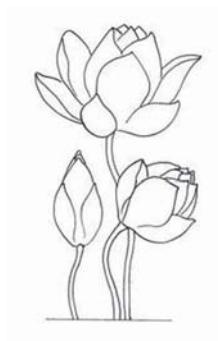
Nobody said it [*the opening of the psychic*] must be done necessarily from above. Naturally it is done direct and is most effective then. But when it is found difficult to do direct, as it is in certain natures, then the change begins from above, and the consciousness descending from there has to liberate the heart centre. As it acts on the heart centre, the psychic action becomes more possible.

\*

The direct opening of the psychic centre is easy only when the ego-centricity is greatly diminished and also if there is a strong bhakti for the Mother. A spiritual humility and sense of submission and dependence is necessary.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Letters on Yoga – III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 347-53)*



## ‘I SEE THEE, I AM THYSELF . . .’

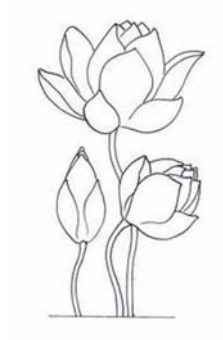
**May 21, 1914**

Outside all manifestation, in the immutable silence of Eternity, I am in Thee, O Lord, an unmoving beatitude. In that which, out of Thy puissance and marvellous light, forms the centre and reality of the atoms of matter I find Thee; thus without going out of Thy Presence I can disappear in Thy supreme consciousness or see Thee in the radiant particles of my being. And for the moment that is the plenitude of Thy life and Thy illumination.

I see Thee, I am Thyself, and between these two poles my intense love aspires towards Thee.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 150)*



## TO CHOOSE THE TRUTH

*What is the Truth? What do you mean when you speak of “the Truth”?*

You want a mental definition of the Truth. The Truth cannot be expressed in mental terms. Yes, it is so. And all the questions put are mental questions.

The Truth cannot be formulated, it cannot be defined — it is to be *lived*.

And one who is wholly consecrated to the Truth, who wants to live the Truth, serve the Truth, will know at each moment what must be done: it will be a kind of intuition or revelation (most often without words, but sometimes also expressed in words) which will make you know at every minute what is the truth of that minute. And it is this that is so interesting. You want to know “the Truth” as a thing well defined, well classified, well established, and after that you are at rest: there is no need to seek any more! You take it up, you say: “Here, this is the Truth” and then it is fixed. This is what all the religions have done. They have established their truth as a dogma. But it is not the Truth any more.

The Truth is something living, moving, expressing itself at each second, and it is *one* way of approaching the Supreme. Each one has his way of approaching the Supreme. There are perhaps some who are able to approach him from all sides at the same time, but there are those who approach through Love, those who approach through Power, those who approach through Consciousness and those who approach through Truth. But each of these aspects is as absolute, imperative and undefinable as the supreme Lord himself is. The supreme Lord is absolute, imperative and undefinable, unseizable in his action, and his attributes have this same quality.

Once one knows this, he who puts himself at the service of one of these aspects will know (it is expressed in life, in time, in the movement of time), will know at each moment what Truth is, and will know at each moment what Consciousness is, and will know at each minute what Power is, and he will know at each minute what Love is. And it is a multiform Power, Love, Consciousness, Truth that expresses itself innumerable in the manifestation, even as the Lord expresses himself innumerable in the manifestation.

24 December 1966

THE MOTHER

*(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 396-97)*

## **SRI AUROBINDO'S WORK AND THE WAY TO ITS FULFILMENT**

### **A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF NOVEMBER 17, 1973**

Sri Aurobindo left his body on December 5, 1950. The Mother departed from hers on November 17, 1973. But the Ashram which they founded is aware of their presence all the time. The Samadhi in the courtyard of the main Ashram-building — holding the physical remains of both these mighty pioneers of a new world — is a living power. All who have stood before it have known a Light and a Love ready to respond to their prayers and aspirations. A giant Grace breathes out from this simple flower-laden incense-haunted monument of peace. Our hearts feel suffused with the promise of that fourfold state of fulfilled being which Sri Aurobindo has summed up in a master-mantra:

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,  
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,  
An unwall'd mind dissolved in the Infinite,  
Force one with unimaginable rest.<sup>1</sup>

It was to embody such a state in its entirety that the Mother carried on the work of Sri Aurobindo after he had sacrificed, as she has declared, his own physical transformation in order to hasten the divine destiny of the world. As a result of the exhaustion of the forces of Darkness in his willingly accepted “death”, he sought for his companion, the Mother, an easier passage in the future to the goal of his Integral Yoga. And, through the Mother’s physical transformation, the path was to be cleared for the race to evolve from humanity to supermanhood. Sri Aurobindo meant to concentrate in his co-worker the achievement of his victory in the time to come.

The first step towards this victory was the permanent establishment, in the Mother’s most outward self, of that phase of the supramental consciousness which he had called the Mind of Light. And that establishment was a prelude to the progressive illumination, which she subsequently described, of the subtle consciousness within the very cells of the body. But when this illumination had reached — if we may judge from her *Notes on the Way* — a stage preparatory to a radical reversal of

the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to,

there took place on the contrary what appeared to be a radical reversal of the entire course of the Yoga. The Mother abandoned the physical frame she had used for ninety-five years in the cause of the Divine's manifestation on earth.

What are we to make of this act of leave-taking by one whom we expected to complete the Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation? And how are we to envisage the shape of the future?

One thing may be immediately said. All the energies the Mother had to spend on her body in the enormous uphill fight for Matter's divinisation have been set free. They are turned now to a general impact on individuals and groups everywhere. Increasingly they are felt as a new cosmic impetus bearing mankind over hurdle after hurdle thrown in its path by agencies mundane and preternatural. Individuals also have known a vast Care bearing them easily along with a strength that is at the same time a sweetness.

But this is one side of the situation. As against the advantage of a greater impact on a universal scale, there is the absence of a *pou sto*, a fulcrumlike poise on hard earth to move its downward gravitating nature to finer intensities. The focus of divine consciousness held within a human face and form, with a recognisable receptiveness to our calls and a sunshine-smile for every agonised grope of our beings, is missed. And, when we realise that the Mother's body which had kept the now-freed energies busy with its maintenance was precisely the fiery point at which a divine future for the very substance of earth-man was being moulded, we cannot help looking anxiously for sign-posts and guide-lines.

## 1

On November 17, 1973, when the Mother withdrew from her body, the question could not but arise: "Is her work fated to remain incomplete?" If any doubt could be entertained of Sri Aurobindo's project of complete success, the idea of incompleteness would be out of place and the perplexed mind might find comfort. But how would we reconcile such comfort with the drive of numberless pronouncements by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? Two brief expressions by Sri Aurobindo of their fundamental goal may be quoted to speak for all.

A letter on January 14, 1932, has the phrase: ". . . I want to divinise the human consciousness, to bring down the Supramental, the Truth-Consciousness, the Light, the Force into the physical to transform it . . ."<sup>2</sup> The same letter goes on to say: "All other Yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental Yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object. The Supramental is simply the Truth-Consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter."<sup>3</sup> Here Sri Aurobindo's aim is the Supermind's descent and the process of this descent finally achieves the total transformation of

the “physical”. That will be the crowning stage of Sri Aurobindo’s action and the Divine’s manifestation.

Again, Sri Aurobindo’s letter of September 15, 1935, which couples the Mother with him by name, says: “What is being done is meant to prepare the manifestation of the Supermind on the earth consciousness down to Matter itself, so it can’t be for the physical of myself or the Mother alone.”<sup>4</sup>

This short declaration implies three basic points: (1) Not only the higher parts of the earth-consciousness but “Matter itself” is to hold the Supermind’s manifestation; (2) Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who are trying in 1935 to bring about this manifestation are to exemplify it in their “physical”; (3) they would not be “alone” in that achievement: others too should succeed by their help.

No doubt, the “physical” of the Mother as well as that of Sri Aurobindo has been given up short of total transformation. But is real failure at all possible? The answer is “No.”

What else can the answer be in the face of such words as Sri Aurobindo employed on October 19, 1946, when conditions in India looked very unfavourable? — “. . . I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God’s victory. I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world — I am not speaking of personal things — which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster.”<sup>5</sup>

Then there is the letter of April 4, 1950, to a disciple “badly upset” with his “sense of the present darkness in the world round us”. Sri Aurobindo writes: “For myself, the dark conditions do not discourage me or convince me of the vanity of my will ‘to help the world’, for I knew they had to come; they were there in the world-nature and had to rise up so that they might be exhausted or expelled . . . Afterwards the work for the Divine will become more possible and it may well be that the dream, if it is a dream, of leading the world towards the spiritual light, may even become a reality. So I am not disposed even now, in these dark conditions, to consider my will to help the world as condemned to failure.”<sup>6</sup>

We may remember that this letter was penned at almost the time when Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were aware that one of them had to give up the body in the interests of their work and he had decided that he would go and she would stay for its completion.<sup>7</sup>

Even apart from our faith in such direct references by Sri Aurobindo to his own mission, we may dismiss the idea of failure on the basis of our insight into the nature of the Avatarhood we ascribe to him and the Mother.

Generally speaking, in the case of Avatars of any type, real failure cannot be thought of, whatever the surface appearances. Has not Sri Aurobindo exclaimed: “Why should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all his operations? What if

failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate purpose? What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine!"<sup>8</sup> If the Divine's (that is, the Avatar's) ultimate purpose is served, the failure which helps it cannot be regarded as a real one. A real failure is the frustration of one's avowed ultimate purpose. The Avatar comes to establish a certain stage in the earth's evolution and always fulfils his mission in the mode intended by the Divinity that he is. To quote Sri Aurobindo again: "The Divinity acts according to another consciousness, the consciousness of the Truth above and the Lila below and It acts according to the need of the Lila, not according to man's ideas of what It should or should not do. This is the first thing one must grasp, otherwise one can understand nothing about the manifestation of the Divine."<sup>9</sup>

The same view Sri Aurobindo expresses elsewhere also. According to it, the Divine Consciousness of the Avatar, concerned as it is with only two things fundamentally — ". . . the truth above and here below the Lila and the purpose of the incarnation or manifestation" — does "what is necessary" for them "in the way its greater than human consciousness sees to be the necessary and intended way."<sup>10</sup>

Now, if real failure is out of the question for all Avatars, how much less can it be conceived in connection with the incarnate Supermind? The Supermind, unlike even the highest Overmind consciousness like Sri Krishna's, is the Transcendent not acting indirectly as in Sri Krishna through the supreme grade of the Cosmic Divine, but acting directly, with all the power of the more-than-cosmic level, however self-veiled and self-limited for the necessities of the World-play. So to believe that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not succeed and that their plan to supramentalise their own "physical" went quite astray is to entertain a sheer anomaly. Simultaneously, we have to come to grips with the fact that they have shed their bodies and thereby made a straight interpretation of their aim unrealistic. But, before doing so, let us further underline the situation in which we are placed by our argument. We cannot deny Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the full possibility to do what they set out to accomplish.

In Sri Aurobindo's letters we have even a few open clues to the unfailing character of the power brought by the Supramental Avatar. A question was put to him in 1935: "It seems to me that if the Supermind is not established in Mother's body-consciousness, it is not because she is not ready for it like us, but because in order to establish it she has first to prepare the physical of the Sadhaks and of the earth to a certain extent. But some people take it in the wrong way; they believe that the Supermind has not been established in her body because she has not yet reached perfection. Am I right?" Sri Aurobindo answered: "Certainly. If we had lived physically in the Supermind from the beginning nobody could have been able to approach us nor could any Sadhana have been done. There could have been no hope of contact between ourselves and the earth and men. Even as it is, Mother has to come down towards the lower consciousness of the Sadhaks instead of keeping always in her own, otherwise they begin to say, 'How far away, how severe you



were; you do not love me, I get no help from you, etc., etc.’ The Divine has to veil himself in order to meet the human.”<sup>11</sup>

Here Sri Aurobindo, speaking of living physically in the Supermind from the beginning, affirms that from the beginning the Mother and he could have had not just a completely divinised consciousness but also a completely divinised bodily existence. To “live” is to be more than merely conscious: it is an organic activity, and when one adds the adverb “physically” one brings in a realisation in terms of the matter composing the organism. Moreover, just to have the physicalised mind or the physicalised life-force turned supramental would not render Sri Aurobindo and the Mother unapproachable or any sadhana impossible to do. As long as some part of the physical being — namely, the material constitution of the body — remained unsupramentalised, a point of contact with Sri Aurobindo and with the Mother would be there for people, and the two Gurus’ sadhana of this part’s supramentalisation would give people an opportunity to do some sadhana of their own along with the still unperfected Gurus. Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s capacity of living physically in the Supermind from the start must signify nothing short of their capacity of having a bodily existence divinised to the full.

Further, in saying “Certainly” to the correspondent Sri Aurobindo has concurred with the latter’s opinion that there never was any question of the Mother’s not being ready for the Supermind’s establishment in her body-consciousness or of her body not attaining the perfection necessary for the establishment of the Supermind in it. This means that complete success in their present lives was always within the reach of the Mother and, by the same token, that of Sri Aurobindo himself. Hence failure, in the essential sense, could never be anticipated for either of them.

What actually happened may be guessed from another point covered by Sri Aurobindo’s “Certainly”. The correspondent has opined that the reason why the Mother’s body had not been divinised by the time he wrote his letter was that “the physical of the Sadhaks and of the earth” had not yet been prepared to the needed extent. This point comes out very clearly in a statement of Sri Aurobindo’s in August 1936 on the spiritual fight upon the physical plane: “As for the question about the illness, perfection in the physical plane is indeed part of the ideal of the Yoga, but it is the last item and, so long as the fundamental change has not been made in the material consciousness to which the body belongs, one may have a certain perfection on other planes without having immunity in the body. We have not sought perfection for our own separate sake, but as part of a general change — creating a possibility of perfection for others. That could not have been done without our accepting and facing the difficulties of the realisation and transformation and overcoming them for ourselves. It has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes — but not yet on the most material part of the physical plane. Till it is done, the fight there continues and, though there may be and is a force of Yogic action and defence, there cannot be immunity. The Mother’s difficulties are not her own; she bears the

difficulties of others and those that are inherent in the general action and working for the transformation. If it had been otherwise, it would be a very different matter.”<sup>12</sup>

The implications are clear. If the Mother did not drag with her the whole world's difficulties in opening up the most material part of the physical plane, if she did not have to tackle the whole earth-consciousness's resistance to the transformative action and working, she would achieve her own supramentalisation, her body would be divinised and she would be yogically perfect and the Aurobindonian goal would be compassed *in toto*. There could be no possibility of failure for her and for Sri Aurobindo in themselves: their own personal success was a certainty. The evolutive process, without which no terrestrial achievement can be permanent and grow in expression of the terrestrial plane's Dharma, is bound to take time but the time required for instruments like Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would be fairly short. Their supramentalisation, even if evolutively stretched out, would show in its history something of “what men would regard as a miraculous intervention”, an amazing rapidity of movement which would come, as Sri Aurobindo has said, “if the human mind were more flexible and less attached to its ignorance than it is.”<sup>13</sup> In any case, there could be no in-built chance of failure for her and him if they sought supramental perfection for their own separate sake: rather there would be an automatic success.

But they did not seek this perfection like that — and there was the rub. Yet it was not such a rub as might lead to failure: it could only lead to a host of difficulties and sufferings and illnesses in the course of an earth-representative sadhana whose final fruit would be a success holding out the promise of transformation to all mankind. Carrying within themselves the power to live physically in the Supermind from the beginning and having the ability to be perfectly ready for divinisation of their bodies, they must be expected to have power enough to establish the Supermind in their physical beings in spite of all obstructions accepted from others and from the general earth-conditions. The obstructions might even create an early period during which Sri Aurobindo would not be sure whether he would succeed: evolutionary Avatars have to pass through all human phases. But, however evolutionary, these were Avatars — and Supramental Avatars at that. Consequently, a time must come when Sri Aurobindo would go past possibility and even probability and reach practical certainty and the luminous dominating sense of achievement in the near future. Thus on December 25, 1934 he writes:

“I know with absolute certitude that the supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable. The question is as to the when and the how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid a rather grim clash of conflicting forces. For in the terrestrial world the predetermined result is hidden and what we see is a whirl of possibilities and forces attempting to achieve something with the destiny of it all concealed from human eyes. This is, however, certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now. That is the situation. My faith and will are for the now.”<sup>14</sup>

Granting the non-failing supramental power in operation through its two chosen emanations who came, as this letter shows, with a small group of beings as collaborators in the work of supramentalisation in the present time and not in another age, we are left with no escape from seeing as a success what has happened to both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and hence as a voluntary fate their passing away without personal supramentalisation. This fate has to be interpreted as having been embraced for nothing less than success but success in a fashion enigmatical to man's non-flexible mind which is attached to its ignorance.

The call on us is to keep steadily before this mind the true nature of the Avatarhood that was Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's — and then to probe the events of the two "deaths". But to reach the proper view we must clear a few crucial points. While refusing to deny the authenticity of the success in spite of those events, we must ask how in view of them the Master and the Mother could be said to succeed in the "now" to which Sri Aurobindo refers and, if they could, under what aspect consistently with their certitude their success would arrive.

## 2

Obviously, they have altered their original plan. And there is no reason why they should not — provided they fulfil in however oblique and paradoxical a shape their fundamental mission. The Avatar, even the Supramental one, assumes certain human traits in right earnest: otherwise Avatarhood would be a flashing intrusion of the Divine and have no evolutionary significance for the world. In a very effective sense, God has to become like us in order to help us become like Him. God has to undergo our predicaments and take upon Himself our defects, pass through obscurities and come to terms with the manifold play of possibilities that work out the designs of the Supreme, a play calling for various adjustments and alterations, shifts of strategy and shufflings of tactics. The Incarnation takes his stand in the midst of a world-order that has gone on for centuries along lines often in opposition to new truths. The Incarnation enters a game proceeding according to rules partly dictated by the Ignorance through which evolution moves towards Knowledge. These rules are permitted to spring surprises even upon Divinity when It enters the human formula. The humanised Divinity holds on to Its basic vocation but needs to revolutionise Its methods, discard old projects, adopt startlingly new devices.

Thus Sri Aurobindo has spoken of an entire change of front from what was being done soon after November 24, 1926, when he and the Mother experienced the Overmind descent into their bodies. Looking back from a latter time (October 18, 1934) he writes: "... if the Mother were able to bring out the Divine Personalities and Powers into her body and physical being as she was doing for several months without break some years ago, the brightest period in the history of the Ashram, things would be much more easy and all these dangerous attacks that now take

place would be dealt with rapidly and would in fact be impossible. In those days when the Mother was either receiving the Sadhaks for meditation or otherwise working and concentrating all night and day without sleep and with very irregular food, there was no ill-health and no fatigue in her and things were proceeding with a lightning swiftness. . . . Afterwards, because the lower vital and the physical of the Sadhaks could not follow, the Mother had to push the Divine Personalities and Powers, through which she was doing the action, behind a veil and come down into the physical human level and act according to its conditions and that means difficulty, struggle, illness, ignorance and inertia. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Alluding to the same "brightest period", Sri Aurobindo remarks on January 14, 1932: ". . . the Supramental could very well have come down into Matter under former conditions, if the means created by the Mother for the physical and vital contact had not been vitiated by the wrong attitude, the wrong reactions in the Ashram atmosphere. It was not the direct supramental Force that was acting, but an intermediate and preparatory force that carried in it a modified Light derived from the Supramental, but this would have been sufficient for the work of opening the way for the highest action, if it had not been for the irruption of these wrong forces on the yet unconquered lower (physical) vital material plane."<sup>16</sup>

Again we hear from Sri Aurobindo on December 31, 1934: "It is a little difficult to say whether all have to come down totally into the physical. The Mother and I had to do it because the work could not be otherwise done. We had tried to do it from above through the mind and higher vital, but it could not be because the Sadhaks were not ready to follow . . ."<sup>17</sup>

A change still more radical and revolutionary in the dynamics of the Integral Yoga was required in 1950. When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother saw the necessity of one of them abandoning the body and Sri Aurobindo chose to withdraw from his physical sheath on December 5, he began to operate from behind the scene as a power of manifestation from the subtle-physical plane where he had established himself and as a power of evolution from the Inconscient where he had thrust the antennae of his consciousness through the dissolution of his semi-illuminated gross-physical substance. His direct role upon the earth was projected into a future when, as the Mother communicated to us, he would come in the first supramental body built in the supramental and not the natural way. From his command to the Mother early in the year that she would have to "fulfil our Yoga of supramental descent and transformation", we understood that just as he would represent a non-evolutionary materialisation of the Supramental she would toil on to represent an evolutionary supramentalisation of the Material: they would be the obverse and reverse of the same eternal Truth-gold made current in our Iron Age. The Aurobindonian objective would still be compassed except that, contrary to the original plan, the Master himself would not be the first body in evolutionary history to be divinised. But as he was concerned essentially with the supramentalisation of the earth-consciousness and

never involved in any personal race for the Superrmind all was well for him so long as his own Shakti, the Mother, with whom he was one in consciousness, was there to be the leader of the evolution, guiding the earth to its fulfilment by supramentalising herself in this life and not in another.

Yes, Sri Aurobindo's departure, although heart-stunning, was yet not absolutely mind-bewildering. It is the Mother's departure that is the extreme enigma. Of course, a radical and revolutionary change of plan is as legitimate for her as for him. But her change has occurred with an ostensible non-completion of the task Sri Aurobindo had entrusted to her. It is this non-completion that hits us hard and acutely challenges us.

### 3

If we are to formulate a satisfying answer, we must set the enigma itself in its proper terms. These terms can only be as follows: "Sri Aurobindo willed — and his willing was in tune with the nature of the Supramental Avatarhood — that from their assumed human bodies a centre would result of a supramentalised physicality for the supramentalisation first of a few of their children and finally of all humanity. He focused his vision of such a centre in the Mother. Now that she has made her exit without actualising his vision, how will she yet manage, as she must, to be in a divine body amongst us to continue carrying the travail of evolution towards the *grand finale* prophesied by Sri Aurobindo? And what, after her exit at the age of ninety-five, should we understand by fulfilment not in a later age but in the present time?"

Our statement has two "posers": to adopt Sri Aurobindo's own brief categories for the original plan, "the question is as to the when and how." The challenge of the "when" can be immediately met. By the present time, the "now", we have to understand the period which would have been covered by the progress of the Mother's body if, animated more and more by the Supermind, it had persisted on earth in its originally planned course of concentrated evolution towards the supramental completeness. How long would that period be? The Mother has reported Sri Aurobindo as saying that perhaps three hundred years would be needed for the complete transformation of the body. She has also expressed her own feeling that it might take longer but an intense speeding-up of the supramental action may keep the time within the lower limit. So we cannot calculate in terms of less than three centuries. The oblique and paradoxical yet authentic success we have to attribute to the Mother must be allowed this time-span to realise itself. With the Supermind as her guard, her life could have been prolonged to that stretch for the full realisation. Logically, we cannot insist on a smaller stretch for the novel "how" of her fulfilment.

All the same, we may not rule out a shorter duration by virtue of the very novelty involved. Who knows if, just to avoid those three centuries which were the

inevitable minimum under the old dispensation, she has struck out a new path which may seem to us a plunge into darkness but is actually a streak of light too rarefied for us to see until it issues once more into our common day? Should we not have faith that she would never do anything except for our advantage — that is, for the purpose of bringing about the Life Divine for us by means of her pioneering fulfilment?

The question would yet remain: “In what form is this fulfilment to be now conceived?” There are only two modes of conceiving it.

One is with reference to the “new body” which the Mother spoke of on several occasions as existing in the subtle-physical plane and acting upon the body in the gross-physical with a view to emerge into it and materially manifest a *corps glorieux*, “a body of glory”, a divinely radiant form. The gross-physical, in order to effectuate the emergence in it of the new body, would have to get transformed to a high degree. Transformation must imply the assumption of the central difficulties of corporeal life and the conquest over them. The tendency to age, to deteriorate in faculties, to grow weak, to harbour the process of decay and run the risk of death — this tendency had to be faced in right earnest and then conquered. The Mother, in her ninety-fifth year, stood evenly balanced, as it were: the difficulties of the human condition were sufficiently borne and the power to prevent them from becoming dominant was in enough exercise but there seemed to be a standstill, a kind of stalemate.

We have to say “seemed” because the Supramental Avatar holds by the right of a direct transcendent origin, the capacity to counter and annul all cosmic laws. The Mother could have brought that capacity into play and moved forward, but the reversal of the problem she had admitted into herself — the problem of “this mortal coil”, the tumultuous trouble of the human condition — would probably have taken an inordinate length of time — very much past what would be advantageous to her children. In response to a sudden call from the Truth above and to the hidden requirement of the World-Play, she consented to the dissolution of a body whose cells were passing through the sublime suffering of a radical recast under the Supermind’s pressure. The Transcendent, that was her own highest Self, overruled in the interests of His earth-creatures His own planned triumph in a chosen vehicle.

The sole course open to the Mother was to let fall the body she had worn so long and so carefully prepared. This would mean letting someone else’s body in the future achieve the fundamental Aurobindonian goal of changing evolutionarily into a divine one. Since both she and Sri Aurobindo had basically sought the supramentalisation of others, such a shift-over of achievement was altogether welcome. But none could be supramentalised without the dynamism of the Avatar who had descended from the Supermind to give supramentalisation to the world: either the Mother or Sri Aurobindo had to be the instrument for the divinisation of earth-creatures. This was the proviso of their very mission. Long ago — on April 20,



1935 — Sri Aurobindo laid down the terms of his work: “I have no intention of achieving the Supermind for myself only — I am not doing anything for myself . . . If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. . . .”<sup>18</sup> Sri Aurobindo’s supramentalisation was the *sine qua non*. And when he left his body, it could not be done in others if it was not done in the Mother whom he had elected as a compact field for his victory. When she left her body, the need still held for a centre which somehow or other would not be different from herself. Someone else’s body would naturally have to be divinised now instead of her own, but the proviso of their mission would be satisfied only if to divinise someone else’s body she yet worked from a poise on the earth itself. That poise would be indispensable to the pioneering Avatar-spirits that she and Sri Aurobindo were. Hence the question confronting the Mother in her ninety-fifth year of Supramental Avatarhood was: how, while obeying the Transcendent Will and giving up the body she had entered nearly a century before, was she to establish an earth-poise of divinising power?

We can reach an understanding of her answer through an insight into the transformation she was undergoing. On the one side the transformation was meant to render the gross-physical form increasingly subtle by the action of the subtle-physical Supramental Shape, so that it might be fit to house the latter. On the other side the transformation was meant to render this Shape increasingly dense by the reaction on it of the gross-physical form, so that it might be fit to be housed in the materially visible and tangible. Embracing the decision of the Transcendent, the Mother appears to have abandoned further subtilising or supramentalising the dense stuff of her evolutionary frame and to have concentrated on drawing up into this frame’s non-evolutionary counterpart — into the subtle-physical Supramental Shape — the conscious essence of whatever subtilisation the dense evolutionary substance had acquired. By means of such a drawing up, she endowed the non-evolutionary counterpart with some of the “virtue” of the dense matter that had been passing through the transformative travail. The deathless Light proper to the new body waiting behind the scene took on an extra density and, when the old body gave itself up to death, the extra-densified new one got charged with the sense of the other’s function and was pulled towards the materially visible and tangible, as if it were henceforth meant to stand not beyond but right over the frontier between its own world and ours.

The Mother we were familiar with is now the new secret body, a superhuman ensheathing. Such a transference from the old body is nothing inconceivable. She actually had the experience, on March 24, 1972, of living as the new body with a continuity of consciousness from the old. She says: “. . . I had a body altogether new, in the sense that it was sexless . . . It was very white. . . . It was very slim (*gesture indicating slenderness*) — it was pretty. Truly a harmonious form. . . . I

was like that, I had become like that.<sup>19</sup> At the time of the transference the old body had not been dropped: it had just been kept aside. Now it has been allowed to dissolve, and the Mother has only a divine ensheathing. But she has assimilated into it all the attainments of the dissolved sheath in terms of "body-mind" and thereby brought it closer to our longing human arms than it ever could be without the assimilation of those attainments. A veritable Goddess, the Mother is yet within concrete reach of us — we have only to stretch our arms more intensely *ripae ulterioris amore*, "with love of the other shore", to get the Truth-touch we need for our integral Godward growth. The greater proximity of this compassionate Perfection to our body's soulful cry is what the Mother has accomplished through the apparent withdrawal from us that was her death.

With its greater proximity comes a greater force to carry us towards the Supramental goal. But this proximity is not the whole aim of the Mother's strategy. The earth-poise the Avatar of the Supermind must have in order to supramentalise earth is no more than approached by the proximity. It has yet to be fully realised. And the extra-densified new body has the power to realise it in full. To obtain that power for this body was the final victory won by the Mother. The new body's extra density provides the Mother with the possibility of materialising that body and making it visible and tangible, a supreme Presence in our midst to bring about our evolutionary completion.

But, just as the Mother's sadhana before her passing away was linked with our receptivity to the higher consciousness and could be to a considerable extent quickened or slowed down by the state in which we were, so also her progress towards materialisation from the boundary between two worlds is conditioned in a substantial measure by our response to her stand on that boundary. She cannot materialise herself soon unless we hasten to spiritualise ourselves.

The sudden shock we have received with the Mother's departure and, along with it, the sense that departure has given us of a greater impact from her new body have caused a forward spurt in our Yoga. If we can keep up the intensified aspiration we may hope to see the new body materialised in the near future — in less than a century. Even if our effort for progress gets relaxed the Mother will press for the manifestation. Her children then may not have to wait very long.

If, however, she finds it unfitting that she should thus manifest, a second way is conceivable. Indeed, it would be the one inevitable way under the circumstances. And of this possibility too we have a glimpse in some words of the Mother. Three years before she had the experience of living in her new body as if it were the most natural sheath for her — to be precise, on February 15, 1969 — she said: ". . . the work is becoming more and more exacting. But I feel (that is to say, the body feels very well) that it is part of the training. It looks like that: it must hold on, the body, or otherwise so much the worse, it will be for another time."<sup>20</sup> Again, in the very talk about the new body the Mother pointed to her own and exclaimed: "Is that



(*Mother points to her body*), is that going to change? It must change or it has to follow the old ordinary process of undoing itself and remaking itself. . . .”<sup>21</sup>

This can mean only one thing: as in the past, the Mother may utilise the usual mode of birth, assume once more a body like ours and be amongst her children at the head of earth’s evolution. An implication of this meaning is that for the body-supramentalising turn of evolution the rebirth of none except the Mother will do. But her rebirth will not involve going laboriously over the same field that she covered before. Rather, by force of all that her earlier incarnation has done and by the greater proximity it has brought about of her Supramental Shape, this second embodiment will have, despite its unavoidable nexus with world-conditions, a rare rapidity of sadhana and will soon be ready to house that Shape and uplift her children to spiritual supermanhood. When and where the hour of the re-embodiment will strike is left to the wisdom operating through the Supramental Shape in which she now abides. But we may be sure that it will not go beyond the limit of what we have stipulated as her extraordinary life-length if the original plan of supramentalisation had been followed. In saying “another time” she need not be construed as referring to a far-off date and negating the broad sense of “now”. The expression simply connotes a bodily existence other than the one that was hers from February 21, 1878. In fact, once she decides on this alternative way of securing her earth-poise, the “when” can be very near and the “where” is likely to be such as to let her appear amidst her erstwhile family without unnecessary delay.

What we must guard against is letting our imagination run riot. We must not start hunting for signs and make various self-gratifying mental constructions. Although we must keep our eyes open, we must be passive in our receptivity. If the Mother takes birth, she will declare herself in her own fashion and her own good time. We must not superimpose our ignorance-coloured “Lo here!” and “Lo there!”. The birth which she will bring about by her direct action will carry the clearest credentials. We shall not need to speak for it. We have merely to watch and wait.

Still, as regards the whole possibility of a second embodiment we have to remember the Mother’s expression: “so much the worse.” She did not favour “another time” and the mechanism involved: “the old ordinary process” of rebirth. It would have to be the last resort. The preference would undoubtedly go to the direct self-materialisation. Even though we have no open reference to such a mode of re-appearance of the Mother, we know that she looked forward in general to an occult method of birth for human beings. This method was expected to come into force after the Mother had sufficiently divinised her body and established herself firmly for the new world she was building up, the world in which Sri Aurobindo was to come in the first supramental body built in the supramental way. But, with the evolutionary alteration of her course on November 17, releasing new powers of action, the will of Sri Aurobindo for supramentalisation in the present age, and not in a later one, would tend to bring this method into use far sooner.

However, if we take “so much the worse” in its own restricted context, we find “another time” to be disapproved as compared only to the birth the Mother accepted in 1878 and wanted to use for the utmost consummation. Then there would be nothing in particular against the usual process of birth. The two alternatives of reappearance would be on a par.

But neither can become an early reality without our co-operation. We should go all out to create the conditions that would facilitate the wonderful phenomenon of self-materialisation. For the Mother's rebirth too our souls must keep devoted vigil. More than ever before we shall have to open our depths to the Light and Love that were lavished on us for so many years and that still waft to us from the joint Samadhi. Had we answered sufficiently to their call, the original plan might never have been changed. Indeed, to a high degree, it is our “estranged faces” that have made us “miss the many-splendoured thing” that for ninety-five years was our Mother, most divine, most human.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

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

*(Continued from the issue of October 2016)*

## **Chapter: LVI**

### **CALL FOR “FRESH HOPE AND VIGOUR”**

There is no event — great or small or even the smallest — from which some good had not accrued.

He [the Good Lord] often fulfils three or four aims through a single event. We frequently see the working of a blind force in the world; accepting waste as part of nature’s method, we ignore God’s omniscience and find fault with the divine intelligence. The charge is unfounded. The Divine Intelligence never works blindly, there cannot be the slightest waste of His power; rather, the restrained manner in which, through the minimum of means, He achieves a variety of results is beyond the human intelligence . . .<sup>1</sup>

— Sri Aurobindo (1909)

The Government of Bengal was already toying with the idea of deporting Sri Aurobindo and was groping around for some pretext when, to its great relief, he was arrested in the Alipore Conspiracy Case on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1908. Barely a fortnight had passed when, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 1908 the Government of Bengal wrote to the Governor General that “if the informer’s evidence could be used or if one of the other prisoners can be induced to turn King’s evidence there is a fair prospect of Aurobindo Ghose and Abinash Chandra Bhattacharjee being convicted,” so that they need not be “removed by arbitrary action under the regulation”.<sup>2</sup>

But the judgment exploded their hope. Further, they were worried about the outcome of the appeal the convicted group filed before the High Court, once again C. R. Das leading the team of Defence lawyers. The idea of deporting Sri Aurobindo was revived along with the possibility of lodging an appeal against Justice Mr. Beachcroft’s judgment in the High Court. The police machinery kept a keen and continuous vigil on the movements of Sri Aurobindo. The royal reception at Uttarpara and the huge gathering must have made them anticipate a fiery oration whereas the speaker must have mystified them. But their men, those who understood English best, were made to follow Sri Aurobindo wherever he went and take down notes of his speeches in detail.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech at Beadon Square, the

meeting presided over by Ramananda Chatterjee (1865-1943), educationist and the renowned editor of the *Modern Review* and the *Prabasi* (Bengali). According to the newspaper report, “In spite of the foul weather a large number of people assembled”<sup>3</sup> on that Sunday afternoon. The speech emphasised the faith in the spirit of nationalism that was ingrained in the hearts of the masses, despite some people having developed an impression that “the country was demoralised by the repression”. Sarcasm enlivened the speech every few minutes. Commenting on the lately imposed Sunset Regulation that forfeited the people’s freedom of movement and assembly after a certain hour, Sri Aurobindo said:

It appeared that we were peaceful citizens until sunset, but after sunset we turned into desperate characters — well, he was told, even half an hour before sunset; apparently even the sun could not be entirely trusted to keep us straight. We had, it seems, stones in our pockets to throw at the police and some of us, perhaps, dangle bombs in our Chaddars.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile preparations were afoot for the publication of a weekly, the *Karmayogin*, from its office at No. 14, Shyam Bazar Street (later shifted to 4 Shyamapukur Lane). The task of its production and circulation vested in Girija Sundar Chakravorty, the younger brother of Shyam Sundar Chakravorty, Sri Aurobindo’s able assistant on the staff of the *Bande Mataram*. The 1<sup>st</sup> issue was published on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1909 and the educated class received it with great warmth.

Sri Aurobindo used to sit almost daily in the afternoon, on the balcony of the house of Krishna Kumar Mitra. Because of the possible harassment by the police it was difficult to meet him. Even then the College Square used to be crowded with people eager to see him.<sup>5</sup>

A poster carrying an announcement about the publication in the offing had been put up in front of the office of the *Sanjeevani*, the residence of Krishna Kumar Mitra where Sri Aurobindo then resided. By the time Upendra, the younger brother of Abinash Bhattacharya, saw the announcement and joined the weekly as a clerk, a good number of people had already subscribed to the periodical — probably informed by a few posters like the aforesaid one as well as through word of mouth — and Upendra was assigned the task of writing down their addresses on wrappers. Let us look at some more facts unknown beyond his extant memoirs in Bengali. He speaks about the day the 1<sup>st</sup> issue of the magazine was published:

It was early in the morning. Reaching the office I saw that our peons, namely Deotadhin, Ram Dayal and Madho, were coming out each carrying 200 copies

of the paper. Rakhal Acharya was carrying twenty-five copies. I also wished to try my hand at selling and carrying ten copies ran along the road shouting “Sri Aurobindo’s new paper — *Karmayogin*!” Four copies were sold before I got into a tram-car and by the time I reached the College Street all my copies had been sold out. I was enthused. Not because I could earn a little more for my poor family, but because I was instrumental in carrying to the people the message of Sri Aurobindo. After a day’s work I secured from Girija Babu 25 more copies and by 9 P.M. sold the whole lot.<sup>6</sup>

Upendra’s reminiscences inform us about an unsung devotee of Sri Aurobindo — one Dharam Singh. He was a warder at Alipore Jail. “At the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo in jail he felt that he was born into a new life.” As long as Sri Aurobindo was in jail, he did his best to steal opportunities to serve him in some way. When Kanai, after shooting at Naren Gossain, was being pursued by other warders, he managed to shield him for a while. After Sri Aurobindo’s acquittal, he resigned his job and came over to work as the watchman at the *Karmayogin* office.

Writes Upendra:

Because of Sri Aurobindo’s pen and Girija Babu’s skill at management, the *Karmayogin* became financially self-supporting very soon. Such was the quality of Girija Babu’s memory that he could recite the names and addresses of a thousand subscribers without looking into the files. The account was stored in his brain. In a few days we could deposit an amount of two thousand rupees in the bank in the account opened for the *Karmayogin*.<sup>7</sup>

In a write-up entitled “Ourselves” Sri Aurobindo stated the aim of the new publication. The opening of the first paragraph was candid and precise in its analysis of the situation that was not very bright; nevertheless it ended on a note of optimism:

The *Karmayogin* comes into the field to fulfil a function which an increasing tendency in the country demands. The life of the nation which once flowed in a broad and single stream has long been severed into a number of separate meagre and shallow channels. The two main floods have followed the paths of religion and politics, but they have flowed separately. Our political activity has crept in a channel cut for it by European or Europeanised minds; it tended always to a superficial wideness, but was deficient in depth and volume. The national genius, originality, individuality poured itself into religion, while our politics were imitative and unreal. Yet without a living political activity national life cannot, under modern circumstances, survive. So also there has been a stream of social life, more and more muddled and disturbed, seeking to get clearness, depth, largeness, freedom, but always failing and increasing in

weakness or distraction. There was a stream too of industrial life, faint and thin, the poor survival of the old vigorous Indian artistic and industrial capacity murdered by unjust laws and an unscrupulous trade policy. All these ran in disconnected channels, sluggish, scattered and ineffectual. The tendency is now for these streams to unite again into one mighty invincible and grandiose flood. To assist that tendency, to give voice and definiteness to the deeper aspirations now forming obscurely within the national consciousness is the chosen work of the *Karmayogin*.<sup>8</sup>

The very day the 1<sup>st</sup> issue of the journal was published Sri Aurobindo addressed a conference at Jhalakati in the district of Barisal. To have an idea about the simple humility that always marked his speeches, let us have a look at the beginning of this one:

Fellow-countrymen, delegates and people of Barisal and Bakarganj, I have first to express to you my personal gratitude for the kindly reception you have accorded to me. For a year I have been secluded from the fellowship and brotherly embrace of my fellow-countrymen. To me, therefore, the kindliness of your welcome must awake much keener feelings than would have been the case in other circumstances. Especially it is a cause of rejoicing to me to have that welcome in Barisal. When I come to this District, when I come to this soil of Bakarganj which has been made sacred and ever memorable in the history of this country — I come to no ordinary place. When I come to Barisal, I come to a chosen temple of the Mother — I come to a sacred pithasthan of the national spirit — I come to the birth-place and field of work of Aswini Kumar Dutta.<sup>9</sup>

The unhygienic conditions in jail, his meagre intake of food and his experiment with fasting for days together do not seem to have negatively affected his fortitude though he was certainly not in the best of health. All the content for each issue of the *Karmayogin* had to be written by Sri Aurobindo and he worked on the texts well ahead of the issue's date of publication, for they had to be hand-composed and proofs corrected more than once — a highly time-consuming task. It seems incredible, when we look at Sri Aurobindo's tour programme and the content of the journal, that he could produce articles of such quality and on such a wide variety of issues — an exercise much of which he must have undertaken often while travelling. His programme even took him away from Bengal. Here is an account of his tour in Assam left by his young, faithful and brilliant follower Nolini Kanta Gupta. While enjoying the fine description of the landscape through which the author was passing, we can visualise Sri Aurobindo's presence by his side.

The backdrop of this particular experience of Nolini Kanta, in brief, was this:

After his release from Alipore Jail the prospect of taking to Sannyasa — the ascetic way of life — fascinated him. He found a collaborator in this lofty project in his compatriot Bejoy Nag, but on the eve of launching the adventure with no fixed physical destination, they decided to inform Sri Aurobindo about it. And that changed the course of their life.

So, one afternoon in the course of one of our regular visits we told him of our plan. He kept quiet for a while, then he said, “Well, you might wait for a few days.” I was a little surprised, for I thought that he would endorse our scheme without any hesitation. Anyhow, we had to wait for a few days. He said to us one day, “You wanted to go on a tour of the country, didn’t you? Well, you come with me. I shall take you on a tour.” We were taken aback and were delighted at the same time. He was to leave for Assam on a political mission, first to a provincial conference to be held at a place called Jalsuka in the Sylhet area, and then to the other areas of Assam on a tour.

This provided me with a fresh opportunity to see once again the beauty of old Bengal, the land of the rivers from a new angle of vision this time. Water, water everywhere, so much water you do not see at any other place, an endless sheet of water spread out below, matching the vast expanse of the sky above. From Goalando we went by steamer to Narayangunge along the Padma and the Sitalaksha, thence to the Meghna; one who has not seen the Meghna cannot imagine what it is really like — it was, as it were, the living Goddess of the water, Jaleshwari — and next, the mighty Dhaleshwari and on to the Surma. We travelled by river steamer for days on end without a break and we moved about by country boat. The rains had come. The low-lying tracts — they call them Howr — which at other times are just dry lowlands — were now all submerged under water. As far as the eyes could reach, there was a vast expanse of water clear and still. Only at a place here and there one could see jutting out of its midst a few houses or a village. One day, in the twilight of the evening, the land and the river took on a rosy hue in the crimson glow of the setting sun as we sailed along by a slow-moving boat. Sri Aurobindo was there and two or three other leaders. I was so powerfully moved by the scene that the child I was — I felt an irresistible desire to burst forth there and then into a song. . . . Somehow with difficulty I contained myself and sat in quiet contemplation.

Out on tour Sri Aurobindo used to address meetings, meet people when he was free and give them instructions and advice. Most of those who came to his meetings did not understand English, they were common village folk. But they came in crowds all the same, men, women and children, just to hear him speak and have his *darshan*. When he stood up to address a gathering, a pin-drop silence prevailed. His audience must surely have felt a vibration of something behind the spoken word.<sup>10</sup>





No. 6, College Square





The account further gives us an intimate view of how Sri Aurobindo's compassion unreservedly flowed into all those who sought his help or guidance, at the cost of the minimum comfort he needed:

It is not that he confined himself to political matters alone. There were many who knew that he was Yogi and spiritual guide and they sought his help in these matters too. I have myself seen as I spent whole nights with him in the same room, at Jalsuka, how he would sit up practically the whole night and go to bed only for a short while in the early hours of the morning.<sup>11</sup>

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June Sri Aurobindo spoke at Bakarganj. His speech was full of sarcasm for Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, describing his reforms as coming from a kind of god who holds in one hand the Khadga (a terrible-looking sword) and in the other the Varabhaya (promise of gracious protection). On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July he spoke to a large audience at Kumartuli. As a newspaper reported, "Babu Aurobindo Ghose rose amidst loud cheers and said that when he consented to attend the meeting he never thought that he would make any speech. In fact he was asked by the organisers of the meeting simply to be present there." Reluctant though he was, at the Chairman's request he rose to speak, but what he delivered that evening was a memorable speech, eliciting cheers from the audience again and again.<sup>12</sup> Next he spoke at a meeting at College Square and according to the report in the newspaper that too was hailed with repeated loud cheers.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August a crowd mostly consisting of students gathered in front of Sri Aurobindo's residence (house of the Mitras) to greet Sri Aurobindo on the occasion of his 37<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary. According to the Police Confidential file:

. . . a band of young men attended at No. 6 College Square, to offer their felicitations to Arabinda Ghose on his attaining his 37<sup>th</sup> year. They presented him with cloth, sweet and fruit. The ceremony was often interrupted by cries of "Bande Mataram" and "Long live Arabinda Ghose". He was also presented with an address which set forth the services he had rendered to the country in developing the national consciousness and setting out clearly the national ideal. Arabinda Ghose was visibly moved and made a suitable reply. In it he exhorted them always to be patient and never to give up the work in despair. "Instability", he said, "is a great reproach to my nation. But when there is a great purpose, a resolute will, there may be any amount of difficulties, but they cannot stand in the way."<sup>13</sup>

According to another source he also said:

In my childhood, before the full development of my faculties, I became conscious of a strong impulse in me. I did not realise what it was then, but it grew stronger and stronger as I gained in years till the weakness of my childhood, fear, selfishness etc. vanished from my mind. From the day of my return to the mother country, the impulse is surging forth in great force, and my set purpose and devotion are becoming more confirmed with the trials and oppressions to which I am subjected.<sup>14</sup>

An extract from his speech, published in a journal a few days later reads:

Service of our motherland is our highest duty at this moment. This must be our duty in this iron age. It is now the time for us to conserve our energy. Do not be impatient, do not despair. Do not lose faith. The present fatigue and inactivity are natural; you will find instances of them in the history of every nation. Everyone must store up energy. Be prepared with fresh hope and vigour for the worship of the Mother. Divine power has infused this nation with a new power. This power will exalt the nation one day.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to this, in the month of July, a Bengali version of the *Karmayogin* had begun to appear at the initiative of Amarendranath Chattopadhyay — the chief organiser of the Uttarpara event. He was assisted by Manmath Biswas and Basant Biswas.<sup>16</sup> Of course Sri Aurobindo had no role in it except for having permitted the publication. However, a new weekly in Bengali, the *Dharma* was launched in the last week of August. Again, the greater part of the journal's content was his own contribution. Nevertheless he kept up his public appointments and spoke once again at College Square on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October. As reported by *The Times of India*:

Mr. Aurobindo Ghose next rose amid loud cheers and cries of “Bande Mataram”. He said that the meeting was the last they could hold before the Partition Day, which was approaching, and so he could speak a few words about that illustrious day which should be observed with great national enthusiasm. The 16<sup>th</sup> October had become a memorable day, not only in the history of India, but in that of the world.<sup>17</sup>

He further said,

We are told that in preaching passive resistance we are encouraging the people to violate law and order and are fostering violence and rebellion. The country is the truth. We are showing the people of this country in passive resistance the only way in which they can satisfy their legitimate aspiration without breaking the law and without resorting to violence.<sup>18</sup>

Thus did Sri Aurobindo try to arouse the spirit of the national cause that had become dim. He persisted with this effort in his speech at Beadon Square on the 16<sup>th</sup> October where “amidst fresh cheers and renewed and prolonged shouts of Bande Mataram in came Aurobindo Ghose and the inevitable rush for Raksha Bandhan ensued”.<sup>19</sup>

However, the most important political event during this period was the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Hooghly on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of September. Of that in the next chapter.

Let us have a glimpse or two of this most sought after and revered political leader's private life at his uncle's residence:

At that time some young men of the Yugantar Party used to come to Sri Aurobindo at 6 College Square for reading the Gita. Sri Aurobindo sat on the veranda with hands crossed, in the freezing cold of the winter, with only a dhoti and a shirt on. One day he got so absorbed while expounding the Gita that he went on until one o'clock. Sarojini came out with the food. Then the young men knew that it was his lunch time and they left him; only then did he eat.<sup>20</sup>

Even while he remained absorbed in writing, his aunt, aged and weak, would call him to escort her to the Ganga, for she would like to bathe in the sacred river. Without a murmur he would stop writing and quietly accompany her to the Ghat. Recollects Krishna Kumar Mitra's daughter, Basanti Chakravarty:

I never saw him annoyed on any occasion. Aurodada would sit engrossed in study. His sandals would be lying nearby. My mother would come and put the pair on and climb up to the terrace for her regular walk. After a while some people would arrive seeking a meeting with Aurodada. He would leave his chair and look for his sandals. Meanwhile the aunt is back. “Little Aunt, would you mind giving me the sandals? I have to go down and meet some visitors!” Then quietly he would put on the sandals and move away without the slightest sign of irritation.<sup>21</sup>

*(To be continued)*

MANOJ DAS

### Notes and References

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*Sri Aurobindo always loved deeply his Motherland. But he wished her to be great, noble, pure and worthy of her big mission in the world. He refused to let her sink to the sordid and vulgar level of blind self-interests and ignorant prejudices. This is why, in full conformity to his will, we lift high the standard of truth, progress and transformation of mankind . . .*

*The Mother*

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 123)

## A TEACHER'S TOLERANCE AND HEALING TOUCH TO TROUBLED TEENS

This is a story of a teacher's labour of love. It's a story of sacrifice or rather, a joy in devoting one's time and energies in nurturing young underprivileged students, most of whom came from the projects<sup>1</sup> or ghettos and had undergone insecurity, anxiety and suffering even though they had barely entered their teens. It's a story of a teacher's compassion for and understanding of a group of difficult and unruly students and how she changed their hardened and cynical attitude towards life. It's a story of a teacher's generosity in deriving her satisfaction through her students' progress, both academically and emotionally. It's a story of sharing, of being supportive and benefitting from each other's experiences. Above all, it is a story of love — a teacher's love for her students and how it changed a pessimistic and distrustful outlook on life in a racially discriminative society into one of hope and benevolence; a love that got permanently etched in their young hearts and brought out the hidden innate goodness that is in all.

This is a story that emerges from the pages of the book *The Freedom Writers Diary* by The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, published by Broadway Books, New York, 1999.

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Born on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1969, Erin Gruwell wanted to be a lawyer; but the 1991 Rodney King riots in Los Angeles, which she painfully watched on television, had such an impact on her that it dramatically changed the course of her life. She decided to become a teacher to help children in racially divided societies. In 1994, after securing a degree in teaching, Erin Gruwell began teaching at Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, California. The Wilson High School lies in a safe neighbourhood and had a fair mix of students from varied backgrounds, rich and poor, coming from every race, religion and culture. Erin had chosen this school as she was expecting it to be a model of integration since it was one of the most culturally diverse schools in the country. However, after a few days of joining the school Erin was shocked to learn that the reality was different: the segregation of the different races was acute and there was no integration whatsoever.

Racial tension in schools and outbreaks of gang activity were common in certain areas. The number of traditionally upper class white students dwindled and

1. A Government subsidised estate or block of homes with relatively low rents.

African-Americans, Latinos and Asians made up the majority of the student body. Inherent conflict, dislike and disharmony amongst the races led to conflicts in the neighbourhoods where many of the students lived. For some students reaching school was stressful. School though was a lot safer than the journey to it. Though seldom, fights based on race broke out in school too.

As Erin was a fresh teacher, she was assigned the most apathetic class, comprising dropouts and rejects, academically and behaviourally, the worst of the lot. They were labelled 'below average' and 'the sure-to-drop-out kids'. Several students were disciplinary transfers or had emotional problems and some of them had even been to a juvenile hall. Many students had a relative or a friend who had been to jail. Erin, however, did not want to prejudge her students on the basis of their colour, culture or academic achievements; she believed that education could overcome even the worst kind of teenage adversity and felt that negative stereotyping did no good for anyone's self-esteem and would affect the young psychologically.

The first day of school was a nightmare for Erin. As she began to talk about the curriculum, her students rocked in their seats and played percussion with their pencils. Some checked their pagers, while others re-applied their eyeliner. Some slouched, some laid their heads on the desks, and some actually took a nap. A paper airplane, made out of the syllabus print-out, was directed at Erin but she managed to dodge it. While Erin spoke she was mostly drowned by a string of jokes from her students. When Erin read the 'Guidelines for Student Behaviour' some of the students snickered. Even though Erin had studied classroom management she was acutely aware that the class was out of control.

The students were sceptical of Erin and resented her — one of those superior whites, supposedly more gifted and accomplished than other races. Many in the class thought this white privileged teacher would not last a week. About Erin's first day in class a student wrote:

My freshman English teacher is way out there. I wonder how she got this job. The administrators should have known better than to give her this class, but I guess she didn't know any better than to take it. How is she going to handle four classes full of this school's rejects? Most people at this school doubt that we can even read or write.

It seems to me that she belongs across the hall with Distinguished Scholars. Yeah, she would fit in nicely there; she and those supposedly gifted white kids who think they're better than everybody else. She walked in here on "I'm sweet and I care about you" mode. It's not going to work. We all know she's going to treat us like everyone else has. The worst part is, I'm pretty sure she thinks she's the one who's going to change us. She alone, the "too young and too white to be working here" teacher is going to reform a group of helpless "sure to drop out" kids from the 'hood.

I'm sure one of these days she's going to go to principal and ask for her leave, but then again, what else is new?

"These kids are going to make this lady quit the first week," my friends were saying. Someone else said, "She'll only last a day."

I give her a month.<sup>2</sup>

## 1

Erin's entire first semester was one torment to another, from indiscipline to disobedience to walkouts. The students were unmonitorable in class and Erin was on trial, tested at every step. They hated reading and getting them to write or do homework was impossible.

Erin relates that her first test was with Sharaud, a student with a history of disciplinary problems, who came into the opening class bouncing a basketball. He was a teacher's nightmare, let alone for a trainee teacher, like Erin. He had threatened his previous English teacher, had a reputation of being a habitual troublemaker and made it amply clear that he hated Erin and school and his sole goal was to make the new English teacher cry. Strange are the ways of fate! for within a month he was the one crying when he became the butt of a bad joke. A classmate made a cartoon of him with his lips exaggerated for comical effect. The caricature was quietly passed around and all the students laughed hysterically. Sharaud was utterly embarrassed. Despite his past antics, Erin sportingly supported him.

She narrates how this caricature being circulated became a defining moment in her life:

When I got hold of the picture, I went ballistic. "This is the type of propaganda that the Nazis used during the Holocaust," I yelled. When a student timidly asked me, "What's the Holocaust?" I was shocked.

I asked, "How many of you have heard of the Holocaust?" Not a single person raised his hand. Then I asked, "How many of you have been shot at?" Nearly every hand went up.

I immediately decided to throw out my meticulously planned lessons and make tolerance the core of my curriculum.

From that moment on, I would try to bring history to life by using new books, inviting guest speakers, and going on field trips. Since I was just a student teacher, I had no budget for my schemes. So, I moonlighted as a concierge at the Marriott Hotel and sold lingerie at Nordstrom. My dad even asked me, "Why can't you just be a normal teacher?"<sup>3</sup>

2. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, pp. 6-7.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.



Erin later recalled how this was the first bonding moment of the class:

I asked them, “How many of you have been shot at?” and at that moment all the kids raise their hands. Whether or not it was true, they had this bonding moment where they were pulling up their shirts and showing where they’d been knifed, and showing where they’d been hit.<sup>4</sup>

To some of the kids death was a bigger reality than securing a diploma. When Erin asked a student if he thought he’d graduate, he replied, “Graduate? Hell, I don’t even know if I’ll make it to my sixteenth birthday!”<sup>5</sup>

A student relates the uncertain and insecure life in the projects:

The reason why my neighbourhood is filled with violence is because I live in the projects.

In the projects, little kids are bad! Rather than play, they destroy. They set trashcans on fire, they knock on people’s doors and run, and they turn their neighbours’ water hoses on in their backyard so it will flood. Most of the kids in my neighbourhood do not know their ABCs, but could sing you a rap song word for word. . . . I don’t even borrow sugar from my neighbours. Becoming friendly with your neighbours will end up getting your house robbed. . . . Being smart and getting good grades makes you an outcast in the projects. . . . Instead of reading about gang violence in newspapers, I’m the kid you see on the news telling a reporter what I’ve witnessed.

At sixteen, I’ve probably witnessed more dead bodies than a mortician. Murder plays a big role in my project. Every time I step out of my front door, I’m faced with the risk of being shot.<sup>6</sup>

Another student writes about his daily hardship, both physically and economically:

I’ve spent most of my life living in poverty, being afraid to walk out of my front door because of the risk of being shot.

At times we barely had enough money to pay our rent.<sup>7</sup>

Many students lived in fear but for most Erin’s classroom — Number 203 — was a place where they felt safe.

As the students hated reading, Erin tried to introduce books which they could relate to. It was important that the students connect with what they were reading if

4. Erin Gruwell, *Be Heard*, You Tube Video Series, Dec. 2006.

5. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 49.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-46.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

she had to generate interest in the class, thus slowly inculcate the reading habit. Erin read a book about an African American boy who had faced problems similar to what was faced by several of the students in the class. The students found the book interesting and Erin made them make a movie based on this story. The movie was shown to the other classes and they expressed their surprise at the initiative taken by Erin's students. Erin then took them on a field trip to see a documentary about two boys from the projects who had a passion for basketball. A student observed that the characters in the book and in the documentary showed that if your passion is deep enough you can achieve anything.

As overcoming prejudice and building tolerance became a key part of Erin's curriculum, she took her class to see the Oscar winning film *Schindler's List* at a white, upper-class theatre. Erin was aghast to see that the women in the audience, on seeing her students troop into the theatre, clutched their jewellery and tightened the grip on their purses. A local paper reported this shameful racial discrimination. Erin received death threats and one of her neighbours menacingly told her, "If you love black people so much, why don't you just marry a monkey?"<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless one positive development of the article was that Thomas Keneally, author of *Schindler's List*, read the article and invited the class to a seminar. At the seminar he was so impressed by the students that he arranged a meeting with the legendary director of the film, Steven Spielberg. Spielberg was enthusiastic on meeting the students and was stupefied how a difficult bunch had become accommodating to each other.

Another encouraging note was that John Tu, a millionaire who had also read the article, thought that the class was a worthy cause to support and offered to help Erin financially with her future field trips.

Instead of receiving accolades for Spielberg complimenting her and her class, Erin aroused envy amongst several teachers in her school, and the Head of the English Department pointedly told Erin, "You're making us look bad."

The semester had been very trying and difficult for Erin as the students had not fully got over their undisciplined streak. To her great relief she lasted the whole of the first semester.

## 2

Although there had been a marginal improvement in the attitude of the students, many had given up hope on these students. Erin was patient; she persevered; she understood that they were just kids, even if somewhat wayward; she was determined to hang in there. The class was stubborn but so was Erin. She was gifted with a positive mental attitude coupled with empathy: "I refuse to believe they're a lost

8. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

cause.”<sup>9</sup> She observed that they were extremely intelligent in hobbies which interested them, she understood that these kids were at a delicate age: “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that if you tell kids they are stupid — directly or indirectly — sooner or later they start to believe it.”<sup>10</sup>

Erin chose stories that could relate to the students’ day-to-day life. For instance they read a story about a boy living in the projects who had to deal with peer pressure and gangs. She motivated her students to learn through reading. Some of the students admitted that this was the first novel they read from cover to cover. She even asked them to enact these stories in class and their creativeness surpassed her expectations. She realised that the students had gone through a lot and encouraged them to write about their diverse personal experiences. It was also a novel way to express themselves and improve their writing skills. She got a wake-up call when she read what a student had written.

The stories my pupils told me were astonishing. For me — someone who had had an idyllic, happy childhood — this was staggering. Perhaps the most poignant thing I heard was one of my students referring to “the place I stay at”. He couldn’t call it home because his life was so transient. What all these kids lacked was any kind of stability.

It was powerful stuff, and I wanted to get them to use storytelling to change their lives for the better.<sup>11</sup>

Story writing became a miraculous new chapter in class. Erin handed out journals and asked the kids to write about their own lives. Erin felt that kids, being at a delicate age, like to rebel so she encouraged her students to use the pen as a means of expressing their annoyance and rebellion. These essays submitted to her were of a sensitive nature and hence kept confidential. Many students wrote about their struggles in life at a tender age and their observations about life and people were quite interesting. Curiously writing about their experiences had a healing effect on them, purging their pain so to speak. A student writes: “I can relate to Anne and Zlata.<sup>12</sup> Like them, I have a diary, I write about how it feels to have disgust and hatred centred directly on you because of who you are.”<sup>13</sup>

Several of the writings were read out in class without disclosing the author. When a tragic and embarrassing story of an anonymous student was read out, he received an anonymous note — obviously from a classmate who sensed who the author was — which simply said, “I feel your pain — you’re not alone!”

9. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

11. Website: [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk).

12. Anne Frank of *Anne Frank’s Diary* and Zlata Filipovic of *Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo*.

13. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 73.

By writing they had found a common denominator which united them. Due to the cathartic effect of articulating their experiences they even acquired a passion for writing that developed their creative side. Erin's greatest lesson was to validate that everyone has a story.

Subsequently Erin's novel way of teaching through writing and tolerance grabbed the attention of the newspapers. One newspaper heading read: "Cathartic writing course chronicles students' pain — Teens honoured for rising above background to become advocates for tolerance". Other headlines read: "Literature transforms student toughs," "Writing to heal" and "Teaching Tolerance".<sup>14</sup>

Erin later reminisced:

I gave my students journals with the hope of giving them a voice. Before long, they began to pour out their stories openly, unburdened by the anxieties associated with spelling, grammar, and grades. Journals provided a safe place to become passionate writers communicating their own histories, their own insights. As they started to write down their thoughts and feelings, motivation blossomed. Suddenly, they had a forum for self-expression, and a place where they felt valued and validated.

As sophomores, my students were inspired to write letters to Miep Gies, the courageous woman who hid Anne Frank, and Zlata Filipovic, the teenage author who penned *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*. When Miep Gies told my students to make sure that "Anne's death is not in vain," they understood her message that writing and storytelling have the power to change the world. Following in the footsteps of extraordinary teenagers like Anne and Zlata, my students used their own diaries to share their experiences of loss, hardship, and discrimination.<sup>15</sup>

### 3

After teaching for a year at Wilson High School, Erin was slowly being accepted by her sceptical students. The teachers, though, were jealous of her achievements and criticised her for being elitist, over-enthusiastic and unorthodox in her style of teaching. In addition to her class, she was now assigned to teach a whole new crop of kids with below-par reading skills whom no other teacher wanted. The Head of the Department aggressively threw in a challenge, "Let's see what you can do with these kids, hotshot!" Some teachers called her a prima donna because she dressed elegantly. At that moment Erin understood why almost half of the new teachers dropped out within the first few years in the profession. Some of the teachers were

14. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

15. Website: [www.freedomwritersfoundation.org](http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org).

keen that she leave. Erin caved in to the pressure and got herself a teaching assignment at another High School. Erin narrates:

I was inches away from a clean getaway, until I made the mistake of telling my principal that I was planning to leave. He was shocked and asked me why.

“All of the teachers are out to get me!” I blurted out.

“But what about your students?” he asked. “Didn’t they sign up for your sophomore English class? Won’t they be disappointed if you’re not here on the first day of school?”

Then my hypocrisy hit me. All year long I had encouraged my students to avoid using labels like ‘all’ and other gross generalisations. . . . Holocaust survivor Renée Firestone reiterated my point of telling my students, “Don’t let the actions of a few determine the way you feel about an entire group. Remember, not *all* Germans were Nazis.” Now I was stereotyping by saying “all” teachers, when in reality it was only a handful who disliked me. There were actually several teachers who were supportive.

If I let a few other teachers chase me away from Wilson, the kids would be the ultimate losers. They would think that I, like so many others, had bailed on them. I realised I needed to finish what I had started.<sup>16</sup>

During the semester Erin selected the book *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (the second most read book in the world after the Bible), to be part of the course study. Later she read Zlata Filipovic — labelled the Anne Frank of Sarajevo — a book on the horrors of the siege of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War. She felt that the adversity faced by her students was similar to Anne and Zlata:

Even though the students were not held captive in an attic [like Anne] or dodging bombs in a basement [like Zlata] the violence permeating in the streets is just as frightening — and just as real.

For some of my students, my classroom is one of the only places where they feel safe.<sup>17</sup>

The class realised that there were teenagers who had suffered more than them.

The books had a therapeutic effect on the students since they not only connected with the stories of Anne and Zlata but were also deeply moved. A student writes: “I have great respect for Anne Frank for writing about her life in the attic, but to me, my neighbourhood is somewhat like her attic.”<sup>18</sup> A student reflects:

16. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 48.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

We've been talking about the war in Bosnia and how similar some of the events are to the Holocaust. We have been reading about a young girl named Zlata, who many call the modern-day Anne Frank. Zlata and I seem to have a lot in common because while Zlata was living through a war in Sarajevo, I was living through a different kind of war — the L.A. riots.<sup>19</sup>

Erin observes:

It's uncanny how many similarities my students have with Anne and Zlata. Since many of my students are fifteen, and Zlata is fifteen and Anne Frank was fifteen when she died, I think the parallels between age, alienation, and teenage angst will really hit home for them.

... my students witnessed Los Angeles literally burn in the wake of the Rodney King verdict; as Zlata dodged sniper fire in the streets where she once played, my students dodged stray bullets from drive-by shootings; as Zlata watched her friends killed by the senseless violence of war, my students watched friends get killed by senseless gang violence.<sup>20</sup>

Many students in the class thought violence was a solution to solve problems. But once they empathised with the pain of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic, and others, they came together as a harmonious family and realised that violence is not the solution. They then learnt the lesson of tolerance.

Erin reiterates the importance of the selection of her books: "I think my students will be able to identify with the teen protagonists in all of the books I've selected. I think they'll be surprised how life mirrors art."<sup>21</sup>

Erin later commented: "I've always felt that stories are a great way to learn about humanity. Traditionally, we use Homer and Shakespeare to teach kids, but I wanted to use stories that would enable them to make parallels with their own communities."<sup>22</sup>

By arousing the curiosity and interest of the students, Erin was successful in disciplining the class.

## §

19. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

22. Website: [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk).

*(The teacher found the children turbulent, rather lazy and as talkative as parrots. She asked:)* Is it like this because their real interest is not turned towards study?

[The Mother replied:] Yes.

*Q. What can we do to obtain calm and quietness in the class and get the children to do some work?*

A. The only effective thing is to create or awaken in them a *real* interest in study, *the need to learn and to know*, to awaken their *mental curiosity*.<sup>23</sup>

## §

Erin requested copies of the books by Anne and Zlata from the Head of the English Department but was turned down, being told that it was a waste of time, that her students were “too stupid” to understand such works, and would only ruin the copies. She used her own resources to procure these books.

## 4

After a year and a half of teaching the turnaround of the students had almost been complete. Erin writes in her diary:

After our ‘toast for change’ my students experienced an epiphany. My once apathetic students seemed to transform themselves into scholars with a conscience. They were so motivated that it’s awe-inspiring.<sup>24</sup>

Erin was astounded when a student, a recent disciplinary transfer into her class who earlier had found reading abhorrent, metamorphosed into a bookworm. Indeed, to Erin’s great surprise all her students had become voracious readers. They started showing off their new reading habit by carrying their new books in the smart plastic bags of the bookseller.

## §

23. See *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 12, pp. 332-33.

24. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 79.

The Mother says:

To love to learn is the most precious gift that one can make to a child, to learn always and everywhere.<sup>25</sup>

## §

Erin's success at school had such an impact that she was invited to a university to hold a seminar on how to inspire teens to read. The two hour seminar got so emotional that midway the participants started crying. At the end of the seminar the dean offered Erin a job at the university to teach two classes a week.

## 5

By now Erin had made a great impact in school and was given the title of educator. Erin introduced the books of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, arguably two of America's finest philosophers. A student writes:

Our class is really intrigued by Emerson because Ms. Gruwell is encouraging us to be independent thinkers. . . . I am amazed at how much his philosophy applies to me. . . .

When Emerson ended his essay with 'to be great is to be misunderstood', it made me think about how many people have always misunderstood me.<sup>26</sup>

## 6

By now the students got excited about their writing assignments *i.e.* writing about their experiences and insights. Erin saw a possibility of compiling their essays into a collaborative book. The students were so motivated that frequently they would do their homework in the classroom until 7 or 8 p.m. Erin, too, stayed late in order to guide her students.

Erin's efforts and caring were bearing fruit, a harvest so rich that she herself had not expected. The students' grades of Es and Fs changed to As and Bs. The disinterested 'drop-out' kids who hated studies had started taking interest in their studies and had transformed themselves into incessant disciplined learners.

## §

25. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 12, p. 166.

26. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, pp. 115-16.



The Mother has emphasised the importance of studies:

Studies strengthen the mind and turn its concentration away from the impulses and desires of the vital. Concentrating on study is one of the most powerful ways of controlling the mind and the vital; that is why it is so important to study.<sup>27</sup>

### §

Erin organised a trip to Washington for her class for which all the costs such as flights and hotels were paid by sponsors. For many who had never left their homes travelling to their capital city visiting all its magnificent monuments and marvellous museums was like a dream. They got an appointment to meet the Education Secretary, Richard Riley who was very impressed with the turnaround of the class over the last couple of years. They presented their diaries to him to enable him get a firsthand experience of the hardships that the students, living in the projects, face and how education has helped them in overcoming their ordeals. The students were so excited about the trip that on their return they narrated all their adventures to their families.

At the end of the semester Erin told her students: "Next year, you guys, I want you to be very active and I want the Freedom Writers<sup>28</sup> to be widely represented throughout Wilson High School Student Council, athletics, and any other extra-curricular activities."<sup>29</sup>

*(To be concluded)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

27. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 12, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 133.

28. The students of Erin's class named themselves "Freedom Writers".

29. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 187.

## HAIKU — POETRY OF THE PRESENT MOMENT: A HEALING AND A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE (OR NON-PRACTICE )

*Old pond —  
a frog jumps in  
sound of water*

— Basho

A haiku is a simple and subtle contemplative unrhymed poem, written in the present tense to express the immediacy of the Present Moment. Originating in Japan, it distills the essence of a moment in time which has moved the poet profoundly in some way: a moment of intense beauty or poignancy such as a beautiful sunset or the sound of a fading bell.

*The bell fades —  
the fragrance of blossoms remains  
this quiet evening*

— Basho

A simple dash usually separates the poem into two sections and the reader is invited to make the connection between the two contrasting images such as Joy and Sorrow, Fragility and Endurance, Action and Inaction, Temporal and Eternal, External and Internal.

This juxtaposition gives the poem a multi-layered meaning which leads the reader beyond the surface of the words into a deeper contemplation of some Eternal Truth.

### **Timelessness: Holiness**

One doesn't think about the poem trying to work it out intellectually but simply loses oneself in the feelings, sensations and atmosphere which moved the poet to express himself, floating in a timeless reverie where there's no separation anywhere, only Wholeness (Holiness).

Using only a handful of words a good haiku can transport the reader to a dreamlike dimension where time stands still, and all cares are suspended in a moment of sublime Oneness with Nature and Humanity.

*Keep a green bough in your heart  
and a singing bird will come*

— Lao Tzu

## Healing

By juxtaposing the Temporal with the Eternal the shattered fragments of life (hurled outwards from the Creator at the time of creation) are re-absorbed and re-united in the timelessness of the Eternal Now. This resolution of conflict between the Temporal state of the Many and the Eternal state of the One offers a healing for both the individual and world Soul.

Traditional Japanese haiku includes the mention of a season (*kigo*) making it part of the Eternal Cycle of the seasons, as well as highlighting a specific Temporal moment in the life of the poet upon Earth. Despite the many changes and vicissitudes of life the seasons continue their Eternal Cycles of Renewal, reminding us of some permanence within the transitory and giving solace in times of grief.

*On the bare branch  
the crow has settled —  
autumn evening*

— Basho

## Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)

The most revered Master of haiku was Matsuo Kinsaku who later named himself after a banana tree (*basho*) gifted to him by his disciples, being a Zen practitioner as well as a poet. It was he who revived the ancient Japanese verse form of haiku (known then as *hokku*) which had been almost stifled to death by the many dry and artificial rules governing its use. Indeed the rules had multiplied to such an extent that they had to be collected in a handbook which, ironically, poets consulted before composing their short and simple haiku verses.

Then along came Basho like a breath of fresh air and changed the form forever, making it accessible not only to the ordinary Japanese man on the street but to the whole Globe. Tossing the rulebook up in the air he insisted that the simplicity of haiku's Oneness with Nature and Humanity transcended the prison of rigid rules. He used the simplest language, making it possible for an ordinary person to become a poet; and in place of a rulebook his advice was simply:

Learn of the pine from the pine; learn of the bamboo from the bamboo.

Until then Japanese literature, including haiku, had been accessible only to the

privileged few as works of art. But all this was to change in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with a new era of commercial printing and publishing endeavours — and with it the revitalised practice of haiku under Basho's inspiration which, aided by mass printing, made the artform accessible to everyone outside the aristocracy and the Imperial Court.

## Haiku, the Tao and Zen

Like Zen Buddhism (a strong force in Japanese culture which developed in reaction to Japan's uptight formalities) haiku emphasises Simplicity, Naturalness and Oneness. Originating in China, Zen Buddhism, likewise haiku, was influenced by the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu.

Though the Tao is ultimately indefinable for 'The Tao that can be described is not the Eternal Tao', it can be roughly translated as The Way, the Natural Flow of Universal Forces within which one tries to act intuitively in 'going with the flow'. Like Zen (and haiku) you cannot explain the Tao, you can only experience it by living in the creative flow of life which contains infinite possibility and where there is no fixed destination, only the process of the Eternal Now.

The word Zen derives from the Chinese word *Chan*, in turn a derivative of the Indian Sanskrit *Dhyana* or *Sunya* one meaning of which is emptiness. No-mind or Empty-mind is not nothingness but rather fullness and completeness, where the small clingy mind is freed to become the undivided Whole Mind, which functions freely (non-attachedly) and merges spontaneously with its environment in the integrated way natural to it.

It is the True Mind, the Natural Mind. In this way it is said that Zen is such an ordinary and natural state that it is only true Zen when it is not being self-consciously practised — i.e. a Non-Practice.

## Action through Observation: the Quantum Physics of Haiku

In a state of undivided Natural-mind the haiku poet, like the Zen practitioner, is so identified with the object of contemplation that the observer and the observed become one. All sense of small self dissolves in a moment of true meditation, or as Basho puts it: when one enters an object in order to 'share its delicate life and feelings'.

*I am one  
who eats breakfast  
gazing at morning glories*  
— Basho

According to the momentous discoveries of Quantum Physics the sub-atomic particles of material objects change simply in response to being observed (maybe also our problems by simply holding and observing them in a contemplative stillness) — science supporting the metaphysics of ‘action through inaction’ (*wu-wei*).

*Sitting quietly, doing nothing,  
spring comes and the grass  
grows by itself*

— Basho

In our Quantum world not only are the observer and the observed intrinsically part of each other (whether or not we are able to experience it consciously), but there can be no observable Universe without an observer to observe it.

We create the world moment by moment simply by being observer-participants, co-creators in a responsive plastic sea of energy existing in a state of unmanifested potential and possibility. In fact, we are the World and the World is us.

### **Intimate Stillness**

Stilling the mind creates a quiet space for this deep intimacy to take place, where the poet and the reader contact the One Source from which the Manifold Universes arise. In stillness we re-discover the truth that we are the One Source as well as the Unique Individual Being co-creating this exquisite experimental Universe — not bystanders or helpless victims of fate but playing a star role.

The minimum amount of haiku words express the maximum depth of the experience — words of poetic power which open the door to a mysterious world beyond the threshold of the words themselves.

Or in the words of William Blake: “To see heaven in a grain of sand.”

*More than ever I want to see  
in these blossoms of dawn  
the god's face*

— Basho

### **Not Knowing**

*I'm never lost  
because I don't know  
where I'm going.*

— Ikku Zenji

Haiku is shrouded in a mysterious atmosphere of tranquillity: words are whispered on the wind not shouted from the rooftops. What is left unsaid is as important as what is said, lingering in the mind long after the poem is read and simply held in the heart like a precious jewel without knowing or doing anything.

In our mental analytical world we are tyrannised by the need to know everything. We want 5-step programmes to instant happiness, flat formulas for how to live properly and continuous external approval of who we are and what we do.

Haiku says that it's all right not to know, we can just be. So much of life is mysterious and imprecise beyond the understanding of reason.

*Not knowing the name of the tree  
I stood in the flood  
of its sweet smell*

— Basho

## We Are the Present Moment

Haiku is concerned with the here and now, a fleeting moment in time which has the power to astonish and lead to sudden illumination (*satori*): the aha! moment when time stands still and the Temporal becomes the Eternal.

The 'hai' of haiku means irony, wry humour, spontaneity and lightness, suggesting a spirit of child-like play and laughter at the paradoxes of the human predicament. The quality of lightness (*karumi*) in both Zen and haiku is linked with the state of non-attachment of the True-mind. The world is an ever-changing collection of fluid moments which cannot be possessed.

Haiku is a way of gathering these transitory moments in words through which the Temporary touches the Eternal Now. Since both the Past and the Future are simultaneously contained in the Present we have only the Now in which to have an effect on the past and future, creating a healing Harmony of Timelessness.

Universal themes such as the beauty of a sunset, fragile buds opening to the warmth of the sun, a frog jumping into a pond are distilled in an evocative picture-poem which links us to the unchanging Transcendent within the ceaselessly changing Temporal.

*Blooming plum  
the voices of children  
sound reverent*

— Issa

## Fullness of Feeling

Unlike traditional Buddhism with its many prescribed stages to Enlightenment, Zen is a direct path with no preparatory stages. Like Zen, haiku is immediate and spontaneous unhindered by formal methods and techniques. The only requirement is whole-heartedness, whether expressing feelings or facts, leaving no gap between the experiencer and the experienced.

*Mad with poetry  
I stride like Chikusai  
into the wind*

— Basho

In a state of True-mind the haiku poet expresses the fullness of the haiku moment with all his Heart and Soul bypassing the censoring intellect. Absolutely nothing comes between the poet and the direct emotional experience, leaving no room for dithering, diluting or distorting.

Thus haiku is fervent and charged with passionate emotion, opening the heart to experience the full range of human feelings which are suppressed beneath the intellect's lop-sided and false ideas about human strength.

Haiku breaks through our protective armour to reawaken the richness of feelings we all share in our common human vulnerability. Haiku says it's okay to feel sorrow as well as joy, doubt and fear as well as hope and peace. We can simply feel them without thinking about or judging them, allowing them to resolve themselves naturally in the Compassionate Stillness because Simple Awareness by itself slowly changes things.

Nothing is contrived but expressed sincerely and intensely, without the small distracting analytical mind getting in the way and diluting the essence of the experience and its emotional revelation.

*In walking, just walk  
in sitting, just sit  
above all, don't wobble.*

— Yun-Men

## Non-Intellectual, Non-Analytical

In the spirit of lightness haiku is devoid of analytical interpretation. It belongs to the intuitive plane beyond the opposites created by the lower intellectual mind, which needlessly stirs up more problems than it can solve and leaves the heart restless and ill at ease.

Haiku is always simply what is happening in this very moment, in this very place. In a state of mindful non-duality an immediate experience is recorded in its 'isness', its 'nowness'. The poet describes his experience but not how he feels about it: the opposite of contemporary confessional-style writing where everything is put on the table.

It has been said that we spend more time thinking about and preparing for our lives than actually living them. Haiku frees us from the prison of obsessive mental self-analysis and anxiety-ridden preoccupation with the uncertain future, and invites us to simply appreciate the world and our lives just as they are in this moment (*sono-mama*): an opportunity for healing the mind, shortening the queue in the psychoanalyst's waiting room and reducing our modern mental health statistics.

*From time to time  
the cloud gives rest  
to the moon-beholders*

— Basho

## Relatedness

By comparing and competing, the inferior intellectual mind destroys our sense of connectedness and relatedness with the whole of life (holiness), robbing us of the Peace which comes from knowing that we're never forsaken by the Whole because it is the very Essence of our Being.

Confidence in the natural organic process of life is undermined as we try to make sense of things in a disconnected mental vacuum. Haiku invites us to let go and to trust in the natural flow of life, yet knowing that in the Quantum world we have the power to create any number of possible outcomes and versions of ourselves.

*Relax, the future  
is already unfolding  
from long-planted seeds.*

— Anon

## Sharing the Half-said Small Thing

Like the half-finished Zen circle a haiku leaves things only half-said, inviting the reader to complete it in his own heart. If too much is expressed using too many words there is no room to gather the atmosphere of stillness needed for such a collaborative contemplation.

Japanese haiku were originally created by any number of poets in a collaboration of linked verse or *renga*. In modern haiku this collaborative process is continued by



the nature of its incompleteness, which beckons the reader to take part in its meaning, just as the Creator invites us to complete the meaning of the Universe by participating in its existence through conscious observation and attention.

It is said that a haiku is only born when someone else falls in love with it: a haiku is only a haiku when it is shared, making it a social activity. As in Zen which is practised unselfishly on behalf of everyone, so the haiku poet writes not for himself alone but in order to share his moment of inspiration with others.

*Summer night —  
even the stars  
are whispering  
to each other*

— Issa

### **Together But Alone**

Nevertheless, the spiritual seeker walks the inner path alone and this sense of loneliness (*sabi*) is also an intrinsic quality of haiku.

In our modern world many find it impossible to be alone for any length of time because we are so alienated from our Inner Being and from the experience/practice of simply being in the Invisible Presence. In fact, the Present Moment is nothing more than Presence itself in all its tremendous plastic potency and we are that Presence and the Present Moment too.

Again it is the co-existence of opposites — ‘alone but together’ — which characterises haiku: the ‘both-and’ philosophy rather than the divisive ‘either-or’, echoing the scientific discovery that atoms can be two things, both waves and particles at the same time. There is no rigid independent separate mechanistic reality, only unlimited creative possibility and potentiality for our Imagination to play with.

The natural melancholy of the impermanence of life adds to haiku’s atmosphere of lonely longing:

*The fragrance and colour  
of the wisteria  
seems far from the moon*

— Buson

### **Secret Treasures of our Enchanted World: Rediscovering the Lost Child Within**

Haiku shows us that a precious jewel lies hidden within everything, and that every situation contains a secret blessing. Haiku reveals what we may have taken for granted and overlooked in our hectic lifestyles, or failed to notice through over-

familiarity — looking without seeing.

Living increasingly in our heads we've alienated ourselves from the joy, wonder and spontaneity of the child within. We've become serious and cynical and suspicious, closing our hearts to the rapture of simply being alive in this incredible miraculous world.

Haiku reawakens the child in us who sees anew the tiny treasures of life everywhere, restoring our Souls and lifting our Hearts in feelings of intense Joy and Gratitude at just being alive in this moment. In seventh heaven, on cloud nine the child within comes out to play, swinging on the stars and laughingly chasing moonbeams.

*How many many things  
they call to mind  
these cherry blossoms!*

— Basho

## Nature and the Material World

Haiku's preoccupation with Nature also provides a common field of universal experience which unites, since the sun sets below every horizon. Outside Japan the contemplation of human nature and human relationships (*senryu*) has become equal to the contemplation of Nature, through which common human feelings can be shared and the barriers which separate people can begin to come down.

*Even considered  
in the most favourable light  
he looks cold*

— Issa

There is nothing abstract about haiku. It is a poetry of materiality, grounded on the Earth Plane and celebrating the wonders of creation and its manifold creatures in a concrete event or moment.

Like Zen it is about the extraordinariness of ordinary things. It celebrates the 'humble' which comes from the word 'humus' or earth. Deflating our intellectual and spiritual pretensions it brings us right back down to earth and to the ordinary physical world, reconnecting us with our true selves, not the false images which we anxiously strain to live up to. Slowly, we return to the steady stable rhythms of Nature.

## Unity in Diversity: To Thine Own Self Be True

The accessibility of haiku's simplicity has made it popular throughout the world

where it has been adopted and adapted by almost all languages.

Although a traditional Japanese haiku uses only 3 lines totalling 17 syllables: 7 syllables in the middle line with 5 syllables in the first and third lines, modern haiku has evolved autonomously outside Japan in innovative and original ways and abandoned the strict counting of syllables.

Basho himself, though usually abiding by the most basic haiku traditions, cautioned his disciples against insincere imitation:

*Don't imitate me  
it's as boring  
as the two halves of a melon.  
Don't follow in the footsteps  
of the old poets —  
seek what they sought.*

Today there can be 5 line haiku, 2 lines or just one line. Ultimately a haiku can even consist of only one word (*tundra*), a stand-alone word or in sequence as a list-poem.

## **A Poetry and a Practice for Our Time**

In our restless modern world of speed and superficiality haiku invites us to pause, to still our anxious minds and to notice the small overlooked details of life, the miraculous in the everyday.

In our culture where 'doing' rather than 'being' has become almost an eleventh commandment, haiku is a way of re-imagining boredom, how we tend to view doing nothing. Instead of reaching for the smartphone or some other distraction to fill the nothingness or boredom, we could perhaps value that moment as a precious opportunity to pay attention to our surroundings and notice the rich details of life. Or simply 'be' and by being maybe affect life in unknown ways, the past as well as the future.

By identifying ourselves with Nature and with the rest of Humanity we are momentarily relieved of the burden of the sufferings of the small self, and its repetitious preoccupation with life's problems. In a moment of expanded Universal Communion the prison of 'I' transcends to the limitless 'Us' as we are lifted into a state of fellow-feeling and sympathy with All Life.

*Sharing tree shade  
with a butterfly —  
friends in a previous life*

— Issa

## Journeying Together

Haiku is for everyone and about anything under the sun and you do not need to be a gifted poet to write haiku. In fact, you don't even need to write haiku, just being absorbed in the world of haiku by reading it is to take a life-changing Journey of Consciousness into realms of the widest and highest kind.

Not all moments in life are haiku-happenings, but when the haiku-moment strikes there is a sudden feeling of aliveness in the world just as it is without analysis. A moment to be savoured and shared.

It might be a moment of simple significance rather than one of earth-shattering enlightenment, but when it strikes the poet is compelled to immortalise it in a few words.

*Just simply alive  
both of us, I  
and the poppy*

— Issa

Do you feel a haiku moment coming on?

GLENYS NIVEDITA

## Acknowledgments

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*The Way of Zen:* Alan Watts

*Frogpond:* 34: 1

*The Narrow Road to the Northern Interior:* Matsuo Basho

Wikipedia

*Deep glens of joy and crooning waterfalls  
And woods of quivering purple solitude;  
Below him lay like gleaming jewelled thoughts  
Rapt dreaming cities of Gandharva kings.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 234)

# THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

(Continued from the issue of October 2016)

## II

### GLIMPSES OF SOME OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

#### The Distribution of Prasad by the Mother

We remember also how the ‘Distribution’ after the group activities in the Playground started. The Mother decided to distribute some small quantity of strength-giving food after the children had finished their group activities. Indeed, this little ‘food’ from the hands of the Mother was so delicious! Ravindra-ji was in charge of supplying this ‘food’ with Sumedha and Usha, two young girls of the ‘Dortoir’ as his helpers. Sumedha shares with us her reminiscences of those years:

I remember, I was in Group B then and *Douce Mère* had come to see us play ‘*Rumal Chor*’ on the eastern side of the Playground. Then, She gave us toffees.

After a few days, we and all the others received ‘coconut and jaggery’, one piece each.

Ravindra-ji used to bring the ‘coconut and jaggery’ in trays from the Ashram, and he would then ask some of us, the children of ‘Dortoir’, our hostel, to count the pieces of coconut. (It seems that the coconuts were cut in the room which is now the Central Office and was formerly Amrita-da’s Office.) Ravindra-ji said that Arunkant and I counted most correctly, so we were allotted that work everyday.

After everyone had finished playing, Ravindra-ji would stand near the gate, the trays were kept on the concrete bench nearby, and he would give each one a piece of ‘coconut and jaggery’ as we passed in a line. Once *Douce Mère*, before going out to the Ashram, came and asked for a piece of coconut. She took a bite and gave the piece back to Ravindra-ji, who, naturally, put it in his mouth immediately. But each one who came after that asked for that particular piece.

After a few days, we were also given groundnuts, roasted with salt and turmeric. This was prepared in our Bakery. So, one day it was ‘coconut and jaggery’ and the next day it was a ladleful of groundnuts.

Later, perhaps when *Douce Mère* started playing tennis in the Tennis

Ground, She Herself began distributing groundnuts to all. She would come out of her room in the Playground and first distribute groundnuts to those who were standing just outside Her door (these were the workers of the Dining Room who would immediately go and join their work), before going towards the Groups. All the Groups would stand in double rows, facing each other, the youngest ones on the western side of the Playground, in front of the Guest House, and then, there would be the slightly elder ones in front of the present Art House. After that came the young boys of Group C, then Group D, and then Group E, the ladies, under the 'Dortoir' Neem tree, and finally, all the others who were not in the Groups.

*Douce Mère* would walk between the two lines, distributing groundnuts with a large wooden spoon which had a red handle, once to the left and once to the right. Amiyoda walked backwards before Her, carrying in his hands a white enamel basin with the groundnuts. During the distribution, Usha and I used to sieve the groundnuts using a big square sieve. We were near the gate, at the concrete bench, and Usha would take the groundnuts, also in a white basin, and put them into Amiyoda's basin.

Normally, *Douce Mère* gave one spoonful to all; to some She gave two spoonfuls; to some just half-a-spoonful, often, just as much or as little as the person asked for.

The little children would finish their share and go and stand in the queue again, between the lines of the other Groups, or stretch out their hands from behind the queue for more. Sometimes *Douce Mère* gave them an extra helping when they said, "*Deux fois*" (meaning "twice"), sometimes She did not. Some of the older children who did more vigorous exercises than the others, after finishing their share would ask for more from the older people. When *Douce Mère* saw that, She started giving them a double portion. One of the young boys, rather thin in build, would on most days ask for "very little" i.e. groundnuts. After a few days of this, the Mother (in a severe motherly tone) told him: "This way you will never become big!" From that day on he asked for "full"!

Nishikanto Roy Choudhury, a great Bengali poet, had lived for some time in his younger days in Rabindranath's Shantiniketan. He used to write poems even at that time and Tagore recognising his exceptional capacity wanted him to stay in Shantiniketan. He was also an able student of the famous Nandalal Bose of the Kala Bhavan there. However, Nishikanto came to Pondicherry and was accepted by the Mother as a *sadhak* of the Ashram. Sri Aurobindo had described him as "a Brahmaputra of inspiration", referring to his poetic genius.

Sumedha continues her narration:

To Nishikanto-da — Kobi-da for us — the Mother would give only a single groundnut as he suffered from a number of ailments. Very much a poet and a person with a humorous temperament, he composed a couplet in Bengali:

*Playground-er Madame,  
Debena Badam!*

(“The Lady of the Playground will not give me nuts!”)

He would even tell the children of the Green Group (Group A): “After I die, I shall be reborn in the Green Group, and the child who eats the most groundnuts, you can be sure, will be me!”

Batti-da (Prabhakar) gives us some more interesting information regarding the poet:

The Mother reduced his share of groundnuts (*Prasad*) to just one nut. Kobi tried to get round that severe rationing by coaxing some of those taking half a spoon or less to ask for full and pass on their excess to him. He had a particular spot (under the ‘Dortoir’ Neem tree) as collection centre. The Mother was told about this. She naturally put a stop to this.

Initially, the youngest children, (of Green Group) received from the Mother their groundnuts in the “Children’s Courtyard” in the Guest House, where they played after their Group activities. After the distribution there, Dada would garland *Douce Mère* with a thick garland of white jasmines. It was Usha-di, Tejen-da’s wife, who used to weave the garland with lots of care.

Sumedha continues:

After 1950, *Douce Mère* stopped seeing people at different times of the day in the Ashram. So, most people used to come to the Playground. They too would join the queue for groundnuts after the Groups.

Once, when *Douce Mère* was distributing groundnuts, she came to Amal Kiran, who had a defective leg, and was standing in the line. Suddenly, he fell down. *Douce Mère* helped him up. When he asked Her why he had fallen down, She replied that it was “the fall of the ego!”

Amiyo-da, Usha and I used to get our share of groundnuts last. Once, only one groundnut was left, so *Douce Mère* with a little laugh gave half of it to Usha and half to me.

Pondicherry was then a free port. Sometimes, we received foreign toffees which came in lovely boxes.

Once, we received marshmallows and *Douce Mère*, as She distributed

them to us, told us to put them immediately in our mouth as these were soft sweets. For some, She Herself put the sweet in their mouth.

Several times, we received from Her boiled maize, smeared with a little butter and wrapped in a white paper.

On special days, we sometimes received *boondi laddus*. They were prepared in 'Cottage' (the Cottage Industries section which also prepared some sweets) by Ganpatram-ji. When the Jaipurias bought the Swadeshi Mills, they wanted *Douce Mère* to distribute huge *laddus*. *Douce Mère* called Ganpatram-ji and told him to prepare really big *laddus*. Ganpatram-ji made *laddus* of two or three sizes and took them to *Douce Mère*. She selected the biggest one. The *laddus* we received were really very big! After distribution, *Douce Mère* told him: "Ganpatram, you could not make the *laddus* big enough." Ganpatram-ji was sad, for he had made the *laddus* exactly of the size that *Douce Mère* had selected. When he met *Douce Mère* later, he asked Her why She had remarked that the *laddus* were not big enough. She replied, "Your heart was not large enough."

On another occasion, it was Dada's birthday, we received *boondi laddus* (the size was normal!). When the 'Gymnastic Marching' for Group H was going on, Ganpatram-ji brought the trays with the *laddus* and put them in *Douce Mère*'s room. Each tray was covered with a white cloth and kept on stools, later they were placed near the window adjacent to the map of India with *Douce Mère*'s symbol. Usha and I would place the trays on another stool from where Amiyo-da would give them to *Douce Mère*. The line was not yet finished when the last tray was put out. Finally there were no more *laddus* for *Douce Mère* to distribute. Dada gave all the toffees he had received from people, while Ravindra-ji hurried to the Standard Stores (which is now renamed Grinde, and which then used to be where we now have our Book Stock) to buy more toffees. At the end, Usha and I got nothing at all, even the toffees were finished. We were waiting near the window as some people were with *Douce Mère*. Dada was pacing up and down near us. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Mother, here is a tray of *laddus*." Someone who needed a stool must have put the tray on the window-sill, and none of us had noticed it. Finally, Usha and I received not only some chocolate-toffees but also *laddus*.

On rainy days, everybody gathered in the verandah on the right side of the Playground gate. *Douce Mère* would stand on the western side, near the wall-bars, for the distribution. Ravindra-ji, Usha and myself would be near the gate with the extra groundnuts. When we had sieved the groundnuts, we would take them to Amiyo-da, skilfully negotiating through the crowd.

Later, *Douce Mère*, sitting in front of the map, started distributing the groundnuts in small light-pink cloth-bags. The bags were kept in a big square metal container on a stool to *Douce Mère*'s right. She had a glass bowl on Her



lap into which Amiyo-da would keep putting the groundnut bags.

Usha and I would fill these bags with the groundnuts that Ravindra-ji brought from the Ashram. We would take the bags to Amiyo-da and he would indicate to us if he wanted more, depending on the length of the queue. Once, there were two bags left in the bowl, and none in the big metal container, and only two persons in the queue, and, he indicated that no more bags would be needed. Now, *Douce Mère* gave two bags of groundnuts to the last but one person (by mistake or was it intentional?). When the last person came near — she was the Queen of Darbhanga — there were no bags left for *Douce Mère* to give her. Amiyo-da ran to us for more bags. But we had none!

That night in the Ashram Ravindra-ji got a good scolding from *Douce Mère*. “There stood the Queen of Darbhanga and I had nothing to give her!” The next evening, Usha and I got a good scolding from Ravindra-ji. After that, we made it a point to keep a hundred filled bags in the big container.

Almost all the Ashramites were in the Playground when *Douce Mère* distributed groundnuts. We, the children used to play or do our homework, get things explained by our teachers either in the ground or in the Laboratory which was then in the Playground compound. On the whole, there was a lot of talking and noise and movement. Therefore, a notice was put up that nobody should talk during the Distribution. Now, Usha and I had to communicate sometimes when we filled the bags. So, we learned the “*Alphabet Sourd-Muet*”, the sign-language used by the deaf and dumb from the French dictionary, *Larousse*.

Sometimes music was played during the Distribution. Once, some light French songs were played and one of our serious minded teachers walked out of the Playground, saying, “Is this spirituality?”

Later on, instead of groundnuts, *Douce Mère* would distribute what has come to be known as Ganpatram-ji’s or ‘Cottage toffees’ (cashew toffees made in the Cottage Industries — one can still get them in the section known as Cottage Restaurant.)

On the whole, we all had a very happy time in the Playground. We were all there till *Douce Mère* left for the Ashram — sometimes, it would be 9 p.m. or even later.

Batti-da shares with us two more interesting incidents:

1) Boiled and salted maize was the item of distribution on that day. When all groups got theirs, there were 10-12 left over — not worth the trouble of taking them back to the Ashram (to Ravindra-ji).

The Mother espied some of us boys. She called us and organised 2-3 running races the length of the Playground. The winner got salted maize as prize.

2) On this particular day, there was a ‘special’ item for the distribution. A devotee had offered biscuits covered with chocolate — all wrapped in colourful silver paper. As it happened, that day, Group C (the present Group D) was the last group. But there were no more chocolate-covered biscuits! Post haste to the shop nearby to bring some big bars of chocolate. We were given, one each — a whole bar!! The Mother remarked: “*Vous voyez — avec la patience même les chocolats deviennent grands!*” (You see — with patience even the chocolates grow big!)

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

*The sadhaka of the integral Yoga will make use of all these aids according to his nature; but it is necessary that he should shun their limitations and cast from himself that exclusive tendency of egoistic mind which cries, “My God, my Incarnation, my Prophet, my Guru,” and opposes it to all other realisation in a sectarian or a fanatical spirit. All sectarianism, all fanaticism must be shunned; for it is inconsistent with the integrity of the divine realisation.*

*On the contrary, the sadhaka of the integral Yoga will not be satisfied until he has included all other names and forms of Deity in his own conception, seen his own Ishta Devata in all others, unified all Avatars in the unity of Him who descends in the Avatar, welded the truth in all teachings into the harmony of the Eternal Wisdom.*

*Nor should he forget the aim of these external aids which is to awaken his soul to the Divine within him. Nothing has been finally accomplished if that has not been accomplished. It is not sufficient to worship Krishna, Christ or Buddha without, if there is not the revealing and the formation of the Buddha, the Christ or Krishna in ourselves. And all other aids equally have no other purpose; each is a bridge between man’s unconverted state and the revelation of the Divine within him.*

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 66)