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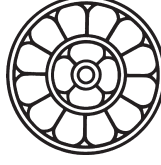
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXX

No. 4

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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# SOME TRANSLATIONS FROM HOMER

## 1. OPENING OF THE ILIAD

Sing to me, Muse, of the wrath of Achilles Pelidean,  
Murderous, bringing a million woes on the men of Achaea;  
Many the mighty souls whom it drove down headlong to Hades,  
Souls of heroes and made of their bodies booty for vultures,  
Dogs and all birds; so the will of Zeus was wholly accomplished  
Even from the moment when they two parted in strife and in anger,  
Pelus' glorious son and the monarch of men Agamemnon.  
Which of the gods was it set them to conflict and quarrel disastrous?  
Leto's son from the seed of Zeus; he wroth with their monarch  
Roused in the ranks an evil pest and the peoples perished.  
For he insulted Chryses, priest and master of prayer,  
Atreus' son, when he came to the swift ships of the Achaeans  
Hoping release for his daughter, bringing a limitless ransom  
While in his hands were the chaplets of great far-hurling Apollo  
Twined on a sceptre of gold and entreated all the Achaeans.  
"Atreus' son and all you highgreaved armèd Achaeans;  
You may the gods grant, they who dwell in your lofty Olympus,  
Priam's city to sack and safely to reach your firesides.  
Only my child beloved may you loose to me taking this ransom,  
Holding in awe great Zeus' son far-hurling Apollo."  
Then all there rumoured approval, the other Achaeans,  
Deeming the priest to revere and take that glorious ransom,  
But Agamemnon it pleased not; the heart of him angered,  
Evilly rather he sent him and hard was his word upon him.  
"Let me not find thee again, old man, by our ships of the Ocean  
Either lingering now or afterwards ever returning,  
Lest the sceptre avail thee not, no nor the great God's chaplets.  
Her will I not release; before that age shall o'ertake her  
There in our dwelling in Argos far from the land of her fathers  
Going about her loom, ascending my couch at nightfall.  
Hence with thee, rouse me not, safer shalt thou return then homeward."  
So he spake and the old man feared him and heeded his bidding.  
Voiceless along the shore by the myriad cry of the waters  
Slowly he went; but deeply he prayed as he paced to the distance,  
Prayed to the Lord Apollo, child of Leto the golden.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 602-03)*

## 2. OPENING OF THE ODYSSEY

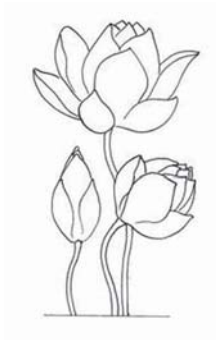
Sing to me, Muse, of the man many-counselled who far through the world's ways  
 Wandering was tossed after Troya he sacked, the divine stronghold,  
 Many cities of men he beheld, learned the minds of their dwellers,  
 Many the woes in his soul he suffered driven on the waters,  
 Fending from fate his life and the homeward course of his comrades.  
 Them even so he saved not for all his desire and his striving;  
 Who by their own infatuate madness piteously perished,  
 Fools in their hearts! for they slew the herds the deity pastured,  
 Helios high-climbing; but he from them reft their return and the daylight.  
 Sing to us also of these things, goddess, daughter of heaven.

Now all the rest who had fled from death and sudden destruction  
 Safe dwelt at home, from the war escaped and the swallowing ocean:  
 He alone far was kept from his fatherland, far from his consort,  
 Long by the nymph divine, the sea-born goddess, Calypso,  
 Stayed in her hollow caves; for she yearned to keep him her husband.  
 Yet when the year came at last in the rolling gyre of the seasons  
 When in the web of their wills the gods spun out his returning  
 Homeward to Ithaca, — there too he found not release from his labour,  
 In his own land with his loved ones, — all the immortals had pity  
 Save Poseidon alone; but he with implacable anger  
 Moved against godlike Odysseus before his return to his country.  
 Now was he gone to the land of the Aethiopes, nations far-distant, —  
 They who to either hand divided, remotest of mortals,  
 Dwell where the high-climbing Helios sets and where he arises;  
 There of bulls and of rams the slaughtered hecatomb tasting  
 He by the banquet seated rejoiced; but the other immortals  
 Sat in the halls of Zeus Olympian; the throng of them seated,  
 First led the word the father divine of men and immortals;  
 For in his heart had the memory risen of noble Aegisthus  
 Whom in his halls Orestes, the famed Agamemnonid, slaughtered;  
 Him in his heart recalling he spoke mid the assembled immortals:  
 “Out on it! how are the gods ever vainly accused by earth's creatures!  
 Still they say that from us they have miseries; they rather always  
 By their own folly and madness draw on them woes we have willed not.  
 Even as now Aegisthus, violating Fate, from Atrides  
 Took his wedded wife and slew her husband returning,  
 Knowing the violent end; for we warned him before, we sent him  
 Hermes charged with our message, the far-scanning slayer of Argus,  
 Neither the hero to smite nor wed the wife of Atrides,

Since from Orestes a vengeance shall be, the Atreid offspring,  
 When to his youth he shall come and desire the soil of his country.  
 Yet not for all his words would the infatuate heart of Aegisthus  
 Heed that friendly voice; now all in a mass has been paid for.”  
 Answered then to Zeus the goddess grey-eyed Athene.  
 “Father of ours, thou son of Cronus, highest of the regnant,  
 He indeed and utterly fell by a fitting destruction:  
 So too perish all who dare like deeds among mortals.  
 But for a far better man my heart burns, clear-eyed Odysseus  
 Who, ill-fated, far from his loved ones suffers and sorrows  
 Hemmed in the island girt by the waves, in the navel of ocean,  
 Where in her dwelling mid woods and caves a goddess inhabits,  
 Daughter of Atlas whose baleful heart knows all the abysses  
 Fathomless, vast of the sea and the pillars high on his shoulders  
 In his huge strength he upbears that part the earth and the heavens;  
 Atlas’ daughter keeps in that island the unhappy Odysseus.  
 Always soft are her words and crafty and thus she beguiles him.  
 So perhaps he shall cease from thought of his land; but Odysseus  
 Yearns to see even the distant smoke of his country upleaping.  
 Death he desires. And even in thee, O Olympian, my father,  
 Never thy heart turns one moment to pity, nor dost thou remember  
 How by the ships of the Argives he wrought the sacrifice pleasing  
 Oft in wide-wayed Troya. What wrath gainst the wronged keeps thy bosom?

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 604-05)*



**3. HEXAMETERS FROM HOMER**

Down he fell with a thud and his armour clangoured upon him.

\*

Down from the peaks of Olympus he went, wrath vexing his heart-strings.

\*

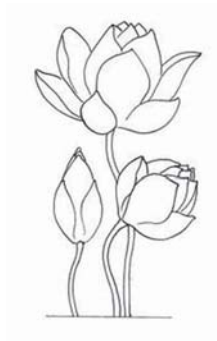
Down from the peaks of Olympus she went impetuously darting.

\*

Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured Ocean.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 606)*



## ON HOMER

The Vedic times were an age in which men lived in the material consciousness as did the heroes of Homer. The Rishis were the mystics of the time and took the frame of their symbolic imagery from the material life around them. (CWSA, 27:14)

\*

Homer and Chaucer are poets of the physical consciousness — I have pointed that out in *The Future Poetry*. (27:14)

\*

Shakespeare is a poet of the vital inspiration, Homer of the subtle physical, but there are no greater poets in any literature. (27:26)

\*

*Sri Aurobindo was asked: "You said that these two lines of Amal's poem:*

*Flickering no longer with the cry of clay,  
The distance-haunted fire of mystic mind*

*have an Overmind touch. . . . Can you show me where their super-excellence lies?"*

When I say that a line comes from a higher or overhead plane or has the Overmind touch, I do not mean that it is superior in pure poetic excellence to others from lower planes — that Amal's lines outshine Shakespeare or Homer for instance. I simply mean that it has some vision, light, etc. from up there and the character of its expression and rhythm are from there. (27:23)

\*

Mind also has its own types of perfection and its own absolutes. What intrusion of Overmind or Supermind could produce philosophies more perfect in themselves than the systems of Shankara or Plato or Plotinus or Spinoza or Hegel, poetry superior to Homer's, Shakespeare's, Dante's or Valmiki's, music more superb than the music of Beethoven or Bach, sculpture greater than the statues of Phidias and Michael



Angelo, architecture more utterly beautiful than the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon or Borobudur or St. Peter's or of the great Gothic cathedrals? The same may be said of the crafts of ancient Greece and Japan in the Middle Ages or structural feats like the Pyramids or engineering feats like the Dnieper Dam or inventions and manufactures like the great modern steamships and the motor car. (27:72)

\*

There are critics now who are in ecstasies over Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and put it on the very highest level, but we could hardly reconcile ourselves to classing any lines from it with a supreme line from Homer or Milton. (27:79)

\*

Now I come to the law prohibiting repetition. This rule aims at a certain kind of intellectual elegance which comes into poetry when the poetic intelligence and the call for a refined and classical taste begin to predominate. It regards poetry as a cultural entertainment and amusement of the highly civilised mind; it interests by a faultless art of words, a constant and ingenious invention, a sustained novelty of ideas, incidents, word and phrase. An unfailling variety or the outward appearance of it is one of the elegances of this art. But all poetry is not of this kind; its rule does not apply to poets like Homer or Valmiki or other early writers. The Veda might almost be described as a mass of repetitions; so might the work of Vaishnava poets and the poetic literature of devotion generally in India. Arnold has noted this distinction when speaking of Homer; he mentioned especially that there is nothing objectionable in the close repetition of the same word in the Homeric way of writing. In many things Homer seems to make a point of repeating himself. He has stock descriptions, epithets always reiterated, lines even which are constantly repeated again and again when the same incident returns in his narrative, e.g. the line,

doupēsen de pesōn arabēse de teuche' ep' autōi.

“Down with a thud he fell and his armour clangoured upon him.”

He does not hesitate also to repeat the bulk of a line with a variation at the end, e.g.

bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn chōomenos kēr.

And again the

bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn aīxasa.

“Down from the peaks of Olympus he came, wrath vexing his heart-strings” and again, “Down from the peaks of Olympus she came impetuously darting.” He begins another line elsewhere with the same word and a similar action and with the same nature of a human movement physical and psychological in a scene of Nature, here a man’s silent sorrow listening to the roar of the ocean:

bē d’akeōn para thina poluphloisboio thalassēs

“Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured ocean.”

In mystic poetry also repetition is not objectionable; it is resorted to by many poets, sometimes with insistence. I may note as an example the constant repetition of the word *Ritam*, truth, sometimes eight or nine times in a short poem of nine or ten stanzas and often in the same line. This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. He uses *āvṛtti*, repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. Moreover, the object is not only to present a secret truth in its true form and true vision but to drive it home by the finding of the true word, the true phrase, the *mot juste*, the true image or symbol, if possible the inevitable word; if that is there, nothing else, repetition included, matters much. This is natural when the repetition is intended, serves a purpose; but it can hold even when the repetition is not deliberate but comes in naturally in the stream of the inspiration. I see, therefore, no objection to the recurrence of the same or similar image such as sea and ocean, sky and heaven in a lone long passage provided each is the right thing and rightly worded in its place. The same rule applies to words, epithets, ideas. It is only if the repetition is clumsy or awkward, too burdensomely insistent, at once unneeded and inexpressive or amounts to a disagreeable and meaningless echo that it must be rejected. (27:96-97)

\*

. . . just as technique is not all, so even Beauty is not all in Art. Art is not only technique or form of Beauty, not only the discovery or the expression of Beauty, — it is a self-expression of Consciousness under the conditions of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. Or to put it otherwise there are not only aesthetic values but

life-values, mind-values, soul-values, that enter into Art. The artist puts out into form not only the powers of his own consciousness but the powers of the Consciousness that has made the worlds and their objects. And if that Consciousness according to the Vedantic view is fundamentally equal everywhere, it is still in manifestation not an equal power in all things. There is more of the Divine expression in the Vibhuti than in the common man, *prākṛto janah*; in some forms of life there are less potentialities for the self-expression of the Spirit than in others. And there are also gradations of consciousness which make a difference, if not in the aesthetic value or greatness of a work of art, yet in its contents value. Homer makes beauty out of man's outward life and action and stops there. Shakespeare rises one step farther and reveals to us a life-soul and life-forces and life-values to which Homer had no access. In Valmiki and Vyasa there is the constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare. And beyond the Ideals and Idea-Forces even there are other presences, more inner or inmost realities, a soul behind things and beings, the spirit and its powers, which could be the subject-matter of an art still more rich and deep and abundant in its interest than any of these could be. A poet finding these and giving them a voice with a genius equal to that of the poets of the past might not be greater than they in a purely aesthetical valuation, but his art's contents-value, its consciousness-values could be deeper and higher and much fuller than in any achievement before him. There is something here that goes beyond any considerations of Art for Art's sake or Art for Beauty's sake; for while these stress usefully sometimes the indispensable first elements of artistic creation, they would limit too much the creation itself if they stood for the exclusion of the something More that compels Art to change always in its constant seeking for more and more that must be expressed of the concealed or the revealed Divine, of the individual and the universal or the transcendent Spirit. (27:122-23)

\*

Poetry does not consist only in images or fine phrases. When Homer writes simply "Sing, Goddess, the baleful wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus, which laid a thousand woes on the Achaeans and hurled many strong souls of heroes down to Hades and made their bodies a prey for dogs and all the birds; and the will of Zeus was accomplished", he is writing in the highest style of poetry. (27:166)

\*

I am unable to agree with you that Chapman's poetry is noble or equal, even at its best, to Homer and it seems to me that you have not seized the subtler quality of what Arnold means by noble. "Muscular vigour, strong nervous rhythm" are force-

ful, not noble. Everywhere in your remarks you seem to confuse nobility and forcefulness, but there is between the two a gulf of difference. Chapman is certainly forceful, next to Marlowe, I suppose, the most forceful poet among the Elizabethans.

(27:171)

\*

There is no nobility at all in . . . :

And such a stormy day shall come, in mind and soul I know,  
When sacred Troy shall shed her towers, for tears of overthrow.

The first line of the couplet is rhetorical and padded, the second is a violent, indeed an extravagant conceit which does not convey any true and high emotion but is intended to strike and startle the intellectual imagination. One has only to compare Homer's magnificent lines absolute in their nobility of restrained yet strong emotion, in which the words and rhythm give the very soul of the emotion

essetai ēmar hot' an pot' olōlē Ilios hirē

(There shall be a day when sacred Ilion shall perish)

but in its depths, not with any outward vehemence. In the fourth quotation:

Heard Thetis' foul petition and wished in any wise  
The splendour of the burning ships might satiate his eyes

the first line has the ordinary ballad movement and diction and cannot rank, the second is fine poetry, vivid and impressive, with a beginning of grandeur — but the nobility of Homer, Virgil or Milton is not there. The line strikes at the mind with a great vehemence in order to impress it — nobility in poetry enters in and takes possession with an assured gait, by its own right. It would seem to me that one has only to put the work of these greater poets side by side with Chapman's best to feel the difference. Chapman no doubt lifts rocks and makes mountains suddenly to rise — in that sense he has elevation or rather elevations; but in doing it he gesticulates, wrestles, succeeds finally with a shout of triumph; that does not give a noble effect or a noble movement. See in contrast with what a self-possessed grandeur, dignity or godlike ease Milton, Virgil, Homer make their ascensions or keep their high levels. (27:171-72)

\*

All perfection is not necessarily inevitability. I have tried to explain in *The Future Poetry* — very unsuccessfully I am afraid — that there are different grades of perfection in poetry: adequateness, effectivity, illumination of language, inspiredness — finally, inevitability. These are things one has to learn to feel, one can't analyse.

All the styles, “adequate”, “effective”, etc. can be raised to inevitability in their own line.<sup>1</sup>

The supreme inevitability is something more even than that, a speech overwhelmingly sheer, pure and true, a quintessential essence of convincingly perfect utterance. That goes out of all classifications and is unanalysable. Instances would include the most different kinds of style — Keats' “magic casements”, Wordsworth's [*lines on*] Newton and his “fields of sleep”, Shakespeare's “Macbeth has murdered sleep”, Homer's descent of Apollo from Olympus, Virgil's “Sunt lachrimae rerum” and his “O passi graviora”. (27:185-86)

\*

*Would you please tell me where in Homer the “descent of Apollo” occurs?*

It is in the first fifty or a hundred lines of the first book of the Iliad.<sup>2</sup>

*I don't suppose Chapman or Pope have rendered it adequately.*

Of course not — nobody could translate that — they have surely made a mess of it.

Homer's passage translated into English would sound perfectly ordinary. He gets the best part of his effect from his rhythm. Translated it would run merely like this, “And he descended from the peaks of Olympus, wroth at heart, bearing on his shoulders arrows and doubly pent-in quiver, and there arose the clang of his silver bow as he moved, and he came made like unto the night.” His words too are quite simple but the vowellation and the rhythm make the clang of the silver bow go smashing through the world into universes beyond while the last words give a most august and formidable impression of godhead. (27:188)

\*

Your critic's rule seems to me rather too positive; like all rules it may stand in principle in a majority of cases, but in the minority (which is the best part, for the less is often greater than the more) it need not stand at all. Pushed too far, it would

1. *This item is composed of parts of three letters that were typed together and revised by Sri Aurobindo in that form. — Ed.*

2. *The passage begins with line 44 of the first book of the Iliad:  
bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn chōomenos kēr. — Ed.*

mean that Homer and Virgil can be translated only in hexameters. Again, what of the reverse cases — the many fine prose translations of poets so much better and more akin to the spirit of the original than any poetic version of them yet made? One need not go farther than Tagore's English version of his *Gitanjali*. If poetry can be translated so admirably (and therefore legitimately) into prose, why should not prose be translated legitimately (and admirably) into poetry? After all, rules are made more for the convenience of critics than as a binding law for creators. (27:200)

\*

When I said there were no greater poets than Homer and Shakespeare, I was thinking of their essential poetic force and beauty — not of the scope of their work as a whole, for there are poets greater in their range. The Mahabharata is from that point of view a far greater creation than the Iliad, the Ramayana than the Odyssey, and either spreads its strength and its achievement over a larger field than the whole dramatic world of Shakespeare; both are built on an almost cosmic vastness of plan and take all human life (the Mahabharata all human thought as well) in their scope and touch too on things which the Greek and Elizabethan poets could not even glimpse. But as poets — as masters of rhythm and language and the expression of poetic beauty — Vyasa and Valmiki are *not inferior*, but also not greater than the English or the Greek poet. We can leave aside for the moment the question whether the Mahabharata was not the creation of the mind of a people rather than of a single poet, for that doubt has been raised also with regard to Homer. (27:367-68)

\*

*You once spoke of Goethe as not being one of the world's absolutely supreme singers. Who are these, then? Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Valmiki, Kalidasa? And what about Aeschylus, Virgil and Milton?*

I suppose all the names you mention except Goethe can be included; or if you like you can put them all including Goethe in three rows — e.g.:

1st row Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki  
 2nd row Dante, Kalidasa, Aeschylus, Virgil, Milton  
 3rd row Goethe

and there you are! To speak less flippantly, the first three have at once supreme imaginative originality, supreme poetic gift, widest scope and supreme creative genius. Each is a sort of poetic Demiurge who has created a world of his own. Dante's triple world beyond is more constructed by the poetic seeing mind than by

this kind of elemental demiurgic power — otherwise he would rank by their side; the same with Kalidasa. Aeschylus is a seer and creator but on a much smaller scale. Virgil and Milton have a less spontaneous breath of creative genius; one or two typical figures excepted, they live rather by what they have said than by what they have made. (27:368)

\*

*Is the omission of Vyasa deliberate?*

It was you who omitted Vyasa, Sophocles and others — not I. (27:368)

\*

*How do you differentiate between epic power and the Aeschylean sublime?  
Into what category would the grandeur, at its best, of Marlowe and Victor Hugo fall?*

I don't know how I differentiate. Victor Hugo in the *Légende des siècles* tries to be epic and often succeeds, perhaps even on the whole. Marlowe is sometimes great or sublime, but I would not call him epic. There is a greatness or sublimity that is epic, there is another that is not epic, but more of a romantic type. Shakespeare's line

In cradle of the rude imperious surge

is as sublime as anything in Homer or Milton, but it does not seem to me to have the epic ring, while a very simple line can have it, e.g. Homer's

Bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn chōomenos kēr

“He went down from the peaks of Olympus wroth at heart”

or Virgil's

Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem,  
Fortunam ex aliis.

or Milton's

Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable.

What is there in these lines that is not in Shakespeare's and makes them epic (Shakespeare's of course has something else as valuable)? For the moment at least,

I can't tell you, but it is there. A tone of the inner spirit perhaps, expressing itself in the rhythm and the turn of the language. (27:370-71)

\*

A fact-to-fact storytelling can be very poetic. Poetry is poetic whether it is put in simple language or freely adorned with images and rich phrases. The latter kind is not the only "poetic" poetry nor is necessarily the best. Homer is very direct and simple, Virgil less so but still restrained in his diction; Keats tends always to richness; but one cannot say that Keats is poetic and Homer and Virgil are not. The rich style has this danger that it may drown the narration so that its outlines are no longer clear. This is what has happened with Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*; so that Shakespeare cannot be called a great narrative poet. (27:614)

\*

*Kindly mention all the epic writers in all the languages — it is good to know, at least.*

In English *Paradise Lost* and Keats' *Hyperion* (unfinished) are the two chief epics. In Sanskrit Mahabharata, Ramayana, Kalidasa's *Kumarsambhava*, Bharavi's *Kiratarjuniya*. In Bengali Meghnadbodh. In Italian Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Tasso's (I have forgotten the name for the moment) are in the epic cast. In Greek of course Homer, in Latin Virgil. There are other poems which attempt the epic style, but are not among the masterpieces. There are also primitive epics in German and Finnish (*Nibelungenlied*, *Kalevala*) — (27:615)

\*

Nobody says that the value of the poet must be measured by the scantiness of his audience any more than it can be measured by the extent of his contemporary popularity. So there is no room for his *reductio ad absurdum*. What is contended is that it cannot be measured by either standard. It is to be measured by the power of his vision, of his speech, of his feeling, by his rendering of the world within or the world without or of any world to which he has access. It may be the outer world that he portrays like Homer and Chaucer or a vivid life-world like Shakespeare or an inmost world of experience like Blake or other mystic poets. The recognition of that power will come first from the few who recognise good poetry when they see it and from those who can enter into his world; afterwards it can spread to the larger number who can recognise good poetry when it is shown to them; finally, the still larger public may come in who learn to appreciate by a slow education, not by instinct and nature. There was a sound principle in the opinion always held in former



times that it is time alone that can test the enduring power of a poet's work, for contemporary opinion is not reliable. (27:670)

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The poems of Clough and Longfellow are, I think, the only serious essays in the hexameter in English literature. Many have dallied with the problem, from the strange experiments of Spenser to the insufficient but carefully reasoned attempts of Matthew Arnold. But it is only by a long and sustained effort like *Evangeline* or the *Bothie* that the solution can really come. Longfellow in this connexion can be safely neglected, but Clough's work is of a different order. Occasionally he really grappled with his task and for a moment [conquered] [.....]<sup>3</sup>. But it is Clough's defect that he is unable ordinarily to combine force with harmony. Either he produces verse of a rough energy, like the general type of hexameter used by him in the *Bothie*, or, as in the pentameter experiments in the *Amours de Voyage*, the breath of life and power is wanting in a harmonious shell of sound. Yet once or twice he has surmounted every difficulty. Especially is there one verse with the right Homeric movement in the *Bothie*, —

He like a god came leaving his ample Olympian chamber

which gave to my mind the key to the just use of the hexameter. (27:743-44)

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. . . the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it. Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, Kalidasa, however much they may differ in everything else, are at one in having this as the fundamental character of their greatness. Their supremacy does not lie essentially in a greater thought-power or a more lavish imagery or a more penetrating force of passion and emotion; these things they may have had, one being more gifted in one direction, another in others, but these other powers were aids to their poetic expression rather than its essence or its source. (26:32)

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Homer gives us the life of man always at a high intensity of impulse and action and without subjecting it to any other change he casts it in lines of beauty and in divine

3. *Manuscript damaged. Two or three words missing. — Ed.*

proportions; he deals with it as Phidias dealt with the human form when he wished to create a god in marble. When we read the Iliad and the Odyssey, we are not really upon this earth, but on the earth lifted into some plane of a greater dynamis of life, and so long as we remain there we have a greater vision in a more lustrous air and we feel ourselves raised to a semi-divine stature. (26:67)

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. . . the unfailing poetic beauty and nobility which saves greatness from its defects — that supreme gift of Homer and Valmiki . . . (26:166)

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The natural turn of poetry, that which gives to it its soul of superiority to other ways of human utterance, is the endeavour of the interpretative cast of its mind always to look beyond the object, even to get behind it and evoke from a something that was waiting for us within its own inevitable speech and rhythm. That inwardness is the triumph of great poetical speech, whether the poet has his eye like Homer on physical object and power of action and the externalised thought and emotion which they throw up into the surface roll of life, or else like Shakespeare on the surge of the life-spirit and its forms of character and passion and its waves of self-interpreting thought and reflection, or on the play of the detached or half-detached seeing intellect or the inspired reason, or on the strainings of the desire-soul of man striving to find the delight of things in the thousand-coloured threads of the double web of our existence. (26:175)

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Man indeed, unlike other forms of being in terrestrial Nature, though rooted in body, proceeds by the mind and all that is characteristic of him belongs to the wonderful play of mind taking up physicality and life and developing and enriching its gains till it can exceed itself and become a spiritual mind, the divine Mind in man. He turns first his view on the outward physical world and on his own life of outward action and concentrates on that or throws into its mould his life-suggestions, his thought, his religious idea, and, if he arrives at some vision of an inner spiritual truth, he puts even that into forms and figures of the physical life and physical Nature.<sup>4</sup> Poetry at a certain stage or of a certain kind expresses this turn of the human mentality in word and in form of beauty. It can reach great heights in this kind of mental mould, can see the physical forms of the gods, lift to a certain greatness

4. As in the hymns of the Vedic Rishis.

by its vision and disclose a divine quality in even the most obvious, material and outward being and action of man; and in this type we have Homer. Arrived to a greater depth of living, seeing from a vivid half outward half inward turn of mind his thought and action and self and world and Nature, man begins to feel more sensitively the passion and power of life, its joy and pain, its wonder and terror and beauty and romance, to turn everything into moved thought and sentiment and sensation of the life-soul, the desire soul in him which first forces itself on his introspection when he begins to go inward. Poetry too takes this turn, rises and deepens to a new kind of greatness; and at the summit in this kind we have Shakespeare. (26:206-07)

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. . . the essence of poetry is eternally the same and its essential power and the magnitude of the genius expended may be the same whatever the frame of the sight, whether it be Homer chanting of the heroes in god-moved battle before Troy and of Odysseus wandering among the wonders of remote and magic isles with his heart always turned to his lost and far-off human hearth, Shakespeare riding in his surge of the manifold colour and music and passion of life, or Dante errant mid his terrible or beatific visions of Hell and Purgatory and Paradise, or Valmiki singing of the ideal man embodying God and egoistic giant Rakshasa embodying only fierce self-will approaching each other from their different centres of life and in their different law of being for the struggle desired by the gods, or some mystic Vamadeva or Vishwamitra voicing in strange vivid now forgotten symbols the action of the gods and the glories of the Truth, the battle and the journey to the Light, the double riches and the sacrificial climbing of the soul to Immortality. For whether it be the inspired imagination fixed on earth or the soul of life or the inspired reason or the high intuitive spiritual vision which gives the form, the genius of the great poet will seize on some truth of being, some breath of life, some power of the spirit and bring it out with a certain supreme force for his and our delight and joy in its beauty. But nevertheless the poetry which can keep the amplitude of its breadth and nearness of its touch and yet see all things from a higher height will, the rest being equal, give more and will more fully satisfy the whole of what we are and therefore the whole of what we demand from this most complete of all the arts and most subtle of all our means of aesthetic self-expression. (26:224-25)

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Mankind in its development seems to begin with the most outward things and go always more and more inward in order that the race may mount to greater heights of the spirit's life. An early poetry therefore is much occupied with a simple, natural,

straightforward, external presentation of life. A primitive epic bard like Homer thinks only by the way and seems to be carried constantly forward in the stream of his strenuous action and to cast out as he goes only so much of surface thought and character and feeling as obviously emerges in a strong and single and natural speech and action. And yet it is the adventures and trials and strength and courage of the soul of man in Odysseus which makes the greatness of the *Odyssey* and not merely the vivid incident and picturesque surrounding circumstance, and it is the clash of great and strong spirits with the gods leaning down to participate in their struggle which makes the greatness of the *Iliad* and not merely the action and stir of battle. The outward form of Shakespeare's work is a surge of emotion and passion and thought and act and event arising out of character at ferment in the yeast of feeling and passion, but it is its living interpretation of the truth and powers of the life-soul of man that are the core of greatness of his work and the rest without it would be a vain brute turmoil. The absence or defect of this greater element makes indeed the immense inferiority of the rest of Elizabethan dramatic work. And whatever the outward character or form of the poetry, the same law holds that poetry is a self-expressive power of the spirit and where the soul of things is most revealed in its very life by the rhythmic word, there is the fullest achievement of the poet's function. (26:243-44)

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A critical or a scientific thought may attempt to give an account of the actuality as it really is, though even to do that they have to go far behind its frontage and make a mental reconstruction and surprising change in its appearance. But the creative powers cannot stop there, but have to make new things for us as well as to make existing things new to the mind and eye. It is no real portion of the function of art to cut out palpitating pieces from life and present them raw and smoking or well-cooked for the aesthetic digestion. For in the first place all art has to give us beauty and the crude actuality of life is not often beautiful, and in the second place poetry has to give us a deeper reality of things and the outsides and surface faces of life are only a part of its reality and do not take us either very deep or very far. Moreover, the poet's greatest work is to open to us new realms of vision, new realms of being, our own and the world's, and he does this even when he is dealing with actual things. Homer with all his epic vigour of outward presentation does not show us the heroes and deeds before Troy in their actuality as they really were to the normal vision of men, but much rather as they were or might have been to the vision of the gods. Shakespeare's greatness lies not in his reproduction of actual human events or men as they appear to us buttoned and cloaked in life, — others of his time could have done that as well, if with less radiant force of genius, yet with more of the realistic crude colour or humdrum drab of daily truth, — but in his bringing out in

his characters and themes of things essential, intimate, eternal, universal in man and Nature and Fate on which the outward features are borne as fringe and robe and which belong to all times, but are least obvious to the moment's experience: when we do see them, life presents to us another face and becomes something deeper than its actual present mask. That is why the poet oftenest instinctively prefers to go away from the obsession of a petty actuality, from the realism of the prose of life to his inner creative self or an imaginative background of the past or the lucent air of myth or dream or on into a greater outlook on the future. Poetry may indeed deal with the present living scene, at some peril, or even with the social or other questions and problems of the day, — a task which is now often laid on the creative mind, as if that were its proper work; but it does that successfully only when it makes as little as possible of what belongs to the moment and time and the surface and brings out their roots of universal or eternal interest or their suggestion of great and deep things. What the poet borrows from the moment, is the most perishable part of his work and lives at all only by being subordinated and put into intimate relation with less transient realities. And this is so because it is the eternal increasing soul of man and the intimate self of things and their more abiding and significant forms which are the real object of his vision. (26:248-49)

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Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa are the essence of the history of ancient India; if all else were lost, they would still be its sole and sufficient cultural history. Their poems are types and exponents of three periods in the development of the human soul, types and exponents also of the three great powers which dispute and clash in the imperfect and half-formed temperament and harmonise in the formed and perfect. At the same time their works are pictures at once minute and grandiose of three moods of our Aryan civilisation, of which the first was predominately moral, the second predominately intellectual, the third predominately material. . . . It is because, conjoining in themselves the highest and most varied poetical gifts, they at the same time represent and mirror their age and humanity by their interpretative largeness and power that our three chief poets hold their supreme place and bear comparison with the greatest world-names, with Homer, Shakespeare and Dante. (1:156)

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. . . there is little of the sublime or romantic in the essence of the Homeric gods though there is much of both in a good many of their accidents & surroundings. (1:214)

\*

When we speak of the Homeric hexameter, we are speaking of a certain balance [of] spiritual force called by us Homer working through emotion into the material shape of a fixed mould of rhythmical sound which obeys both in its limiting sameness & in its variations the law of the spirit within. (1:241)

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Must an adequate version of Homer, a real *translation*, be couched in the hexameter? At first sight it would seem so. But the issue is here complicated by the hard fact that the same arrangement of quantities or of accents has very seldom the same spiritual & emotional value in two different languages. The hexameter in English, however skilfully managed, has not the same value as the Homeric, . . . Why has there never been a real rendering of Homer in English? It is not the whole truth to say that no modern can put himself back imaginatively into the half-savage Homeric period; a mind with a sufficient basis of primitive sympathies & sufficient power of imaginative self-control to subdue for a time the modern in him may conceivably be found. But the main, the insuperable obstacle is that no one has ever found or been able to create an English metre with the same spiritual & emotional equivalent as Homer's marvellous hexameters. (1:244-45)

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A fancy was started in Germany that the Iliad of Homer is really a pastiche or clever rifacimento of old ballads put together in the time of Pisistratus. This truly barbarous imagination with its rude ignorance of the psychological bases of all great poetry has now fallen into some discredit; it has been replaced by a more plausible attempt to discover a nucleus in the poem, an Achilleid, out of which the larger Iliad has grown. Very possibly the whole discussion will finally end in the restoration of a single Homer with a single poem, subjected indeed to some inevitable interpolation and corruption, but mainly the work of one mind, a theory still held by more than one considerable scholar. (1:280)

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The divine gifts, result of the outer sacrifice, were also symbols of inner divine gifts, the cows of the divine light symbolised by the herds of the Sun, the horse of strength and power, the son of the inner godhead or divine man created by the sacrifice, and so through the whole list. This symbolic duplication was facilitated by the double meaning of the Vedic words. *Go*, for instance, means both cow and ray; the cows of the dawn and the sun, Homer's *boes Eelioio*, are the rays of the Sungod, Lord of Revelation, even as in Greek mythology Apollo the Sungod is also the Master of poetry and of prophecy. (16:679)

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The Iliad deals only with an episode of the legendary siege of Troy, it covers an action of [ ] days in a conflict lasting ten years, & its subject is not the Trojan War but the Wrath of Achilles. Homer was under no obligation therefore to deal with the political causes that led to hostilities, even supposing he knew them. The Mahabharata stands on an entirely different footing. (1:292)

\*

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink  
 At the Mermaid, capture immortality;  
 A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink  
 Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.  
 (2:614)

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The sense of “rays” is quite indisputable in such passages as the third verse of Madhuchchhandas’ hymn to Indra, I.7, “Indra for far vision made the Sun to ascend in heaven: he sped him all over the hill by his rays,” *vi gobhir adrim airayat*.<sup>5</sup> But at the same time, the rays of Surya are the herds of the Sun, the kine of Helios slain by the companions of Odysseus in the Odyssey, stolen by Hermes from his brother Apollo in the Homeric hymn to Hermes. (15:124-25)

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There are deficiencies if not failures in almost all the great epics, the *Odyssey* and perhaps the *Divina Commedia* being the only exceptions, but still they are throughout in spite of them great epics. (27:354)

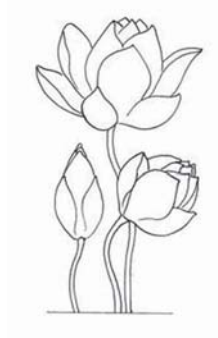
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*We have various guesses about your previous lives. The other day I happened to ask X whether you were Shakespeare. He was diffident. My own belief is that you have somehow amalgamated all that was precious in those that manifested as Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki, Dante, Virgil and Milton: if not all, at least the biggest of the lot. Kindly let us know the truth. Among your other and non-poetic incarnations, some surmise Alexander and Julius Caesar.*

5. We may also translate “He sent abroad the thunderbolt with its lights”; but this does not make as good and coherent a sense; even if we take it, *gobhir* must mean “radiances” not “cows”.

Good Heavens, all that! You have forgotten that Mrs. Besant claims Julius Caesar. I don't want to be prosecuted by her for misappropriation of personality. Alexander was too much of a torrent for me; I disclaim Milton and Virgil, am unconscious of Dante and Valmiki, diffident like X about the Bard (and moneylender?) of Avon. If, however, you can bring sufficiently cogent evidence, I am ready to take upon my back the offences of all the famous people in the world or any of them; but you must prove your case.

Seriously, these historical identifications are a perilous game and open a hundred doors to the play of imagination. Some may, in the nature of things must be true; but once people begin, they don't know where to stop. What is important is the lines, rather than the lives, the incarnation of Forces that explain what one now is — and, as for particular lives or rather personalities, those alone matter which are very definite in one and have powerfully contributed to what one is developing now. But it is not always possible to put a name upon these; for not one hundred-thousandth part of what has been has still a name preserved by human Time. (35:55-56)





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

*(Continued from the issue of March 2017)*

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

### **SECTION FOUR THE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION**

#### **Chapter One Ascent and Descent**

##### **The Meaning of Spiritual Transformation**

What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the self, or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscious. That cannot be done by the influence of the Self leaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmixed above mind, life and body and not in mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its *full* descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation.

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The power of concentration above the head is to bring peace, silence, liberation from the body sense, the identification with mind and life and open the way for the lower (mental-vital-physical) consciousness to rise up to meet the higher Consciousness above and for the powers of the higher (spiritual or divine) Consciousness to descend into mind, life and body. This is what is called in this Yoga the spiritual transformation.

### **A Double Movement in the Sadhana**

There is a double movement in the sadhana — the Divine Consciousness, Power, Light, Peace descending into all the body, the consciousness from all parts of the body rising upwards to meet the Divine Consciousness above — the descent and the ascent.

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The sadhana is based on the fact that a descent of Forces from the higher planes and an ascent of the lower consciousness to the higher planes is the means of transformation of the lower nature — although naturally it takes time and the complete transformation can only come by the supramental descent. Your experiences here are forms of the widening experiences of this process.

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The practice of this Yoga is double — one side is of an ascent of the consciousness to the higher planes, the other is of a descent of the power of the higher planes into the earth consciousness so as to drive out the Power of darkness and ignorance and transform the nature.

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All the consciousness in the human being who is the mental embodied in living matter has to rise so as to meet the higher consciousness; the higher consciousness has also to descend into mind, into life, into matter. In that way the barriers will be removed and the higher consciousness will be able to take up the whole lower nature and transform it by the power of the supermind.

The earth is a material field of evolution. Mind and life, supermind, Sachchidananda are in principle involved there in the earth consciousness, but only matter is at first organised; then life descends from the life plane and gives shape and organisation and activity to the life principle in matter, creates the plant and animal; then mind descends from the mind plane, creating man. Now supermind is to descend so as to create a supramental race.

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There are two movements — one an ascension of the lower consciousness to meet the higher, the other the descent of the higher consciousness into the lower. What you first experienced was an uprush of the lower consciousness from all parts so

strong as to break the lid of the inner mind — that was the splitting of the skull — and to enable the joining of the two consciousnesses above to be complete. The result was a descent. Usually the first thing that descends from the higher consciousness is its deep and entire peace — the second is the Light, here the white light of the Mother. When the higher consciousness descends or is intensely felt, there is very usually an opening of the limited personal being into the cosmic consciousness — one feels a wide and infinite being which alone exists, the identification with the body and even the sense of the body disappears, the limited personal consciousness is lost in the Cosmic Existence. You had all this first in the impersonal way, but after the burning up of the psychic fire, you felt the Personal wideness, the cosmic consciousness of the Divine Mother and received her blessing.

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If your consciousness rises above the head, that means that it goes beyond the ordinary mind to the centre above which receives the higher consciousness or else towards the ascending levels of the higher consciousness itself. The first result is the silence and peace of the Self which is the basis of the higher consciousness; this may afterwards descend into the lower levels, into the very body. Light also can descend and Force. The navel and the centres below it are those of the vital and the physical; something of the higher Force may have descended there.

### **Both Ascent and Descent Necessary**

The lower consciousness ascends towards the higher to join it — the higher descends into the lower to transform it. It is the rule of the consciousness in this sadhana.

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A going up and up higher, though a part of the total necessary movement, does not by itself have any effect on the outer being. It only divides the consciousness into two and its only logical outcome is Nirvana. I have always written that the descent is necessary to change the nature; ascent is useful to open the higher planes and exalt the level of the consciousness, but it does not change the lower being except superficially by opening to it certain possibilities it had not before. But the descent must first take place in the inner being. When the higher consciousness is settled in the inner being, then it can change the outer. But necessarily the descent must be dynamic, not merely that of a static peace; the inner peace must itself become dynamic.

The descent whether of peace or force or light or knowledge or Ananda must

occupy the whole inner being down to the inner physical. Without that how is the outer to be transformed at all? It is an amazing idea to suppose that the outer can be changed while the inner is left to itself. What you had in the inner being was a static stillness which did not even entirely occupy the inner physical except at times — that was why the dynamic descent was necessary, but in the inner being or if possible the whole being, the inner outflowing into the outer, not in the outer being to the exclusion of the inner.

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In the physical consciousness the descent is the most important. Something of the subtle physical can always go up — but the external physical consciousness can only do it when the force from above comes down and fills it. There is then a sort of unification made when the higher consciousness and the physical are one undivided consciousness and there is an ascent of forces from below and descent from above, simultaneous and mutually interpenetrating.

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I am not speaking of mere rising above [*as the means of changing the external nature*]. The rising above has to be followed by the descent of the higher consciousness into the different parts of the being. That aided by the psychic development and aiding it changes the external nature.

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It was an experience (by ascension) of the spiritual plane of being above in which there is absolute peace and light and Ananda. It is this that has to descend into the mind, vital and body and be the constant condition and the basis for the final transformation of the consciousness and nature.

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There are two movements that are necessary — one is the ascent through the increasing of peace and silence to its source above the mind, — that is indicated by the tendency of the consciousness to rise out of the body to the top of the head and above where it is easy to realise the Self in all its stillness and liberation and wideness and to open to the other powers of the Higher Consciousness. The other is the descent of the peace, silence, the spiritual freedom and wideness and the powers of the higher consciousness as they develop into the lower down to the most physical and even the subconscious. To both of these movements there can be a block — a

block above due to the mind and lower nature being unhabituated (it is that really and not incapacity) and a block below due to the physical consciousness and its natural slowness to change. Everybody has these blocks but by persistent will, aspiration or *abhyāsa* they can be overcome.

### **The Order of Ascent and Descent**

There is no fixed rule in such things. With many the descent comes first and the ascension afterwards, with others it is the other way; with some the two processes go on together. If one can fix oneself above so much the better.

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I think the descent is more usual than the ascent. Some sadhaks finish the ascent first or ascents and descents but more often the descents come first and the ascent (above the head) takes place only when there has been much working of peace, force, Ananda etc. in the body.

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The movement of ascension cannot finish so long as the movement of descent is not ready to finish.

### **Ascent and Descent of the Kundalini Shakti**

The spine is the main channel of the descent and ascent of the Force, by which it connects the lower and the higher consciousness together.

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The sensation in the spine and on both sides of it is a sign of the awakening of the Kundalini power. More precisely, it is felt as a descending or an ascending current or currents, or both at the same time. There are two main nerve channels for the currents, one on each side of the central channel in the spine. The descending current is the Energy from above coming down to touch the sleeping Power in the lowest nerve centre at the bottom of the spine; the ascending current is the release of energy going up from the awakened Kundalini. This movement as it proceeds opens up the six centres of the subtle nervous system and by the opening one escapes from the limitations of the surface consciousness bound to the gross body, and great ranges

of experience proper to the larger subliminal self, mental, vital, subtle-physical, are shown to the sadhaka. When the Kundalini meets the higher consciousness, as it ascends through the summit of the head, there is an opening to the higher super-conscious reaches above the normal mind. It is by ascending through these in our consciousness and receiving a descent of their energies that it is possible ultimately to reach the supermind. This is the psycho-physical method which is elaborately systematised in the Tantra. In our Yoga it is not necessary to go through the systematised method, — for this psycho-physical process is only a part of the movement of the Yoga and it takes place spontaneously according to need by the force of the aspiration and the call for the workings of the Divine Power. As soon as there is an opening, the Divine Power descends and conducts the necessary working, does what is needed, each thing in its time, and the Yogic consciousness begins to be born in the sadhaka.

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The force which you felt must evidently have been a rising of the Kundalini ascending to join the Force above and bring down the energy needed to ease the depression and then again rising to enforce the connection between the Above and the lower centres. The seeming expansion of the head is due to the joining of the mind with the consciousness of the Self or Divine above. That consciousness is wide and illimitable and when one rises into it the individual consciousness also breaks its limits and feels wide and illimitable. At such times one often feels as if there were no head and no body but all were a wide self and its consciousness, or else the head or the body is only a circumstance in that. The body or the physical mind is sometimes startled or alarmed at these experiences because they are abnormal to it; but there is no ground for alarm, — these are usual experiences in the Yoga.

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There is a Yoga Shakti lying coiled or asleep in the inner body, not active. When one does Yoga, this force uncoils itself and rises upward to meet the Divine Consciousness and Force that are waiting above us. When this happens, when the awakened Yoga Shakti arises, it is often felt like a snake uncoiling and standing up straight and lifting itself more and more upwards. When it meets the Divine Consciousness above, then the force of the Divine Consciousness can more easily descend into the body and be felt working there to change the nature.

The feeling of your body and eyes being drawn upwards is part of the same movement. It is the inner consciousness in the body and the inner subtle sight in the body that are looking and moving upward and trying to meet the divine consciousness and divine seeing above.

\*

Yoga means union with the Divine — a union either transcendental (above the universe) or cosmic (universal) or individual or, as in our Yoga, all three together. Or it means getting into a consciousness in which one is no longer limited by the small ego, personal mind, personal vital and body but is in union with the supreme Self or with the universal (cosmic) consciousness or with some deeper consciousness within in which one is aware of one's own soul, one's own inner being and of the real truth of existence. In the Yogic consciousness one is not only aware of things, but of forces, not only of forces but of the conscious being behind the forces. One is aware of all this not only in oneself but in the universe.

There is a force which accompanies the growth of the new consciousness and at once grows with it and helps it to come about and to perfect itself. This force is the Yoga shakti. It is here asleep and coiled up in all the centres of our inner being (chakras) and is at the base what is called in the Tantras the Kundalini shakti. But it is also above us, above our head as the Divine Force — not there coiled up, involved, asleep, but awake, scient, potent, extended and wide; it is there waiting for manifestation and to this Force we have to open ourselves — to the power of the Mother. In the mind it manifests itself as a divine mind-force or a universal mind-force and it can do everything that the personal mind cannot do; it is then the Yogic mind-force. When it manifests and works in the vital or physical in the same way, it is then apparent as a Yogic life-force or a Yogic body-force. It can awake in all these forms, bursting outwards and upwards, extending itself into wideness from below; or it can descend and become there a definite power for things; it can pour downwards into the body, working, establishing its reign, extending into wideness from above, link the lowest in us with the highest above us, release the individual into a cosmic universality or into absoluteness and transcendence.

### **Ascent and Descent and Problems of the Lower Nature**

If one can remain always in the higher consciousness, so much the better. But why does not one remain always there? Because the lower is still part of the nature and it pulls you down towards itself. If on the other hand the lower is transformed, it becomes of one kind with the higher and there is nothing lower to pull downwards.

Transformation means that the higher consciousness or nature is brought down into the mind, vital and body and takes the place of the lower. There is a higher consciousness of the true self which is spiritual, but it is above; if one rises above into it, then one is free as long as one remains there, but if one comes down into or uses mind, vital or body — and if one keeps any connection with life, one has to do so, either to come down and act from the ordinary consciousness or else to be in the self but use mind, life and body — then the imperfections of these instruments have to be faced and mended; they can only be mended by transformation.

You say you rise a little above into this higher consciousness, but where do you rise? Into the quieted mind and above the vital or above the mind itself into something always calm and pure and free?

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No. I did not intend any sarcasm by my question [*at the end of the preceding letter*]. You had written that by rising a little above the ordinary consciousness one was free from difficulties and that this was what one felt — I thought you meant that this was your own experience. So I put the question, as the experience of the quiet mind is one that can easily be broken by the invasions of the vital or the inertia of the physical being. The experience of the deeper freedom and calm which belongs to the self remains, but it can be covered up by the lower consciousness.

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That [*thoughts about others*] can be only a temporary result of past activities. The endeavour should now be to make the ascent above into the silence of the Self in the higher universal consciousness above, for that was evidently what was trying to come when the disturbance broke in. That would probably bring also the descent of the permanent spiritual peace into all the being as a basis for the higher activities.

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That you should be able to keep your consciousness uplifted is already something. As for the opening its coming and apparent closing is a normal experience — it needs several openings before the thing is settled by a permanent poise of the consciousness above and an increasing descent into the head and below. It is the pull from below that should get no indulgence — for that, though most do indulge in it, is a wrong crabby way of doing it. One must be safely stationed above before one can descend without a tumble. Not that the tumble if it comes precludes a going up again — it does not; but that is no reason for letting it happen.

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Even if the permanent opening does not come at once, you have only to wait and it is bound to come. It is certainly a pity that the restlessness of the vital should kick so much against vacancy of the consciousness; for if you could stand it this emptiness, now neutral, and therefore not interesting to the vital, would become positive and be the peaceful recipient of the pouring from above. The difficulty is that the vital has always been accustomed either to doing something or to something doing and



when it is doing nothing or nothing is doing (or it seems like that on the surface), it gets bored and begins to feel and talk or to do nonsense. However even with this obstacle, the Descent can come down — it need not wait for the Supramental.

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Yes. To ascend is easier than to bring down; the higher consciousness gets entangled and impeded in the physical and the mind and vital.

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Rising higher and higher and bringing down is the method of the Yoga; but it is not possible to do it with full effect until one has so prepared oneself that one can rise above the head to the Self in the higher mind. It was the point you had reached but could not confirm before the difficulties came in from the physical consciousness.

### **Experiences of Ascent and Descent**

The ascent of the consciousness in the lower centres into the higher and the descent of the higher powers and the white light indicates a farther preparation of the vital and physical being and its forces by spiritualisation of the centres.

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All these are different actions of the Force on the adhar with the one intention of opening it up from above and below and horizontally also. The action from above opens it to the descent of forces from above the Mind and the ascent of consciousness above the lid of the ordinary human mind. The horizontal action opens it to the cosmic consciousness on all its levels. The action from below helps to connect the superconscious with the subconscious. Finally the consciousness instead of being limited in the body becomes infinite, rises infinitely above, plunges infinitely below, widens infinitely on every side. There is besides the opening of all the centres to the Light and Power and Ananda that has to descend from above. At present only the mind centres seem to receive fully the descent of Force, while the upper vital centres are being prepared with a minor action on other parts of the body. It is a matter of time and perseverance for the way to be entirely open.

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The experience you feel is that of the Atman, the cosmic Self supporting the cosmic consciousness — not yet clear but in its first impression. When the consciousness goes down from that condition, it brings something of it into the vital and physical consciousness and the result is either that these parts or at least the vital open and get into touch with what has been brought down. The inert *tāmasikatā* or the unease in the legs comes because the physical is not able to receive or assimilate. This will disappear when that part opens and receives and is able to assimilate.

It was there the occasional descent of the Force to establish a connection — here the descent is taking another form intended to establish the fundamental experiences of the Realisation.

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It is the beginning of a very decisive experience and realisation — first, the Ascent above the mind (head) into the spiritual plane. It is here that one releases and is released into the vastness, fullness, solace, freedom, peace and joy of the Infinite and becomes aware of the universal Self and the Divine. Its realisation is the foundation (when it is fixed and when one rises constantly above the body in the wideness of the infinite Being) of the spiritual state and the beginning of the spiritual transformation of the nature. What you have been having up to now is the psychic change; when the psychic and spiritual join together, then the transformation can be complete. For this the Descent is necessary and that is the second thing you are feeling, — the descent of the higher, spiritual or divine consciousness and energy into the whole system down to the bottom of the spine where is the Muladhara or centre of the physical consciousness. The Energy descends through all the levels and centres, mind centres, vital centres, physical centre and fills the whole body with the higher existence and consciousness. The ascent is the liberation (*mukti*) and when once this ascends, one is liberated from the body consciousness, one no longer feels the body as a form, no longer feels contained in the body, but widens out into the formless Vastness of the Divine. Or sometimes the body is felt as something very small in this vastness. In the Descent the body is felt but not as a confining form so much as an instrument and receptacle for this larger consciousness. Your description of the experience is unmistakable. All the elements are there. What has to happen is to get fixed in the wideness, freedom, stillness, peace of the consciousness above and for the Descent to continue till it has fixed the higher power of being everywhere below — in the body and in the subconscious below it and also all round the body so that one lives enveloped in this new consciousness and being.

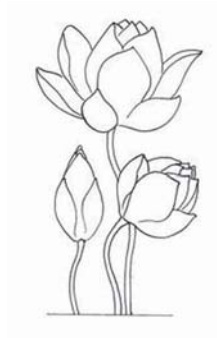
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The experiences you relate mark a great progress — the passage from the perception of the ascending Force to that of the descending Shakti. For the spiral coils of Light you saw and whose effects you felt — the merging in silence and peace, the peace of the Atman or the Brahman consciousness — are usually a first effect, they are visual forms of the dynamic descent of the Divine Force from above; also the passage from the realisation of the static Brahman with the sense of the unreality of the world-existence to the realisation of the status of the dynamic one. This is a considerable step in the integral Yoga.

The Brahman consciousness is sometimes described as a static one, but it has two aspects, static and dynamic, and it is when both are united that it becomes integral. This is the greater consciousness I speak of in the sentence quoted by you, greater than either that which perceives the Brahmic silence and immobility alone or that which perceives the cosmic existence and action alone.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Letters on Yoga — III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 413-27)*



## ‘OH, TO BE THE PURE FLAWLESS CRYSTAL . . .’

May 25, 1914

O Divine Master of love and purity, grant that in its least stages, its smallest activities, this instrument which wants to serve Thee worthily may be purified of all egoism, all error, all obscurity, so that nothing in it may impair, deform or stop Thy action. How many little recesses lie yet in shadow, far from the full light of Thy illumination: for these I ask the supreme happiness of this illumination.

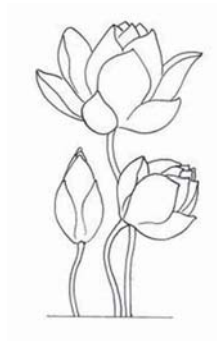
Oh, to be the pure flawless crystal which lets Thy divine ray pass without obscuring, colouring or distorting it! — not from a desire for perfection but so that Thy work may be done as perfectly as possible.

And when I ask Thee this, the “I” which speaks to Thee is the entire Earth, aspiring to be this pure diamond, a perfect reflector of Thy supreme light. All the hearts of men beat within my heart, all their thoughts vibrate in my thought, the slightest aspiration of a docile animal or a modest plant unites with my formidable aspiration, and all this rises towards Thee, for the conquest of Thy love and light, scaling the summits of Being to attain Thee, ravish Thee from Thy motionless beatitude and make Thee penetrate the darkness of suffering to transform it into divine Joy, into sovereign Peace. And this violence is made of an infinite love which gives itself and a trustful serenity which smiles with the certitude of Thy perfect Unity.

O my sweet Master, Thou art the Triumpher and the Triumph, the Victor and the Victory!

THE MOTHER

(*Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 156)



## ON THE DHAMMAPADA

### Conjugate Verses

*Just as the rain penetrates through the thatch of a leaking roof, so the passions penetrate an unbalanced mind.*

There are innumerable small Buddhist sects of all kinds, in China, in Japan, in Burma, and each one follows its own methods; but the most widespread among them are those whose sole practice is to make the mind quiet.

They sit down for a few hours in the day and even at night and quiet their mind. This is for them the key to all realisation — a quiet mind that knows how to keep quiet for hours together without roving. You must not believe however that it is a very easy thing to do, but they have no other object. They do not concentrate upon any thought, they do not try to understand better, to know more, nothing of the kind; for them the only way is to have a quiet mind and sometimes they pass through years and years of effort before they arrive at this result — to silence the mind, to keep it absolutely silent and still; for, as it is said here in the Dhammapada, if the mind is unbalanced, then this constant movement of ideas following one another, sometimes without any order, ideas contradicting and opposing each other, ideas that speculate on things, all that jostles about in the head, makes holes in the roof, as it were. So through these holes all undesirable movements enter into the consciousness, as water enters into a house with a leaky roof.

However that may be, I believe it is a practice to be recommended to everyone: to keep a certain time every day for trying to make the mind quiet, even, still. And it is an undeniable fact that the more mentally developed one is, the quicker one succeeds; and the more the mind is in a rudimentary state, the more difficult it is.

Those who are at the bottom of the scale, who have never trained their minds, find it necessary to speak in order to think. It happens even that it is the sound of their voice which enables them to associate ideas; if they do not express them, they do not think. At a higher level there are those who still have to move words about in their heads in order to think, even though they do not utter them aloud. Those who truly begin to think are those who are able to think without words, that is to say, to be in contact with the idea and express it through a wide variety of words and phrases. There are higher degrees — many higher degrees — but those who think without words truly begin to reach an intellectual state and for them it is much easier to make the mind quiet, that is to say, to stop the movement of associating the words that constantly move about like passers-by in a public square, and to contemplate an idea in silence.

I emphasise this fact because there are quite a few people who, when mental silence has been transmitted to them by occult means, are immediately alarmed and afraid of losing their intelligence. Because they can no longer think, they fear they may become stupid! But to cease thinking is a much higher achievement than to be able to spin out thoughts endlessly and it demands a much greater development.

So from every point of view, and not only from the spiritual point of view, it is always very good to practise silence for a few minutes, at least twice a day, but it must be a true silence, not merely abstention from talking.

Now let us try to be completely silent for a few minutes.

*(Meditation)*

13 December 1957

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*Just as the rain cannot penetrate a house well covered with thatch, so also the passions cannot penetrate a balanced mind.*

*(It begins to rain.)* That's it. The mind of the sky must be out of balance. *(Laughter)* It is raining.

So I think the sky has no balance and it is better for you to go home. *(It rains harder.)* Well, there is nothing to be done!

The balance is not being restored. You should all go home and meditate on the necessity of having a balanced mind. That's all.

20 December 1957

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*In the two worlds, in this world and in the other, one who does evil grieves. He laments and suffers as he recalls his evil deeds.*

It is quite evident that when you act in an ugly and mean way, naturally you are unhappy; but to be unhappy because you are conscious of the ugliness of your actions seems to me to be already a very advanced stage, for one needs to be very conscious in order to be aware of the evil that one does, and to be conscious of the evil that one does is already a first step towards not doing it any more.

Generally, people are altogether blind to the ugliness of their own actions. They do wrong through ignorance, through unconsciousness, through smallness,

through that sort of doubling back on oneself which comes from unconsciousness and ignorance, that obscure instinct of self-preservation which makes one ready to sacrifice the whole world for the sake of one's own well-being. And the smaller one is, the more natural appears the sacrifice offered to one's smallness.

One must be very much higher on the scale to see that what one does is ugly. One must already have at the core of oneself a kind of foreknowledge of what beauty, nobility, generosity are, to be able to suffer from the fact that one doesn't carry them within oneself.

I think the Dhammapada speaks here of those who already know what is beautiful and noble and who do evil wilfully, deliberately. For them life becomes terribly painful indeed. To do persistently what one knows should not be done, is at the cost of all peace, all possible tranquillity, all the well-being that one can have. He who lies is constantly uneasy in the fear that his lie may be discovered; he who has acted wrongly is in a constant anxiety at the idea that perhaps he will be punished; he who tries to deceive has no peace lest it should be found out that he deceives.

In reality, even for a purely egoistic reason, to do good, to be just, straight, honest is the best means to be quiet and peaceful, to reduce one's anxiety to a minimum. And if, besides, one could be disinterested, free from personal motives and egoism, then it would be possible to become truly happy.

You carry with you, around you, in you, the atmosphere created by your actions, and if what you do is beautiful, good and harmonious, your atmosphere is beautiful, good and harmonious; on the other hand, if you live in a sordid selfishness, unscrupulous self-interest, ruthless bad will, that is what you will breathe every moment of your life and that means misery, constant uneasiness; it means ugliness that despairs of its own ugliness.

And you must not believe that by leaving the body you will free yourself of this atmosphere; on the contrary, the body is a kind of a veil of unconsciousness which diminishes the intensity of the suffering. If you are without the protection of the body in the most material vital life, the suffering becomes much more acute and you no longer have the opportunity to change what is to be changed, to correct what is to be corrected, to open yourself to a higher, happier and more luminous life and consciousness.

You must make haste to do your work here, for it is here that you can truly do it.

Expect nothing from death. Life is your salvation.

It is in life that you must transform yourself. It is upon earth that you progress and it is upon earth that you realise. It is in the body that you win the Victory.

*27 December 1957*

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*One who does good rejoices in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. He rejoices more and more as he recalls his good deeds.*

*One who does evil suffers in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. "I have done wrong": this thought torments him. And his torments increase still more as he follows the way which leads to the infernal world.*

*One who does good rejoices in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. "I have done good": the thought rejoices him and his happiness increases more and more as he follows the way that leads to the celestial world.*

It would almost seem from these texts that Buddhism accepts the idea of a hell and a heaven; but that is quite a superficial way of understanding; for, in a deeper sense, this was not the thought of the Buddha. The idea on which he always insisted is that you create, by your conduct and the state of your consciousness, the world in which you live. Everyone carries in himself the world in which he lives and in which he will continue to live even when he loses his body, because, according to the Buddha's teaching, there is, so to say, no difference between life in the body and life outside the body. Some persons believe, some traditions teach that to leave the body is a blessing and that all difficulties disappear, provided, however, you fulfil certain rites, as in some religions, and that is also why so much importance is given to the religious rites which are, as it were, a passport for going to a happier region once you have left the body.

Some even imagine that as soon as you leave the body you at once leave your miseries behind; but it is far from being true and this is what the Dhammapada points out here: what it calls the infernal world consists of psychological ranges, particular states of consciousness you enter when you do wrong, that is to say, when you stray away from all that is beautiful, pure, happy and you live in ugliness and wickedness. Nothing is more disheartening than to live in an atmosphere of wickedness.

What the Dhammapada says here in an almost puerile way is essentially true. Naturally, it does not refer to those who think, "Oh, how good I am, how nice I am!" and therefore feel happy. That is childishness. But when you are good, when you are generous, noble, disinterested, kind, you create in you, around you, a particular atmosphere and this atmosphere is a sort of luminous release. You breathe, you blossom like a flower in the sun; there is no painful recoil on yourself, no bitterness, no revolt, no miseries. Spontaneously, naturally, the atmosphere becomes luminous and the air you breathe is full of happiness. And this is the air that you breathe, in your body and out of your body, in the waking state and in the state of sleep, in life and in the passage beyond life, outside earthly life until your new life.

Every wrong action produces on the consciousness the effect of a wind that



withers, of a cold that freezes or of burning flames that consume.

Every good and kind deed brings light, restfulness, joy — the sunshine in which flowers bloom.

3 January 1958

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*Even though he may recite a great number of sacred texts, if he does not act accordingly, the foolish one will be like the cowherd who counts the cows of others. He cannot share in the life of the disciples of the Blessed One.*

*Though he may recite only a tiny portion of the sacred texts, if he puts into practice their teaching, having rejected all passion, all ill-will and all delusion, he possesses the true wisdom; his mind completely freed, no longer attached to anything, belonging neither to this world nor to any other, he shares in the life of the disciples of the Blessed One.*

The thing has been so often said and repeated that it seems quite unnecessary to insist on the fact that a mite of practice is infinitely more precious than mountains of talk. Surely, all the energy that one spends in explaining a theory would be much better utilised in overcoming in oneself a weakness or a defect.

Therefore to conform to the wisdom of this teaching, we shall consider the best means of rejecting all passion and ill-will and delusion.

The delusion consists in taking the appearance for the reality and transient things for the only thing worthy of pursuit, the everlasting Truth.

It is rather interesting to note that the Dhammapada clearly underlines that it is not enough to be free from the bonds of this world only, but of all the worlds.

For the true and zealous Buddhists tell you that ordinary religions captivate you by enticing you with the glittering advantages that you will find after death in their Paradise, if you practise their principles. Buddhism, on the other hand, has neither hell nor heaven. It does not terrify you with eternal punishment nor does it tempt you with celestial felicities.

It is in the pure Truth that you will find your satisfaction and the reward of all your efforts.

10 January 1958

## Vigilance

*Vigilance is the way that leads to immortality (or Nirvana). Negligence is the way that leads to death. Those who are vigilant do not die. Those who are negligent are dead already.*

In these texts the word Nirvana is not used in the sense of annihilation, as you see, but in the sense of an eternal existence in opposition to life and death, as we know them in the present earthly existence, and which are contrary to each other: life contrary to death, death contrary to life. It is not *that* life which is spoken of, but the eternal existence which is beyond life and death — the true existence.

Vigilance means to be awake, to be on one's guard, to be sincere — never to be taken by surprise. When you want to do sadhana, at each moment of your life, there is a choice between taking a step that leads to the goal and falling asleep or sometimes even going backwards, telling yourself, "Oh, later on, not immediately" — sitting down on the way.

To be vigilant is not merely to resist what pulls you downward, but above all to be alert in order not to lose any opportunity to progress, any opportunity to overcome a weakness, to resist a temptation, any opportunity to learn something, to correct something, to master something. If you are vigilant, you can do in a few days what would otherwise take years. If you are vigilant, you change each circumstance of your life, each action, each movement into an occasion for coming nearer the goal.

There are two kinds of vigilance, active and passive. There is a vigilance that gives you a warning if you are about to make a mistake, if you are making a wrong choice, if you are being weak or allowing yourself to be tempted, and there is the active vigilance which seeks an opportunity to progress, seeks to utilise every circumstance to advance more quickly.

There is a difference between preventing yourself from falling and advancing more quickly.

And both are absolutely necessary.

He who is not vigilant is already dead. He has lost contact with the true purpose of existence and of life.

So the hours, circumstances, life pass in vain, bringing nothing, and you awake from your somnolence in a hole from which it is very difficult to escape.

17 January 1958

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*Having fully understood what vigilance is, the sages delight in it and take their pleasure in the presence of the Great Ones.*

Throughout this teaching there is one thing to be noticed; it is this: you are never told that to live well, to think well, is the result of a struggle or of a sacrifice; on the contrary it is a delightful state which cures all suffering. At that time, the time of the Buddha, to live a spiritual life was a joy, a beatitude, the happiest state, which freed you from all the troubles of the world, all the sufferings, all the cares, making you happy, satisfied, contented.

It is the materialism of modern times that has turned spiritual effort into a hard struggle and a sacrifice, a painful renunciation of all the so-called joys of life.

This insistence on the exclusive reality of the physical world, of physical pleasures, physical joys, physical possessions, is the result of the whole materialistic tendency of human civilisation. It was unthinkable in ancient times. On the contrary, withdrawal, concentration, liberation from all material cares, consecration to the spiritual joy, that was happiness indeed.

From this point of view it is quite evident that humanity is far from having progressed; and those who were born into the world in the centres of materialistic civilisation have in their subconscious this horrible notion that only material realities are real and that to be concerned with things that are not material represents a wonderful spirit of sacrifice, an almost sublime effort. Not to be preoccupied from dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn with all the little physical satisfactions, physical pleasures, physical sensations, physical preoccupations, is to bear evidence of a remarkable spirit. One is not aware of it, but the whole of modern civilisation is built on this conception: "Ah, what you can touch, you are sure that is true; what you can see, you are sure that is true; what you have eaten, you are sure of having eaten it; but all the rest — pooh! We are not sure whether they are not vain dreams and whether we are not giving up the real for the unreal, the substance for the shadow. After all, what are you going to gain? A few dreams! But when you have some coins in your pocket, you are sure that they are there!"

And that is everywhere, underneath everything. Scratch the appearances just a little, it is there, within your consciousness; and from time to time you hear this thing whispering within you, "Take care, don't be taken in." Indeed, it is lamentable.

We have been told that evolution is progressive and that it follows a spiral of ascending progression. I do not doubt that what one calls comfort in modern cities is a much higher degree of evolution than the comfort of the cave-man. But in ancient narratives, they always spoke of a power of foresight, of the prophetic spirit, the announcement of future events through visions, life's intimacy with something more subtle that had for the simple people of that age a more concrete reality.

Now, in those beautiful cities that are so comfortable, when one wants to condemn anything, what does one say? — "It's a dream, it is imagination."

And precisely, if a person lives in an inner perception, people look at him slightly askance and wonder whether he is altogether mentally sound. One who does not pass his time in striving for wealth or in trying to increase his comforts and

well-being, to secure a good position and become an important person, a man who is not like that is mistrusted, people wonder whether he is in his right mind.

And all that is so much the stuff of the atmosphere, the content of the air you breathe, the orientation of the thoughts received from others that it seems absolutely natural. You do not feel that it is a grotesque monstrosity.

To become a little more conscious of oneself, to enter into relation with the life behind the appearances, does not seem to you to be the greatest good. When you sit in a comfortable chair, in front of a lavish meal, when you fill your stomach with delicious dishes, that certainly appears to you much more concrete and much more interesting. And if you look at the day that has passed, if you take stock of your day, if you have had some material advantage, some pleasure, a physical satisfaction, you mark it as a good day; but if you have received a good lesson from life, if it has given you a knock on your nose to tell you that you are a stupid fellow, you do not give thanks to the Grace, you say, "Oh, life is not always fun!"

When I read these ancient texts, I really have the impression that from the inner point of view, from the point of view of the true life, we have fallen back terribly and that for the acquisition of a few ingenious mechanisms, a few encouragements to physical laziness, the acquisition of instruments and gadgets that lessen the effort of living, we have renounced the reality of the inner life. It is that sense which has been lost and it needs an effort for you to think of learning the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, the goal towards which we must advance, towards which all life advances, whether you want it or not. One step towards the goal, oh! it needs so much effort to do that. And generally one thinks of it only when the outer circumstances are not pleasant.

How far we are from the times when the shepherd, who did not go to school and kept watch over his flock at night under the stars, could read in the stars what was going to happen, commune with something which expressed itself through Nature, and had the sense of the profound beauty and that peace which a simple life gives!

It is very unfortunate that one has to give up one thing in order to gain another. When I speak of the inner life, I am far from opposing any modern inventions, far from it, but how much these inventions have made us artificial and stupid! How much we have lost the sense of true beauty, how much we burden ourselves with useless needs!

Perhaps the time has come to continue the ascent in the curve of the spiral and now with all that this knowledge of matter has brought us, we shall be able to give to our spiritual progress a more solid basis. Strong with what we have learnt of the secrets of material Nature, we shall be able to join the two extremes and rediscover the supreme Reality in the very heart of the atom.

*24 January 1958*

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*Those who are intelligent, meditative, persevering, who ceaselessly struggle with themselves, attain to Nirvana, which is the supreme felicity.*

*Whosoever can sustain his zeal, remain pure in his actions, act wisely, restrain his passions, live according to the Law (or to morality), he shall see his renown increase.*

This promise of a good name does not seem to me quite worthy of the Buddhist teaching. It probably meant something else. And to live according to morality, one must know which morality is intended, for if it is the usually recognised social morality, that also does not seem to me a very alluring promise. Those who have decided to abandon all worldly weaknesses certainly do not care about satisfying social morality . . . nor about acquiring a good name!

To sustain one's zeal is an excellent thing, to remain pure in one's actions is also indispensable, to act wisely is also perfect, one cannot do it too often; to restrain one's passions, that goes without saying, is the beginning . . . but that conclusion!!

However I see "Dhamma" has been translated here as "Law", and "Yasa" as "renown", whereas Dhamma should mean rather the inner truth and Yasa the spiritual glory. So we can interpret the text in this way: "Whosoever can sustain his zeal, remain pure in his actions, act wisely, restrain his passions, live according to the inner truth, he shall see his spiritual glory ever growing."

Thus understood, this text is quite excellent. One cannot do better than to conform to it.

*31 January 1958 and 7 February 1958*

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*By his effort, his vigilance, his discipline and self-mastery, the intelligent man should create for himself an island which no flood can submerge.*

*The fools, devoid of intelligence, give themselves up to negligence. The true sage guards vigilance as his most precious treasure.*

*Do not let yourself fall into carelessness, nor into the pleasures of the senses. He who is vigilant and given to meditation acquires a great happiness.*

*The intelligent man who by his vigilance has dispelled negligence, mounts to the heights of wisdom, whence he looks upon the many afflicted as one on a mountain looks down upon the people of the plain.*

*Vigilant among those who are negligent, perfectly awake among those who sleep, the intelligent man advances like a rapid steed leaving behind a weary horse.*

*Vigilance is admired. Negligence is reproved. By vigilance, Indra became the highest among the gods.*

*The Bhikkhu who delights in vigilance and who shuns negligence advances like a fire consuming all bonds, both small and great.*

*The Bhikkhu who takes pleasure in vigilance and who shuns negligence can no longer fall. He draws near to Nirvana.*

I have read out to you the whole chapter because it seemed to me that it is the totality of the verses that creates an atmosphere and that they are meant to be taken all together and not each one separately. But I strongly recommend to you not to take the words used here in their usual literal sense.

Thus, for example, I am quite convinced that the original thought did not mean that you are to be vigilant in order that you may be admired and that you must not be negligent in order not to be reproved. Besides, the example given proves it, for certainly it was not for the sake of gaining admiration that Indra, the chief of the overmental gods in the Hindu tradition, practised vigilance. It is a very childish way of saying things. Yet, if you take these verses all together, they have by their repetition and insistence, a power that evokes the thing which seeks expression; it puts you in relation with a psychological attitude which is very useful and has a very considerable effect, if you follow this discipline.

The last two verses particularly are very evocative. The Bhikkhu moves forward like a burning flame of aspiration and he shuns negligence.

Negligence truly means the relaxation of the will which makes one forget his goal and pass his time in doing all kinds of things which, far from contributing towards the goal to be attained, stop you on the path and often turn you away from it. Therefore the flame of aspiration makes the Bhikkhu shun negligence. Every moment he remembers that time is relatively short, that one must not waste it on the way, one must go quickly, as quickly as possible, without losing a moment. And one who is vigilant, who does not waste his time, sees his bonds falling, every one, great and small; all his difficulties vanish, because of his vigilance; and if he persists in his attitude, finding in it entire satisfaction, it happens after a time that the happiness he feels in being vigilant becomes so strong that he would soon feel very unhappy if he were to lose this vigilance.

It is a fact that when one has made an effort not to lose time on the way, any time lost becomes a suffering and one can find no pleasure of any kind in it. And

once you are in that state, once this effort for progress and transformation becomes the most important thing in your life, the thing to which you give constant thought, then indeed you are on the way towards the eternal existence, the truth of your being.

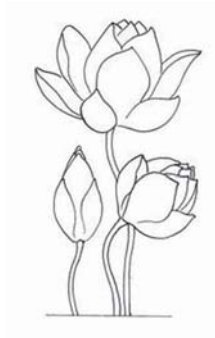
Certainly there is a moment in the course of the inner growth when far from having to make an effort to concentrate, to become absorbed in the contemplation and the seeking of the truth and its best expression — what the Buddhists call meditation — you feel, on the contrary, a kind of relief, ease, rest, joy, and to have to come out of that in order to deal with things that are not essential, everything that may seem like a waste of time, becomes terribly painful. External activities get reduced to what is absolutely necessary, to those that are done as service to the Divine. All that is futile, useless, precisely those things which seem like a waste of time and effort, all that, far from giving the least satisfaction, creates a kind of discomfort and fatigue; you feel happy only when you are concentrated on your goal.

Then you are really on the way.

*14 February 1958*

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 194-209)*



## “VERGE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Another experiment in blank verse. Worth anything as poetry? Please give your impression — in some detail, judging all the elements: mood, language, rhythm, structure.

### VERGE

When glow and gloom are one before day-rise  
And half-sleep hears in every sound a secret,  
Miraculous horizons touch the eye.  
But oh the long day-void of outer space!  
What sea can charm us to the shimmery goal  
Of unknown musics surging through the mind? . . .

voyage

We journey<sup>1</sup> till the breeze sinks to a prayer  
And stirless shadows seem a hidden light.  
Then slowly round the hush an aureole dreams,  
Building cool paradise out of old pain.  
But ere we plumb the haze-world, poignancies  
Cry through our soul and sharp crags cut the moon!

I hope the phrase “the long day-void” prepares one to feel that the second part of the poem deals with evening-vagueness and is not a continuation of the early-dawn motif. The words “We voyage till” ought also to help that feeling.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

1. It seems to me that “journey” is more effective.

I don’t think the two phrases do all that; but I suppose on a reading of the whole poem one can without much difficulty realise that the two parts of the poem are correspondents, one of the dawn-depths and the other of the evening-depths.

It is fine poetry, but it is less strongly cut in language and rhythm than the previous one. It is more dim in its suggestions, “shimmery” and “haze-world” I suppose in form and colour. The last half is cut into three “two lines”, they cannot



be called couplets, not being rhymed. This is a spacing difficult to carry out without creating some monotony in the total effect. The first half's spacing 3.1.2 is an easier arrangement to execute.

4 November 1935

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

*To the ordinary man who lives upon his own waking surface, ignorant of the self's depths and vastnesses behind the veil, his psychological existence is fairly simple. A small but clamorous company of desires, some imperative intellectual and aesthetic cravings, some tastes, a few ruling or prominent ideas amid a great current of unconnected or ill-connected and mostly trivial thoughts, a number of more or less imperative vital needs, alternations of physical health and disease, a scattered and inconsequent succession of joys and griefs, frequent minor disturbances and vicissitudes and rarer strong searchings and upheavals of mind or body, and through it all Nature, partly with the aid of his thought and will, partly without or in spite of it, arranging these things in some rough practical fashion, some tolerable disorderly order, — this is the material of his existence. The average human being even now is in his inward existence as crude and undeveloped as was the bygone primitive man in his outward life.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 74-75)*

# SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of March 2017)

## Chapter: LX

### A Command from the “Voice well known”

Ever since his acquittal in the Alipur case — a turn of events not at all to the Government’s liking — Sri Aurobindo had repeated intimations from divers sources: that he was a “marked” man still, that the Damocles’ sword might fall on him any day. Once before — twice before — he had been prosecuted without a “scrap of reliable evidence”; he had been acquitted on both occasions, but the acquittal was no insurance against the risk of a fresh prosecution on equally flimsy evidence or of arbitrary deportation by a devious recourse to the regulation of 1818. In the eyes of the Government, Sri Aurobindo was an unrepentant seditionist and revolutionary, only a diabolically clever one since it was so very difficult to bring him to book. So soon after acquittal, he had started the *Karmayogin* and then the *Dharma*, and both were financial successes. He was constantly on his feet, and his speeches were widely reported and discussed. He still seemed to exert an unparalleled influence on the young men who met or read or heard him. He was still listened to with consideration and respect by many of the seasoned politicians. Everything he did, everything he said, was news! It wasn’t surprising, therefore, that Government’s uneasiness mounted week by week, day by day.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar<sup>1</sup>

In chapter LVII, (*see Mother India, January 2017*) we have seen how Sri Aurobindo was planning a united front of the scattered revolutionary groups — a move about which we do not get any hint from the reminiscences of those who were then close to him. A different set of people — like Hem Chandra Das, a landlord of Noakhali and others — seemed to be assisting him in that regard.

But even if we refrain from exploring any secret line of his political plans at the time, the sheer quantity and quality of his actions and preoccupations during the short period of less than eleven months make a mind-boggling study. He toured the distant areas of Eastern Bengal — with the help of boats or carts when not plodding by foot through muddy and dusty roads and thorny meadows. He attended several conferences and commanded the outcome of the famous Hooghly Congress despite

speaking very briefly to an audience that heard him with rapt attention and where the large delegation of Nationalists obeyed him without a murmur, thereby saving the Congress unity. He filled the pages of his two journals with broadly two categories of articles: analyses of current social and political issues and serious articles of timeless value. He delivered at least twenty speeches at numerous meetings including the immortal one at Uttarpara. He granted interviews, wrote about his experiences in Alipore Presidency Jail, famous as *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison Life) for a magazine. He looked into the management of his two journals, learnt Tamil, helped his young lieutenants to develop their writing skill and taught French to Nolini Kanta Gupta. At the home of his uncle where he resided, he was an obedient nephew who, at a carefree call from his aunt while he was amidst his epoch-making writing, laid down his pen without the slightest sign of unease and descended to the role of an escort for the venerable lady who must walk down to the Ganga Ghat for her sacred bath.

Yet, after a day's labour, he managed to find time at the office of his journals for as uncanny a game as 'automatic writing' in the evening. Of this last intriguing business, let us have an idea from the reminiscences of his life-long trusted assistant, Nolini Kanta Gupta:

Here in Shyampukur and about the same time, there began for us another kind of education, another type of experience, a rather strange experience I should say. Everybody knows about automatic writing, that is, where the hand of the writer goes on automatically writing without any kind of impulsion, desire or direction on his own part; he remains neutral and lets himself go.

It is said that through this kind of writing are brought down spirits or bodiless entities. The savants of the West may say that all this is a play of the subconscious mind as the waking mind then abdicates. But that is a matter for argument. Let me here describe what actually happened. Sri Aurobindo showed to us, or rather made us hear, not examples of automatic writing but of automatic speech. About eight in the evening, we would take our seats around him. The lights were put out and all was silent. We kept still for a while. Then slowly there came a voice from Sri Aurobindo. It was clearly not his own voice, there were many voices, each of a different character and tone. The voice itself would say who it was. Some of them I remember very well. Once someone came and said many fine things about education, about literature, about our country. We got eager to know his name. After putting us off for a while he finally gave out that he was Bankimchandra. The talks were in English. He had used a word, "obfuscated", and as none of us knew the meaning of this unusual word we asked him the meaning. His reply was, "In our days we knew better English than you do." Another day, somebody else appeared and immediately announced himself in a terrible voice, "I am Danton! Terror! Red

Terror!” He went on discoursing on the need and utility of all that bloodshed of the French Revolution. Another who came introduced himself thus, “I am Theramenes.” Theramenes was a political leader of ancient Greece. He spoke in a calm and subdued tone and gave us a lesson in political matters. So many others came like this, day after day, and taught us many things on various subjects. Someone even raised the question of Hindu-Muslim unity and offered us a solution as well.

Who are these beings? Or, what are they? Do supraphysical beings exist in fact? And do they come and disclose their identity before men in this manner? It is a very obscure and complicated affair indeed. Supraphysical beings do exist. But the supraphysical world is not of a single piece. There are worlds upon worlds in a regular series, from the most gross to the most subtle; above the physical is the subtle-physical, above that is life, and above life, mind, the series continues above mind also; and in each of these there are several layers or planes. Any of the beings from any of these worlds or planes can manifest himself. But he has to manifest through the instrumentality of the human medium, through the substance of the medium’s mind, life and body. Therefore he cannot easily manifest his real nature or true being, he has to gather his materials from the medium’s own substance. Very often it is the make-up of the medium that predominates and the being that manifests preserves very little of his own. But it may on the other hand be quite otherwise. All will depend on the capacity of the medium. With an impure or unfit medium there will be a greater possibility of charlatanism and falsehood.

In many cases it is not the true soul of a dead person that comes; what comes is some portion of him, some fragments of his mind, life or subtle body that may have survived in the corresponding worlds or in some other worlds. By animating these parts and using them as vehicles some other being or entity or force may come, as if a representative of the whole man. Or else it might even happen that an entirely different being presents himself under a false name. There is really no end to the complexities that may arise in these supraphysical worlds. There may also be a medium who knows how to keep under his control the action and modality of such appearances, that is to say, determine in advance the particular beings or types of being that will come or will not come, the kind of things they will say or will not be allowed to say. Or he may, if he chooses, open the gates for anyone to appear, simply in order that he may watch and examine what takes place. Needless to add that when Sri Aurobindo made himself a medium, something like this used to happen.

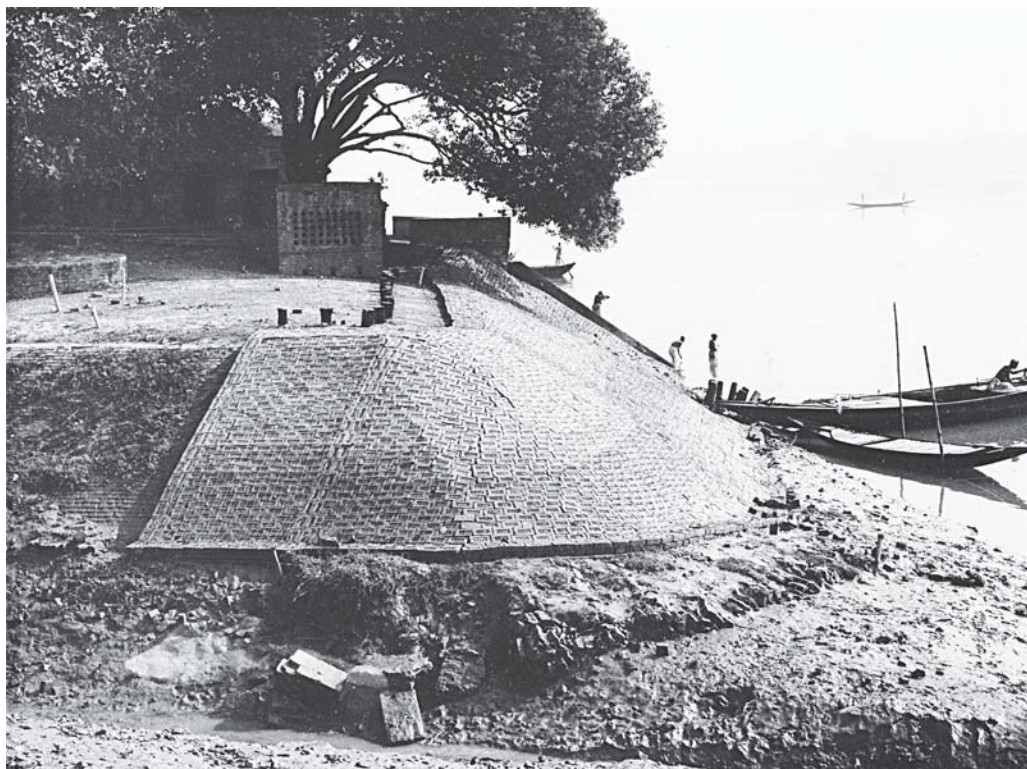
As a record of one of his experiments on this line, Sri Aurobindo himself has said or rather left in writing something that we all know. The book entitled *Yogic Sadhan* was written entirely in this manner through his hand by somebody else. And judging by the fact that at the time of the writing Sri Aurobindo had

seen the subtle presence of Rammohan Roy around, it may be inferred that the book was written or inspired by Rammohan Roy. Sri Aurobindo has likewise told us that the subtle being of Vivekananda came to him in Alipore Jail to give him certain instructions.<sup>2</sup>

From his talks and correspondence with disciples and other sources it becomes evident that for him this incredible exercise was more a matter of relaxation and amusement than anything else. But how could his voice change again and again? Could it be that Sri Aurobindo himself being the medium, the spirits that descended could not but be some superior beings, even though not Bankimchandra or Danton?

Suddenly one day these charmed evenings came to an end. Sri Aurobindo was informed about the impending search of the *Karmayogin* office and his arrest and he left the city at once. Numerous legends and gossip were in circulation, each claiming to be authentic. Some of them were quite imaginative. Even in the early sixties of the last century the present author had to suffer a narrative presented by an officer of the Indian Administrative Service which she in her turn had received from an acknowledged authority on the revolutionary phase of our freedom struggle, as to how Sri Aurobindo daringly jumped from the roof of his office building to that of the next and then to another and yet another, *ad infinitum*, to descend on the bank of the Ganga, at midnight, to avoid the uninterrupted surveillance by the C.I.D. However, apart from the undiluted accounts left by Nolini Kanta Gupta and Suresh Chandra Chakravarti, we have the statement of Sri Aurobindo himself, terse and precise, in reply to a letter by his friend and disciple during both the political and Pondicherry chapters of his life, Charu Chandra Dutt of the Indian Civil Service. Removing the doubts on the issue created by certain individuals — some doing so out of a desire to colour the event with a touch of adventure and some others to directly or indirectly glorify their own or their institution's role in it, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

These are the facts of that departure. I was in the Karmayogin office when I received word, on information given by a high-placed police official, that the office would be searched the next day and myself arrested. (The office was in fact searched but no warrant was produced against me; I heard nothing more of it till the case was started against the paper later on, but by then I had already left Chandernagore for Pondicherry.) While I was listening to animated comments from those around on the approaching event, I suddenly received a command from above in a Voice well known to me, in the three words: "Go to Chandernagore." In ten minutes or so I was in the boat for Chandernagore. Ramchandra Majumdar guided me to the Ghat and hailed a boat and I entered into it at once along with my relative Biren Ghosh and Mani (Suresh Chandra Chakrabarti) who accompanied me to Chandernagore, not turning aside to



Chandernagore – Boraichanditola Ghat



Chandernagore – Path leading from the Ghat to Motilal Roy's House



Chandernagore – Ganges: looking south from Police Ghat





Memorial plaque at Chandernagore:

In the early hours of a February day in 1910,  
 Sri Aurobindo, having travelled by boat landed at this Ghat.  
 He lived in seclusion and on 31<sup>st</sup> March left for Pondicherry via Calcutta from this Ghat.  
 This plaque commemorates the auspicious occasion of his stay in Chandernagore.

Bagbazar or anywhere else. We reached our destination while it was still dark and they returned in the morning to Calcutta. I remained in secret entirely engaged in Sadhana and my active connection with the two newspapers ceased from that time. Afterwards, under the same “sailing orders”, I left Chandernagore and reached Pondicherry on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1910.

I may add in explanation that from the time I left Lele at Bombay after the Surat Congress and my stay with him in Baroda, Poona and Bombay, I had accepted the rule of following the inner guidance implicitly and moving only as I was moved by the Divine. The spiritual development during the year in jail had turned this into an absolute law of the being. This accounts for my immediate action in obedience to the adesh received by me.<sup>3</sup>

There is a significant but extremely subtle clarification given by Sri Aurobindo himself to one of his French biographers, Professor Gabriel Monod-Herzen, on the issue of his receiving the command. Here is an extract from a talk given by the Professor at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (Pondicherry) in 1972:

While I was writing my book I related how Sri Aurobindo began publishing the *Karmayogin* at Calcutta after coming out of prison and how, while in the newspaper office once, he suddenly (as I wrote) “received the order to go to Chandernagore.” The next morning I was sent a little piece of paper where the word ‘*reçut*’ which I had used was crossed out by Sri Aurobindo and in its place “*perçut*” was written. Well, one really has to know French in order to make a correction like that. Sri Aurobindo had a literary mind but of a perfect precision. It is a good point to keep in view: when you read him, say to yourselves that each word has been chosen and no other can be put in its place.<sup>4</sup>

While ‘*reçut*’ means ‘received’, ‘*perçut*’ means ‘perceived’. We may say that the command was revealed to him — through his vision and unflinching intuition.

Discussions and debates on the exact dates of Sri Aurobindo leaving Calcutta and arriving at Chandernagore could constitute a full chapter; but a study of them makes it almost certain that he boarded the boat on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, probably before 10 p.m. It was a moonlit night, and he arrived at his destination at the pre-dawn hour on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

While in jail Sri Aurobindo had met one Charuchandra Roy, a well-to-do resident of Chandernagore and a professor at St. Mary’s Institute (later Duplex College). Roy subscribed to the revolutionary ideology and had also inspired a few youths of the town to take to it. The British Indian police arrested him on the basis of the approver Naren Gossain’s statement and put him behind bars awaiting trial,

but had to set him free at the French Government's protest.

Sri Aurobindo sent Biren Ghosh to him, hoping that he would arrange for his immediate shelter. What he did not know was that the brief jail experience and the fear of punishment had totally sucked the spirit of revolution out of the gentleman. He was growing into a good and respectable citizen under French colonial rule.

A nervous Roy flatly refused help and tried to prove his goodwill for the fugitive by suggesting that instead of choosing this small French pocket, he should forthwith proceed to France proper! Probably he expected his prudent advice to wake up in Sri Aurobindo's memory a short history of France — that it was the land of liberty, equality and fraternity and as such should serve as a safe haven for him.

Writes the other escort of Sri Aurobindo, Suresh Chandra Chakravarti:

We suppose Roy Mahashay thought that the moment Sri Aurobindo asks the solitary steerman, the latter would, within two and half hours or so, sail across the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea and enable him to arrive at Nice or Toulon or Marseille. But Sri Aurobindo could not quite count on the boatman and his boat hired from Bag Bazar Ghat of Calcutta to perform that sort of feat. Hence, instead of launching a voyage to France, he stayed put there.<sup>5</sup>

The said Charuchandra probably was under the impression that, refused shelter by him, the helpless leader had sailed away, desperately seeking some other shore.

But the unexpected refusal did not seem to have disturbed Sri Aurobindo the least. After all, it was around this time (1909 -1910) that he wrote these unforgettable lines:

Rejoice and fear not for the waves that swell,  
The storms that thunder, winds that sweep;  
Always our Captain holds the rudder well,  
He does not sleep.<sup>6</sup>

He was peacefully asleep on the bare, damp wooden plank under the thatch of the boat. Needless to say, the "Voice well known" to him, that of "our Captain", could not but justify itself.

*(To be continued)*

MANOJ DAS

### Notes and References

1. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar: *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*; Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.

2. Nolini Kanta Gupta: 'Shyampukur'; *Collected Works*, Vol. 7.

3. Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*; CWSA, Vol. 36, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

4. Prof. Gabriel Monod-Herzen was a Doctor of Science in Physics from the Sorbonne. He had an illustrious career as a Professor, a Dean and Director of several science institutes in France and abroad. During World War II he worked for the "Free French" movement. He was later the Consul-General of France in Ethiopia. His connection with the Ashram goes back to the mid-thirties of the last century.

5. Suresh Chandra Chakravarti: *Rachana Sangraha* (Bengali); Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata. (Passage quoted translated from Bengali by the present author.)

6. Sri Aurobindo: 'To R.'; *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2.

*To do all in . . . liberating knowledge, without the personal egoism of the doer, is the first sign of the divine worker.*

*The second sign is freedom from desire; for where there is not the personal egoism of the doer, desire becomes impossible; it is starved out, sinks for want of a support, dies of inanition. Outwardly the liberated man seems to undertake works of all kinds like other men, on a larger scale perhaps with a more powerful will and driving-force, for the might of the divine will works in his active nature; but from all his inceptions and undertakings the inferior concept and nether will of desire is entirely banished. . . .*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 179)

## SONGS FROM THE SOUL

*(Continued from the issue of January 2017)*

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

### MAHAKALI

Come to me, Mother, in Thy warrior mood, come with Thy divine impetuosity shaking all the worlds by the tramping of Thy feet; fill my heart with Thy terrible beauty and awful grandeur. Thy fiery radiant eyes will dispel all darkness from my soul, Thy stern exacting voice will rouse me from lethargy and slumber, Thy thrilling touch will give me indomitable spirit and force to conquer.

Indeed I have need of Thee, Mother Mahakali, my kingdom is besieged by the Asuras and demons, who are relentless in their attacks on me. How long shall Thy child live under their sway? How long shall I allow my temple to be defiled by those forces of darkness and falsehood? At my present rate of progress, I shall never be able to rid me of their evil influence completely. With my unaided strength, I shall never be able to conquer them finally.

Come then, Mother, with Thy mighty violence smashing all obstacles in me, snapping all the chords of desire and attachment that still give a foothold in me to the Asuras and Rakshasas, breaking relentlessly all that is impure, malignant or undivine in me, so that out of their ruins may be built up a glorious structure of divine strength and beauty, where Thou, Mother, in all Thy grace and power, wilt live for ever and for ever.

### A VISION

What a glorious vision Thou hast shown to me, Mother! As I remember it, a thrill of joy passes through my whole system.

But it was so short! It was like the glorious dawn this morning when the earth and the sea and the sky vied with each other to produce a soft *shyama* colour tinged with gold all over Nature. The sun appeared in its splendour for a moment, and then was hid deep behind the clouds. The rays are still lingering in my heart, but, alas! the glorious sun has disappeared.

Thou hast only infinitely increased the thirst in the heart, the longing for the divine vision. Remove the clouds from me, Mother, for good; let me see Thee by

the side of Thy Divine Beloved for ever within my heart; let me see and recognise and share in Thy play of love in every object, in every event in the world, so that the glorious vision may last for ever, and I may never have to suffer from separation.

Give me some of Thy love, Mother, by which Thou hast secured the Divine Beloved for ever by Thy side; if only I could identify myself completely with Thee! A stream of delight is flowing through all my veins, Mother; what a glorious vision Thou hast shown to me to-day! What a joy!

### **PRAISE AND BLAME**

When we depend on the estimation of others, we bring ourselves to their level. Regard for the opinion of people is a help in the lower scale of life, but it is a great obstacle when we would rise higher. It is the ego in us that hankers for praise and is afraid of blame. When we seek the aggrandisement of our egoistic life, we try to please others and avoid their criticism. In doing so we may often have to give up the path of truth and accept that of falsehood. Those who would realise truth in their life must give up all such selfish desire and self-seeking, and must be ready to accept with equality all the consequences of following the truth.

When we feel disturbed by the opinions of others, to that extent our surrender is incomplete, and our dependence on the divine will imperfect. Those who have completely dedicated themselves will seek only the satisfaction of the Divine Mother, and disregard what the whole world may have to say of them. Seeking thus only to satisfy the Mother in all our life and action, we shall make our relation so intimate with her that she herself will take up all our actions and use us as instruments for her work in her own divine way. Then the praise or blame of the world will lose all power to touch us, and we shall be established in perfect peace and equality.

### **SELF-DECEPTION**

We are never deceived so badly as when we ourselves deceive ourselves. By vigilance we can protect ourselves against deception from outside, but when we deceive ourselves our whole life becomes full of falsehood. We cannot always stand guard on ourselves; indeed our own self may be our worst enemy.

Subtle are the ways in which our nature plays false with us. We think we believe things which we really do not believe. We really believe things which we think we do not believe at all. We pretend to be what we are not; we really are what we pretend not to be. We know things to be wrong, yet somehow justify them to ourselves; we know things to be right, yet persuade ourselves against them. Under such circumstances truth will have no chance in us.

As long as we depend solely on our own mind and intelligence, we shall never be completely free from this dark play of self-deception. Our hidden desires and attachments will pull the string from behind and divide our intelligence against itself. We must rise above our egoistic desire-soul and stand on the higher self which is the real truth of our being. Established in the immutable peace and infinite freedom and absolute purity of our true universal self, we must entrust to the divine Mother our whole nature with all its truth and falsehood, its right and wrong, its good and bad. The only way of escaping from self-deception is to surrender ourselves completely to Thee, Mother Divine.

### **PERSONAL RELATION WITH THE DIVINE MOTHER**

Thou hast satisfied all the great demands of my soul, Mother; Thou hast become the centre of my life, my pole-star: never, never again shall I go astray.

In Thee I have found the solution of all my doubts, in Thee I have found light in my darkness. The insatiable thirst for knowledge in me has found an eternal source of illumination in Thyself.

In Thee I have found my heart's delight. Thy grace and sweetness and beauty have filled my whole life with gladness. In allowing me to offer my love to Thee and lay my heart's homage at Thy feet, Thou hast given me the surest means of purifying myself and preparing for the immortal joy of the divine life.

And in serving Thy great cause, Mother, I have found such a scope and field for all my power and energy as was beyond even my wildest imagination; and Thou art teaching me the true skill in work.

Thou wilt always shine as the pole-star in the firmament of my life, and with all my heart and soul I shall constantly turn to Thee and follow Thee, until I grow into the light of Thy light, the life of Thy life and become completely identified with Thyself. Only then will be fulfilled the highest aspiration of my soul.

\* \* \*

By submitting to Thee, Mother, I submit to my own highest self, and that is the true condition of freedom. Thou imposest no alien rule or law on me, but makest me find out the true law of my own nature. Thou usest no force or compulsion except that of Thy all-conquering love, which satisfies the inmost needs of my soul. The more I realise my nearness and identity to Thee, Mother, the more I approach my highest self-realisation.

I feel Thee essentially bound up with all my life. In my work I feel that it is Thy force which works for Thy sake. In my joys it is Thy infinite sweetness that flows into me. In my light it is Thy light which dispels all my darkness. I feel no hesitation

to bare my bosom completely before Thee; my faults and my merits, my defects and my virtues, are all offered to Thee, Mother. I have nothing to show, nothing to hide. In Thee I find my own true self, and in my true self I find Thee.

Our relation is eternal and immutable. Thou hast created me out of Thy own self, Mother, so that Thou mayest taste Thy own love. Thou sittest in the heart of my heart and guidest me towards Thee. To love Thee and be loved, to approach Thee and be fully identified with Thee — that is the sole purpose in my life, the sole meaning of my existence. By surrendering to Thee, Mother, I fulfil the function of my life.

\* \* \*

Thou art the source of all my strength, all my inspiration, Mother, Thou art the source of all my life. The more I draw upon Thee, the more rich and prosperous becomes my life.

All the true and good and beautiful things in the world are but derivations and reflections from Thee, Mother; they are true with Thy truth, good with Thy goodness, beautiful with Thy beauty. Apart from Thee they are mere shadows, mere misleading appearances. Those who turn away from Thee and ignorantly run after these shadows, they move in endless misery, and lose themselves in the wild desert of life. Thou art the source of all truth and goodness and beauty, Mother, and these must be realised through Thee and Thee alone.

Let me give up all pursuits of the finite, Mother, and tune myself with the infinite; let me turn away from all mere shadows and reflections and resort to the source of all glory and greatness; let me constantly draw upon Thee, Mother, and grow into Thy own divine life. By making Thee my own, I shall become the master of all the glories in the world.

\* \* \*

Great must have been my *sadhana* through innumerable lives, I am now able to approach Thee, Mother, and be accepted as one of Thy chosen ones. Thy grace has decided to make me an instrument of Thy will, to turn me into a vehicle of Thy manifestation on the earth. My whole being is throbbing with joy at Thy intimate touch within me.

Thou hast occupied my heart, Mother, no one else shall have any more homage from me. Seeking to aggrandise and glorify my ego, I have constantly brought worry and shame on myself; now all my egoistic pursuits are ended; I shall no more hanker after any work but shall allow Thy will to work in me; I shall no more ignorantly strive to aggrandise myself, but shall allow Thee to fill my whole being and transform me in Thy own way.



I have taken my absolute refuge with Thee, Mother, and Thou hast taken me under Thy protection. It is for Thee to decide what success will come to me, what illumination, what delight. I have given my sole charge to Thee, the supreme Mother and can now rest in absolute peace.

\* \* \*

Thou art seated in the heart of my heart, Mother; to keep my mind and heart and soul always turned towards Thyself is my only *sadhana*; therein I have found the secret of my true happiness and the surest means of my transformation.

My mind always tends to go outward; there is a restless hankering for movement, for work in my nature. But when I work for my own sake, from personal and egoistic motives, I get more and more entangled. Hence it is that I constantly aspire to be able to work solely for Thy sake, Mother, with Thy force in me, so that in and through my work I may remain always in touch and communion with Thee.

My heart always hankers after beauty and love, but if I follow the suggestion of the senses, I get more and more entangled, and irresistibly go downward; hence I pour all my love at Thy feet, Mother, and constantly seek to fill my heart and soul with Thy heavenly charms, so that in and through my love I may realise my identification with Thee, and rise above the bonds of my earthly nature.

Through all the movements of my nature to come into intimate touch and union with Thee, Mother, that is my only *sadhana*; therein I have found the secret of my transformation.

\* \* \*

Thou art the *goal of my sadhana*, Mother, my sole aspiration is to transform myself into Thy nature and live eternally and consciously in union with Thee.

Thou art the *sadhaka* in me, Mother; Thou hast descended into me and assumed my bonds and limitations, so that Thou mayest conquer and transform them. I have only to surrender myself and with absolute confidence rely on Thee; everything else Thou wilt do for me.

Thou art the *sadhana* in me, Mother; Thou art aspiration in my soul, devotion and love in my heart, light in my consciousness, strength and power in my will; as ineffable joy and sweetness Thou pervadest all my life. My progress in *sadhana* is the progress of Thy manifestation in me.

Thou callest from below, Thou respondest from above, Thou art Thyself the call. Thou art my life, Thou art my soul, I have no existence apart from Thee. Thou art my *sadhana*, Thou art my *siddhi*, Thou art my all in all, oh! Graceful, Merciful Divine Mother!

\* \* \*

Always to follow Thee, to shape myself into Thy image, always to keep me full of Thyself, to lay my heart's homage at Thy feet, that is my only *tapasya*, I know nothing else, I have no other rule or principle.

In Thyself, Mother, Thou hast made Truth concrete, real, tangible to us; we can see it, follow it, live it. By identifying myself with Thee, I shall be identified with the Truth; Thou wilt lift me to Thy own height and give me Thy own status. That is the ideal of my *sadhana*, Mother, I know no other method or ideal,

That I still commit mistakes and errors, that I still fall into falsehood shows that my *sadhana* is not yet perfect. When every cell in my body, every idea in my mind, will know Thee and consciously follow Thy will, only then shall I rise above all error, all untruth. My whole being will be turned towards Thee, my mind will remain filled with Thy light, my heart will remain filled with the joy of Thy intimate touch and the members of my body will automatically carry on Thy work in Thy way — that is the state for which I am constantly aspiring, Mother.

\* \* \*

Thou art the source of all my power, Mother, thou art the source of all my light and happiness. To remove completely all barriers and obstacles that stand between me and Thyself, Mother, that is my strenuous *sadhana*, moment by moment. The more I open myself to Thee, the fuller and happier I grow in life.

My old nature raised doubts in me, but did not give their solution; created longings and desires, but could not satisfy them; goaded me on to restless work, but showed no aim or end. Restless, doubtful, burning with unsatisfied longings and thirsts, that is the life, Mother, out of which Thy grace has delivered me.

Thou hast solved all my doubts; Thou hast convinced me of the hollowness of my egoistic pursuits and desires; Thou hast shown to me the real aim and skill in work. To rise above my human ways and to manifest the divine in me through Thy grace, that is the secret, and I have set my whole soul upon it.

I have not to deny any of the real needs and desires of my soul, but have to turn to Thee for their real fulfilment. I have only to discard the falsehood and pretence which hides my true self from me. Drinking deep in the fountain of all joy and light and power, I shall grow into the fullest, the richest, the happiest life.

## NEW BIRTH

We must cut ourselves off completely from our old life and our old habits, and patiently wait in peace and silence aspiring after a new birth in a new life; only then will the higher force descend into us and carry out our transformation.

As long as we keep up a sort of compromise with our old self and our old life,

we raise a great obstacle to the working of the higher force in us. Currents and influences constantly enter into us from the life of the race, which tend to keep us bound to the average level of humanity. We must give up all our attachments, cast off our old nature as a worn-out garment or shell, and raise a wall of protection around us, so that nothing from the outside world may touch or affect us; only under these conditions a new nature, a new life will begin to form in us.

As the caterpillar runs away from its familiar fields of branches and leaves, giving up all its old habitual movements, finds out a secluded corner in some high place far above the ground, and casting a web of protection round itself waits in perfect calm and silence to be turned into a butterfly, even so we must completely retire into ourselves, cut off from the outside world, and in perfect calm and silence seek a new birth, a new life in Thee, Mother; only then shall we cast off our humanity and realise the divine life for which we are destined.

*(Concluded)*

ANILBARAN

*(Songs from the Soul, Amiya Library, Calcutta, 1946, pp. 135-53)*

*I understand well, there are people who do not like the idea of a "Divine", because immediately it gets mixed up with all those European or Occidental conceptions (which are horrible) and then that complicates their life somewhat — but you are not in need of that! — the "Something" one is in need of, the Love one is in need of, the Truth one is in need of, the supreme Perfection one is in need of — and that is all. The formulas . . . the fewer formulas there are the better. But that: a need, which the Thing alone can satisfy — nothing else, no half-measure, only that. And then, you go! . . . Your way will be your way, that has no importance — whatever the way, it does not matter, it does not matter; even the extravagances of the modern American youth can be a way; that has no importance.*

*The Mother*

*(Notes on the Way, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 11, p. 6)*

## A CHOSEN SPIRIT: SISIR KUMAR MITRA

The advent of an Incarnation ensures the presence of worthy instruments during his lifetime to serve his cause. They act out their destined roles in the play of which the Master is the playwright.

Shri Sisir Kumar Mitra, a noted educationist from Bengal was such a soul chosen by the Divine Duo; he left Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan, the unique Gurukul conceptualised by Rabindranath Tagore and became a permanent inmate of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. The year was 1940, hardly a year before the demise of Rabindranath. Sisir Kumar had served as the Professor of History at Santiniketan for ten long years and was one of the major contributors to the success of Visva-Bharati. He was also very close to Rabindranath. Sisir Kumar's leaving the institution was very painful for Rabindranath, though by that time he was reconciled to the departure of persons dear to him and most important for his institution, one after another, beginning with the singer non-pareil Sahana Devi, the poet Nishikanta and the versatile talent, Dilip Kumar Roy, all of whom joined Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Apart from Dilip Kumar Roy, the others were lifelong inmates of the Ashram. (The other renowned person to join the Ashram, after the poet's demise, was Charu Chandra Datta, I.C.S. and revolutionary, who was Vice-Chancellor of the Visva-Bharati.)

In the case of Sisir Kumar, Rabindranath was most unwilling to lose him. Under the impression that the young scholar had to bear an excessive work load at Visva-Bharati, he made an attempt to hold him back by assigning relatively lighter work at Sriniketan, the village welfare organisation attached to Visva-Bharati. In fact, at that time Rabindranath's fame and influence were at the zenith, not only in the literary circle but also among intellectuals all over the world and scholars from several countries desired to become a part of his Santiniketan.

Thus leaving Santiniketan and particularly the commanding aura of Rabindranath was not at all an easy decision for Sisir Kumar. But the silent call of the Master of his soul was irresistible; his destiny had been designed differently. He took refuge with the Master and the Mother in 1940, while the other Sisir Kumar, Sisir Kumar Ghose, Professor of English, renowned scholar on Sri Aurobindo, continued at Santiniketan, of course paying frequent visits to the Ashram and playing an important role in shaping a centre devoted to studies on Sri Aurobindo.

At the Ashram, the Mother assigned Sisir Kumar Mitra the task of organising the educational programme, mostly for the children of devotees, who had come over to Pondicherry at the outbreak of World War II. Sisir Kumar took it up as his sadhana and worked with unflinching devotion and dedication fully utilising his

earlier experience in the field. What began as a small school grew into what is well-known today as Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. He taught history and worked as the Joint Director as well as the Dean of Arts of the Centre, with Pavitra (P. B. St. Hilaire) as Director.

By and by, his insight into history in the light of Sri Aurobindo led him to author works that were off the beaten track in their interpretation of events and personalities. His articles had an unconventional approach to history and were published in some of the major newspapers of the country and were much appreciated. However, by nature he shied away from the limelight and avoided conferences and symposia. Hence, despite his valuable contributions to the literature on Indian History, he remains much less known in academic circles.

Here is an outline of his life.

Sisir Kumar belonged to Konnagar, a small town in Hooghly district of the then-undivided Bengal (now West Bengal), where he was born on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1901 to Krishna Chandra and Bhanumati Devi. Krishna Chandra died at an early age and subsequently Bhanumati Devi took initiation for *sannyas* from Adyapith, a religious group worshipping the 'Divine Power' in the form of "Adya Ma" near Dakshineswar, West Bengal. Sisir Kumar had quite an eventful youth, ranging from taking part in the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920 to undertaking intense study of Indian Art and Culture at Gouria Sarvavidyayatan. He started writing in various periodicals from 1926.

But the most memorable incident of his life took place in 1909, when at the age of 8, he had a chance to see Sri Aurobindo for the first time at Konnagar. Later, Sisir Kumar, in a number of letters, recounted that experience of his which proved to be the significant signal for his future yogic life.

1931 was another crucial year for the academician Sisir Kumar, when he came in contact with Rabindranath, which led him to join Visva-Bharati as Professor of History.

Thereafter 1938-40 were the preparatory years for his future life at the Ashram.

Regarding Sisir Kumar's leaving Santiniketan and joining Sri Aurobindo Ashram, his letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> April 1939 to Nolini Kanta Gupta, one of the lifelong disciples of Sri Aurobindo beginning from the revolutionary days and later the Secretary of the Ashram, is quite informative:

Respected Sir,

Presently I am working at Sriniketan. Sriniketan is the village welfare body of Visva-Bharati located at a distance of 1½ kilometres from Santiniketan. Rabindranath wishes that I work for some time in the Education Department here. There is a Teacher Training School under the Department. Presently I am working there. The authorities felt that I had decided to leave Santiniketan due

to the load of the work. They have therefore allotted me a lighter work here in this rural surrounding. As per Rabindranath's wish and at the request of the Principal, I will stay here for about a month and try to implement the new work methodology. I will work during the summer vacation also; however, I hope I will be at the Ashram for the August Darshan, unless I go there even earlier by receiving the Command. . . .

Another letter written to Nolini Kanta Gupta regarding his first sight of the Master is significant, revealing his aspiration to serve Sri Aurobindo, which was obviously the most significant factor in severing his ties with Santiniketan. The letter is dated 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1939:

Now let me tell you about myself. I am a Professor of History at Visva-Bharati. I studied cultural history. I belong to Konnagar — the ancestral place of Sri Aurobindo. In 1909 I saw Sri Aurobindo there. I was then 8. I do not know why, but since then my mind revolves around Him. I have collected all the books from the Ashram regarding the path of yoga. A few months ago I wrote to Mr. Nahar that nowadays I wish to leave everything and stay at the Ashram . . .

Two other instruments of the Divine who paved Sisir Kumar's way to Pondicherry were Prithwi Singh Nahar and Charu Chandra Datta. However, Dilip Kumar Roy also played an important role in this regard.

Sisir Kumar's acquaintance with Dilip Kumar Roy becomes vivid in one of his letters to Nolini Kanta Gupta:

Last July, I met Dilip Babu at Calcutta. I was amazed by his singing. He is an ever-joyous soul. He talked to me like an old acquaintance. I told him that I wish to go for the November Darshan. Please tell him that I also wish to stay at the Ashram as an inmate. I fully depend on your compassion.

Keep me in your mind — this is my prayer.

Yours loving  
Sisir Kumar Mitra

His gratitude towards Prithwi Singh Nahar comes alive from another of his letters written to Nolini Kanta Gupta:

Courtesy Sri Prithwi Singh Nahar, I have learnt about your Ashram since long. Can you please facilitate instruction from the Mother for starting my Yoga? I have surrendered everything to Her including myself. Would be grateful if I get the chance to offer at Her Lotus Feet a Govt. Bond for Rs. 1000 inherited from my father and a few of my books. Now I solely aspire for a Yogic Life. . . . I lost

my father when I was 9 months old. Subsequently my mother took sannyas, who also died last January. I have no sibling. I have surrendered everything of mine at the Feet of Sri Aurobindo.

It is evident that all the letters of Sisir Kumar to Nolini Kanta Gupta were marked by a genuine yearning for a spiritual life at the Feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They also indicate the invaluable role played by Nolini Kanta Gupta in shaping the future of those who were ready for the integral path. The Divine seems to have endowed him with the serene capacity for playing his role in this regard unerringly.

Another letter from Sisir Kumar to Nolini Kanta Gupta may be mentioned here. This was written on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1939 from Surul, Santiniketan.

Respected Sir,

You must be aware that Mother has allowed me to become a permanent inmate of the Ashram. I have already tendered my resignation here. I will get my release next January; I will reach the Ashram before February Darshan. I am arranging to send my books to the Ashram.

What I have received at Pondicherry will definitely help me in my sadhana; I was blessed by the company of holy souls like you. I still remember your words. I felt immensely exalted by them. You said, "They have brought down blocks of silence, blocks of peace, blocks of everything which the sadhak will need for his illumination, if only the latter will open and receive them." I have rarely heard anything so precious. Mother appeared to me as the Goddess of the Gods. Calling the aspiring souls closer, She has illuminated the whole creation. But still humans are in the dark. But one day all will see and embrace the Light. Mother said, "They will come when they will have the inner call."

Feeling myself Blessed — after receiving Mother's Grace and the company of sadhaks like you . . .

At Santiniketan Sisir Kumar came in close contact with various eminent people. Among them were Charu Chandra Datta (1876-1952), and Professor Tan-yun-shan of the 'Cheena Bhavan'. In 1942, the collected works of Sri Aurobindo were gifted to Marshal Chiang-Kai-Sheik through Professor Tan-yun-shan. In this respect the written instruction of the Mother was:

Take from Arya Publishing one complete set of Sri Aurobindo's works and offer to Marshal Chiang-Kai-Sheik.

Sisir Kumar informed Professor Tan-yun-shan about this instruction of the Mother. On 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1942, Professor Tan-yun-shan wired Sisir Kumar:

THANKS FOR TELEGRAM SHALL GLADLY ARRANGE PRESENTATION TO MARSHAL CHIANG STOP ADVISE ARYA PUBLISHING SEND BOOKS — TANYUNSHAN.

Eventually Professor Tan-yun-shan had the Darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry and took up the study of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

*Twenty Years of the Visva-Bharati Cheena Bhavan*, a book authored by Professor Tan-yun-shan in 1957 was reviewed by Sisir Kumar in the journal, *Mother India* (July 1958), in the course of which he wrote:

My mind goes back to a simple function in 1934; Rabindranath Tagore inaugurating the Indian Branch of the Sino-Indian Cultural Society at Santiniketan with Prof. Tan as the secretary. . . . As one who had once the privilege of sharing the life there I like to believe . . . that one day "the dream" bequeathed by the Poet will be realised by his institution.

Indeed, Sisir Kumar remained a link between the two heavens: one poetic and the other spiritual.

As already mentioned, Charu Chandra Datta was one of the major factors which paved the way for Sisir Kumar to become an inmate of the Ashram. In this regard Sisir Kumar wrote to Nolini Kanta Gupta on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1940:

You must be knowing that Charu Chandra Datta is going to the Ashram for the next February Darshan. He will accompany me. In fact Mr. Datta brought me to Shantiniketan — and now I am going to the Ashram with him . . . isn't it amazing?

Sisir Kumar presented complex spiritual or philosophical issues in a very lucid style. Not only the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, but several noted publishing houses across India published his books. Some of his timeless creations are *Resurgent India*, *The Liberator*, *India's Influence on Western Thought*, *India's Evolution and its Meaning*.

One of his famous compilations is *India and Her Future*.

His life-sketches of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo proved to be of great help to seekers. The journal, *Mother India*, published a series of his brief but thought-provoking articles. When in 1959 the Mother for the first time sanctioned the installation of Sri Aurobindo's Relics at Navadwip in Bengal, *Mother India* published in March 1959 Sisir Kumar's account of the event:

The Mother gave to Bengal through Gobindalal Goswami, Rector, Bangabani, Navadwip, the Sacred Relics of Sri Aurobindo for enshrinement on February



21, 1959, the Mother's 81<sup>st</sup> birthday. . . . The Mother had already fixed upon the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, the Saraswati Puja Day, for her gift of the Relics. . . . While the Mother was arranging the Relics, a sadhak chanted the mantra, "*Sri Aravindah saranam mama . . .*"

Another contemporary devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, with whom Sisir Kumar had a very intimate relationship, was Nolini Kanta Sen who, after his first Darshan, exclaimed,

A new World of Truth and Light opened up before me and I at once accepted Sri Aurobindo as my Master.

After the sudden demise of Nolini Sen, Sisir Kumar wrote in the July 1962 issue of *Mother India*:

His life which began with mental brilliance and its middle caught in the dynamics of the Life Divine, came to an abrupt close on 30 June, 1962. But a life given to and accepted by the Divine Mother can have no close. It means a re-start, a new life invested with greater powers and vaster possibilities.

Sisir Kumar shares his birthday with the day of *Mahaprayana* of Sri Aurobindo (5<sup>th</sup> December). It was on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1939 that Sisir Kumar, for the first time had been at the Ashram; he returned to Santiniketan after two weeks on 4<sup>th</sup> December. He became a permanent inmate of the Ashram on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1940. After 36 years of dedicated service to the Mother, Sisir Kumar left his body on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1976. He must have realised the truth behind death which he had articulated at the death of his dear friend, Nolini Sen.

Even though, thanks to his introvert nature and shyness, he is counted neither "among the great" nor "among the not so great", he occupies the position of an able architect of the International Centre of Education in the history of the Ashram.

BISWAJIT GANGULY

(Translated by Ujjwal Kumar Bose from the author's article in Bengali, published in the August 2016 issue of *Srinwantu*.)

Sources: *Mother India*; Sri Aurobindo Achives; "A Foot in the Door of the Indian Civil Service" by Sri Saibal Gupta, etc. Courtesy: Kiran Kakkad, Samarpan Mandal and Alope Mukherjee.