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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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All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in

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

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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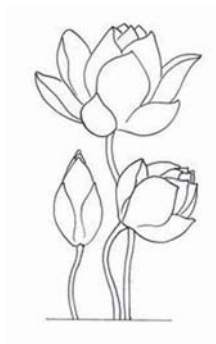
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I MADE DANGER MY HELPER

I made danger my helper and chose pain for thy black anvil my strength
hammering to sheen,
And have reckoned the snare and the pit as nought for the hope of
one lonely ray;
I turned evil into good, drew out of grief force and returned love to the
hate in men:
I have dared the abyss, I have climbed the night, I have cloven the
perfect Way.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 670-71;
in the section called 'Incomplete Poems from Manuscripts Circa 1927-1947')*



THE GREAT ARANYAKA

A COMMENTARY ON THE BRIHAD ARANYAK UPANISHAD

Foreword

The Brihad Aranyak Upanishad, at once the most obscure and the profoundest of the Upanishads, offers peculiar difficulties to the modern mind. If its ideas are remote from us, its language is still more remote. Profound, subtle, extraordinarily rich in rare philosophical suggestions and delicate psychology, it has preferred to couch its ideas in a highly figurative and symbolical language, which to its contemporaries, accustomed to this suggestive dialect, must have seemed a noble frame for its riches, but meets us rather as an obscuring veil. To draw aside this curtain, to translate the old Vedic language and figures into the form contemporary thought prefers to give to its ideas is the sole object of this commentary. The task is necessarily a little hazardous. It would have been easy merely to reproduce the thoughts & interpretations of Shankara in the modern tongue — if there were an error, one could afford to err with so supreme an authority. But it seems to me that both the demands of truth and the spiritual need of mankind in this age call for a restoration of old Vedantic truth rather than for the prolonged dominion of that single side of it systematised by the mediaeval thinker. The great Shankaracharya needs no modern praise and can be hurt by no modern disagreement. Easily the first of metaphysical thinkers, the greatest genius in the history of philosophy, his commentary has also done an incalculable service to our race by bridging the intellectual gulf between the sages of the Upanishads and ourselves. It has protected them from the practical oblivion in which our ignorance & inertia have allowed the Veda to rest for so many centuries — only to be dragged out by the rude hands of the daringly speculative Teuton. It has kept these ancient grandeurs of thought, these high repositories of spirituality under the safe-guard of that temple of metaphysics, the Adwaita philosophy — a little in the background, a little too much veiled & shrouded, but nevertheless safe from the iconoclasm and the restless ingenuities of modern scholarship. Nevertheless, it remains true that Shankara's commentary is interesting not so much for the light it sheds on the Upanishad as for its digressions into his own philosophy. I do not think that Shankara's rational intellect, subtle indeed to the extreme, but avid of logical clearness and consistency, could penetrate far into that mystic symbolism and that deep & elusive flexibility which is characteristic of all the Upanishads, but rises to an almost unattainable height in the Brihad Aranyaka. He has done much, has shown often a readiness and quickness astonishing in so different a type of intellectuality but more is possible and needed. The time is fast coming when the

human intellect, aware of the mighty complexity of the universe, will be more ready to learn & less prone to dispute & dictate; we shall be willing then to read ancient documents of knowledge for what they contain instead of attempting to force into them our own truth or get them to serve our philosophic or scholastic purposes. To enter passively into the thoughts of the old Rishis, allow their words to sink into our souls, mould them & create their own reverberations in a sympathetic & responsive material — submissiveness, in short, to the Sruti — was the theory the ancients themselves had of the method of Vedic knowledge — giram upasrutim chara, stoman abhi swara, abhi grinihi, a ruva — to listen in soul to the old voices and allow the Sruti in the soul to respond, to vibrate first obscurely in answer to the Vedantic hymn of knowledge, to give the response, the echo & last to let that response gain in clarity, intensity & fullness. This is the principle of interpretation that I have followed — mystical perhaps but not necessarily more unsound than the insistence & equally personal standards of the logician & the scholar. And for the rest, where no inner experience of truth sheds light on the text, to abide faithfully by the wording of the Upanishad and trust my intuitions. For I hold it right to follow the intuitions especially in interpreting this Upanishad, even at the risk of being accused of reading mysticism into the Vedanta, because the early Vedantists, it seems to me, were mystics — not in the sense of being vague & loose-thoughted visionaries, but in the sense of being intuitional symbolists — who regarded the world as a movement of consciousness & all material forms & energies as external symbols & shadows of deeper & ever deeper internal realities. It is not my intention here nor is it in my limits possible to develop the philosophy of the Great Aranyaka Upanishad, but only to develop with just sufficient amplitude for entire clearness the ideas contained in its language & involved in its figures. The business of my commentary is to lay a foundation; it is for the thinker to build the superstructure.

The Horse of the Worlds

The Upanishad begins with a grandiose abruptness in an impetuous figure of the Horse of the Aswamedha. “OM” it begins “Dawn is the head of the horse sacrificial. The sun is his eye, his breath is the wind, his wide-open mouth is Fire, the universal energy; Time is the self of the horse sacrificial. Heaven is his back and the mid-region is his belly, earth is his footing, — the quarters are his flanks and their intermediate regions are his ribs; the seasons are his members, the months and the half months are their joints, the days and nights are that on which he stands, the stars are his bones and the sky is the flesh of his body. The strands are the food in his belly, the rivers are his veins, the mountains are his liver and lungs, herbs and plants are the hairs of his body; the rising day is his front portion and the setting day is his hinder portion. When he stretches himself, then it lightens; when he shakes himself, then it thunders; when he urinates, then it rains. Speech verily is the voice of

him. Day was the grandeur that was born before the horse as he galloped, the eastern ocean gave it birth. Night was the grandeur that was born in his rear and its birth was in the western waters. These were the grandeurs that arose to being on either side of the horse. He became Haya and carried the gods, — Vajin and bore the Gandharvas, — Arvan and bore the Titans, — Aswa and carried mankind. The sea was his brother and the sea his birthplace.”

This passage, full of a gigantic imagery, sets the key to the Upanishad and only by entering into the meaning of its symbolism can we command the gates of this many-mansioned city of Vedantic thought. There is never anything merely poetic or ornamental in the language of the Upanishads. Even in this passage which would at first sight seem to be sheer imagery, there is a choice, a selecting eye, an intention in the images. They are all dependent not on the author’s unfettered fancy, but on the common ideas of the early Vedantic theosophy. It is fortunate, also, that the attitude of the Upanishads to the Vedic sacrifices is perfectly plain from this opening. We shall not stand in danger of being accused of reading modern subtleties into primitive minds or of replacing barbarous superstitions by civilised mysticism. The Aswamedha or Horse-Sacrifice is, as we shall see, taken as the symbol of a great spiritual advance, an evolutionary movement, almost, out of the dominion of apparently material forces into a higher spiritual freedom. The Horse of the Aswamedha is, to the author, a physical figure representing, like some algebraical symbol, an unknown quantity of force & speed. From the imagery it is evident that this force, this speed, is something worldwide, something universal; it fills the regions with its body, it occupies Time, it gallops through Space, it bears on in its speed men and gods and the Titans. It is the Horse of the Worlds, — and yet the Horse sacrificial.

Let us regard first the word Aswa and consider whether it throws any light on the secret of this image. For we know that the early Vedantins attached great importance to words in both their apparent and their hidden meaning and no one who does not follow them in this path, can hope to enter into the associations with which their minds were full. Yet the importance of associations in colouring and often in determining our thoughts, determining even philosophic and scientific thought when it is most careful to be exact & free, should be obvious to the most superficial psychologist. Swami Dayananda’s method with the Vedas, although it may have been too vigorously applied and more often out of the powerful mind of the modern Indian thinker than out of the recovered mentality of the old Aryan Rishis, would nevertheless, in its principle, have been approved by these Vedantins. Now the word Aswa must originally have implied strength or speed or both before it came to be applied to a horse. In its first or root significance it means to exist pervadingly and so to possess, have, obtain or enjoy. It is the Greek echo (OS. [*Old Sanskrit*] ashā), the ordinary word in Greek for “I have”. It means, also and even more commonly, to eat or enjoy. Beside this original sense inherent in the roots of

its family it has its own peculiar significance of existence in force — strength, solidity, sharpness, speed, — in *ashan* and *ashma*, a stone, *ashani*, a thunderbolt, *asri*, a sharp edge or corner, (Latin *acer*, *acris*, sharp, *acus*, a point etc.) and finally *aswa*, the strong, swift horse. Its fundamental meanings are, therefore, pervading existence, enjoyment, strength, solidity, speed. Shall we not say, therefore, that *aswa* to the Rishis meant the unknown power made up of force, strength, solidity, speed and enjoyment that pervades and constitutes the material world?

But there is a danger that etymological fancies may mislead us. It is necessary, therefore, to test our provisional conclusion from philology by a careful examination of the images of this parable. Yet before we proceed to this inquiry, it is as well to note that in the very opening of his second *Brahmana*, the Rishi passes on immediately from *aswa* the horse to *Ashanaya mrityu*, Hunger that is death and assigns this hunger that is death as the characteristic, indeed the very nature of the Force that has arranged and developed — evolved, as the moderns would say — the material worlds.

“Dawn” says the Rishi, “is the head of the horse sacrificial.” Now the head is the front, the part of us that faces and looks out upon our world, — and Dawn is that part to the Horse of the worlds. This goddess must therefore be the opening out of the world to the eye of being — for as day is the symbol of a time of activity, night of a time of inactivity, so dawn images the imperfect but pregnant beginnings of regular cosmic action; it is the Being’s movement forward, it is its impulse to look out at the universe in which it finds itself and looking towards it, to yearn, to desire to enter upon possession of a world which looks so bright because of the brightness of the gaze that is turned upon it. The word *Ushas* means etymologically coming into manifested being; and it could mean also desire or yearning. *Ushas* or Dawn to the early thinkers was the impulse towards manifest existence, no longer a vague movement in the depths of the Unmanifest, but already emerging and on the brink of its satisfaction. For we must remember that we are dealing with a book full of mystical imagery, which starts with & looks on psychological and philosophical truths in the most material things and we shall miss its meaning altogether, if in our interpretation we are afraid of mysticism.

The sun is the eye of this great Force, the wind is its life-breath or vital energy, Fire is its open mouth. We are here in the company of very familiar symbols. We shall have to return to them hereafter but they are, in their surface application, obvious and lucid. By themselves they are almost sufficient to reveal the meaning of the symbol, — yet not altogether sufficient. For, taken by themselves, they might mislead us into supposing the Horse of the Worlds to be an image of the material universe only, a figure for those movements of matter & in matter with which modern Science is so exclusively preoccupied. But the next image delivers us from passing by this side-gate into materialism. “Time in its period is the self of the Horse Sacrificial.” If we accept for the word *atma* a significance which is also common

and is, indeed, used in the next chapter, if we understand by it, as I think we ought here to understand by it, “substance” or “body”, the expression, in itself remarkable, will become even more luminous and striking. Not Matter then, but Time, a mental circumstance, is the body of this force of the material universe whose eye is the sun and his breath the wind. Are we then to infer that the Seer denies the essential materiality of matter? does he assert it to be, as Huxley admitted it to be, “a state of consciousness”? We shall see. Meanwhile it is evident already that this Horse of the Worlds is not an image merely of matter or material force, but, as we had already supposed it to be, an image of the power which pervades and constitutes the material universe. We get also from this image about Time the idea of it as an unknown power — for Time which is its self or body, is itself an unknown quantity. The reality which expresses itself to us through Time — its body — but remains itself ungrasped, must be still what men have always felt it to be, the unknown God.

In the images that immediately follow we have the conception of Space added to the conception of Time and both are brought together side by side as constituents of the being of the horse. For the sky is the flesh of his body, the quarters his flanks & the intermediate regions his ribs — the sky, nabhas, the ether above us in which the stellar systems are placed, — and these stellar systems themselves, concentrations of ether, are the bones which support the flesh and of which life in this spatial infinity takes advantage in order more firmly to place & organise itself in matter. But side by side with this spatial image is that of the seasons reminding us immediately & intentionally of the connection of Time to Space. The seasons, determined for us by the movements of the sun & stars, are the flanks of the horse and he stands upon the months and the fortnights — the lunar divisions. Space, then, is the flesh constituting materially this body of Time which the Sage attributes to his Horse of the worlds, — by movement in Space its periods are shaped & determined. Therefore we return always to the full idea of the Horse — not as an image of matter, not as a symbol of the unknown supra-material Power in its supra-material reality, but of that Power expressing itself in matter — materially, we might almost say, pervading & constituting the universe. Time is its body, — yes, but sanvatsara not kala, Time in its periods determined by movement in Space, not Time in its essentiality.

Moreover, it is that Power imaging itself in Cosmos, it is the Horse of the Worlds. For, we read, “Heaven is its back, the mid-region is its belly, earth is its footing” — pajasyam, the four feet upon which it stands. We must be careful not to confuse the ancient Seer’s conception of the universe with our modern conception. To us nothing exists except the system of gross material worlds — annamayam jagat, — this earth, this moon, this sun & its planets, these myriad suns and their systems. But to the Vedantic thinkers the universe, the manifest Brahman, was a harmony of worlds within worlds; they beheld a space within our space but linked with it, they were aware of a Time connected with our Time but different from it. This earth was Bhur. Rising in soul into the air above the earth, the antariksham,

they thought they came into contact with other sevenfold earths in which just as here matter is the predominant principle, so there nervous or vital energy is the main principle or else manas, still dependent on matter & vital energy; these earths they called Bhuvar. And rising beyond this atmosphere into the ethereal void they believed themselves to be aware of other worlds which they called Swar or heaven, where again in its turn mind, free, blithe, delivered from its struggle to impose itself in a world not its own upon matter & nerve-life, is the medium of existence & the governing Force. If we keep in mind these ideas, we shall easily understand why the images are thus distributed in the sentence I have last quoted. Heaven is the back of the Horse, because it is on mind that we rest, mind that bears up the Gods & Gandharvas, Titans & men; — the mid-region is the belly because vital energy is that which hungers & devours, moves restlessly everywhere seizing everything and turning it into food or else because mind is the womb of all our higher consciousness; — earth is the footing because matter here, outward form, is the fundamental condition for the manifestation of life, mind and all higher forces. On Matter we rest and have our firm stand; out of Matter we rise to our fulfilment in Spirit.

Then once again, after these higher & more remote suggestions, we are reminded that it is some Force manifesting in matter which the Horse symbolises; the material manifestation constitutes the essence of its symbolism. The images used are of an almost gross materiality. Some of them are at the same time of a striking interest to the practical student of Yoga, for he recognises in them allusions to certain obscure but exceedingly common Yogic phenomena. The strands of the rivers are imaged as the undigested food in the horse's belly — earth not yet assimilated or of sufficient consistency for the habitual works of life; the rivers, distributing the water that is the life blood of earth's activities, are his veins; the mountains, breathing in health for us from the rarer altitudes and supporting by the streams born from them the works of life, are his lungs and liver; herbs and plants, springing up out of the sap of earth, are the hairs covering & clothing his body. All that is clear enough and designedly superficial. But then the Upanishad goes on to speak no longer of superficial circumstances but of the powers of the Horse. Some of these are material powers, the thunder, the lightning, the rain. When he stretches himself, then it lightens; when he shakes himself, then it thunders; when he urinates, then it rains — vijrimbhate, extends himself by intensity, makes the most of his physical bulk & force; vidhunute, throws himself out by energy, converts his whole body into a motion & force; these two words are of a great impetuosity & vehemence, and taken in conjunction with what they image, extremely significant. The Yogin will at once recognise the reference to the electrical manifestations visible or felt which accompany so often the increase of concentration, thought & inner activity in the waking condition — electricity, vidyutas, the material symbol, medium & basis of all activities of knowledge, sarvani vijnanavijrimbhitani. He will recognise also the meghadhwani, one of the characteristic sounds heard in the concentration

of Yoga, symbolical of kshatratejas and physically indicative of force gathering itself for action. The first image is therefore an image of knowledge expressing itself in matter, the second is an image of power expressing itself in matter. The third, the image of the rain, suggests that it is from the mere waste matter of his body that this great Power is able to fertilise the world & produce sustenance for the myriad nations of his creatures. "Speech verily is the voice of him." Vagevasya vak. Speech with its burden of definite thought, is the neighing of this mighty horse of sacrifice; by that this great Power in matter expresses materially the uprush of his thought & yearning & emotion, visible sparks of the secret universal fire that is in him — guhahitam.

But the real powers, the wonderful fundamental greatnesses of the Horse are, the Sage would have us remember, not the material. What are they then? The sunrise & sunset, day & night are their symbols, not the magnitudes of space, but the magnitudes of Time, — Time, that mysterious condition of universal mind which alone makes the ordering of the universe in Space possible, although its own particular relations to matter are necessarily determined by material events & movements — for itself subtle as well as infinite it offers no means by which it can be materially measured. Sunrise & sunset, that is to say birth & death, are the front & hind part of the body of the horse, Time expressed in matter. But on Day & Night the sage fixes a deeper significance. Day is the symbol of the continual manifestation of material things [in] the vyakta, the manifest or fundamentally in Sat, in infinite being; Night is the symbol of their continual disappearance in Avyakta, the unmanifest or finally into Asat, into infinite non-being. They appear according to the swift movement of this Horse of the Worlds, anu ajayata, or, as I have written, translating the idea & rhythm of the Upanishad rather than the exact words, as he gallops. Day is the greatness that appears in his front, Night is the greatness that appears in his rear, — whatever this Time-Spirit, this Zeitgeist, turns his face towards or arrives at as he gallops through Time, that appears or, as we say, comes into being, whatever he passes away from & leaves, that disappears out of being or, as we say, perishes. Not that things are really destroyed, for nothing that is can be destroyed — nabhavo vidyate satah, but they no longer appear, they are swallowed up in this darkness of his refusal of consciousness; for the purposes of manifestation they cease to exist. All things exist already in Parabrahman, but all are not here manifest. They are already there in Being, not in Time. The universal Thought expressing itself as Time reaches them, they seem to be born; It passes away from them, they seem to perish; but there they still are, in Being, but not in Time. These two greatnesses of the appearance of things in Time & Space & their disappearance in Time & Space act always & continuously so long as the Horse is galloping, are his essential greatnesses. Etau vai mahimanau. The birth of one is in the eastern ocean, of the other in the western, that is to say in Sat & Asat, in the ocean of Being & the ocean of denial of Being or else in Vyakrita Prakriti & Avyakrita Prakriti, occult sea of

Chaos, manifest sea of Cosmos.

Then the sage throws out briefly a description, not exhaustive but typical, of the relations of the Horse to the different natural types of being that seem to possess this universe. For all of them He is the vahana, He bears them up on His infinite strength & speed & motion. He bears all of them without respect of differences, samabhavena, with the divine impartiality and equality of soul — samam hi Brahma. To the type of each individual being this Universal Might adapts himself & seems to take upon himself their image. He is Haya to the Gods, Arvan to the Asura, Vajin to the Gandharvas, Aswa to men. Ye yatha mam prapadyante tans tathaiva bhajam-yaham, mama vartmanuvartante manushyah Partha sarvashah. In reality, they are made in his image, not He in theirs, & though he seems to obey them & follow their needs & impulses, though they handle the whip, ply the spur & tug the reins, it is he who bears them on in the courses of Time that are marked out for him by his hidden Self; He is free & exults in the swiftness of his galloping.

But what are these names, Haya, Vajin, Arvan, Aswa? Certainly, they must suggest qualities which fit the Horse in each case to the peculiar type of its rider; but the meaning depends on associations & an etymology which in modern Sanscrit have gone below the surface & are no longer easily seizable. Haya is especially difficult. For this reason Shankara, relying too much on scholarship & intellectual inference & too little on his intuitions, is openly at a loss in this passage. He sees that the word haya for horse must arise from the radical sense of motion borne by the root *hi*; but every horse has motion for his chief characteristic & utility, Arvan & Vajin no less than Haya. Why then should Haya alone be suitable for riding by the gods, why Arvan for the Asuras? He has, I think, the right intuition when he suggests that it is some peculiar & excelling kind of motion (*visishtagati*) which is the characteristic of Haya. But then, unable to fix on that peculiarity, unable to read any characteristic meaning in the names that follow, he draws back from his intuition and adds that after all, these names may have merely indicated particular kinds of horses attributed mythologically to these various families of riders. But this suggestion would make the passage mere mythology; but the Upanishads, always intent on their deeper object, never waste time over mere mythology. We must therefore go deeper than Shankara and follow out the intuition he himself has abandoned.

I am dwelling on this passage at a length disproportionate to its immediate importance, not only because Shankara's failure in handling it shows the necessity & fruitfulness of trusting our intuitions when in contact with the Upanishads, but because the passage serves two other important uses. It illustrates the Vedantic use of the etymology of words and it throws light on the precise notions of the old thinkers about those super-terrestrial beings with whom the vision of the ancient Hindus peopled the universe. The Vedantic writers, we continually find, dwelt deeply & curiously on the innate & on the concealed meaning of words; vyakarana, always considered essential to the interpretation of the Vedas, they used not merely as

scholars, but much more as intuitive thinkers. It was not only the actual etymological sense or the actual sense in use but the suggestions of the sound & syllables of the words which attracted them; for they found that by dwelling on them new & deep truths arose into their understandings. Let us see how they use this method in assigning the names assumed by the sacrificial Horse.

Here modern philology comes to our help, for, by the clue it has given, we can revive in its principle the Nirukta of our ancestors and discover by induction & inference the old meaning of the Vedic vocables. I will leave Haya alone for the present; because philology unaided does not help us very much in getting at the sense of its application, — in discovering the visishtagati which the word conveyed to the mind of the sage. But Vajin & Arvan are very illuminative. Vaja & Vajin are common Vedic words; they recur perpetually in the Rigveda. The sense of Vaja is essentially substantiality of being attended with plenty, from which it came to signify full force, copiousness, strength, and by an easy transition substance & plenty in the sense of wealth and possessions. There can be no doubt about Vajin. But European scholarship has confused for us the approach to the sense of Arvan. *Ar* is a common Sanscrit root, the basis of ari, Arya, Aryama and a number of well known words. But the scholars tell us that it means to till or plough & the Aryans so called themselves because they were agriculturists and not nomads & hunters. Starting from this premise one may see in Arvan a horse for ploughing as opposed to a draught-animal or a warhorse, & support the derivation by instancing the Latin arvum, a tilled field! But even if the Aryans were ploughmen, the Titans surely were not — Hiranyakashipu & Prahlad did not pride themselves on the breaking of the glebe & the honest sweat of their brow! There is no trace of such an association in arvan here, — I know not whether there is any elsewhere in the Vedas. Indeed, this agriculturist theory of the Aryans seems one of the worst of the many irresponsible freaks which scholastic fancifulness has perpetrated in the field of Sanscrit learning. No ancient race would be likely so to designate itself. *Ar* signifies essentially any kind of pre-eminence in fact or force in act. It means therefore to be strong, high, swift or active, preeminent, noble, excellent or first; to raise, lead, begin or rule; it means also to struggle, fight, to drive, to labour, to plough. The sense of struggle & combat appears in ari, an enemy; the Greek Ares, the war-god, arete, virtue, meaning originally like the Latin virtus, valour; the Latin arma, weapons. Arya means strong, high, noble or warlike, as indeed its use in literature constantly indicates. We can now discover the true force of Arvan, — it is the strong one in command, it is the stallion, or the bull, ie master of the herd, the leader, master or fighter. The word Asura also means the strong or mighty one. The Gandharvas are cited here briefly, so as to suit the rapidity of the passage, as the type of a particular class of beings, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Kinnaras whose unifying characteristic is material ease, prosperity and a beautiful, happy & undisturbed self-indulgence; they are angels of joy, ease, art, beauty & pleasure. For them the Horse becomes full of ease & plenty,

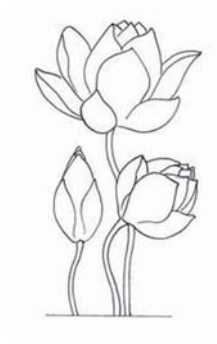
the support of these qualities, the vahana of the Gandharvas. The Asuras are, similarly, angels of might & force & violent struggle, — self-will is their characteristic, just as an undisciplined fury of self-indulgence is the characteristic of their kindred Rakshasas. It is a self-will capable of discipline, but always huge & impetuous even in discipline, always based on a colossal egoism. They struggle gigantically to impose that egoism on their surroundings. It is for these mighty but imperfect beings that the Horse adapts himself to their needs, becomes full of force & might and bears up their gigantic struggle, their unceasing effort. And Haya? In the light of these examples we can hazard a suggestion. The root meaning is motion; but from certain kindred words, *hil*, to swing, *hind*, to swing, *hind*, to roam about freely & from another sense of *hi*, to exhilarate or gladden, we may, perhaps, infer that haya indicated to the sage a swift, free & joyous, bounding motion, fit movement for the bearer of the gods. For the Aryan gods were devas, angels of joy & brightness, fulfilled in being, in harmony with their functions & surroundings, not like the Titans imperfect, dispossessed, struggling. Firmly seated on the bounding joy of the Horse, they deliver themselves confidently to the exultation of his movements. The sense here is not so plain & certain as with Vajin & Arvan; but Haya must certainly have been one in character with the Deva in order to be his vahana; the sense I have given certainly belongs to the word Deva, is discoverable in Haya from its roots, & that this brightness & joyousness was the character of the Aryan gods, I think every reader of Veda & Purana must feel and admit. Last of all, the Horse becomes Aswa for men. But is he not Aswa for all? why particularly for men? The answer is that the Rishi is already moving forward in thought to the idea of Ashanaya Mrityu with which he opens the second Brahmana of the Upanishad. Man, first & supreme type of terrestrial creatures, is most of all subject to this mystery of wasting & death which the Titans bear with difficulty & the gods & Gandharvas entirely overcome. For in man that characteristic of enjoyment which by enjoying devours & wastes both its object & itself is especially developed & he bears the consequent pressure of Ashanaya Mrityu which can only lighten & disappear if we rise upward in the scale of Being towards Brahman & become truly sons of immortality, Amritasya putrah. That form of force in matter that is self-wasting because it wastes or preys upon others, is man's vahana.

Of this Horse of the Worlds, who bears up all beings, the sea is the brother & the sea is the birthplace. There can be no doubt of the meaning of this symbol. It is the upper ocean of the Veda in which it imaged the superior & divine existence, these are the waters of supramaterial causality. From that this lower ocean of our manifestation derives its waters, its flowing energies, apah; from that when the Vritras are slain & the firmaments opened, it is perpetually replenished, prati samudram syandamanah and of that it is the shadow & the reproduction of its circumstances under the conditions of mental illusion, — Avidya, mother of limitation & death. This image not only consummates this passage but opens a door of escape from that

which is to follow. Deliverance from the dominion of Ashanaya Mrityu is possible because of this circumstance that the sea of divine being is bandhu, kin & friend to the Horse. The aparardha proves to be of the same essential nature as the parardha, our mortal part is akin to our unlimited & immortal part, because the Horse of the Worlds comes to us from that divine source & in his essence partakes of its nature, & from what other except this Ocean can the Horse of the Worlds who is material yet supramaterial be said to have derived his being? We, appearing bound, mortal & limited, are manifestations of a free & infinite reality & from that from which we were born comes friendship & assistance for that which we are, towards making us that which we shall be. From our kindred heavens the Love descends always that works to raise up the lower to its brother, the higher.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Kena and Other Upanishads, CWSA, Vol. 18, pp. 273-87)



‘ALL THE VEILS MUST VANISH AND THE LIGHT BECOME COMPLETE IN ALL HEARTS’

June 28, 1914

All Nature hails Thee, O Lord, and with arms lifted and hands outstretched she implores Thee. Not that she doubts Thy infinite generosity and thinks she must ask in order to have; but that is her way of bowing to Thee and giving herself to Thee, for is this giving anything else than being ready to receive? She delights in thus offering a prayer to Thee though she knows that this prayer is superfluous. But it is an ardent and happy adoration. And the feeling of devotion is thus satisfied without in any way hurting the intellectual consciousness which knows Thee to be one with everything and present in everything.

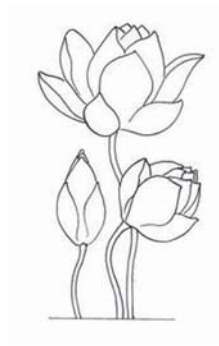
But all the veils must vanish and the light become complete in all hearts.

O Lord, in spite of the work, in it, give us that perfect calm of the spirit which makes possible the divine identification, the integral knowledge.

My love for Thee, O Lord, is Thyself and yet my love bows down before Thee in deep devotion.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 188)



A CONVERSATION OF 30 SEPTEMBER 1966

[This talk begins with Mother's comments on the following letter of Sri Aurobindo.]

“... although St. Paul had remarkable mystic experiences and, certainly, much profound spiritual knowledge (profound rather than wide, I think) — I would not swear to it that he is referring to the supramentalised body (physical body). Perhaps to the supramental body or to some other luminous body in its own space and substance, which he found sometimes as if enveloping him and abolishing this body of death which he felt the material envelope to be. This verse¹ like many others is capable of several interpretations and might refer to a quite supraphysical experience. The idea of a transformation of the body occurs in different traditions, but I have never been quite sure that it meant the change in this very matter. There was a yogi some time ago in this region who taught it, but he hoped when the change was complete, to disappear in light. The Vaishnavas speak of a divine body which will replace this one when there is the complete siddhi. But, again, is this a divine physical or supraphysical body? At the same time there is no obstacle in the way of supposing that all these ideas, intuitions, experiences point to, if they do not exactly denote, the physical transformation.”²

It is strange, this was the very subject of my meditations these days — not deliberate, they are imposed from above. Because through the entire passage from the plant to the animal and from the animal to man (especially from the animal to man), essentially the differences in form are minimal; the true transformation lies in the intervention of another agent of consciousness. All the differences between the life of the animal and the life of man come from the intervention of the Mind; but the substance is essentially the same and it obeys the same laws of formation and construction. For example, there is not much difference between a calf that is formed in the womb of the cow and the child that is formed in the womb of the mother. There is a difference, that of the intervention of the Mind; but if we look at a *physical* being, that is to say, visible as the physical is visible now and having the same density (for example, a body having no need of circulation, or of bones — particularly these two: the

1. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” I Corinthians, 16. 53, 54.

2. Letter dated 24 December 1930. *Letters on Yoga*, Cent. Vol. 24, p. 1237.

skeletons and blood circulation), it is difficult to conceive. And as long as it is like that, with this circulation of the blood, this action of the heart, one could imagine — one can imagine — by a power of the Spirit, the renewal of force, of energy, through means other than food; this is conceivable; but the rigidity, the solidity of the body — how is that possible without the skeleton? . . . In that case, this would be a transformation infinitely greater than that from the animal to man; this would be a passage from man to a being who would not be built in the same manner, who would no longer function in the same manner, who would be like the condensation and concretisation of “something”. . . . Up to now, that corresponds to nothing we have yet seen physically, unless the scientists have found something I do not know about.

One can conceive of a light or a new force giving to the cells a kind of spontaneous life and spontaneous force.

Yes, that is what I say, food can disappear; that one can conceive.

But the whole body could be animated by this force. The body could remain supple, for instance. Even retaining its bone-structure, it could remain supple, have the suppleness of a child.

But the child because of that cannot remain standing! He cannot exert himself. What will replace the bone-structure, for instance?

It could be the same elements, but having suppleness — elements whose firmness would not come from hardness but from the force of light, no?

Yes, that is possible. . . . Only, what I mean to say is that perhaps the thing will be done through a large number of new creations. For instance, the passage from man to this being will perhaps be accomplished through all kinds of other intermediaries. It is the leap, you understand, that seems to me tremendous.

I conceive very well a being who could, by spiritual power, the power of his inner being, absorb the necessary forces, renew himself and remain always young; that one conceives very well, even for giving a certain suppleness so as to be able to change the form, if need be. But the total disappearance of this system of construction immediately — immediately from the one to the other — that seems to be . . . that seems to require stages.

Evidently, unless something happens (which we are obliged to call a “miracle”, because one cannot understand how) how can a body like ours become a body wholly built and moved by a higher force and without a material support? This (*Mother holds the skin of her hand between her fingers*), how can this change into

this other thing? . . . That appears impossible.

That appears miraculous, but . . .

Yes, in all my experiences I understand very well the possibility of no longer having the need for food, the disappearance of all this process (for example, changing the method of absorption, that is possible), but how to change the structure?

But that does not seem to me impossible.

That does not seem to you impossible?

No, perhaps it is imagination, but I imagine very well a spiritual power entering into it and producing a kind of luminous inflation, and all this suddenly blooming like a flower. This body, shrivelled up towards itself, opens out, becomes radiant, supple, luminous.

Supple, plastic, yes, that one can conceive, it can become plastic; that is to say, the form will not be fixed as now. All that one can conceive, but . . .

But I see it very well like a kind of luminous blooming: the Light must have this force. And it destroys in no way the present structure.

But visible? Which one would be able to touch?

Yes, only, it is like an opening out. What was closed opens like a flower, that's all. But it is always the structure of the flower, only it is wholly opened and it is luminous, no?

(Mother shakes her head and remains silent for a moment.) I have not had the experience, I do not know.

I am absolutely convinced, because I have had experiences which proved it to me, that the life of this body — the life which makes it move and change — can be replaced by a force; that is to say, one can create a kind of immortality, and the wear and tear can also disappear. These two things are possible: the power of life can come and the wear and tear can disappear. And that can come psychologically, through a total obedience to the divine Impulsion, which enables one to have at each moment the force that is needed, to do the thing that is needed — all that, all that, these are certitudes; it is not a hope, it is not an imagination: these are certitudes. Well, one must educate and slowly transform, change one's habits. It is possible, all that is possible. But only, how long would it take to do away with the necessity (let

us take this problem only) of the skeleton? That seems to me to be a matter still very far away. That is to say, many intermediary stages will be necessary. Sri Aurobindo said that life could be prolonged indefinitely. That, yes. But we are not yet built with something that wholly escapes dissolution, the necessity of dissolution. The bones are very durable, they can even last a thousand years if they are in favourable conditions, it is understood; but that does not mean immortality *in principle*. You understand what I mean?

No. You believe that it must be a non-physical substance?

I do not know if it is non-physical, but it is a physical that I do not know! And it is not the substance as we know it now, particularly not the construction that we know now.

I do not know, but if it must be a physical body, as Sri Aurobindo has said; it seemed to me (but perhaps it is day-dreaming) that it might be like a lotus-bud, for example; our present body is like a lotus-bud that is quite small, closed, hard; and it opens out, it becomes a flower.

Yes, but that, my child, that is . . .

What cannot this Light do with the elements that it has? They are the same things, the same elements, but transfigured.

But vegetable things are not immortal.

No, it was only a comparison.

Well, yes!

There is this question only. Perpetual change, that I conceive; I could even conceive of a flower that does not fade, but it is this principle of immortality . . . That is to say, in essence, a life which escapes from the necessity of renewing itself: that it is the eternal Force which manifests itself directly and eternally, and yet it should be this, a physical body (*Mother touches her skin with her fingers*).

I understand very well a progressive change and that one could make of this substance something which might renew itself from within to the outside and eternally — and that, that would be immortality; but only, it seems to me that between what is now, as we are, and this other mode of life, there have to be many stages. Well, these cells, with all the consciousness and experience they have now, if you ask them, for example, “Is there anything that you cannot do?”, they will answer in their sincerity, “No, what the Lord wills, I can do.” This is their state of consciousness.

But in appearance it is otherwise. The personal experience is this: whatever I do with the Presence of the Lord, I do without effort, without difficulty, without fatigue, without waste, like this (*Mother indicates a wide harmonious rhythm*); only it is still open to all the influences from outside and the body is obliged to do things that are not directly the expression of the supreme Impulsion; from there come the fatigue, the friction. . . . So, a supramental body suspended in a world that is not the earth — it is not that!

No.

Something is needed that has the power to resist the contagion. Man cannot resist the contagion of the animal, he cannot, he is in constant relation. Well, this being, how will he do it? . . . It would seem, for a long time — for a long time — he will still be subjected to the laws of contagion.

I do not know, but it does not seem to me impossible.

No?

I feel that this Power of Light being there, what can touch it?

But all the world will disappear! It is that, is it not?

When That comes, when the Lord is there, there is not one in a thousand who would not be frightened. And not in the reasoning, not in the thought: like that, in the substance. Then supposing, supposing that it is so, that a being becomes the condensation and expression, a formula of the supreme Power, the supreme Light — what would happen!

Well, that is the whole problem.

Yes.

Because I do not see the difficulty of transformation in itself. It seems to me rather the difficulty of the world.

If everything could be transformed at the same time, that would be all right, but it is not obviously like that. If one being was transformed all alone . . .

Yes, that would be unbearable, perhaps.

Yes.

My feeling (it is a kind of feeling-sensation) is that there should be intermediary stages.

And then, when you see how man had to fight against the whole of Nature in order to exist, you have the feeling that these beings — those who will understand them, who will help them — will have with them a relation of devotion, attachment, service, as animals have for men. But those who will not love them . . . they will be dangerous beings. I remember, once I had a very clear vision of the precarious situation of these new beings, and I had said (it was before 1956, before the descent of the supramental power), I had said, “The Supramental will first manifest itself in its aspect of Power, because it will be indispensable for the safety of the beings.” And indeed it is Power that descended first — Power and Light: Light that gives Knowledge and Power.

It is a thing that I am feeling more and more: the necessity of intermediate periods. . . . It is quite evident that something is in the process of happening, but it is not the “something” that has been seen and foreseen and which will be the culmination; it is *one* of the stages that is going to come about, it is not the culmination.

Sri Aurobindo also has said that first of all there will come the power to prolong life at will (it is much more subtle and wonderful than that), but that is a state of consciousness which is in the process of being established; it is a kind of relation, and of constant, established contact with the supreme Lord; and that abolishes the sense of wear and tear and replaces it by an extraordinary flexibility, an extraordinary plasticity. But the state of *spontaneous* immortality is not possible — not possible, at least for the present. This structure must change into something other than this; and in order to change into something other than this — in the way things are happening, it will take long. It may go faster than in the past, but even admitting that the movement rushes forward, even then it will take time (according to our notion of time). And what is, besides, quite worth noticing, is that one must change one’s sense of time if one is to be in the state of consciousness where wearing out does not exist; one enters into a state where time no longer has the same reality. It is something else. It is very special, it is an uncountable present. Even this habit that one has, of thinking beforehand or of foreseeing what is going to happen, is a stumbling-block, is a clinging to the old manner of being.

So many, so many habits to change.

The integral realisation will come about only when one can be divine spontaneously. Oh! To be divine spontaneously, without turning to see that one is so, having passed beyond the stage where one wants to be so.

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 45-53)

LETTERS TO A CHILD

[To one of the first children admitted to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram; he came at the age of ten. Interested as a youth in music, painting and poetry, he later became a teacher of music in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. He began writing to the Mother at the age of twelve.]

Always do with pleasure the work you have to do.

Work done with joy is work done well.

14 March 1932

*

When you have a desire you are governed by the thing you desire; it takes possession of your mind and your life, and you become a slave. If you have greed for food you are no longer the master of food, it is the food that masters you.

22 August 1932

*

My dear Mother,

Today when I went to X for my music lesson I felt uneasy. I also felt that he is not very happy with me. I had a sort of bad feeling at that time. Why did I feel this uneasiness? After coming home I felt tired and had no interest in doing anything. Now I feel that after the music lesson, the good things that were developing in me have been broken to pieces. Is it true?

All these feelings — this uneasiness, this tiredness, these impressions of broken progress — come from the vital, which rebels because its desires and preferences are not satisfied. All that has no true reality.

2 April 1933

*

O Mother,

The disturbance still has not disappeared. I am in a worse state than before. There is something wrong in my mind. Also, I feel bad everywhere. Tell me what I should do.

Think of something else. Keep yourself busy; don't remain idle, doing nothing.

18 December 1933

*

Dearest Mother,

I want to feel your touch in each and every one of my movements. I want to feel your presence everywhere.

Mother, accept my prayer.

I am always with you, my child, so it is not only possible but quite easy to feel my presence constantly.

With love and blessings.

6 March 1934

*

Mother, O Mother,

Have I done any wrong? Answer me please. If I have done any wrong, please excuse me. Are you displeased with me? Mother, make me yours.

Why this question? You have done nothing wrong and I am not in the least displeased with you. Did I look very serious tonight? If it is so, it was because I was thinking of the stupidity and blindness of this poor world, but there was surely nothing concerning you.

With love and blessings.

9 March 1934

*

My little mother,

Yesterday I told you that "we" had painted an envelope. By "we" I mean that there is me and you. I feel that it is not I who am working, so I say "we". I am your child.

That is *really nice* and I am *very pleased*. Yes, I am always with you and even more specially when you are working on your painting and music. Are you aware that you are making a great deal of progress? I like the envelopes that *both of us are painting together* very much, and that is one more proof that we are doing them together, because they are nearly always just as I thought they should be. The small

one you sent this morning is very fine and the choice of colours is excellent.

Affectionately.

Your little mother.

15 March 1934

*

My mother,

I do not want the vulgar joy of the world. Take me into your heart. Take me into your arms.

Yes, I am taking you into my arms and cradling you to my heart so that you may have true happiness and unalloyed peace.

Love from your little mother who is always with you.

15 March 1934

*

My little mother,

Peace, peace, give me your unalloyed peace and make me conscious of you.

Peace be with you, my child, the peace of Certitude and of confidence in my love which never leaves you.

Your mother.

16 March 1934

*

My little mother,

Why does this difficulty come? Do I open myself to it or is it something else? Mother, after having come so close to you, why does it come?

You should not speak to others about what I write or say to you, because they become jealous and their jealousy creates a bad atmosphere which falls back on you and brings back the difficulty to you; because you spoke, you opened yourself and received it, perhaps without even being aware of it.

Love from your mother.

17 March 1934

*

My dear mother,

My heart wants to run to your feet; it wants to lose itself in you. This is what I want, but have I done it? I want to be close to your heart, I want . . . but is it possible? I don't know.

Make me peaceful. Give me the taste of your divine presence.

Yes, my dear child, it is entirely possible and since you want it sincerely, it will come to be so. You will feel yourself always close to my heart, cradled in my arms, and Peace will fill your being and make you strong and joyful.

Love from your mother.

29 March 1934

*

Sweet mother,

I feel devoid of strength, will and energy. I don't know what to do. This state must go, but I don't know how. I have no courage.

Do not distress yourself, it is the result of these last few days of sickness. It will pass — but you must eat well regularly and sleep well too, taking care not to go to bed too late.

Very lovingly.

30 March 1934

*

My dear little child,

I was so pleased to receive your nice letter. You must learn that it is your good and *your good alone* that I want. I want to make you a strong and conscious man who is master of himself — that is, in control of his lower nature and capable of becoming a true Yogi if that be his aspiration. And the more this man realises his true being, the more he will become my very dear child.

That is why, now, when the will that is expressing itself is the will of the lower nature, I cannot satisfy all its whims, for that would be the worst thing I could do for you.

True love is the love that wants, to the exclusion of all else, the highest good for the loved one. This is the love that I have and want to have for you.

Your mother.

6 April 1934

*

*My sweet mother,
May peace be with me always.*

Peace, peace in your heart and your vital.

Yes, Peace, Light, Force and Bliss are always with you in the Consciousness that is constantly by your side, bringing you the solicitude of my love.

9 April 1934

*

My dear child,

Yes, you are and will be more and more a child of the Light. No obscurity must be allowed to manifest through you.

12 April 1934

*

Dear little child,

The paintings are fine, they are like Japanese ones. As for the “plane” from which they come, it is surely the subtle physical, where the memory of all the conceptions and works of art realised on earth is stored.

Very affectionately yours.

16 April 1934

*

Mother,

I do not want a life without energy.

Very good — then you must acquire energy, and after all, it is not so difficult, especially here where you are as if bathed in a sea of energy. You have only to open and receive.

Love from your mother.

17 April 1934

*

Sweet mother,

Give me peace, energy and inspiration.

Learn to drink from the eternal source; it contains everything.

With my love.

21 April 1934

*

My child, my child, why this great sadness? Is it because someone to whom you had given your friendship has withdrawn for reasons that he thinks are very profound?

But don't you still have your mother's friendship? And also all her love, and her solicitude for you?

No, all is not sad and gloomy, neither the trees nor the sky nor the sea; everything is full of the divine Presence and is only too glad to speak of it to you. Shake off this childish depression and contemplate the Sun that is rising in your heart!

28 April 1934

*

Mother,

You don't love me at all. Is this the way that one loves one's child?

My child,

Certainly I do not love you in the way you conceive of as love; and I do see how it could be otherwise. You first have to realise the Divine Consciousness — only then will you be able to know what true love is.

30 April 1934

*

My sweet mother,

Human contact has done me much harm, but I cannot give up this habit. I have made many efforts to stop all human contacts, but I cannot. I don't know what to do.

Mother, let me open to you and to no one else, always, always. Give me patience.

I don't think it would be good for you to live completely retired and turned in on yourself. The whole thing is to choose your relationships well. You must choose to enter into relation only with those whose contact *does not veil my presence*. This is the important point which should never be forgotten. All that leads you away from me in thought and feeling is bad. All that brings you closer to me and gives you the

perception and joy of my presence is good. You should judge things in the light of this rule. You will see that it will help you to protect yourself from many mistakes.

I send you much patience and all my love.

2 May 1934

*

My sweet mother,

You are everywhere. Remain with me always.

My dear child,

You are always in my arms and always I hold you close to my heart to comfort and protect you, to strengthen and illumine you. Never for a moment do I leave you and I am sure that if you are a little attentive you will very clearly feel the warmth of my arms around your shoulders.

Your mother.

4 May 1934

*

My dear child,

It seems to me that you are so often sad and depressed because your nerves are not very strong. You should eat more, sleep longer, take some exercise in the open air, etc.

Affectionately.

9 May 1934

*

Peace, peace, my little child, the sweet peace of inner silence and outer calm. May it always be with you.

Affectionately.

14 May 1934

*

You see, my child, the unfortunate thing is that you are too preoccupied with yourself. At your age I was exclusively occupied with my studies — finding things out, learning, understanding, knowing. That was my interest, even my passion. My mother, who loved us very much — my brother and myself — never allowed us to

be ill tempered or discontented or lazy. If we went to complain to her about one thing or another, to tell her that we were discontented, she would make fun of us or scold us and say, "What is this nonsense? Don't be ridiculous. Quick! Off you go and work, and never mind whether you are in a good or a bad mood! That is of no interest at all."

My mother was perfectly right and I have always been very grateful to her for having taught me the discipline and the necessity of self-forgetfulness through concentration on what one is doing.

I have told you this because the anxiety you speak of comes from the fact that you are far too concerned about yourself. It would be better for you to pay more attention to what you are doing and to do it well (painting or music), to develop your mind, which is still very uncultivated, and to learn the elements of knowledge which are indispensable to a man if he does not want to be ignorant and uncultured.

If you worked regularly eight to nine hours a day, you would be hungry and you would eat well, you would feel sleepy and sleep peacefully, and you would have no time to wonder whether you are in a good or a bad mood.

I am telling you these things with all my affection, and I hope that you will understand them.

Your mother who loves you.

15 May 1934

*

My dear little child,

I constantly envelop you in my peace: you must learn to keep it. I am constantly in your heart: you must become conscious of my presence and receive and use the force that I am pouring into you to enable you to overcome all difficulties.

Love.

21 May 1934

*

My dear child,

Carefully keep this bliss, this repose, this assurance of Victory; they are more precious than all the riches of this world, and they will keep you very close to me.

Love from your mother.

22 May 1934

*

My dear child,

Only spiritual force has the power to impose peace on the vital, for if peace is not *imposed* on it by a power greater than its own, the vital will never accept it.

So you must open yourself to the spiritual force and allow it to work in you; then you will more and more dwell in constant peace and joy.

With all my love.

24 May 1934

*

My dear child,

I carry you always in my arms, pressed close to my heart, and I have no doubt that you will become aware of it if you forget the world and concentrate on me. By turning your thoughts towards me you will feel closer and closer to me and peace will come to dwell in your heart.

Love.

25 May 1934

*

My dear little child,

It is by inner identification that the true closeness can come. I am always with you in all love.

Your mother.

2 June 1934

*

My dear child,

You will no longer revolt when you understand that it is the most useless and foolish of all things; and when you give up this bad habit of revolt, you will see that suffering too will go away and be replaced by an unvarying happiness.

With all my being, I want this progress and this transformation for you.

With love.

10 June 1934

*

My sweet mother,

I shall be what you want me to be. Dear mother, accept my childlike prayer.

For you I want consciousness, knowledge, artistic capacity, self-mastery in peace and perfect equality, and the happiness that is the result of spiritual realisation. Is this too grand and vast a programme?

With your mother's blessings.

12 June 1934

*

Mother,

I want a discipline.

This is quite excellent and I approve of it. Without outer and inner discipline, one can achieve nothing in life, either spiritually or materially. All those who have been able to create something beautiful or useful have always been persons who have known how to discipline themselves.

Always with you in all love.

23 June 1934

*

Yes, my dear child,

I am your true mother who will give birth in you to the true being, the being who is free, peaceful, strong and happy always, independently of all circumstances.

Love from your mother.

25 July 1934

*

My dear mother,

Give energy and force to your child. Oh, take me into your heart. Let me live in you.

My dear child,

I carry you always in my heart and you are bathed in energy; it is through a quiet and confident aspiration that you will receive it. All my love is with you.

I hope you do not show my letters to anyone. It is better to keep them to

yourself; otherwise, if you show them, all the force that I put into them evaporates.

11 August 1934

*

Mother, my dear mother,

You know everything that I need. Take me into your heart. Surround me.

My dear child,

I know very well what you need — it is to be surrounded by my love as by a protection, and truly my love is always with you, around you; but you, on your side, must open to it and allow it to envelop you and help you.

16 August 1934

*

My dear mother,

I want to be like the lion on the envelope I am sending you this evening.

My dear little lion,

I am in your heart that it may be happy, in your head that it may be peaceful, and in your hand that it may be skilful.

With all my love.

21 August 1934

*

My dear little child,

Your lions are superb. How quiet they are in their strength. A strong being is always quiet. It is weakness that causes restlessness. I am sending you (on my envelope, but in reality too) the repose that comes from concentrated energy.

Be sure that you will become strong and quiet, have faith in a perfect realisation and in the Divine's omnipotence to achieve it. The Force and Consciousness are always with you, as well as all my love.

Your mother.

21 August 1934

*

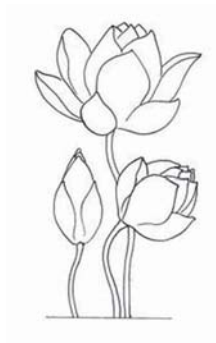
*My dear mother,
Purify me. Dispel the shadows. I will not revolt any more.*

You must never lose confidence in my unvarying love.

30 August 1934

THE MOTHER

(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 16, pp. 113-26)



THE CAUSE OF CULTURE

We are a Monthly Review of Culture. But it is not our specific purpose to cast a recording and critical eye on all cultural phenomena during each month. We do not aim at giving a serial picture of contemporary developments in art or philosophy or science. Surely, we shall pick out several current manifestations of the creative mind and scrutinise them — the work of an Eliot or an Einstein, a Schweitzer or a Sorokin, a Marcel or a Henry Moore will be within our ken — but we are mainly concerned with bringing to the receptive reader through diverse cultural channels what we consider to be most directly and integrally “spiritual”: that is to say, what is most directly and integrally significant or evocative or expressive of man’s aspiration to be more than man and of his actual or possible union with the Divine, the Eternal, the Infinite.

In our belief Culture has its finest fulfilment in such “mysticism”. For, a proper understanding of the cultural activity points to a spiritual origin of it and a spiritual objective. In Culture, considered deeply and not as a mere inventive exercise for the adornment or aggrandisement of common life, we have two movements — the unfolding of man’s power of the True, the Beautiful and the Good and the lifting of that power to its highest realisable creativity. Now, a purely naturalistic view of this power is bound to be inadequate. The pursuit of Truth, Beauty and Goodness, however carried on and with whatever differences in different places and ages, has an inherent idealism in it. It is a pursuit of Values, of Ends regarded as worthy in themselves irrespective of circumstances and persons. There is a sense of Absolutes: there is an impulse of self-consecration in face of them: there is a passion of self-sacrifice in relation to their presence. In a naturalistic view of the world we can have no Values, no Absolutes: the useful, the expedient, the opportune are all we can conceive of: the idealist is either an impossibility or a freak. If Culture is to have a rationale and be deemed not a brilliant aberration rather than a desirable glory, then we must discern a spiritual origin to it — an origin in some marvellous secret Being impelling us to manifest in our own terms Its Perfection.

The second movement of Culture — the lifting ever higher of our power of unfolding the True, the Beautiful and the Good — directs attention beyond the intellect which seeks to catch the whole of complex Reality in logically consistent formulas, the aesthetic faculty which strives to seize in delightful patterns all the affinities and contrasts of existence, the ethical nature which longs to turn the varied conditions of life into equal occasions for striking into unegoistic shapes the interrelations of individuals. The second movement does not only testify to the idealist in the thinker, the artist and the moral man: it also gives evidence of a gradation in Values. Truth is seen as of many planes — outer, inner, inmost, highest.

Beauty is visioned as of several degrees — gross, subtle, supernatural, beatific. Goodness is beheld as of numerous poises — impulsive, intelligent, inspired, enlightened. And an urge is felt to rise from stage to stage, refine and largen one's capacity, merge one's initiative with some in-dwelling and over-brooding Mystery that is the All-True, the All-Beautiful, the All-Good. This urge is the implicit or explicit religious tension in the phenomena of Culture. It suggests a spiritual objective inherent in cultural activity — the objective of a hidden illimitable Being calling on us to be aware of the real Soul within, be in tune with its evolutionary *élan*, transcend ourselves constantly and convert our own terms into those of a perfect, a divine supermanhood.

Main concern with the most directly and integrally spiritual is, therefore, not only justifiable in a Cultural Review but should also render that Review cultural in the intensest manner. Such concern on our part, however, must not be taken to be in the least coloured by obscurantism or fanaticism. It is nothing jealous or narrow: it has no desire to substitute Cult for Culture. Nor does it want any impoverishment of world-values for the sake of an entrancing Beyond. Wide and vigorous is its sweep, for it draws its scope and its movement from the philosophy and Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. The Aurobindonian philosophy and Yoga carry as their central motif the evolutionary fulfilment of man. This automatically ensures at the same time a many-aspected march forward and an emphasis on the earth-scene where the complex travail of evolution began, proceeds and must find its success.

Here a few points need some clarification. All Yoga involves evolution of consciousness — not a mere development of surface faculties but an ascent with a basic change. The change is brought about by an increasing realisation of the inner and inmost as well as highest self of man. Something that is as yet not frontally present in its genuine form but is glimmeringly there *in potentia*, something not openly organised as yet but occultly operative with a bright shadow, as it were, of itself on organised faculties, has to be experienced by means of a special inward process of detachment, concentration, meditation, self-dedicated attitude and profound passion for the Divine

. . . who is all and one
And yet is no one but himself apart.¹

As a result, an ascent is effected into the Infinite and the Eternal, both in an immanent universality and in a transcendent supra-cosmicity. This is genuine evolution — as basic as the *saltus* from Matter to Life, from Life to Mind. But while in man Matter, Life and Mind are intertwined and have to take fundamental account of one another the spiritual status has often a strong dissociating action, and a gulf

1. *Savitri*, p. 524.

seems to be made between Nature and Spirit. At its extreme this action gives rise to a world-shunning asceticism. Even otherwise, there is always a stress on the Hereafter, the Yonder, the Heaven after death or the Nirvana above birth. The evolutionary ladder by which consciousness climbs to the Spirit is sought to be kicked away or else looked down upon as a convenience of no ultimate value.

Evidently, evolution is not really fulfilled by such a procedure. The positing of a world of Matter, as the scene of Life's emergence and Mind's disclosure and Soul's revelation from behind all three, appears irrational and excessive if the aim of evolution is only to pass for ever out of that world and away from the various powers at play in it. No doubt, we may find some satisfaction in regarding that world as a sink of evil and error from which man's being has to struggle free or as a school of probation and trial in which it prepares itself to deserve post-mortem bliss or at best as a game of diverse hide-and-seek between it and God. But such an outlook leaves finally that world very much in the void and one wonders why at all the Eternal took up the labour of so multitudinous, so vicissitudinous a creation if a Beatitude beyond this creation were the sole thing to be realised through it, a Beatitude to which the creation adds really nothing.

Evolutionary fulfilment can come only when, together with the ascent of the human consciousness to the Divine, there is a descent of the Divine's consciousness into the human and some answer here and now is discovered to the age-old cry of earth-existence for its own perfection. A mind dealing with cosmic multiplicities not gropingly but as part of a plenary Truth-awareness, a life-force meeting the challenge of time and change with a self-measured omnicompetence born of the Power that has made the world, a body-form radiant with a health and beauty fountaining from the automatic immunity of the supreme Ground of all being — such must be the triple nature of man led by the soul in him to the eternal Bliss which, according to the Upanishad, is the secret source, substance and support of the whole universe. And the divinised individual must be no solitary wonder but the forerunner of a divinised society. A collective perfection must be the gradually realised goal: a new race living in a new and superhuman consciousness and working out the inexhaustible harmonies of a supramental Infinite. It is towards this perfection that the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is directed and it is towards the formation of a nucleus of it that the Ashram at Pondicherry is moving by a complex inner and outer process under the guiding eye and organising hand of Sri Aurobindo's co-worker, the Mother.

Naturally, the Aurobindonian Yoga, most directly and integrally spiritual, bent upon consummating the travail of evolution, encourages and fosters every species of Culture. Art, philosophy, science — whatever manifests the creative urge in man finds here its field and a novel inspiration which can be utilised for bringing into each cultural activity a wealth of significance and image and rhythm from "planes" that are supernormal and that no one except a developed Yogi can command or be

commanded by with sustained frequency and in abundant purity. Not that this inspiration gets through in all cases. To be always its medium is a most difficult task. But it is always there ready to be tapped. And to present some of the successful tappings of it, together with pointers to it of whatever kind of authentic quality and with other prose and poetry touched by the spiritual ideal or else intellectual and imaginative expression not out of sympathy with it — this is intended to be our principal service to the cause of Culture.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

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SRI ARAVINDA GHOSH

The youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the Nationalist propaganda in India but in endowment, education and character, perhaps, superior to them all — Aravinda seems distinctly marked out by Providence to play in the future of this movement a part not given to any of his colleagues and contemporaries. The other leaders of the movement have left their life behind them; Aravinda has his before him. Nationalism is their last love; it is Aravinda's first passion. They are burdened with the cares and responsibilities of large families or complex relations; Aravinda has a small family and practically no cumulative obligations. His only care is for his country — the Mother, as he always calls her. His only recognised obligations are to her. Nationalism — at the best, a concern of the intellect with some, at the lowest a political cry and aspiration with others — is with Aravinda a supreme passion of his soul. Few, indeed, have grasped the full force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done. But even of these very few, though their vision may be clear, their action is weak. Man cannot, by a fiat of his will, at once recreate his life. Our *karma* follows us with relentless insistence from day to day and from death to death. To see the vision of truth and yet not to be possessed by the supreme passion for it which burns up all other desires and snaps asunder, like aspen bands, all other ties and obligations — this is the divine tragedy of most finer natures. They have to cry out with St. Paul at every turn of life's tortuous path — "The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." But blessed are they for whom this tragic antithesis between the ideal and the real has been cancelled: for whom to know the truth is to love it, and to strive after the truth is to attain it; in whom there is no disparity, either in time or degree, between the idea and its realisation; in whom the vision of the ideal, by its own intrinsic strength, at once attunes every craving of the flesh, every movement of the mind, every motion of the heart, and every impulse of the will to itself: who have to strive for its realisation, not within, but without; who have to struggle not with their own self, but with the not-self; who have to fight and conquer not themselves but others, in order to establish the Kingdom of God, realised by them in the relations of their own inner life, in the actualities and appointments of the life of their own people or of humanity at large. These are, so to say, the chosen of God. They are born leaders of men. Commissioned to serve special ends affecting the life and happiness of large masses of men, they bear a charmed life. They may be hit, but cannot be hurt. They may be struck, but are never stricken. Their towering optimism and the grace of God, turn every evil into good, every opposition into a help, every loss into a gain. By the general verdict of his countrymen, Aravinda stands to-day among these favoured sons of God.

Hereditary Influences

Birth is not an accident. “Accident of birth” is the language of infidel empiricism. Nature has no room for accidents in her schemes. It is only man’s inability to trace her secrets that has coined this word to cover his ignorance. Man’s birth is no more an accident than the rise and fall of tides. There can really be no accidents in evolution; the law of natural selection has killed their chance altogether. But does the operation of natural selection start only after the birth of the organism or does it precede it? Is it only a biological, or also a psychological law? Like the problems of biology, those of psychology also are inexplicable except on this theory. The inference is irresistible that there is such a thing as natural selection even in the psychic plane. The spirit, by the impulse of its own needs, must choose and order the conditions of its own life even as the physical organism does. This is the psychic significance of heredity. Life from this point of view is not a lottery, but a matter really of determined choice. The needs of the organism supply the organs in the lower kingdom; the desires of the heart collect and create their necessary equipment and environment for the human being. On no other hypothesis can the riddle of the human life be explained satisfactorily. It may not explain everything, but it explains many things absolutely un-understandable and inexplicable on any other hypothesis. This at least has been the Hindu view from time immemorial. A crude intuition at first, it became a settled conviction with the people subsequently, with a fundamental philosophy of causation behind it. And this theory stands curiously verified in Aravinda Ghose.

Two strong currents of thoughts, ideals and aspirations met together and strove for supremacy in Bengal, among the generation to which Aravinda’s parents belonged. One was the current of Hindu Nationalism — of the revived life, culture and ideals of the nation that had lain dormant for centuries and had been discarded as lower and primitive by the first batch of English-educated Hindus, especially in Bengal. The other was the current of Indo-Anglicism — the onrushing life, culture and ideals of the foreign rulers of the land, which expressing themselves through British law and administration on the one side, and the new schools and universities on the other, threatened to swamp and drown the original culture and character of the people.

Maternal Grandfather — Rajnarain Bose

The two stocks from which Aravinda sprang represented these two conflicting forces in the country. His maternal grandfather, Rajnarain Bose was one of the makers of modern Bengal. A student of David Hare, a pupil of Richardson, an alumnus of the Hindu College, the first English college that had the support of both the Hindu community and the British rulers of the province, Rajnarain Bose started life as a social and religious reformer. But while he caught as fully as any one else among his contemporaries the impulse of the new illumination, he did not lose so completely, as many of them did, his hold on the fundamental spirit of the culture and civilisation

of his race. He joined the Brahma Samaj under Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, but felt repelled by the denational spirit of the later developments in that movement under Keshub Chandra Sen. In fact, it is difficult to say, to which of its two leaders — Debendranath or Rajnarain, the Adi or the older Brahma Samaj, as it came to be called after Keshub Chandra Sen seceded from it and established the Brahma Samaj of India — was more indebted for its intense and conservative nationalism. But it may be safely asserted that while Debendranath's nationalism had a dominating theological note, Rajnarain's had both a spiritual and social, as well as a political emphasis. In him it was not merely the spirit of Hinduism that rose up in arms against the onslaught of European Christianity, but the whole spirit of Indian culture and manhood stood up to defend and assert itself against every form of undue foreign influence and alien domination. While Keshub Chandra Sen pleaded for the recognition of the truths in the Hindu scriptures side by side with those in the Bible, Rajnarain Bose proclaimed the superiority of Hinduism to Christianity. While Keshub was seeking to reconstruct Indian and specially Hindu, social life, more or less after the modern European model, Rajnarain's sturdy patriotism and national self-respect rebelled against the enormity, and came forward to establish the superiority of Hindu social economy to the Christian social institutions and ideals. He saw the onrush of European goods into Indian markets, and tried to stem the tide by quickening what we would now call the Swadeshi spirit, long before any one else had thought of it. It was under his inspiration that a Hindu Mela or National Exhibition, was started a full quarter of a century before the Indian National Congress thought of an Indian Industrial Exhibition. The founder of this Hindu Mela was also the first Bengalee who organised gymnasia for the physical training of the youth of the nation. Stick and sword play and other ancient but decadent sports and pastimes of the people that have come into vogue recently, were originally revived at the Hindu Mela, under Rajnarain Bose's inspiration and guidance. Rajnarain Bose did not openly take any part in politics, but his writings and speeches did a good deal to create that spirit of self-respect and self-assertion in the educated classes that have found such strong expression in our recent political activities.

A strong conservatism, based upon a reasoned appreciation of the lofty spirituality of the ancient culture and civilisation of the country; a sensitive patriotism, born of a healthy and dignified pride of race; and a deep piety expressing itself through all the varied practical relations of life — these were the characteristics of the life and thought of Rajnarain Bose. He represented the high water mark of the composite culture of his country — Vedantic, Islamic and European. When he discoursed on *Brahma-Jnan* or knowledge of God, he brought to one's mind the ancient Hindu gnostics of the Upanishads. When he cited verses from the Persian poets, filling the ear with their rich cadence — his eyes melting in love and his mobile features aglow with a supreme spiritual passion — he reminded one of the old Moslem devotees. And when he spoke on the corruptions of current religion, or

the soulless selfishness of modern politics, he appeared as a nineteenth century nationalist and iconoclast of Europe. In his mind and life he was at once a Hindu *Maharshi*, a Moslem *Sufi*, and a Christian theist of the Unitarian type; and like Rammohan Roy, the founder of the Brahma Samaj of which Rajnarain Bose was for many years the honoured President, he also seems to have worked out a synthesis in his own spiritual life between the three dominant world-cultures that have come face to face in modern India. Like Rammohan, Rajnarain also seems to have realised himself, intellectually and spiritually, that ideal of composite nationhood in India, which the present generation has been called upon to actualise in social, economic and political relations of their country. Rajnarain Bose was also an acknowledged leader in Bengali literature. A writer in the "Modern Review" (Calcutta) calls Rajnarain Bose the "Grandfather of Indian Nationalism." He was Aravinda's maternal grandfather; and Aravinda owes not only his rich spiritual nature, but even his very superior literary capacity to his inherited endowments from his mother's line.

Traits of his Father

If his maternal grandfather represented the ancient spiritual forces of his nation, Aravinda's father, Dr. Kristodhan Ghose, represented to a very large extent, the spirit of the new illumination in his country. Dr. Ghose was essentially a product of English education and European culture. A man of exceptional parts, he finished his education in England and taking his degree in medicine, entered the medical service of the Indian Government. He was one of the most successful civil surgeons of his day, and had his life been spared, he would have assuredly risen to the highest position in his service open to any native of India. Like the general body of Indian young men who came to finish their education in England in his time, Kristodhan Ghose was steeped in the prevailing spirit of Anglicism. Like all of them he was a thoroughly Anglicised Bengalee in his ways of life. But unlike many of them, underneath his foreign clothing and ways, he had a genuine Hindu heart and soul. Anglicism distorts Hindu character, cripples, where it cannot kill, the inherited altruism of the man, and makes him more or less neglectful of the numerous family and social obligations under which every Hindu is born. Like the original Anglo-Saxon, his Indian imitation also lives first and foremost for himself, his wife and children; and though he may recognise the claims of his relations to his charity, he scarcely places his purse at their service as an obligation. But Kristodhan Ghose was an exception. Though he affected the European's way of living, he never neglected the social obligations of the Hindu. His purse was always open for his needy relations.

The poor of the town, where he served and lived, had in him a true friend and a ready help. In fact, his regard for the poor frequently led him to sacrifice to their present needs the future prospects of his own family and children. He had his sons educated in England; and so great was his admiration for English life and English culture that he sent them out here even before they had received any schooling in

their own country. But his charities made such constant and heavy inroads into his tolerably large income that he could not always keep his own children living in England provided with sufficient funds for their board and schooling. Sons of comparatively rich parents they were brought up almost in poverty in a friendless country where wealth counts so much, not only physically but also intellectually and morally. Keen of intellect, tender of heart, impulsive and generous almost to a fault, regardless of his own ones but sensitive to the suffering of others — this was the inventory of the character of Dr. Kristodhan Ghosh. The rich blamed him for his recklessness, the man of the world condemned him for his absolute lack of prudence. But the poor, the widow and the orphan loved him for his selfless piety, and his soulful benevolence.

When death overtook him in the very prime of life there was desolation in many a poor home in his district. It not only left his own children in absolute poverty, but destroyed the source of ready relief to many helpless families among his relations and neighbours. His quick intellectual perceptions, his large sympathies, his selflessness, characterised by an almost absolute lack of what the man of the world working with an eye to the main chance calls prudence as a matter of personal calculation, — these are Aravinda's inheritances in his father's line.

Early English Education

As a boy, Aravinda received his early education in a public school in England. The old Head Master of this school is reported to have said, when Aravinda's name came prominently before the British public in connection with the state trial of which he was made the principal accused this time last year (1908), that of all the boys who passed through his hands during the last twenty-five or thirty years, Aravinda was by far and above the most richly endowed in intellectual capacity. From this school he went to Cambridge, where he distinguished himself as a student of European classics, and passed the Indian Civil Service Examination with credit. Failing, however, to stand the required test in horsemanship, he was not allowed to enter the covenanted service of the Indian Government. But returning to India, he found employment in the state of Baroda, where his endowments and scholarship soon attracted the notice of the authorities, leading to his appointment to the post of Vice-Principal of the State College. Had Aravinda cared for earthly honours or wealth, he had a very splendid opening for both in Baroda. He was held in great respect by the Maharaja. He was loved by the educated classes in the state. He was exceedingly popular with the general public. All these opened very large possibilities of preferment before him in the service of the premier native state in India.

From Baroda to Bengal

But there was a new awakening in the country, demanding a thorough reconsideration of the old and popular political, economic, and educational ideas and ideals of the

people. It abjured the old mendicant methods of prayer, protest and petition. It proclaimed a new gospel of self-help and self-reliance. It called out to the spirit of India to come to its own, to stand upon its own inner strength, and to put forth its native efforts for the realisation of its true native life. It called aloud for leaders and workers — for the poet, the preacher, the philosopher, the statesman, the organiser and the man of action, — to help the sacred cause. It laid on all who would accept the call the heaviest self-sacrifice yet demanded of any public man in modern India. It wanted men who would not only as hitherto give their country their leisure moments and their idle pennies, but who would consecrate all their working hours and their hard earnings to the service of the Motherland. The call went to the heart of Aravinda. His own native province called for him. It laid on him the vow of poverty. It offered him the yoke of the saviours of their people and the uplifters of humanity — the yoke of calumny, persecution, imprisonment and exile. Aravinda obeyed the Mother's call, accepted her stern conditions, and cheerfully took up her chastening yoke. He gave up his place in Baroda, worth £560 a year, to take up the duties of Principal of the College started at Calcutta under the new National Council of Education on a bare subsistence of £10 a month.

Movement of National Education

This movement of national education owed its origin to the latest education-policy of the Indian Government (1904-05) who sought to turn the institutions of public instruction in the country to distinctly political ends. The old education had given birth to widespread disaffection. It had called into being “the discontented B.A.s.” The new educational policy initiated by Lord Curzon was directed towards curing this evil. Its aim was to manufacture loyal citizens — men who would be ever content to remain loyal to the autocratic government in their country, without any desire for free citizenship. The movement of National Education was the people's reply to this official policy. It took definite shape and form as a result of the persecution of schoolboys by the executive in Bengal for their participation in the new political movement in the country. But it had a more fundamental need. The official-controlled education had been condemned by both friends and foes alike. It was shallow and rootless. It imparted the shadow but not the substance of modern culture to the youth of the nation. It was artificial, because foreign in both its spirit and form. It led to a fearful waste of youthful energy by imposing the necessity of learning a foreign language, to receive instructions through its medium in higher branches of study. It was controlled by an alien bureaucracy, in the interest mainly of their own political position, and only secondarily in those of the real intellectual life of the people. It was excessively literary, and detrimental to the industrial and economic life of the country. The movement of National Education was started to counteract these evils of the officially controlled system of public instruction. It proposed to promote — “Education — scientific, literary and technical, on national

lines and under national control.”

Nervousness of the Leaders

But though owing its initiation to the threats of the Government to close the doors of the official schools, colleges and universities to those who would take any part, even to the extent of simply attending, in any political meeting or demonstration — the National Education movement in Bengal sought to avoid all open causes of friction with the authorities and professed to work *independent of* but not in *opposition to* the Government. Political in its origin, it tried to avoid all conflicts with the authorities by assuming an absolutely non-political attitude.

The school of thought to which Aravinda belonged did not support this declaration of the National Council of Education and could not appreciate this needless fear, as they thought, of offending official susceptibilities. But they had to accept the verdict of the majority. One of the unfortunate things in modern public life is the dependence of all large public movements on the help and support of the wealthy classes in the community. Large and organised movements in our times cannot be carried on without large and substantial financial support; and the rich are not willing to lend their support to any institution without seeking to control it. This unfortunate condition lowers the intellectual and moral tone of many public institutions. Without their personal intervention or control, they would be able keep up a very superior intellectual and moral standard. This is particularly injurious in comparatively unadvanced communities, where realised wealth has not yet had time to ally itself with high culture, and where, owing to the absence of a vigorous and free national life, it has but little incentive and less opportunity for cultivating such an alliance.

The Nationalists are a poor party in India, and the National Council of Education, though it owed its initiation to their efforts passed, almost from the very beginning, beyond their sphere of influence, and Aravinda's position as the nominal head of the National College, practically controlled by men of different views and opinions, became more or less anomalous.

Loss to Cause of National Education

This was, from some points of view, very unfortunate. Aravinda had received the best modern education that any man of his country and generation could expect to have. He had for some years been a teacher of youth in Baroda, and had acquired considerable practical experience in his art. He had clearly realised the spirit and actualities of the life of his nation, and knew how the most advanced principles of modern pedagogy could be successfully worked into a thoroughly national system of education in India. He went to Calcutta as an educationist. He knew that the foundations of national independence and national greatness must be laid in a strong and advanced system of national education. He had a political ideal, no doubt; but politics meant to him much more than is ordinarily understood by the term. It was

not a game of expediency, but a school for developing character. Education could no more be divorced from politics than it could be separated from religion or morals. Any system of education that helps such isolation and division between the various organic relations of life is mediaeval and not modern. It is the education of the cloister — abstract and unreal, not the education of the modern man, eager to realise his fullest manhood in and through every relation of life. Aravinda is an apostle of modern education. Indeed, his ideal of modern education is even higher than what is understood by modern education ordinarily in Europe. It is a supremely spiritual ideal. Its aim is to actualise the highest and deepest God-consciousness of the human soul in the outer life and appointments of human society. It was the temptation of having an open field for the realisation of this lofty educational ideal which brought Aravinda to Calcutta. Had he been given a free hand in the new National College, that institution would have opened an altogether new chapter not only in the history of modern education in India, but perhaps in the whole world. To work the realism of the spirit of modern culture into the mould of the idealism of ancient Indian philosophy, would not only secure for India her lost position as the teacher of humanity but would perchance even save modern civilisation from total collapse and destruction under the pressure of a gross and greedy industrialism.

But, unfortunately, neither individuals nor communities can easily break away from their own past. Most of the members of the new National Council of Education in Bengal were products of the old university. Some of the leading men in the new organisation had been closely associated for many years with the actual working of the old system. Steeped in the traditions of this old education, they could hardly be expected to thoroughly enter into the spirit of modern pedagogy. They were willing to give fair room to the new principles, as an experiment, but could hardly give them their absolute and whole-hearted support as truths. It seemed to them like jumping into the unknown. While accepting the principle of National Education as education on national lines and under national control, and, consequently, pledged not to accept any official aid, they were not free from the fear of possible official opposition which, if once aroused, would make their work, they thought, absolutely impossible. They had a real dread of the bureaucracy, and no strong confidence really in their own people. The dominating and declared ideal of the new Council consequently came to be not in any way to supplant, but only to supplement, the existing government and university system of education in the country. A timid, temporising spirit, so galling to the reformer and the man with new visions and large ideas, generally guided the work of the National Council, and it made it almost impossible for Aravinda to throw himself heart and soul into his educational work in Calcutta. His place in the National College, though he was its nominal Principal, was not really that of an organiser and initiator, but simply of a teacher of language and history, even as it had been in the Maharaja's College at Baroda. He had left Baroda in the hope of finding a wider scope of beneficent and patriotic activity in

the new College in Calcutta. That hope was not realised. Almost from the very beginning he saw the hopelessness of working out a truly modern and thoroughly national system of education through the organisation at whose service he had so enthusiastically placed himself.

New and Wider Field for Work

But the man possessed by pure passion, creates, where he cannot find them ready-made for him, his own instruments for the realisation of his supreme end in life. And wider fields of public usefulness were soon opened before Aravinda. The Nationalist school was without a daily English organ. A new paper was started. Aravinda was invited to join its staff. A joint-stock company was shortly floated to run it, and Aravinda became one of the directors. This paper — “Bande Mataram” — at once secured for itself a recognised position in Indian journalism. The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thinking, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian. It at once raised the tone of every Bengali paper, and compelled the admiration of even hostile Anglo-Indian editors. Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country, eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day. It even forced itself upon the notice of the callous and self-centred British press. Long extracts from it commenced to be reproduced week after week even in the exclusive columns of the “Times” in London. It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it; and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal. The opportunities that were denied him in the National College he found in the pages of the “Bande Mataram,” and from a tutor of a few hundred youths he thus became the teacher of a whole nation.

BIPIN CHANDRA PAL

(*Character Sketches* by Bipin Chandra Pal,
Yugayatri Prakashak Limited, Calcutta, 1957; pp. 79-95.)

[The text published above is slightly different in places from the earlier edition mentioned below.

In his Foreword (dated November 1918) to his book *Indian Nationalism — Its Principles and Personalities*, published by S. R. Murthy and Co., Triplicane, Madras, B. C. Pal writes: “The Sketches published in this Volume were written from time [to time] for the periodical press and do not pretend to be in any sense an exhaustive study of all sides of the persons with whom they deal.”

The chapter heading in that book is “Aravinda Ghose”. — Eds.]

SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN — “LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA”

(Continued from the issue of December 2019)

1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION (Part 5)

At Baroda College, Sri Aurobindo was a bit reserved, and the students, in awe of their learned professor, also hesitated to approach him. But many knew him to be kind and some broke through their diffidence and sought his help. Mr. G. H. Gokhale, a student in Sri Aurobindo’s English class in 1901 and 1902, notes that Sri Aurobindo “gave away a major part of his income in charities of his liking. His beneficiaries were poor people.”¹ When a poor student approached Sri Aurobindo for some financial help, he spontaneously gave him a generous sum.²

P. B. Chandwani, who felt privileged and grateful to be taught by Sri Aurobindo, wrote:

At the end of the year, having secured a 1st class, a rare distinction in those days, I was offered a handsome scholarship by Elphinstone College, Bombay, and though I left Baroda contrary to his wishes, he gave me a glowing testimonial in his own handwriting.³

As well as helping others, Sri Aurobindo never hurt anyone’s feelings. G. H. Gokhale remarked:

His calm and genial manner seemed incapable of hurting even a fly.⁴

Hemendra Prasad Ghose, a sub-editor in *Bande Mataram*, had remarked that Sri Aurobindo “was sensitive to the susceptibilities of his fellow-workers.”⁵ Rajaram Patkar, a student who was close Sri Aurobindo, has also spoken about his “gentle and sweet nature”.⁶

1. Reminiscences of Ganesh Hari Gokhale; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

2. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2012, p. 349.

3. P. B. Chandwani, ‘Reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo and Impressions of His Ashram’, *Mother India*, August 1971, p. 469.

4. Reminiscences of G. H. Gokhale; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

5. Hemendra Prasad Ghose, ‘Reminiscences of Aurobindo Ghose’, *Orient Illustrated Weekly*, 27 February 1949; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

6. Reminiscences of Rajaram N. Patkar dated 30 September 1956; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

Sri Aurobindo has written:

Indiscriminate compassion is the noblest gift of temperament, not to do even the least hurt to one living thing is the highest of all human virtues; but God practises neither.⁷

When Sri Aurobindo was appointed the acting Principal of Baroda College in April 1905, the students hailed the promotion in *The Baroda College Miscellany*: “Prof. Ghose is an excellent man endowed with the qualities both of head and heart.”⁸ And again in September 1905 *The Baroda College Miscellany* stated: “The acting Principal Prof. Ghose has in these few months by his suavity of disposition, amiable manners, and great regard for the interest of all concerned with the College, augmented our deep love for him.”⁹

Sujata Nahar in her book, *Mother’s Chronicles*, writes:

Sri Aurobindo’s sweetness and affection had filled the hearts of his students.¹⁰

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar records:

Sri Aurobindo effortlessly won the admiration and love of his pupils. Many of his pupils of those distant days — K. M. Munshi, for instance, who was Sri Aurobindo’s student in 1903 — have eloquently testified to his tremendous hold on the undergraduates.¹¹

In respect to Sri Aurobindo’s stay in Baroda, Nirodbaran states:

Sri Aurobindo left behind a reputation of fair play, sincerity, honesty; he was loved by his students and all those who came in contact with him; though he wasn’t a social man at all.¹²

About Sri Aurobindo’s endearing qualities, Rishabchand comments:

The colleagues and students of Sri Aurobindo loved and adored him for his extraordinary intellectual attainments, his burning love for India and Indian culture, his saintly character, and his gentle, unassuming manners.¹³

7. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 497.

8. *The Baroda College Miscellany*, Vol. XII No. 1, p. 27 – Editorial notes; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 48 – Editorial notes; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

10. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book Five, p. 222.

11. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 52.

12. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 408.

13. Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 152.

Sri Aurobindo's Bengali teacher at Baroda, Dinendra Kumar Roy, writes:

I wonder if anyone other than Derozio, the professor at Calcutta's Hindu College, has ever received as much respect, love, devotion and trust from his students as Aurobindo did.¹⁴

The renowned Nationalist leader, Bepin Chandra Pal, wrote:

He was held in great respect by the Maharaja. He was loved by the educated class in the State. He was exceedingly popular with the general public.¹⁵

And Jitendralal Bandhopadhyay, a distinguished professor of English Literature, wrote in a prestigious monthly review:

Indeed, the twelve years of his residence in Baroda form a very important portion in his life. They were the seed-time of his soul in the strict literal sense of the word; and more than that, they were absolutely necessary in order that he might identify himself with the life, thought and culture of contemporary India. . . . He was popular among the students and well thought of by the public and held in high estimation by the Gaekwar.¹⁶

Although Sri Aurobindo was an employee of Baroda State, he had a unique rapport with the Maharaja. Basanti Mitra writes:

The Maharaja Gaekwar respected and loved him very much; in his letters he always addressed him as 'my dear friend'.¹⁷

A subject of a princely state being treated as an equal by its Maharaja was something unheard of.

When Sri Aurobindo departed from Baroda it was one of Rajaram N. Patkar's most touching moments of his life. Four decades later he recalls:

In the evening Aravind Babu, though he had a very busy time, called me in his room and I sat by his side. With a caressing touch of his hand on my shoulder he affectionately said to me, "Well, Rajaram, we part after all. We part in body

14. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 25-26 (Dinendra Kumar Roy's *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

15. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, Compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, pp. 414 (Written by Bepin Chandra Pal and published in his journal *Svaraj* which he was editing in London in 1909-10).

16. Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, June 2016, p. 449.

17. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), 'Our Aurodada', *Srinwantu*, April/August. 1984, p. 83.

but not in soul — which is omnipresent. . . . you are a good boy; continue to be good throughout your life. You have yet to complete your education — which over, you will enter the arena of public life which is full of struggle. You will come out successful and triumphant only if you remain honest and good and obey the dictates of your conscience. If you observe this dictum your path will be smooth and you will be happy.”

He finished these words and got up. He went straight to his book case, and knowing my love for Sanskrit picked up two books — Kalidas’s *Shakuntala* and *Vikramorvasi* — and presented them to me as a token of his love for me. He also gave me a few verses composed by himself, one styled *Songs to Myrtilla and Other Poems* and the other *Urvashi* — a translation in verse of Poet Kalidas’s drama.

I quietly bowed, touched his feet and left the room with a heavy heart and wet eyes. Though an old man now — with one foot in the grave, — I still remember the parting scene with a heavy heart.¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo’s farewell is very significant since he gave Rajaram Patkar a mantra of life, that one will be victorious if one is honest, good and acts as per one’s conscience.

Barely two months after Sri Aurobindo resigned from the Baroda State Service he was charged for sedition for his articles in the *Bande Mataram*, following which he immediately resigned his principalship of the Bengal National College. On the first day of the case the *Bande Mataram* reported,

Yesterday on the opening of the *Bande Mataram* Case the students mustered strong in the Court premises and its neighbourhood. They were there to pay their tribute of respect to Sri Aurobindo Ghose . . . Students were assaulted by the police.¹⁹

On 22nd August 1907 students and teachers of the Bengal National College assembled to express their deep regret at the resignation of their beloved former Principal. Concurrently they conveyed their heartfelt appreciation for his unique abilities as a teacher as also his personal sacrifice in developing the College from its inception. They were also very sympathetic to the grave danger he was facing *vis-à-vis* the sedition case. It was decided in the meeting that a photograph of the former Principal be taken to be hung up at the College hall. Accordingly, Sri Aurobindo

18. Reminiscences of Rajaram N. Patkar dated 30 September 1956; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives (Also in Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, June 2012, pp. 431-32).

19. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, Compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 85 (*Bande Mataram*, 27 August 1907).

was invited to come over to the College to be photographed. The teachers then requested him to speak a few words to the students since they were eager to receive some advice from him. Sri Aurobindo gave an inspiring speech, where his voice uncharacteristically betrayed some emotion.²⁰

During this difficult phase of the sedition charge, Sri Aurobindo's self-sacrifice was not lost on the students of Baroda College. They still fondly remembered him and in a show of solidarity sent this message:

We the students, past and present, of the Baroda College, in a meeting assembled, convey our warmest sympathy to our late Vice-Principal Mr. Ghose in his present trouble.²¹

Let us now traverse from professorship to editorship. At the *Bande Mataram* office, Hemendra Prasad Ghose observed that Sri Aurobindo's sensitivity and courtesy was such that he was particular not to undermine anyone even in the slightest, irrespective of the fact that they happened to be his subordinates:

On one occasion he waited for me for about an hour to suggest that I should change a word in my article written for the next morning; and when I told him that he should have changed the word without waiting for my consent, he smiled and said — "But I could not do that."

Hemendra Prasad Ghose continues:

On more than one occasion he requested me to induce Shyam Sunder to write more paragraphs than articles. "Shyam Babu shines in articles," he said, "and he may take offence if I make the proposal."²²

Another person who was moved by Sri Aurobindo was Dr Arthur R. S. Roy, who worked as the manager-cum-accountant at *Bande Mataram*. Being new to this field of work and having recently joined the journal, Roy was constantly criticised for his work by a fellow accountant. But Sri Aurobindo intervened and assuaged his feelings. A relieved Roy writes: "I was much eased in mind and thankful as I was getting quite nervous . . ." Roy further expresses his gratitude:

20. The full speech is printed in *CWSA*, Vol. 7, pp. 655-57.

21. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed; 2006, p. 245.

22. Hemendra Prasad Ghose, 'Reminiscences of Aurobindo Ghose', *Orient Illustrated Weekly*, 27 February 1949; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

He recommended to me the study of the *Bhagavat Gita* and gave me a typed copy of his translation in metrical verse with corrections and annotations in his own handwriting that was later stolen from me in New York City . . . He became a demigod to me.²³

Let alone his friends, students, associates and subordinates, Sri Aurobindo did not even want to hurt the feelings of his servants. He never scolded his wayward Bengali cook nor his dishonest servant Kestha who had served him at Baroda.

Later at Calcutta, Sarojini once complained to him about the house cook's misbehaviour towards her. He listened attentively; but when the cook came to serve them at the table a few times, Sri Aurobindo said nothing. An exasperated Sarojini then exclaimed: "If you don't say anything to the cook, he will become more and more insolent!" Realising the delicateness of the situation, Sri Aurobindo told the cook, "You don't listen to Didi? Cook, this is very bad! Do you understand? You must never do it again, — Never!" But Sri Aurobindo's admonition was in such a serene tone that it did not prick the cook's *amour propre*. The cook tried to give some justification and the matter ended there.²⁴

The Mother has explained the true meaning of generosity:

To be generous is to be benevolent towards everyone — not only materially but also in the heart and in the mind. It means always to have good feelings towards all. Even in the mind there must never be any bad thoughts about anybody or anything. . . .

It is in that way that generosity can put an end to most difficulties.²⁵

Sri Aurobindo had a small select group of friends with whom he used to converse. Nonetheless many people came to the house to chat with him especially since he was loved and trusted by the Maharaja, and they too held him in high regard. Some visitors came because they had business motives while others sought advice about sending their sons to Europe for education. During his leisure time he was engrossed with his studies, translations and writing of poetry. When people came at such times it interrupted his work, yet he used to accommodate these visitors and they would not guess the disturbance they caused.²⁶

Once, a Maharashtrian named Mangesh, supposedly a protégé of the late Congress leader M. G. Ranade, came to Baroda and introduced himself to Sri

23. Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, December 2013, p. 1029 (Dr Arthur R. S. Roy, 'Sri Aurobindo Ghose – Memoirs of Long Ago').

24. See Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 21st February 1989, pp. 96-97 (This incident occurred a few months after Sri Aurobindo resigned from the Baroda Service).

25. Huta, *Mother You Said So*, p. 22.

26. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 18, 49.

Aurobindo. He wanted to sell life insurance to the Maharaja for a large sum and tried to persuade Sri Aurobindo to use his good offices with the Gaekwar. Dinendra Kumar Roy soon recognised Mangesh to be a braggart and a rogue, yet Sri Aurobindo behaved cordially with him. When Roy expressed his feelings about Mangesh Sri Aurobindo just laughed and said nothing.²⁷

Sri Aurobindo's sense of goodness did not allow him to criticise or disapprove of anybody. Sri Aurobindo has written:

The ripened soul does not condemn but seeks to understand and master . . .²⁸

The Mother states:

When a thought is expressed in speech, the vibration of the sound has a considerable power to bring the most material substance into contact with the thought, thus giving it a concrete and effective reality. That is why one must never speak ill of people or things or say things which go against the progress of the divine realisation in the world. This is an absolute general rule.²⁹

During Mangesh's visits, Sri Aurobindo bore his garrulity calmly, but it exasperated Dinendra Kumar Roy no end. Mangesh once criticised the Tagore family, provoking a piqued Dinendra Kumar Roy to write a caricature of this Mahratta socialite and publish it in a Bengali monthly. This public portrayal enraged Mangesh and the uproar created amongst the influential Marathas in Baroda was such that Sri Aurobindo had to ask Roy to make up with Mangesh. Roy was grateful that despite the grave embarrassment caused to Sri Aurobindo, he was never reproached by him. Even Sri Aurobindo's friend and host Mr. Khaserao Jadhav reprimanded Roy. Roy, however, notes:

But Aurobindo did not admonish me. Had he said something unpleasant it would have been impossible for me to go to Baroda with him. I asked him if it was really a crime to draw a character-sketch of someone who had behaved with such extreme arrogance in the company of friends, making impertinent remarks about one of the most respectable families of the country, a family I dearly loved.³⁰

In spite of the gravity of the situation Sri Aurobindo could see the lighter side of the incident for Roy continues:

27. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

28. *CWSA*, Vol. 23, p. 225.

29. *CWM*, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 60.

30. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 50-52.

Aurobindo laughed a lot when he read Mangesh's character-sketch. From this may be gauged his own opinion of Mangesh.³¹

Charu Chandra Dutt, I.C.S., though five years younger, was a friend of Sri Aurobindo and a fellow-revolutionary. He recounts some of his encounters with Sri Aurobindo. His first meeting was accidental but a pleasant one. He narrates:

My first meeting with Sri Aurobindo was a casual encounter on the Baroda railway station platform in 1900. I was going to Bombay, and he had come to see a friend off. I introduced myself as a friend of his eldest brother and of his wife's people. He was very kind to me, and said, as my train was starting, "Now that we are both in Gujerat, we are sure to see each other often." This is how I first met face to face, my Master, or my Chief, as I called him in those days.³²

The friend that Sri Aurobindo came to see off at the railway station was the artist Shashi Kumar Hesh. The above incident was narrated to Sri Aurobindo by Nirodbaran:

Nirodbaran: Charu Dutt says that the first time he met you was at the train station at Baroda. He was passing through Baroda and you had come to the station to see somebody off. You were accompanied by Hesh and Deshpande. Dutt was travelling with an Englishman, an I.C.S. man probably, and just before Baroda station the Englishman asked, "Do you know where Ghose is now?"

"Which Ghose?"

"That Classical scholar of Cambridge who has come away to India to waste his future."

Dutt told him that you were at Baroda. When the train stopped there, Hesh saw Dutt and shouted to him: "Dutt do you know Ghose?" Then he introduced you. Dutt said to the Englishman, "Here is Ghose."

"That?" the Englishman exclaimed in great surprise, because you had come to the station in the Indian official dress and turban.

Sri Aurobindo: Turban? Does he mean Palleri cap?

Nirodbaran: Probably.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

32. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, Compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 418 (Article written by Charu Chandra Dutt, *Sunday Times*, 17 December 1950).

Sri Aurobindo: But the official dress also? I don't remember. It is true that at times I used to put on Marathi dress. Then?

Nirodbaran: That was the first meeting. The second was at his own house in Bombay, where you came with a bundle of papers containing the scheme of the Bhavani Mandir. Oh yes, Jatin Banerji was also at Baroda station.³³

Sometime in early 1904 Sri Aurobindo came to Thane and requested Charu Chandra Dutt to join the Bhavani Mandir movement. "Needless to say I was beside myself with joy at having been chosen by such a great man," writes Dutt. Dutt then expressed his doubts, since the movement seemed to be based on Yogic practice of which he knew nothing, to which Sri Aurobindo laughed and replied, "Your aim and ours are exactly the same, why not look upon the ochre robe as a uniform?" A relieved Dutt got easily convinced and was happy that he got an opportunity to contribute to the movement, let alone to get "such noble guidance."³⁴

After the partition of Bengal in 1905, Sri Aurobindo again visited Thane and took Charu Chandra Dutt to Bombay for the night. In order to ascertain if he was fully committed to the revolutionary movement, Sri Aurobindo pointedly asked him if he would join the big organisation (secret society). Dutt replied: "I shall be proud to serve under you personally, if you have me; I am yours unreservedly and unconditionally." Dutt reminisced, "He accepted me without any oath or formality and I felt deeply grateful to him."³⁵

"I was very proud of his trust," writes Charu Chandra Dutt in another article, "I had implicit faith in him." And of Yoga which C. C. Dutt knew nothing of, Sri Aurobindo smilingly reassured him, "Be patient and you would understand everything. In a yogi's garb you would get a better chance of following your ideals."³⁶

Sri Aurobindo's benevolence to Charu Chandra Dutt extended to elucidating several interesting subjects like history, politics, art and linguistics. However, he was unwilling to discuss spiritual matters. C. C. Dutt narrates:

During the first decade of this century, when I came within Aurobindo's orbit, I was a casual Gita student, reading the scripture with the help of the commentaries and thinking out the meaning in the usual way. I never, however, studied it with Sri Aurobindo. He discussed history and politics with me, read poetry and drama to me in many languages, but never attempted to teach me religion

33. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 498.

34. See *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, Compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 418 (Article written by Charu Chandra Dutt, *Sunday Times*, 17 December 1950).

35. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, Compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 419 – article written by Charu Chandra Dutt, *Sunday Times*, 17 December 1950.

36. C. C. Dutt, 'A Pilgrimage to Narmada Valley', *Srinwantu*, August 1986, pp. 136-37, 123.

or philosophy. As I have mentioned already, he had given some spiritual instruction to a couple of friends in Baroda; but when, one day, I put him one or two questions about sadhana, he put me off summarily by saying, “Not yet”. But, really speaking, he had never been indifferent to my spiritual welfare. He gave me only as much as I was capable of receiving at the time. I understood the mantra “Bande Mataram.” So he tacked me on to the realisation thereof, in Karma. Still, my being was not satisfied, subconsciously it craved for subtler gifts. In 1906, I said one day to him, “You give so many nice things to others. I have a request to make today for myself. Let me have an old copy of the Gita, one that you have handled for some time.” He said nothing at the time but when he came to me again he brought me a very well-thumbed copy of the Gita. He gave it to me very lightly and I took it from him very lightly too. But the real meaning of this giving and taking appeared to me forty years later.³⁷

C. C. Dutt then explains:

What he did, or tried to do, all along, for an absolute duffer like me, I am going to relate presently. When the time truly came for me to enter the spiritual path, he took a decisive step. His compassion towards me was boundless. He had gone on preparing me by a series of very subtle steps before he finally threw wide open the portals of my heart.³⁸

What struck Charu Chandra Dutt was Sri Aurobindo’s “infinite compassion”. He recounts:

I always looked upon Aurobindo as a resolute man, — a man who knew his mind. As my revolutionary chief he was never whimsical or capricious. But his outstanding quality was an infinite compassion, his justice was ever tempered by mercy. I am speaking, just now, of the period before his final departure from Calcutta, when he acted principally under the guidance of his rational intelligence. Once in 1907, a report came to him that a certain young revolutionary worker had been guilty of grave misconduct. I was then in Calcutta. Ordinarily, in such cases, we took the necessary action and informed him about it. But he took up this particular case himself and ordered a very severe punishment. When he told me of it, I assured him that his order will be carried out without delay. My difficulty was that I was not myself convinced of the young fellow’s guilt. But it was not for me to reason why, when I received an order. So I issued the necessary directions. Next morning, I found him sitting

37. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, pp. 128-29.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-26.

listlessly with a sad look on his face and asked, “You quite well, Chief?” He replied, “I don’t feel comfortable about that matter of yesterday. Have I been hasty? You never said anything, Charu!” “Do I ever say anything when you issue an order?” I got up promptly and walked out saying, “Let me see how far things have gone. If at all possible I shall stay execution of your order.” Luckily it was not too late and the previous order was countermanded. His mercy stepped in to temper the severity of his justice.³⁹

Nagendra Kumar Roy, a young boy who assisted Sukumar Mitra in organising Sri Aurobindo’s escape from Chandernagore to Pondicherry, once visited Raja Subodh Mullick for some work in 1906. He narrates:

A friend introduced me to the Raja and I bowed to him. . . . He pointed at a sofa facing him and asked me to sit down.

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

His clothes showed no sign of care. His dhoti and shirt and shoes were ordinary. . . he sat calm, peaceful and serene, his eyes luminous, his look deep. The day remains unforgettable because of my first Darshan of Aurobindo. Luck smiled on me. Along with the Raja, I met, unexpectedly, my god.⁴⁰

There was also an incident concerning the grandfather of Charu Chandra Dutt’s wife. He was living near Calcutta and was very keen to meet Sri Aurobindo; but since he was aged, and thus restricted in his movements, he asked C. C. Dutt if he could bring his friend Aurobindo to him. Sri Aurobindo readily obliged and offered his respects to this elderly man and chatted with him in Bengali. The venerable man had a Radha-Krishna temple in the village and out of delight offered Sri Aurobindo some fruits and sweets as *Prasad*.⁴¹

Once, while speaking about Charu Chandra Dutt, Nirodbaran asked Sri Aurobindo: “Was he a great friend of yours?” Sri Aurobindo’s magnanimously replied: “Yes.”⁴² Sri Aurobindo has graciously written:

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

40. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, April 2014, p. 303.

41. See Prabhakar Mukherji, ‘Sri Aurobindo in the Suburbs of Calcutta’, *Mother India*, March 1962, p. 69.

42. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 97.

Charu Dutt? Yes, saw very little of him, for physically our way lay far apart, but that little was very intimate, one of the kind of men whom I used to appreciate most and felt as if they had been my friends and comrades and fellow-warriors in the battle of the ages and could be so for ages more. But curiously enough my physical contact with men of his type — there were two or three others — was always brief. Because I had something else to do this time, I suppose.⁴³

Charu Chandra Dutt further writes:

Those who have had the good fortune of attending on the Master personally here in the Ashram, have had daily experience of his sweet temper and his beautiful smile. But we others, we have seen instances, too, where a sadhak, gone astray, was recklessly proceeding to dig his own grave, while the Master was trying persistently to save him. The Lord of the sinful, the Lord of the destitute, the Lord of the weak, has ever been like this!⁴⁴

The significance of Sri Aurobindo's love can be gauged by a letter he wrote to a disciple:

You need not imagine that we shall ever lose patience or give you up — that will never happen. Our patience, you will find is tireless because it is based upon unbounded sympathy and love. Human love may give up, but divine love is stable and does not falter.⁴⁵

The Mother has said:

Compassion is the equivalent of *miséricorde*. It is a pity full of strength and kindness, a pity that pardons and makes amends, forgets all offences and wants always what is best for everyone.⁴⁶

And once, commenting on one of Sri Aurobindo's aphorisms, the Mother said:

Sri Aurobindo tells us that to radiate love in all circumstances is a sign of the Divine who has equal love for the one who strikes him and the one who worships him — what a lesson for humanity!⁴⁷

43. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 25.

44. Charu Chandra Dutt, 'My Friend and my Master', *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, pp. 123-24.

45. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, pp. 57-58.

46. CWM, Vol. 17, 2nd Ed., p. 10.

47. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, 2nd Ed., p. 296.

Sri Aurobindo's career took a completely different turn than what his father had planned. Aware of his extraordinary brilliance, Krishnadhan Ghose wanted his son Auro to join the I.C.S., since it was considered the pinnacle of success. Ironically, instead of serving the British government with distinction Sri Aurobindo locked horns with them. Sri Aurobindo's younger brother Barin wrote:

Father's fond wish was that Aurobindo will brighten the face of the country by achieving a position in the I.C.S. Were he alive I do not know what would be his feeling at his renowned son's fame spread all over the world.⁴⁸

Sri Aurobindo, however, was a *littérateur* and a poet and had no interest whatsoever in administration. Yet, in order not to disappoint his father, Sri Aurobindo appeared for this arduous examination. After he passed the test, he had to find a way to disqualify himself without hurting the sentiments of his father. Charu Chandra Dutt writes:

His failure to appear at the riding test in England was no idle whim. As he explained to me one day, it was the least unpleasant way of letting his father know that he did not want to join the I.C.S.⁴⁹

Besides C. C. Dutt, many of the revolutionaries had pleasant interactions with Sri Aurobindo. Abinash Bhattacharya, a fellow revolutionary who was also Sri Aurobindo's attendant, writes:

I was fortunate enough to have lived together with Sri Aurobindo for a few days. I called him *Sejda* and addressed him as *tumi* [an informal or familiar form of the second person]. I had the opportunity to observe him at close range at his daily work. . . . Those who got the chance to come close to him and speak with him went away deeply impressed by his simple beautiful laughter; his childlike bearing left a mark on every heart. Usually he was absorbed in thought. I have looked upon him at different times as a brother, a friend and a companion. He gave me affection and sometimes scolded me for my childish conduct. I have been charmed by his heart's vastness.⁵⁰

Bhupendranath Dutta, Vivekananda's youngest brother, who worked at *Yugantar*, remarked that Sri Aurobindo was liked by the young revolutionary workers and struck them as being "affectionate".⁵¹

48. Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, October 2011, p. 848.

49. Charu Chandra Dutt, 'My Friend and my Master', *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, p. 123.

50. Abinash Bhattacharya, 'Sri Aurobindo', *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 539 (originally published in *Galpa-Bharati*, Vol. 6, 1950-51, pp. 829-50; translated from Bengali and reproduced in *Srinwantu*, November 1984).

51. See Bhupendranath Dutta, *Aurobindo Smarane* (translated from Bengali); papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

Another revolutionary, Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, who lived with Sri Aurobindo like a family member for almost a year during the period 1907-08 reminisces:

I got malarial fever from my frequent visits to Chandannagore. Sri Aurobindo took me with him to his maternal grandfather's house in Baidyanath (Deoghar) along with his wife, sister and a cook. A large thick cotton carpet was spread on the floor and we all slept on it. Sri Aurobindo used to type on long foolscap paper; his rendering of the Mahabharata in verse form. Dr. Prankrishna Acharya treated me. One day I had an acute attack of fever. I shivered very much and felt thirsty and nauseous. The typed sheets lay nearby and I spewed on them. Sri Aurobindo's serene face did not betray any sign of dismay at what had happened, nor did he come hurrying to save his manuscripts. Slowly he rose and was about to clean up the mess. I felt mortified beyond description. My soul melted in gratitude and at the same time I felt terribly embarrassed. Never had I experienced such love and kindness. At least, I expected to hear some exclamation such as "Oh! Now he has spoilt everything!" But no, nothing came out of him. Nothing perturbed his serene face, not a line moved on it. Previously I had been roundly rebuked by others on so many occasions for unintended mischief. But all the while I was with Sri Aurobindo more than a year I never heard from him, even on a single occasion, so much as a "Don't!" Not even an order or admonition. If I went beyond the limit, Sri Aurobindo would just keep silent, but it was not that gravity of silent disapproval, he just remained unmindful, as if he had not heard what I was saying, being immersed in some other thought. Even that unmindfulness was not due to any indifference or neglect; he repeatedly found out if I persisted in some sort of mischief, but he always remained outwardly the same as ever. Now as I reflect upon it, I seem to see the truth of it. A high and noble mind develops a large outlook and vision, while a small mind seeing defects everywhere, becomes blinded by them.⁵²

The last phrase echoes a quotation of a visitor to the Ashram for the Darshan in 1949, the Sarod maestro Baba Allaudin Khan: "When your faults and shortcomings have no limits, you go on looking for blemishes in others!"⁵³

Another incident reveals Sri Aurobindo's sensitive side. When Sudhir Kumar Sarkar was with Sri Aurobindo at Calcutta and Deogarh, his parents who lived in Khulna got anxious about the whereabouts of their 18-year-old son. They sent his elder brother to the *Yugantar* office to enquire and bring him back home. When Sri

52. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 21st February 1989, pp. 94-95 (This incident occurred a few months after Sri Aurobindo left Baroda).

53. *A Life . . . What a Life!* – commemorating Baba's visit to Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1949.

Aurobindo was informed, he gave Sudhir Sarkar some money to rejoin his family. Concerned that he was possibly being relieved of his duties as a revolutionary worker, Sudhir Sarkar sought a clarification, to which Sri Aurobindo replied:

Visit your mother once every week. When you go away, inform her the first time about your departure. The next time you go, tell her two or three days before your departure, then leave without any further message.

On subsequent visits, go to your house after a fortnight, stay for two or three days, then leave the house, letting someone else inform your mother about your departure. When you go the next time, don't put up at your own house, stay in someone else's house, but visit your family. When you leave, don't inform them at all. In this way, after you have paid visits to your home five or six times, your absence will be taken as natural, and there will be no anxiety.

A touched Sudhir Sarkar added,

Such a tender-hearted and considerate person Sri Aurobindo was and at the same time the main figure in a secret revolutionary conspiracy!⁵⁴

Reflecting on Sri Aurobindo's magnanimity, Sudhir Kumar Sarkar recounts another fascinating incident:

Sri Aurobindo used to mingle with us unreservedly, eating, sleeping, talking and joking with us! There was no barrier at all. At that time so much liberality appeared a little too much for me. One day I went so far as to protest. It happened when I found he had written in a letter to his friend Sundari Mohan Das, "My friend Sudhir Kumar is going to see you." I asked him point blank, "How do I become your friend? You, who are so much above me in learning, age, accomplishment and fame — in fact, in every respect. Rather it is proper I should venerate you, seek advice from you, be humble to you; instead I am described as your friend and equal. And that too while writing to someone who is much older than me, and higher in status!"

Sudhir Sarkar then describes Sri Aurobindo's response to his embarrassing predicament:

But Sri Aurobindo brushed all this aside and would not let me go before convincing me thoroughly of my misconception. In his faltering Bengali which

54. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 21st February 1989, p. 97.

sounded so sweet in his English-accented tongue, he said, “Because our aims, our hopes, our aspirations are so much the same how can we be any other than friends? The difference you feel is due to the tradition of this country. At present, it has gone beyond limit and taken an exaggerated form which seems so unnatural.”⁵⁵

Upendranath Bandopadhyay, who like Sudhir Sarkar was later incarcerated in Andamans, was a member of the *Bande Mataram* editorial staff. He spoke of Sri Aurobindo’s dedication to his task at the journal: “Fellow workers viewed Aurobindo Babu with both awe and devotion.”⁵⁶

In early 1905 and then again in September or October, Sri Aurobindo stayed with Charu Chandra Dutt at Thane. It was there that he met C. C. Dutt’s brother-in-law, Raja Subodh Mullick (1879-1920). During his stay of five or six days, Sri Aurobindo became well acquainted with Subodh Mullick. They found themselves in complete agreement on political ideology and the programme. Subodh Mullick rendered great service to India and gave unstinted support to Sri Aurobindo in his political work.⁵⁷

As part of the Swadeshi movement Sri Aurobindo was keen on a distinct domestic policy of national education. He has noted:

National education was another item to which Sri Aurobindo attached much importance. He had been disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience.⁵⁸

Sri Aurobindo attended a meeting on 11th March 1906 where a resolution for formally inaugurating a National Council of Education was passed.⁵⁹ He also met the educationist Satish Chandra Mukherjee (1865-1948), founder of the Dawn Society, at the residence of Subodh Mullick, where he was putting up when on a visit from Baroda. According to Abinash Bhattacharya’s younger brother, Upendra-chandra Bhattacharya:

Satishchandra, in course of his discussion with Sri Aurobindo about a scheme of national education, requested him to join the Dawn Society. Sri Aurobindo said in response, “Nobody can relate the concept of national education with a

55. *Ibid.*, p. 91 (This incident occurred a few months after Sri Aurobindo left Baroda).

56. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, November 2013, p. 929.

57. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 84.

58. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 58.

59. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, July 2013, p. 571.

name like Dawn Society; they will have no interest. We need a national university. We have to build a National Council of Education.”⁶⁰

Stirred by the concept of national education, Subodh Mullick declared at a large gathering that he was donating a sum of Rs. one lakh towards founding of a national college. The exuberant gathering hailed Mullick, then aged 26, as Raja — an honorific that became prefixed to his name.⁶¹ When the Bengal National College at Calcutta was to be inaugurated on 15th August 1906, Raja Subodh Mullick persuaded Sri Aurobindo to be its first Principal and the latter accepted.

From March 1906 or so Sri Aurobindo stayed with Mullick in his mansion at Calcutta as an honoured guest. Sri Aurobindo became close to Subodh Mullick and he has himself said, “I mixed intimately with Mullick.”⁶² Charu Chandra Dutt narrates how he, Mullick, and all the other family members adored Sri Aurobindo:

Another time, when Aurobindo came to us at Thana, my brother-in-law, Subodh Mullick, was staying with us. We had a great time together. Aurobindo and Subodh became very friendly during their stay in Thana, and this friendship of theirs ripened into close association, when Subodh entered into political life a year later. At his insistence, Aurobindo accepted the direction of the National College and of the newly started daily paper, *Bande Mataram*. During this period he lived mostly in Subodh’s Wellington Square house — not only as an honoured guest, but practically as a member of the family. Our mother he addressed as mother and she addressed him as either Aurobindo or simply as Baba. It was indeed marvellous — a vastly learned man, a great political leader like him, dropping his formidable personality and becoming one with another family, in love and affection! In the Calcutta house Aurobindo became to my wife, even more of a brother than he had been in Bombay. Ordinarily he was averse to accepting personal service. But it was by no means an uncommon sight to see Lilavati wiping the sweat and combing his hair tenderly after his return from work, and he protesting, “But why? I have got no lice in my head.” The ladies of the house cooking little things for him was a daily occurrence, both in Thana and in Calcutta. He never objected to that, as he was a connoisseur of good food. But be it remembered that he was always a small eater.⁶³

Sukumar Sen, a close friend of the Mullick family and a share-holder in the Company which floated *Bande Mataram*, notes:

60. *Ibid.*, p. 488.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 489.

62. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 453.

63. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and My Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, p. 134.

It is my opinion that Sri Aurobindo was a very lovable man. So far as I observed, everyone felt it an honour to make him welcome and entertain him at their house. The Mullicks regarded it as an honour for him to stay with them. Aurobindo often wanted to go and live by himself, but the Mullicks would not let him go. The Mullicks' house is a famous one. It is rich in art-treasures and other things.⁶⁴

However, it was difficult for common folk to meet Sri Aurobindo at the Mullick mansion. So in late 1906, Abinash Bhattacharya, on the instructions of Sri Aurobindo, made arrangements for Sri Aurobindo to relocate to Chaku Khansama Lane, where Barin, Sarojini, Abinash Bhattacharya and others joined him.

Whilst on the subject of Raja Subodh Mullick, the Bengal National College and Satish Chandra Mukherjee — who, as per Wikipedia, was “a pioneer in establishing a system of national education in India, along with Sri Aurobindo”⁶⁵ — there is an interesting incident worth narrating. About his role at Bengal National College Sri Aurobindo has noted:

At an early period he left the organisation of the college to the educationist Satish Mukherjee and plunged fully into politics.⁶⁶

When Sri Aurobindo was the Principal at the College there was a misunderstanding between Satish Mukherjee and Subodh Mullick over the Rs. one lakh grant announced by Mullick towards founding of the college. Mullick had offered the money to Sri Aurobindo to be spent in whatever way he liked, which meant there was a possibility that the money could be utilised for political activities. Satish Mukherjee, the initiator behind the proposed college and the person to succeed Sri Aurobindo as Principal, was disappointed that the money was not directly offered to him as was promised earlier. He confronted Mullick about this and was told that he will need to get Sri Aurobindo's consent in order to pursue his educational venture. Accordingly, Mukherjee met Sri Aurobindo and tried to impress upon him the importance of using the donation entirely for educational purposes. The proceeding of the meeting is narrated by a person who heard it from Mukherjee himself:

Sri Aurobindo listened to Satish Chandra's long lecture calmly. Not even once did he interrupt or ask any question. When Satish Chandra finished, he only said, “I support your view. The money could be spent in a right way through your hands. I withdraw whatever reservation I had.”⁶⁷

64. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 37.

65. Website: <https://www.google.com/search?q=satish+mukherjee>, dated 30 August 2019.

66. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 78.

67. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, July 2013, p. 570.

Satish Chandra then thanked him and requested him to write a line of instruction to Subodh Mullick. Sri Aurobindo obliged him at once. Satish Chandra was overwhelmed on how calmly and fairly Sri Aurobindo resolved the issue:

I realised the *mahatmya* (the highest quality of nobility) of Sri Aurobindo more intensely through this dialogue. A man of such tremendous personality! Yet he gave me the opportunity to place before him my view that was contrary to his, spoken in my way, for such a long time and without a murmur, without a question — a grand trait of his great character indeed!⁶⁸

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

68. *Ibid.*

DARWIN: THE GREAT AMATEUR

It seems that if an idea is repeated often enough, then however counter-intuitive it may be, people eventually come to accept it, and to believe that they understand it.

— Paul Davies

The Fact of Evolution

Evolution is now generally considered a fact, except by some literalist or fundamentalist religions. “It has to be said emphatically: the theory of evolution is true and no manoeuvring will destruct its foundations, even if it is true that we do not yet understand all the mechanisms nor even all the modalities,” writes Claude Allègre.¹ And another scientist, Michael Ruse, states: “By any understanding of the terms, evolution is a well-established fact. It is logically possible that evolution is not true, but it is not reasonable to believe this.”² Evidence of the increase in the number of life-forms and their diversification has been abundantly found in the fossil record, the fact of anatomical structures common to various species, their geographical distribution, similarities during embryonic development, and DNA sequences.

In the general mind the idea of evolution is supposed to have originated with Charles Darwin, at a time that people still wore top hats, carried walking sticks and rode in horse-drawn carriages. But Darwin’s idea was preceded by a lot of research and theorising, and to a considerable extent the result of it. And although it is true that in Europe the origin of the universe, life and the human being was for many centuries attributed to a Creator “in the beginning”, several cultures held that the world and everything in it had evolved.

One such culture was that of the ancient Greeks, who were the first (in the West) to propose answers to the basic questions of existence in a rational, original manner. Their common view was that the history of humanity and the world was cyclic; it repeated itself again and again at huge time-intervals from chaos to cosmos to chaos. But in the fragments left us from some early Greek thinkers one can find hints of a progressive evolution. Anaxagoras of Miletus is quoted as having taught that originally humans were born from animals. Archelaus, the first Athenian philosopher and a teacher of Socrates, said that at first men were included among the animals and were afterwards separated from them. And Democritus, also a contemporary of Socrates, gave a fairly consistent picture of the evolution from

1. Claude Allègre: *Dieu face à la science*, p. 140.

2. Michael Ruse: *Darwinism and its Discontents*, p. 51.

primitive hunter-gatherers to agricultural civilisation.

Then there is the remarkable case of Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi (1207-1273), the great Sufi poet who, at the time of the Middle Ages in Europe but of a great cultural flowering in the Muslim world, wrote his *Spiritual Couplets*. Although orthodox Islam is creationist, we find in Rumi the following lines expressing a distinct evolutionary view:

I died as inanimate matter and arose a plant,
 I died as a plant and rose again an animal,
 I died as an animal and arose a man.
 Why then should I fear to become less by dying?
 I shall die once again as a man
 To rise an angel perfect from head to foot!³

However, the clearest formulation of an evolutionary vision of the universe and life on the Earth is found in the Indian scriptures. “In certain respects the old Vedantic thinkers anticipate us;” wrote Sri Aurobindo, “they agree with all that is essential in our modern ideas of evolution. From one side all forms of creatures are developed; some kind of physical evolution from the animal to the human is admitted in the Aitareya [Upanishad] . . . The Puranas admit the creation of animal forms before the appearance of man and in the symbol of the Ten Avatars trace the growth of our evolution from the fish through the animal, the man-animal and the developed human being to the different stages of our present incomplete evolution. But the ancient Hindu, it is clear, envisaged this progression as an enormous secular movement covering more ages than we can easily count. . . . It is this great secular movement in cycles, perpetually self-repeating, yet perpetually progressing, which is imaged and set forth for us in the symbols of the Puranas.”⁴

What is evolution to the modern mind? The Oxford Dictionary of Biology gives this definition: “The gradual process by which the present diversity of plant and animal life arose from the earliest and most primitive organisms, which is believed to have been continuing for at least the past 3000 million years.” According to Denyse O’Leary, “evolution is the theory that all life forms are descended from one or several common ancestors that were present on the early Earth, three to four billion years ago.”⁵ And Michael Behe writes: “In its full-throated, biological sense, evolution means a process whereby life arose from non-living matter and subsequently developed entirely by natural means.”⁶

3. Translation E. H. Whinfield, 1898.

4. Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, p. 385.

5. Denyse O’Leary: *By Design or by Chance?* p. 9.

6. Michael Behe: *Darwin’s Black Box*, p. xi.

Darwinism and ‘Darwinism’

It is erroneous to associate evolution exclusively with Charles Darwin, although proclamations that “we live in the age of Charles Darwin” and comparisons of Darwin with Copernicus, Newton or Einstein are rife in the popularisation of science as divulged by the media. To avoid being controversial they lean heavily on the tenets of scientific materialism, back up this official science with their own hyperbole, and if they occasionally serve up unorthodox items, it is with a sauce of denigrating irony.

All the same: “Darwin is not a strict Darwinian”, and the man who said so was none other than a renowned self-proclaimed Darwinian, Stephen Jay Gould.⁷ In fact, as we will see, Darwin was anything but a strict Darwinian in the current sense. “Darwin must be distinguished from modern Darwinism. One of the primary justifications for examining Darwin’s own views is precisely to expose the frequent mismatches between the Darwin who is invoked by today’s biologists eager to defend their corner, and the Darwin who wrote *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*.”⁸

Nor was or is Darwinism the sole evolutionary theory. There is e.g. Lamarckism, far from defunct although often so pronounced; vitalism, taboo in academe but stubbornly raising its head time and again in various disguises (evolution, after all, is about life); there is the ‘Omega Point’ theory of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and his epigones; there is, of course, creationism, not only as narrated in some holy books, but also in its metaphorical variations; there is the intelligent design theory, which posits that the complexity in nature can only have been fashioned by a special Intelligence; and there is the very scientific but fiercely opposed theory of ‘punctuated equilibrium’ formulated by Stephen Gould and Niles Eldredge. This enumeration is far from complete but will have to do for the moment. The situation is actually such that, some say, every evolutionary biologist has his own theory.

Then what is authentic Darwinism? It is the theory gropingly worked out by Charles Darwin (1809-1882), especially in two of his books: *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859), and *The Descent of Man* (1872). The first book has had an enormous impact on the way humanity came to see itself. It has become the bible of present-day Darwinian biology and is quoted with reverence. To this end it is very useful, as in some cases Darwin has defended both sides of his arguments. “Before Darwin’s death in 1882 the *Origin* went through a further five, often substantially revised, editions. They were revised so frequently and so radically because Darwin had found it increasingly difficult to deal with the problems presented to him by some of

7. John Brockman: *The Third Culture*, p. 53.

8. Tim Lewens: *Darwin*, p. 6.

his more acute critics.”⁹

Given this reverence even by such rational and critical-minded people as positivist scientists, it is not amazing to what degree Charles Darwin has been exalted, not to say canonised. “Reading Darwinist literature, one cannot help noticing the way in which each writer stresses his or her own orthodoxy and total fidelity to Darwin, much like bishops discussing the encyclicals of a pope.”¹⁰ Novelist Barbara Kingsolver describes Darwin’s idea of natural selection as “the greatest, simplest, most elegant logical construct ever to dawn across our curiosity about the workings of natural life. It is inarguable, and it explains everything.”¹¹ And the philosopher Daniel Dennett credits Darwin with “the single best idea anyone has ever had.”¹²

What, then, is ‘Darwinism’? It is an agglomerate of theories assembled and frequently revised under an umbrella postulated to be Charles Darwin’s original idea. It is this cluster of more or less integrated theories which, after Darwin and up to the present, claims to prove that Darwin’s evolutionary machinery would have been working, though he lacked most of the parts. Gregor Mendel’s theory is among the best known; August Weismann’s work is familiar only to experts, although it was defining for ‘Darwinism’; and then came Hugo de Vries who introduced the mutations, Thomas Morgan and the application of mathematics to biology, ‘the new synthesis’ also called ‘neo-Darwinism’, the discovery of the double helix as the structure of DNA, sociobiology, and the theory of ‘punctuated equilibrium’, to name the most important elements of the cluster.

Darwin knew nothing of the ‘mechanisms’ which could explain his variation, natural selection or inheritance. The composition of the cell, the chromosome and the gene would be discovered decades later; even the fertilisation of the ovum by the spermatozoon was still a mystery; and the discovery of the double helix would have to wait till 1953, a century after the publication of the *Origin*. “Darwin’s scientific arguments are extremely weak, quite simply because in 1859 one was still completely ignorant of the mechanisms of reproduction and heredity,” writes André Pichot, a historian of science.¹³ Claude Allègre agrees: “Darwin’s book contains indeed little proof. His book consists for the most part of conjectures, because he did not have the essential elements at his disposal to establish his theory.”¹⁴ Darwin himself had admitted something similar in a letter: “It deserves especial notice that the more important objections [to his theory] relate to questions of which we are confessedly ignorant; nor do we know how ignorant we are.”¹⁵

9. Derek Gjertsen: *Science and Philosophy*, p. 106.

10. Denyse O’Leary: *op. cit.*, p. 111.

11. William Dembski (ed.): *Uncommon Dissent*, p. xvii.

12. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

13. André Pichot: *Histoire de la notion de vie*, p. 808.

14. Claude Allègre: *op. cit.*, p. 132.

15. Charles Darwin: *The Origin of Species*, p. 431.

A Sea-going Naturalist

Charles Darwin was born in a rich family and could look forward to a life without financial worries. His grandfather and father were doctors, and Charles was expected to become likewise. He was therefore sent to the University of Edinburgh, the citadel of things medical in Britain. But young Charles could not stand the bloody slaughter on the dissection table which, at a time when anaesthetics were unknown, was a dreadful affair. What Charles did feel attracted to was nature and her landscapes, plants and animals. He was instinctively drawn to people like the zoologist Robert Grant, the first to talk to him enthusiastically about evolution and its explanations, in this case the theory of the Frenchman Lamarck.

As Charles did not have the character to become a medical practitioner, his father allowed him to join Trinity College, at Cambridge University, in order to study theology and become a member of the Anglican clergy. A college education was a *sine qua non* for a clergyman; this made the universities of Cambridge and Oxford the main breeding ground of the official religion. The prospect of a sinecure as a country clergyman, a vicar, attracted Charles, for then he would have lots of leisure to devote to his hobby of exploring nature. At that time many of the books on “natural science” were indeed written by clergymen. “Naturalism was mostly the preserve of enthusiastic amateurs: clergymen whiling away idle moments in their rural parishes, and genteel young women drawing butterflies and pressing plants . . .”¹⁶ — “I believe that I was considered by all my masters and by my father as a very ordinary boy, rather below the common standard in intellect,” wrote Darwin in his *Autobiography*. “To my deep mortification my father once said to me: ‘You care for nothing but shooting dogs and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family.’” Yet Destiny had other prospects for him.

When he was twenty-two, he received a proposal for a voyage on *HMS Beagle*, a 90-foot coaster of the Royal Navy preparing for a surveying mission. It had to test a new generation of clocks, of prime importance for calculating a ship’s position, and to map the coastlines of South America. The captain, Robert FitzRoy, himself only twenty-seven but highly qualified, was looking for a gentleman who would be a suitable companion and who at the same time could make himself useful on his ship. Darwin, with his intense interest in nature, could be the ship’s ‘naturalist’; and as FitzRoy was a rather fanatical Bible reader, Darwin’s theological studies would fit in nicely also.

To carry a naturalist, i.e. a person who studied nature, was normal procedure on a mission like this. Much of the planet and its denizens was still unknown, and the new knowledge favoured the expansion of the British Empire, the trade of its merchants and the zealous efforts of its missionaries. The nineteenth century was

16. Iain McCalman: *Darwin’s Armada*, p. 21.

the age of geological, zoological and botanical exploration, of which the story of the mutiny on the *Bounty* is a telling illustration. Normally it was the ship's chief surgeon who doubled as naturalist, with the assistant-surgeon, in most cases a young physician, as his helper. It was as assistant-surgeon that the botanist Joseph Hooker travelled to Antarctica on the *Erebus* under Captain Ross, and that Thomas Huxley visited Australia and the surrounding region aboard the *Rattlesnake*.

This made Darwin's position on the *Beagle* quite exceptional, for he was not a surgeon but a sort of unqualified gentleman who paid for most of the expenses from his own purse. No wonder, then, that the chief-surgeon and actual naturalist, Robert McCormick, felt threatened by Darwin's status as confidant of the captain and by his untiring activities as a collector and scientist. McCormick "would leave the ship at Rio, cursing FitzRoy for allowing an unqualified outsider to usurp his domain. Darwin thought it a good riddance: the man was a pompous ass with antiquated ideas."¹⁷

HMS Beagle left Portsmouth in the last days of the year 1831 for a voyage around the world which would last five years. While the ship cruised down the east coast and up the west coast of South America, Darwin made several excursions inland. His voyage became one of discovery without end. He sent crates full of strange insects, gigantic fossil bones from unknown monsters, plants, birds and other animals to the motherland, where they were in eager demand for private collections and the first museums. He witnessed an eruption of a volcano, Mt. Osorno in Chile, and marvelled at its titanic power to change the aspect of the Earth. And he was puzzled by the fact that, on an archipelago of small islands like the Galapagos, animals of the same species could show such marked differences. His "burning zeal to add even the most humble contribution to the noble structure of natural science" still increased, and could not be tempered by the constant sea-sickness which would affect his health for the rest of his life.

From the Galapagos the *Beagle* set sail for Australia. Having dropped anchor in Sidney, "my first feeling was to congratulate myself that I was born an Englishman."¹⁸ And nearly two years later, after rounding Cape of Good Hope, Darwin set foot again on his native soil, in October 1836. This was no longer the naive nature-lover of five years earlier. He had become rated as one of the experienced and knowledgeable world-explorers for the natural sciences, and the narrative of his eventful voyage on the *Beagle*, based on his diaries, rendered him acceptable in scientific circles. "The great amateur"¹⁹ had arrived. He would never go on another journey in his life.

17. Iain McCalman: *op. cit.*, p. 45.

18. Tim Lewens: *op. cit.*, p. 23.

19. Hilary and Steven Rose: *Alas Poor Darwin*, p. 111.

Evolution in the Air

“Precisely when Darwin came to believe in evolution, whether it was a gradual dawning or a sudden realisation, we will probably never know.”²⁰ What we already know is that young Charles was driven by a “burning zeal” to add his personal contribution to natural science. He also thought of himself as a “philosophical naturalist”, which meant “a naturalist whose classifications should not merely fit the pragmatic purpose of recording observations, but one who looks to give some rationale for nature’s mode of organisations. More specifically, the rationale should be based on natural laws.”²¹ In other words, Darwin felt the urge not only to gather objects, facts and phenomena, but to look for explanations behind them and make them fit together in a theory.

There existed already a number of evolutionary theories when Darwin formulated his. The French philosophers, champions of the Enlightenment, had proposed several solutions to the transformations in the world of life, and Denis Diderot had summarised them in his influential but officially proscribed *Encyclopédie*. Buffon (1707-88) and Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) were learned and widely respected scientists with strong opinions for and against evolution. But the profoundest influence went out from the classification of all (then known) natural things by Carolus Linnaeus, the Latinised name of the Swedish botanist Karl von Linné (1707-78).

Linnaeus was, like everyone at the time, familiar with the Chain of Being, an age-old order of existence in a hierarchy of increasing complexity and consciousness: minerals, plants, animals, and at the top the lord of creation, the human being. But in his *Systema Naturae* (1735) he undertook the daring step to include the humans into his classification of nature, still at the top, yes, but all the same in the company of the animals. To this end he created the class of the ‘primates’, containing the monkeys, the apes and . . . the human beings. Because he never openly put the Christian creation myth in doubt, Linnaeus became a much honoured scientist in his own country and in the rest of Europe. He became known as “God’s Registrar”, and it was said that *Deus creavit, Linnaeus disposuit*: God created, Linnaeus classified.²² The inclusion in his classification of the human species, *Homo Sapiens*, would be essential in the evolutionary theories to come, and his influence, though rarely acknowledged, has ever been of the essence.

A direct precursor of Charles Darwin was his own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802). Erasmus was an excellent doctor, invited by King George III to be his personal physician — an offer which the doctor declined. He was also a man of the

20. Michael Denton: *Evolution – A Theory in Crisis*, p. 27.

21. Tim Lewens: *op. cit.*, p. 74.

22. Michael Shermer: *In Darwin’s Shadow*, p. 101.

broadest interests, a freethinker and “unabashed materialist”, and as such “the very embodiment of enlightened values.”²³ He constructed his own comprehensive theory of evolution. “He reasoned that life had not been created in the Garden of Eden but had arisen naturally and gradually, by stages, from the most elemental microscopic stuff.”²⁴ His thought ran along the same lines as Lamarck’s: species changed by adaptation to their environment. Charles Darwin certainly read his grandfather’s *Zoonomia or the Laws of Organic Life* (1796). Yet, in his *Origin of Species* he dismissed him in a footnote as “a pre-Lamarckian harbinger of Lamarck’s confusion”. And in his *Autobiography* Darwin spoke disparagingly of Erasmus’s *Zoonomia*, the book that may well have planted in Darwin’s mind the seed not only of evolutionism, but of the theory of natural selection.”²⁵

One may be amazed to learn that Darwin was a Lamarckian himself, a fact which has long been disclaimed by Darwinian authors but which they can no longer deny. The Darwin-versus-Lamarck controversy has been one of the main features of evolutionary biology. “The caricature of Lamarck’s position that we have inherited today” can still be found, whenever he is mentioned, in curt negations of his historical importance, like: “Lamarck believed in all sorts of things that have been rejected.” Statements of this kind usually betray an un-scientific attitude or a lack of knowledge. It is a frequent experience for the student of the history and philosophy of science to find how reputed authors blindly copy incorrect matters or references, and thereby contribute to the creation of untruths and outright legends. André Pichot does have reasons to write: “The history of the biology of the last two centuries has been altered by numerous legends.”²⁶

Lamarck (1744-1829) was the first great evolutionary theorist. Goulven Laurent, in *The Birth of Transformism — Lamarck between Linné and Darwin*,²⁷ calls him “the French Linnaeus”. He attributes to him the classification of the invertebrate animals, the founding of their paleontology, the promotion of the concept of biology (a word he coined), the introduction of the word ‘fossil’ in its present sense, and the formulation of ‘transformism’, the term then used by French scientists for what we call ‘evolution’. Lamarck based his view on pure materialism (although, as a good deist, he recognised “a sublime Author of all things”).

His theory of ‘transformism’ rested on two principles: organs are created by the need and use of them, and acquired characteristics can be inherited. This second principle means that change in the species could take place from the outside inwards: the changes in a living being during its life could be transmitted to its offspring.

23. Roy Porter: *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. 377.

24. Roy Porter: *op. cit.*, p. 382.

25. Robert Wright: *The Moral Animal*, p. 276.

26. André Pichot: *op. cit.*, p. 860.

27. Goulven Laurent: *La naissance du transformisme – Lamarck entre Linné et Darwin*.

Darwin, on the contrary, held that inherited changes were the result of small variations within the bodies of a species which resulted themselves gradually in changes on the outside. Neither of them had an explanation for the mechanism of their ‘transformations’. (Darwin himself did not use the word ‘evolution’ in his *Origin*, he called it ‘transmutationism’.) Science had not yet progressed sufficiently to allow an understanding of what were, in sum, guesses based on research and experience. This lacuna made Darwin, conscious of the fragility of his position, defend his theory all the more tenaciously, not to say desperately, and may explain his denigrating remark about Lamarck quoted above.

The astonishing truth is that Darwin was as much a Lamarckian as his French predecessor! “It is Darwin who has used for the first time the term ‘inheritance of acquired characteristics’, unknown to Lamarck, and who has tried to make it into a theoretical justification for his ‘pangensis’.”²⁸ Lamarck had never presented a theory to support the inheritance of acquired characteristics; it was at the time the consensus among scientists, and it would remain so throughout Darwin’s life. Darwin, however, concocted a theory of pangensis and ‘gemmules’, secreted internally by each part of the body, gathered in the sex cells, and transmitted to the embryo through the union of sperm and egg. This idea was later discarded as one of his blunders and fell into oblivion. But “the Darwinian heredity of acquired characteristics is clearly affirmed in several places of *The Origin of Species*, and even, rather curiously, in a fully Lamarckian manner.”²⁹ It was the reason that Darwin grew obsessed with the fear that his children might have inherited the illness he had contracted on the *Beagle*, which was impossible according to his own theory of variation and natural selection, so often held to be his only and definitive view.

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

(Opening chapter of the book *Evolution, Religion and the Unknown God*,
sourced from www.aurobindo.ru)

28. Goulven Laurent: *op. cit.*, p. 131.

29. André Pichot: *op. cit.*, p. 812.

FOREWORD TO R. Y. DESHPANDE'S *THE FIRST HYMN OF RISHI VAMADEVA*

Understanding human history remains one of the most important concerns for all people and countries. Yet even with all our development of archaeology, anthropology and linguistics, much remains unclear and constantly changing. Our ancient past disappears into superstition by our modern accounts, yet we continue to look to many of our oldest books to guide us to the truth, its details, and to the Divine. We all sense a mystery from the past that holds many secrets, if not great wisdom and unbounded vision.

The Rigveda remains our most important and authentic document from the ancient sages that set forth the spiritual paths for humanity at the dawn of history. Such rishis, yogis, gurus, seers, sages and prophets were well known to all the cultures of the world from the Mayans of the Americas to the Celts of Europe, to the Egyptians and Babylonians, to the Persians, Indians and Chinese extending to the native peoples of Polynesia. They are part of an inner history and shared memory of the species that no academia or education can eradicate. Yet only through the Rigveda have the actual words of these sages been preserved in their own language along with ancient commentaries as well.

Besides the historical development of intellect, science and technology, there has always been a continuation of various esoteric, spiritual, mystical and yogic traditions in humanity that have looked to a higher cosmic intelligence. These form the foundation of India's dharmic traditions of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain that are now spreading throughout the world to guide humanity again. Such deep meditation-approaches have existed throughout the world, but seldom with the support and respect they have had in India.

Sri Aurobindo was one of the greatest gurus and yogis of modern times and probably the most important teacher to uncover for humanity today the secret of the Vedas and of our ancient yogic heritage that influenced the globe from the earliest eras. His *Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* remain classics in their field, and must be read by anyone seeking to understand the spiritual origins and potentials of humanity that have long been lost to organised religion or to materialistic science.

The Rigveda is the oldest and largest of the Vedas, yet already demonstrates considerable antiquity and various levels and a long period of time for its vast compilation. It portrays an all-encompassing seer wisdom that unfolds all the secrets of nature, humanity and cosmic consciousness in a profound but enigmatic symbolism that is hard to decipher.

The Rigveda's language is profoundly mantric, also enigmatically phrased, a

weaving of sound, image and meaning on intertwining both the inner and outer worlds, the known and the unknown. For this reason the Rigveda has been seldom understood. Such mantric and symbolic approaches can be found throughout the ancient world, including the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* or the Chinese *I Ching* and similarly been misinterpreted to various degrees.

Mantra has always been a language of the spiritually aware and specially initiated. It was even more so in ancient times before an outer discourse and literal, worldly mind came to dominate the human species. Of these symbolic languages the Vedic is undoubtedly the most complex, intricate, fathomless — and yet to be understood.

Modern scholars, particularly from the West, are content to take the outer symbolism of the Vedas, which is considerable, as determinative, reducing the text to primitive nature worship or at best primitive poetry. We cannot blame them for this deficiency as such a mantric and meditative approach to consciousness is not part of their education, world view, values or intellectual disciplines, which is confined primarily to outer material factors of time, place and person, with ideas only relevant via technological applications.

There is certainly considerable traditional literature from Vedic texts like the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads that explain in more depth the Vedic teaching, though seldom in a comprehensive manner. Yet even these other Vedic texts are highly symbolic and are subject to the same type of misinterpretations as the more arcane Rigveda. Yet it should also be noted that, these later teachings came long after the appearance of the Rigveda, and were not always certain of the meaning of the original mantras either.

It is only in teachings on the Veda like those of Sri Aurobindo that we find the Vedic wisdom systematically explained for the modern mind, and the keys to its mantric symbolism and cosmic wisdom unfolded.

The Rigveda has ten books or mandalas with over a thousand hymns and over ten thousand verses, an extensive literature indeed. Yet to address the whole Vedic compendium it is difficult to examine one hymn and go into depths, into its secrets. That is what makes the current book, *The First Hymn of Rishi Vamadeva*, by R. Y. Deshpande unique and important.

Numerable rishis are mentioned in the Rigveda and many names and forms of the Divine or inner Self. The hymns of certain Rishis, particularly to Agni, the Vedic fire of consciousness, not just a material fire, remain poignant and transformative. Such are the hymns of Parashara Shāktya and Dirghatamas in the first mandala, Vishvamitra in the third mandala, the Atris in the fifth mandala, the Rishi Vamadeva in the fourth mandala.

Vamadeva Gautama, the prime seer of this fourth mandala, is the son of Rishi Gotama, whose hymns occur in the first mandala of the Rigveda, along with Vamadeva's brother Nodhas. The Gotamas later became the purohitas of the kingdom

of Videha, where Devi Sita took birth. The King Janakas of Videha, who were under the guidance of this rishi family, were famed as realised sages and great yogis. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad contains extensive dialogues between the sage Yajnavalkya and King Janaka, explaining the highest teachings of Self-knowledge. This may reflect Vamadeva's influence over time through his lineage. Vamadeva's hymns contain many notable mantras, including the famous Hamsa mantra (RV. IV.40.5).

R. Y. Deshpande is a great Vedic scholar, prolific author, disciple and writer on Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, including how it relates to the Veda. He has taken one of the key hymns of Rishi Vamadeva that explains the mystery of the ancient seers and their spiritual origins, notably the great Angirasas, the oldest and most central of the Vedic rishi families (gotras). He studies the hymn as a point of entrance in the vast Rigvedic universe beyond the ordinary human mind and its limited perceptions.

The book addresses this monumental mantric hymn on all levels of meaning, application, chanting, symbolism and structure. Having examined the existing literature of translations and interpretations of Vedic hymns, I do not think that any such comparable detailed and comprehensive study of a single hymn of the Rigveda has been made, and certainly not from a deeper vision like that of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

Deshpande's study approaches the Rigveda as a Book of Poems, primarily as a book of deep spiritual poems, a Book of Poetry, and other factors follow in the sequel afterwards. He searches out the sources from which these mantric poems originate, linking them to inspirations from the worlds of Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, and Overmind, the spiritual planes beyond Mind, as described in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. He follows Sri Aurobindo in his various writings about what he calls the Overmind Aesthetics.

This poetic study by Deshpande vis-à-vis the Rigveda is perhaps the first of its kind in the field. It shows that the Rigveda constitutes a much more exalted type of mantric poetry that opens the mind to higher planes of awareness far beyond the concerns of poetry in ordinary aesthetics that are largely confined to the intellect. Our inner being can follow such a mantric poetic energy towards a fundamental change of consciousness to a level of truth perception that takes us far beyond the ignorance of the world.

Focusing on one hymn, the author is able to go into depth into the mantras, language and symbolism, explaining clearly every word and unfolding every nuance of meaning.

Vedic mantric hymns are full of subtle and seed meanings, much like the Sutras or Kavya works of later times, but perhaps deeper than them. Rendering them into such an outward and spiritually limited language like modern English is not easy and requires much explication, as well as creating the proper background. It is not a question of merely a good translation but of creating the higher vision and

change of consciousness in the reader in order to appreciate what the seers have passed on to us.

Modern India has given us a number of important Vedic scholars who have researched the deeper meanings of the Rigveda. Notably along with Sri Aurobindo have also been Kapali Shastri and M. P. Pandit, as well as R. L. Kashyap. A related school rests upon the works of Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, chief disciple of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, who Kapali Shastri also followed, and Ganapati's disciple Brahmarshi Daivarata whom Maharshi Mahesh Yogi consulted with. Sri Anirvan, who translated Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* into Bengali, wrote important works like *Veda Mimamsa*. Swami Veda Bharati was yet another in whom the Rishi vision has awakened. R. Y. Deshpande is continuing this line of esoteric Vedic interpretation and adding new dimensions to it, further clarifying Sri Aurobindo's views.

In my recent book *Vedic Yoga: The Path of the Rishi*, I have similarly examined the Vedic teachings and their yogic and mystic secrets. Previously I translated about eighty hymns of the Rigveda in my *Wisdom of the Ancient Seers*. This came under the inspiration of M. P. Pandit who published some of my other Vedic writings in various Sri Aurobindo publications from 1980-1984. I share some of the same inspirations and am happy to find these presented in such expansiveness in Deshpande's book.

My main regret in my Vedic work is that I have not gone into great depth and detail with any single hymn in my effort to look at the Vedas as a whole. I am happy to see Dr. Deshpande does that here and in such a complete manner in which nothing of significance is left out and all details are thoroughly explored for their numerous implications.

His book — *The First Hymn of Rishi Vamadeva* — can inspire a new generation of Vedic scholars and yogis who are willing to explore this magnificence, the Rishi heritage with the vision of higher consciousness and the understanding that the entire universe dwells within us and that we have very far to go as a species to honour our own Rishi heritage as cosmic beings.

May the ancient Rishis, our spiritual fathers, again arise within us in order to inspire us and lead us through this difficult period of human history!

24 July 2018

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