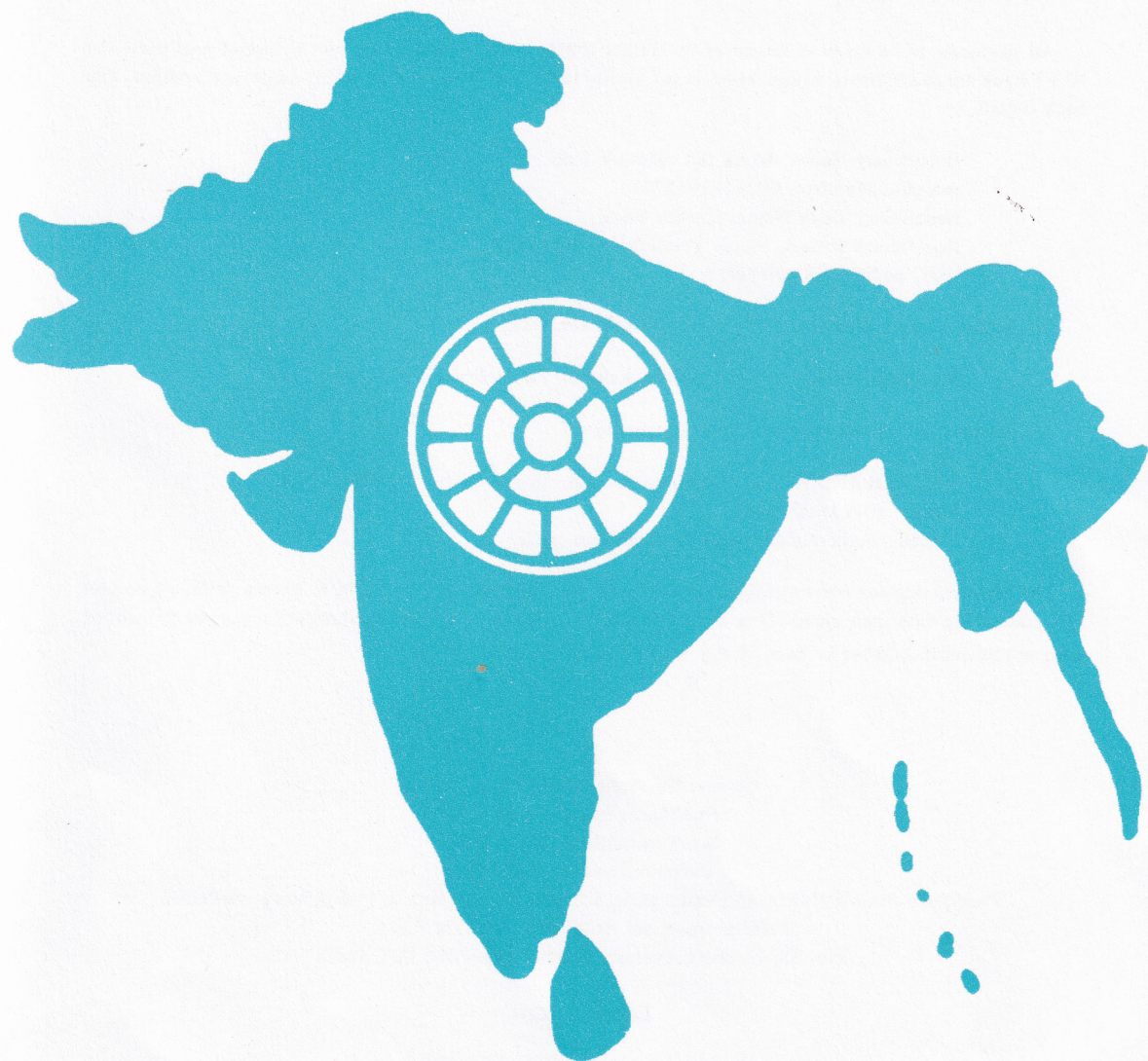


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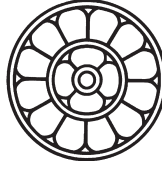
MAY 2023

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

MAY 2023

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY
INDIA



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



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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXVI

No. 5

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
“I”	...	7
THE DELIGHT OF WORKS	...	8
<i>The Mother</i>		
‘I AM ATHIRST FOR AN INTEGRAL UNION WITH THEE . . .’	...	11
ASPIRATION IN THE PHYSICAL FOR THE DIVINE’S LOVE	...	12
A CONVERSATION OF 22 NOVEMBER 1967	...	14
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>		
HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA		
1. The Prodigal Poetic Promise	...	22
<i>Nishikanto</i>		
THE KING OF KINGS	...	36
<i>Sahana</i>		
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — VIII	...	37
<i>Harindranath Chattopadhyay</i>		
THE FEAST OF YOUTH	...	48
<i>Arvind Sule</i>		
ARVIND SULE RECOLLECTS (INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY RAMAN REDDY)	...	54
<i>Gautam Malaker</i>		
“LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA” —		
SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN (PART 35)	...	63
Section 3: A Quiet and Humble Disposition		

“I”

This strutting “I” of human self and pride
Is a puppet built by Nature for her use,
And dances as her strong compulsions bid,
Forcefully feeble, brilliantly obtuse.

Our thinking is her leap of fluttering mind,
We hear and see by her constructed sense:
Our force is hers; her colours have combined
Our fly-upon-the-wheel magnificence.

He sits within who turns on her machine
These beings, portions of his mystery,
Many dwarf beams of his great calm sunshine,
A reflex of his sole infinity.

One mighty Self of cosmic act and thought
Employs this figure of a unit nought.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 619)



THE DELIGHT OF WORKS

In thy works there are always these three, the Master, the Worker and the Instrument. To define them in oneself rightly and rightly to possess them is the secret of works and of the delight of works.

Learn thou first to be the instrument of God and to accept thy Master. The instrument is this outward thing thou callest thyself; it is a mould of mind, a driving-force of power, a machinery of form, a thing full of springs and cogs and clamps and devices. Call not this the Worker or the Master; it can never be the Worker or the Master. Accept thyself humbly, yet proudly, devotedly, submissively and joyfully as a divine instrument.

There is no greater pride and glory than to be a perfect instrument of the Master.

Learn thou first absolutely to obey. The sword does not choose where it shall strike, the arrow does not ask whither it shall be driven, the springs of the machine do not insist on the product that shall be turned out from its labour. These things are settled by the intention and working of Nature and the more the conscious instrument learns to feel and obey the pure and essential law of its nature, the sooner shall the work turned out become perfect and flawless. Self-choice by the nervous motive-power, revolt of the physical and mental tool can only mar the working.

Let thyself drive in the breath of God and be as a leaf in the tempest; put thyself in His hand and be as the sword that strikes and the arrow that leaps to its target. Let thy mind be as the spring of the machine, let thy force be as the shooting of a piston, let thy work be as the grinding and shaping descent of the steel on its object. Let thy speech be the clang of the hammer on the anvil and the moan of the engine in its labour and the cry of the trumpet that proclaims the force of God to the regions. In whatsoever way do as an instrument the work that is natural to thee and appointed.

The sword has a joy in the battle-play, the arrow has a mirth in its hiss and its leaping, the earth has a rapture in its dizzy whirl through space, the sun has the royal ecstasy of its blazing splendours and its eternal motion. O thou self-conscious instrument, take thou too the delight of thy own appointed workings.

The sword did not ask to be made, nor does it resist its user, nor lament when it is broken. There is a joy of being made and a joy of being used and a joy of being put aside and a joy too of being broken. That equal joy discover.

Because thou hast mistaken the instrument for the worker and the master and because thou seekest to choose by the ignorance of thy desire thy own state and thy own profit and thy own utility, therefore thou hast suffering and anguish and hast many times to be thrust into the red hell of the furnace and hast many times to be reborn and reshaped and retempered until thou shalt have learned thy human lesson.

And all these things are because they are in thy unfinished nature. For Nature

is the worker and what is it that she works at? She shapes out of her crude mind and life and matter a fully conscious being.

*
* *

Know thyself next as the Worker. Understand thy nature to be the worker and thy own nature and All-Nature to be thyself.

This nature-self is not proper to thee nor limited. Thy nature has made the sun and the systems, the earth and her creatures, thyself and thine and all thou art and perceivest. It is thy friend and thine enemy, thy mother and thy devourer, thy lover and thy torturer, the sister of thy soul and an alien and a stranger, thy joy and thy sorrow, thy sin and thy virtue, thy strength and thy weakness, thy knowledge and thy ignorance. And yet it is none of these things, but something of which they are attempts and imperfect images. For beyond all these it is an original self-knowledge and an infinite force and innumerable quality.

But in thee there is a special movement, a proper nature and an individual energy. Follow that like a widening river till it leads thee to its infinite source and origin.

Know therefore thy body to be a knot in Matter and thy mind to be a whirl in universal Mind and thy life to be an eddy of Life that is for ever. Know thy force to be every other being's force and thy knowledge to be a glimmer from the light that belongs to no man and thy works to be made for thee and be delivered from the error of thy personality.

When that is done, thou shalt take thy free delight in the truth of thy individual being and in thy strength and in thy glory and in thy beauty and in thy knowledge; and in the denial of these things thou shalt take delight also. For all this is the dramatic mask of the Person and the self-image of the self-Sculptor.

Why shouldst thou limit thyself? Feel thyself also in the sword that strikes thee and the arms that embrace, in the blazing of the sun and the dance of the earth, in the flight of the eagle and the song of the nightingale, in all that is past and all that is now and all that is pressing forward to become. For thou art infinite and all this joy is possible to thee.

The Worker has the joy of her works and the joy of her Lover for whom she works. She knows herself to be his consciousness and his force, his knowledge and his reserving of knowledge, his unity and his self-division, his infinity and the finite of his being. Know thyself also to be these things; take thou also the delight of thy Lover.

There are those who know themselves as a workshop or an instrument or the thing worked, but they mistake the Worker for the Master; this too is an error. Those who fall into it can hardly arrive at her high, pure and perfect workings.

The instrument is finite in a personal image, the worker is universal with a personal trend, but neither of these is the Master; for neither is the true Person.

*
* *

Know last the Master to be thyself; but to this self put no form and seek for it no definition of quality. Be one with That in thy being, commune with That in thy consciousness, obey That in thy force, be subject to That and clasped by it in thy delight, fulfil That in thy life and body and mentality. Then before an opening eye within thee there shall emerge that true and only Person, thyself and not thyself, all others and more than all others, the Director and Enjoyer of thy works, the Master of the worker and the instrument, the Reveller and Trampler in the dance of the universe and yet hushed and alone with thee in thy soul's silent and inner chamber.

The joy of the Master possessed, there is nothing else for thee to conquer. For He shall give thee Himself and all things and all creatures' gettings and havings and doings and enjoyings for thy own proper portion, and He shall give thee that also which cannot be portioned.

Thou shalt contain in thy being thyself and all others and be that which is neither thyself nor all others. Of works this is the consummation and the summit.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 163-66)



‘I AM ATHIRST FOR AN INTEGRAL UNION WITH THEE . . .’

August 9, 1914

Lord, we are before Thee that Thy will may be done. Remove from our thought all obstacles, doubts, all weaknesses, limitations, all that veils our knowledge and obscures our understanding.

I am athirst for Thy consciousness, I am athirst for an integral union with Thee, not in inaction and a flight from physical activity but in a complete, absolute, perfect accomplishment of Thy will.

The splendour of Thy supreme light must spring forth from all the darkness that has swept down upon the earth.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 220)



ASPIRATION IN THE PHYSICAL FOR THE DIVINE'S LOVE

Here is the flower we have called “Aspiration in the Physical for the Divine’s Love.” By the “Physical” I mean the physical consciousness, the most ordinary outward-going consciousness, the normal consciousness of most human beings, which sets such great store by comfort, good food, good clothes, happy relationships, etc., instead of aspiring for the higher things. Aspiration in the physical for the Divine’s Love implies that the physical asks for nothing else save that it should feel how the Divine loves it. It realises that all its usual satisfactions are utterly insufficient. But there cannot be a compromise: if the physical wants the Divine’s Love it must want that alone and not say, “I shall have the Divine’s Love and at the same time keep my other attachments, needs and enjoyments. . . .”

The fundamental seat of aspiration from which it radiates or manifests in one part of the being or another is the psychic centre. When I speak of aspiration in the physical I mean that the very consciousness in you which hankers after material comfort and well-being should of itself, without being compelled by the higher parts of your nature, ask exclusively for the Divine’s Love. Usually you have to show it the Light by means of your higher parts; surely this has to be done persistently, otherwise the physical would never learn and it would take Nature’s common round of ages before it learns by itself. Indeed the round of Nature is intended to show it all possible sorts of satisfactions and by exhausting them convince it that none of them can really satisfy it and that what it is at bottom seeking is a divine satisfaction. In Yoga we hasten this slow process of Nature and insist on the physical consciousness seeing the truth and learning to recognise and want it. But how to show it the truth? Well, just as you bring a light into a dark room. Illumine the darkness of your physical consciousness with the intuition and aspiration of your more refined parts and keep on doing so till it realises how futile and unsatisfactory is its hunger for the low ordinary things, and turns spontaneously towards the truth. When it does turn, your whole life will be changed — the experience is unmistakable.

When, as a child, I used to complain to my mother about food or any such small matter she would always tell me to go and do my work or pursue my studies instead of bothering about trifles. She would ask me if I had the complacent idea that I was born for comfort. “You are born to realise the highest Ideal,” she would say and send me packing. She was quite right, though of course her notion of the highest Ideal was rather poor by our standards. We are all born for the highest Ideal:

therefore, whenever in our Ashram some petty request for more comfort and material happiness is refused, it is for your own good and to make you fulfil what you are here for. The refusal is actually a favour inasmuch as you are thereby considered worthy to stand before the highest Ideal and be shaped according to it.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 130-31)



A CONVERSATION OF 22 NOVEMBER 1967

There is a progress.

At the end of the physical demonstration on the 2nd of December,¹ all the children in a chorus are going to pray, and I have written the prayer for them. I am going to read it to you. But I had not thought of it; I was asked and I did it.

Probably they read the *Bulletin* and so they asked for a prayer — a prayer that is truly of the body. And I answered:

The prayer of the cells of the body

Now that, by the effect of the Grace, we are slowly emerging out of inconscience and waking to a conscious life, an ardent prayer rises in us for more light, more consciousness,

“O Supreme Lord of the universe, we implore Thee, give us the strength and the beauty, the harmonious perfection needed to be Thy divine instruments upon earth.”

It is almost a proclamation.

After the demonstration they are going to say it. It appears they are going to show the whole historical growth of physical culture and then at the end they will say: we have not come to the end, we are at the beginning of something and here is our prayer.

I was very glad.

You say there is a progress?

A progress! A tremendous progress! They had never thought, never; there in the totality they had never thought of achieving the transformation: they were thinking of becoming the best athletes in the world and all the usual nonsense.

The body, you see, they asked for a prayer of the *body*. They have come to understand that the body must begin to transform itself into something else. Before this, they were quite full of the whole history of physical culture in all the countries, and the country where it is most advanced and how to use the body as it is, etc. Well, it was the ideal of the Olympics. Now they have jumped beyond; that was the past, now they want transformation.

1. Every year on this date, the children of the School and the Ashram sadhaks who take part in sports give a general demonstration of physical culture.

Yes, people in their mind and their vital asked to become divine; well, it is all the old story of spirituality, reiterated for centuries. No, now it is the *body*. It is the body that wants to participate. It is altogether a progress.

Yes, but one can see very well how in the mind the aspiration maintains itself, how it lives by itself. In the heart also, one sees very well how the aspiration lives. But in the body? How to awaken this aspiration in the body?

But it is already fully awake for months in me! So it must be they have just now felt it and they feel it.

How is it done? — it is in the process of being done.

But how in oneself . . .

No, no, no. If it has been done in one single body, it can be done in all bodies.

Yes, but I ask how . . . yes, how?

Well, that is what I have been trying to explain for months.

First of all, to awaken the consciousness in the cells . . .

Well, yes!

Yes, of course, but once it is done, it is done: the consciousness wakes up more and more, the cells live consciously, aspire consciously. I have been trying to explain it for months; for months and months I have been trying to explain it. And so it is just that which has pleased me, that they have understood at least the possibility.

The same consciousness which was the monopoly of the vital and the mind has become that of the body: the consciousness is working in the cells of the body.

The cells of the body are becoming something conscious, wholly conscious.

A consciousness that is independent, not depending at all upon the vital or the mental consciousness: it is a bodily consciousness.

(Silence)

And this physical mind of which Sri Aurobindo said that it was an impossibility, that it was something that turns round and round and will always turn round and round, precisely without consciousness, like a kind of machine, that mind has been converted, has become silent, and in the silence it has received the inspiration of the Consciousness. And it has begun again to pray: the same prayers that were there before in the mind.

I quite understand what can happen in you, but . . .

But since it is happening in one body, it can happen in all bodies! I am not made of something different from the others. The difference is in consciousness, that is all. It is made exactly of the same thing, with the same things, I eat the same things, and it was made in the same way, absolutely.

And it was as stupid, as obscure, as unconscious, as obstinate as all the bodies of the world.

And this began when the doctors declared that I was very ill,² that was the beginning. Because the entire body was emptied of its habits and its forces, and then slowly, slowly, slowly the cells woke up to a new receptivity and opened themselves to the Divine Influence directly.

Otherwise there would be no hope. If this matter that started by being . . . Even a pebble is already an organisation — certainly it was worse than a pebble: unconscious, inert, absolute; and then, little by little, little by little that woke up. It sees, yes, it sees, it has only to open its eyes to see. Well, it is the same thing which happens: for the animal to become a man it did not require anything other than the infusion of a consciousness, a mental consciousness; and now it is the awakening of this consciousness which was altogether at the bottom, the very bottom. The mind is withdrawn, the vital is withdrawn, all is withdrawn. At the time when I was said to be ill, the mind was gone, the vital was gone, the body was left to itself — purposely. Yes, it is that, it is just because the vital and the mental were gone that it gave the impression of a very serious illness. And then, in the body left to itself, little by little the cells began to wake up to the consciousness (*gesture of aspiration rising up*); this consciousness that was infused into the body by the vital (from the mental into the vital, from the vital into the body), when both had disappeared, the consciousness emerged slowly, slowly. That started with a burst of the Love from the highest summit, the last supreme altitude, and then little by little, little by little, it came down into the body. And then this physical mind, that is to say, something altogether, altogether stupid, which used to turn round and round, repeating always the same thing, a hundred times the same thing, little by little it was illumined, became conscious, was organised, and then it entered into the silence; then in the silence the aspiration expressed itself in prayers.

(Silence)

It is the contradiction of all the spiritual assertions of the past: “If you want to live fully conscious of the divine life, give up your body — the body cannot follow”; well, Sri Aurobindo came and said: the body, not only can it follow, it can even be

2. During the spring of 1962.

the base for manifesting the Divine.

The work remains to be done.

But now a certitude is there. The result remains still far off, very far; much has to be done before the crust, the experience of the most external surface as it is, manifests what is happening within (not “within” in the spiritual depths: within the body). To enable that to manifest what is within . . . This will come last, and it is good it is so, for if it came before time, one would neglect the work, one would be so satisfied as to forget to finish his work; everything should be done within, should be well and good, should be thoroughly changed, then the outside will speak it out.

But it is all one single substance, all similar everywhere, and everywhere it was unconscious; and then what is remarkable is that *automatically* things are happening (*gesture showing points scattered everywhere in the world*) altogether unexpected, here and there, in people who do not even know anything.

(Silence)

The material cells have to obtain the capacity to receive and to manifest consciousness. And then what makes for a radical transformation is that in place of, so to say, an eternal and indefinite ascent, there is the appearance of a new type — it is a descent from above. The previous descent was a mental descent, and this one, Sri Aurobindo calls it a supramental descent; the impression is that of a descent of the supreme Consciousness which infuses itself into something that is capable of receiving it and manifesting it. And then, out of this, when it has been thoroughly churned (how long it will take, one does not know), a new form will take birth, which will be what Sri Aurobindo called the supramental form — which will be . . . it does not matter what, I do not know what these beings will be called.

How will they express themselves, how will they make themselves understood, and all that? . . . In man, it has developed very slowly. Only the mind has laboured much and basically has made things move quicker.

How is one going to reach there? . . . There will surely be stages in the manifestation, with perhaps a specimen that will come and say: this is how it is. (*Mother looks in front*) One sees that.

Only, when man came out of the animal, there was no means of recording — of noting down and keeping an account of the process — now it is quite different, so it will be more interesting.

(Silence)

But still at the present moment, the vast majority — the vast majority — of the intellectual humanity is perfectly satisfied with being busy with itself and its bits of progress like this (*Mother draws a microscopic circle*). It has not even — not even

the desire to be anything else.

This means that the coming of the superhuman being . . . it may very well pass unperceived or not be understood. One cannot say, for there is no analogy; evidently if a monkey, one of the big monkeys, had met the first man, he would simply have felt that it was a being a little . . . queer, that's all. But now it is different, because man thinks, reasons.

But with regard to all that is superior to man, man has been accustomed to think that these were beings . . . divine beings, that is to say, they had no body, they appeared in the light — in short, all the gods as they have been conceived — but it is not at all like that.

(Long silence)

Then?

You are not convinced?

Why don't you try?

Of course! That is why I put the question to you. I am not doubting anything whatsoever. I put the question to you, I asked you: "How is one to do it, I do not know how it is done." . . . For example, in the morning I shave myself; well, in the morning one is stupid, one is tired, the mind refuses to work, the vital refuses to work . . .

Yes, it is an excellent occasion.

Certainly, it is just what I do, and I say: well, no, I do not see. I do not know how to make it move — it does not move. It does not move unless I put my mind or vital or heart to it.

Bah!

It is not that I am doubting. I say that my body is an ass, quite possibly, but I do not doubt.

It is not an ass, poor fellow! *(Mother laughs)*

Doubts I do not have, but the question about the "how", that, yes, I do not know.

For me that problem never arose, because . . . When one plays music or does painting, one sees very well that the consciousness enters into the cells and these cells

become conscious. This experience, for example: there are things in a box and one says to the hand: “Take twelve”; (without counting, like that) the hand picks up the twelve and gives them to you. That is an experience that I had long, long ago. At the age of twenty I started having experiences like that, therefore I know. I knew how the consciousness works. Well, it is impossible to learn piano or to do painting unless the consciousness enters into the hands and the hands become conscious *independently* of the head. The head can be busy elsewhere, that has no importance. Besides, this is exactly what happens in the case of people called somnambulists: they have a consciousness belonging to the body that makes them move and do things [that are] quite independent of the mind and the vital.

I mean to say that when I am before the mirror for shaving, if I do not put within me the mantra or an aspiration coming from the heart, well, it is an inert block that is shaving, and add to that the physical mind whirling. But if I put a mantra or a mental will . . .

But no! It is the *body* that ends by saying the mantra! Spontaneously, so spontaneously that even if you by chance think of other things, your body will be saying the mantra. You do not have this experience?

No.

And it is the body that aspires, the body that says the mantra, the body that wants the light, the body that wants the consciousness — you, you can think of other things, Tom, Dick or Harry, a book, etc., it has no importance.

But now I understand very well, very well; in the beginning I did not understand, I believed that I was made “ill” so that I would stop the life that I was leading when I was downstairs³ — but I lead a life still more busy than the life downstairs, therefore . . . I asked myself why, whether it was a period of transition. But now I understand: cut off, I fainted in a swoon. That is why the doctor declared that I was ill: I could not move a step without fainting; I wanted to walk from here to there: on the way, pouf! I fainted. Someone had to hold me so that the body would not fall down. But as for me, I did not lose consciousness for a single minute. I fainted, but I was conscious, I saw my body, I knew that I had fainted, I did not lose consciousness, and the body also did not lose consciousness. So now I understand: it was cut off from the vital and the mental and left to its own resources; it was simply the body: all that it knew, all the experiences it had had, all the mastery that was there in all the states of being, the vital, the mental and above, all that gone! and this poor body left to itself. And then

3. Since this “illness” in 1962, Mother retired to her apartments upstairs.

naturally, little by little, all that was rebuilt, rebuilt, a conscious, purely conscious being.

Yes, I understand, I understand. But truly it was cut off, that I have known — I have seen — cut off, the states of being sent away: “Go away, you are no longer wanted.” And then a new life needed to be built up. And instead of the necessity of passing through all the states of being as was done before, by successive awakenings (*gesture of ascent step by step as done by the old yogis*) up to the highest, the very highest, beyond form — now it is not at all like that, it needed nothing at all of all that, it has simply to . . . (*gesture of aspiration that rises and opens like a flower*). Something has opened and developed within, and that is why this stupid mind has been organised, has been capable of being silent in an aspiration; and then . . . then it was the direct contact, without any intermediary — direct contact. And that it has now, all the while. All the while, all the while, the direct contact. And it is *the body*, it is not through all kinds of things and states of being, not at all, it is direct.

But once it is done (Sri Aurobindo has said this), once *one* body has done it, it has the capacity to pass it on to others: and I tell you, now — I do not say in the whole and in detail, probably not, but here and there (*gesture of scattering, indicating various points upon earth*) — all of a sudden one or another experience occurs in people. There are people (the majority) who are afraid; then naturally it goes away — it is because they were not sufficiently prepared within; if it is not the petty routine of every minute, of day to day, they have fear; and once they have fear, it is finished, it means that years of preparation will be needed for this to happen again. But there are some who are not afraid; an experience, all of a sudden! “Ah! . . .” Something altogether new, altogether unexpected, of which they never thought.

It is contagious, this I know. And it is the only hope, because if everyone had to go again through the same experience . . . Well, now I am ninety — at ninety people are tired, they have had enough of life. To do that one must feel young like a little child.

And it takes long, I see quite well that it has taken a long time.

And then, it is not done, it is being done, but it is not done — far from it — we are far from it. . . . What is the percentage of conscious cells? One does not know.

And from time to time there are some that scold the others. It is very amusing! They scold, they catch hold of them, tell them stupidities (in their way) — to those that want (*Mother draws a small circle*) to continue the old habits: digestion must be done in a certain way, absorption in a certain way, circulation in a certain way, respiration in a certain way . . . all the functions must be done according to the method of Nature; and when it is not like that, they become anxious. And then those that know, catch hold of them and put them under heavy bombardment in the name of the Lord. It is very amusing!

Something is translated in words (it is without words, but there something is translated in words) and then there are conversations among the cells (*Mother*

laughs): “Imbecile that you are! Why do you have fear? Don’t you see it is the Lord himself who is doing this to transform you?” And the other: “Ah! . . .” Then it remains quiet, and then opens itself and waits, and then . . . the pain goes away, the disorder goes away, and everything is put in order.

It is wonderful.

But if by mischance the mind comes in, starts to help or judge, then the whole thing stops, and all fall back into the old habit.

(Long silence)

In reality, it is the ego, vital, mental, etc., all that has been, pouf! taken away.

It was a radical operation.

And so now, there is a kind of suppleness, plasticity. And all this is learning — it is very much in relation with the whole (*horizontal gesture*), but it is learning to look for all its support, all its force, all its knowledge, all its light, all its will, all, all, like that (*vertical gesture, turned to the Supreme*), solely like that, in an extraordinary plasticity.

And then, the splendour of the Presence.

THE MOTHER

(Notes on the Way, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 91-101)



HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

1. THE PRODIGAL POETIC PROMISE

(a)

The Irish mystic and poet, AE, has written:

The gay romance of song
Unto the spirit's life doth not belong.

And it is true that AE utters the core of himself best in chaste simple whispers. But the spiritual feeling caught in the series of great little books published by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya in his early days is like a jet of rainbow-flame. Sometimes the colours fuse into a white light, but usually they sparkle and quiver and trace in the veil between the outward and the inward a variegated rift, so to speak, through which may be poured with an ever-largening impetus the luxuries of the Eternal. No poet writing in English in our day has given such a prodigal promise to convey the Spirit's authentic thrill as Chattopadhyaya.

I have the good fortune to have my perusal of his works prefaced by a personal impression of him at the height of his career as a young man. It was in 1926, when he was 39 years of age, at one of the weekly *soirées* organised by an energetic Begum ambitious of having gifted artists appear under her auspices to a cosmopolitan circle. Every Sunday she made a new lion: I happened to be caught in the trap of her enthusiasm, just a fortnight before Chattopadhyaya was launched upon us as the most Numidian of all the lions she had rejoiced in. I must confess that my own poetry at that time was hardly even an articulate mew; all that was leonine about me was perhaps the sweep of my mane. My poetry, nevertheless, was applauded; and when on his Sunday Chattopadhyaya appeared, a well-meaning mutual friend intimated to him that a rising poet was in the audience. But there seemed at first no chance for him to meet that "poet" — so great was the pressure on his versatile genius to pack itself within the couple of hours during which he was to be on the stage. And I must say he was a volcano compared to the crackle of burning twigs that had been the talent displayed hitherto in that circle. I looked and listened and lost myself; for, as that resonant, richly flexible, deep-vowelling tone filled the ear and that expressive fiery-gestured figure crossed the eye, I felt a strange beauty run through my veins and beat upon the intellect's reserve and judgment, until the whole being awoke to the perception of some elemental force blowing through Chattopadhyaya's personality as through a flute of the most profound tremolo possible.

He recited his poems, sang his songs, acted snatches from his plays; uplifted, bewitched, impassioned his audience; and when the whole gorgeous hubbub was over, and the flashing eyes and floating hair became more recognisably a fellow human being instead of a mouthpiece of incalculable magic, I found myself beckoned to view them at close quarters. The words spoken to me were very kind, though a trifle patronising; I could see at once a genuine love for poetry wherever it might come from; but before we could slip into the technical intimacies in which all writers of verse delight, there was a call on him to please the other artists who had gathered in his honour. So I retired, with a resolve to buy his complete works at the earliest opportunity and try him out in cold print away from his voice and gesture which I felt could pass off what might be thin pseudo-Sufism as fumes of the unmixed Wine. When I did go through his books I noticed certain flaws which had been missing during the recital but which I had managed dimly to suspect by recollection in tranquillity on my way home. These were that his mind, very subtle and plastic though it was with an astonishing power of various profusion, did not sufficiently exercise a power of massive or concentrated control; and that his imagination lived in a state of dazzling speed capable of being magically creative but lacking somewhat in that self-understanding which broods and chisels and sifts patiently when the creative furor slackens. Deficiencies like these, if accompanied by a flow of inspiration whose tumultuousness can make them like weeds upon a mighty wave, may be negligible and on the whole nugatory; they may seem even inevitable as a price for that unique phenomenon — a poet possessed; for they can be the outcome of that peculiar and rare type of genius which can produce so much and so richly that there is neither the time nor the necessity to refashion and perfect what has been already done. In short, instead of correcting a slightly flawed poem, a poet may spend the same time writing half a dozen new ones, at least three of which may be born as miraculous as Aphrodite fresh from the foam. But Chattopadhyaya's verse did not give me the impression that he had reached such a height of lavish excellence: he had to his credit many brief masterpieces, but as often as not he betrayed a danger of letting his poems get finished without the substance attaining the true imaginative crystallisation, and there was also a danger of the vocabulary becoming more decorative than passionate. Hence the defects could not be excused; still, I had the firm intuition that the whole drift of his genius was towards the beautiful prolificity that covers up all peccadilloes; for I could not help marking that his fluency was exceptional though not quite marvellous and that not a single poem of his, even among those that were flawed, failed to exhibit in however partial a form qualities of the first order and through three-quarters of it a really valuable inspiration. It was this abnormal fact that confirmed my experience, during the recital, of contact with a poetic surge deep and original beyond measure.

Before looking at some of the short miracles by which Chattopadhyaya has given a secure longevity to his verse I must record a minor aesthetic irritation. For

one thing, he makes an excessive use of certain hackneyed rhymes, though there also he is in the company of the Masters, for Crashaw in the most exalted flare of his religious aspiration couples “fire” with “desire” twice, with less than a dozen lines in between and only the plural to make a variation, while Swinburne who had the ingenuity to overcome the supposed unrhymableness of “babe” by producing that neglected poetic gem “astrolabe” could yet allow his inventive power to suffer complete paralysis whenever “fire” gleamed at him from the end of a line: like a penny in the slot it invariably drew out the stale delight of “desire”. The same fault is to be laid at the door of AE, forbidding us to read him at a stretch, “crystal purities” though many of his poems are. Chattopadhyaya mixes this “fire-desire” cult with a side-worship of the “God-clod” twins, the former cheapening in a total survey the technical impression on a critic and the latter bringing in sometimes an almost bathetic turn.

Another tendency which jars on one when it is aimless or distorts itself in what may be called, in Max-Nordause, “echolalia” — a tendency capable of a fine haunting or else epigrammatic effect but not seldom an easy result of negligence and an instrument of perverse ingenuity or rhetorical barrenness. Shakespeare is notorious for his pun-mania and in his comic scenes one may excuse him provided he is neat and does not torture the language too much; but nobody can help jibbing at the immortal Will’s becoming so unrhymically wilful as to write “your eye I eyed”. Chattopadhyaya, who with myself is in private life a victim to Shakespeare’s disease, keeps punning out of his poetry; still, even an innocent line like

And be the being I was meant to be

does not make charming homophony, nor does his later and most magnificent poetic phase gain by the sudden cropping up of a lesson in grammar such as

Began before Beginning was begun.

Far from having powerful or profound reverberations the phrase jolts against the tympanum as nothing except a thought-saving blatancy. . . . All this is rather by the way, for it would be perverse to insinuate that the genuine worth of his poetry is spoilt on the whole by occasional blots. And what that worth is can be conveyed only by superlatives.

It may not be out of place in appreciating Chattopadhyaya to defend him against a probable charge of being exotic and therefore overstrained or meretricious. Exoticism need not always be an artificial hot-house product; when it blossoms directly from an imaginative thrill, there is a sovereign excess about it which carries a high artistic potency of suggestion. The Song of Solomon is exotic in its poignant richness of word and vision; the Book of Job is exotic in the figurative revel of its

grandiose closing argument; Spenser and Keats are exotic when they diffuse their heavily-charged sensuousness. What is essential is that confusion should be avoided and some clear outline cling to the warm colour-riot both *en masse* and in the details, just as tropical efflorescence comes to the eye not only with a clean-cut fiery impact in general but also with a vivid distinctness of colourful particulars. Wherever in Chattopadhyaya at his best a tropical brightness is perceived, the hues compose unmistakable pictures crowding towards a total significance, though I dare say those who are used to a less warm and fertile atmosphere of mind may take time to adjust their perspective.

The difficulty is perhaps enhanced by the peculiar source of this poet's opulent ardour; for that source is the ancient mystic insight which feels a supreme Oneness behind and within the universe, an unfamiliar light consciously playing through the pageant of sky, passion of sea, prodigality of earth, and transmuting even the dull dross of shadow and ugliness to a hint or symbol round which the divine joy can irradiate. Once, however, a sympathetic insight is opened, the reader moves with ease among the spiritually sensuous intensities expressed by Chattopadhyaya and realises how grievous the loss might be if he were to find no entrance to the heart of this God-drunk music. There is an early poem which very well represents his exoticism in a certain aspect of the mystic mood:

You flood my music with your autumn silence
And burn me in the flame-burst of your spring.
Lo! through my beggar-being's tattered garments
Resplendent shines your crystal heart, my King!

Like a rich song you chant your red-fire sunrise,
Deep in my dreams, and forge your white-flame moon. . . .
You hide the crimson secret of your sunset,
And the pure, golden message of your noon.

You fashion cool-grey clouds within my body,
And weave your rain into a diamond mesh.
The Universal Beauty dances, dances
A glimmering peacock in my flowering flesh!

Obviously, the stanzas do not grow according to an explicit logical method or paint their pictures with an eye to surface meaning. They must be considered by stepping a little back from the usual domain of the imagination and then the coherence and the clarity appear. The first two lines proclaim the combined peace and power of the divine presence as felt by the poet — the peace mellow and fruitful, the power a fiery bloom — in a kind of correspondence between the world without

and the world within. The next two subtly connect up with the preceding pair by intimating with paradoxical felicity how the keenly felt divine presence within is able to manifest its glory despite the faults and frailties of human nature: we are reminded of Plato's famous rejoinder to Diogenes — "Your pride peeps out through the holes of your raggedness", but here it is the high and rare splendour of the spirit taking by surprise the poor surface self: not only the so-called beautiful but even the wretched does the King of Kings use for a gateway into the universe. The language again joins the ideas of peace and power: "crystal" indicates the cool virgin beauty which is yet here not void of a royal resplendence. The second stanza continues the same theme with a different set of images and symbols: the pulse of life in the poet is in tune with the spiritual throb at the core of each day's procession of sky-moods — flaring sunrise and sunset, midnight's lucid trance of moon and midday's unperturbed lustre. A slight technical immaturity of expression renders the poem at this point not so finished as might be desired, for "Deep in my dreams" is too far to be easily understood with "You hide . . ." The final verse carries the dominant motif a step further by transferring the spirit's thrill to the very physical being: body and soul seem to fuse in one illimitable sensation of light, as if the entire cosmos were unfolding its secret to the individual. Clouds become soft serenities in him and the rain a gorgeous yet pure intricacy of life-movement whereby the flesh blossoms into perfection, and the whole cosmic spirit, drunk with its own infinite magnificence, traces there its rhythm of delight:

The Universal Beauty dances, dances
A glimmering peacock in my flowering flesh!

This is a climax of the exotic imagination, a figure and fantasy packed with the richest significance and consummating the fundamental idea by a last stroke of concrete colour.

A vision analogous in breadth and vivid cumulativeness of meaning to this *grand finale*, though by a puissant rather than a rhapsodical utterance, is William Watson's symbolisation of the factor of disharmony in the world by the figure of the raven: he suggests the strange shadow whose raucous intrusion and weird touch are felt everywhere. Here is his concluding verse —

Coils the labyrinthine sea
Duteous to the lunar will,
But some discord stealthily
Vexes the world-ditty still,
And the bird that caws and caws
Clasps Creation with his claws.

The end of this verse compares very fairly in poetic excellence, while contrasting in psychological attitude, with Chattopadhyaya's close. It is of interest also as what Chattopadhyaya himself might have written in the period subsequent to that which gave birth to his first book. He came like a bacchanal of paradise, scattering largesse of poetic joy; but soon another mood possessed him or, more accurately, shared his soul — the raven and the peacock existing now side by side. That this should occur one could have predicted from the acute sensibility of his nature. I remember that when I saw his face during the recital I said to myself, "Here is a highly strung temperament — clearly a man who would be moved to intense passion, either joy or grief, and would most probably veer from one extreme to the other — a mind borne away on great impulsive gusts, plunging headlong into whatever seems momentous to him, living, therefore, dangerously but with prodigious possibilities of development along the bent his mood assumes."

(b)

The bent of anguish which disengages itself from the various velleities of Chattopadhyaya's verse brings with it an intellectual confrontation of the world-problem. Not, to be sure, a logical arguing in poetry; a mental strength is what I mean and a faculty to catch, more often than before, intuitions through the aesthetic sensation. The old exoticism remains — accompanied by a more contemplative force, since there mingles with his acute experience of world-pain a longing to solve its great riddle. Faith, too, keeps its old fervour and thus the new philosophical temper in him accepts pain with open arms like an inscrutable beloved with whom he has to wrestle to the point of death before he can earn a surrender of all-transmuting bliss. Suffering is a sacred privilege to him: he is pushed by it not to blaspheme or even doubt, but nearer and nearer the goal he seeks. Though, like William Watson in the "Crow"-stanza, he can be puzzled by the spectre of discord haunting the world-ditty, he utilises the invasion of his being by it to raise to yet intenser a pitch his aspiration towards the ideal harmony. "Give me the sorrow that shall take me to the Holy of Holies," he seems to cry: "welcome grief and tears and heartbreak — if the sharp agony rend the inner veil, the salt tears corrode my chains, the heartbreak fling wide open a door to the All-Beautiful." He even regards pain as an indispensable means for attaining the godhead, since the sum of impurity in human nature is so massive that a burning sacrifice alone can destroy it to the full. A characteristic expression of this mood is in these twelve lines:

O pain, I love the lonely wine-red gleam
 Within your deep and ever-wakeful eyes:
 Old Arab in the dark tent of my dream
 Under the burning skies.

Excess of ecstasy, immortal pain,
 Comrade of love, companion of desire,
 Lone Bedouin riding through life's desert plain
 A camel of red fire.

Most splendid traveller of eternity
 In whose first footfall the wide world began,
 A holy Mecca in the heart of me
 Awaits your caravan.

The poetic quality here is striking, but it is possible to overlook the implications which certain phrases have and which make that quality singularly rich for its thought-stuff. The eyes of pain are “deep and ever-wakeful” and “wine-red” not only because they have become sunken and blood-shot with sleeplessness; there dwells an unobscurable profundity in them and their red gleam reveals some hidden joy behind, a relish as of some rare wine that induces a mystic self-awakening. For this pain is the biting disappointment with things that pass turned into intense longing for the Eternal — a longing which by the splendour of its vision and the arduousness of its effort is miraculously bitter-sweet: just because the splendour is so great, the arduousness necessary to compass it is gigantic — the excess of the ecstasy causing the unbearable travail. The line “In whose first footfall the wide world began” adds a shade broader to the conception by envisaging the entire time-process as a difficult movement from eternity to eternity through the immortal Spirit's self-separation and self-pursuit, a long cyclic pilgrimage each individual can hasten in himself if he directs life's pain to a sacred end, “a holy Mecca” of prayer — that is, if he invites it to perform a mystic worship through his inner consciousness.

Another remarkable poem tinged by the same mood is “Challenge”; it has, besides, a more personal note:

You have done well
 By having hurled me into such deep hell,
 Since from its fires which burn my heart and eyes
 I shall erelong arise
 Like brave sweet incense to the peaks of time
 Your feet could never climb!

Star in your high estate,
 Who share not now the darkness of my fate!
 Some sudden night you will begin to be
 A nursling light in my eternity,
 Since in deep sorrow I am being bent
 To an unfathomable firmament.

The idea of suffering spiritualised is presented vividly by the similitude of incense rising self-offered to the Divine from a holocaust of human life: the epithets “brave” and “sweet” convey the exact psychological experience of sorrow accepted as a means to direct the soul of desire to a sacred end. A subtler and more powerful imagination leaps from the second stanza. By addressing his tormenter as “star” the poet not only suggests her once-idealised loveliness now standing aloof from his misery in cold disdain, but also enhances to an utter transcendence the mysterious “peaks of time” which he has declared unscalable by her feet. For, even star-height seems too poor compared with the altitude his soul has felt as its inevitable destiny. And what is this altitude? “an unfathomable firmament” wherein constellations are lost and light-years dwarfed into a negligible span — a lofty God-consciousness before which all other exalted states are nothing, but which the poet links up to “deep sorrow” by the apt word “bent”. The metaphorical feat here has well-nigh no parallel in poetic literature for profound novelty, though others have figured the sky in language felicitous or striking. We have Blanco White’s fine and adequate

This glorious canopy of light and blue —

there is Baudelaire’s *recherché* exclamation,

Le Ciel! couvercle noir de la grande marmite —

and its less hectic counterpart in Fitzgerald’s Omar,

And that inverted bowl we call the sky
Whereunder crawling coop’t we live and die —

Shelley has an unforgettable image in speaking of Byron,

The Pilgrim of Eternity whose fame
Over his living head like Heaven is bent,
An early but enduring monument.

The last idea would be the most original as well as the grandest, if Chattopadhyaya did not exceed it by a further subtlety of boldness: to have pressed the optical illusion of the sky’s bend into service of a condition of torture fraught with immense spiritual possibilities is *feliciter audax* to a supreme revelatory point. It represents to my mind Chattopadhyaya’s summit in his young days in what I have distinguished as the capacity to receive intuitions through the poetic intelligence, just as the lines about the dancing peacock I have emphasised earlier are his climax through the aesthetic sensation.

The philosophy of suffering embodied in the two poems quoted above is not

the sole expression given by him to his developing poetic intelligence. He does not become insensitive to the waves of beauty that in his earliest period flooded his being; the old joy remains despite the new sorrow, for all beauty seems to him the conquest won by the Spirit over the obstacles in the way of its universal manifestation, it is the constant sign of God's emergence and increase. The pain-motif brought in a certain ache for the supracosmic; and the theory of Maya, with a stress on some featureless light and peace beyond, plays a perceptible though not very prominent role henceforth in his verse. He has moods when the issue of suffering turned soulwards appears to be an escape into a "white hush" far from earth's panorama of change and even the beauty and delight possible here a path to a perfection behind the temporal and the manifest, behind also the larger occult planes that form earth's immediate background and from which the poets draw the multi-hued stuff of their dreams. At such times his colourful poetry becomes like the pictures of the young Andhra artist whose premature death he commemorates in a series of sonnets:

In the deep red, sweet yellow, quiet green
 We see the gorgeous striving of your mind
 Towards the perfect ultimate serene
 Vision of Love which strikes all colour blind.

The main trend, however, of his muse is to sing the Spirit as realisable within the time-process, so that the movement from eternity to eternity may mean the suffusion of each hour by the secret Splendour:

What do I seek beyond the golden edges of the earth?
 Here is the Image clothed in light and mystery and fire.
 In conscious hours our restless human hands can bring to birth
 All that the Spirit may desire.

The glories of beyond are here, the destiny of skies
 Is being fulfilled on earth; the fate of every silver star
 Is hidden in a seed. A sudden vision in my eyes
 Plucks all the radiance from afar.

Where do you wander, restless heart? All that you seek is born
 Each moment in you, though you know it not, since you are blind.
 See, I am clothed in regal gold and purple cloths of morn
 And mantled in the scented wind.

This cry, twelve lines long like much of his best verse, is a fitting note on which to end a survey of Chattopadhyaya's genius before its self-consecration for a couple

of years to Sri Aurobindo's yoga in the Ashram at Pondicherry. But there are some other peculiarities of his work deserving notice. Here the aesthetic sensation and the poetic intelligence are openly allied, the lines

A sudden vision in my eyes
Plucks all the radiance from afar

being again a phase of the latter in an intuitive crystallisation of considerable power.

The seventy and odd sonnets, too, that we have from him during his early years illustrate more or less the same alliance; they give a very mature ring and they point to a rather prolific future in the genre, for he writes them with an inspired ease not usually to be found where a firm yet flexible tone and structure are requisite for success as in the Italian form, and Chattopadhyaya's penchant is for that: even when the sestet is English *à la* Shakespeare, the octave he generally builds with a Petrarchan punctiliousness of rhyme. The muscular energy other sonneteers employ is almost absent: instead, a nimble quickness executes the complexities — a magician and not a master-builder rears up the flawless fabric. There is no dearth of force whenever that is necessary, but it is of a man sure-footedly leaping up difficult edges rather than strenuously climbing them. Alfred Douglas has written a sonnet with a curiously phrased sestet of great strength —

Only to build one crystal barrier
Against this sea which beats upon our days;
To ransom one lost moment with a rhyme
Or if fate cries and grudging gods demur,
To clutch life's hair, and thrust one naked phrase
Like a lean knife between the ribs of Time.

Critics might, like grudging gods, demur to the slightly histrionic shade, but the compressed aphoristic magnificence of the traditional sonnet-language is in ample evidence. Now listen to Chattopadhyaya:

One perilous moment wherein must be told
All the deep-hidden mysteries which lie
Within a lifetime's darkness like pure gold:
One moment lent to utter the great cry
Of love, which lost, Time greyly passes by
And leaves the world broken and bent and old.

The technique leans on a subtle urge, a widening out to fill the form and not a packing in as by Alfred Douglas, but the strength is there and as if to give conclusive proof

of it the inverted foot made by “broken” violates the metre by a highly effective jerk emphasising the sense.

Taken ensemble, Chattopadhyaya’s accomplishment in the sonnet-medium — before Sri Aurobindo’s series of sonnets in 1939 — is perhaps the most notable in our century by its sustained poetry. Rupert Brooke has been awarded the palm by English critics but his work is too scarce and the highest inspiration peeps out just once or twice, whereas Chattopadhyaya has in almost every sonnet some genuine flash. The former has, however, one feature which is very striking and worth emulating — a vivid quaver and restless beauty expressed technically by anapaests and an unusual overrunning from line to line. Chattopadhyaya’s vividness is due to colour and image, while the feeling-tone depends on the shortness or length of sentence, grammatical staccato or suspense. It is difficult to choose the very best when so much merit is scattered throughout: perhaps the following catches the typical accent in more than one variety:

Clouds close and clash across the starry deep
And darken every corner of the sky.
Holding their breath under a sullen sweep
Of sudden rain, the lakes and meadows lie. . . .
Loud wind and storm have hushed the croak and cry
Of frog and cricket. Lightning flashes leap
Like amber serpents from the grey-black sleep
Of clouds, and earth seems like a blind man’s eye!

But tranquil dreams the sky behind the storm
And the clear stars burn with a fleckless flame
Beyond the veils which the dim clouds have drawn
Across them, as the dreams serene and warm
In me though storm-clouds cover up Thy name
At times between the weeping dusk and dawn.

Chattopadhyaya’s performance with the sonnet has in a particular context disclosed a quality not represented in the above — a quality which is neither the poetic intelligence nor the aesthetic sensation, but can only be described as creative insight: the rhythm and the language, though not superior as art to what is done elsewhere, are then of a kind eminently desirable by one who seeks to utter the Spirit from increasingly authentic sources, for the word-music bears upon its surge an experience, or at least the reflection of an experience, proper to occult planes not easy of access. Chattopadhyaya has not written any poem woven all of this rare light, but in places it breaks through and we have a magic and an intonation practised by only a few poets in their most spiritual moments. I shall give three examples, two

occurring outside the sonnet-sequences. He sees once the twilight fall like some great benediction of quiet from the sky over “the ripening gold of rice fields” — yet there is no quiet in his own heart and the “black storm” raging in it threatens to destroy for him the spell:

What lips are these which strive with shadowy breath
To extinguish the rich flame upon the height?

In the words and the music of these lines the atmosphere of the very spell and the weird darkness opposing it enters: it is not just explained or imaged — the veil has been stirred aside from across mysterious regions. On another occasion he writes of “plying swift oars of inwardness” in “a dim boat of dreams” and passing beyond all time and change until he reaches

the city of old sleep
Where the lone ways are crowded with white peace.

The whole occult picture is made to grow real, one feels oneself actually in that unknown place — the poetic suggestion from there has come out pure and sheer, helped by the vowellation, the trio of spondees and, in a line of monosyllabic slowness, the significant dissyllable “crowded” as if by its single occurrence to enforce the fact that it was only with aloof calm that the ways of the sleep-city were packed. Four lines in one of the sonnets upon the young Andhra artist’s death reflect the most intimate mystic revelation intuited by Chattopadhyaya direct on some inner plane:

Departing, you have left a track of light
Over the solitary ocean-deep
Of my dark soul across which day and night
My body voyages like a boat of sleep.

The vision and the experience emerge by degrees, gather more and more concrete fulness until in the last line the native vibration of them flows out. The total effect is a highwater-mark of creative insight.

At this point I might have said:

“If the faculty of creative insight develops side by side with the exotic and the mental strain for Chattopadhyaya’s genius, we must have, as a result, work of unprecedented depth as well as exuberance and power. Already in 1934, when he has joined Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram, the bulk of his work is sure of a permanent place in English literature: he will hardly lie on a lower level than AE and Yeats; but they have come to the fading hour of life, all their triumphs lie behind them — Chattopadhyaya is still in mid-career and his future is big with a versatile fruition to which it is hard

to assign cautious boundaries. There is a flow in his richness that is prophetic of diverse self-fulfilment on a grand scale with regard both to the swelling number of individual poems and to work executed in large proportions. Among shorter poetic forms one kind strikes us as hardly exploited elsewhere by his published books. In them we come across rhapsody bejewelled with sense-colour, reflection alive with apposite simile and metaphor, vision vibrating with imagery of truth — but the personal emotion-cry of a lyric directness is not often heard. Lyricism is present, yet rarely direct and personal as for instance in Shelley, and when the peculiar mood is felt it is not with the mystic touch discoverable in all places. Chattopadhyaya has responded to the Divine as a presence suffusing Nature, haunting the kingdom of thought, sweeping down strange curves of world on unfamiliar world other than this; what he has not awakened to is the Divine as a person, an archetype of the human nature — face and lips and hands and feet that are perfect and at the same time like ours by a close warmth.

“Shelley and Yeats mix the ideal and the real in a manner that is mystic by imagination, not by experience: Emilia Viviani was in fact nothing save a fancied symbol of the Soul within Shelley’s soul, and the woman with odorous twilight about her tresses and about her mouth is a mere shadow hinting by gesture here and there the Rose of all Roses enshrined in Yeats’s heart. But the personal emotion burns none the less, joining its heat to the light of high dreams: in Chattopadhyaya the two elements fall almost apart as if he could not somehow adjust a blending of the human shade and the divine substance — except on a couple of occasions and then too not in the finest vein. The purely human love-poems, though not negligible, suffer by comparison with the unstrained fire in the mystic pieces: only one stands out, altogether non-mystic yet steeped in witchery, to indicate his potentialities if ever he were to fill himself with a passion for God as a spiritual body, an archetype of the human. This extraordinary lyric should take its place beside Robert Bridge’s ‘Awake, my heart, to be loved, awake, awake!’ Bridge’s stanzas have ranked with the supreme cries of English lyricism by an exalted sweetness; this poem of Chattopadhyaya’s is a more simple rapture but just for that simplicity works perhaps a more intimate magic:

My love and I will meet each other again,
O joy, it is going to be soon and very soon.
And when we meet we will kiss each other’s pain,
Kiss each other’s pain away under the moon.

Though I have wounded my love she will come to me,
For she, my love, is generous, she is so kind.
Pour more goldenly, light of day, on the tree!
Touch the leaves at twilight more tenderly, wind!

Though I have spoken to her unbeautiful words,
 Though I have broken her heart she will come again.
 Sing more sweetly at dawn, O beautiful birds!
 Slip more silverly over the stones, O rain!

The spontaneous technique is beyond praise: the varied tremolo of glide-anapaests, the effective truncation of initial feet in the more ecstatic lines, the euphonious surprise of other less usual stress-arrangements — and running through all these modulations a play of long vowels and ringing liquids and lapsing sibilants. It is a pity we do not have more of this impassioned imaginative delicacy in Chattopadhyaya's verse — but that may be because its complete outflow has waited for the true bent of his personal emotion to manifest itself: that is, in the mystic way, as all other parts of his nature have done.

“A second line of development is towards creations of long breath, poems or poetic dramas conceived and constructed largely, bold sweeping canvasses whereon the full-blown prolificity of which he seems capable if signs can be believed shall paint some story of the soul with occult planes of forces and personalities and godheads as its theatre. The plays he has produced ere now are fine poetry but the blank verse tends to be a rich monotone because of a lack of strong variations in style and rhythm; besides, they are too brief to claim a royal afflatus of idea and craftsmanship. That he would write short poems in abundance enough to put him on a par with any other English poet who has done the same is certain. But to deal out a generous quantity of excellent quality in small and separate outbursts is not the sole factor determining poetic rank; the decisive factor which lifts one clean to the top is the gift of designing a spacious, a palatial, a multitudinous unity. By this time, the thirties [1930s], we know only one attempt to make mightily; but Hardy's *Dynasts* is a sprawling greatness. Though its plan has behind it an intention more intricate and extensive than the *Iliad*, it lacks the organic control the latter, for all our vagueness about its single authorship, exhibits so lucidly to the mind, and it suffers also by an unsteady poetic fire in the various parts. If Chattopadhyaya makes something even less colossal yet large and poetic enough, if he fashions a new *Prometheus Unbound*, essays and finishes another *Hyperion* or rebuilds a *Paradiso*, in terms of a fresh and mature mystic originality, he will stand like a giant in the dawn of a new era, his masterpiece gathering its lines of light from a creative Sun beyond both our day and our darkness.”

(To be continued)

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D SETHNA)

(Reprinted from *Inspiration and Effort — Studies in Literary Attitude and Expression*,
 1995, pp. 161-80)

THE KING OF KINGS

The King of kings has made you a king,
Your sceptre gave, your throne of gold,
Men and fair maids for retinue,
Your swords of sheen, your warriors bold,
Your crown, your flag, your victor-pomps,
High elephants and steeds of pride,
The wise to counsel, the strong to serve,
And queens of beauty at your side.

To me He gave His alms of grace,
My little wallet full of songs,
His azure heavens for my robe,
His earth, my seat, to me belongs.
My sleeping room is His wide world,
Planet and star for bulb and lamp:
The King of kings who beggared me
Walks by my side, a comrade tramp.

NISHIKANTO

*Translated by Sri Aurobindo*¹

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 571)

1. The King of kings, by Nishikanto (1909-1973). An early typed copy of this translation is marked: "Translated by Sri Aurobindo from Nishikanto's song, 7.2.1941."

SAHANA'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — VIII

(Continued from the issue of April 2023)

Last night I felt as if a force was coming from you. This morning too, after receiving Sri Aurobindo's letter, I felt the force coming for a long time. It was clear, though the body was tired.

Yes, the Force was sent, but especially for strength and quiet in the nerves and quiet in the mind so that there might be sleep. I shall continue till the sleep and quiet come, try to be quietly open and recover. (3.3.35)

*

Mother Divine, I hear that Sri Aurobindo's eye has become red from overwork. I am very sorry that I have been writing every day for my health. Until he is a little better I won't write any more.

About my food, it is true that I don't eat much because I am afraid about my liver trouble; so I don't eat sometimes even if I feel hungry, and there is always nervousness due to fear of getting fat. Anyhow, if it is necessary I will take more food.

Don't stop writing. Your letters are short and will not interfere; besides my eye is better and white, I have to be careful about it, it does not need complete rest.

To suppress hunger like that is not good, it very often creates disorder — I doubt whether fatness and thinness of a healthy kind depends on the amount of food taken — there are people who eat well and remain thin and others who take only one meal a day and remain fat. By underfeeding (taking less than the body really needs) one may get emaciated, but that is not a healthy state. The doctors say it depends mostly on the working of certain glands. Anyhow the important thing is now to get the nervous strength back.

As for the liver also, eating little does not help, very often it makes the liver sluggish so that it works less well. What is recommended for liver trouble is to avoid greasy food and much eating of sweets and that is also one way of avoiding fat. But to eat too little is not good — it may be necessary in some stomach or intestine illness, but not for the ordinary liver trouble. What about taking a walk (for exercise and fresh air) daily? (15.3.35)

*

Dear Mother, last night I slept well, thanks to your grace. There was no nervous disturbance. An inner quiet and peace came and the body too felt a soothing effect.

I am glad to know the disturbance was expelled last night — now the receptivity of the body consciousness has to be kept so that it may not at all return or, if it tries, may immediately be expelled. You must always try to keep the quietude, not allow depressing or disturbing thoughts or feelings to enter you or take hold of your mind or your speech — there is no true reason after one has gained the inner quietness and wideness why that should be allowed to lapse and these things enter. And if the mind keeps the quietude and receptivity to higher forces only, it can then easily pass on that quietude and receptivity to the body consciousness and even to the material cells of the body. (2.4.35)

*

Mother, when you accept somebody, doesn't it mean that you have found in him even a small part that desires sincerely the Divine and that you give him a chance for it? Accepting someone permanently — does it mean anything more than that?

What you say about whom we receive that if one part of them sincerely desires the Divine, we give them a chance — is quite true. If we demanded more at the beginning, exceedingly few would be able to commence the journey towards the Divine. (2.4.35)

*

Sri Aurobindo, kindly give me a clear and satisfying answer to this question: Can a person, who brings up another person's child as his own, love him as much as his own child? The question is Jyotirmoyee's to Nolina. Nolina says that in her experience it is possible. Dilip says it is not at all possible. Nolini says, why not? He says it is quite possible. What is your opinion? We would like to know and understand.

It is certainly possible because it often happens — especially with women in whom the maternal instinct is easily aroused, but it happens to men also. Especially the very fact of bringing up a child in that intimate way has the tendency to create a feeling which may be tenderness or affection only but may be and often is even strong love. (8.4.35)

*

Mother, my mind was disturbed when I heard about the incidents regarding the attitude and behaviour of M and others; they went on turning in my head. I can see clearly the matter. I have been neither hurt nor shocked by it. I could see rather calmly and straightforwardly the movement. Only the physical mind was making too much noise over the matter.

That should not happen. Once a subject or thought is dealt with by the perception, you must have the power to drop it altogether out of your consciousness. (7.5.35)

*

Mother, see what has happened! So long I was going on well, but today the memory of the past was coming and going like pictures before my mind. I was almost pressed down by them. I got up to meditate, but failed; then I tried to reject — no success. I couldn't separate myself at all. These things stop the progress and I feel heavy and exhausted.

So long as you have not learned the lesson the past had to give you, it comes back on you. Notice carefully what kind of remembrances come, you will see that they are connected with some psychological movements in you that have to be got rid of. So you must be prepared to recognise all that was not right in you and is still not corrected, not allow any vanity or self-righteousness to cloud your vision. (24.10.32)

*

When I perceive that I should tell you something but there is an unwillingness on my part, I force myself to let you know so that your light and force can descend on that part. Is this forcing a mental action? Even though there was a desire to hide before telling, yet after telling, satisfaction and relief are the result in spite of the action having been forced.

It is quite all right. It is not a mental rule, but comes from the psychic being.

Mother Divine, there was another discussion about mind somewhere else, especially about your asking us to reject mental movement. I won't write to you all that I felt and said. Here I am putting only a little bit of it.

I can feel what is the real function of the mind. And I feel that what generally people call mind or intellect is only the movement of the physical mind (because only the physical mind creates doubts — is it not so, Mother?) not the clear passive and silent mind or the higher or intuitive mind which can be the true expression of the higher things and the seat of knowledge. When you

discourage mental movement it is, I feel, this limited physical mind's obscure and doubt-creating movement. Am I right?

You answered extremely well.

I am writing to Sri Aurobindo on control of speech: "I can't make any progress in this respect. At every step I feel its necessity, but I can't carry it out rightly. As a result, many unpleasant and undesirable things happen causing mental friction and one has to pay a heavy price for it, especially during a discussion. Yet, how to save myself and others? Will you show me the way which I can follow to learn the true method of control? Please grant me this prayer."

. . . It is quite certain that these discussions are often a source of friction and misunderstanding.

Perhaps what might be the best from the point of view of sadhana is to use these occasions . . . as occasions of psychic self-training and the overcoming of things that in the matter of speech stand in the way of a complete harmony between the inner consciousness and the movement of the outer being. . . . Apart from that, the self-control that is desirable in these surroundings and in the midst of discussion would mean among other things:

1. Not to allow the impulse of speech to assert itself too much or say anything without reflection, but to speak always with a conscious control and only what is necessary and helpful.
2. To avoid all debate, dispute or too animated discussion and simply say what has to be said and leave it there. There should also be no insistence that you are right and others wrong, but what is said should only be thrown in as a contribution to the consideration of the truth of the matter.
3. To keep the line of speech and wording very quiet and calm and unsistent. . . .
4. Not to mind at all if the others are heated and dispute, but remain quiet and undisturbed and yourself speak only what can help things to be smooth again.
5. If there is gossip about others and harsh criticism (especially about sadhaks), not to join — for these things are helpful in no way and only lower the consciousness from its higher level.
6. To avoid all that would hurt or wound others.

Perhaps you have tried to do these things already; if so, then see how far you have been successful and perfect the self-control.

In spite of it if anyone misunderstands or feels offended, then there is no help for it. (14.6.36)

*

Mother, if I could have followed the line Sri Aurobindo has indicated, then by now I would have succeeded a lot, but in fact nothing has been done in that respect. Nevertheless, I have gone on trying according to my way of understanding. But you know what our efforts come to. Hence so much suffering for not being able to do as well as I should. I shall, however, try anew to follow on Sri Aurobindo's directions, but again how difficult! . . .

Dear Mother, my condition is still not settling down. Rise and fall, well and not well, urge and again no urge for sadhana or change — this is the state. At times the prayer is moved by emotion, at others it is only a string of words. Can't get hold of the right thing through all these fluctuations. Will these ups and downs go on for ever?

It is an oscillation due to something in the resistant part (not the whole of it) being still dissatisfied at the call to change. When any vital element is disappointed, dissatisfied, called or compelled to change but not yet willing, it has the tendency to create non-response or non-cooperation of the vital, leaving the physical dull or insensible without the vital push. With the psychic pressure this remnant of resistance will pass. (29.8.36)

* * *

[Sahana's Note:] Now I shall present 6 consecutive letters but I have to say something by way of introduction. In January 1937 my condition began to deteriorate so much so that I decided to leave this place. It started with my abhiman towards the Mother, my ego's resentment, the reason being that she didn't appear to love me. Along with it, many difficulties regarding the sadhana began to accumulate, leading to the conclusion that sadhana was impossible, I couldn't do it. Besides, if the Mother didn't love me, when she had despaired of me, what was the use of my staying here?

The situation rose to a climax and I took the decision to leave. Friends tried to dissuade me in various ways, but I gave no ear to their pleadings. Only one refrain I repeated, "If anyone can prevent me, it is the Mother." A terrible obstinacy gripped me. All my luggage was packed, except the bedding. The preparation was complete. Still, strange to say, I felt that I couldn't go; all this was just a drama, but outwardly I was determined. As I was ready and waiting, the mind enveloped in darkness, Nolini came quietly and said, "What? Are you going?" "Yes, Nolini-da, I am going," I replied with tearful eyes. The atmosphere of the house was tense, sombre. He kept quiet for a while and sat on my cot. Then in a deep slow voice he continued, "Mother asked, 'Is Sahana going tomorrow?'" Then he stopped. Again, he repeated, "Mother said, 'Is Sahana going tomorrow?'" He repeated it just in the way the Mother had said

it. She seemed to have spoken three times slowly, halting at each time. My being was then filled with silent sobs and I burst out as soon as he had finished. Utterly broken I cried, "Nolini-da, please tell Mother I won't go." It was as if I was just waiting for this touch of the Mother. The cloud dispersed at once. What a relief! Nolini-da said before departing, "Give me whatever money you have with you." I understood his fear. After this event, there was no repetition of this thought of going away. Now the six letters from Sri Aurobindo bearing on this episode:

(1a)

All these suggestions that came to you were of course part of the attack on the physical consciousness, — the attack on the body is used to raise these ideas and the ideas are used to make it more difficult for the body to recover. At a certain stage attacks fall heavily on the body because the opposing forces find it more difficult than before to upset the mind and vital directly so they fall on the physical in the hope that that will do the trick, the physical being more vulnerable. But the sensibility of the body to attacks is no proof of incapacity just as a finer sensibility of the mind or vital to attacks was no proof — it can in due time be overcome. As for the feelings about the Mother and that her love is only given for a return in work to those who can do sadhana well, that is the usual senseless idea of the vital-physical mind and has no value. . . . I hope you will be all right soon. If the body does not right itself, you must keep me informed from time to time. (17.1.37)

*

(1b)

Try to keep yourself open to our Force in the body, that is the main thing. If the nerves (physical) are quieted, the illness itself will be less intense in its symptoms and can be more easily got over. (17.1.37)

*

(2)

It would not be at all right to yield to these suggestions which are obviously there of a force that wants to make use of unease and disappointment of the vital in order to drive you to break your sadhana. These are the usual suggestions that come to all under the stress of the vital condition, "I am not fit for this sadhana. I must go, I cannot stay here — . The Mother does not love me. I have given up everything

and got nothing. The struggle makes me too miserable, let me go.” As a matter of fact there is no real foundation for these suggestions. Because an acute struggle has come, it would be absurd to conclude that you are unfit for the sadhana and to give up after going so far. It is because you have asked the physical vital to give up certain of its cherished attachments and habits that it is in this condition; unable to resist altogether, miserable at being deprived, it accepts these suggestions as an excuse for escape from the pressure you have put upon it. The acuteness of the struggle is due to the vehemence of the attack, but still more to this vital or a part of it responding to the suggestions; otherwise a less disturbing even if a slower movement would be quite possible. The Mother has in no way changed towards you nor is she disappointed with you — that is the suggestion drawn from your own state of mind and putting its wrong sense of disappointment and unfitness on to the Mother. She has no reason to change or be disappointed, as she has always been aware of the vital obstacles in you and still expected and expects you to overcome them. The call to change certain things that seem to be in the grain of character is proving difficult even for the best sadhaks, but the difficulty is no proof of incompetence. It is precisely the impulse to go that you must refuse to admit — for so long as these forces think they can bring it about, they will press as much as they can on this point. You must also open yourself more to the Mother's Force in that part and for that it is necessary to get rid of this suggestion about the Mother's disappointment or lack of love, for it is this which creates the reaction at the time of Pranam. Our help, support, love are there always as before — keep yourself open to them and with their aid drive out these suggestions. (26.1.37)

*

(3)

As you say that you are determined to go, I can only answer by reaffirming our disapproval of the step you propose to take and the rejection — from a blind vital feeling — of the true path and the spiritual life. It is not true that you could not appreciate our help and solicitude or that you were unable to follow the sadhana, you are only shutting the door of your mind and vital to the help and laying stress on a temporary block which would have disappeared if you had dissociated yourself from it. I can only express the hope that the true being in you will awake in time and draw you back from this course, restoring the inner contact with us and the unity with the higher self a glimpse of which had come to you for a moment. (31.1.37)

*

(4)

From your last letter it is clear that it is not your own will that pushes you to go but something that has taken hold of your mind, a clutch of some Force which is using old movements of the outward mind and vital to drive the action. All the more reason to reject this action as contrary to the soul's and heart's true feeling. The pride that says, "I am one of those who can break but will not bend", is a poor thing and conceals the fact that one is bending before forces and impulses that are ignorant and obscure. Its result is, as you yourself have seen at the end of your letter, that one bends to the lower forces of nature but refuses to bend to the Divine.

If sadhana is a struggle between the higher will and the old forces of nature bringing suffering and inner torment, we do not want you to do that kind of sadhana. That is not the spirit of our Yoga. What we want you to do is to recover your quietude and go on in that. To have the basis of quietude and allow the Divine Force to work in you firmly and quietly is always the best method — it is not necessary to proceed through a big personal effort, disturbance and struggle. Come back to this — open yourself once more, as you did before, — then you could get back sleep or health in a day or two and were growing inwardly without excessive trouble — and let the Mother's Power and Grace lead you.

I shall do all to help you and pull you out, but that which has closed itself in you must open for the help to work quickly as it did before. Otherwise too it can pull you out, but if there is this strong obstruction that has to be undone, time is needed. A central change of attitude in your mind would, I believe, make all the difference — it has done so before. (1.2.37)

*

(5)

I have not the slightest doubt that you can do the sadhana if you cleave to it — not certainly in your own unaided strength, for nobody can do that, but by the will of the psychic being in you aided by the Divine Grace. There is a part in the physical and vital consciousness of every human being that has not the will for it, does not feel the capacity for it, distrusts any hope or promise of a spiritual future and is inert and indifferent to any such thing. At one period in the course of the sadhana this rises up and one feels identified with it. That has happened to you now but along with an attack of ill-health and nervous indisposition which has turned this passage through the obscure physical into a dark and intense trouble. With enough sleep and quieting of the nerves and return of physical energy that ought to disappear and it would be possible to bring the Light and Consciousness down into this obscure part. An intense concentration bringing struggle is not what is needed but a very quiet attitude

of self-opening. Not any effort of sadhana just now, but the recovery of tranquillity and ease is what is wanted at present to restore the opening of the nature. (2.2.37)

*

(6)

I am very glad to hear that the incubus of this depression and dark condition has been lifted. I think now that the first thing is indeed to restore your nervous and physical strength by sleep and food — it was largely through the depressed body consciousness and nerves that the bad condition was able to hold and to prevent the return of mental clarity and the psychic to give its balance. For the sadhana simply keep the consciousness open to us and let things go on quietly until you are naturally and without struggle or too much effort able to do more. Also do not hesitate to write whenever it is necessary. (3.2.37)

* * *

Mother, this time I was able to keep my consciousness right even under multiple attacks.

It is a great thing that you have been able to keep your consciousness right under these attacks. (17.3.37)

*

Through various ups and downs, troubles and trials, I acquired experiences and perceptions beyond belief. Still, the inherent difficulties of our nature, their hold over us and their power of creating hurdles on our way (for example, attachments, desires, tendencies of the lower nature, etc. whose roots are very deep indeed) remain, but to make myself free from such obstacles, to conquer, eradicate them is the urge and aspiration I am feeling now. Should I devote myself to achieving it? Shall I succeed? What is the way? Please let me know.

Certainly, all the help possible will be given. As for the method, there are always the two ways possible — one, to overcome the difficulty in its own field, the other to develop the inner realisation until it grows so strong that the roots you speak of have no longer any soil to hold by and come out easily by a spontaneous change. (19.3.37)

*

Yes, I have understood that the dumb has no enemy, so I shall henceforth keep dumb. But shall I for ever remain a disturbing element?

Certainly in these things “Silence” is the best motto. (13.6.37)

*

I feared that I have lost my voice for good. Very often I had the impulse to give up singing, but I realised at once that I was not singing for my sake but for the Divine to whom I should offer whatever I have. I find after three months that good results have started to follow.

It is so with all things in the path of sadhana, one must persist however long it takes, so only one can achieve. (13.6.37)

*

I feel often that weeping is a thing which opens the door to weakness, allows opportunities to those powers to enter which take away our mental will.

It is quite correct that weeping brings in the forces that should be kept outside — for the weeping is a giving way of the inner control and an expression of vital reaction and ego. It is only the psychic weeping that does not open the door to these forces — but that is without affliction, tears of bhakti, spiritual emotion or Ananda.

Your experience was a very beautiful one — the inner being realised by it that which must be established in the waking state as the foundation of the spiritual consciousness and spiritual life. (3.7.37)

*

Mother dear, I used to have such experiences at one time; I could then separate my inner being, but not in the way Sri Aurobindo has indicated. I remember that the suffering of the body used to appear as something quite different, I could see that it was the outer being that suffered, the inner being was not involved, there was a division into two parts in the being.

It is that separation of the inner from the outer which has to come back and be fixed — until outer and inner can become one free consciousness. Probably when you had it your attention was more on the change of mind and vital and you were observing those. (26.7.37)

*

Sri Aurobindo, am I then going on a wrong track? You wrote nothing, so I am uneasy. Please let me know where I stand.

Silence does not mean disapproval. Your letter informed me of your present state in regard to your inner feeling in relation with others which is evidently very good. You have only to go forward and see that it is confirmed and perfected beyond all possibility of interruption, disturbance or mixture. (23.9.38)

*

It seems there is a control over speech; still, how difficult for me! What we call a slip of the tongue seems also to be less now. I wonder at the amount of tangles in which our nature is caught. To change them will be a Herculean job. One gets lost even to think of it.

The habits of the physical or the vital physical nature are always the most difficult to change, because their action is automatic and not governed by the mental will and it is therefore difficult for the mental will to control or transform them. You have to persevere and form the habit of control. If you can succeed in controlling the speech often, — it needs a constant vigilance, — you will finally find that the control stands itself and can in the long run always intervene. This must be done so long as that movement is not fully opened to the Mother's Force and Light, for if that happens the thing can be done more quickly and sometimes with a great rapidity. There is also the intervention of the psychic, if the psychic is sufficiently awake and active to intervene each time you are going to speak at random and say "No", then the change becomes more easy.

(11.10.38)

* * *

[Sahana's Note:] The period of correspondence with questions and answers comes to an end. I shall now begin furnishing Sri Aurobindo's letters without questions — not all, but quite a number of them.

(To be continued)

SAHANA

(At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo,
translated by Nirodbaran from the original Bengali)

THE FEAST OF YOUTH

[Sri Aurobindo's review of Harindranath Chattopadhyay's The Feast of Youth was featured in the April issue of this journal.]

Here are a few of the poems mentioned by Sri Aurobindo. Some more will follow in the next issue]

THE FEAST OF YOUTH

Lo! over the mountains in the silver-grey
Enchanted distance, breaks a burning day!
Long clouds of faery-flaming fire
Bloom on the heaven-looming mountain-tops . . .
And everywhere warm, silver fountain-drops
Scatter the music of desire!

The old stars dance enkindled with divine
Ecstatic sparks. The sea is foaming wine!
The moon, a luscious-ripened grape,
O'erfloods the Cup of Youth . . . The ocean-shells
Transform themselves for rapture, into bells
For Youth's bright feet of faery-shape!

Thrilled by the scented breath of Youth, the wind
Shapes earth into a rich, creative mind!
And threshes out the sleeping snow
Into an active dream of joy . . . The world,
A secret flower, its petals hath uncurled
Like visible hints of godly glow!

O! I shall draw the blue out of the skies
And offer it like wine of paradise
To drunken Youth . . . pluck the red sun
Like a rich fruit to set before his mouth,
And satisfy his hunger and his drouth
After the moment of our union.

*

FIRE

Kindle your glimmering lamp in the infinite space, O Love!
 Let the dark shadows dance in the burning depths of mine eyes.
 I am athirst for one glimpse of your beautiful face, O Love!
 Veiled in the mystical silence of stars and the purple of skies.

Thrill me with radiant rapture, O Love! of your ravishing flute,
 Folding my silence in song, and my sorrow in silver eclipse,
 Shaping my heart into flower, and the flower of my heart into fruit
 Meet for your orchards of light, and the touch of your luminous lips.

Cast in the shadowy deeps of my being, your love, like a spark,
 Fan it to magical flame, till my dead heart burst into fire,
 Swing, like a censer, my dream of devotion, O Love! through the dark,
 Turn into tumults of incense my richly-pulsating desire!

*

MESSAGES

Secretly He sends His message
 Swiftly through the flowering years . . .
 In a child's resplendent laughter
 And woman's tender tears . . .
 Sunset-fires are dancing, dancing
 To the music of its feet . . .
 In the burning breast of sunrise
 I can hear its footsteps beat.
 In my slumber and my waking
 I can hear His sobbing flute . . .
 Thro' the springtime and the autumn
 Shaping every flower and fruit . . .
 And His gleaming laughter colours
 Orange hills and purple streams,
 He is throbbing in the crystal,
 Magic centre of my dreams. . . .
 Lo! His splendour bursts like lightning
 Thro' the burning mystic space . . .
 Shadows dance upon my pathways
 To the light upon His face . . .

Silver stars are visible twinkles
 Of His clear, transparent touch . . .
 He is moving every moment
 To the world He loves so much!

*

THE HOUR OF REST

The village sleeps with all its huts . . .
 The tired day must die;
 The dazzling knife of sunset cuts
 The throbbing heart of sky,
 That bleeds itself to death and shuts
 Earth's beauty from its eye.

The flower of rest is blossoming
 On earth and hill and stream, . . .
 The homing birds, at sunset sing
 A song of shade and gleam . . .
 The West is like a parrot-wing
 Tinged with a peacock-dream!
 I gaze athwart the lonely wold
 And commune with the flowers . . .
 Whose little, lovely lives are sold
 To sunshine and to showers . . .
 And in their coloured breasts they hold
 The secrets of the hours!

I watch the faintly-dreaming hill,
 The sky's dim-silvern line . . .
 And feel that I have drunk my fill
 Of clear, nascent wine
 Drawn from the rich grape of God's will
 Half-human, half-divine!

There is a sweetness in the world
 That I have sometimes felt,
 And oft in fragrant petals curl'd
 His fragrance I have smelt . . .
 And in sad notes of birds, unfurl'd
 The kindness He hath dealt!

*

WORSHIP

You flood my music with your autumn silence
 And burn me in the flame-burst of your spring.
 Lo! through my beggar-being's tattered garments
 Resplendent shines your crystal heart, my King!

Like a rich song you chant your red-fire sunrise,
 Deep in my dreams, and forge your white-flame moon . . .
 You hide the crimson secret of your sunset,
 And the pure, golden message of your noon.

You fashion cool-grey clouds within my body,
 And weave your rain into a diamond mesh.
 The Universal Beauty dances, dances
 A glimmering peacock in my flowering flesh!

*

BRANCHES

The branches of my heart are now in flower
 For the bright, Universal Spring hath woken
 Within my being, in her fullest power.
 A vow she pledges through a shining shower,
 I give her back a blossom for a token!

Through immemorial mists of faded dreams
 A new thought twinkles like a golden glimmer.
 My tears flow towards the End in opal streams,
 My laughter bursts into a thousand gleams
 And thrills the star-fires with a twofold shimmer!

The Spring-hues deepen into human Bliss!
 The heart of God and man in scent are blended . . .
 The sky meets earth in one transparent kiss . . .
 My heart springs up out of the dim abyss
 On wings of light god-rich and beauty-splendid!

*

SEA-SONG

O Sea! I watch thy many-coloured game
 With changing sky in vast play-halls of time . . .
 I would I could divine thy peacock-flame
 And shape it into rhyme!

God churns thy waters into silvern foam
 And breathes His music into every shell . . .
 In breaking waves He builds His secret home
 Nearest thy heart to dwell.

Thy breast burns night and day to reach the sky . . .
 The sky to kiss thee yearns herself to tints!
 Thou, gazing at the crystal of thine eye
 Dost prophecy her glints.

O! I would fain possess thy hidden dreams
 And quell thy mystic sound-and-colour strife,
 Weaving thy gorgeous songs and pearls and gleams
 Into my dream of life.

My inward ear hath caught each subtle note
 That sky plays on her silver flute above . . .
 Through dawn, thy loud and ruby-flaming throat
 Breaks into tunes of love.

I hear thee chant to heaven and rejoice . . .
 The blue sky drinks thy waves like godly wine!
 O Sea! there is some magic in thy voice
 That makes the sky divine . . .

I gaze within my heart and find thy shells
 Scattered in shining heaps of glowing light,
 Thy emerald waves break like enchanted bells
 To flood my heart with white!

God hides His dreams of passion and of power
 Amid thy wave-house built so strong . . . so strong . . .
 My joy in thee hath blossomed into flower,
 My sorrow into song!

*

MY UNLAUNCHED BOAT

The hour hath come to launch my boat, my sailless boat
 At sea. . . .
 I sit upon the shore alone, and daylight dies
 In silence on the bosom of the darkening skies . . .
 And with him, every note
 Is crushed to silent sorrow in the song-bird's throat,
 Ah me!
 And I have not launched out my boat to sea!

The Spring hath come and gone with all her coloured hours.
 The earth beneath her tread
 Laughed suddenly a peal of blue and green and red . . .
 And for her tender beauty wove a flowery bed . . .
 She gathered all her touch-born blossoms from bright bowers
 And in her basket rained quick-dazzling showers,
 And fled with all the laughter of earth's flowers . . .
 Ah me!
 And I have not launched yet my boat to sea!

The restless waves are dancing in the sea
 Mad with a drunken grief . . .
 From every tree
 Quivers and drops each red and purple leaf
 That was its spirit's joy and hidden heart's relief!
 In every breeze and corner of the sky
 Whose lip was dumb and mute
 Showers suddenly a scattered melody . . .
 Behind the clouds some hidden Flutist plays His flute . . .
 Ah me!
 And I have not my boat launched out to sea!

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAY

(*The Feast of Youth*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1918)

ARVIND SULE RECOLLECTS

(Interviews conducted by Raman Reddy in November-December 2007)

(Continued from the issue of April 2023)

Domestic Service

R: How come Padmasini¹ did small repairs? I mean, we associate Padmasini with . . .

SULE: Only hot water service and servants. Yes, her main work was early in the morning — hot water service, oh my God! [*recollecting what a big affair it was*]

R: The hot water supply was there in 47?

SULE: *Arre*, very much!

R: Servants going from house to house?

SULE: Yes. I will tell you about it. We had 30/40 people supplying hot water to houses. Those days Kameshwar's department was supposed to be only for visitors — if any visitors came and wanted servants. So he had a few servants. But we had here about 300/400 workers in those days and 30/40 men for supplying hot water.

Then the maid-servants would make cow-dung balls that were also supplied to houses. I think Ravindra-ji used to do the coal supply. Coal was supplied and cow-dung balls were also supplied.

And then for hot water we had one godown where we had wood. So early morning at 3 o'clock Padmasini used to get up. The servants will go to the godown, bring wood in a hand cart. Breaking the wood into pieces was another job, and then she will put a fire for heating the water. I remember them coming and bringing the wood. There was a shed in the corner where Bula-da's section is there now — all that was under Padmasini. Only the hall was with Bula-da.

R: So Padmasini used to make the hot water?

SULE: Yes, first in the big drums, and then from the drums, the water was poured into buckets, and the workers would carry two buckets with a bamboo. About 30/40

1. Padmasini, a relative of Amrita, was looking after of the Domestic Service of the Ashram.

workers would distribute the hot water. And the first bucket was at 5 o'clock, I think, or 4.30. First it was to Nolini-*da*, Amrita, and then to S or somebody, everybody's timing was fixed.

Now S and they were supposed to be very special people. Now suppose S's timing for hot water was 5 o'clock. If the hot water did not come 5/8 minutes past 5 o'clock, she would rush to Amrita's window: "AMRITA. What is this? It is 5.10; I have not received my hot water." (*laughter*)

"Oh, I am sorry!" Amrita was in charge, that is, nominally, the whole responsibility was his. The Domestic Service was under him.

R: So what was Padmasini's responsibility?

SULE: Padmasini was his assistant. Actually she was doing everything but with Mother and all that, who was in charge of the Domestic Service? Amrita. You follow. So poor fellow with his *lungi* (the distance is not much) he would rush to Padmasini.

"PADMASINI, what happened?"

"What can I do? The man has not come."

Now people coming from Ousteri, you can't expect them to be here at 4.30 sharp, you follow. And by the time she complained or Amrita scolded her, that fellow will come.

"Hey, there now, you see he has come. *Arre pō dā sheegram*. [Go quickly!]" She would bombard him.

"*Do poremma, do poremma*." [I am going, *Amma*. I am going, *Amma*.]

It was actually a drama. Now imagine this would start from early morning, this was hot water business! Now she was also supplying 400 servants.

R: 400 servants!

SULE: Yes, 400 servants we had. I myself have paid 400 servants, some permanent, some temporary, some replacements. All together we paid bonus for 400 people, I still remember.

R: But that must have been at a much later date?

SULE: It went on increasing as inmates increased. So this hot water business, you can say, was from 5 to 7/7.30, and then at 7.30 it will be servants' attendance. Padmasini will sit here in the centre. This table was there in the centre and she used to take attendance, and they all stood outside to give attendance. I used to come at 7.30. My table was there outside.

Then there also the same story! 7/7.30, no, it was 6.30. Sorry, those days servants came at 6.30. By 6.30 servants were supposed to be in people's houses, but

if they did not come to those so-called important people: “6.40, AMRITA! 6.40! No servant!” (*laughter*)

“Oh, no servant! (*after rushing to the Domestic Service*) PADMASINI!”

“Yes, Yes, I know.”

And there it was the same story. The maid servant will come: “Sorry *Amma, tungita*. [I slept off.] *Payyan udambu sari ille*. [My child is not well.]

“*Sari, pō, pō*. [Okay, go, go.]

I’m telling you this because Padmasini was supposed to be like Purnananda, Yogananda, Charu-da. She was the only female of the five people in Ashram who were known for their temper. You follow. Among them she was the only lady. Now you can see why. She used to get up at 3.30 to start the hot water service. And from 5 o’clock with these important people shouting, “Hey, where is my hot water?” Then at 6.30, “Hey, where is my servant?” Now by the time it was 7/7.30 with this harassment of, “Where is my this? Where is my that?” you could say that her head was off. (*laughter*)

Then she used to supply umbrellas to the servants for rainy days. She was handling so many things. Now she was sitting here and by the time it was 7.30/8 the rush hour was almost over. 8 o’clock was the time when people came for complaints: “My servant is not working properly” or this and that. She was sitting right there in front and she could see anybody coming. Now she knew people by experience and she knew that it must be some complaint. So before they could open their mouth, she will get up: “NO, NO, NO, NO!” (*laughter*)

I have seen it. Half the people would get scared and run away. If it happened to be one of those important ones, “What is this Padmasini? We haven’t even told you what we want and you start shouting at us.”

“All right, all right, what do you want?”

You follow. Then sometimes they may want a servant or they may want to change their servant.

R: Was Padmasini doing all this work?

SULE: Tatya Saheb was under her. But it was all her work because Tatya Saheb also had duty with Counouma. I remember one or two cases were going on and Tatya Saheb was handling the court business under Counouma.

R: Counouma was there? Was he connected with the Ashram in 1947?

SULE: Of course, my goodness. He was one of the main Trustees in 1947 at least.

R: The Trust Board was not even there.

SULE: But the Trustees were there. Board perhaps was formed later on, because I remember Counouma was very much there, and he used to be always with Mother. He was the main person, though Amrita was supposed to be the manager. Because he was a lawyer and a Pondicherry man, Mother used to always consult him, for anything and everything.

R: Just one thing. In 47 when you came in February, was this hot water service there?

SULE: Very much there. And I forgot to tell you the main incident. Even in rain, hot water service will not stop. Now one day it was raining at 6 o'clock. Rain or no rain, we used to all stand for the Balcony Darshan and Mother would come knowing that people are standing. Some people would have an umbrella and as soon as Mother came, they would close it.

Now one day when it was raining and Mother was on the balcony, she saw one of our hot water service workers. At that time I was not in the Domestic Service, I was in the Building Service. (I came to know about this later on.) And Mother saw that fellow in the rain with no umbrella, nothing.

"How can one take hot water in the rain?"

So as usual at 8 o'clock when Amrita, Nolini, used to go to Mother, she asked: "Amrita, this morning, at the balcony time I saw somebody carrying something. What is it?"

"Oh Mother, hot water supply."

"Hot water supply in the rain! No, stop it. You expect them to go in the rain carrying hot water?"

[*Sule describing humorously what Mother may have thought:*] "Our people are Nawabs or what? Just hot water supply is all right, but that does not mean that these poor fellows have to rush, come rain come sun, and see that their timing is not disturbed."

Mother was very much angry and she said, "No, during rain there is not going to be any hot water. If anybody complains, send them to me. Tell them Mother has said no hot water during rain."

Amrita came and told Padmasini, "Henceforth, if there is any rain, they will wait."

But you know our people, "Mother has said no hot water if it is raining; if rain stops? (*laughter*) Mother didn't say not to give hot water when it is not raining."

"Arre, what rain? There was no rain at 7 o'clock."

So they must come and sit. The moment rain stops, hot water service should start.

R: This is what Padmasini told you?

SULE: Yes, I will tell you about it. I was there in the Building Service. I used to do also accounts before we were shifted to Coco Garden. After that Khirod-*da* brought me back to the main office to do accounts and bring money from Satyakarma. Then one day Tatya Saheb left. One of his relatives was a queen and there was some talk that the government will give money or land to her descendants, and he was one of them. So Tatya Saheb left the Ashram to claim it and his place here was empty.

Now one day when I went to Satyakarma to take money for the Building Service, he casually asked me, “Who is doing accounts for you?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Oh, all right.”

He spoke to Amrita, “There is that young boy with Khirod-*da*. They have got so many people there, they can manage. Why don’t you have him here? He can look after the accounts of Padmasini, so that at least the account side will be taken care of.”

So next day I got a chit at 8 o’clock, or rather Khirod-*da* got a chit: “Arvind Sule shifted from Building Service to Domestic Service.”

Khirod-*da* came to me, “You have to go.”

I said, “All right.” There was no argument.

* * *

SULE: There was not much of labour trouble in the Domestic Service. If the servants shouted five times, Padmasini would shout ten times. But in spite of all that, there was affection for them. In spite of her temper, she loved the servants. She knew that they were Tamils and she was also Tamil, and they knew that *Amma* will always do justice to them. *Amma* will not be unfair. And she always did whatever was possible for their betterment, so much so that our department came to be known for it. “Oh, it is no use complaining to Padmasini. She will always support the servants.”

Amrita always said, because he knew Ashramites very well and their nature of complaints: “Just because you get complaints, don’t start scolding them, always listen to them. Find out what’s the matter. It’s not necessary that they are always in the wrong. Mother has asked us to look after the servants. Taking care of the inmates is not our job; that is the Mother’s job.”

We had this understanding that we have to take care of the servants. We are here to look after them, even if they are paid servants. Mother may be paying them, but in Mother’s eyes they are all Her children. There is no difference in Mother’s eyes between an inmate and a servant. I have heard that there was a time when, after the Darshan, Mother herself used to give with her own hands the Deepavali *sari* to the maid servants. What I am trying to tell you is that Mother never treated servants as servants.

R: Can you give an example of the Mother's attitude towards them?

SULE: Perhaps I have told you about a mason who was with us. He used to come from Ousteri by bus. He was the one who helped in building portions of the Ashram building — Adimoolam. When he became old, he requested Amrita: "Ayya, I am unable to come even by bus. I would like to have pension."

Now pension generally is 40 per cent, but pensions were not very common then. Now it is understood that if you have worked for 20-25 years, and if you are 55 to 60 years, you are entitled to pension. So Amrita reported to Mother, "Adimoolam, our mason, has become old and he is praying for pension. What should I do?"

Then Mother enquired, "Did Adimoolam help in our Ashram building?"

Shanmugham was the head mason in building the Ashram; Adimoolam was his assistant. Mother did quite a lot for Shanmugham. When he stopped working, his monthly pay was going to him until he died.

So when Mother was asked about Adimoolam, "Shall we give him 40 per cent?"

"No, no. Give him full pension. Whatever is the monthly pay, go on sending him by money order as long as he is there."

Mother's Grace

SULE: I have seen Mother's Grace working innumerable times. Once I was with Dr. Patil, the dentist. He was treating me with a needle and it slipped from his hand.

R: My God!

SULE: My habit was that whenever I sat I first remembered Mother, that it was not the dentist who was doing it, but it was She who was doing it. And instinctively I did "HAAN" (*opening his mouth as if throwing something stuck in the throat*) and the needle came out.

I didn't know how dangerous it was! I just happened to look at Dr. Patil at that time. His face was the face of death and he was perspiring. "Where is the needle? Where is the needle?"

It could have been such a major accident. I could have been dead right on the chair. Anything could have happened. I know the gravity of it because I just happened to look at him, and I had never seen him so frightened.

R: You felt the needle going in?

SULE: No, it slipped from his hand and fell on my tongue, and I instinctively (I call it Mother's Grace) I did HAAN and instead of going in, it just came out. It is only after seeing his face that I said, "Mother, you have saved me."

* * *

SULE: There were many incidents like this. I had once Herpes. You know Herpes is very painful. But you will not believe it. I had it on the back and B used to apply medicines, and the doctor expected me to tell him that it was paining terribly. But I was not getting pain!

“You will get pain. Perhaps it has just started; you will get pain, but don’t be afraid. You will get pain.”

I told him, “No doctor, I have no pain.”

Perhaps he was wondering whether it was Herpes at all. I still remember everybody said that Herpes is very painful and even B’s sister-in-law said, “You are not getting pain, not yet?”

I said it may be painful, but I know one thing, that as long as Mother is there, she will see to it that I don’t get any physical pain. I never had physical pain. Somehow Mother always saved me from it.

* * *

SULE: Once I showed all my X-rays to a big doctor from Bangalore who is famous for operations. His mother worked in the Laundry, so I told her: “Your son is such a big doctor. Please tell him to give us an appointment.”

So we took all my X-rays to him. He saw the X-ray negatives and he just looked at me, “My God! I can’t understand how you are standing on your legs. From what I see here, you should be lying down crying in pain.” And he advised Dr. Datta to give me all these tablets which I never took.

I told him, “Yes, I know. What you see there I don’t know, but I know that what you have said just now is a fact.”

He himself said, “It is a miracle that you are standing on your feet. You should be screaming in the bed now.”

I said, “Yes, I know. If I’m standing on my legs today, it is purely Mother’s Grace, and I will be standing on my legs as long as She wants me to stand.”

* * *

SULE: There is no end to Mother’s Grace. When people ask me about sadhana, I tell them: “I don’t know anything. I know only one thing, that is, Mother’s Feet. Even about devotion, tell me how suddenly you become a devotee of Mother or Sri Aurobindo. What have you done? It is no credit to you. It is because they put something in you that there is devotion in you, and you just happen to come here. How is it that the other son does not turn up? Why did not the others come? Then I remember reading Sri Aurobindo’s quotation: “You don’t choose the Divine, the Divine chooses you.”

So I know that everything, whatever you have, even knowledge, from where

does it come? It is all Mother's! All is Her Grace. So from now on I have just left it to Her. Whatever is necessary, that is, if Mother thinks it is necessary for me, I will get. Otherwise, all I want is Her Feet.

R: You said you don't know when you became a devotee of the Mother.

SULE: I have been trying to find out when it was. But Mother must have managed it so smoothly that I never knew when she became Mother from the so-called French lady. Even after a year or so, we were once talking of Mother in the Building Service — I am telling you about my attitude towards Mother. Khirod-da was laughing at me. He must have thought that this duffer doesn't know anything about Mother.

I said: "Oh that poor lady, she is so good, but the others around her, her assistants, prevent her from giving you what you want. She won't mind giving, but the others don't want to give." Look at my rank ignorance!

R: 'Others' meaning?

SULE: The heads of departments. Suppose you need something. If you ask Mother, she will always give, but you don't get it because of the others. There is a proverb, you know, "God gives, but the *pujari* doesn't give."

I thought that Mother was just one of the managers of the Ashram. In the beginning when I was new here, I used to even take Sri Aurobindo as a Guru only, but that incident of seeing him in the mirror changed me. And then not consciously, but automatically I started worshipping him. But how and when the French lady became Mother, I don't know.

R: Do you know how many years it took you?

SULE: That also I don't know.

* * *

SULE: One day when I was at the Samadhi, I distinctly heard Mother's voice. "What are you worried about? I am here for whatever is needed. Why worry?"

Mother gave me this knowledge, and I came to understand that after all everything comes from Her. I had read in the Meditation Hall, "To heal with her feet the aching throb of life." And then I start looking back to the time when I was a boy of 15/16. How did I come here? It was Mother's Grace that brought me here. In spite of all my defects, Mother has always protected me and kept me here for so many years. I don't get tired of telling people this.

Sometimes people say, "Oh, you are here for so many years!"

I tell them, “If I’m here, it’s only because of Her Grace. She has seen that I am not thrown out by the forces that take you away. So it is no credit to me. It is all Mother’s Grace.”

(Concluded)

You must always aspire towards the Mother, because hers is the force which can alone give you the true realisation of the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 106)

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

(Part 35)

Section 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

(Continued from the issue of April 2023)

Sri Aurobindo had a gift for languages; he notes that in his teens he had “mastered Greek and Latin, English and French, and he had also acquired some familiarity with continental languages like German and Italian”¹ and at Baroda he “learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages”.²

Sri Aurobindo’s skill in writing Bengali was largely unknown. At the *Karmayogin*, Girija Sundar Chakravorty — the younger brother of Shyam Sundar Chakravorty — requested Sri Aurobindo to start a Bengali journal as it would sell far more than an English one. “But I cannot write Bengali well!” protested Sri Aurobindo. “However, I can try. At the moment I am writing *Karakahini* in Bengali. I will send a part of it to you. If that kind of language would do, we can consider bringing out a paper in Bengali,”³ he added. When Sri Aurobindo submitted the first instalment Upendra Chandra Bhattacharya, a worker at *Karmayogin*, narrates:

Delighted, Girija Babu said, “Please go on writing. If there is anything inscrutable in your writing, I can tackle it at the proof-reading stage.”

Next day Sri Aurobindo sent a few pages of the *Karakahini* through Dharam Singh. With irrepressible eagerness I snatched the bundle from Dharam Singh’s hand and tried to read the script. Alas, Sri Aurobindo’s Bengali handwriting was no different from that of his English. I could not read a word. But Girija Babu went on reading aloud fluently. We were in ecstasy at listening to Sri Aurobindo’s Bengali.

The very next day, on Sri Aurobindo reaching our office, the decision was taken to publish a Bengali journal. Discussion regarding its name, size and the picture on the cover page went on for some time and Sri Aurobindo named it *Dharma* and instructed us to print the picture of a lotus in full bloom on its cover page with *Yada yada hi dharmasya* etc. below it . . .

The *Karmayogin*’s work was on the increase . . . Since there was not

1. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 28.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

3. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2017, pp. 32-33.

enough space here another house close by was taken on rent. New equipment for the printing of *Dharma* and everything else were promptly arranged through Girija Babu endowed with exceptional organisational capacity . . .

The journal was priced an Anna a copy [*sixteen annas made one rupee*]. All were surprised that Sri Aurobindo wrote articles in Bengali! He had mastered the language in the shortest possible time. His articles were rich not only for their depth, but also for the charm and beauty of the language. Publication of the *Dharma* created a pleasant sensation in the public and it circulated very well, but not as much as our English journal, for the latter was in great demand outside Bengal, particularly in Madras [*The Karmayogin seems to have commanded the next largest circulation in Maharashtra*].⁴

Sri Aurobindo's scholarship in Bengali is evident from his writings in Bengali starting from his letters to Mrinalini Devi from 1902 to 1907, his articles in *Yugantar* in 1906-07, in the *Dharma* in 1909 and his series in the Bengali monthly *Suprabhat* in 1909-10 — the series was later converted into a book, *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison Life). Sri Aurobindo's body of work in Bengali includes a number of poems, letters and articles on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. In addition he has translated from the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and a large number of Bengali poems including Vaishnava devotional poetry. He also translated from Sanskrit into Bengali.

Sri Aurobindo learnt Sanskrit in Baroda all by himself. His scholarship of Sanskrit was such that he translated from the epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the poetry of Kalidasa, Bhartrihari and others, and from the scriptures like the Gita, the Upanishads and the Vedas.

Panchanan Tarakratna, a Sanskrit scholar, and some of his students were arrested and kept in Alipore jail for a while. He reportedly gave a few lessons in Sanskrit to Sri Aurobindo, who quietly listened, neither asking questions nor stating anything. One day Tarakratna asked him: “You are studying since so many months, what did you understand?” Sri Aurobindo then sequentially recited to him, word by word, whatever Tarakratna had taught him from the first day. Sri Aurobindo's scholarship and the fact that he never demonstrated it humbled Tarakratna. Tarakratna also remarked that Sri Aurobindo's eyes were the most amazing he had ever seen.⁵ This Panchanan Tarakratna is none other than the highly respected scriptural scholar of Bhatpara, whom Abinash Bhattacharya has referred to as Panchanan Tarkachudamani. Abinash, who was also in Alipore jail then, mentioned that after pundit Panchanan got acquainted with Sri Aurobindo he was overawed by his Sanskrit scholarship.⁶

4. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

5. Swarna Hans, August 2004; sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

6. See Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 537.

During the Alipore trial several manuscripts of Sri Aurobindo's writings were seized. Many of these were recovered decades later, but others are apparently lost forever.⁷ Sri Aurobindo was asked by an attendant, “Have you written any stories?” He replied:

I have, but they are all lost. When there was the rumour that our house [*in Pondicherry*] would be searched by the police, my trunk was sent off to David's place. After some time when they brought the trunk back, it was found that all my stories had been eaten away by white ants. So my future fame as a story-writer perished. (*Laughter*)

But it is a pity I lost two translations of poems. One of them was a translation of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* in terza rimas. It was rather well done. . . .

But the stories were nothing to speak of except one. I can say something of this one because I still have two pages left of it. All my stories were occult.⁸

Sri Aurobindo wrote two stories under the general title “Occult Idylls”. One completed story was named ‘The Phantom Hour’ and another, which was never completed, was called ‘The Door at Abelard’. These stories were written during the early part of his stay in Pondicherry, 1910-12, or perhaps a year or two earlier.⁹

About the lost manuscript of *Meghadūtām*, Nirodbaran noted: “I remember that once when we were talking of the subject there was a tinge of regret in Sri Aurobindo's voice at the mention of this manuscript. “It is a pity that the translation cannot be found,” he said, “for it was well done.” This makes the loss all the greater, for he seldom spoke of his achievements.¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo has noted that at the time he “began the publication of . . . the *Arya*” he also began “to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry.”¹¹ Elsewhere he wrote that “much of his poetry . . . published from Pondicherry” was written at Baroda. This was also a period “of preparation for his future work.”¹²

About his poetry in Baroda he said: “But *Love and Death* was not my first blank verse poem — I had written one before in the first years of my stay in Baroda which was privately published, but afterwards I got disgusted with it and rejected it.”¹³ About ‘Love and Death’ he clarified to a disciple, “There is no Yogic knowledge

7. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 69.

8. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 105.

9. See *CWSA*, Vol. 4, p. 1006.

10. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo For All Ages*, 1994, p. 28.

11. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 9.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

13. *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, p. 223.

there. It was written before I started Yoga.”¹⁴

A few months before Sri Aurobindo wrote ‘Love and Death’ his poem ‘Urvasie’ was printed, circa 1898-99. Later when the Ashram Library wanted a copy of this poem, he replied: “I don’t think I have the *Urvasie*, neither am I very anxious to have this poem saved from oblivion.”¹⁵ He also told a disciple: “It is a poem I am not in love with — not that there is not some good poetry in it, but it seems to me as a whole lacking in originality and life. However, I may be mistaken; a writer’s opinions on his productions generally are.”¹⁶

And about a critic who commented on his poem ‘Revelation’, written circa 1904-06, Sri Aurobindo detachedly and amusingly writes in a letter: “An Indian critic (very competent, if a little academic) disregarding all the mystic suggestions and even the plain statement of the closing couplet, actually described the poem as the poet’s memory of a girl running past him on the seashore!!”¹⁷

In Bengal, Sri Aurobindo published ‘Chitrangada’ of which he noted: “The publication of *Chitrangada* was a mistake. I wrote the poem hastily — a rough draught, intending to rewrite it and make it worth something. But the rewriting was never done. I am not very anxious for the thing to survive in its present crude form.”¹⁸

Whilst Sri Aurobindo was working on *Savitri* Amal Kiran writes, “Not only did he want my self-critical-faculty to be on the alert, but also asked me to comment on the epic he had been writing for years”.¹⁹

When a disciple wrote, “I hear that James Cousins said about your poem *The Rishi* (written in circa 1900-08) that it was only spiritual philosophy, not poetry,” Sri Aurobindo’s impersonal reaction was:

I never heard that. If I had I would have noted that Cousins had no capacity for appreciating intellectual poetry. But that I knew already — just as he had no liking for epic poetry either, only for poetic “jewellery”. His criticism was of *In the Moonlight* which he condemned as brain-stuff only except the early stanzas for which he had high praise. That criticism was of great use to me — though I did not agree with it. But the positive part of it helped me to develop towards a supra-intellectual style. As *Love and Death* was poetry of the vital, so *Ahana* [*Ahana and other Poems*] is mostly work of the poetic intelligence. Cousins’ criticism helped me to go a stage farther.²⁰

In another letter he writes:

14. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-26.

19. K. D. Sethna, ‘What Sri Aurobindo Means to Me’, *Mother India*, December 1972, p. 751.

20. *CWSA*, Vol. 27, pp. 229-30.

What does Cousins’ bad opinion about *The Rishi* matter to me? I know the limitations of my poetry and also its qualities. I know also the qualities of Cousins as a critic and also his limitations. If Milton had written during the life of Cousins instead of having an established reputation for centuries, Cousins would have said of *Paradise Lost* and still more of *Paradise Regained* “This is not poetry, this is theology.” Note that I don’t mean to say that *The Rishi* is anywhere near *Paradise Lost*, but it is poetry as well as spiritual philosophy.²¹

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo wrote:

. . . I could not say anything if somebody condemned a poem of mine root and branch because he did not like it or on good grounds — such as Cousins’ objection to the inferiority of the greater part of *In the Moonlight* to the opening stanzas. I learned a great deal from that objection; it pointed me the way I had to go towards the Future Poetry.²²

James Cousins visited Pondicherry in 1921. It may be interesting to reproduce his reminiscence:

A two-day visit (August 22-23, 1921) to the Yogi-philosopher, Aurobindo Ghosh, gave me an intimate touch with the long tradition of India. Out of political agitation in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo escaped to the French colony of Pondicherry on the coast of south-east India, and settled for a life of exile, devoted to philosophical, literary, and yogic study and practice. His home soon attracted disciples and visitors, and became recognised as an ashrama in the tradition of the rishis of old. My visit arose mainly out of literary interests. I had read with appreciation a small book of Sri Aurobindo’s English verse, and had written an article on it. He had begun a review of my “New Ways in English Literature” with the brief, but sufficing sentence: “It is not often that literary criticism of the first order is produced in India. ‘New ways in English Literature’ is eminently of this class;” and “The Renaissance in India”, which included my preliminary impressions of the revival of Indian painting in Bengal, was made the text of a series of chapters on the same theme by the sage covering a year of the magazine of the Ashrama, “Arya”, and published as a book under the same title as mine.

My first visit to Sri Aurobindo, 9 to 10 a.m. was difficult. He left all the talking to me. But my second interview next morning was the other way round: he had presumably taken my measure from my previous day’s talk (a risky

21. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

thing for even a sage to do), and talked for the allotted hour. What he said is as completely forgotten as what I said the previous day: but I retain a flavour of gentleness and wisdom, breadth of thought, and extent of experience that marked him out as one among millions.²³

From December 1917 to July 1920 Sri Aurobindo published thirty-two instalments in the *Arya* — later published as a book *The Future Poetry*. The commencement for these chapters was an introduction of James H. Cousins, *New Ways in English Literature*.²⁴ In the opening chapter of *The Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo writes:

It is not often that we see published in India literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive, criticism which forces us both to see and think. A book which recently I have read and more than once reperused with a yet unexhausted pleasure and fruitfulness, Mr. James Cousins' *New Ways in English Literature*, is eminently of this kind.²⁵

Sri Aurobindo often would downplay his writing. When a poet-disciple complained that a poem of his took so much trouble and pain and the Muse is partial to his Guru, Sri Aurobindo replied: “Not at all. I have to labour much more than you, except for sonnets which come easily and short lyrics which need only a single revision. But for the rest I have to rewrite 20 or 30 times. Moreover I write only at long intervals.”²⁶

An extract from a fragmentary draft of a letter of Sri Aurobindo reads:

I send you my volume of poems since you have desired to read it, but with some hesitation. I doubt whether you will find much that is worth your perusal except two or three of the shorter poems, they were written long ago, some as many as 20 or 25 years, and are rather gropings after verse and style than a self-expression. It is only now that I am doing work which I feel has some chance of living, but it is not yet ready for publication.²⁷

Sri Aurobindo would often encourage the artists in their yoga. He wrote:

Literature and art are or can be first introductions to the inner being — the inner mind and vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of bhakti, poems of divine seeking etc., or creates music of that kind, it means

23. Website: <http://overmanfoundation.org/james-h-cousins-reminiscence-of-sri-aurobindo/> 31 Jan 2023.

24. See *CWSA*, Vol. 26, p. 399.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

26. *CWSA*, Vol. 27, p. 213.

27. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, pp. 253-54.

that there is a bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression.²⁸

Sri Aurobindo told a disciple that “you write from an inspiration which I have set going.”²⁹ Sri Aurobindo often advised the artists in the Ashram to be balanced and level-headed. He once told a poet-disciple, “You have some literary gift and can let it grow — but no desire for fame, if you please.”³⁰ To another disciple he wrote:

The use of poetry etc. is to keep one in contact with one’s inner being and that helps to prepare for the direct contact with the inmost, but one must not stop with that, one must go on to the real thing. If one thinks of being a “literary man”, a poet, a painter as things worthwhile for their own sake, then it is no longer the Yogic spirit. That is why I have sometimes to say that our business is to be Yogis, not merely poets, painters etc.³¹

And in *The Synthesis of Yoga* he writes, “The Yogin’s aim in the Arts should not be a mere aesthetic, mental or vital gratification, but, seeing the Divine everywhere . . .”³²

In another letter Sri Aurobindo writes to a disciple:

I have always told you that you ought not to stop your poetry and similar activities. . . . One can stop these things when they drop of themselves, because one is in full experience and so interested in one’s inner life that one has no energy to spare for the rest. Even then, there is no rule for giving up; for there is no reason why the poetry, etc., should not be a part of sadhana. The love of applause, of fame, the ego-feeling have to be given up, but that can be done without giving up the activity itself.³³

Sri Aurobindo’s inimitable beautiful prose had a modest strain. The poet Arjava once exulted to Dilip Kumar Roy: “How beautifully he writes, Dilip! How crystal clear! Not a trace of haziness anywhere. No abracadabra, wanting to show off and yet how luminous — shedding light without heat — like his eyes!”³⁴ And Gabriela Mistral, Chilean poet and Nobel laureate wrote: “Six foreign languages have given the Master of Pondicherry a gift of ordination, a clarity free from gaudiness, and a

28. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 244.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 447.

30. *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, pp. 600-01.

31. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 212.

32. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 142.

33. *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, p. 715.

34. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., p. 315.

charm which borders on the magical.”³⁵

Sri Aurobindo once praised a disciple’s ability in English: “As for Harin, I never object to what he may invent in language or in grammar, because so much mastery of language carries with it a right to take liberties with it. But I am more severe with myself and others.”³⁶ Sri Aurobindo also said: “Harin used to write ten or twelve poems in a day or any number more. It takes me usually a day or two days to write and perfect one or three days even, or if very inspired, I get two short ones out, and have perhaps to revise the next day. Another poet will be like Virgil writing nine lines a day and spending all the rest of his time polishing and polishing.”³⁷ When the disciple questioned, “If Harin could receive his inspiration without any necessity for rewriting, why not you?” Sri Aurobindo clarified: “So could I if I wrote every day and had nothing else to do and did not care what the level of inspiration was so long as I produced something exciting.”³⁸

In another instance a poet-sadhak wrote “Every time I complain of difficulty in writing, you quote the names of Milton and Virgil, but you forget they had no Supramental Avatar or Guru to push them on.” Sri Aurobindo replied, “Considering that the Supramental Avatar himself is quite incapable of doing what Nishikanta or Jyoti do, i.e. producing a poem or several poems a day, why do you bring him in? In England indeed I could write a lot every day but most of that has gone to the Waste Paper Basket.”³⁹

In addition to his brilliance in poetry and politics Sri Aurobindo is considered one of the world’s foremost philosophers. There are more than 300 centres in India and overseas that study his teachings. He once cursorily wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy:

And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher! How I managed to do it? First, because Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to the War and left me in the lurch with 64 pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there, automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!⁴⁰

35. Gabriela Mistral, ‘Gabriela Mistral, Chilean Poet and Nobel Prize-Winner, on Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1974, p. 566 (translated from Spanish by Norman Dowsett).

36. *CWSA*, Vol. 27, p. 646.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

40. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 70.

Referring to this letter Nirodbaran told his Guru: “You wrote to X that though people call you a philosopher you have never learnt philosophy. Well, what you have written in the *Arya* is so philosophical that the greatest philosopher of the world can never expect to write it. I don’t mean here the bringing down of the new Truth, but the power of expression, the art of reasoning and arguing with intellect and logic.” Sri Aurobindo replied:

There is very little argument in my philosophy — the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge.⁴¹

Sri Aurobindo has noted: “In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*.”⁴² In a letter Nobel laureate Romain Rolland wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy: “I thank you for what you have written to me about Sri Aurobindo as also for the monthly *Arya*. I entirely agree with your outlook. I know as yet too little about Sri Aurobindo, but what little I know about him convinces me that there is in him one of the highest spiritual forces of the world.”⁴³

Let us very briefly examine how mankind looked upon Sri Aurobindo as a philosopher. Several academics in the world placed Sri Aurobindo in the top rung of the all-time world philosophers. Dr. Frederic Spiegelberg, author and Professor at Stanford University, not only called Sri Aurobindo “the greatest living philosopher on earth”⁴⁴ but also added: “I shall not restrict Sri Aurobindo’s greatness to this age only. We have Plato, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel — but they do not have the same all-embracing metaphysical structure, they do not have the same vision.”⁴⁵

Pitrim Sorokin, author and Research Center Director at Harvard University, found Sri Aurobindo’s works “a sound antidote to the pseudo-scientific psychology, psychiatry and educational art of the West”.⁴⁶ He also wrote: “Aurobindo’s treatises are among the most important works of our time in philosophy, ethics and humanities. Sri Aurobindo himself is one of the greatest living sages of our time.”⁴⁷

Dr. Raymond Frank Piper, author and Professor of Philosophy at Syracuse University said: “Sri Aurobindo is one of the greatest thinkers, indeed he has attained

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

42. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 9.

43. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., 2004, p. x.

44. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 20.

45. ‘Tributes to Sri Aurobindo from Celebrities’ *Mother India*, August 1997, p. 615.

46. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 751.

47. *London Times Literary Supplement*, ‘Tributes to Sri Aurobindo from Celebrities’, *Mother India*, August 1997, p. 615.

an incomparable triune greatness as poet, philosopher and saint.”⁴⁸

S. K. Maitra, Head of the Department of Philosophy and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, at the Benaras Hindu University, after making a comparative study of Sri Aurobindo and many Western philosophical thinkers, reached the conclusion: “May we not say that . . . there is a philosophic yoga which converts the philosophies with which we are familiar into the ideal philosophy, the philosophy that is to be the future philosophy! An outline of this philosophic yoga Sri Aurobindo has given in his writings.”⁴⁹

The President of the World Congress of Faiths, Baron Palmstierena, said: “Aurobindo is to me one of the greatest teachers of mankind today. His wisdom surpasses intellectual knowledge and inspires efforts to reach contact with the life divine. In a darkened age his message brings hope.”⁵⁰ And writing in the *World Review* (October 1949), the Rev. E. F. F. Hill declared: “Aurobindo is the greatest contemporary philosopher and great in the company of the greatest mystics of all time.”⁵¹

Gabriela Mistral, Chilean poet and Nobel laureate wrote: “Sri Aurobindo, the Master, highest of mystics . . . Sri Aurobindo is a unique synthesis of a scholar, a theologian and one who is enlightened.”⁵²

A propos *The Life Divine* Aldous Huxley regarded it of the “highest importance” and a remarkably fine “piece of philosophic and religious literature,”⁵³ while British writer and explorer, Sir Francis Younghusband deemed “it the greatest book which has been produced in my time”.⁵⁴ And London’s renowned *Times Literary Supplement* wrote: “And he has crystallized the mellow wisdom of a lifetime into luminous prose in *The Life Divine*, which, it is not too much to say, is one of the master-works of our age.”⁵⁵

At the time of the enshrinement of the relics in the Delhi Ashram, prolific philosophic author Professor Jean Herbert of the University of Geneva wrote: “Even those most allergic to anything that smells of mysticism . . . must acknowledge Sri Aurobindo as one of the greatest men, not only of our age, but of all ages. His all-embracing, crystal clear and profound philosophy is assuredly a contribution to human thought, vision and progress which ranks with that of Plato, Kant, Bergson

48. *Ibid.*

49. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 440.

50. *London Times Literary Supplement*, ‘Tributes to Sri Aurobindo from Celebrities’, *Mother India*, August 1997, p. 615.

51. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 752.

52. Gabriela Mistral, ‘Gabriela Mistral, Chilean Poet and Nobel Prize-Winner, on Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1974, pp. 566-67 (translated from Spanish by Norman Dowsett).

53. ‘Aldous Huxley on Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1965, p. 10.

54. ‘Sir Francis Younghusband on Sri Aurobindo: A Letter of 1941 and a Book Review of 1942’, *Mother India*, August 1975, p. 623.

55. Website: <http://savitri.in/blogs/light-of-supreme/sri-aurobindo-a-philosopher-of-modern-india-times-literary-supplement-1-july-1944> (3.2.2023)

or Goethe . . .”⁵⁶

From Japan in the Far East, Shumei Okawa — described as “the leading spirit of the pan-Asiatic movement in Japan” — wrote an article, in August 1918, ‘A Sage, Arabindo Ghosh’, where he called him “the most genuine Indian of all the Indian thinkers in the strict sense of the word”.⁵⁷

On 1st July 1944, *Times Literary Supplement* — London’s internationally renowned weekly literary review where numerous distinguished writers have contributed — did a lengthy feature on Sri Aurobindo. In an important editorial message they introduced him as a great new force in world thought under the heading ‘Sri Aurobindo a Philosopher of Modern India’. We reproduce an extract:

Of all modern Indian writers Aurobindo — successively poet, critic, scholar, thinker, nationalist, humanist — is the most significant and perhaps the most interesting. Yet few have heard of him in England or America. This is a pity, for he should make a special appeal to the intelligent Anglo-Saxon. He is not an armchair philosopher, but a man who, having led a life of intense activity, has retired to brood over it, if one may say so of a Hindu, in the dim light of a Gothic cathedral. In fact, he is a new type of thinker, one who combines in his vision the alacrity of the West with the illumination of the East. To study his writings is to enlarge the boundaries of one’s knowledge. . . .

But, before coming to his work; it may be mentioned that he has edited many excellent journals, among them the famed *Arya* (a philosophical review). . . . Indeed, Aurobindo is accepted by contemporary India as not even Tagore was accepted. There are no criticisms, only praise. . . .

He is not a philosopher in the ordinary sense of the word. He gives us no rounded system of speculation, but only flashes of light. Speaking of the Vedic sages, he remarks:

“ . . . thought proceeded by other methods than those of our logical reasoning . . . The wisest then depended on inner experience and the suggestions of the intuitive mind for all knowledge that ranged beyond mankind’s ordinary perceptions and daily activities. Their aim was illumination, not logical conviction, their ideal the inspired seer, not the accurate reasoner.”

. . . He has always acted his dreams. “Truth of philosophy,” he has said, is of a merely theoretical value unless it can be lived. . . .” So from individual self-discipline he has gone to the life of humanity. *The Psychology of Social Development, Ideal and Progress and The Ideal of Human Unity* should be carefully considered by all those who are busy preparing blue-prints for the future. Aurobindo is an internationalist, not in a dreamy nor yet in a conventional

56. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 760.

57. *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, December 1994, p. 240.

manner, but by inner compulsion — the compulsion of thought leading to an inevitable conclusion. Long before others he spoke of “one world”. His final word, that we are whether we like it or not, “members one of another”. Unless we realise this truth, and act upon it, we shall never have peace and good will on earth.⁵⁸

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo was universally recognised as a great philosopher, intellectual, mystic and Yogi. The President of India, Rajendra Prasad placed him “in the pantheon of its greatest seers and prophets,” and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, later to become President of India, described Sri Aurobindo as “the greatest intellectual of our age and a major force for the life of the spirit”, whilst Jawaharlal Nehru has described Sri Aurobindo as “one of the greatest minds of our generation”.⁵⁹

About his books on philosophy, Sri Aurobindo noted:

I myself have developed many capacities by Yoga. Formerly I could not have written a line of philosophy — now people have started writing books about my philosophy to my great surprise. It is not a question of first class or second class. One has to produce one’s best and develop — the “class” if class there must be will be decided by posterity.⁶⁰

Sri Aurobindo’s quiet humble disposition was something that came naturally and spontaneously to him. He has said:

I don’t make any attempt to be a scientist or painter or general. I have certain things to do and have done them, so long as the Divine wanted; others have opened in me from above or within by Yoga. I have done as much of them as the Divine wanted.⁶¹

Sri Aurobindo has also revealed that he changed his nature by “force of Yoga”:

The question was whether new faculties not at all manifested in the personality up to now in this life could appear, even suddenly appear, by force of Yoga. I say they can and I gave my own case as proof. I could have given others also. The question involved is also this — is a man bound to the character and qualities he has come with into this life — can he not become a new man by Yoga? That also I have proved in my sadhana, it can be done.⁶²

58. Website: <http://savitri.in/blogs/light-of-supreme/sri-aurobindo-a-philosopher-of-modern-india-times-literary-supplement-1-july-1944> (3.2.2023)

59. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 735.

60. *CWSA*, Vol. 27, pp. 453-54.

61. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, pp. 53-54.

62. *Nirodbaran’s Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2001, p. 138.

About the yoga Sri Aurobindo told Nirodbaran: “Well, of course the first business of Yoga is not to make geniuses at all, but to make spiritual men — but Yoga can do the other thing also.”⁶³ He also cautioned him: “What is all this obsession of greater or less? In our Yoga we do not strive after greatness.”⁶⁴ Elsewhere he explained: “The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way — men need not be extraordinary beings to follow Yoga. That is the mistake you are making — to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual.”⁶⁵

The Mother has cautioned us against excessive self-esteem and instead to be like a flower; sweet, simple and natural:

Above all, whatever we undertake should not be done for the purpose of self-assertion. If we are attached to fame and glory, to the esteem of our peers, we are soon led to make concessions to them; and if we seek any opportunity to admire ourselves, it becomes easy to make ourselves out to be what we are not, and nothing more obscures the ideal within us.

We should never tell ourselves, openly or indirectly, “I want to be great, what vocation can I find for myself in order to become great?”

On the contrary, we should tell ourselves, “There must certainly be something I can do better than anyone else, since each one of us is a special mode of manifestation of the divine power which, in its essence, is one in all. However humble and modest it may be, this is precisely the thing to which I should devote myself, and in order to find it, I shall observe and analyse my tastes, tendencies and preferences, and I shall do it without pride or excessive humility, whatever others may think I shall do it just as I breathe, just as the flower smells sweet, quite simply, quite naturally, because I cannot do otherwise.”⁶⁶

In a conversation the Mother told a disciple that Sri Aurobindo “reveals Himself to all those who are simple, sincere and humble.”⁶⁷

Sri Aurobindo has remarked, “Men of genius have generally a big ego — can’t be helped, that.”⁶⁸ And about people with strong personalities Sri Aurobindo has said:

All great personalities have a strong ego of one kind or another — for that matter it does not need to be a big personality to be ego-centred; ego-centricity is the very nature of life in the Ignorance, — even the sattwic man, the philanthropist, the altruist live for and round their ego. Society imposes an effort to restrain and when one cannot restrain at least to disguise it. Morality’s highest business is to

63. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

66. *CWM*, Vol. 2, 2nd Ed., p. 53.

67. Mona Sarkar, *Blessings of the Grace*, 1st Ed., 2015, p. 121.

68. Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 746.

control or widen, refine or sublimate it so that it shall be able to exceed itself or use itself in the service of things bigger than its own primary egoism. But none of these things enables one to escape from it. It is only by finding something deep within or above ourselves and making *laya* (dissolution) of the ego in that that it is possible. . . .⁶⁹

Once, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “As for the sense of superiority, that is a little difficult to avoid when greater horizons open before the consciousness, unless one is already of a saintly and humble disposition.”⁷⁰

And for those who have a sense of superiority the Mother has said:

. . . you cannot think yourselves superior unless you are unconscious. The minute you are truly conscious you lose this notion of superiority and inferiority completely. So, in both the cases, you must not feel yourselves superior — for it is a smallness and a meanness — but feel full of goodwill and sympathy and not care at all for what people say or don’t say, but be polite, because it is always preferable to be polite rather than impolite, for you put yourself into contact with more harmonious forces and can fight much better against the forces of destruction and ugliness, for no other reasons than these, because we like harmony and it is better to keep that; but essentially you should be far above all this and feel interested only in your relation with the Divine, what He expects from you and what you want to do for Him. For *this* is the only thing which matters. All the rest has no importance.

There are people who want to show their superiority. This proves that they are quite small. The more one wants to show his superiority, the more it proves that he is quite small. You see, a little child who lives simply without looking at itself and how it lives, is much greater than you because it is spontaneous.⁷¹

Nirodbaran jestingly asked Sri Aurobindo about his Nirvana realisation: “Now about your absence of urge towards spirituality. Even though that sounds like a story, pray tell us how you could free your mind from all thoughts in 7 days or be established in Brahmic consciousness in a few days.” Sri Aurobindo casually retorted:

3 if you please. You are terribly inaccurate in your statements. It was simply through the Divine Grace, because it had been done by thousands before me throughout the centuries and millenniums, and the Divine did not want me to waste time over that; other things in the Yoga were not so damned easy!⁷²

69. *CWSA*, Vol. 27, p. 545.

70. *CWSA*, Vol. 28, p. 431.

71. *CWM*, Vol. 7, 2nd Ed., pp. 388-89.

72. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 424-25.

A disciple told Sri Aurobindo, “You had Nirvana in three days. Still you say there was no spirituality in you!” He succinctly replied, “None, before I took up Yoga.”⁷³ Alluding to his experience — a calm that surrounded him and remained for long months afterwards — on arriving at Bombay from England in February 1893, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

I could illustrate my meaning more concretely from my own first experience of the Self, long before I knew even what Yoga was or that there was such a thing, at a time when I had no religious feeling, no wish for spiritual knowledge, no aspiration beyond the mind, only a contented agnosticism and the impulse towards poetry and politics. But it would be too long a story, so I do not tell it here.⁷⁴

When sadhaks were overwhelmed with struggles Sri Aurobindo would encourage and goad them by revealing his past difficulties and how he overcame them. Once, whilst trying to reassure a disciple, Sri Aurobindo said, “You as such are not called upon to take all that trouble. Even for me it would have been impossible if I had to do it all myself. At a certain stage the heavens opened and the thing was done for me.”⁷⁵ In another instance a sadhak lamented, “Suddenly to drop without doing anything wrong — why such a setback?” “Everybody drops”, Sri Aurobindo said, “I have dropped myself thousands of times during the sadhana. What roseleaf-princess sadhaks you all are!”⁷⁶ And when a sadhak declared, “No joy, no energy. Don’t like to read or write — as if a dead man were walking about. Do you understand the position? Any personal experience?” Sri Aurobindo replied: “I quite understand; often had it myself devastatingly. That’s why I always advise people who have it to cheer up and buck up.”⁷⁷

In another letter Sri Aurobindo wrote: “For me the path of Yoga has always been a battle as well as a journey, a thing of ups and downs, of light followed by darkness followed by a greater light . . .”⁷⁸ In one instance he wrote:

That kind of passivity to the forces comes upon many when there is the descent into the physical; one then feels different forces playing in the consciousness without having the same power of reaction as one had in the mind and the vital — sometimes peace etc. from above, sometimes disturbing forces. I had to pass through the same stage myself and it took me 2 years at least to get out of it. To develop in the physical itself a constant will for the drawing down of

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 374-75.

74. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 170.

75. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 77.

76. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 374.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 372.

the higher consciousness — especially the Peace and Force from above, is the best way out of it.⁷⁹

To another disciple he wrote:

I don't find it a noble voice at all, it is the voice of the usual defeatist suggester using any and every reasoning to instil weakness, flight and self-destruction. There is no strong reasoning, either, it is the usual round of sophistries always the same and repeated to every sadhak in turn. “Give up, give up, give up! run, run, run! die, die, say die, say die.” . . . I know too well the ways of the fellow — I have paid heavily to know. In my own sadhana I have heard his chant of death a million times and several hundreds of times from this or that sadhak. So I simply refuse to listen to him and I advise you to do the same.⁸⁰

Sri Aurobindo told a seeker, “Weaknesses are natural to man; in fact, I have never met a person who was perfect.”⁸¹ And he told his disciples: “If people were to know all the facts about my life they would never believe that such a man could come to anything.”⁸²

A disciple once stated, “What of your brilliant career? If one has the essential principle, what does it matter if one has no urge towards spirituality?” Sri Aurobindo's witty reply read:

My career was much less brilliant than many others'. They ought to have progressed then farther in Yoga than myself, e.g. Mussolini, Lenin, Tilak, Brajendranath Seal, the admirable Crichton, Gandhi, Tagore, Roosevelt, Lloyd George etc. etc. All Avatars or all full of the essential principle!⁸³

Sri Aurobindo did not have the slightest hesitation in revealing that sports was not his forte: “I myself have never been a sportsman nor — apart from taking a spectator's interest in cricket in England or a non-player member of the Baroda Club — taken up any physical games or athletics except some exercises learnt from Madras wrestlers in Baroda such as *dand* or *baithak* and those I took up only to put some strength and vigour into a frail and weak though not unhealthy body, but I never attached any importance or significance to these things and dropped the exercises when I thought they were no longer necessary.”⁸⁴ And when a biographer wanted

79. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

81. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 45.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

83. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 425.

84. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 2nd Ed., 1984, p. 504.

to write in his biography “He played cricket well”, Sri Aurobindo corrected him, “Never. He only played cricket as a small boy in M^r Drewett’s garden at Manchester and not at all well.”⁸⁵ About doing physical work Sri Aurobindo revealed:

It is not a question of liking but of capacity — though usually (not always) liking goes with the capacity. But capacity can be developed and liking can be developed or rather the *rasa* you speak of. One cannot be said to be in the full Yogic condition — for the purposes of this Yoga — if one cannot take up with willingness any work given to one as an offering to the Divine. At one time I was absolutely unfit for any physical work and cared only for the mental, but I trained myself in doing physical things with care and perfection so as to overcome this glaring defect in my being and make the bodily instrument apt and conscious. It was the same with some others here. A nature not trained to accept external work and activity becomes mentally top-heavy — physically inert and obscure. It is only if one is disabled or too physically weak that physical work can be put aside altogether. I am speaking of course from the point of view of the ideal — the rest depends upon the nature.⁸⁶

The Mother mentions that the virtue of “selfless admiration” is rare. She explains the true meaning of humility:

. . . I shall touch briefly on the meaning of true humility . . . Humility is that state of consciousness in which, whatever the realisation, you know the infinite is still in front of you. The rare quality of selfless admiration about which I have spoken to you is but another aspect of true humility; for it is sheer arrogance that refuses to admire and is complacent about its own petty achievements, forgetting the infinite which is always ahead of it. However, you need to be humble not only when you have nothing substantial or divine in you but even when you are on the path of transformation. Paradoxical though it may sound, the Divine who is absolutely perfect is at the same time absolutely humble — humble as nothing else can ever be. He is not occupied in admiring Himself: though He is the All, He ever seeks to find Himself in what is not-Himself — that is why He has created in His own being what seems to be a colossal not-Himself, this phenomenal world.⁸⁷

Nirodbaran’s correspondence with his Guru makes a fascinating study on Sri Aurobindo’s magnanimity in treating a then stuttering disciple like a friend. We often notice Sri Aurobindo’s delightful and inimitable self-deprecating humour as for instance in the following exchange:

85. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 39.

86. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 53.

87. *CWM*, Vol. 3, 2nd Ed., p. 175.

I prophesy that your message will reverberate in the rarefied atmosphere evoking a loud rebellious echo from human hearts.

I admit that you have successfully proved that I am an imbecile.⁸⁸

We don't mean to give you a compliment when we say these things.

Of course not. It is the reverse of complimentary, since you prove me to be an ignorant and mistaken fellow of an Avatar, who merely wastes his time doing things which are of no earthly use to any human being — except perhaps Arjuna who is not here.⁸⁹

A disciple once impertinently wrote: “The difficulties you face, the dangers you overcome, the struggles you embrace would seem to be mere shams.” Underlining “mere shams” Sri Aurobindo calmly and ironically responded: “Truly then what a humbug and charlatan I have been, making much of sham struggles and dangers — or, in the alternative, since I took them for realities, what a self-blinded imbecile!”⁹⁰

Some disciples who were close to Sri Aurobindo made good use or even took advantage of his liberalness. Nirodbaran wrote:

... one day in a fury I attacked his Yoga — “Karmayoga is all bosh,” etc. He wrote: “You will excuse the vein of irony or satire in all this — but really, when I am told that my own case disproves my own spiritual philosophy and accumulated knowledge and experience, a little liveliness in answer is permissible.”⁹¹

On another occasion Nirodbaran wrote: “I remember a story of my childhood. I was dining with my father when I was obliged to go out. I turned round and said, ‘Papa, see you don’t eat my fish!’ Well, fathers may not, but Gurus?” Sri Aurobindo replied:

No, Sir, I don’t eat your fish. I have oceans of fish at my disposal and have no need to consume your little sprats. It is Messrs. H. F. (hostile forces) who do that — the Dasyus or robbers. You display your fine new penknife and they say “Ah! He’s proud of his fine new penknife, is he? We’ll show him!” and they filch it at the first opportunity.⁹²

88. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 426.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 427.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 422.

91. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – The Modern Avatar’, *Mother India*, August 1971, p. 463.

92. *Nirodbaran’s Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2001, p. 324.

On Sri Aurobindo’s modest and egalitarian attitude towards his disciples Dilip Kumar Roy said: “It was because he allowed us such liberties that we could go on treating him almost as our equal in stature — so much so that Nirod often ran full tilt into him whenever his daemon impelled him to.”⁹³

Even in conversation with his disciples Sri Aurobindo’s self-effacing humour would surface:

DISCIPLE: The general idea is that unless one has got a screw loose in his brain one would not come for Yoga. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you mean? If a screw is loose then the machine is not doing its work at all!

DISCIPLE: The idea seems to be: the more loose screws the better chance for Yoga. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean myself? (*Laughter*)⁹⁴

Alluding to the conversations that Sri Aurobindo had with his attendants, Nirodbaran writes:

Yogis and great men there were, who used to joke with their disciples and friends; but it seems to me that there was always a barrier of awe and reverence between them. And though Sri Aurobindo allowed us to forget that and we cut jokes with him on equal terms, the sense of his being our Guru was there.⁹⁵

An aphorism of Sri Aurobindo reads:

O fool of thy weakness, cover not God’s face from thyself by a veil of awe, approach Him not with a suppliant weakness. Look! thou wilt see on His face not the solemnity of the King & Judge, but the smile of the Lover.⁹⁶

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKER

93. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., 2004, p. 30.

94. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 168.

95. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, p. 238.

96. *CWSA*, Vol. 12, pp. 495-96.

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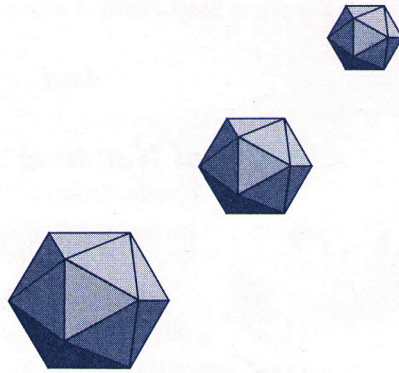
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