

MOTHER INDIA

AUGUST 15, 1969

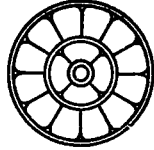
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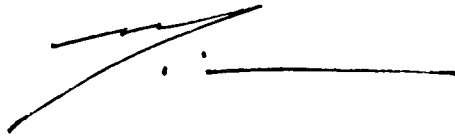


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute.

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXI

No. 7

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO

TO V. CHANDRASEKHAR

I

Pondicherry, 13 July 1920

Dear Chandrasekhar,

I have not been able to write to you before for want of time—a thing of which I have always a very short supply nowadays. I hope that your illness has “improved” in the right way—by this time; if not, please write and keep us informed of your state of health. Above all, do not harbour that idea of an unfit body—all suggestions of that kind are a subtle attack on the will to siddhi and especially dangerous in physical matters. It has been cropping up in several people who are doing the Yoga and the first business is to expel it bag and baggage. Appearances and facts may be all in its favour, but the first condition of success for the Yogin and indeed for anybody who wants to do anything great or unusual is to be superior to facts and disbelieve in appearances. Will to be free from disease, however formidable, many-faced or constant its attacks, and repel all contrary suggestions.

It is now precisely in this physical field that I am getting most obstruction nowadays. I have myself been sporting a choice kind of cough for the last month or so which took up its lodgings in my throat and cheerfully promised to be my companion for the longest possible period it could manage of my physical existence; and though ill received and constantly discouraged, it is still hanging about the premises. In other matters I progress with and in spite of the customary obstructions, much faster than at any previous period of my Yoga. Nothing absolutely new—I am simply going on developing to a higher degree the *vijñāna* and turning other things into something of its substance.

It is bad that you do not find things favourable for your own Yoga. In case you find it too difficult there, why not try another period here? This time there would be no inconvenience. Our friends the R's had intended to ask you to stay with them; they were only waiting to get things into order and were sorry you went away suddenly before they could put it to you. Another time the arrangement could be made, and I think there would be no objection about being here for the 15th August. Was that only an idea, an intention or a resolution?

Please write sometimes about your health and your Yoga.

2

Pondicherry, 13 April 1921.

Dear Chandrasekhar,

I am glad to get your letter after so long a time. I have myself written no letters for the last six months to anyone, both on account of lack of time and absorption in Yoga, which explains my silence. I will do my best to help you; but until you come, write to me, for even if I do not answer, that creates a physical link which makes transmission of help easier on the material plane—for the physical consciousness. It will certainly be better for you if you come to Pondicherry, but I recognise the difficulties. We are trying, not yet with success, to arrange for a house here where people who come for the Yoga may stop. Perhaps it would be best for you to wait a little and see whether this materialises. It would hardly do in your present state of health for you to expose yourself to the difficulties of bad food of the Tamil hotel type etc. Amrita will write and inform you as soon as we can get the thing settled.

3

(Dictated to Amrita)

July 21, 1924

It is not easy to get into the silence. That is only possible by throwing out the mental and vital activities. It is easier to let the silence get into you, *i.e.*, to open yourself and let it descend. The way to do this and the way to call down the higher powers is the same. It is to remain quiet at the time of meditation, not fighting with the mind or making mental efforts to pull down the power of the Silence but keeping only a silent will and aspiration for them. If the mind is active, one has only to learn to look at it, drawn back and not giving any sanction from within, until its habitual or mechanical activities begin to fall quiet for want of support from within. If it is too persistent, a steady rejection without strain or struggle is the one thing to be done.

The mental attitude you are taking with regard to “the Lord is the Yogeswara” can be made a first step towards this quietude.

Silence does not mean absence of experiences. It is an inner silence and quietude in which all experiences happen without producing any disturbance. It would be a great mistake to interfere with the images rising in you. It does not matter whether they are mental or psychic. One must have experience not only of the true psychic but of the inner mental, inner vital, and subtle physical worlds or planes of consciousness. The occurrence of the images is a sign that these are opening and to inhibit them would mean to inhibit the expansion of consciousness and experience without which this Yoga cannot be done.

All this is an answer to the points raised by your letter. It is not meant that you should change suddenly what you are doing. It is better to proceed from what you have attained which seems to be solid, if small, and proceed quietly in the direction indicated.

(Dictated to Amrita)

October 4, 1924

Your question was whether, in the absence of a quiet aspiration, you are right in straining yourself to reach the Higher. There are two kinds of movements in the Sadhāna, the ascent and the descent. The ascent or the upward movement takes place when there is a sufficient aspiration from the being, *i.e.*, from the various, mental, vital and physical planes. Each in turn ascends above the mind to the place where it meets the supramental and then can receive the origination of all its movements from above. The Higher descends when you have a receptive quietude in the various planes of your being prepared to receive it. In either case whether in rising upward to rise to the Higher or in remaining passive and open to receive the Higher, an entire calmness in the different parts of the being is the true condition. If you do not have the necessary force in the quiet aspiration or will and if you find that a certain amount of effort will help you in rising upward you may go on using it as a temporary means until there is the natural openness in which a silent call or simple effortless will is sufficient to induce the action of the Higher Shakti.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAN'S VISITING OTHER PLANETS

A LETTER OF SRI AUROBINDO AND A COMMENT BY THE MOTHER

A Question to the Mother

MAN'S landing on the moon yesterday is, no doubt, an event marking a very great scientific achievement, but what is its significance for the progress of humanity from the spiritual point of view?

While I was thinking about this yesterday, I was reminded of a letter of Sri Aurobindo written in 1934 in which He has answered this question by referring to Your own experience of visiting other planets in the subtle body. I enclose this answer for You to see along with the question.

I would like to know from You if this is a complete answer to my question—or would You like to add something to it?

22.7.1969

Sri Aurobindo's Letter

Q: I have been wondering whether the Mother has been able to establish a direct connection with Mars or any other far-off planet which is probably habitable and inhabited.

A: A long time ago Mother was going everywhere in the subtle body but she found it of a very secondary interest. Our attention must be fixed on the earth because our work is here. Besides, the earth is a concentration of all the other worlds and one can touch them by touching something corresponding in the earth-atmosphere.

13.1.1934

The Mother's Comment

This answer is a very interesting one as it deals with the centre of the question.

22.7.1969

OUR EARTH AND THE UNIVERSE

TWO LETTERS

Sri Aurobindo's Letter

There is no reason to suppose that there is no life in any part of the material cosmic system except earth. No doubt the suns and nebulae cannot harbour material life because there is not the necessary basis, but wherever there is a formed world, life can exist. It used formerly to be supposed that life could not exist except in conditions identical with the earth, but it is now being discovered that even man and the animals can adapt themselves to atmospheric conditions deficient in oxygen such as exist in the stratosphere—this proves that all depends on adaptation. There are animals that can exist only in the sea, yet sea-animals have become amphibious or turned into land animals—so mammals on earth can by habit of adaptation live only in a certain range of atmosphere and need oxygen but they could adapt themselves to other conditions—it is a law of habit of Nature, not a law of inevitable necessity of Nature. It is therefore quite possible for life to exist in other planets in our and other systems, though the beings there may not be quite like earthly humanity or life quite the same.

September 10, 1937

The Mother's Letter

In the whole creation the earth has a place of distinction, because unlike any other planet it is evolutionary with a psychic entity at its centre. In it, India, in particular, is a divinely chosen country.

SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

Do not divide what is one. Both science and spirituality have the same goal—the Supreme Divinity. The only difference between them is that the latter knows it and the other not.

December. 1962

THE MOTHER

La liberté que nous voulons
réaliser à Auroville n'est pas une
licence où chacun fait à sa guise
sans se soucier du bien être et
de l'organisation du tout.



The liberty we wish to realise at Auroville is not a licence where each one does as he likes without caring for the welfare and the organisation of the whole.

Tout bon Aurovillien
doit faire effort pour
se libérer de tous les desirs
toutes les préférences et
toutes les répulsions.
L'égalité d'âme en
face de toute circonstance
est le principal but à
atteindre pour vivre
à Auroville.

Every good Aurovillian should try to free himself from all desires, all preferences and all repulsions.

Equanimity in the face of all circumstances is the chief goal to attain in order to live in Auroville.

THE INNER BEING AND SEPARATION FROM THE OUTER

LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO

Self: Since yesterday the quiet pressure of the sadhana is felt for almost the whole day. It is becoming more powerful and intense. If the vital participates in it now, the whole nature would be changed into quite a different thing!

SRI AUROBINDO: The "whole nature" does not so easily change. What has to be done is to get the inner being spiritualised by a higher consciousness. 18-7-1934

Self: The consciousness lives more an inner than an outer life.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the first condition. 18-7-1934

Self: During the present state, is the peace so very necessary? Don't you think its descent is retarded by the vital?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is always better to have peace. As for the vital, there is always something in it that resists and tries to retard, but if the inner being opens sufficiently and you can live in the inner being, peace can descend and establish itself there in such a way that the vital movements of the surface may be there, but will not be able to break the inner peace. 18-7-1934

Self: When one lives an inner life, does not one come in touch with the psychic and bring about its leadership?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not always at once. There is the inner mind, vital, physical. Many live a long time in that. The psychic is the inmost. 19-7-1934

Self: Till the evening the consciousness was in such a state that I could not make out anything. Along with the inner quietude it experienced a condition never before felt. It remained quite indifferent to what the outer being did and it stood on its own as if waiting for something.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is some part of the inner being that has entered into quietude and separated itself from the external nature. 27-7-1934

Self: Usually it is my mind that determines and formulates the aspiration. But during today's silence, I saw the aspiration surging up spontaneously and harmoniously in a ready-made form!

SRI AUROBINDO: So much the better. It is the inner being that has become active. 6-8-1934

Self: During the work also, though the mind was busy with thoughts, there was stillness, firm and solid, behind the activity.

SRI AUROBINDO: Very good.

Self: Does the above experience mean that my consciousness was not only in the inner being but on some higher plane?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the inner being. But the stillness comes from the higher consciousness.

It is sufficient to begin with if there is a constant inner stillness not disturbed by any thoughts or movements on the surface. 11-8-1934

Self: During the free reception, I feel the descent passing through my head, forehead and inner vision centre.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the inner mind centres that have become open and conscious. 18-8-1934

If the deeper consciousness is coming back, then it does not matter about withdrawing. To remain concentrated is sufficient. 6-10-1934

Everyone carries around him an environmental consciousness or atmosphere through which he is in relation with others—or with the universal forces. It is through this that there [enter] forces or thoughts or feelings of others. 17-10-1934

It can become silent when there is the wideness. One can become conscious of it and deal with what passes through it. A man without it would be without contact with the rest of the world. 18-10-1934

Self: During our sleep, does the inner being stop the sadhana when we are having ordinary dreams?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. It can go on behind the surface. 31-10-1934

Self: If the inner being did sadhana behind the surface or during the sleep, would I not know it as I do about my dreams?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily—the inner being can do many things which the surface mind does not know. 1-11-1934

People do not feel all that is going on in them—very little comes to the surface of the ordinary consciousness. 3-11-1934

If you feel emptiness, peace, and silence in the midst of the most restless activities, the inner being cannot have withdrawn. 3-11-1934

Self: You wrote, "If you feel it, why should it be a hyperbole? It would be a hyper-

bole if you thought or said it without feeling it except in a vague and uncertain manner.” Well, my mind thinks that to have such a union with the Mother is not possible for my present stage of sadhana and that it comes only after a long preparation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Such movements by the mind are of no value. If you had spoken of a final perfect integral and absolute union, there would have been overhaste in expectation, but you spoke of a beginning of identification and that is quite possible now.

1-10-1934

From NAGIN DOSHI

MELLIFLUITY

COME, eloquent deep flow—but all in proper time:
 Let measure be perfected, let the living well
 Give only the Divine in full clear draughts that quell
 The darkness, and call up an inward golden chime
 In answering: be sweetness more than rhythm and rhyme
 The reason knows and reins its awkward tongue to tell:
 Be endless peaks and oceans when this cramping spell
 Is lifted, and the Sun rules in its vast sublime.

O music of the deathless Wisdom, come to me,
 Lift in completion out of this dull ragged sphere
 To plenitude of moulding grace and harmony,
 All beauty of one Truth the very blood's career:
 Be song the increasing burden culminate and sheer
 That rounds the ready man and bears him, sure and free.

JESSE ROARK

CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

16-7-1934

Q: I do not yet know if I am on the path of the true consciousness. I pray to you for some directions that may take me easily to the Truth.

SRI AUROBINDO: What has developed in you is a power of true inner vision—this will help you to enter through it into touch with the Divine; you have only to let it develop. Two other things have to develop—the feeling of the Divine Presence and Power and inspiration behind your actions, and the inner contact with myself and with the Mother. Aspire with faith and sincerity and these will come. I do not wish to give any more precise instructions until I see what happens in you during your stay here—for although the path is common to all, each man has his own way of following it.

19-7-1934

Q: Last evening I had the vision that you were standing in front of me. I requested you, "Kindly take me to the Divine." You asked me to follow you; and then you escorted me to a mountain. We climbed on and on till we attained a very high peak where the temple of Mother Durga was located. I bowed and got her blessings. Afterwards we ascended farther on where Lord Krishna was. Making my pranams I received his blessings. Then I prayed to the Lord, "Please grant me peace and wisdom." He replied, "These things you can have from Sri Aurobindo." Later we returned home.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a mental vision, the images being supplied by the mind. The mountain always represents the ascending hill of existence with the Divine to be reached on the summit. In your vision you got the contact with the Divine and were told to seek peace and knowledge from me.

Q: Then I felt as if the Mother had been standing on the terrace silently, with closed eyes, and all the sadhaks standing below. It was evening.

SRI AUROBINDO: That again is a mental vision. These mental visions are meant to bring in the mind the influence of the things they represent—here the effect of the Mother's meditation and blessing in the evening.

Q: Is there any probability of my encountering the hostile forces? If so, how to face them?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is better not to trouble about the hostile forces. Keep your aspiration living and sincere and call in the Divine in each thing and at each moment for support and all that you feel or need and keep yourself open to us. That is the easiest way to the Divine. If you begin to concern yourself with the hostile forces, you will only make the path difficult and troublesome.

From DR. R. S. AGARWAL

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(These talks are from the Note-books of Dr. Nirodbaran who used to record most of the conversations which Sri Aurobindo had with his attendants and a few others, after the accident to his right leg in November 1938. Besides the recorder, the attendants were: Dr. Manilal, Dr. Becharlal, Purani, Champaklal, Dr. Satyendra and Mulshanker. As the notes were not seen by Sri Aurobindo himself, the responsibility for the Master's words rests entirely with Nirodbaran. He does not vouch for absolute accuracy, but he has tried his best to reproduce them faithfully. He has made the same attempt for the speeches of the others.)

APRIL 1, 1940

P: A poet friend of mine has written that he met X and was impressed by him. He found X to have illimitable bhakti for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

SRI AUROBINDO: Illimitable? Well, X had a strange way of showing it.

P: Then my friend writes that X has gone very deep down in his consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is always possible to go down. (*Laughter*)

P: Here is a letter from Indumati. She asks whether her bhakti for Krishna is genuine or not and how she can dedicate herself to Krishna and pray to him to free her from all bonds.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a little dangerous to pray for that.

P: Then she says that sometimes she sees Krishna's picture moving. Once she saw that he was very far away.

SRI AUROBINDO: You may say to her that bhakti is all right but it has to be complete and, when it is complete, she won't suffer from any troubles. The picture seen as moving means the Presence is there.

N: Why do you say it is dangerous for her to pray to be freed from bonds?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because Krishna has extraordinary ways of freeing one, and she may not like them. You know the story of Nolinেশwar and his father. Because his father used to persecute him, he prayed for his father's death. But when his father lay on the point of death, Nolinেশwar prayed again to Krishna to spare him. The father recovered and then he started his old persecution again! (*Laughter*)

N: D has put two more objections to Nishikanta's expression: first he says that আপন (own) is a pronoun and here it has been used as an adjective, which is not permissible with this word.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why adjective?

N: He says it is one.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think it is.

N: N's objection seems to have gone. He has agreed that by implication it can be taken in the sense of "self dream".

P: Yes, he says that if a hyphen is put then আপন পাবে would be clear.

SRI AUROBINDO: If a hyphen solves the problem, then put it.

N: The other objection of D is that the dream is called "disagreeable". How could a disagreeable dream be asked to fulfil itself? Why should a dream of which one is afraid be fulfilled?

SRI AUROBINDO: The poet is not afraid. He thinks he is afraid. That is not an objection at all. The whole argument of our philosophy is that what seems disagreeable is really not disagreeable. It is an emanation of the Self and it can't be an illusion. One has to find one's fulfilment in it or through it.

P: After all a poet has the right to take some liberty.

N: D says that this kind of liberty is not permitted.

P: Why not? He himself has taken liberties with language in his অনামী (*Anami*), that are grammatically impossible. About one expression I had to explain to him with all force possible that it couldn't be allowed and he dropped it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. In a novel of Stevenson's a character says, "Opulent orotunda Dublin," and argues: "Why should I say 'Rotunda Dublin' like others and not as I please?" Now modern writers invent new words: for "beautiful and lucid" they say "blucid". (*Laughter*)

P: That is fine. It can also mean "blue acid".

SRI AUROBINDO: And I have seen "hithery thithery movement", which, of course, is expressive.

EVENING

DR. B: How to distinguish between self-respect and egoism?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no general rule. You have to become conscious. If you get angry or hurt, it means that it is your egoism and not self-respect. Otherwise there is no rule by which it can be distinguished.

P: Krishnalal has painted a dog, a Kabuli dog belonging to Jwalanti's son. The colour has not come out properly because the model is velvety black.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not necessary to make an exact copy of the model. Talking of Kabuli animals, I remember my mother had a Kabuli cat. She had asked a Kabuliwalla to bring her a cat: he brought one the size of a small tiger. The first thing it did was to kill all the chickens in the neighbourhood. (*Laughter*). I don't know what happened to it afterwards.

P: The second volume of your *Life Divine* is likely to come out in August. Many chapters have already been sent to the Press.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who puts all the interrogation marks on the proofs?

P: If it is the first proof, then somebody from Calcutta may be putting them. Otherwise people who see the proofs here may be doing it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Sometimes the marks are very puzzling. Once I saw a vertical line against four or five lines and one interrogation mark beside it. That's all. No questions are asked. Just a mark is put. I don't know what it means—whether the English is considered incorrect or some omission is felt or there is an objection to the whole statement. (*Laughter*)

S: Perhaps they object to the whole philosophy?

P: Amal was asking if you would be publishing any poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Poetry? Perhaps after 30 years. Considering the criticism of Nishikanta's poetry it seems better to write for private reading than for publication. Besides, English publishers say nobody reads poetry now.

APRIL 2, 1940.

A CRITIC named Nagaraj wrote an unfavourable review of *The Life Divine* in *The Aryan Path*. We were wondering how he came to do so—whether *The Aryan Path* had asked him to do the review or he had himself sent it to the journal.

SRI AUROBINDO: Usually *The Aryan Path* sends my books to Krishnaprem for review.

N: As the article has appeared in the review columns the journal must have sent the book to Nagaraj. We know what kind of thing to expect because his ideas are well known to us. Our attitude is: "Oh, Nagaraj!"

S: From the very beginning of the review it seems the writer has not understood Sri Aurobindo at all.

P: Possibly he had not even read the book.

S: Even if he has read it, he doesn't appear to have understood it. Who is this Nagaraj?

P: Don't you know him? He is the critic of *The Hindu*. He is a Madhwaite.

SRI AUROBINDO: He can't understand any new ideas or any new interpretation of the old. He considers it a violation of the truth. *The Hindu* has given him prominence.

S: If one understands and then disagrees, the disagreement may be worth considering. But without understanding, disagreement is foolish.

P: May I read out Jayaprakash Narayan's statement in court from *The Harijan*? No other paper has published it for fear of the Indian Defence Act. He says that both Germany and the Allies are fighting for new colonies.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not true for the Allies because they have more at present than they can chew and they are content with what they have.

P: He says that England is fighting to preserve her empire.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is true.

P: "To us Indians," he continues, "both Nazism and British Imperialism are the same. There is no difference between the two."

SRI AUROBINDO: That is humbug.

P: "So why should we fight for an Imperialism which denies our freedom, which holds the same domination over us? It is good that I have been arrested for my speech at Jamshedpur, for it is an important industrial centre. And if by my arrest the workers get more war bonus, I will be satisfied."

SRI AUROBINDO: After getting the war bonus, can they fight for the Allies? If they can't, it seems inconsistent.

N: Dilip is seeing the proofs of *The Life Divine* and he gets great joy out of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see.

S: Obviously—but ask him to see the account sheets and let us know if he gets any joy.

SRI AUROBINDO: They will kill him. (*Laughter*)

N: Usually he finds proof-reading a dull business.

P: But if one is an author, one has to do it—at least the first proofs.

N: He has done it and he does it, but he finds it dull.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course writing is more pleasant than proof-reading. Even in my second reading I missed an obvious mistake like "cact" for "act". (*Laughter*)

EVENING

SRI AUROBINDO (*looking at P with great amusement as he came in*): Have you seen the report of the All India Sweepers' Conference at Lahore under Sardull Singh's presidentship?

P: No.

SRI AUROBINDO: They have protested against Jinnah's Moslem India scheme and said that if India was going to be divided they must also have a separate India. I was not quite wrong when I said that barbers also would now start an agitation for an India of their own ... (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO (*still greatly amused*): Chhotu Ram has said that the Sikhs will resist partition at any cost. They will not live under Moslem domination, be under a Khoja Baniya (Jinnah) or a Hindu Baniya (Gandhi). (*Laughter*) Jinnah is now piping down and saying: "Oh I didn't mean this or that. They have misunderstood me. I didn't want the transference of Moslem minorities," etc., and he is all praise for the Sikhs.

P: He knows he will get it hot from the Sikhs. If Jinnah maintains his theories he will create difficulty in the Punjab. Sikander Hyat Khan will lose all support.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Sikhs have very strange names: "Tiger Lion", "Water Lion", "Fire Lion".

(*To be continued*)

NIRODBARAN

SRI AUROBINDO AT EVENING TALK

SOME NOTES OF 1920-1926

(V. Chidanand kept notes of many of the early talks of Sri Aurobindo, belonging to the period before November 24, 1926. He has kindly passed them on to us. We propose to bring them out in future issues of Mother India. We are now publishing his Introduction to these valuable records—a piece of personal reminiscence that is both interesting and moving.)

INTRODUCTION

I WAS eighteen when I had my first *Darshan* of Sri Aurobindo in March 1920 in Pondicherry. I was then a student of the B.A. class in Madras. My brother V. Chandra-sekhar was at that time staying in Pondicherry and meeting Sri Aurobindo often. Impelled by a great desire to have *Darshan* of Sri Aurobindo, I went to Pondicherry during the summer vacation of 1920. Sri Aurobindo was so good as to see me on the very day I reached Pondicherry; I saw him in the evening in the company of my brother.

My first impression of Sri Aurobindo was that he was a true Rishi with a unique spiritual individuality. His intent and far-away gaze indicated to me that he was not of the earth. He was lean, but he gave me the impression that he possessed a great, dynamic, calm strength. His complexion was dark, but his personality was radiant.

Sri Aurobindo made kind inquiries regarding my studies and interests. When I told him that my main interests were literature, fine arts and philosophy, he outlined for me courses of studies in these subjects. Politics also inevitably came up for discussion. It was a very informal talk, but extremely stimulating and useful to me.

I had *Darshan* of Sri Aurobindo every evening for a week afterwards. We used to talk mainly about literature and politics. It was a treat to hear him. His wisdom was profound and he had a fine and subtle sense of humour.

Those meetings and many others afterwards were etched in my memory. While taking leave of him, I requested his permission to come to see him again, and he kindly granted my request.

After leaving Pondicherry, I began to read the works of Sri Aurobindo with avidity. The mental pleasure and spiritual satisfaction that I got from reading his works I had never got from any other thinker or writer. The pages of the *Arya* revealed to me a superhuman being and a superhuman intellect. Here was a tremendous many-splendoured personality, rich and full and integrated. His philosophy was not an intellectual approach to Reality. It was a statement of his direct, authentic, profound and mystic experience. In one of the evening talks we were privileged to have with him, the ques-

tion was put to him: "What is your philosophy?" Sri Aurobindo's reply was: "Philosophy answers to the mind. It is certain mental concepts. To express Supermind in mental concepts is like attempting to write a grammatical treatise on a poem, which takes away all its poetry. Supermind is better expressed in poetry like the Upanishads where you do not get mental concepts, but it is the life lived that is expressed. The expression, of course, cannot be complete and it conveys its full meaning only to the Seer who can get to the thing behind it. You may also express Supermind in music, but it will not convey anything to the ordinary man. My philosophy is not the basis of my Yoga, but the result of it. I would not write a philosophy now, but if I had to write it, I would preface it by saying that it is only an aspect of the Infinite." Sri Aurobindo regards the different schools of philosophy as different facets of Truth, different perspectives. He extracts the spiritual honey from every philosophy. Each partial truth of the different exclusive systems he puts in its proper place. He synthesizes not only the various systems ancient and modern, but also their spiritual practices. He synthesizes Matter and Spirit, body and mind, reason and faith, Science and Yoga. It is interesting to refer in this connection to the remarks he made in one of his evening talks: "All philosophies are equally true. At a certain stage in my Yoga I saw that the intellect was wrong. Later I came to know that the intellect was right and not right....The experience one has, one cannot fully represent to the mind. I experienced the One Purusha, the Many Purushas in the One Purusha..."

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In the beginning of 1926 I decided: "Sri Aurobindo is my Guru." But I asked myself, "Will he accept me as his disciple?" With trepidation I proceeded to Pondicherry and sought an interview with the Master, which he readily granted. I wondered at the great change in his physical appearance since I had seen him last. His complexion was now fair and his body had filled out. I told him the purpose of my visit. When he consented to accept me as his disciple I felt myself blessed.

My brother and I lived in the house next door to 9 Rue de la Marine, the Master's residence. There were in all about ten or twelve disciples then living in a cluster of houses close by. It was like Gurukul. There used to be informal sittings in the evenings when we used to talk on all kinds of subjects. It was often table-talk. Sometimes serious subjects also were discussed and then the Master would give an exposition of his views. At other times the talk was in a lighter vein on men and matters, on politics at home and abroad, etc.... But it must be stressed that it was all off the cuff. A. B. Purani has described the nature of these talks and I shall not repeat what he has said. I shall give just a few of my own impressions and some pronouncements that I noted down.

Sri Aurobindo's voice was soft and gentle, almost feminine. His words flowed like the cool waters of a perennial spring. His was a universal mind, receiving knowledge and thoughts "from all the hundred realms of being". His experience in the

sphere of Sadhana as well as in other spheres was vast. But he made us feel quite at ease in his august presence. I never saw him solemn or serious. Humour, even light-hearted jokes and jests, used to be there in plenty. On occasions he would chuckle happily.

We therefore looked forward to the evening sittings with great pleasure. The Master would talk in a relaxed and jovial mood. But as time passed, it appeared to us that he was getting more and more indrawn, and towards November 1926 the sittings began to be held later and later. We used to assemble at dusk, and wait for his coming until late in the night. Evidently Sri Aurobindo had reached a crucial stage in his Sadhana and was on the verge of discovering some hidden truth. Even to this day I remember how once towards midnight we were eagerly waiting for his *Darshan* when he came and told us that he had had a remarkable experience, and that the hymns in the Veda which spoke of the "well" confirmed his experience. "The 'well' in the Veda always symbolises the subconscious physical. If you can get to the bottom of the physical, you can get through, so to speak, to the ocean below, *apraketam sahlam*, the inconscient Supramental—not conscient to us but conscient of itself—the Supramental below. There is a Supermind below as well as a Supermind above. In reaching the Supermind below, if one has not got sufficient force, he may fall into the 'well'. But if the Light and Truth descend, he can reach the Supermind below and bring up the 'well' within him; in that case the 'well' ceases to be the 'well' any longer. Then the 'Madhu', the 'Honey', is poured into the Sahasrara, the thousand petalled lotus-centre on the top of the head. In the Veda there is mention of this lotus. And through that centre the 'Madhu' flows into the material physical being." We were all thrilled to hear the Master's self-confident narration of his profound experience. Thus did he sojourn in the kingdoms of the spirit and map them out for the benefit of future generations.

I listened to the talks attentively, sometimes partook in them, and as my memory was fairly good I used to record them the next day. All his original thoughts were precious to me, and I put on paper as faithfully as I could the memorable words that fell from his lips. This I did from day to day for several months till November 26. Generally, there was no connection between the subjects talked about one evening and those on the next. Even in the same evening many different subjects came up. Because of this there is no continuity in my notes over the years and they may appear somewhat disjointed, but, of course, there is the background of Sri Aurobindo's individuality and the pervading presence of his unique vision.

V. CHIDANAND

SPIRITUAL INDIA AND SRI AUROBINDO

THE old picture of spiritual India with the dreamy unpractical look has been stripped off the wall. Not that the picture was false in every detail; but unhappily it overlaid the true with the fictitious. India does "dream" a great deal of what is behind the veil of earth's appearances and she definitely is not concerned with only the dust and heat of an outward-going life. Even in the year 1969 she is tremendously "inward": political slogans and economic formulas do not wholly absorb her; but her "inwardness" is not unpractical, her other-worldly dreaming does not end in an emotional haze, a mental mist.

CONCRETE REALISATION

Ever since the hymns of the oldest scripture in history, the Rigveda, began to be sung, it has been dinned into Indian ears that the way of the inner life is not blind belief or vague speculation. We have to pierce the veil of earth's appearances and seize the hidden Beauty as no less real than the universe to which we are accustomed. To rest content with faith in God and in the Hereafter is far from enough from the Indian standpoint; it is equally insufficient to chop logic about the Absolute and the soul's immortality.

Ignatius Loyala, the Christian mystic, framed once a famous query: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" The Indian mystic, from the Rigveda down to our day, has asked more pungently: "What does it profit a man if he possesses a soul but never realises it?" Realisation: that is the key-word in India. A man realises what love is by actually falling in love with a woman and taking her to himself—not by emotionally reading Shelley or intellectually studying Havelock Ellis. So too by a psychological process within him, which brings him into actual touch with a divine reality and not by mere religious belief or philosophical speculation does he grow aware of his true soul and become a mystic.

SEEING GOD

When the young Narendra, who later made a name on three continents as Swami Vivekananda, met the God-intoxicated Ramakrishna, the first question he shot at him was: "Sir, have you seen God?" A crude question for the awed religionist and a naive one for the abstract thinker, but typically Indian in its approach to the Unknown. And typically Indian was the answer it evoked: "I see God more concretely than I see you." Indian mysticism begins to be understood as we start grasping its concreteness.

When the sacred books of this land spoke, for instance, of God's light, they did not use a poetic figure. They meant light just as concretely as Raman meant it when

he won the Nobel Prize in Physics. In India the concrete was not synonymous with the material, even as consciousness did not stop with the level of the *élan vital* and the mind. Beyond apparently unconscious Matter and the grades of organic evolution there was for the Indian a Power which was the Spirit.

And this basic stuff of being, this divine substance of consciousness, could be perceived by the subtle senses lying latent behind our imperfect physical instruments. A faint and faltering image of it entered our perception in the cosmos around us. Listen to a stanza from those chants of mystical seerhood, the Upanishads, describing the supreme spiritual Existence: "There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not nor any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness and by His shining all this shineth." Super-Science is here: a statement of some concrete fact. Even while denying the ultimate reality of the things we know, it denied by means of a greater affirmation of the Real. Our lustres faded in the high trance of the mystic because a mightier one which was more substantial took their place.

PRACTICE OF YOGA, STATIC OR DYNAMIC

A wishy-washy play with the Unknown is not Indian mysticism. India has established a sustained systematic process leading to it from many starting-points, and that is what is meant by Yoga. Yoga is a "yoking", a union of the human with the Divine: its results are concrete and verifiable. Long and arduous is the path, but there can be no mistake about its practicality: thousands in India even today take it up and pursue it to one end or another.

Various ends have been put before the Yogi, all realisable by a steady endeavour, but they fall mainly into two classes of realisation: the static and the dynamic.

The Masters of the static path regard the world as a thing to be thrown aside, a temporary bagatelle. They aim at an absorption in the vast Divine. Their experience of a mysterious Eternal, compared to which the world is like an empty hallucination, is overwhelmingly concrete, but it diverts the consciousness from the earth's normal activities and gives no final *raison d'être* to them.

Why did the Eternal bring about or permit the pageant of Time and Space if its aim was merely to renounce it? Such a renunciation is indeed not unpractical escapism towards a sort of day-dream—it is escapism without being unpractical, for what its escape leads to is felt as a greater reality behind Nature rather than as an imaginary or theoretical "thin air". All the same, there is a certain one-sidedness which is not in tune with the modern trend of life no less than with the secret instinct of mankind that the earth too has importance and is no flimsy foil to heaven. India today is awake to that deep instinct and its *penchant* is for synthesis, for many-sided unity. And the dynamic Yoga which is the other side of spiritual realisation in India's past falls in with such a *penchant*.

THE DOUBLE PRACTICALITY OF THE GITA

This dynamic Yoga regards the world as a field of God's manifestation, not as a trap from which the soul must break out. The finest expression of it in our history is the "Song Celestial", the Bhagwad Gita. The Gita is not an ascetic cry; it does not seek to pluck one away from the throbbing heart of things. It is a gospel delivered on a battlefield with warriors brandishing their spears and holding drawn bows of destruction. In fact the scene is remarkably like the modern world with the holocaust of a terrible conflict not long past and the heart-numbing threat of the Cold War all about us. And the word of Sri Krishna is not a pious advice to stand aside from the grim actuality but "Go forth and fight: conquer a mighty kingdom" because on the one side stood in burning indignation the defenders of civilised values and on the other a titanic tyranny. Sri Krishna, however, did not look forward to just an outward triumph. The warrior was asked to rise above the ordinary human consciousness and live in the light of the Eternal and be by Yoga the instrument of a Will wider than his own.

The Gita is not a gospel of action in the common meaning of the term: it teaches a new way of action which absorbs human push and power into an inspired and illumined initiative that is divine. It combines two species of practicality—the practicality of Yoga and the practicality of life. The former is present in even the static realisation and its presence everywhere gives the lie to those who think that mystics live in a "glorified gas". But the static path lays an overstress on the Beyond: Sri Krishna makes the Beyond dynamic here and now, he links up with it the concrete human.

THE GREATEST YOGI OF THE AGE

An attitude similar to the Gita's is to be found in the greatest Yogi of our age, Sri Aurobindo. That is why in these times of tense body and alert mind, with upheavals in our midst and upheavals around us, he stands as a modern among the moderns. The eyes of renascent India turn to Pondicherry, the little town on our east coast, capital of the one-time French India, where a school of spirituality, an Ashram with hundreds of disciples, sprang up with him as its centre.

A magnificent leonine personality—a writer educated from boyhood in England and using the English language like a mother-tongue in splendid poetry as well as prose—a scholar in Greek and Latin—at home in French, German and Italian, not to mention Sanskrit and other Indian languages—once a politician of profound constructive power—a gigantic philosophical intellect whose chief work, *The Life Divine*, has been hailed as epoch-making—a still more towering Master of Yoga, whom Tagore in the East and Rolland in the West called the custodian of the future—Sri Aurobindo was a figure to dominate the world's gaze.

For six years he led his country's fight for political freedom. Then suddenly he left politics to concentrate more completely on the Yoga he had already been prac-

tising for some years. He felt his withdrawal into the background a most necessary step, because the true genius of India was itself a background—the deep Spirit waiting secretly behind the clamour and conflict raging in the outer being of man. India's greatness in the past arose, according to Sri Aurobindo, from her possession of the hidden Spirit by Yogic experience.

The Spiritual Background, however, was not his whole objective. In India's finest hours the contact with the outer being was never lost. Sri Aurobindo sought for something more than a contact which, after a brief flash of illumination, lets the outer being remain the half-lit and stumbling creature it normally is. As in the background, so too in the forefront there must always be the Spirit. His Yoga is integral, an all-round fulfilment of the Divine on this very earth and not in a remote paradise or a transcendental Nirvana. That is why Pondicherry, with its Ashram, can be regarded as the gateway to a wonderful future.

DIVINISATION OF LIFE

Sri Aurobindo holds that man's hopes and dreams can be crowned only if, with the help of the highest consciousness developed up to now, we rise beyond ourselves to a new level of being, a level above mind as mind was above animal life and animal life above mere matter in which everything lay latent and unevolved.

This new level has to be a step forward in evolution and not just Science, Philosophy, Art, Ethics or Religion achieving combinations and permutations of the various aspects of man at his cleverest and noblest. Sri Aurobindo takes up the whole beautiful heritage of past progress but does not rest with giving it a novel shape: he seeks to divinise the entire self by a special experience and ultimately permeate with a spiritual power of consciousness every means of manifestation and the entire outer form so that even the poor body which lives a victim to disease and decay and the sudden stroke of death may become king of Nature.

Our mind boggles at the colossal scheme. But surely one for whose constructive insight men of practical force like Tilak and Das bore the deepest esteem cannot be dismissed as a chaser of the rainbow's end. The fact that his Ashram is not an abode of complacent "navel-gazers" but a scene of varied enterprise, astir with architects, engineers, scientists and manual workers as well as artists, poets, musicians and thinkers—this fact is enough to testify that the source from which such a complex fountain sprang must have still been a manifold creative vitality. The Ashram is an experiment to form by a profound psychophysical transformation the nucleus of a super-mankind to be.

THE INTEGRAL YOGA

Patiently and without lust for fame the Master kept moulding his vision of super-mankind. The method of his Integral Yoga is a very plastic one. There are no mechanical breath-exercises or painful physical postures; it is our consciousness that

the Yoga starts with, a constant remembrance of the Divine and an offering of all our movements, inward an outward, to Him by a consecrated attitude, a self-surrender that brings about a series of extraordinary yet concrete and convincing experiences affecting every side of us, down to our physical substance.

“A quixotic hope!” cries the man in the street in the face of a Yoga so far-reaching and revolutionary. The claims of the Rigveda, the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Gita are difficult enough to accept, but here in our midst we have something that exceeds them all. Can that intractable old stumbling-block of every spiritual effort in the past, the physical body, be illumined and transformed together with the mind and heart? The signs of such a change would not be the ability merely to stay in a sealed trance, insensitive to outward attacks of pain, or a vague and intermittent exaltation in the nerves, or a few spectacular capacities as developed by “naked fakirs”.

An immense wakeful consciousness that is unfettered by human limitations and uses a body that has taken on itself the divine immunity of the Spirit—this is the Aurobindonian ideal. There is nothing fantastic here, once it is admitted that the Spirit is the supreme underlying reality. For, if everything has come from the Spirit, Matter too must be a diminished aspect of some divine truth and can by awakening to that truth get divinised. The trouble is that life does not always bear out logic. Doubt, disbelief, denial are bound to dog the path of Sri Aurobindo’s experiment, but we must not forget that we are living in a country where the Spirit has trafficked with the earth for ages and the Divine and Superhuman are no strangers. Above all we must remember what Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter to a disciple apropos of inveterately sceptical intellectuality like Bertrand Russell’s as contrasted with the temperament which easily and eagerly believes or rests happy with lofty notions. Referring to himself and to his associate and co-worker in the Integral Yoga—the Mother—the letter begins:

“I must remind you that I have been an intellectual myself and no stranger to doubt—both the Mother and myself have had one side of the mind as positive and as insistent on practical results and more than any Russell can be. We could never have been content with the shining ideas and phrases which a Rolland or another takes for the gold coin of Truth. We know well what is the difference between a subjective experience and a dynamic outward-going and realising Force. So although we have faith (and who ever did anything great in the world without having faith in his mission or the Truth at work behind him?), we do not found ourselves on faith alone, but on a great ground of knowledge which we have been developing and testing day and night for years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane. That is why I am not alarmed by the aspect of the world around me or disconcerted by the often successful fury of the adverse Forces who increase in their rage as the Light comes nearer and nearer to the field of earth and Matter.”

THE BACKGROUND OF AUROVILLE

It is, on the one hand, the process of an unheard-of spiritual transformation and, on the other, the presence of a super-scientific this-worldly genius, that are the background of the larger field of work into which the Aurobindonian inspiration has broken forth in the project of Auroville, which is too large to allow more than just a touch on it here. Extending to a greater range of human material than the intensive life of the Ashram could allow, that inspiration has sent out a call to the four corners of our disillusioned earth. The call is to find at last a centre of manifold yet unified existence in a city marking the dawn of a new era of peace and harmony in the secure workings of the new principle of divine dynamism which Sri Aurobindo terms "Supermind" or "Truth-Consciousness". Not that all who give their services to Auroville have to be full-fledged Yogis; but all must be aware that the City of Dawn is a dream coming true under the shaping hand of the guide and guru of Sri Aurobindo's Ashram today: the Mother.

K. D. SETHNA

SRI AUROBINDO: "THE PROPHET OF NATIONALISM, THE LOVER OF HUMANITY"

SOMETIME back Dr. C. P. Ramaswami Iyar reminded us in the course of his speech on the occasion of the birthday of Mrs. Annie Besant that we have already forgotten our glorious patriots of yesterday—patriots like Lokmanya Tilak, Dadabhai Naoroji, Lala Lajpat Rai, Annie Besant. "We hardly try to recall today the pioneering work which they did and which still shines brightly on the pages of history, and so we have practically sealed some of the undying sources of not merely political but cultural inspiration existing with us. We are too much engrossed in the present-day party politics and group leadership to lift our eyes and look towards even our immediate past which forms in so many ways a glorious chapter of our renascent life." It is really sad that even the political meetings organised in memory of Mahatma Gandhi have become today too formal and conventional to be truly inspiring.

PROPHETIC POLITICAL THINKER

If this be the fate of those of our great men who worked more or less in the political field throughout their lives, it is no wonder that the political aspect of Sri Aurobindo who is usually looked upon as a yogi and a philosopher should be so easily forgotten. But a time will come—and let us hope it comes sooner rather than later—when enlightened people will feel more and more drawn towards the politics of Sri Aurobindo along with his yoga and philosophy and poetry. What is more, it is not merely as a patriot, an ardent nationalist, a dynamic political worker and a leader of political movements that he will appeal to us but also as a profound prophetic political thinker and philosopher. The integral sweep of his yogic knowledge and vision and the world-embracing breadth of his outlook, based upon the all-transforming power of what he calls the Supramental Truth-Consciousness, are bound to exercise an enormous influence upon the politics of the modern man preparing himself for "the glorious noons of the future."

True, being a yogi and a philosopher he does not deal with the so-called political questions of the day in the manner and speech of the professional or academic politicians. After all, a mystic is certainly entitled to deal with our mundane problems in his own particular way and language. But what is remarkable about Sri Aurobindo is that he does not deal with the life-problems from any narrow moral or theological or abstract utopian point of view; nor does he ever become so unrealistically optimistic as to ignore the depressing limitations and stupendous difficulties of average human nature. There is hardly any room for magic or miracle in his approach to the radical transformation of man and his life, individual and collective. Neither does he suggest

that mere belief or faith in, or even the traditional realisation of, the Divine will automatically solve all our problems. On the contrary, the prospect which he holds out before us is one of a long, grim fight with individual as well as cosmic hostile forces, internal no less than external enemies that are now putting forth their very deadliest assaults to crush us. It is a quite severe life of hard, patient toil, of constant vigilance and determined dynamic outlook which he unfolds before us.

Even his recurring gospel of total surrender to the Force of the Divine Mother is no labour-saving device thrown out to helpless, depressed modern humanity. If Bhakti is any cult with him, it is the Bhakti of the strong, the determined, the unflinching warrior that he enjoins us to develop: otherwise we shall find it impossible to collaborate with the mighty Divine Will which alone can effectuate our evolution into true supermanhood. And without the ushering in of such an evolutionary consciousness, we may grapple and wrestle, howsoever we will, with our political, economic and other life-problems with all our scientific, intellectual or even humanitarian and religious resources and fervour and may even succeed in changing ourselves to a certain extent, as we are bound to, yet our basic problems would still remain unsolved, simply because these problems have their origin not in life and human nature as we know them at the present mental level but beyond and above, to use philosophical language, in the Superconscient as much as below in the Inconscient.

THE EARLIEST PHASE OF HIS PATRIOTISM

At first sight it would appear to us rather strange that Sri Aurobindo should develop into a nationalist, into such a true child of Mother India. When he was hardly seven years old, he was sent by his parents to England for a "thoroughly English education." Even before that, the education which he received was in a European school at Darjeeling. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that one who was so utterly cut off from his country and his culture early in life should become in his youth such an ardent champion of India's political independence and spiritual culture. But it was the will of destiny and even when he was in England the independence of his country was very dear to his heart. He and his brothers became members of a secret society called "Lotus & Dagger" which had been started in London by Indian students with the sole object of freeing India from foreign rule. Then the speeches which Sri Aurobindo delivered at the Indian Majlis in Cambridge, advocating the use of even drastic methods for securing the freedom of his country, were revolutionary in nature. Also, the fact that he could not get into the Indian Civil Service, as he deliberately did not turn up for the riding test, although he had evidently qualified himself for the Service at the written examination, is chiefly attributable to the love which he bore for his motherland. The European education and the European environment could not make him forget the pang of her subjection nor could these deter him from making one of the great sacrifices of his life while yet a promising young man with an equally promising prospect of a successful career before him by virtue of—in Bepin Chandra

Pal's words—"the best modern education that any man of this country and generation could expect to have."

THE EXCITING EIGHTEEN-NINETIES

It was during the eighteen-nineties when he was employed in the Baroda State that he began to give some definite form to the revolutionary ideas that had been growing in his mind during his stay in England. At that time the freedom of his country seemed to him the first consideration and he believed that it could be achieved only through revolution. His first active move was made in 1900 when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji, to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might take thirty years for its materialisation. "The idea was to carry on secretly, or so far as visible action could be taken under various cloaks and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruitment throughout Bengal. Youths were to be actively drawn into the arena of politics while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from older men who had advanced views or who could be won over to them. Centres were to be opened in every town and eventually in every village, societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral—young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement."

The idea immediately caught on in Bengal and already existing small groups and associations of young men began to turn in this direction. And when the Partition of Bengal came, "a general outburst of revolt" was so readily possible because Sri Aurobindo along with some other national leaders had prepared the ground for it. A nationalist movement came to be started in right earnest and the Extremist Party was also born in the Congress. A change in the then political atmosphere of the country was evident. Sri Aurobindo took advantage of the Swadeshi movement to popularise the idea of a violent revolt in the future. And actually the Bengali daily paper *Yugantar* began, under his guidance, to preach open revolt against the British rule and even suggested instructions for guerilla warfare. The Nationalist Party which now came to be formed under his leadership, particularly in Bengal, became the spearhead of the new fervour of patriotism which swept over the country at this time. His idea was to capture the Congress and "make it an instrument of revolutionary action instead of a centre of a cautious constitutional agitation which would only talk and pass resolutions and forward prayers, petitions and protests to the foreign government". It would be a sort of a state within the State giving directions to the people and creating organised bodies and institutions which would be its means of action. There would be an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance which would render the administration of the country by a foreign government difficult and finally impossible. This plan included a boycott of British trade, the replacement by national schools of the Government institutions, the setting up of arbitration courts, the creation of volunteer forces which

would be the nucleus of an army for the purpose of making open revolt effective. Although all these schemes could not be fully implemented, yet the idea of boycott certainly took a firm root in the country. Long before the coming of Gandhi on the political scene of our country the Swadeshi movement in the economic sphere at least had made much headway. But, above all, Sri Aurobindo's political leadership of the Nationalist Party created a new spirit which kept on throbbing and burning in the hearts of the young and the old alike. The cry of "Bande Mataram" began to ring on all sides and "men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity was broken." A new force of love for one's own motherland was released, which nothing could destroy and it was this potent patriotism, made widespread all over the country, which was successfully utilized by the subsequent leaders of the Congress such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose, bringing India at last to the goal of full independence in 1947.

"INDEPENDENCE" AS THE GOAL OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Yet Sri Aurobindo ever loved to be a silent worker. He was a leader who acted and inspired mostly from behind the scene. Even the articles which he wrote for the *Induprakash* of Bombay and in which he severely criticised the Moderate politics as no better than "mendicancy" were published anonymously. His association with the fiery English weekly, *Bande Mataram*, however, gave him an opportunity to come into the open. It was this paper which had first declared its policy to be "complete autonomy, free from British control", but Sri Aurobindo found this phrase rather "too cautious and complex" and substituted for it the single word "Independence" as the one goal of the Indian political movement. But what is remarkable and inspiring is that even at this early stage of our freedom movement—it was the end of 1906—Sri Aurobindo looked upon the political independence of India as not an end in itself but a part of a bigger world-change, for he wrote: "A Divine Power is behind the movement; the *Zeit-Geist*, the Time-Spirit is at work to bring about a mighty movement of which the world at the present juncture has need. That movement is the resurgence of Asia and the resurgence of India is not only a necessary part of the larger movement but its central need. India is the key-stone of the arch, the chief inheritor of the common Asiatic destiny....The idea of a free and united India has been born and has arrived at full stature in the land of the Rishis, and the spiritual force of a great civilization of which the world has need, is gathering at its back." Very few of the then political leaders had this vision regarding the movement of political emancipation which had been set going at that time with so much ardour and spirit in our country.

INDIA AS THE ETERNAL AND INFINITE MOTHER

It is now easy to understand that to Sri Aurobindo patriotism or love for one's

country was not only a vital-emotional or even a religious, but a spiritual experience. He once wrote that India has never been to him what was merely suggested by "her outer vestures, attractive and gorgeous though they are." On the contrary, she was to him the Mother, the eternal and infinite Mother, the Compassionate Mother of man. Thinking of his own country, India, he wrote: "Patriotism cannot be anything short of a desire to redeem one's country. It cannot bear to look upon the country as a sepulchre though it may seem so. It feels the immortality stirring beneath those ruins with which subjection has overspread the country." In another article he wrote: "Political freedom is the life-breath of a nation. Without it a nation cannot grow, cannot expand.... The work of national emancipation in a great and holy *Yagña* of which boycott, Swadeshi, national education and every other activity, great and small, are only major and minor parts. Liberty is the fruit we seek from the sacrifice, and Motherland the goddess to whom we offer it; into the seven leaping tongues of the fire of the *Yagña* we must offer all that we are and all that we have, feeding the fire even with our blood and lives and the happiness of our nearest and dearest."

"NATIONALISM IS AN AVATAR"

Also Sri Aurobindo had always felt that the movement of India's freedom was being guided by an unseen Power and that she was bound to be free. He also knew that "India has a secret Power which no other nation possesses" and that "our political beginning will have a religious end." Not only this, as his spiritual experience in course of his political activities began to increase and deepen, he gave a new orientation to the very conception of nationalism. At a Bombay meeting, after the well-known Surat debacle, he made this memorable utterance: "Nationalism is a religion that has come from God.... It has not been crushed. It is not going to be crushed. Nationalism survives with the strength of God and it is not possible to crush it, whatever weapons are brought against it. Nationalism is immortal...because it is no human being; it is God who is working in Bengal." And later on he wrote in the *Bande Mataram*: "Nationalism is an Avatar and cannot be slain. Nationalism is a divinely appointed Shakti of the Eternal and must do its God-given work before it returns to the bosom of the Universal Energy from which it came." This is certainly not the language and experience of a nationalist or a politician as we usually know him, but of a divinely inspired seer. Henceforward Sri Aurobindo began to understand the meaning of the independence movement of India in a way which came to be incomprehensible to most of his countrymen and even the enlightened political leaders of that time could not realise its significance properly. Bipin Chandra Pal truly said of him in one of his famous articles on Indian nationalism: "His only care is for his country—the Mother as he always calls her. His only recognised obligations are to her. Nationalism, at the best a concern of the intellect, with some at the lowest a political cry, and an aspiration with others, is with Aravinda the supreme passion of his soul. Few, indeed, have grasped the full force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done..."

In the Alipore Jail he underwent such a thorough spiritual conversion on account of the unambiguous revelation of Vasudeva everywhere that it was no wonder his subsequent political utterances began to be felt as coming from strange lips. It is certain that the writings which he contributed to the *Karmayogin* after his release from the Alipore Jail could not have been fully understood by his countrymen, although they might have soothed as well as flattered their excited political fervour and idealism. "The problems," he once wrote, "which have troubled mankind can only be solved by conquering the kingdom within, not by harnessing the forces of Nature to the service of comfort and luxury, but by mastering the forces of intellect and the spirit, by vindicating the freedom of man within as well as without and by conquering from within external Nature. For that work the resurgence of Asia is necessary, therefore Asia rises. For that work the freedom and greatness of India is essential, therefore she claims her destined freedom and greatness, and it is to the interest of humanity, not excluding England, that she should wholly establish her claim." Here it is clear that he not only widened the scope of the purpose and objective of the Indian freedom movement but also underlined the new technique of spiritual self-conquest and self-mastery in order to solve all problems, including the political. Merely an open or secret revolt against the British, boycott of British goods, opening of Nationalist schools, etc., he no longer found enough. This was another important anticipation of the higher political technique which Mahatma Gandhi later on was to call "Satyagraha" and "Ahimsa."

A NEW VOICE IN INDIAN POLITICS

After his release from the Alipore Jail his speeches, writings, and personal talks began to show that Sri Aurobindo's career had taken a different turn. He began to declare openly now that the leadership of the national movement had been taken up by the Divine Himself and that the work assigned to him was no longer political. In the *Karmayogin* he wrote: "The task we set before ourselves is not mechanical but moral and spiritual. We aim not at the alteration of a form of government but at the building up of a nation. Of that task politics is a part, but only a part. We shall devote ourselves not to politics alone, nor to social questions alone, nor to theology or philosophy or literature or science by themselves, but we include all these in one entity which we believe to be all-important, the *Dharma*, the national religion which we also believe to be universal. There is a mighty law of life, a great principle of human evolution, a body of spiritual knowledge and experience of which India has always been destined to be guardian, exemplar and missionary. This is the eternal religion."

POLITICAL FREEDOM IS NOT ENOUGH

It is true that at the time when India was in the thick of the first phase of its

fight for freedom in this century, these words of wisdom sounded strange, even escapist. He was almost given up as lost to the political world. But at this distance, specially now that we have actually attained that freedom, of which C. R. Das, Bepin Chandra Pal, Lokmanya Tilak and Sri Aurobindo had but dreamed of at that time, we can soberly ponder these utterances which emanated from that deep spiritual experience. The conviction grew upon Sri Aurobindo that "the new India of the future could not be built on political freedom. The race must awaken to its spiritual possibilities, to a profounder sense of its soul-fulfilment, for out of that knowledge alone can come the true vision and force by which the future can be securely built and India can rise at the end to the pinnacle of her glory".

As years passed, Sri Aurobindo came to believe more and more in a higher spiritual force as the one thing indispensable for the realisation of India's true freedom and greatness. Furthermore, as his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of the Forces of which he had become aware. He saw that Britain would be forced by the insistence of India's demands and the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the nationalist cause. Also, his personal intervention in politics would, therefore, be no longer indispensable.

HE RETIRES TO PONDICHERRY BUT THE NEW VOICE CONTINUES TO BE HEARD

Yet even when he went to Pondicherry in 1910 and settled there once and for all, leading a life of so-called retirement and seclusion in order to devote himself fully to his world-transforming yogic sadhana, he continued to take a very keen interest in the affairs of the world, specially in the fate of India. And there is really nothing strange or surprising in this for it seems, from the very first, "the aim of his yoga has been not only to realise the Divine beyond and attain to the highest spiritual consciousness but also to take up all life and all world activity into the scope of the spiritual consciousness and action and to base them on the truth of the Spirit and invest them with a spiritual meaning". That he steadily and unswervingly consecrated himself to this mighty and difficult yogic path is borne out by the simple fact that he persistently refused to come out of his yogic seclusion in spite of so many appeals and persuasions by the then-political leaders of the country, including C. R. Das and Gokhale.

WHY HE RETIRED TO PONDICHERRY

What exactly was the nature of his silent work at Pondicherry is, to an appreciable extent, indicated in what he wrote in 1922 in the course of his reply to a letter from Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. He said, "I see more and more manifestly that man can never get out of the futile circle the race is always treading until he has

raised himself on to a new foundation. I believe also that it is the mission of India to make this great victory for the world. But what precisely was the nature of the dynamic force of this great Consciousness, what was the condition of this effective Truth? How could it be brought down, mobilised, organised, turned upon life? How could our present instruments, intellect, mind, life, body be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge and mastery of that secret.”

And actually the secret was thoroughly mastered by him in his own life by the end of 1926 after which, it is said, his sadhana was turned more and more towards bringing that “great Consciousness”—technically called by him the Supramental Consciousness—down into earthly life and matter, and not keeping it confined to himself alone or his few chosen disciples. His vision, his Yoga, his sadhana were for the entire earth, for the whole of humanity and not for his personal salvation—this he has told us time and again. And what is more, his mighty task continues to be done all these years, unabated and undistracted, by his still dynamic presence in the earth-atmosphere and his supreme co-worker, the Mother, who represents “the same consciousness and power as the one he stood for”, and will continue to operate here till the Kingdom of Heaven, the Life Divine, is established upon the earth once for all.

LET US, THEN, TURN TO THE MASTER-SEER

Now that we have attained political independence but find ourselves face to face with problems of the greatest magnitude and often feel helpless and depressed before them; now that we are more and more forced to realise that political freedom by itself cannot solve our problems—on the contrary, it invariably brings in its train new problems of which we were not aware before—our need to turn for light to our country’s master-seer, Sri Aurobindo, should grow increasingly evident. Sri Aurobindo’s yogic vision and technique are of such a dynamic, revolutionary and global character that the entire earth-life and consequently humanity as a whole, not merely an individual group or nation, can find through it the ultimate deliverance. We cannot prepare ourselves for this knowledge and vision in a better way than by going through and assimilating in our lives the truths he has given us in such political masterpieces as *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, and *The Foundations of Indian Culture* as well as such political gems as *Ideals and Progress*, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, *The Renaissance in India* and *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*.

SHREE KRISHNA PRASAD

HOW SRI AUROBINDO WITHDREW TO PONDICHERRY

I .

SRI Aurobindo's role in Bengal politics was very brief (1906-1908), but during this brief period he succeeded in bringing about a revolutionary change both in the sphere of our political ideas and in the sphere of the practical means to achieve it. Next to Bepin Pal, he was the most dreaded enemy of the British Empire in the eyes of the alien bureaucracy. In the course of the Alipore Bomb Case in which several dozens of Bengali revolutionaries were arrested, it was contended by the highest and most responsible British officials that "the conviction of the other persons concerned would be of no avail if Arabinda were set free; for, in that case he would lose no time in starting a fresh conspiracy and the work now done would be altogether in vain". Such was the view of no less a person than Mr. E. A. Gait, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal in May, 1908. Like the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Mr. Gait had reasons to believe that Sri Aurobindo was "the master-mind at the back of the whole extremist campaign in Bengal". So the Chief Secretary of Bengal made the following recommendation to the Government of India in May, 1908: "In the interest of peace and good government, it is absolutely necessary that this man should be removed from the political arena". But, notwithstanding the most rigorous application of the existing laws by the bureaucracy, Sri Aurobindo was not found guilty of sedition or treason in the British court of law and was therefore acquitted and released from jail in May, 1909.

II

During his life of seclusion in the Alipore prison, Sri Aurobindo's mind experienced deep changes. In the course of his silent communion with his soul he discovered a force mightier than the human, directing and controlling the national movement. He also noticed that great changes were taking place in the larger political life of the country. A hush had fallen upon the land. But even in this dark and dismal setting Sri Aurobindo did not lose heart, for he had realised in prison that He who was in the movement was also in the pause. He gave eloquent expression to this sentiment in his first public oration at Uttarpara on his acquittal and release. As a vehicle for his own thought he also started two weeklies, namely, *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali. But hardly a year had passed when he had to flee from British India for safety in a French colony. As he himself discloses, one day he was in the *Karmayogin* office when information, derived from a high-placed police

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official, was carried to him by Ram Chandra Mazumdar, a member on the sub-editorial staff of that paper, that the office would be searched the next day and that a warrant of arrest under 124-A.I.P.C. had been issued against Sri Aurobindo on account of his article "To My Countrymen" published in the *Karmayogin* on 25th December, 1909. Sri Aurobindo writes in this connection: "While I was listening to animated comments from those around on the approaching event, I suddenly received a command from above, in a voice well-known to me, in three words: 'Go to Chandernagore.' Ram Chandra Mazumdar guided me to the Ghat and hailed a boat and I entered into it at once along with my relative Biren Ghosh and Moni (Suresh Chandra Chakravarti) who accompanied me to Chandernagore, not turning aside to Bagbazar or anywhere else. We reached our destination while it was still dark: they returned in the morning to Calcutta" (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 95).

III

A good deal of misconception still exists in many minds as to how Sri Aurobindo escaped to Chandernagore under cover of darkness. Some modern biographers of Sister Nivedita like Lizelle Reymond (French), and, following her, Girija Sankar Roychoudhury (Bengali) have circulated a basically inaccurate story regarding Sri Aurobindo's flight from Calcutta in which Sister Nivedita's role has been unnecessarily exaggerated. Accepting with an unstinted credulity Reymond's story, Girija Sankar writes that Yogin Ma of the Ramakrishna Math at Bagbazar, on having the information from her relative Sasi Bhusan De (an I.B. man) that a warrant of arrest had been issued against Sri Aurobindo, at once communicated it to Swami Saradananda who in his turn sent information to Sri Aurobindo through Ganen Maharaj. Sri Aurobindo without delay wrote out his last testament to his countrymen, namely, "Open Letter to My Fellow-Citizens", went that very night to Sister Nivedita requesting her to take the responsibility of *Karmayogin* and fled to Chandernagore by boat (*Bhagni Nivedita o Banglaye Biplav-vad*, pp. 165-66).

This version of Sri Aurobindo's flight from Calcutta has hardly any foundation in reality. The reader's attention is drawn in this connection to Suresh Chandra Chakravarty's *Smriti-Katha* (1962, pp. 34-43) as supplementary to Sri Aurobindo's statements. The fact is that even before the dramatic flight of Sri Aurobindo from Calcutta there was a likelihood of his deportation in the near future. The bureaucracy could not sit idle until the chief brain behind the Maniktola Conspiracy was brought under its iron grip. With this background Nivedita had once informed Sri Aurobindo that the Government had decided to deport him, and so she had advised him "to go into secrecy or to leave British India" so as to avoid an interruption of his work. Sri Aurobindo writes the following in this connection: "I told her that I did not think it necessary to accept her suggestion; I would write an open letter in the *Karmayogin* which, I thought, would prevent this action by the Government. This was done and

on my next visit to her she told me that my move had been entirely successful and the idea of deportation had been dropped. The departure to Chandernagore happened later and there was no connection between the two incidents which have been hopelessly confused together in the account in the book." Regarding his flight to Chandernagore, Sri Aurobindo writes further: "There have been many legends spread about on this matter and it was even said that I was to be prosecuted for participation in the murder in the High Court of Shamsul Alam, a prominent member of the C.I.D. and that Sister Nivedita sent for me and informed me and we discussed what was to be done and my disappearance was the result. I never heard of any such proposed prosecution and there was no discussion of the kind, the prosecution intended and afterwards started was for sedition only. Sister Nivedita knew nothing of these new happenings till after I reached Chandernagore. I did not go to her house or see her..." (*On Himself and on The Mother*, pp. 117-118).

The only connection between Sri Aurobindo and Sister Nivedita regarding his departure was that before departing for Chandernagore he left a message for her requesting her to take charge of the *Karmayogin* during his absence, which she did quite faithfully. This message was communicated to Sister Nivedita not before his flight from Calcutta, but only on the day following his escape to Chandernagore. Sister Nivedita neither had any previous knowledge of Sri Aurobindo's departure nor did she make any arrangement for his stay at Chandernagore, as has been suggested by some writers.

IV

When Ram Chandra had left the Bagbazar Ghat, Sri Aurobindo and his two companions, Biren Ghosh and Suresh Chakravarty, got into a boat. The party reached the Rani Ghat of Chandernagore at early dawn. Sri Aurobindo sent Biren Ghose to Charu Chandra Roy, a prominent nationalist of Chandernagore, who however refused asylum to the exile. At this critical juncture Motilal Roy, having been informed of the plight of Sri Aurobindo by Srish Ghosh who had learned of it from Charu Roy, at once escorted the exiled leader to his residential house at Barai Chanditola and gave him the needed shelter. Sri Aurobindo was kept hidden in a room on the first floor of his own house and later in a small room on the ground floor of these premises. If Motilal Roy is to be believed, Sri Aurobindo arrived at Chandernagore in February 1910 on the day following the Saraswati Puja, *i.e.* 15 February; therefore he must have left Calcutta on 14 February. (*Vide* Motilal Roy's letter to Sri Nagendra Kumar Guha Roy, dated 16 May, 1950, as published in *Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo* by N. K. Guha Roy, p. 92.)

Thus Sri Aurobindo led the life of a political refugee at Chandernagore for six weeks, sometimes under the care of Motilal Roy and sometimes under the care of Narendra Nath Banerjee. Four places were utilised by Naren Banerjee for hiding Sri Aurobindo at Chandernagore, *viz.*, his house at Gondolpara, a thatched hut at

Halderpara, a small house in Kars' Garden near the station and a hut at Nichupatti in Lakshmiganj). Finally, Sri Aurobindo decided to leave for Pondicherry and it was arranged between Amarendra Nath Chatterjee of Uttarpara and Motilal Roy of Chandernagore that he would be escorted from Chandernagore to Agarpara by Motilal's men and thence he would be taken charge of by Amarendra Nath Chatterjee. As stated to the writer by Sri Satya Karmakar of Chandernagore, at present about 88 years old, he (Satya Babu) accompanied Srish Ghosh in escorting Sri Aurobindo to Eriadaha-Agarpara by boat, himself knowing nothing of the background of Sri Aurobindo's journey. Amar Chatterjee, accompanied by Manmatha Biswas, took Sri Aurobindo, from Agarpara to the Chandpal Ghat in Calcutta, whence Sri Aurobindo, along with Bijoy Nag, left Calcutta on 1 April 1910 by *S. S. Dupleix* of the Messageries Maritimes Company. All appropriate arrangements in Calcutta including the purchase of tickets and the escorting of the party to the Health Officer's residence at night to secure health certificates had been made by Sarbasree Sukumar Mitra and Nagendra Kumar Guha Roy.

V

Sri Nagen Guha states that under Sri Aurobindo's instructions from Chandernagore, the details of his journey from Calcutta to Pondicherry were planned and the relevant steps taken by Sukumar Mitra, Sri Aurobindo's cousin, with the help of Nagen Guha Roy. Accordingly, a two-man cabin was booked in the Colombo-bound *Dupleix* of the Messageries Maritimes Company for 1 April, and two tickets were purchased for Sri Aurobindo and his attendant, Bijoy Nag, under false names, and two steel trunks packed with Sri Aurobindo's belongings were made ready. But unfortunately, due to some miscalculation in time, Sri Aurobindo and his party were not met by any of Sukumar Mitra's men at the Chandpal Ghat; so they proceeded in a hackney-carriage towards the residence of Sukumar Mitra at 6, College Square. After some anxious movements to and fro, Sri Aurobindo was at last met by Nagen Guha at the Chandpal Ghat with a message from Sukumar Mitra. But as ill luck would have it, the medical examination of the passengers had already been over and the absentees faced expulsion if they failed to produce medical certificates. At this critical juncture Providence saved Sri Aurobindo from trouble. With the help of one of the ship's coolies Nagen Guha took Sri Aurobindo and Bijoy Nag to the Health Officer's residence and got them examined without delay. What actually happened will be clear from the following Weekly Report of the I.G. (Police), Bengal, to the Director of Criminal Intelligence, Government of India, dated 17 April, 1910:

"On the 31st of March the Special Branch Officer of the Calcutta Police who supervises arrivals and departures of Indians by sea reported that two native passengers who gave their names as J.N.Mitter of Ulubiria and Bankim Chandra Bhowmik of Nilphamari, Rangpore, had reserved berths on this steamer for Pondicherry. The Health Officer's inspection for this ship was held on the evening of the 31st. The

Calcutta Police officer who was present at the Health Officer's inspection reported that neither of these two passengers had turned up for inspection. On the 4th instant a letter was received from the Messageries Maritimes Company to the effect that these two persons had actually sailed on the *Dupleix* for Pondicherry, but that as they boarded the steamer at the last moment they had not been seen by the Calcutta Police Officer. On enquiry it was ascertained from the Health Officer that at about 9-30 p.m. on the night of the 31st *ultimo*, 2 Bengalis giving their names as J.N. Mitter and Bankim Chandra Bhowmik came to his private residence and requested to be furnished with health certificates to enable them to sail on the *Dupleix*. The Health Officer granted them the necessary certificates. On a photograph of Aurobindo Ghosh being shown to the Health Officer, he stated that this was probably the individual who gave his name as Jatindra Nath Mitter. The Health Officer further stated that he was struck by the fluent English which this gentleman spoke."

Evidently, this J.N. Mitter was no other than Sri Aurobindo and B.C. Bhowmik his attendant Bijoy Nag. Even the cleverest intelligence of the British bureaucracy of those days could not know anything about Sri Aurobindo's flight from Calcutta before 4 April, 1910.

UMA MUKHERJEE

(Reproduced, with slight adaptation, from People's Path, Jullundur, September 1968)

DARSHAN OF SRI AUROBINDO

(This article was written by Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in August 1943 immediately after his first darshan—before, in fact, he completed the first draft of his well-known book on Sri Aurobindo. It was printed in November of the same year in a paper called Human Affairs published from Udipi. That paper has been discontinued for many years. The article is of particular interest as having been the author's very first piece of writing on the Master, a charming passage towards a corpus of biographical and expository literature that is, to use one of his happy pet adjectives, "multifoliate" and, to employ accurately for once an epithet too frequently cheapened, "brilliant.")

THEY were coming still, the stream of visitors to the Ashram swelled day by day till it grew into a flood on the day of *darshan*. Men, women and children, with their packages and their hold-alls, their Sunday *Hindu* and their umbrellas, crowded near the gate of the Ashram on the morning of the fifteenth of August 1943—and the *sadhaks* discharging "gate duty" patiently coped with the rush with a quiet assurance, with a ready smile for one and all. From the four ends of India—from obscure nooks and by-paths, from distant cities and inaccessible hamlets—the pilgrims had assembled in Pondicherry in the vicinity of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

They had come braving the hundred and one annoyances minor and major that our imperfect society engenders in its midst; they had come—these princes and paupers, these financiers and politicians, these landlords and merchants, these poets and philosophers, these students and teachers, these sinners and saints, these seeming scoffers and these half-hearted believers—they had all converged towards the *sanctum sanctorum*, desiring to have *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. Did they know—did *all* of them know—what *darshan* meant? What precise experience was in store for them, how exactly it was going to grow into their being and shape their future—they cared not, perhaps, to speculate about all this or, if they did, their minds were baffled in an instant and they quickly gave up the struggle.

Maybe, it was only an idle curiosity that brought some of the visitors to Pondicherry; maybe, some had caught the contagion of enthusiasm from their friends and had therefore proceeded to the Ashram on *darshan* day to put their half-baked aspirations through the acid test of experience, so that the fluidities of enthusiasm may harden into the pure gold of faith or—failing in the test—break into so many drops and atoms of disillusionment; maybe, some had accidentally chanced to read *Yoga and Its Objects* or *Baj Prabhou* or *Herachtus* or *The Mother* or an instalment or two of *The Future Poetry*, had been swept off their feet, the spark thus enkindled had, day by day, hour by hour, blazed into a bonfire of adoration—unreasoned, irrational adora-

tion—and the poor victims had by sheer gravitational pull, been drawn to the Ashram, they had to count the minutes, the seconds, that divided them from the “unhoped-for elusive wonder”...“the illimitable”...“the mighty one”...“the minstrel of infinity”; maybe, again, some had learned by slow degrees to follow and admire the career of Sri Aurobindo as a nationalist, as a poet, as a philosopher, and yet had failed to go further, had in fact nurtured a giant scepticism about the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, had even—once or twice—dubbed it all mysticism and moonshine, and had accordingly, come to satisfy themselves whether their own views were not, after all, the correct views, whether Sri Aurobindo was not, essentially, a poet and an apostle of nationalism rather than a saint and a *mahāyogin*. There were men and women of all categories, and children too of all categories, some carrying heaven in their hearts, others merely frolicsome and gay, many suddenly charmed and chastened by the Ashram atmosphere, but a few stubbornly resisting even its invisible currents and persisting in their own unique life-force movements and convolutions.

One heard casual remarks, stray greetings, whispered confidences. The premises of the Ashram were filled with a suppressed excitement. One heard the accents of many Indian languages. One idly wandered hither and thither: one gazed and gazed about oneself and—one felt fairly at home in those seemingly exotic and unusual surroundings. What did it matter if one didn't know *who* one's neighbour was? One knew *what* he was, or seemed to be,—a co-pilgrim to the shrine of fulfilment. One might speak to one's neighbour if occasions arose—or if the formal introductions had been made—but it was safer, on the whole, to sit or move about quietly. It was better to participate in the luxurious repast of silence; it was more becoming to seek refuge in the wisdom and strength of a chastening and uplifting reticence.

Many of the *sādhaks*, and many even among the visitors, had a noticeably abstracted air. They sat, by themselves or in little clusters, on the pavements or on the steps of a flight of stairs—and seemed to be lost in thought; of them perhaps it was written.

wisdom's self
Oft seeks a sweet retired solitude,
Where with her best nurse contemplation
She plumes her feathers, and
 lets grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of
 resort
Were all too ruffled and
 sometimes impaired.

And there were others too—other groups and clusters—and the men and women were agitatedly conversing in pointed jerks, expressive gesticulations, and impatient exclamations. But the generality belonged, perhaps, to neither of these categories.

The majority of those who had come to the Ashram for the first time wore just a puzzled air: they had indeed come to an Ashram, they were on the threshold of a unique experience (if the *sadhaks* were to be believed), they were suddenly projected into a strange new world—and they just wondered, they wondered in their ignorance, they wondered in their humility and awe, they just wondered whither all that pageantry was leading, what priceless revelation was waiting for them round the corner, and how exactly they were going to embalm it and preserve it during all the savourless tomorrows of their star-crossed lives.

The queue was being formed at last. It was about two in the afternoon. It was a bright day in Pondicherry, and it was a great day for Pondicherry. The queue was forming, and though the endless line of pilgrims hardly seemed to move, it actually did move on; the coil curved upwards towards the library and reading room, and curved downwards, emerging into the garden, followed for a little while a straight course, soon turning sharply towards the meditation hall. It moved on, like an impossibly long centipede, enveloping the pillars, scaling the stairs now in one direction now in another and at last reaching the very hall, the very spot.... The queue was long, with its cusps and crests, links and breaks, its ascents and descents, it swayed and moved, it stopped and moved and swayed, and a hushed expectancy filled the pores and cells of the human frame and even the very chambers of the obscure human heart. How patiently they awaited their proper chance—how statuesque many of them stood, their eyes avoiding the midday glare of the sun, their fingers firmly clasping the Tulsi garland or the fair white flower or the bright red rose—they waited and they moved, they moved and they prayed. “I cannot believe . I want to believe... I must believe .. I will believe... let me believe”... thus even the agnostic prayed, and hope and despair warred in his bosom, and he held the garland in a yet firmer grasp.

The last turn was taken. One's eyes grazed over the intervening pilgrims and rested on the two figures seated together in unblenched majesty and aura serene. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo! The great moment had come... the presence was a flood of Light and Truth .. and the mere mind staggered under the blow, the mere human frame lurched forward mechanically, but the eyes were held irretrievably in a hypnotic spell. Thought was impossible then .. the mind had abdicated its sovereignty for the nonce... and one (dare one say it?) had become almost a living soul. The crowning moment of all! One faced the Mother, one faced the Master... it was impossible to stand the smile, it was impossible to stand the penetrating scrutiny of those piercing eyes. A second or two, perhaps, no more... but how can one take count of the fleeting units of Time? One rather glimpsed then the splendourous truth—“There shall be no more Time!” Eternity was implicated in a grain of Time... one all but crossed the boundaries of Space and Time ... one experienced a sudden upsurge of glory that was nevertheless grounded on a bottomless humility. And—but already one was out of the room!

The pulses of life started beating once again; the wires, the machinery of the mind were resuming their work once more; the feet knew whither they should go.

The heart was agog still with the agitations of the hour—and one returned to one's room to gather, to piece together, the thousand and one fancies, the thousand and one aspirations, that had welled up in prodigious exuberance during that one great moment of timeless Time. One grew quieter, serener, one registered a feeling of singular, inexpressible fulfilment. One was abnormally calm, but one was also radiantly, almost divinely, happy!

The presence that thus flooded my storm-tossed soul and chastened it with the gift of grace bore little resemblance to the published photographs and even less to one's deliberate mental imaginings. And yet—how can I account for it?—it was a truly familiar face. Where had I seen the Master before? I had seen Him ever so often—yet where? The mind raced through the dizzy corridors of thirty-five years of terrestrial life... where, O where had I seen His face before? Was it the face of Zeus that had once held me enraptured as I chanced upon it in a book of mythology? ... Or was it rather the face of Aeschylus?—Perhaps, Vasishta looked even like this when he blessed Dasaratha's son; and it was thus, perhaps, that Valmiki sat when the whole of *Ramayana*, even to the minutest particularity, shaped itself before his wise and lustrous eyes! And the vision of the Mother and of the Master—were they in very truth the cosmic Mahashakti and the all-highest Ishwara?—the vision remained, the experience persisted, the memory of the smile eased yet the multitudinous pricks of the work-a-day world, and the memory of the *brahmatej*, austere yet inconceivably beautiful, that was resplendent on Sri Aurobindo's face yet gave one the hope and the strength to bear the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world—nay, gave one even the strength to aspire to change it all and boldly to nurture the incipient hope that even the frailest and the foulest clay can evolve—however long the journey and arduous the path—into the supermanhood of the Gnostic Being and the triune glory of Sachchidananda!

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE SYMBOL OF INDIA

(This is the English translation by V. Chidanand of an article in Telugu by V. Chandrasekhar published on August 15, 1947, in Samata, a monthly journal (now defunct) edited by V. Sadanand.)

AMONG flowers, which flower would you choose as the symbol of our country? Think a little and say. The symbol of a country is the symbol of its nature and individual characteristics. A country is not the land, nor its people either. A country is an idea. It is the embodiment of an idea. We do not know when was born the idea which is the inmost soul of our country. It was only after the birth of the idea that the self-knowledge of the country was born.

Growth and decay, changes and revolutions may occur in the body of a country, in the outer form, but so long as the idea is kept secure and living and conscious, there is no danger to the country. Those who in their hearts feel and experience this idea will feel the presence of their country, wherever they may go, either to foreign lands or to the ends of the earth. And this idea does not depend upon history which is a process of the march of time. On the contrary a country's history depends upon the idea. This becomes manifest in the history of the country. In the country's institutions and methods of government, literature, art and philosophy, customs and manners, games and sports, frolic and fun—in all these the idea becomes manifest, and builds their forms. The country's past and future are here in the idea, the one in the form of long-garnered wisdom and the other in the form of potential force. Therefore the symbol of a country is the symbol of this idea. Now ponder and say which flower you would choose as the symbol of our Bharat.

Instead of thinking with the mind to give a decisive answer to this question, it is better and more proper to perceive it in the heart. The living idea in the inner being of Bharat is the attempt to achieve a resolution, a reconciliation, a harmonization and synthesis of the oppositions, contradictions, riddles, and paradoxes of this world. The seers, who saw oneness in the manyness that we see, began to explore the causes of the apparent multiplicity, how the many are strung invisibly upon the thread of unity, how the one unites the many and how this is the answer to the problem of existence, this the explanation and this the synthesis. It was then that the idea which is the soul of Bharat was born. The consciousness of the country began to increase with the increasing consciousness of the idea. What more appropriate symbol could there be for our Bharat than the hundred-petalled lotus?

Rounded fullness, plenitude, supremely beautiful arrangement, harmonious synthesis, richness, sacredness, holiness and purity, that which gathers all these into unity, and causes the hundred-petalled flower of our heart to open in a flush of delight is the lotus—the lotus which is the beloved of our Gods and their King. There is some mystic

bond between our Gods and the lotus. It looks as though for some inscrutable reason the idea that is the life and soul of Bharat incarnates itself as the lotus among all the species of flowers.

Sri Aurobindo is this hundred-petalled lotus. Let nobody think that because "Aurobindo" means "lotus" we are just letting our imagination run away with us. Harmonious synthesis is the soul of Sri Aurobindo's teaching, thought and Yogic life. Global, integral synthesis is their basis. Such a clear, broad and lucid synthesis of the ancient and the modern, of the East and the West and of the many philosophical views in the world that are pitted against one another has not been reached until now. Sri Aurobindo has offered a spiritual symphony to the world. Our country's tradition of synthesis in spiritual as well as secular life gradually became weakened, and finally was almost lost. Then began the great downfall of our country. This ancient tradition of synthesis our country will again take up through Sri Aurobindo. For the synthesis of the One and the Many, and of the different and yet complementary truths has in Sri Aurobindo's teaching blossomed like the rounded full-blown lotus. Has not the name of this Sadhak of integralism, this Maha Yogi, a significance and a meaning? Just as the lotus is in a way the symbolic form of our Bharat, so too Sri Aurobindo is the incarnation in human form of the perfect blossoming of our eternal Wisdom.

The 15th of this month is Sri Aurobindo's birthday. This day was destined to be the day of our freedom from foreign domination. There seems to be some mystic inner connection, some secret significant suggestion in this. The country must learn in all humility and reverence Sri Aurobindo's synthesising wisdom. Through such a harmonious vision alone can the many differences and conflicts that are now raging in the land dissolve in a *grand finale*.

VELURI CHANDRASEKHAR

A TALK ON PAVITRA

(Last month we published a Talk by Pavitra (P. B. St. Hilarre). Here is one on him, given to the young teachers and students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education by Nirodbaran. It is part of a series of informal lectures. It was prefaced with the words: "I have told you two stories. One was of a remarkable Sannyasi, aged about 140, still living in the Himalayas and having a woman disciple; the other of a half-baked sadhak, now sitting before you, less than half the age of the Sannyasi. I shall tell you a third story—of a true Yogi. Perhaps you have already guessed whom I have in mind. It is a story touched with sadness but there is a rare sweetness in it too.")

WITHIN a few months we have lost two of our dear elder brothers, both of them early pioneers of our Yoga and pillars of strength to us: Amrita-da and Pavitra-da. Pavitra-da, to whom I offer my humble homage today, will be especially remembered by you since he was the Director of our Centre. Though many of you had no close contact with him, you must have often observed him coming to the Centre with a serene smiling face, walking with long firm steps, a tall and slim figure not likely to be missed by anyone old or young. You have also heard him calling out your names at the Playground during the prize distributions before the Mother.

When I first arrived at the Ashram, I was very much impressed by his appearance and bright complexion. I used to meet him every Prosperity Day, on the first of each month, when, standing by the Mother's chair, he would distribute our respective "necessaries" with a friendly smile and an affectionate look. He would be clad in dhoti, punjabi and chaddar, and had a well-trimmed squarish beard. He looked like an apostle. To me, he seemed much more handsome with that beard and in that dress than in his later clean-shaven aspect and his return to European costume. But it made no difference to his bearing, by which one could easily make out that he came from distinguished European stock. In fact he belonged to an aristocratic French family and was a noble representative of French culture.

How and when from a distant land, leaving like Buddha his home, his relatives, his brilliant worldly prospects as a graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique, and wandering through Japan, China, Mongolia and Tibet in quest of the Unknown, he came at last to the land of Buddha and took permanent refuge at the feet of Sri Aurobindo—this strange saga you have already heard from his own lips. What I am going to tell you today are my own impressions of him that have been formed through a span of about thirty years. Though my contact with him was not very close, still I had ample occasion to see him from far and near, to hear about him now and then from Sri Aurobindo himself, and always to maintain a high regard for him. During the later years, as my contact became closer, since I was living in the

same house, my regard increased and I found in him a man who rang true in every fibre of his being, a Yogi indeed of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. To be able to say that is not a small thing. You are still young, and to be young is "very heaven", but to us old people, at least to me, Sri Aurobindo's Yoga has at times given a good dose of hell. I am consoled only by his statement that hell is the shortest cut to heaven.

The Mother is reported to have remarked that from the very first day Pavitra-da kept on the right path, without vacillation. You might find here an echo of what Sri Aurobindo said about his own self, that he never turned to the right or to the left after he had settled himself in Pondicherry. I am reminded also of a Mantra in the Rig Veda. Aditi, the infinite Mother, cries in the ancient hymn to Indra, the divine Power about to be born from her womb: "This is the path of old discovered again, by which all the gods rose up into birth, even by that upward way shouldst thou be born in thy increase; but go not forth by this other to turn thy mother to her fall." And Pavitra-da, a true son of Aditi, kept to this upward way all through.

Who is Aditi? I will make a short digression. Champaklal once, on his birthday, made two paintings: one of a white lotus, the other of a red lotus. Don't think that because he is now preparing for you only birthday cards or has been doing 'marble painting' he knows no other art. The Mother has called him 'master of cards'. We used to call him 'master of lotus painting'. When he offered those two paintings to the Mother, she said, "I will show them to Sri Aurobindo and ask him to write on them his blessings." Champaklal replied, "Mother, you can then ask him to write something on them." Champaklal added to me, "On the white lotus Sri Aurobindo wrote 'Aditi', and on the red one Mother wrote 'Avatar', and she asked me not to show them to anyone." "Why not?" I asked. "She said people would not understand," Champaklal replied.

Now we may come to the main point of interest. What was Pavitra-da's relation with Aditi, the divine Mother? Champaklal again tells me that the very first time the Mother saw Pavitra-da, she said to Champaklal, "I have told Sri Aurobindo that he will do my work of foreign correspondence." Champaklal added, "Mother founded a small carpentry where I was asked to do some carpentry work. Mother asked him also to work there and he made a table to iron clothes on."

You know that the part of the building in which Pavitra-da lived is connected through a long corridor with the Mother's quarters. It was so designed in order that she might have free access to him and he could be at her call at all times. She would visit him at any hour of the day for one thing or another. More than once Sisir was surprised in his talk with him on School matters by her sudden appearance. She gave Sisir some advice and left. Another day, long after, I heard her coming out of her bathroom at about 6 a.m. shouting, actually shouting, "Pavitra, Pavitra!" I got a bit alarmed. God knows what he was doing, shaving or taking coffee. He cried back, "Oui, Mère, oui, Mère!" and came almost running. She scolded him about some School matter and he quietly and submissively listened. I have heard also that the Mother on her way to the Balcony darshan would pass through his bedroom

and, if she found him still sleeping, would rouse him out! These are small instances, but it is the small incidents that reveal the intimacy of the relation between the Mother and the child. You also know that Pavitra-da was the driver of the Mother's car from the beginning of the Ashram. She would not trust anyone else. He would take her to the Tennis Court, back to the Playground, wait long hours if necessary, and then bring her back home. Even on all her excursions, in the early days of the Ashram, it was he who acted as the driver. Sri Krishna was the charioteer of Arjuna in the battle of Kurukshetra, and Pavitra-da was the driver of the Divine Mother in the highways of the world! My friend Nishikanta, who has the faculty of occult vision, tells me that once as Pavitra-da was taking the Mother out in the car, he saw that the car was being pulled by several pairs of spirited horses (I don't remember their number or colour) with a sovereign galloping speed. It was at one time Pavitra-da's part too to call the Doctor whenever the Mother felt a need for him. All of which means that, to adapt a verse from *Savitri*, she could move in him as in her natural home. I do not know that any other expression could bring out the relation so truly and profoundly. I have also seen him kneeling in a quiet simple manner before the Mother, receiving a flower from her. This intimacy did not make him forget that she before whom he knelt was no other than the divine Mother Herself. When on the Mother's 80th birthday, the Pathamandir of Calcutta asked Pavitra-da to write something on his experiences in *sādhana* with her, he replied that this was a matter too intimate to be disclosed to the public.

To be so near and intimate, what a wonderful boon! you might say; but it is not so easy a boon to keep. For, the Mother being the Shakti, there is an automatic pressure for change on those who are near her and there are very few who can bear that pressure. I shall tell you of my own experience. When I came near to Sri Aurobindo to serve him, I was like a green leaf. Basking in the golden rays of the morning sun, I became fresh, strong and blithe, but as years wore on, the green turned, not "one red", but a mixed patchwork of red, brown and grey: the rays were too bright!

Now I will give you another example to show how the Mother's very presence acts. Once Sri Aurobindo, lying like Lord Shiva in his bed, was amusing us, his *pramathas*, with the story of his student life in England. His voice was soft and subdued and we were listening raptly, lest a single word should be missed. Suddenly he said, almost in a whisper, "The Mother is coming!" All at once turning our backs and sides to him, we sat straight like so many good boys and waited for her arrival. She sized up the situation and said, with a gracious smile, "They are making you talk?" and went back.

I needn't multiply instances to prove the dynamic, almost electric effect of her presence. All of you are familiar with it. Pavitra-da and others who were near her had to bear the full current of that power and, I am sure, they bore it well, for, first of all, they had a long period of preparation before the blessed "subconscient" started working when we came; and then, they were greater *ādhāras* who "saw, felt,

knew the deity," and "She held their hands, she chose for them their paths."

2

What was Pavitra-da's relation with us? His closeness to the Mother did not make any difference to it. Both Amrita-da and Pavitra-da were so much like us in their outer ways, manners and behaviour, that their "exterior semblance very often belied their soul's immensity." Pavitra-da, when he first came to the Ashram, was supposed to have said that he was a brother to all, and indeed he ever maintained the French ideal of equality and fraternity with all, high and low, young and old. You must have noticed that at the Theatre he used to sit with all of you on the 'parterre' instead of on a chair. One never came from a meeting with him without carrying away some sweetness, light and purity. Purity, sweetness and light were indeed his inborn psychic qualities. The name "Pavitra" given to him by Sri Aurobindo could not have been more appropriate. One could feel a white light wrapping him like a fine vesture wherever he went. I often saw him sitting in meditation on his terrace, and on moonlit nights the moonbeams filtering through the leaves of the Service Tree bathed him with a light "that never was on sea or land," as if a Japanese Buddha had been sitting there, deep in trance.

About the prodigious amount of work he used to do, I think many of you have heard; and everything was done methodically down to the minutest detail. I never saw his light going out before 11 p.m., after which he would always come down, do pranam at the Samadhi, pace for a while and go back. The worker side of his personality has been described very well in the article in the *Mother India* of June. I can only add that the hair oil, eye lotion, tooth powder, shaving cream, etc., that make you spick and span, were prepared according to his instructions. He was a Polytechnician in both the senses. You can see then how indispensable he was to the service of the Mother. When the vacuum cleaner was used for the first time, it was he whom the Mother called to clean Sri Aurobindo's room, and the radio was also set-up there and operated by him. You may argue that there are plenty of people who could do so much work, but to do it all with a constantly calm and dedicated spirit would not have been possible unless one had walked on what Sri Aurobindo has called the sunlit path. And how thorough he was! Once when I took to him an article written in French, he verified all the references, corrected the small slips and, to my surprise, even corrected my lavish use of *et ceteras* instead of, at most, two at a time, and of commas before or after the brackets! I was reminded of the Guru's practice in such minor matters. We had occasions to break lances with Pavitra-da in connection with our School work but that did not affect our spiritual relationship. He always maintained his poise and equanimity and sweetness. I don't mean that he had no inner difficulties, but he never allowed them to intrude upon his outer nature and I would go further and assert that without a considerable inner development such an outer conquest is not possible. Sri Aurobindo's stress on "change of the outer nature" found in him an exceptional response.

I shall relate to you a striking instance of Pavitra-da's equanimity and submission to the Divine Will. You have been told of his entering the First World War and going through its terrible ordeal. Now when the Second War broke out, he was supposed, as a French citizen and '*un ancien combattant*', to take part in it. An order came to the effect that he must resume military training in Pondicherry, preparatory perhaps to going to the battlefield. The Mother had to consent to it, since there was no way out. My colleague S says that on the eve of his joining the parade, the Mother brought a garland to be offered by Pavitra-da to Sri Aurobindo, and Pavitra-da followed and did pranam to him, seeking his blessings. Every morning he would go out in his uniform and return after a few hours with a smiling face and a cheerful spirit. But the development that we all awaited with apprehension was not long in coming. There was a rumour that he would soon be called to the Front. The Mother was very much loth to let him go. In our talks with Sri Aurobindo, he would refer to the Mother's strong unwillingness: Pavitra-da had become a part of their being and was so indispensable that the Mother could not do without him. Though she was rather vexed, she found no normal way out of the *impasse*. We were all sore on his account and were waiting with fear for the order to come, but at the same time hoping that some miracle would happen preventing his departure. The Mother asked him to get ready. She doesn't take any chances. We did not hear of any perturbation on his part. Since the War had already been named the Mother's war, and our people were taking part in it, Pavitra-da also must have accepted it in the same spirit. But to leave the Ashram-home, after spending the best part of one's life in close association with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, for an uncertain, even perilous, future, is, to say the least, not easily done. He began to prepare himself and, among external things, what he was particular about taking with him was a stove which, it seems, he had designed himself and got made in his atelier.

At last the order arrived that he would leave by such and such a steamer that would touch Pondicherry on such and such a date. We were counting the days. But the ship never arrived! We were startled to learn that the ship had been torpedoed somewhere along the way. Was it the hand of Providence that acted in so drastic a manner in order to save a yogi from a calamitous end? *Ne me bhakta pranaśyati*. My bhakta does not perish, says Sri Krishna. No other ship arrived either, for, very soon after this, Pondicherry declared itself for De Gaulle. Whatever the reason might have been, we saw Pavitra-da employed here to transmit War news from his radio to Sri Aurobindo four or five times a day!

This was somewhere in the early forties, I believe. Since then much water has flown under many bridges and many a change has come about in our life here. Youngsters invaded the Ashram in a flood and a school had to be started, of which Pavitra-da was made the Director. From a very small beginning the Centre has grown steadily to its present distinguished stature and acquired an international status. Behind this distinction, there was in no small measure the incessant activity and living interest of Pavitra-da who always kept in his dreams and in his wakeful moments the

thought of the Centre in the forefront of his mind, consulted the Mother at every step and carried out her wishes. Things were moving splendidly. Many Government Commissions came and went, we received partial recognition, and some grants. Various changes and experiments took place in our educational system and the Centre was ever-expanding. There was every reason to hope that it was going to be a unique institution embodying the ideals of Sri Aurobindo, and all of us were working towards that ideal when one day we heard that Pavitra-da was not well. His movements and his meetings with us and with others became gradually more and more restricted: finally he was confined to his own room and to his contact with the Mother.

There is a darkness in terrestrial things
That will not suffer long too glad a note.¹

3

Now I will touch upon the last and most painful episode of Pavitra-da's life and the supreme example of his equanimity. At first we thought it was just a passing illness. He seems to have come to know from the Doctor about its nature nearly one year after the initial onset and, thereafter, it was a strictly guarded secret. Vague forebodings crossed our minds, but these were dissipated when we saw him carrying on his work cheerfully and always meeting us with a glad smile. We were deceived by the restricted movements of the joints and took them to be symptoms of some kind of rheumatism. Besides, there followed a period when we used to see him walking briskly in the corridor, even running and doing many other minor exercises. Every morning we would greet each other with a Bonjour or a silent nod. The rigidity that had rendered movement difficult and painful seemed to have gone and we were all so happy to anticipate a complete cure. But the symptoms came back and took their unrelenting course. Gradually he had to stop all exercises and we used to see him moving about with a stick, dragging his affected leg. Later on, he was moving almost like an ant, taking half an hour or more to reach the staircase of the Mother's room from his own. Still, with this extreme incapacity and, I am sure, constant gnawing pain and other *sequelae*, he went on doing all his duties till the last day. His personal servant said that he would take about half an hour to cross a few yards in order to reach his bureau. Yet there was no dark shadow on his face. Sri Aurobindo always used to urge upon us the lesson of equanimity, such an equanimity that nothing in the world could disturb it. It is the very rock basis of sadhana and I am certain that Pavitra-da achieved it in great measure. In the later phases I tried always to avoid him, the pale face and creeping-like walk were too painful for me, but sometimes I would be caught while he, along with André, was on his way to the Mother. Greetings were exchanged and he was as calm, as tall and upright as before.

I have said that the nature of the malady was kept a secret, but when I came across the truth just by accident a few days before his passing, I simply gasped.

¹ *Savitri*

To know very well the character and progress of the disease for so many years, and to remain still undisturbed, calm and ungrieved, doing all his daily work—shall I not call this a victory of what Wordsworth terms “man’s unconquerable mind”? Was this not a heroic soul, a Vibhuti, a Yogi? I was told that when he learnt for the first time what his ailment was, he did not seem in the least perturbed, and he kept a graphic record of his symptoms till the last day. I could not but compare what I believe would have been my reaction if I had been in his position, but the less said about it the better.

Pavitra-da fought the battle of Kurukshetra in his body for five long years against an adversary who remains still unconquered in the medical world. He may have failed, but I am convinced that he fought not only for himself but for the world, and half the battle has been won by his superb effort. An unprecedented *yagña* is being performed; it demands priceless sacrifices. The first Greek king who touched the Trojan soil had to lay down his life. Great souls, mighty *ādhāras*, have to bear enormous burdens, not for themselves alone, but for us mortals too. “. . . must fire always test the great of soul?” It is they who help to lift the weary weight of this unintelligible world and make life bearable to us. From Pavitra-da’s luminous example we can learn what true greatness is like. Indeed the Mother has given an exceedingly high place to his spiritual achievement.

Presences like his amongst us serve as a steady light on the voyage of our soul. Why not give the example, I might be asked, of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? The Mother is the light of a thousand suns, and through such as Pavitra-da she shines tempered and transparent. They are nearer to us as our elders. One who says that even in her cradle she was conscious of belonging to another world, “the child remembering inly a far home”, and the other who had the Nirvanic experience in three days—they are too great for us mortals as examples. In spite of many beatings from the Guru on this point, I remain still unrepentant and incorrigible, feeling a gap between such beings and ourselves. But people like Pavitra-da are near us, are our kindred, for all their high attainments. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me that there were at least a few here who have had the Brahmic experience. I feel that Pavitra-da was one of them. His total surrender to the Mother, his wide self-giving, were surely the result of major spiritual experiences. These must have laid the ‘shining axe of God at the root of all doubts and perplexities and annihilated all denials and oppositions’—*bhidyate hṛdaya-granthi, cchidyate sarvasaṁśayān*. Sri Aurobindo told Pavitra-da at their first meeting that he could realise what he was seeking—liberation—but there were also many other things besides that in Yoga. Seeing Yogis like him and moving among them we too can hope for the Highest and, adapting Francis Thompson, say:

O Invisible, we view thee,
 O Intangible, we touch thee,
 O Unknowable, we know thee,
 Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

NIRODBARAN

NAME GLOSSARY TO SRI AUROBINDO'S *ILION*

This glossary has been prepared by an American disciple to serve as an easy guide to the various human characters and geographical elements at play in the epic which Sri Aurobindo wrote in Quantitative Hexameters according to a system of Quantity shown by the Poet in a long essay as natural to the English language. Mr. Eric Hughes has sent the following note on his own admirable compilation:

“Words in parentheses following the glossed name present the customary spelling of that name.

“In certain instances, the name in Iliion differs slightly in identification from that found in classical references. For instance, Eurys, the son of Polydamas, is identified as the grandson of Antenor; but classical references give his grandfather as Panthoüs.

“Also, certain very familiar names appear in Iliion, but apparently have no relationship to their popularly known identifications; for instance, Orestes, who here is a Trojan warrior and not the son of Agamemnon.

“Certain variations in spelling also occur. For instance, Oileus appears in Iliion without diaeresis, but in all classical references, it has it. Perhaps the omission is a printing error?”

Acamos (Acamas): son of Theseus. When Diomedes went to Troy to ask for the return of Helen, Acamas accompanied him.

Achaia (Achaea): common designation for Greece in Hittite and Egyptian texts, 1400-1200 B.C. In Homer, it refers particularly to the land of Achilles's men and Agamemnon's followers. Its territory was southeast Thessaly and the north coast of the Peloponnesus.

Acherontian waters: the Acheron, a river of Thesprotia in southern Epirus. It flowed underground at several points and thus was reputed to lead to Hades.

Achilles: son of Peleus and Thetis. In the *Iliad* he appears as a magnificent barbarian somewhat outside the circle of Achaean civilization. He alone among the Homeric figures keeps the old practice of making elaborate and costly funerary offerings, including human victims.

Acirrous: a cohort of Diomedes and a resident of Troezen.

Admetus: king of the Pherae and husband of Alcestis. In *Iliion* he is wounded by Penthesilea.

Aeacids (Aeacidae): a people sired by Aeacus, son of Zeus and Aegina. Achilles was one of them.

Aegean: sea between Greece and Asia Minor.

Aeneas: son of Anchises and Aphrodite; father of Ascanius (who does not figure

- in *Iliad*); one of the leading Trojan princes (of the younger branch of the royal house).
- Aeolia* (Aeolis): territory of the northernmost group of Greek immigrants to the western coast of Asia Minor, extending from the Hellespont to the mouth of the Hermus; a linguistic and ethnological, not a geographical, unit.
- Aeolus*: son of Hellen (founder of the Hellenes) and founder of the Aeolian race.
- Aetes*: a Hellene, father of Echemus; a Greek warrior.
- Aetna*: a volcano in northeast Sicily. See *Enceladus*.
- Aetolia*: a country bordered on the west by the lower and middle valley of the river Achelous, and on the east by Mount Oxya, a mountainous region.
- Aetor*: Antenor's brother.
- Agamemnon*: eldest son of Atreus (*q.v.*) and brother of Menelaus; king of Mycenae, or Argos, and commander in chief of the forces against Troy.
- Aiamos*: "son of the Northwind"; a Trojan warrior.
- Ajax* (Aias): (1) son of Telamon, king of Salamis. In the *Iliad*, he leads the Salaminian contingent. Of enormous size, he is called "the bulwark of the Achaeans" and "greater Ajax". He has already been slain at the opening of *Iliad*. (2) son of Oileus, the Locrian chieftain. In the *Iliad*, he leads the Locrian contingent. See note page 14 of the published text of *Iliad*.
- Alcesiphron*: Trojan senator.
- Alceste's son*: Alceste (or Alcestis) was the wife of Admetus, king of the Pherae in Thessaly. When Admetus was dying, she offered herself in his stead, so he lived and she went to Hades. She was returned to the world of the living by the grace of Persephone (Kore), or by the intervention of Heracles. The son referred to here is Eumelus.
- Alexander*: an alternative name of Paris, son of Priam.
- Amphitrite*: the consort of Poseidon.
- Ananke*: personification of compelling necessity or ultimate fate to which even the gods must yield.
- Anchises*: a member of the younger branch of the Trojan royal house. He had a liaison with Aphrodite on Mt. Ida and Aeneas was the son born of it. Anchises was forbidden to speak of the liaison but he boasted of it to his friends. As a result of this boast, he was—according to differing versions—either blinded or lamed. After the Trojan War, he fled with Aeneas and eventually founded Rome.
- Anna*: a sister of Penthesilea, the Amazon.
- Antenor*: an elderly and upright counselor in Troy during the siege, who advised the return of Helen to the Greeks. He was also host to the Greeks who came to Troy requesting Helen's return. His friendliness toward them and his advice to return Helen were taken by the Trojans as traitorous.
- Antenorid*: an epithet of the house of Antenor.
- Aphrodite*: Greek goddess of love, beauty, and fertility.
- Apollo*: Greek god of music, archery, poetry, prophecy, medicine, and care of

flocks and herds. He is often associated with codes of laws, and was the ideal of manly beauty. In matters of ritual, especially of purification, his oracles were commonly regarded as the supreme authority.

Arcady (Arcadia): a mountainous area in the central Peloponnesus, but with fertile valleys; its pastoral life was shown in its myths and cults.

Archeress: a title of Artemis (*q.v.*).

Ares: Greek war-god; not one who leads his people into battle, but a personification of the warlike spirit. Aphrodite is frequently his partner. He was the son of Zeus and Hera, and was commonly the helper of foreign peoples (the Trojans) and unusually warlike ones (the Amazons).

Aretes: a Trojan senator.

Argos: a city in the southern part of the Argive plain, three miles from the sea, at the foot of the Mycenaean and classical acropolis called Larissa; it was the kingdom of Diomedes, who acknowledged Agamemnon's leadership.

Aruthoa: mother of Zethus, a Phthian.

Aruthon: one of Penthesilea's captains.

Artavoruxes: one of Penthesilea's captains.

Artemis: Greek goddess of earth, especially of forests and hills; occasionally a city-goddess. She was the daughter of Zeus, sister of Apollo, and a giver of fertility.

Ascanus: a Trojan senator.

Asius: a Trojan warrior apparently slain before the start of *Ihon*.

Aspetus: a Trojan seer and senator.

Astarte: a title of Aphrodite.

Astyoches: a Trojan senator.

Ate: personification of infatuation or moral blindness, the daughter of Strife and Zeus, and the sister of Lawlessness.

Athamas: a Trojan admiral and senator.

Athene (Athena): patron goddess of Athens, and extensively worshipped elsewhere. She is connected with citadels (and hence with heroes and cities), also with water. She exhibits a tendency to be a female Ares. Patroness of arts and crafts, and of wisdom, she sprang, unmothered, from the forehead of Zeus. She is also known as Pallas. Her statue, the Palladium, stood in Troy and was a symbol of protection so long as it remained undisturbed, but Athena herself aided Odysseus.

Atlas: a Titan, son of Iapetus and Clymene, and guardian (or supporter) of the pillars of heaven.

Atreid: an epithet of the house of Atreus, and especially of Agamemnon.

Atreus: son of Pelops (*q.v.*) and husband of Aërope. He served up to his brother Thyestes the latter's own sons at a banquet to commemorate his supposed reconciliation with his brother after Atreus had banished him. As a result of this grisly act, a curse fell upon his house, the working out of which provides the plots of many of the Greek tragedies which have come down to us. He was the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus, and the grandfather of Electra and Orestes.

Atrides: an epithet of Agamemnon (son of Atreus).

Attica: a triangular promontory, easternmost part of central Greece.

Aulis: a small hill on the Euripus with a landlocked harbor. It was here that the Greek fleet collected before sailing to Troy, and Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to the gods to break a calm and allow the ships to depart.

Aurus of Ellae: a "henchman" of Penthesilea; apparently one of her runners.

Automedon: the son of Diores; and Achilles's charioteer.

Babylon: ancient city on the Euphrates.

Bellerophon: an ancestor of Sarpedon (*q.v.*) and a native of Ephyre (identified with Corinth).

Bellona: Roman war-goddess. Here it is an epithet of Penthesilea.

Briseis: daughter of Briseus and Lyrnessus; widow of Mynes; she became Achilles's slave-concubine. She was taken from Achilles by Agamemnon, thereby setting off the quarrel between them which forms the central "problem" of the *Iliad*. She was eventually returned to Achilles.

Brises: a Trojan hero who has apparently already been slain at the opening of *Iliad*.

Bucoleon's son: Anchises, though his father was actually Capys.

Cadmeian Thebes: Thebes (*q.v.*) was founded and built by Cadmus, a son of Agenor, king of Tyre. He was led to the spot by a cow while searching for his sister Europa. The city was first called Cadmeia. Cadmus killed a dragon, an offspring of Ares, to get water. Athena advised him to sow the teeth of the dragon. There came up a harvest of armed men, whom Cadmus killed by tricking them into fighting one another. Five survived and became the ancestors of the nobility of Thebes.

Caria: a region of southwestern Asia Minor.

Cassandra: a daughter of Priam. Homer makes no mention of her being a prophetess. Aeschylus presented the version of her prophetic powers given here.

*Centaur*s: a tribe of wild, beastlike monsters, with the upper part of a human and the lower part of a horse. They live in the woods or mountains of Elis, Arcadia, and Thessaly. Representative of wild life, animal desires, and barbarism.

Chaleidice (Chalcidice): southern projection of Macedonia, ending in the three promontories of Pallone, Sithonia, and Acte.

Charmidas: a Greek killed by Penthesilea.

Chersonese (Chersonesus): (1) the Gallipoli peninsula; (2) the Crimea; (3) a city of the Chersonesus, on the Crimean Riviera, near Sevastopol.

Cimmerian(s): a fabulous people "on whom the sun never looks" (Homer). They emerged from south Russia, entered Asia Minor, and broke the power of Phrygia.

Cirrhes: a Greek warrior killed by Penthesilea while he was fleeing the battle.

Clymene (Clymenus): a euphemistic title of Hades.

Corecbus: a Lycian leader.

Crete: a Greek island in the eastern Mediterranean, south southeast of Greece.

Creusa: wife of Aeneas and mother of Ascanius.

Cromon: an epithet of Zeus (son of Cronos, or more usually, Krónos, a Titan).

Cyclopes: gigantic one-eyed beings, the craftsmen of Hephaestus and the sons of Heaven and Earth; they make the thunderbolts and fortifications (Tiryns) of Zeus. In Homer, they are savage and pastoral and have no government or laws.

Cyenus: brother of Zethus, a Hellene.

Cypris: an epithet of Aphrodite. Her sanctuaries in Cyprus (at Paphos and Amathus) were especially renowned. Homer called her "the Cyprian."

Cythera: an island off the southeast promontory of the Peloponnesus on which there was a sanctuary of Aphrodite.

Cytherea: an epithet of Aphrodite. See *Cythera*.

(*To be continued*)

ERIC HUGHES

YOGA AND LIFE

FIRST BREATH OF RELEASE FROM SUFFERING

Reminiscences of One Walking upon the Way—in His Own Words

“...most men live in their physical mind and vital, except a few saints and a rather larger number of intellectuals. That is why, as it is now discovered, humanity has made little progress in the last three thousand years, except in information and material equipment. A little less cruelty and brutality perhaps, more plasticity of the intellect in the élite, a quicker habit of change in forms, that is all.”¹

What is meant by living in the vital?

“Most people live in their vital. That means that they live in their desires, sensations, emotional feelings, vital imaginations, see and experience and judge everything from that point of view.”²

This is the basic cause of our suffering. When there came a quiescence in the vital being, then there dawned in me the first sense of release from suffering.

I am not boasting. In writing about oneself one has to use lots of “I” ’s and “my” ’s. This might sound like boasting but how to avoid it, how else to convey one’s experience? If one shrinks from stating a fact, where lies the utility of writing anything at all?

I confess at the very outset that as most men live in their vital and physical mind, so did I. I have no intention to pose as a saint. A saint is one who has gone beyond struggle and crossed the sea of darkness. That is not my case. There is not as yet even a glimpse of the blessed shore. Some achievements are there but nothing exceptional, far less astounding.

Mine has been a life of suffering, mentally, vitally as well as physically. In my world-life I was full of worries and ‘tied down by a thousand ties’. Even little things upset me. A slight inconvenience anywhere appears to the vital as ‘a world of difficulty’, as the Mother says. So it was with me. For this plight of mine, I was frequently ridiculed by a cousin, a man of principles who knew how to face a storm without being swept away. Even in a hurricane he would not become un-nerved. My heart was full of admiration for this quality in him which I so clearly lacked.

It is true that on taking up the Ashram life I was relieved of worldly cares and worries, for the day one is accepted as a permanent inmate his daily bread is assured, but that did not cut the knots of desire or release me from the black web of ego.

The Master once wrote to a disciple: “The experiences you have are the be-

ginning of the change in the vital, e.g., peace with yourself and those you thought had injured you, joy and freedom from all worldly cares and desires and ambitions. These came too with a quieted mind, but they can be fixed when the vital is liberated and tranquillised.”¹

According to my diary the first breath of release came to me in 1937. To my pleasant surprise I passed days at a time with no sense of suffering.

But this proved to be only the initial stage—just a relief one feels when freed from the tyranny of the vital and the torture of the physical mind. What was gained so far was that the poisons of life did not produce any serious effect, but though suppressed they were there. The forces that these poisons represented waited for an opportunity to trip me up.

Why it happens this way is explained thus in terms of “the hostile forces”: “At every step of the journey, they are there attacking furiously, criticising, suggesting, imposing despondency or inciting to revolt, raising unbelief, amassing difficulties.... A little trifling false step or mistake and they appear on the road and clap a whole Himalaya as a barrier across it.”

It took me a quarter of a century of struggle to reach even this initial stage. I tried hard to free myself from the clutches of these forces but so strong was their hold that nothing could make them budge an inch. I seemed to be stuck in the same place for years and years at a time. Nowhere was I free. Each of the forces tried to take the field and dominate.

I remember an amusing incident:

One summer morning I had some friction with R in which he got the upper hand. A note was sent to me with the authority of the Mother’s signature under it. This roused a fire of resentment and a spirit of retaliation. So overpowered was I by a fire of anger that my limbs began to tremble. Then up came a violent suggestion: R must be taught the lesson of his life.

A little later I heard a voice from the void, soft and feeble: “Is it for this you have come here?”

At once the flaming fire of retaliation sank. “Can the heart that harbours enmity be an abode of God? Only a well-swept heart could be a fortress unassailable,” says a saint. I took a broom in hand and went to sweep R’s room. Finding it shut I swept the outer portion. That very day I took the resolution: “I shall not resort to retaliation whatever be the cost.” This was in 1943.

The consuming fire of retaliation came up many a time but I remained true to myself despite vehement protests from within. Even when insults were hurled at me, I tried hard to remain calm and to meet the person with a smiling face. Great was the humiliation to my wounded ego but I swallowed the bitter pill.

This proved a stepping-stone for a leap forward. We must go on adding one conquest to another until the whole being opens unreservedly to the Yogic Force.

¹ *On Yoga*, Tome II, p. 400.

Thus starting out to teach a lesson to another I myself ended up learning a lesson.

Long afterwards I read: "Vehemence comes from the unregenerate vital ego which is just the thing that stands most in the way of transformation; the other things are comparatively mild obstacles compared with this part of the being."¹

At times I watched the hostile forces making my vital a field of battle but I could do nothing. Once driven out they returned with redoubled force. Depression and disappointment were my only gain.

I felt these words as if they had been spoken to me: "If you want to change, you must first resolutely get rid of the defects of your vital being...then alone the vital in you will become fit for sadhana."² I made this the key principle of my sadhana.

The malady in the vital was so deep-rooted that years of working of the Mother's Force even directly in the lower regions seemed to produce no tangible result.

Then I came across these lines: "Remain firm and quiet with the right will in you and let the Force do its work. That will may not bear recognisable fruit at once, but adhere to it and the fruit will come."³ These words put new heart in me.

The rigid hold of the opposing forces began to slacken from 1957. They were there but made their appearance only when I was hit hard. This allowed me to breathe a new air. I looked around and felt all quiet within: no worry, no trouble, no sense of suffering, no mean impulse, no disturbing passion.

Doubtless, the serpents of undesirable elements must still be there though they have lost the power to bite. Says Mikhail Naimi: "Even when a serpent's head is cut, it retains poison but it cannot bite."

To quote Sri Aurobindo again: "Disturbance in the vital will always come so long as full peace has not descended there but with a fixed resolution in the mind kept always to the front the acuteness of the disturbance can disappear and the road becomes shorter."⁴

There is another quotation from Mikhail Naimi, as spoken by Mirdad: "A thunderbolt would never strike a house except that that house drew it to itself. The house is as much to account for its ruin as the bolt."

A question was put to the Mother: "Sometimes when an adverse force attacks us and we come out undefeated why are we attacked once again by the same force?" She answered:

"Because something was left inside....You have something in you which attracts this force. Take for example the force of depression. It is like a little signal to those forces which intimates to them: 'You can come, the door is open.'

"So long as you have not completely effaced it, the attacks will recur unexpectedly. You push back—it is like a ball you throw upon the wall and back it returns; you push

¹ *On Yoga*, Tome II, p. 420

² *Ibid.*, p. 413-4.

³ *Ashram Diary*, date October 29.

⁴ *On Yoga*, Tome II, p. 423.

back once more and again it returns, until the moment when there is nothing that attracts. Then it returns no more."¹

Seven more years were to pass until a stable basis was obtained. Then there arose a feeling time and again that I had gone beyond struggle. My off-hours I passed sitting alone allowing no thought to enter so that there might be only one thought, that of the Mother.

"The chief difficulty in the way of living in the light...is the confused and turbid restlessness of man's vital nature. If it is quieted, the major difficulty is gone."

Past are the days when my vital, an ever-restless sea, used to run after "the little joys and pleasures of things". No clamour, no hankering for anything now. All within seems to be still. I feel such relief² as a traveller feels on reaching home after a long and tedious journey.

There is a sort of "inner rest" which refuses to be easily disturbed. When difficulties come there arises by itself the inner strength to meet them. This experience is something quite new to my nature.

But it seems the time has not yet come for the greater things, waiting wrapped within, to be revealed. Not yet have I been able to discover the Kingdom of God within me.

Compiled by HAR KRISHAN SINGH

¹ *Bulletin*, August 1968, pp 23-24

² "The sense of release as if from jail always accompanies the emergence of the psychic being or the realisation of the self above." — *On Yoga*, Tome II, p. 118.

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FOCUS

9. The 'Yugantar'

The *Yugantar* was a Bengali paper started by Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother. Its declaration was filed on March 12, 1906. In this regard the following passage occurs in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (p. 44, 1953 edition):

“At Barin's suggestion he (Sri Aurobindo) agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper.”

Copies of the *Yugantar* have not come to light so far, in spite of a wide search. If any of our readers can trace them or furnish more information about the paper we shall be very much obliged.

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

SIXTEENTH SEMINAR

23RD FEBRUARY 1969

(Continued from the issue of July 1969)

I

ASCETICISM AND TRUE AUSTERITY

I BEGIN this paper with a quotation from Sri Aurobindo: "The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge."¹

Poets, artists, thinkers have all extolled the glory of this earthly existence. "A leafy luxury" of nature, sapphire stars, rippling rills are indeed eternal fountains of joy. Death, suffering, impermanance create but a little stir in our earth-enchanted hearts. Amal Kiran, in one of his poems, writes:

Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!
I fear to soar lest tender bonds decrease.
If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.²

These lines vividly express a sincere human aspiration of living in God here, upon this earth.

But let me hasten to add that this is not the usual feeling of the seekers of God. Buddhist, Shankarite, Christian saints and many others have decried this earthly existence. They encountered two different worlds existing at two different poles as it were—"a greater spiritual life above and a lower existence below". Such polarity of existence has always been a great enigma to God-intoxicated men. Not being able to

¹ *The Life Divine* (American Edition), p. 13.

² K. D. Sethna, "This Errant Life", *The Secret Splendour*, p. 3.

reconcile these opposites the sages in the past denounced this mundane life and sought refuge in forests or caves. A number of Christian saints in medieval times lived a rigorous life in Egyptian deserts. These world-shunning ascetics saw the world, to use Sri Aurobindo's words, as "a lie, an insanity of the soul."

It was, then, taken for granted that denial of the material urges of man would entail suffering. The ascetics willingly accepted the bed of nails, whipping, hair-clothes, etc. to torture the body or at least to kill the sense of comfort in the body. A Chinese saint tore off his eyelids because he had resolved not to sleep. In fact, the history of asceticism will remain incomplete without reference to the hysteric torments inflicted upon the body. This has been so for one simple reason: the ascetic assumes bodily life to be fundamentally evil, and spirit to be the sole good.

Asceticism was not absent even from the ancient Greek civilisation, particularly from the Dionysian cult.¹ This sect believed that the soul was imprisoned in the body and by the practice of purification it could be released from the trammels of the physical existence. Long strenuous fasts were enjoined. Epimanides, a poet and prophet of Cnossos in Crete, is celebrated for fasting. He is said to have fallen into a deep sleep and waked up not before 57 years! It is to be noted here that the Greek idea of *katharsis* had a deeper significance than the one commonly stated. It sought, explains Sri Aurobindo, "the purification of the *citta*, or mass of established ideas, feelings and actional habits in a man either by *samnyama*, rejection, or by *bhoga*, satisfaction, or by both."²

Among the ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians, fasting and other forms of self-mortification were enjoined but they did not have ascetic views as such.³ The Sumerians and Babylonians had no clear conception of the soul. They believed that the soul disappeared a few months after death. Self-torture and penitence were meant to excite pity of the offended deity. The Egyptians, however, had a profounder religion. They believed in the immortality of the soul, and yet never disparaged the bodily existence. They had on the contrary a cheerful view of life. Ra, particularly in his manifestation as Aten, was an affectionate god. The world was his kingdom. The king Akhanaten wrote:

"Thou risest beautifully in the horizon of heaven,
O Living Aten who createst Life!
When thou risest in the eastern horizon
Thou fillest every land with beauty."⁴

And also,

"Thou art the mother and the father of all thou hast made."⁵

¹ See *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, p. 80.

² *The National Value of Art*, p. 21.

³ See *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, p. 110.

⁴ & ⁵ See J. H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*.

For the Egyptians the world was beautiful because it was the creation of God.

The conception of "sin" is another source of self-mortification. A Muslim saint wept for 40 years because as a child he had stolen a brick from a neighbour's wall!

Although asceticism is widely practised among the sadhus of India, its history does not go back beyond the Buddhist era. In the Vedic period there was no asceticism proper. The Veda speaks of sacrifice but this has a deeper significance. It reveals that this material life is not the only existence knowable to man. There are higher planes and profounder depths within and to awaken to these planes and depths is the real goal of man. And it also says that such an ascent to higher planes brings "new birth." And again, each new birth is accompanied with wideness of consciousness till we are one with the Vast. This flight into the Vast may result, at a certain stage of ascent, in Nirvana, in the experience of the unreality of physical existence. But this is only a mid-way experience in the soul's upward journey. On a still higher plane of consciousness the world does not appear to be unreal. Death, suffering, limitation that we experience in the world is the result of Avidya, says the Isha Upanishad. It is due to this Avidya that we are unable to experience "harmony and oneness with the universe".

The human urge to enjoy is legitimate. But, being limited and egoistic, our enjoyment is also limited and egoistic. It is by surmounting these limitations that we enter into the true enjoyment of the world-existence. "By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy," says the Isha Upanishad. "The renunciation demanded," explains Sri Aurobindo, "is not a moral constraint of self-denial or a physical rejection, but an entire liberation of the spirit from any craving after the forms of things."¹ What we call true austerity consists in renouncing "the desire to possess and enjoy".

It is this desire to possess and enjoy—the desire called *tṛṣṇa*, thirst, by the Buddhists—that brings old age, death, despair, and suffering. According to Buddhism salvation consists in extinction of the individual in Nirvana.

But Sri Aurobindo strikes a new note. "Yoga," says Sri Aurobindo, "is in its essence a turning away from the ordinary material and animal life led by most men or from the more mental but still limited way of living followed by the few to a greater spiritual life, to the divine way...."² And then he adds, and this is important to note, "every part of our energies that is given to the lower existence in the spirit of that existence is a contradiction of our aim and our self-dedication. On the other hand, every energy or activity that we can convert from its allegiance to the lower and dedicate to the service of the higher is so much gained on our road, so much taken from the powers that oppose our progress."³ From this it is clear that it is not by repression or inhibition of the senses that we are seeking here to make ourselves perfect but by a conversion of their allegiance to the lower existence.

Incidentally, many outsiders on their visits to the Ashram have been puzzled as to the nature of our Yoga here. We put on no ochre robes, use no wooden shoes, do not

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Isha Upanishad* (1924), p. 19.

² & ³ *On Yoga I, The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 81.

sleep on stone-beds, we have even no restrictions in food. All these and many other details speak against the traditional notion of Ashram life. Long back someone had asked Sri Aurobindo in a letter: "Why does the Mother put on rich and beautiful dresses?" Sri Aurobindo replied: "Is it your notion that the Divine should be represented on earth by poverty and ugliness?"¹

In reply to another such letter Sri Aurobindo wrote: "A fine sari or a palace are expressions of the principle of beauty in things and that is their main value. The Divine Consciousness is not bound by these things and has no attachment, but it is also not bound to abstain from them if beauty in things is part of its intended action."²

The true austerity consists, for the sadhak of the Integral Yoga, in attaining to an inner liberation by means of purification of the senses: "...being in God and yet living in man is the very difficulty that he is set here to solve and not to shun,"³ says Sri Aurobindo.

The Mother, in "Four Austerities and Four Liberations," says that the ascetic practices are "low, dark and diseased. Spiritual life, on the contrary, is a life of light and balance, beauty and joy."⁴ But this "life of light and balance, beauty and joy" is more difficult than the life of asceticism. "Indeed, it is much more difficult," observes the Mother, "to lead a life of measure and balance, equanimity and serenity than to fight the abuses of pleasure and the obscuration they cause by the abuses of asceticism and the disintegration they bring about. It is much more difficult to secure a harmonious and progressive growth in calmness and simplicity in one's physical being than to ill-treat it to the point of reducing it to nothing. It is much more difficult to live soberly and without desire than to deprive the body of nourishment and clean habits so indispensable to it, just to show off proudly one's abstinence. It is much more difficult again to avoid, surmount or conquer illness by an inner and outer harmony, purity and balance than to disregard and ignore it, letting it do its work of ruin. And the most difficult thing of all is to maintain the consciousness always on the peak of its capacity and never allow the body to act under the influence of a lower impulse."⁵

The above quotation of the Mother shows not only the difficulties in the path but also our ideal here in the Ashram. To attain to this ideal, self-control and self-discipline are absolutely indispensable. This the Mother sums up in the four austerities to be observed: 1. Tapasya of Love, 2. Tapasya of Knowledge, 3. Tapasya of Power, 4. Tapasya of Beauty.

The idea of austerity is interlinked with the idea of sacrifice. In fact no Yoga is possible without a "conscious sacrifice". The vulgar concept of sacrifice is a painful process of self-immolation or at least self-mortification. But this is not the essence of sacrifice. What is to be sacrificed "is not one's self," says Sri Aurobindo, "but the band of the spirit's inner enemies that we have to discourage, expel, slay upon the altar of

¹ *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 633.

² *Ibid.*, p. 634.

³ *On Yoga I, The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 374.

⁴ & ⁵ *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Education*, p. 81.

the growth of the spirit; these can be ruthlessly excised, whose names are desire, wrath, inequality, greed, attachment to outward pleasures and pains, the cohort of usurping demons that are the cause of the soul's errors and sufferings...these have to be sacrificed in the harsher sense of the word."¹

The Veda represents the idea of sacrifice as a "journey or voyage".² For it has an upward movement and its goal is "the vastness, the true existence, the light, the felicity"³ But the voyage is by no means easy and free of danger, the path is indeed arduous for the seeker after knowledge. For, as he proceeds he meets Dasyus and Danavas, Rakshasas and Wolves and Tearers ever vigilant to arrest the ascent of the pilgrim. "They must be expelled," affirms Sri Aurobindo, "overpowered, slain, thrust down into their nether darkness by the aid of the mighty and helpful deities."⁴

Thus purified by true austerity and sacrifice and renunciation we become "soldiers of light", not world-shunning ascetics but hero warriors ready to "fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born, against the past that seeks to endure; so that the new things may manifest and we be ready to receive them".⁵

DEBRANJAN

Compiled by KISHOR GANDHI

¹ *On Yoga I, The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 123.

^{2,3,4} Sri Aurobindo, *On the Veda*, pp. 432-33

⁵ The Mother, "Student's Prayer".