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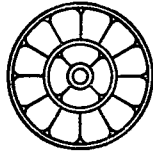
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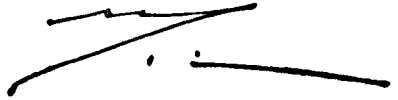


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Vol. XXVII

No. 6

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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THE RIGHT WAY TO LEARN

(This is what the Mother wrote under a photograph of her, taken in 1912 in France while she was playing tennis.)

I REMEMBER I learnt to play tennis when I was eight years old, it was a passion; but I never wished to play with my little comrades, because I learnt nothing (usually I used to defeat them), I always went to the best players; at times they looked surprised but in the end they used to play with me — I never won, but I learnt much.

THE MOTHER

HOW TO ACT WITH SERVANTS

(On principle the Mother did not believe in the use of servants. So the following was never made public, lest it should be misunderstood as a permanent sanction to their use. But as it can be extremely helpful while servants are yet being employed we have decided to publish it — with the necessary warning.)

COMMENT AGIR AVEC LES DOMESTIQUES

Ne pas être indulgent,
ne pas être sévère.
Ils doivent savoir que l'on voit tout,
mais on ne doit pas les gronder.

2.7.68

LA MÈRE

Don't be indulgent,
don't be severe.
They should know that you see everything,
but you shouldn't scold them.

2.7.68

THE MOTHER

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of May 1975)

(This new series of answers by the Mother to questions put by the children of the Ashram appeared for the first time in the Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education but in a somewhat fragmentary, incomplete form. We are giving the translation of the full text as it was taped, with here and there a few special additions or modifications made by the Mother at the time of the first publication of the series as a book in French in February 1968. This translation came out in book-form in 1973.)

January 16, 1957

“Man seeks at first blindly and does not even know that he is seeking his divine self; for he starts from the obscurity of material Nature and even when he begins to see, he is long blinded by the light that is increasing in him. God too answers obscurely to his search; He seeks and enjoys man’s blindness like the hands of a little child that grope after its mother.”

(Thoughts and Glimpses, Centenary Edition, Vol. 16, p. 382)

Sweet Mother, how can it be that one seeks something and yet does not know what one is seeking?

THERE are so many things you think, feel, want, even do, without knowing it. Are you fully conscious of yourself and of all that goes on in you? — Not at all! If, for example, suddenly, without your expecting it, at a certain moment I ask you: “What are you thinking about?” your reply, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, will be: “I don’t know.” And if I ask in the same way another question like this: “What do you want?” you will also say: “I don’t know what.” And “What do you feel?” — “I don’t know.” It is only to those who are used to observing themselves, watching how they live, who are concentrated upon this need to know what is going on in them, to those that one can ask a question like that, precise, and who can immediately reply. In some instances in life, yes, one is absorbed in what one feels, thinks, wants, and then one can say: “Yes, I want that, I am thinking of that, I experience that”, but these are only moments of existence, not the whole time.

Haven’t you noticed that, haven’t you?

Well, to find out what one truly is, to find out why one is on earth, what is the true purpose of physical existence, of this presence upon earth, of this formation, this existence ... the vast majority of men live without asking themselves this even once! It is only a small élite who put this question to themselves with interest, and fewer

still start working to get the answer. For, unless one has the luck to come across someone who knows it, it is not so easy a thing to find. Consider, for instance, that there had never come to your hands a book of Sri Aurobindo's nor of any of the writers or philosophers or sages who have dedicated their life to this search; if you were in the ordinary world as millions of people are in the ordinary world, never having heard of anything, except at times — and not always nowadays, even quite rarely — of some gods and a certain form of religion which is more a habit than a faith and, besides, rarely tells you why you are upon earth.... Then, one doesn't even think of thinking about it. One lives from day to day the events of each day. When one is young, one thinks of playing, eating, and a little later of learning, and after that one thinks of all the circumstances of life. But to put this problem to oneself, to confront this problem and tell oneself: "But finally, *why* am I here?" how many do that? There are people to whom this idea comes only when they are facing a catastrophe. When they see someone whom they love die or are put in particularly sad and difficult circumstances, they turn back upon themselves, if they are sufficiently intelligent, and tell themselves: "But indeed, what is this tragedy we are living, and what is its use, and what its goal?"

And it is only at that moment one begins the search to know.

And it is only when one has found, you know, found what he says, found that one has a divine Self and that consequently one must seek to know this divine Self.... That comes much later, and yet, in spite of everything, from the very moment of birth in a physical body, there is in the being, in its depths, this psychic presence which pushes the whole being towards this fulfilment. But who knows it and recognises it, this psychic being? That too comes only in special circumstances, and unfortunately, most of the time these have to be painful circumstances, otherwise one goes on living without reflecting. And in the depths of one's being is this psychic being which seeks, seeks, seeks to awaken the consciousness and re-establish the union. One knows nothing about it.

When you were ten, child, did you know this? No, did you? Well, still in the depth of your being your psychic being wanted it already and was seeking what it was. It is probably that which has brought you here.

There are so many things which happen and one doesn't even ask oneself why. One takes them ... it is like that because it is like that. It would be very interesting to know how many of you, till the moment I spoke to you about it, had asked yourselves how it happened that you were here?

Naturally, most of the time, the reply is perhaps very simple: "My parents are here, so I am here." However, you were not born here. Nobody is born here. Not even you, are you? You were born at Bangalore. No one is born here And yet, you are all here. You have not asked yourselves why — it was like that because it was like that! And so, between even asking oneself and giving an external reply satisfactory enough to be accepted as final, and then telling oneself: "Perhaps it is an indication of a destiny, of the purpose of my life?" How long a way must be trod to come to that!

And for everybody there are more or less external reasons, which, besides, are not

worth much and explain everything in the most commonplace way possible, but there is a deeper reason of which you are yet ignorant. And are there many among you who would be very interested in knowing why they are here? How many of you have put this question to yourselves: "What is the real reason for my being here?"

Have you asked yourself, child?

I had once asked you, Sweet Mother.

Oh! that's true. And you? ... And you?

I don't remember.

You don't remember. And you?

Not before, Mother.

Not before. Now it begins to come! And you?

No.

No And I could ask many others still. I know it well. Only those who have come after having some experience of life and came because they wanted to come, having a conscious reason for coming, those naturally can tell me: "I came because of that", and that would be at least a partial explanation. The truest, deepest reason may yet elude them, that is, what they have specially to realise in the Work. That indeed already requires crossing many stages on the way.

Essentially, it is only when one has become aware of one's soul, has been identified with one's psychic being that one can see in a single flash the picture of one's individual development through the ages. Then indeed one begins to know but not before. Then indeed, I assure you, it becomes very interesting. It changes the situation in life.

There is such a great difference between feeling vaguely, having a hesitant impression of something, of a force, a movement, an impulse, an attraction, of something which drives you in life — but it is still so vague, so uncertain, it is cloudy — there is such a difference between this and having a clear vision, an exact perception, the total understanding of the meaning of one's life. And it is only at that moment that one begins to see things as they are, not before. It is only at that moment that one can follow the thread of one's destiny and see clearly the goal and the way to reach it. But that happens only through successive inner awakenings, like doors opening suddenly on new horizons — truly, a new birth to a truer, deeper, more lasting consciousness.

Till then you live in a cloud, gropingly, under the weight of a destiny which at times crushes you, giving you the feeling of having been made in a certain way and

not being able to do anything about it. You are under the burden of an existence which weighs upon you, makes you crawl on the ground instead of rising above and seeing all the threads, the conducting wires, the threads which bind different things into a single movement of progression towards a realisation that grows clear.

One must spring out of this half-consciousness which generally is considered quite natural — that's your "normal" way of being and you do not even withdraw from it sufficiently to be able to see and be astonished at this incertitude, this lack of precision; whilst, on the contrary, to know that one is seeking and to seek consciously, voluntarily, *steadfastly* and methodically, that indeed is the exceptional condition, almost "abnormal". And yet it is only thus that one begins to live truly.

UNLEASHED

UNLEASHED, her Titan stallions ... Fury drove,
 Midst roar and din and cracking of the whip,
 Across soft summer's pale meadow skies,
 To distant conquest and final appease.

Crashing through rivers with unfaltering speed,
 Displacing to huge wakes the once misty and still,
 Leaving the torrents to reflect as they fall
 The spark-streaked course of each striking hoof,

Endlessly she wields her joyous soft-hued display,
 As behind the great steeds the chariot comes,
 Midst the now gentler motion that calmly forebodes,
 Ecstasy's final and sweetest release.

So travels love in the void of the heart,
 Until unioned with the One of which it is part.

RANDY BRAHM

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(These talks are from the notebooks 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 Mulshankar. As the notes were not seen by Sri Aurobindo, 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.)

JULY 5, 1940

News has come today about the details of the naval fight between the French and the English fleets in Oran. But Sri Aurobindo did not seem to be in a mood to talk. Almost all the time he listened to our talks.

P: Pétain is being called the Führer of France.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he has realised the dream of his life at 84.

N: They say that a major part of the French navy has fallen to the British.

SRI AUROBINDO: A large part.

EVENING

P: The German radio says that the Pétain Government has cut off all diplomatic relations with England.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): There is not much relation to cut off. They have only a *chargé-d'affaires* at London. On this side things are getting tighter.

P: In the Balkans?

SRI AUROBINDO: No; in Pondicherry. The Consul has left for the North, nobody knows where. The Vice-Consul also left for the North with the director of the Bank, perhaps to arrange for the currency directly without passing through the Governor. The Viceroy is coming to Madras. The French Governor is now frightened because the Pétain Government has issued orders to carry out Government orders as it is the duty of the *fonctionnaire* to obey the superior authority. Moreover, Hitler has threatened the admirals, officials, and others that, if they don't obey, their wives and children will be taken to the concentration camps.

S: Then what remains for them to resist for?

P: The British also are taking strong measures, I hear. They have forbidden all British ships to touch Pondicherry. That means a blockade.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, they must have done that after learning about the Governor's attitude.

N: And now if the diplomatic relation goes, the British will take possession of Pondicherry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily. Even if the diplomatic relation goes, Pondicherry may simply remain hostile without being at war.

N: It seems that the Pétain Government will very soon take up a hostile attitude towards England and even go to war with her, especially now after the naval intervention.

SRI AUROBINDO: Looks like that. Their policies are lining up more and more with Germany. (*To P*) Have you seen the new constitution of France that Pétain has proposed?

P: No, I haven't seen it yet.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is all authoritativeness and dictatorship. Pétain is the dictator and Weygand is the Vice-Dictator, I suppose the successor. Weygand, Mother says, is tremendously rich. He is one of the chief share-holders of the Suez Company.

P: Dr. André seems to have been correct in his estimation of the French officials here. He said, "You will see all of them will back out when the Government order comes from France. They say only big things but they don't actually want to go to war. I know about two doctors in our hospital."

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, all those who were shouting have become tame. I mean the military officers who wanted to fight with the British and one of them even wanted to commit suicide. (*Laughter*)

P: I told him about Bulloch who has been earnest and sincere and gone to war willingly. He said that because he was a technician he had to go.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not correct. He has gone because he wants to fight, wants to get a promotion.

P: Some people say that conditions in France must be all right. The peasants must be getting enough food, otherwise they would have revolted.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who are these people?

P: Some townspeople.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then the peasants in India must be very prosperous because they don't revolt. (*Laughter*)

P: I told them that in Germany people had to be on war ration for seven years.

N: By this blockade we shall also suffer.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course, especially as our wheat is detained at Madras. If we had our own wheat we could go on till the millennium.

N: Then instead of wheat we shall have rice. (*After a while*) Have you read Harin's poems?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they are good but nothing wonderful. I have read part of AB's conversations¹ too. I don't see that all of them are worth publishing. There are plenty of trivial things. A selection has to be made and even then it may not be

¹ The conversations Anilbaran Ray had with Sri Aurobindo on his first arrival were sent to Sri Aurobindo for revision with a view to publishing them. (Nirodbaran)

worth-while publishing it.

N: Besides, the style is very poor. He hasn't taken any care to present things in an elegant way.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course I didn't speak to him in Bengali.

P: It seems to me that such things require a bit of rounding off to be presentable and to have a literary value.

SRI AUROBINDO: But he may fear that it may be too much rounded off like Charu Dutt's stories! (*Laughter*) It is all about his sadhana. There is nothing literary there. Things like — keep your mind quiet and aspire ...

P: That reminds me of Noren. He says, "Charubabu says 'Keep your mind quiet and aspire'; Sri Aurobindo also has said this. What is new in that?"

S: Easy to say but difficult to do.

SRI AUROBINDO: But AB seems to have done it all right. When he was asked to do that, he said he tried and his mind became quiet but nothing descended. (*Laughter*)

P: At that time everybody used to feel something very concretely after having a talk with you.

(*At this point S began to smile, looking at N.*)

SRI AUROBINDO: That was the golden period of the Ashram. And now (*looking at N significantly*) is the age of 'physical crust'. (*Laughter*) The scientists have a special term for it.

S: But a most momentous period for us.

(*After a while P read out a poem by B. K. Thakore on Hitler. Therein Thakore says, "We will gather all our might to crush you."*)

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Not so easy as in poetry. (*Laughter*)

(*To be continued*)

NIRODBARAN

A TALK BY VASUDHA

TO THE STUDENTS OF THE CENTRE OF EDUCATION,
AT "KNOWLEDGE", ON 18 FEBRUARY 1975

(This is the first of the two talks given by Vasudha recently. The second will appear in our issue of July or August 15.)

VASUDHA: I am asked to talk to you, to say something about the Mother I think perhaps I cannot do it to your satisfaction. Myself, I have nothing to say — nothing special to say but if you have any questions to ask me I shall try to answer them to the best of my ability. First of all, I'll introduce myself to you — to those who do not know me well. Now it happens that tomorrow, 19 February, will be exactly forty-seven years since I came here. I came to Pondicherry on 19 February 1928. Now, I am rather curious to know what sort of questions are coming to me. Any questions?

Q: What were Mother's activities during the whole day?

VASUDHA: You want to know about Mother's daily routine?

Well, when I came here, things were not as they are now. As you know, according to the times the routine went on changing. The year I came here, as far as I remember — you know it was forty-seven years ago — there used to be meditation three times a day: in the morning, in the afternoon and at night. And in those days there was neither a school nor a playground nor any of the other departments or activities, there was no Press, either — or anything else. So nothing was done about such matters. But Mother used to see a few people every day — a certain fixed number of people — by turns in the morning. In the evening she went out for a drive and at night at about 7 or 8 she gave soup to people — to the sadhaks. These were the activities people participated in when I first came here.

Q: How did you first come here?

VASUDHA: Shall I tell you the story of how I came here? It is rather a long story. You must know one thing that in 1928 when I came here I was fourteen years old. In 1927 my elder brother, who was an engineer, wanted to come here permanently — he had already visited the Ashram twice, spent a few days and wanted to remain for good but Mother had said, "I will call you when I need you." As I was very young then, nobody talked to me about these things in the house, only my brother told me in November 1927, "Write a letter to Mother saying that you want to go to the Ashram and stay there." I did not know how to write in English at that time, so I said to him, "If you dictate to me then I'll write." So he dictated to me just one line:

“Divine Mother,
At the Lotus Feet of the Divine Mother,
I want to stay in the Ashram.

Vasudha.”

This is what I wrote and he sent my note along with his letter to Mother. Our correspondence with Mother was done through Champaklal, I believe. You know Champaklal? He is from the same place as I, the same town. We knew Champaklal from our childhood. So my brother wrote to Champaklal and the answer came.... Mother must have asked him perhaps about me. I was thirteen and the answer was, “For little children there is no place here.” In those days, you must remember, it was not as it is now, the Ashram was a very serious place, only for yoga, for sadhana, and children of young age were not allowed, nor very old people; only young people, and that too those chosen and approved by Mother and Sri Aurobindo, were permitted. This was so not only for staying but even for Darshan. For Darshan, permission was not granted to anybody and everybody; only those who had been selected were granted permission. So this was the answer which we received in November 1927.

Now in February 1928, my brother was preparing to come to Pondicherry to stay permanently and I must tell you that he was the eldest person in our house, for my father had passed away when I had been six years old and Chandulal became my guardian. Our family consisted of just a few people: another brother, who was studying agriculture in Poona, my mother, my eldest brother's wife and myself. My brother had naturally to make arrangements for our coming over here permanently. As I was the youngest he was eager that I should also come and stay here. But, as I have already told you, the answer from Mother was that little children had no place here. So in February when he had decided to come he was to start from Bombay on the 17th because the 21st was the darshan day; he would reach here on the 19th just two days before Darshan. Now it so happened that on the 14th or 15th he received a letter from Pondicherry from Kashibhai, Kamalaben's father, who was also one of our friends. — He wrote to my brother because my brother must have written to him, “I am coming to Pondicherry, starting on the 17th. Kasibhai's reply was, “Why are you saying ‘I am coming’, as though you were coming alone. When Vasudha has permission, why don't you write ‘We are coming’? Are you not bringing her?” Now this was news to us because I had not asked for permission after the refusal in November 1927. The answer “There is no place for little children here” was clear. And there was no question of my writing again so soon, in three months I couldn't have become big! As I said before, in those days permission was so difficult to get that my brother thought that if I had really got permission for darshan or for staying I should not miss the chance, and if he didn't take me it would be a very wrong thing. But he also felt that if I hadn't got permission and it was only a rumour from somewhere, it would be no good taking me, it would be a waste of money; besides, if I went there I might get neither Darshan nor permission to stay. So my brother was in a fix, he didn't want to

miss the chance and he didn't want to take me unnecessarily. What to do then? There was not much time to write a letter and get an answer. So he sent a wire to Kashibhai, "You said Vasudha has got permission, is it true?" and we waited for the answer to come. A wire came back to say "Yes."

So we started on the night of the 17th and reached Pondicherry on the 19th at about 3.30 p.m. Champaklal had come to receive us at the station on a cycle. *(Laughter)*

For the first time in my life I saw a rickshaw and a man pulling it; I was asked to sit in it with my brother but my heart was beating madly as I found it awkward for a man to pull another person; yet I couldn't say anything. My brother was still very curious to know how I had got permission. How did it happen that I who had not got permission three months earlier should have got it now? So he asked Champaklal to explain the mystery. Then Champaklal related the facts to us.

It so happened that because my brother was to come here permanently, my sister-in-law (his wife) wrote a letter to Mother — in Gujarati of course — also asking for permission to come. The Gujarati letter was naturally read by Champaklal to Mother. The letter was signed Subhadra. After reading the whole letter Champaklal said it had been written by Chandulal's sister, instead of saying Chandulal's wife. *(Laughter)* Mother said, "She can come." When I heard that, I felt very bad and I said to myself, "I want to go back immediately. I have come here by a mistake." But as I was not very free in speech with my brother — I was quite timid — I couldn't say anything to him. Besides, being my eldest brother, he was almost like a father to me. I was very much troubled but I went on hearing the talk which was going on Champaklal was on the cycle by the side of my brother and was talking to him. Champaklal continued, "Then suddenly I remembered and I said, 'Mother, Mother, I have made a mistake. It is not his sister who has written the letter but it is his wife who has asked Mother for permission. I made a mistake.' Mother said, 'Well, you have made a mistake, not I. *(Laughter)* I have given permission to his sister, not to his wife.'" Hearing this I was relieved. And so that is how I came here ...

Let me tell you a little more. I came here only for the Darshan as I was then studying in Bombay; I had taken leave for fifteen days from my school. I was not very fond of talking, even to my brother, and in our house I hardly talked, so in the train I sat thinking to myself that fifteen days were too much for me. I had the old ideas of yoga, people meditating with closed eyes and grim faces and nobody smiling, nobody laughing and talking, so what would I do there for fifteen days? I thought, "We shall reach on the 19th; on the 20th we have to be there because the 21st is the Darshan, but the 22nd can be the last day — three days and I'll come back." Well, I don't know how the fifteen days passed and then fifteen years and many more years but I am still here.

Q: Did you see Mother on the same day?

VASUDHA: Yes, we saw Mother on the same day — both I and my brother. We were given the room in the Guest House near the gate where Tara Jauhar lives now in *Dortoir Annexe*. And it was arranged that both my brother and I would see Mother at seven or eight at night in the room which is now 'Prosperity' upstairs. Champaklal, I guess, according to my brother's instructions had arranged for rose garlands. To go to the 'Prosperity Room' we had to pass through Champaklal's room and climb a few steps to enter it. I remember I first saw Mother in the 'Prosperity' standing somewhere in the middle of the hall. I naturally did just what my brother did, I imitated him because I did not know what one should do and what one shouldn't. He gave one garland to Mother and did *Pranam*. I too gave one garland to her and did *Pranam*. The garlands had been kept for a long time in a dish and the petals of some roses had fallen in it, so I collected them and put them all in Mother's hands and did *Pranam* again. She gave me a sweet smile. And I forgot all about my going away.

My only disadvantage was that I had not studied sufficiently in school and I had come here without much knowledge of English but I had a good knowledge of my own language. I had just started to learn English when I came here. And I continued studying it here merely by talking and hearing, so my language is not good enough for speaking in public.

Q: What was the human side of Mother, as you saw it?

VASUDHA: May I ask you what you mean by the human side? Acting like any ordinary person? She talked to me, she patted me, she caressed me, she scolded me, as any mother would do — human or divine; it is very difficult to make a distinction between the two. In all our human relations with her there is something divine. That is a very difficult thing to say, but Sri Aurobindo has spoken about her divinity. He has spoken a lot about the divine powers of the Mother, hasn't he? The human side we all know....

Q: But what did you see?

VASUDHA: I myself did not know exactly what was divine, but Sri Aurobindo had said that she was the Divine Mother and I took her for that and did whatever she asked me to do. I did as much as I could, as best I could, and I tried to serve her in the best way possible. That much only I can say. The human part of her, everybody knows — because everybody has come into contact with her, everybody has seen her and many have lived with her for quite a long time. Whatever I felt is for me only, it cannot be related to others because it becomes flat, it has no meaning for them, they will not understand it. I understand with my own heart, my own mind and my own feelings, with my limited understanding. And each one does that. Even if I tell you, I think it will be no use, it will be wasting time, we will just be jabbering.

Q: We have heard that Mother had a very fine sense of humour.

VASUDHA: Sense of humour? I thought Sri Aurobindo had a very fine sense of humour, not Mother so much as far as I know. She was generally more serious.

Q: What were the other activities in those days?

VASUDHA: Naturally, as things developed, activities went on changing. I don't know what happened before. But later there was a Press, Mother used to go often to the Press; we had other properties — the lake, she used to go there for drives in the evening. We had a playground and she started going to the playground and then we had the sports, and she used to supervise the sports. We had a school and she used to attend the school functions; she herself started playing tennis, you know. And as the Ashram developed, so the activities also developed, or rather because of her interest in them these departments and activities came about.

Q: How did you become her personal attendant?

VASUDHA: It was a long process; going near her was a gradual thing. If I start from the beginning it will be a long story. Have you the patience to hear it from the beginning or shall I just tell you the end? Oh, you want it from the beginning? Then I must tell you how I started my work here. I had come here only for the Darshan of the 21st February, I had my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and after that in a day or two my brother had an interview with the Mother and she said to him, "Your little sister is very nice, Sri Aurobindo also was pleased." Then she added: "If she likes to stay here I'll keep her" — and after a few minutes' pause again — "if she doesn't want to marry." In those days there was no question of marriage or of a married life in the Ashram. So when my brother came back from the interview he told me what Mother had said. I never thought of marriage at that time and naturally I could not talk to my brother — being too shy a person — whether I wanted to marry or not. I said to him, "Yes, I want to stay here, I don't want to marry." I had been very much enchanted when I had seen Mother's smile; and I forgot all about going home and about all the difficulties and serious aspects of this place.

I have told you that Mother used to give soup in the evening at 7 or 8. She would sit in the 'Prosperity' verandah upstairs facing the staircase. Each one of us would go to her with a cup and she would fill it with soup, sip it and give it back as Prasad. You know Mother was wearing a sari in those days, afterwards she started wearing gowns, salwar, khameez, etc. She used to cover her head with the sari right down to the forehead, and to keep the sari in place she would wear a band, sometimes a simple band and sometimes with some embroidery on it. Now it so happened that after a few days of my coming here I saw her wearing a velvet band with jari-work on it. It was made out of a jari topi — such as worn in North India — embroidered with gold and silver

threads. The Ashramites called the band a 'crown'. Now, I had learnt that kind of work in my school and I said to Mother in Gujarati when I went to her for soup, "I know this kind of work." (*Laughter*) She could not understand what I was saying and so she called Champaklal who was in the next room, "Champaklal, Champaklal", and he came running. Mother said, "What is she saying?" (*Laughter*). I told him what I had said and he repeated it to her in English. Then Mother smiled and kept quiet.

The next day Datta called me. Do you know who Datta was? She was an Englishwoman who had come here with Mother from Japan. When I went to her, what do you think she gave me? Not the work I had said I could do, but an old piece of Bengali bamboo mat. You know the kind of fine mat which is very cool for people to lie on in summer. Datta gave me this piece and said that Mother wanted me to make some vase-mats — mats to put under vases — of different sizes and shapes. I had never done this kind of work before. I said, "All right", as I never said "No" for any work. But, to make vase-mats, one requires materials — a piece of cloth and some fancy threads for binding the edges. Datta did not give me anything — nor did I ask for anything, because I couldn't talk in English! I brought the old piece home; I had a pair of scissors, so I started cutting all sorts of geometrical shapes — round, square, triangular, hexagonal, octagonal — but I needed some cloth and thread to finish the edges, otherwise the straws would come off. When my brother returned from his work — he was in charge of construction and repairs of buildings — I said to him, "This is the work I am given and I need some cloth and silk threads."

I must mention here that in those days life in the Ashram was very strict and not at all as it is now. People did not keep any money with them. All that they had was given to Mother and she provided us with all our needs. Naturally I had no money of my own and whatever my brother had he had given away to Mother. Every month Mother used to give to the sadhaks some pocket-money — to different people according to their needs or according to what she thought they needed — three or five rupees or more. Nowadays this sum is paltry but in those days it was a big amount! Besides, things were very cheap in Pondicherry. I knew my brother used to get some pocket-money, so I asked him for the materials and he took me to the bazaar. I chose a piece of pink cloth and a few blue silk skeins. I stitched the piping and put some fancy stitches on it and, when the mats were ready, I took them to Datta. She seemed to be very pleased and Mother, though she did not say anything to me, must have been pleased also, for I kept on getting more and more needlework after that.

I started getting Mother's blouses for stitching and many other types of needlework. I had told her that I knew some embroidery. So gradually she went on giving me some work through Datta. Every day we used to see Mother at the morning meditation, in the evenings when she went out for her drive and at night during soup-time.

Slowly my work increased and I got more and more embroidery to do. I wonder if you know Lalita? Lalita was a Parsi girl here at that time and you know Parsi saris are embroidered in one corner only as the other end is tucked in when wearing the sari.

She had offered all her beautiful saris to Mother and whenever Mother wore them — Mother used to wear the sari in the Bengali style where both the ends are visible — they used to look rather funny with one end embroidered and one plain. So I told Mother I could do this kind of alteration-work for her. (*Laughter*) Later she sent me one sari and this time with silk threads I traced the design from one corner and reproduced it exactly at the other end. Mother was very pleased with the result and she gave me many saris afterwards to complete the corners.

I think I forgot to recount one of her activities in those days. She used to visit people in their rooms in the afternoons — once a week or once in two weeks. One day she came to our house — where we now have our embroidery department — and she asked me, “Will you do a sari for me?” I promptly said, “Oh, yes”, though embroidering a sari was a big work and I had never done it before. Mother imitated me, “Oh, yes.” (*Laughter*) In the evening when I went to Datta she told me that Mother had already ordered silk threads from France and they were on their way by sea — in those days there were no planes Even before asking me, Mother had already ordered the silk threads! And that is how I started embroidering saris for the Mother. I began my first sari in August 1929 — a white lotus on a white background and finished it in December of the same year. At that time we had no big artists to do the designs for us — Amal Kiran was our only artist and he did some sort of simple lotus design which a child would be proud of now.... Mother wore the sari next year on her birthday. I used to embroider the whole day and did no other work.

You have asked me how I went upstairs to attend on Mother.

I used to send my work through Datta but from time to time Mother would call me. Then she started seeing me once in two weeks and gradually I started doing the work of washing, mending and ironing her clothes. Day by day her personal work increased as people who were doing it were not there or had given up the work. I never asked for any work and never refused any but I always offered myself when I felt the need was there. Gradually she asked me to take the ironed clothes to her room every day and started giving me flowers. The personal work actually started when Datta passed away and Chinmayi, the Mohammedan girl from Hyderabad, was not willing to work. Mother gave me all the work that these two had been doing for her. That is how I went nearer to her till finally on 9 December 1958 when she was unwell — you will recall that that was the time when she stopped playing tennis and also doing other activities in the playground — I started attending to her person. Later again on 3 April 1962, I was called up at night when she was very ill and I stayed on with her day and night for years. Mother did not come down from that time till the end.

Q: (from a child): When did the small children come here?

VASUDHA: You may remember that the Second World War broke out in 1939.

Perhaps many of you were not born then When Japan sided with Hitler, many of the devotees who were staying outside Pondicherry in places like Calcutta or other places in Bengal were afraid of bombardment of their towns by the Japanese and felt they would be absolutely safe in the Ashram because of the presence of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Mother gave refuge to families and that is how children came here. Children need to study and must also have other activities to keep them occupied, so that is how the school and playground started. Gradually Mother became very lenient; she was not as strict as before, many things were allowed which were once tabooed.

Q: Why do you say that Mother became lenient ?

VASUDHA: I'll give you one instance. You know that Mother used to cover her head fully and some of her ideas seemed to be very much like those of orthodox old ladies. Whenever I went to her with a half-covered head, she would pull the sari to cover my head fully. (*Laughter*) Now am I right in saying that Mother became very lenient afterwards? Also, in those days rules about food were very strict — no meat, no fish (fish was only for the cats), no smoking, no drinking, not even eggs were taken — only pure vegetarian food. Those rules perhaps even now exist, but I don't know how far they are respected

Q: Have you talked with Sri Aurobindo ?

VASUDHA: I saw Sri Aurobindo very closely at Darshan time but there was no talking. In those days we used to have Darshan three times a year — 21 February (Mother's Birthday), 15 August (Sri Aurobindo's Birthday), 24 November (Victory Day). We could go close to him, do Pranam at his feet and he would place his hand on our head and bless us. This mode of Darshan lasted till November 1938 when Sri Aurobindo had an accident and fractured his right thigh. Until he was well again, Mother alone continued to give Darshan on these occasions. People were increasing and Sri Aurobindo (after the accident) could not bear the strain of sitting too long, so the method of Darshan was changed. We walked past in front of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in a line. The gap between the two Darshans — February 21 and August 15 — was felt to be too big, so 24 April — which was Mother's day of final arrival in Pondicherry in 1920 — was made the fourth Darshan Day.

Q: Did Mother give Birthday Cards in those days ?

VASUDHA: There were no cards in the old days. Mother used to see people on their birthdays and give a short meditation and a few selected flowers — each flower had a special significance and according to our needs she gave the flowers. In 1958 when she stopped seeing people for sometime, she started sending the Birthday Cards.

Q: What did Mother eat?

VASUDHA: Her food did not vary much, it was very simple — mostly fruits, vegetables and nuts. Towards the end all this was well mashed and made semi-liquid because she found it difficult to chew She was very fond of cheese....

Q: Who prepared her food?

VASUDHA: The food was prepared in Mother's own kitchen. Also some of the sadhaks used to prepare different dishes at home and send them to her; Mother would taste a little from each and the rest would be sent back as Prasad.

Q: Did she wear a sari all the time?

VASUDHA: In the old days I always saw her dressed in a sari when she received people, but when she retired to her own room I presume she must have changed into a gown. Later when she started playing tennis she took to salwar and khameez and saris became rare ... gowns and coats at home and salwar-khameez outside.

Q: Did she have any favourite dress?

VASUDHA: Yes, she liked certain beautiful embroidered saris and gowns; she preferred certain pastel shades — pale pink, pale blue, pale grey, etc. She liked maroon red but not bright red — all this was in the early days. Later on she used to wear all kinds of colours to please people — that is, whatever had been offered to her.

Q: How did you enjoy your stay here?

VASUDHA: Enjoy? I would rather ask you to tell me what you mean by enjoyment. Is it like eating ice-cream? (*Laughter*) I can't say how I enjoyed my stay but I can say I have utilised my time to my utmost capacity, I made the best I could of the chances and occasions given to me. But enjoyment is not the word for it ...

Q: What are your achievements?

VASUDHA: Well, that's for you to see. If you see anything in me which is good, it is surely something I have achieved here. If you see anything in me which is not desirable, it means that there still remains a lot to be done. But I won't call it a failure because my sadhana still continues. I don't think my forty-seven years of dedicated service and conscious sadhana can be just a waste ... all this is not for me to say — what I have achieved — it is for others to see, that is, if they can see anything at all. ...

Q: How often did Mother play the organ?

VASUDHA: I think when she first received the organ, she used to play it very often. She used to play music during interviews with some people. Also, Mother used to herald the new year by playing the organ music at midnight on the new year's eve. Later on she stopped doing this, but she used to play the organ off and on

Q: When did 'letter writing' start in the Ashram?

VASUDHA: I think perhaps in the 'thirties. Mother and Sri Aurobindo started writing letters to the sadhaks to give them guidance in their spiritual life — sadhana. But I remember Mother asked me to write to her every day to tell her all that I did — where I went, whom I saw, how I spent my time. I think she wanted to keep a check on me to see what I was doing. Also, I had too many difficulties, so she asked me to write everything to her — all that I thought and felt and did. All of you may have read my letters in the *Bulletin*. That is how it started, but it lasted for a few years, I think it stopped in 1938 when Sri Aurobindo had his accident. I stopped corresponding much before that because I used to see Mother daily and there was no need for letter-writing.

Q: Did you write to Sri Aurobindo also?

VASUDHA: Though we were not many, still there were quite a good number who wrote letters so there were two groups — Sri Aurobindo would answer to some and Mother to others and my letters were answered by Mother — though two or three times Sri Aurobindo also wrote to me.

Q: Was there a difference in tone in their answers?

VASUDHA: A great difference. Surely you have read both Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's letters. You must know the difference yourself. (*Laughter*)

Q: How did you learn French?

VASUDHA: Mother asked me to learn French, and she started teaching me. The lessons were given in a very nice way. I used to go to her with paper and pencil once a week. She would ask me a question in French which She would write down on the paper along with the answer; later I would learn them by heart, and that is how my French lessons started. Once on the lesson paper she did a sketch of me. I had put my chin on her lap and was looking up at her when she said, "Now don't move", and in two minutes she did a small sketch and wrote under it, in French, "C'est votre portrait quand vous riez, la tête sur mes genoux." (*Laughter*) That is

how she taught me French. Later she asked Suvrata — you must have heard of Madame Gaebelé — to take a class of a few sadhaks who wanted to learn French and I was one of them. Also, when any Frenchman came and took classes I joined them.

Q: Were there any picnics?

VASUDHA: There were no picnics because there were no children! But Mother used to go far out for drives and sometimes she used to take some of us also in one or two cars following her. We would drive far out, then select a pleasant spot to spread a cloth and sit ... once we had palm-fruits A local man climbed up a palm-tree and brought down some fruits, clove them with big knife and brought out the kernels which Pavitra peeled and gave to each one of us. That was our picnic ...

Q: How did Mother look when you first saw her?

VASUDHA: That is very difficult to say but I had the impression that she looked to me like any foreign lady. She looked very young — though she was fifty years old when I saw her — she had a lovely face and I was charmed by her beautiful nose. She was tall and slim and had a beautiful figure. She looked startlingly beautiful.

Q: Was Sri Aurobindo very dark when you first saw him?

VASUDHA: I don't remember to have seen him very dark. They say he was quite dark before but I did not find him so.

At the last Darshan I had of him in December 1950, I saw that his body was of a bright golden colour — this I had never seen before His body seemed to me luminous.

Q: Were there film shows in the Ashram?

VASUDHA: Not in the Ashram but in those days some of us saw a French film in Salle Jeanne d'Arc — I think Suvrata had taken some of her French-class students there.

When did film-shows start in the playground? Dada will be able to tell you better.... The playground is not my domain. (*Laughter*)

Q: Did Sri Aurobindo ever see a film?

VASUDHA: No, Sri Aurobindo never saw a film here. You must know that even when I came here there were no talkies — we had only silent pictures. When Sri Aurobindo came in 1910 there were surely no films of any kind!

Q: Did Sri Aurobindo see any slides in his room?

VASUDHA: No, never.

Q: What is your most memorable experience with the Mother?

VASUDHAH: Most memorable? What is most memorable?... Something you remember most and never forget in your life, is most memorable, isn't it? I'll have to think it over

Now I think it is time to stop and if I don't get up, nobody else will ...
I hope I have not bored you

TWO POEMS

TO A YOUNG FRIEND, AFTER A CHINESE EVENING

GREEN willows sway beside a lake of spring,
Still waters lap against a pebbled shore,
Caught in the wind's caress the pine trees sing,
And open in the heart a secret door,

A door that at your touch will softly swing,
And bid you dance across a moonsteeped floor,
So that your heart shall with vast joy take wing,
And your soul into the starbright stillness soar ...

A BIRTHDAY SONG

A VAST new song has come into my life,
A song of Thee, and all Thy love for me,
And as the morning breaks on this new day,
I lift my heart in praise, and chant to Thee ...

The dawn is like a child in silver dress,
Its fragile gold the smile of love and tears,
And as it glides into my heart on this new day,
I lift my heart in praise, and sing the coming years ...

JEAN

SOME DIARY NOTES

MARCH 4-14, 1953

(As the Diary Notes published in this year's March issue were much appreciated and there was a demand for further instalments of the kind, the following sequence is being offered. Naturally it is very personal matter and "I" and "me" are all over the place; but as these "I" and "me" are the sadhaka and not the mere ego-individual it is hoped that they will be considered as representative of all who have ventured forth on the delightfully difficult path of the Integral Yoga. As both the delight and the difficulty are bound to be basically common in spite of surface variations, one sadhaka's experiences cannot but prove helpful to other toilers towards the depths and heights.)

WEDNESDAY, 4th — Came back from Villupuram a little depressed, thinking that Mother had received the impression that I and not Mina was going away. On reaching the Ashram the mind and heart cleared and when I went to the Samadhi a gathering together of the being took place, an intense interiorisation as if to collect the whole consciousness and lift it up to the Divine, letting it go nowhere else and to none other.

When I saw Mother at the "staircase",¹ she cried: "Bien revenu" ("Welcome back"). I gave her Mina's message: "A thousand million thanks. I am carrying you with me in my heart." Mother was pleased and smiled and said something like "All right." Then I asked her: "Mother, why did you think I was going away?" She replied: "I never thought that. I knew you were not going. But I had the impression that Mina also was not going."

The day passed happily after this — aspiration and peace and Mother's presence pervaded the hours.

The same evening I caught Mother on the playground at seven, and said to her: "May I ask one question? Could I come and sit in your 'Prayers'-class?" She answered: "You can come." So after the distribution of groundnuts I went to this class. I had been told by a friend that it was one of the best things in the Ashram and that Mother appeared in her real divinity there. Today she read out the three last Prayers from her book *Prayers and Meditations* and discoursed a little about them and about her introduction to the book. It was an exquisitely deep half-hour. I was extremely glad I attended this class held in Mother's own room at the playground.

When I got up from the mat there, I struck my back against the sharp corner of an overhanging cupboard fixed to the wall. It was a fierce impact right on the upper part of my spine. Everybody was perturbed. But most miraculously I felt not the slightest pain either then or afterwards. While I walked out of the room Mother gave me a concentrated look.

¹ People come up the stairs in a queue and receive blessings from Mother, who stands almost at the head of the staircase.

THURSDAY, 5th — All the time I kept fixing my consciousness on Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There was a sense of some blocking somewhere. Fine spells during the day but not to my satisfaction because too short.

The first piece of news I got in the morning was from Soli Albles, who came smiling and striding from the Ashram. "Stalin has been given a blow in the brain. He is dying." People in the Ashram were feeling that the Divine had brought about that brain-stroke, the cerebral haemorrhage. Mother said that the going of one individual could not make all the difference and that other instruments could be found by the Asuric force. When S.A. asked her if our aspirations and the Supermind's Descent could make the difference, she smiled and nodded. She is also reported to have said that Stalin had been really finished two months earlier. He had merely continued as a powerless shell.

Since yesterday I have started not to come down at all from Mother's floor till 12 or 12.30 after seeing her and sitting in Sri Aurobindo's room. It is so lovely to spend the time there: I could stay there the entire day without tiring.

More and more my being resolves to turn to Mother, but the sense of difficulty does not diminish. Oh if only one could be poised overhead and in the psychic all the time!

FRIDAY, 6th — Yesterday was Kishor Gandhi's birthday. But Mother did not give him an interview that evening. She was coming to his room the next day — that is, today.

I go early to the Samadhi each morning, sit there for half an hour or more and then go to the Balcony Darshan. I wait for the Balcony Darshan, sitting on the edge of the footpath near one of the big doors. I concentrate and try to blot out the whole world. But some particular thoughts keep hovering. They are too sweet to be easily or rudely dismissed.

At the staircase I took Mother's hand and kissed it. She smiled most beautifully, tilted her head to one side and said in silence: "I accept your love and I understand your need."

In the evening she came to our house to meet K. G. I sat with Pavitra in my room, while S.A. shut himself up in his. After a few minutes I felt a tremendous pressure on the head — as if an extraordinary descent had been taking place. In all these two and a half weeks in the Ashram I have never felt so strong a push from overhead. The Mother seemed to be emanating a gigantic power from where she sat. K.G. told me afterwards that he had never had such a wonderful interview before.

When Mother came out, S.A. and I brought flowers to offer to her. After he had offered his, Keshav Poddar's wife came out from her room and requested Mother to come in as she had something to say.

When Mother reappeared, I brought her my flowers. I had hurriedly collected them from our own garden. They were *Quiet Mind*, placed within the *Divine's Presence*.

At the moment of offering them, *Quiet Mind* tumbled off and fell to the ground. Mother laughed: "Your quiet mind has fallen down. Well, I'll replace it with this" — and she gave me a tiny pink flower which means *Detailed Surrender*.

I forgot to write that in the morning at the staircase I spoke to Mother about H.V. and gave her a note mentioning in brief what H.V. had asked me to tell Mother: "She is very anxious to come." Mother said: "When she was here, she made all sorts of conditions." I said: "But now she wants to make an unconditional surrender." Mother replied: "Oh yes, they all make that before they come here!"

Every afternoon S.A. and I have long philosophical chats, discussing a thousand and three things concerning Yoga. Quite a stimulus to the minds of both of us.

SATURDAY, 7th — Last night I had a dream in which I was telling Mother that I must get poised above the mind and in the psychic.

At the staircase I related my dream to her. She said: "I see." Then I told her: "I need this very badly. You must make me poised like that." She replied: "No. *You* must make yourself poised. You have read in Sri Aurobindo that he does not encourage laziness." I said: "Yes, but can't I keep asking that you should do it? Isn't that genuine aspiration?" She answered: "Yes, you can ask, but not in the ordinary way. If you just get up in the morning and ask once and then nothing more — that won't do. It must be an intense inner asking." I agreed with her. She smiled and kept looking into my eyes with those wonderful heart-opening head-cleaving eyes of hers.

I went into Sri Aurobindo's room with an exceedingly powerful feeling within my head as well as above it, as if what I had asked for had been attempted. I kept this feeling for some time — sitting very quietly in Sri Aurobindo's room, and letting a wordless prayer go rising from the heart.

I want so much the total consecration, the integral self-opening! When will it come? Mother, make haste. The delay is unbearable.

SUNDAY 8th — Felt myself to be at my wits' end. Never in all these days was the morning so filled with a sense of hopelessness. Will I ever be able to keep up the decision I have taken? Am I not made of putty? Have I any strength or stability to go through the Yoga? All these questions weighed on my mind and heart and made me sad and threw an atmosphere of futility over my efforts.

Then, when everything seemed lost, something happened. I went and sat in the Pranam Hall, waiting for Mother to come down. She came and slowly my heart began to open. It started flowing with love and blessedness. I got up to do my pranam and, after doing it, went to my precious place near Mother's chair. She had placed "The Divine's Solitude" in my left hand and a red rose in my right. More and more the heart widened and took Mother in and I threw my being towards her. It seemed the beginning of what I had asked for all these days. The flow and the consecration

continued right through the pranam and persisted when I went up the staircase and met Mother again. She appeared to recognise the change and stood gazing into my eyes. The change accompanied me to Sri Aurobindo's room. I nowadays sit there as long as I wish. Today I must have sat for nearly half an hour. And throughout that half hour the heart and the mind kept open and lived in the Mother's marvellous presence and Sri Aurobindo's exalted aura. The harbour seemed within sight of this wave-tossed wind-veged mariner at last. But all is not done yet. The opening must continue and increase and become, as it were, world-wide.

Mother played music at one o'clock this afternoon. I sat on the ground near the Samadhi and listened to the sweet and deep and far-away melody, interspersed with chords of intense nearness and intimacy as well as an enveloping embracing largeness.

Today wasn't bad at all. Thank you, my Mother and my Lord.

MONDAY 9 — A day of quiet assimilation — or so at least it appeared to be, since there was no fretting. Not that there was no questioning or doubting of myself. But it all went on in the surface consciousness and a sense was pervasive that beyond the surface consciousness a wonderful work was proceeding. As a symbol of this was the fact that I felt a great peace to be not quite within me but all around me in the whole town of Pondicherry. And the entire vastness of the circumambient peace was as if focusing itself on some spot somewhere in my being that was not accessible to the talking and walking Amal. Yes, not accessible, but not imperceptible. For it was the vague perception of it that eliminated fretting. In spite of my inquiring again and again whether the huge task I had undertaken could be carried through by poor me, I saw no reason to pull a long face. On the contrary, a happy irresponsibility played in my heart and mind. I went cheerfully to Mother on the staircase. I was one of the early birds — at about 11. Only one chap was there, Pranab's brother. Mother brought a sweet from her room and gave it to me with a rose. I knelt down as usual and got up with an easy familiarity with Mother's presence. She was in a blue dress. I spoke to her about Sehra's mamma who, according to Sehra's letter, was still suffering from non-stop asthma. Mother gave a packet of blessing-petals for her, and another for Sehra herself. Then I spoke of H.V. She said that the difficulty was to find accommodation for her but that she would try. I left Mother then, but while about to enter Sri Aurobindo's room I remembered that I had to tell her about the day of my departure. Purani was leaving on the 14th, so I had decided to synchronise my going with his. Mina's doctor, Satya, was now talking with Mother. I waited till he had finished and then called out to her as she was about to go away. She stopped and I went and told her about the 14th. She nodded and then with an arch half-smile asked me: "Am I expected to see you before you go?" I said: "Please, Mother, if you can. Just a few minutes' interview." She gave a full smile and said: "I'll try." Then she went inside and I to Sri Aurobindo's room where I sat for half an hour. I came out and sat in the middle room watching Mother take the "staircase."

I was very quiet. No special aspiration, but a strange ease. Throughout the day

this remained. At the tennis court, when Mother was leaving I found to my surprise that she looked at me long and deep, and with a sweet smile that covered my whole body with pleasure as she passed on.

The French-translation class began at 5:30. I was there, and found myself relaxed and pleased. Went home for a quarter of an hour and walked to the Samadhi. Quite an intimate and soft half-hour I had there with Sri Aurobindo. The background, the depth which all the day had been inaccessible though not imperceptible, came a little to the front and delighted me.

While communing with Sri Aurobindo I had a feeling that today was perhaps the most important in my whole stay. It was to all appearance a neutral day, but it was packed with a secret promise. At the evening distribution, Mother again gave a knowing look and smile. I stood very close to her after getting the groundnuts. Sutapā was not there, so I stood in her place, right within Mother's most immediate physical atmosphere.

Tomorrow, what have you in store for me? Can it be paradise at last?

My bed is situated in an ideal position. I lie and look through the two windows on the two sides. Each presents a different view. That to the left shows an unobstructed sky, a vast star-quivering darkness during night and a blue with depth beyond depth during day. The window to the right shows in daytime a swaying jungle of palms, a South-Sea-Island picture. At night the palms become mysterious presences, lit with little glints. I find myself extremely happy gazing through the two windows alternately.

I must put down on paper the sight I saw some evenings back when Mother went to the place where the children's French class is held by her. Before she distributed the sweets, a small girl was brought to her. She had a little fever. Mother caressed her hair with a soft but significant pressure. Then she passed her hand right to the back of the head and down the spine. This she did again and again, most affectionately but with an effectivity beyond mere affection. She was acting upon the fever-force. For a long time she went on and at last bent her own head and lightly kissed the girl on the forehead. Oh it was so wonderful to watch the whole thing. Who would mind being ill in order to have such a doctor? I remember Mother telling me that when her son André was a boy she used to cure all his illnesses herself, without calling any doctor. It is sweet to be Mother's child. How I yearn to belong to her and be part of her!

TUESDAY, 10th — Has today fulfilled the promise of yesterday?

Let me begin at the beginning. Every night, during my stay here, I have had some sort of sexual dream, the impulse that had been pushed out of the conscious mind was making a revolt in the subconscious. And every night there was a certain response to the stimulus, some assent or participation of the being. Last night I had two sexual dreams. In one there was a habitual routine-response. But in the other, all of a sudden a refusal came from the being, a spontaneous smiling refusal and I knew that the psy-

chic had acted in a flash. With the flash I woke up and felt a release in the consciousness. A gate long shut had burst open. A tiny lamp of God had been lit in the unchartered chaos of the lower vital.

The morning did not appreciably differ from other mornings. Some aspiration was going on, but nothing unusual. Then I went to the Samadhi. There a strong opening took place. The psychic started flowing and flaming. This was like old times. This was what I had been hankering for. I went to the pranam and the flow and the flame increased. They went on and on. They continued at the staircase, kept going in Sri Aurobindo's room where I sat for 45 minutes. Right through the afternoon, right through the evening, an effortless joy and constant Godward intensity, a penetration into Sri Aurobindo's being and into the Mother's. I felt enveloped and embraced by their holy atmosphere. Within their consciousness I seemed to have made my home, though of course without sharing in their supreme light. I had nothing to do except attend to the automatic aspiration and natural drive towards the Divine. The attending brought them at once to a consecrated keenness. Here was a taste of paradise indeed. Even if I were not in the midst of paradise I was definitely at its door and could take into myself both the glory of its blissful fire and the enchantment of its beautiful floweriness.

At pranam the Mother said: "I think I have fixed your interview for tomorrow." "That's very good, Mother," I said. "Thank you so much."

At the staircase when she met me she said: "I'll go and make sure about the date." She went inside and consulted her diary. "Oui, c'est juste. Demain à six heure." I fervently thanked her again. Today I didn't kneel at her feet. I went down on my knees and hugged her legs. This gave somehow a closer and warmer contact.

It's past eleven now at night. I am going to bed. A wonderful day! I have been broken open at last. May the breaking grow from more to more till I am one with the Mother's Infinite!

WEDNESDAY, 11th — For the first time in these days there was no dream at all with any sexual tinge in it.

The day was one of restfulness up to evening. I went to Mother after the balcony. It was rather early. She came but when I went, after Pranab's brother, she smiled and said: "I am here, but not officially." She meant that she had not come to start the "staircase". I stood a little puzzled, but quiet. She gave me a rose and a sweet. I did not go down to her feet — I showed that I was not doing what I would if she were there officially. I gave her my head to pat and she did the patting both playfully and vigorously. Then I told her what had been in my heart since the glorious yesterday. "Mother, I am extremely grateful to you." She took it as referring to the fact that although she was there not officially she had received me. So she laughed and said: "Is it not?", meaning, "Is there not cause for gratitude?" I laughed, too, and remarked: "I don't mean just for this. I mean also in general, for everything." She again laughed. Then I went to Sri Aurobindo's room. Mother started the official

staircase very late, at 12 almost. So, after Sri Aurobindo's room, I had a long sit in the middle room — watching Mother when she did come. She always calls Soli and Nirod last. When Soli went, she said: "I am seeing you tomorrow, am I not?" Soli replied: "No, you are seeing me on the 15th." She went to consult her notebook and said: "This evening I am seeing Amal."

After everything was finished I sat chatting with a friend. Suddenly after 20 minutes or so of chatting, I caught sight of Mother and Pranab going out of Mother's room on the other side. I felt awfully ashamed. I made a resolve never to chat lightly outside Sri Aurobindo's sacred room and within such easy earshot of Mother. I went home uncomfortable. I lay in bed that whole afternoon, relaxing and getting into a frame of mind in which such sacrilegious frivolity would be impossible. Throughout the afternoon I felt a strong pressure on the head and an increasing aspiration in the heart.

At 4:30 I went to the Samadhi — rather to watch Mother go to tennis. I then followed her there, and sat with a happy flow from my heart to her all the time. At 5 o'clock I left and came to the Samadhi where I spent about half an hour of deep devotion to Sri Aurobindo and Mother. I went from there to the playground where my interview was to be at six. Mother came a little late and said: "I have by mistake given some time to other people too." I said: "That's all right. How much time will you give me?" She looked at her watch and I at mine. It was 12 minutes past six. She said: "I give you till 6:30." "Very well," I said, "I'll be short in my talk."

I asked her first about Mina's offer to work with me on *Mother India*. I said: "She has been helping me often, reading the typescripts while I check the proofs. But now she wants to make the work a regular part of her sadhana as an offering to you. She will also buy a typewriter. May I accept her as a co-worker?" Mother looked interested when I said the above. To my question she answered: "Yes, you certainly may. But, you know, I intend to bring *Mother India* here. It will be printed from here at some time in the future. At that time, when you come to work here, Mina too will have to come here and work."

After this I began to talk of my personal difficulties. I put before Mother a map of my vital being so that she might work on it. I drew her attention again to the need in me for being poised not only in the psychic but also overhead. She agreed. "You must break through the lid and sit above. Have you had some experience of the Kundalini? It rises up and breaks through the lid. Not immediately, of course, but after passing through the other centres." I said: "But can't you break the lid from above?" "No," she said, "that would simply crush your brain!" I told her how tired I was, working still with the mind. I said: "I feel as if my mind has made all the use of itself that it was capable of. Something new is now wanted. All the time in me is the desire to go beyond the mind. This desire interferes even with my creativity, for I am no more content to create with the mind. Please take me beyond." She sat in thought a long while, looking high and far. I tried to receive inwardly the impact of her working. At the close of the interview I asked her: "Do you remember, Mother, that I

once inquired whether the Supermind could transform us in spite of ourselves? You said: 'Yes'. That gave me a great deal of hope for myself." She laughed. I continued: "I feel now that the decision I have taken is due to the Supermind's descent in some way, its gripping the earth in a definite manner. Nothing else could have brought it about." She sat silent for awhile, and then said: "Have you read Sri Aurobindo's article, *The Mind of Light*?" I said I had. She went on: "This was the last thing he wrote, apart from some revisions of *Savitri*. Immediately after he gave up his body the Mind of Light got realised in me."

The Mind of Light is, of course, a stage in the descent and establishment of the Supermind on earth. It is not the Gnosis proper, but the mental Gnosis. So much, therefore, is at least fixed here in Mother. Many other and greater things must be working in her — something of the direct Supermind, too, I am sure.

I finally told her how much love I had for her, and said: "But sometimes all that amount refuses to break through and come out." She laughed. I added: "Oh please make it break through and come in all its fullness."

I kissed her hand and she blessed me.... After the distribution I attended the Prayer-class, now the Conversation-class since the Prayers are finished. Here, too, she discoursed on the various centres of the being and on the rising of the Kundalini. One felt that she was not just stating things: every phrase of the description was as if lived through by her or attempted to be evoked by her in us. She spoke in French but I understood everything.

After the playground activities the Garage Darshan and then home.

My new life in the Ashram seems to have begun.

THURSDAY, 12th — Again a clear night, but a somewhat neutral day. No exaltations or ecstasies, yet once more I feel that this has been a day of assimilation and preparation. Mother's face seemed a mirror of things behind my surface consciousness. I saw the same kind of lingering look and steady smile as on Monday. So I'm full of expectation and look forward towards tomorrow. With the approach of evening and night, some little foretaste came already.

From the talk I had with Mother at the staircase, I feel absolutely certain that I shall be called here again in April to do the special University Number of *Mother India* from the Ashram Press.

How I long to be in the Ashram for good! But everything is in Mother's hands and also depends on Sehra's co-operation and glad acceptance to share in the Ashram life and Ashram work.

Only two days before me, and then not *adieu* but *au revoir*. I'm sure Soli will greatly miss the pleasant and varied talks that he and I have been having on matters philosophical and spiritual.

As he is one of the architects designing and building the Mother's new room, I have asked him to show it to me. He said he would be most happy to do so, if Mother permitted. He'll ask her tomorrow.

FRIDAY, 13 — I was right. Mind and heart again broke open. Nothing very spectacular — but a soft ceaseless receptivity, a quiet inner blessedness. It grew more intense before and during pranam and while I was upstairs — especially when I was in Sri Aurobindo's room.

The afternoon seemed somewhat wasted because all the time the call was for drawing in, yet I had work in hand which required the mind to be active and questful.

In the evening the intensity returned to some extent and the sense of blessedness came to a finer focus than during the afternoon.

I have a feeling that tonight will be the most beautiful of all the nights.

Last night some part of the lower vital seemed to get worked out, exhausted, and then rejected from the system, leaving the system freer and fresher.

P.S. There was one little disappointment this morning. The Mother did not like the idea of Soli taking me to her new room. The fact is that nobody is taken there — even Nolini and Amrita haven't seen it. Only those who are strictly concerned with the work are allowed. Although disappointed I wasn't at all depressed. I perfectly understood the situation and saw Mother's viewpoint.

SATURDAY, 14 (2 p.m.) — A pleasant day. Told Mother on the staircase: "Do you remember the awful thing that is going to happen this evening?" She opened her eyes wide and said: "What?" I replied: "I am going away!"

"Dramatist!" she exclaimed and smiled.

Had an enjoyable but not quite quiet time in Sri Aurobindo's room. Kneled before his chair and offered myself, heart and soul, to him.

My roots are here. May the flower and fruit be here also! Bombay has no pull for me. The only gladness I feel in going there is really because of just one heart and face.

AMAL KIRAN

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FRANCIS THOMPSON AND THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

SINCE the publication of Francis Thompson's *Poems* in 1893 critics have been trying to prove him either an imitator or a follower of Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan and the other poets of the seventeenth century. Coventry Patmore called him a "greater Crashaw", in an article in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1894.¹ George Saintsbury thought that Thompson was "very much under the influence of Caroline poetry, especially that of Crashaw."² Holbrook Jackson wrote: "Those who care to discover obvious resemblances among poets have compared him, fittingly enough, with Crashaw, Vaughan and Herbert, and other seventeenth century mystical singers, and sometimes as though he had been influenced by them."³ Thompson's love for the Baroque, far-fetched imagery, quaint diction and the metaphysical bent of his mind inevitably place him alongside the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. Moreover, his Catholicism and love for mysticism reinforce his position as a follower of the devotional poets of the age of Donne. Let us examine, in this brief essay, if it is proper to link Thompson with the Metaphysical poets or not.

John Donne is generally regarded as the fountainhead of the Metaphysical poetry in England though Thompson held a different view. "To most people," writes Thompson in his essay on Shelley, "the Metaphysical School means Donne, whereas it ought to mean Crashaw," and Crashaw was, in Thompson's opinion, "the highest product of the Metaphysical School."⁴ Donne was certainly a greater poet than either Crashaw or Thompson and his metaphysical strain was compounded of many simples — the logic of the medieval schoolman, keen analytical interest in human experience, particularly of love and religion, an intervening tone of personal reflection. If Thompson did not feel a close kinship with Donne it is simply because he shared neither Donne's intellectual cynicism nor his witty satire. Highly intellectual, Donne could not trust his own great learning, and his thought wavered between medieval and modern theories. His many-sided nature was "never subdued into harmony," says George Restorver Hamilton, "the world and the flesh were powerful forces distracting him from the things of the spirit and his poetry was a true enough pattern of his life to show the disorder of the conflict. Francis Thompson did not suffer from any such discord."⁵ Donne's peculiarity which alienated him from his own age was a combination of intellectual dissatisfaction and emotional fervour. On the other hand, Thompson was essentially a poet of faith and his mystical insight, as R.L. Megroz says, "gave him strength to suffer, but could not satisfy the hunger except by creating a wonderful poetry of faith."⁶

However different their outlooks, Thompson searched for symbolism in Donne. The thought of the "after-strain" in Thompson's *Ode to the Setting Sun* has a likeness in its imagery to Donne's poem, *The Crosse*. The setting sun, in Thompson's poem, is "the type memorial" which reminds the poet of Christ and His Crucifixion.

Thompson learnt from Donne that an image is more than a likeness. We read in Donne's *The Crosse*:

Let Crosses, so, take what hid Christ in thee,
And bee his image, or not his, but hee.

Thompson writes:

Now with wan ray that other sun of Song
Sets in the bleakening waters of my soul;
One step, and lo! the Cross stands gaunt and long
"Twixt me and yet bright skies, a presaged dole.

Crossing the *border-line* of likeness the image of the Cross in Donne's poem expresses a longing for spiritual release whereas in Thompson's poem it symbolizes the price that the poet must pay for the achievement of song and that he must accept in the spirit of Christian resignation. The Cross, the symbol of the crucified Saviour, is the nucleus in the poems of both Donne and Thompson, but the symbol strikes the senses in both the poets differently and goes vibrating to their minds and calls up different ideas. But the central idea of the poems of both Donne and Thompson emphasizes the chastening influence of the sufferings and miseries of life to make one soar high above the world and take refuge in Christ.

Wit is one of the main characteristics of Metaphysical poetry; but it is not enough. It may please the mind but cannot quench the thirst of the soul. One would need to be of very reasonable intelligence and substantial education in order to understand the poetry of the Metaphysical poets. Sometimes, an excess of intellectual expression of ideas makes a poem unintelligible. Thompson, reviewing Donne's poetry in the November 4, 1899 issue of the *Academy*, put his finger on this defect of the great poet. He wrote, "... with all its intellectual brilliancy, Donne's poetry was hard."⁷ But Thompson was not blind to the saving grace in Donne's poetry and marked that the hardness was softened by "a legitimate love affair" which informed it "with depth and height of feeling."⁸ Thompson thought that Donne's poetry should be praised for its relevance not only to the head but also to the heart. In his comment on Donne's poetry cited above, he anticipated Rupert Brooke's enlightening appreciation of the senior poet. For example, Brooke wrote of "that wider home which Donne knew better than any of the great English poets, the human heart."⁹ Strongly emotional, Thompson gave more importance to the heart than to the head.

Thompson was attracted no less to the Donne who suffered and preached than to the Donne who wrote poetry. He recognised that, purified by suffering, Donne gained a new life and "... not only does there arise", wrote Thompson in the same review in the *Academy*, "Donne the great preacher ... his life grows steadily more ascetic ... and above all, his poetry ... becomes surcharged with profound religious-

ness.”¹⁰ If Thompson was encouraged by the earlier Donne in matters of imagery and symbolism, the later Donne inspired his thought by an ascetic religiousness. However, the difference in outlook between the two poets should be borne in mind. Thompson did not share with Donne the mystic’s postulate — “if we can know ourselves, we shall know all” — which was often on Donne’s lips. The God-centred Thompson had anchored his life’s vessel in the harbour Faith. Donne grew increasingly mystical in his awareness of life, while all things combined to make Thompson a poet of mystical reality. Donne’s inquisitive intellect took him to the realm of self-knowledge; Thompson’s faith to the Kingdom of God.

Thompson’s acquaintance with George Herbert was through Coleridge who was enamoured of Herbert’s *The Flower*. Everard Meynell tells us that Thompson paid the poem particular attention on “S.T.C.’s recommendation”, and that Thompson had “in his mind the lines —

I once more smell the dew and rain
And relish versing”

when, conscious of the wings “of coming songs that lift my hair and stir it”, he praises the

Giver of spring, and song, and every young new thing.

Herbert welcomes a return of grace in his heart when he writes in *The Flower*:

How fresh, O Lord, how sweete and cleane
Are thy returns! ev’n as the flowers in spring.”¹¹

Thompson feels the presence of God in the world’s unfolded blossom in *From the Night of Forebeing*:

From sky to sod,
The world’s unfolded blossom smells of God.

There are critics who find resemblances between parts of Thompson’s *The Hound of Heaven* and Herbert’s *The Pulley*. But such a comparison seems superficial, because the theme of Thompson’s poem is the pursuit of God rather than the soul’s flight, whereas Herbert’s poem deals with the blessings of God bestowed upon Man who receives “Rest” as the final boon from his Creator:

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlesnesse;
Let him be rich and wearie, that at last,
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse
May tosse him to my breast.

The phrase in Herbert's poem, "Yet wearinesse/May tosse him to my breast", is at variance with Thompson's, "Rise, clasp My hand, and come." In the former, "wearinesse" will "tosse him to my breast"; in the latter, He comes Himself to the fear-stricken soul and stretches His hand caressingly to hold its hand — as a father gives his strong hand to the staggering child. Again, in the former, God is passive — man may lie on His breast through "restlessness" and "wearinesse"; in the latter, God is active — He follows the soul till it feels Him and can ask: "Is my gloom, after all/Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?", and the pursuit ends in a divine embrace. No doubt, certain resemblances have indeed been noticed between some of Herbert's conceits and Thompson's ideas and images, but such resemblances, as Megroz says, "cannot be pressed home."¹²

In fact, Herbert's influence upon Thompson is seen in the following lines, in which Thompson revived the Christian love which had died away after the devotional poets of the seventeenth century:

Ah! let the sweet birds of the Lord
With earth's waters make accord;
Teach how the crucifix may be
Carven from the laurel-tree,
Fruit of the Hesperides
Burnish take on Eden-trees,
The Muses' sacred grove be wet
With the red dew of Olivet,
And Sappho lay her burning brows
In white Cecilia's lap of snows!

(To a Poet Breaking Silence)

(To be continued)

SHAILENDRA NATH CHAKRAVERTY

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE FUTURE

A SEARCH APROPOS OF R. C. ZAEHNER'S STUDY IN SRI AUROBINDO AND TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

(Continued from the issue of May 1975)

7

TEILHARD'S MISUNDERSTANDING OF VEDANTA, TEILHARD AND ECUMENISM, TEILHARDIAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE GITA'S SPIRITUAL VISION

At the point where we stand with Teilhard in our inquiry, we cannot help being amazed that a pantheist born should frequently be so touchy about the pantheist realisation. Troubled by his own instincts, he is, of course, likely to repeat reassuring himself and his colleagues of his good faith as a Christian and his freedom from pantheism of any reprehensible brand. But why should he often go over to the offensive, adopt a positively hostile attitude and indulge in wholesale misrepresentation? The reason can only be surmised as an element of fanatical dogmatism which, as Zaehner¹ tells us, has made its home in some sections of Christianity ever since the days of St. Augustine and Emperor Constantine. Not all Christians, not even all members of the large denomination to which those two zealots belonged, suffer from such obscuration and perversion; but, by a paradox, Teilhard who was "irreducibly hyper-Catholic" did.

The folly to which he was led reaches its climax in his assessment of Vedanta. We have already cited some utterances bearing on it. We may quote two more in which he misrepresents this arch-example of what he dubs the various "sophisms" of the East. One utterance is thus translated by Zaehner:²

"At first it would appear that in the eyes of the Hindu *everything comes to life*; but, in reality, *everything is materialized*. The luminous destiny of all things, the paradise of which souls dream, are *confused with the dark source* from which they spring, the fundamental reservoir of homogeneous ether and latent life into which everything must return and be lost, there to find the destined beatitude, for it is from there it came forth. *Life is understood and experienced as a function of matter.*"

Elsewhere Teilhard,³ describing the Hindu type of religion, writes:

"In order to become 'spiritual' (that is, one with all beings) ... why not ... follow

¹ *Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Oxford University Press, London, 1971), pp. 89, 112.

² *Ibid.*, p. 20. The extract is from "Cosmic Life" in *Writings in Time of War* (Collins, London, 1968), p. 29

³ *Actvation of Energy* (Collins, London, 1970), pp. 220-1.

the road of suppression and negation and so try to wipe out everything that produces the 'difference' between us and all the objects in the world? ... Each infinitesimal centre expands, through release of its individual characteristics, to the dimensions of, and within, one and the same general substratum in which its dream is realised and in which it forms one with all the rest around it. And so, by entry into unconsciousness, we find a complete solution, it would seem, to the problem of perfection and happiness."

Reading these and the earlier extracts we may assuredly pronounce that in the whole history of modern religious comment we would look in vain for anything more inept and ridiculous. What the Upanishads term Infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, the Mind of the mind, the Sense of the senses, the One who is ever awake even in things that sleep, the eternal World-Self, the God-Being who has become all existences while remaining more than their entire sum-total, the Brightness whose shadow is all that is bright, the supreme "He" (*Sa*) no less than the absolute "That" (*Tat*), the Lord for whose habitation is this whole universe — the vast and varied spirituality of ancient India, which is still practised today, is for Teilhard a lapsing into some state of undifferentiated matter, a sinking into a general substratum of unconsciousness. As Zaehner¹ has twice remarked, Teilhard appears to be utterly ignorant of Eastern mysticism — and yet he pontificates on it in season and out. In view of this, one has to make a serious reservation in one's over-all estimate of him.

Doubtless, his prime significance to the modern age rests in his interpretation of evolution and his brilliant deductions about the future development of man. Secondly, he is important for his endeavour, as priest-cum-palaeontologist, to reorientate scientific thought by means of a Christ-inspired religious insight no less than to give Christianity a new start as a religion of cosmic evolution. What he saw or failed to see in the religions of the East is really a marginal issue. But that a powerful and original thinker, who had the living sense of "One World" of the spirit lying within all and inevitably emerging by an evolutionary drive, should still be unaware of the super-conscious world-oneness which is the true object of ancient India's spirituality, and be quite dense in his general approach to the spiritual phenomenon when it occurs in the East — that such a thinker should remain so narrowly Christian as well as perversely anti-Vedantic should give us pause in two respects. First, when we hear his name mentioned as herald of the Ecumenical Movement in Europe today, which seeks a dialogue not only of Roman Catholicism with Protestantism but also of Christianity with humanist Marxism on the one hand and, on the other, the religions of the East. Next, when we face his final conception of the spirituality of the future.

Zaehner² himself is constrained to note Teilhard's unfitness to rank as the preparer of a dialogue of religions or as a satisfying pioneer of the coming age:

"Indeed, had Teilhard read more widely, he ... might have hesitated to write with so superb a self-confidence these not very ecumenical words:

"The time has certainly arrived when at last, at the opposite pole of a dated ori-

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 7, 17.

² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

entalism, a new mysticism can and must emerge which will be both fully human and fully Christian: the highway of the West — the highway of the world of tomorrow ' ”¹

Surely, the Roman Catholic Christianity which might be a vital component of the complex modern soul would not altogether be that of Teilhard but one which, along with the Teilhardian idea of a super-humanity achieved through evolution, would find in itself something of the wideness we perceive in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (published by the Catholic University of America, 1967). There Dom Bede Griffiths, at the end of a 24-column article on Hinduism, writes: “To a Christian, Hinduism presents on the whole the most profound *preparatio Evangelica* the world has seen.” Even here is a *souçon* of patronage, but the attempt to understand and evaluate correctly is evident and the Christian bias is far indeed from being offensive. In fact, since the author is a Christian minister, it is perfectly natural; and yet it does not vitiate in the least the genuine appreciation shown of the Indian vision.

Face to face with a host of declarations by Teilhard of his faith we should expect him to be pre-eminent in such appreciation. Take, for instance, the passage:² “Precisely because there exists in all beings a common centre, scattered and separate though they are in appearance, they meet together at a deeper level. The more they perfect themselves naturally and sanctify themselves in grace, the more they come together and fuse into one, within the single, unifying Centre to which they aspire: and we may call this Centre equally well the *point* upon which they converge, or the *ambience* in which they float.” We are at once reminded of the words in the Chhandogya Upanishad (3.14.4), which Zaehner quotes in a different connection. Referring to the above passage we can press him into our own service. He³ says: “At last we can begin to understand what the Upanishad meant when it spoke of ‘the Self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice or a barley corn, or a mustard seed, or a grain of millet,’ and of how this infinitesimal something is at the same time ‘greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than all these worlds.’”⁴ The inner point of convergence for all beings, the Centre of centres, is also an illimitable ambience, the “divine milieu” or “universal Element”, as Teilhard often terms it, which is a cosmic Presence.

It may be submitted to us that Teilhard has in mind the Cosmic Christ, the Mystical Christ-Body extended from the phenomenon of God’s Incarnation as Jesus and of Jesus’s glorified resurrection — or, rather, intensified in its primordial cosmic existence by these phenomena. To Teilhard, the point and the ambience are a deific Person identical with an historical God-Man. Can Indian spirituality parallel such an aspect? Certainly it can. Does not Zaehner tell us that in the Gita God speaks in the first person as an Incarnation and do we not have this Incarnate God — Krishna, Son of Vasudeva — telling us at once that He is within all hearts and that everything in the universe is secretly He — *Vāsudevah sarvam iti*,⁵ which can be translated “The

¹ *Oeuvres* 7, p. 236 [This corresponds to *Activation of Energy*, p. 227.]

² *Writings in Time of War*, p. 171. ³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-1. ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 75. ⁵ 7 19.

son of Vasudeva is all” as well as “The omnipresent Godhead is all”? Further, do we not have even the Cosmic Krishna — the Mystical Krishna-Body, as it were — directly represented in one of its aspects, the aspect of *Kāla*, Universal Time as Destroyer? Zaehner’s own translation of some verses on this Mystical Body is highly suggestive. In another book,¹ he writes, beginning with Arjuna’s plea to be allowed to see Krishna in his form of “Lord” and “All-Highest Person”:

“Krishna grants his request and promises to show him ‘this whole universe... centred here in One, with all that it contains of moving and unmoving things; [behold it] in my body.’² Such a vision, however, cannot be seen with ordinary mortal eyes, so Krishna bestows on Arjuna a ‘celestial’ eye, and:

So saying Hari, the great Lord of power and the skilful use of it, revealed to the son of Prithā his highest sovereign form....

If in [bright] heaven together should arise the shining brilliance of a thousand suns, then would that perhaps resemble the brilliance of that [God] so great of Self. Then did the son of Pāndu see the whole [wide] universe in One converged, there in the body of the God of gods, yet divided out in multiplicity.”³

The Gita also copes and crowns the persistent tendency in Indian spirituality to combine the Within and Without, the absolute reality and this life of ours. Noting that tendency, Zaehner⁴ in one place translates for us the Isha Upanishad’s beginning:

This whole universe must be pervaded by a Lord, —
Whatever moves in this moving [world].
Abandon it, and then enjoy:
Covet not the goods of any one at all.

He⁵ returns to the subject later:

“Teilhard is...quite wrong when he writes off Eastern Mysticism as being ‘dated’. ...What he criticizes is only one tendency in Eastern mysticism, the tendency to renounce the world rather than to merge into it so as the better to dominate it.

“He is right when he says that ‘the incomparable greatness of the religions of the East lies in their having been second to none in vibrating with the passion for unity...’⁶ But he is wrong when he adds that ‘the Hindu sages thought that if a man is to attain this unity he must renounce the earth, its passions and cares, and the efforts it demands’. For did not the *Īśa* Upanishad say: ‘Renounce, and then enjoy’? And this is the message, much elaborated, it is true, not only of Sri Aurobindo but also of Teilhard.

“What Teilhard is attacking is Śankara’s Illusionism and the world-denying austerity of Theravada Buddhism; but this is less than half of Indian religion, and this too was the object of Sri Aurobindo’s scarcely less stringent criticism.”

We may add that the Isha Upanishad next says (in Sri Aurobindo’s translation): “Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is

¹ *Concordant Discord: The Interdependence of Faiths* (Oxford, the Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 143.

² *Gita* 11:7 ³ *Ibid.*, 11:9-13. ⁴ *Evolution in Religion*, p. 11. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶ *Écrits du temps de la guerre*, p. 442: E.T. in *Hymn of the Universe*, p. 65.

in thee and not otherwise than this: action cleaves not to a man."¹ The theme of "free" action in a long life amidst men links what Zaehner has called "the full teaching of the Upanishads" with the Gita's insistence on unattached action — action done against the background of an inwardly realised infinite Unity and offered up to the Supreme Lord so that ultimately His Will alone may move the worker. The Avatar, the God-Man, acts as an example *par excellence* of world-work. Zaehner² indicates a part of this example: "In the Gītā (4.8.) Krishna, himself a God incarnate, says that the purpose of his becoming man was 'for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the setting up of the law of righteousness.'" Zaehner has omitted the further phrase in the same context: "I am born from age to age." And even in His transcendent status Krishna is still the worker: "I have no work that I need to do in all the three worlds (of Matter, Life, Mind), I have nothing that I have not gained and have yet to gain, and I abide verily in the paths of action" (3.22).³ A very important side of this action is the repeated birth of the Avatar at critical moments of history. The Gita's doctrine of the Incarnation is thus significant not only of focusing in a human form God's super-personhood but also of God's charging the world with a more and more dynamic power of secret pantheistic presence. An ultra-Teilhardism is implied here: Teilhard's "Divine Milieu" building up Christ's Cosmic Body acquires an extra vibrancy and vitality.

So we may well generalise and enlarge a phrase which Zaehner⁴ employs in observing that the Gita does not see "salvation solely in terms of spirit", matter being "that from whose bondage release must be sought.... The two cannot be brought together unless spirit enters deeply into matter and moulds it towards a higher and more unified form of existence. This is what the Gītā does, and in this it supplements and completes Christianity." One does not quite know what the last phrase implies. It would ordinarily mean that something which comes later in time is added but that this something, though valuable, is not anything really new: the addition, while giving fullness, yet continues by way of elaboration and explicitness what was already there in vital substance earlier. The true position, as between the Gita and Christianity, is rather different.

The core of the Gita — the Krishna-cult, from which springs its doctrine of matter's infusion with spirit — may be traced to several centuries before Christ. Already in c. 300 B.C. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador of Seleucus Nicator to the court of "Sandrocottus" (Chandragupta) at "Palibothra" (Pataliputra), testifies to the prevalence of the Krishna-cult. Before Megasthenes, there is the Indian grammarian Panini (undoubtedly prior to 400 B.C. and perhaps as ancient as 700 B.C.) referring to the worship of Krishna. And, according to all Indologists, even the Gita

¹ *Eight Upanishads* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953), pp. 3, 5.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

³ *The Message of the Gita as Interpreted by Sri Aurobindo*, edited by Anilbaran Roy (George Allen & Unwin London, 1946), p. 56.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

is pre-Christian.¹ So, instead of saying that it supplements and completes Christianity, we should make two points in the opposite direction. First, the Gita contains many precious spiritual elements ranging farther than the Christian religion and rendering this Indian scripture much more eligible to be called a complete revelation. Secondly, the Gita, by one great element in it, anticipates essential Christianity, an element which loses some of its integrity in the orthodox Christian doctrine because of the latter's cleavage between God and the universe, but whose wholeness glimmers out once more in Teilhard in spite of that doctrine — through his innate though consciously resisted oriental bent.

Perhaps Zaehner himself, whatever the precise content he may have intended in his phrase in the book under review, would not in general be averse to our position. Briefly scanning the development of worship “in the course of the centuries that had elapsed between the time of the Rig-Veda and the compilation of the Great Epic and the Purānas”, Zaehner, in his other book,² says: “In fact, by the time the Epic came to be written — let us say in the third century B.C.³, though everyone agrees that there are strata of antiquity in it, the earliest of which may be separated from the latest by as much as six hundred years — two gods and two gods only had emerged whose devotees claimed for them the title of *Parabrahman* and *Paramātman*, the ‘highest Brahman’ and the ‘highest Self’, thereby identifying them both with the God who ‘encompasses’ all things in time and eternity and with the God in the human heart who is ‘no larger than the fine point of an awl’.⁴ These gods were Rudra-Śiva, the God of the *Śvetāśvatara* Upanishad, and Vishnu, who in his incarnation as Krishna is the God of the Bhagavad-Gītā, a religious classic which is not only by far the best known and by far the most influential text within the Hindu tradition, but also, to my mind, ranks as the most significant sacred text in the whole history of religion.”

In view of this pronouncement, perhaps Zaehner would not disagree too with us that, considered all round, Teilhardism is indeed best describable as the Gita in the garb of an evolutionary world-interpretation. Unlike Christianity, the Gita's Vedanta admits a universal incarnationism which a religion based on the fact of Evolution must imply. And it has at the same time all that Teilhard holds beyond what he understands by “pagan pantheism” or “pantheist humanism”. An un-Christianisable Cosmic Godhead unfolding Himself in the very stuff of the universe even while being transcendent of it, an infinite All in which the universe has its oneness and which can yet be a Person of persons, a saviour and conservator of souls and, when necessary, concentratedly manifest as an Incarnation — such a Godhead is the very substance of the Gita's teaching. How Teilhardism is the Gita itself in a new shape may be

¹ According to S. Dasgupta, it is actually pre-Buddhist (*A History of Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1922-55, Vol. II, p. 551).

² *Concordant Discord: The Interdependence of Faiths*, p. 117.

³ Cf. Sri Aurobindo speaking of “the time — apparently from the fifth to the first centuries B.C. — when the old story and poem or epic tradition of the Bharatas took its present form” (*Essays on the Gita*, The Sri Aurobindo Library Inc., New York, 1950, p. 15). (K. D. S.'s Note)

⁴ *Svetāśvatara* Upanishad 5:8.

gathered most effectively from a brief summing-up of this culminating Vedantic scripture by Sri Aurobindo¹ in the context of its past background of spiritual systems and schools from which it brings forth "something rich and strange" while synthesising them:

"The thought of the Gita is not pure Monism although it sees in one unchanging, pure, eternal Self the foundation of all cosmic existence, nor Mayavada [Illusionism] although it speaks of the Maya of the three modes of Prakriti [Nature-force] omnipresent in the created world; nor is it qualified Monism although it places in the One his eternal supreme Prakriti [Para-Prakriti or Supernature-force] manifested in the form of the Jiva [individual soul] and lays most stress on dwelling in God rather than dissolution as the supreme state of spiritual consciousness; nor is it Sankhya [a system of analysis of existence] although it explains the created world by the double principle of Purusha [Soul as Being] and Prakriti [Nature as Becoming]; nor is it Vaishnava Theism although it presents to us Krishna, who is the Avatar of Vishnu according to the Puranas, as the supreme deity and allows no essential difference nor any actual superiority of the status of the indefinable relationless Brahman over that of this Lord of beings who is the Master of the universe and the Friend of all creatures."

Then Sri Aurobindo goes on to place the Gita in the perspective of "other syntheses in the long history of Indian thought". He² writes:

"We start with the Vedic synthesis of the psychological being of man in the highest flights and widest rangings of divine knowledge, power, joy, life, and glory with the cosmic existence of the gods, pursued behind the symbols of the material universe into those superior planes which are hidden from the physical sense and the material mentality. The crown of this synthesis was in the experience of the Vedic Rishis something divine, transcendent and blissful in whose unity the increasing soul of man and the eternal divine fullness of the cosmic godheads meet perfectly and fulfil themselves. The Upanishads take up this crowning experience of the earlier seers and make it their starting-point for a high and profound synthesis of spiritual knowledge; they draw together into a great harmony all that had been seen and experienced by the inspired and liberated knowers of the Eternal throughout a great and fruitful period of spiritual seeking. The Gita starts from this Vedantic synthesis and upon the basis of its essential ideas builds another harmony of the three great means and powers, Love, Knowledge and Works, through which the soul of man can directly approach and cast itself into the Eternal. There is yet another, the Tantric,³ which though less subtle and spiritually profound, is even more bold and forceful than the synthesis of the Gita, — for it seizes even upon the obstacles to the spiritual life and compels them to become the means for a richer spiritual conquest and enables us to embrace the whole of Life in our divine scope as the Lila [Cosmic Play] of the Divine, and in some directions it is more immediately rich and fruitful, for it brings

¹ *The Message of the Gita*, pp. xvi-xvii ² *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xviii.

³ All the Puranic tradition, it must be remembered, draws the richness of its contents from the Tantra. (Sri Aurobindo's Note)

forward into the foreground along with divine knowledge, divine works and an enriched devotion of divine Love, the secrets also of the Hatha and Raja Yogas, the use of the body and of mental askesis for the opening up of the divine life on all its planes, to which the Gita gives only a passing and perfunctory attention. Moreover it grasps at that idea of the divine perfectibility of man, possessed by the Vedic Rishis but thrown into the background by the intermediate ages, which is destined to fill so large a place in any future synthesis of human thought, experience and aspiration.”

Sri Aurobindo¹ next looks forward while turning to the task of understanding and expounding the Gita:

“We of the coming day stand at the head of a new age of development which must lead to such a new and larger synthesis. We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins of any of the three schools or Tantrics or to adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the Gita. That would be to limit ourselves and to attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities. We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future. A mass of new material is flowing into us; we have not only to assimilate the influences of the great theistic religions of India and of the world and a recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism, but to take full account of the potent though limited revelations of modern knowledge and seeking; and, beyond that, the remote and dateless past which seemed to be dead is returning upon us with an effulgence of many luminous secrets long lost to the consciousness of mankind but now breaking out again from behind the veil. All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis; a fresh and widely embracing harmonisation of our gains is both an intellectual and a spiritual necessity of the future. But just as the past syntheses have taken those which preceded them for their starting-point, so also must that of the future, to be on firm ground, proceed from what the great bodies of realised spiritual thought and experience in the past have given. Among them the Gita takes a most important place.”

From the Gita's vast ground we have to follow the Teilhardian development of spiritual thought into modern evolutionism and read the mystical heart of significance in the evolutionary theory. There we join the world-vision Sri Aurobindo conjures up from India's multitude of past spiritual syntheses, and infuses with his own discovery of a new and hitherto unmanifested power of the Divine Consciousness. This power, from its super-cosmos of ideal realities, projects at the end of a hierarchy of subtle planes a Divine Unconsciousness, as it were, a Light utterly concealed, a Truth abysmally involved, as a prelude to a many-graded evolution back into the Plenitude. But the regained Plenitude, at which the Aurobindonian Integral Yoga aims, has to be an embodied one — God's self-fulfilment on earth.

(To be continued)

K. D. SETHNA

¹ *Op cit.*, pp xviii-xix.

HE WHO RODE THE TIGER*

A SHORT STORY

THE royal orchard in the outskirts of the capital presented a fascinating sight, early one morning. A rope-trap, which the malis had set up to catch a naughty boar that had lately made a mess of the watermelons, had netted a large tiger.

It seemed from the marks that the tiger had paid a nocturnal visit to the orchard along with its family. Entrapped, it had tried hard to snap the ropes and, failing, had perhaps persuaded the family to retire into the forest at the approach of dawn. Thereafter it stood waiting for its doom, a stoic detachment writ large on its face.

When the first mali chanced upon the scene he shrieked and, about to swoon away, just stopped short of it. Soon he realised that it would be impossible for the tiger to free itself from the strong ropes. His fear changed into joy and the joy kept on increasing, resulting in his blaring out an original composition.

A song that had been preluded by a shriek soon attracted the second mali to the scene. Before he was aware of the fearful presence in the dusk, the first mali announced, "A tiger!"

The second mali was about to utter a pooh when his sleepy eyes met the pair of sapphire flames calmly surveying him. He too let out a shriek and slunk several yards away.

"Ha! Ha!!" laughed the first mali. And, on second thought, he laughed even more lustily, for, his colleague used to ridicule him at every available opportunity.

The second mali, who had by now realised that the tiger was in the trap, retorted, "Don't neigh, you fool. Other horses will begin to wonder!"

"How can a stallion refrain from laughing at the funny ways of a mule?" asked the first.

"Mule, is it? But no doubt I too had heard a mule a little while ago," retorted the second.

The first mali flared up, "Have you the cheek to suggest that I had shrieked just as you have done? If you only knew how I entrapped the tiger! For your information, he was quite unwilling to get into it. I jumped on to his back and boxed his ears and forced him into the trap. Understand?"

Now the second mali began to laugh. Even after five minutes when there was no sign of his wild laughter coming anywhere near an end, the first mali, on the verge of weeping, yelled, "Stop! And see for yourself whether I can ride the tiger or not!"

Residents of the nearby hamlet had begun to collect. The first mali girded up his loins and advanced towards the tiger.

"Truly the son of his father!" observed one or two voices from the crowd.

The second mali bit his lips vigorously and shouted, "Stop!"

The first was too eager to do that.

* With acknowledgements to JS, a Statesman Publication, Calcutta.

“You think I cannot ride a tiger, do you? You are obviously ignorant of the fact that there was a time when I used to travel riding tigers for nights together across forests and hills. I am ready to demonstrate how I did it.” The second mali too advanced at the tiger.

“Here’s yet another true son of his father!” commented some lively voices in the crowd.

Both the sons of their fathers tried to prevent each other from advancing, and in the process got locked in a wrestle. The game went on, to the great delight of the audience and to the amazement of the tiger, for fifteen minutes—the distance between the wrestlers and the tiger remaining the same.

Suddenly there appeared two royal officers, the kotwal and the rotwal. They got down from their horses and demanded to know what the matter was. The malis, in the heroic position of each tearing the other’s beard, stood statuesque for a while and then limping towards the officers, knelt down before them. When the officers understood the cause of their fight, they laughed and commented, “Who ever heard of nanny-goats aspiring to ride tigers!”

The first mali hurried to say, “That is exactly what I said whereupon this fool attacked me. I said, it is for the kotwal or the rotwal to sit on the tiger, not for a nanny-goat like you or I.”

“But wasn’t it I who said so first?” protested the second mali.

“No. None of you ever said so. And there is much suffering in wait for you in your luck for not having said so,” bellowed the kotwal gravely.

The rotwal observed, “It is rather surprising that it didn’t occur to you block-heads that, I being the king’s herald, riding the tiger should be exclusively my privilege. People would naturally heed me better when I announce the royal wishes from the back of a tiger than from a horse or an elephant!”

The kotwal cast a stern look at the rotwal and yelled at the malis, “When will you understand that it was only the kotwal and none but the kotwal who was eligible to ride the tiger?”

No sooner had he said this than events took a dramatic turn. Both raised their lathis, with the stoical tiger and the eager crowd looking on from two sides. But since both the officers had played the lathi last when they had been recruited to the king’s service on that basis two decades ago, all they could do now was to keep each other at bay pressing their lathis together.

The crowd found the situation unchanged even after half an hour. It raised slogans in order to induce the officers to some more spectacular action: “Who will ride the tiger?” “The kotwal or the rotwal!” “The rotwal or the kotwal?” “He who is the true son of his father!”

They fell into silence suddenly. The commander and the minister were seen pushing through the crowd. The kotwal and the rotwal instantly brought their lathis down and, prostrating themselves to their superiors, began to sob.

Said the rotwal, “Huzoors! I said, it only befits the minister and the commander,

or the commander and the minister to sit on a tiger. What right have we to look forward to such a luxury? Did anyone in our fourteen past generations ever ride a tiger?"

Said the kotwal, "Huzoors, all I did was to correct him, telling him that he should have said fifty-eight generations instead of a mere fourteen!"

"No. None of you said any such thing, for, we heard slogans to a quite different effect. Be prepared to pay heavily for having not said what you should have!" bellowed the minister.

"It is true that my forefathers were great lovers of tigers' backs. My heaven-gone father used to go to the primary school always riding a fat soft tiger," reminisced the commander.

"It was the custom in my maternal uncle's house to keep at least half a dozen tigers always ready at beck and call. My mother, when a baby, had a pet tigress for her pussy," said the minister.

People looked amazed at the minister's statement.

"Is that so?" asked the commander with a grimace, "Well, then, I will now ride the tiger, in the tradition of my father. You may fondle it in the tradition of your mother."

The crowd immediately showed appreciation of the commander's provoking proposal.

The very next moment the commander and the minister were found to have unsheathed their swords. Moving in a circle, they continued protecting each from the other.

The tiger yawned and the crowd clapped their hands.

But before the clapping died down the familiar cry of the king's bodyguards could be heard. Looking back, all saw the royal chariot approaching fast.

In no time the minister and the commander put back their swords and fell flat on the ground before the chariot. The sickly old bulky king was helped out of the chariot by a number of servants specially trained for the operation, and was seated on a bejewelled chair that had accompanied him.

"Get up!" roared the king.

The minister and the commander, shaking like two blades of corns in the west wind, tried to mutter something simultaneously. But the king silenced them with an impatient motion of the hand and said, "We have heard everything from our spies. You both are suspended. The jungle from which the tiger came is ours. The tiger itself, like all of you, is ours. The garden here is ours. But when it comes to riding the tiger, it must be one of you, eh, you goblins?"

The two suspended officers boxed each other's ears with mutual consent and wiped their tears with their turbans and whimpered, "There could be no question of anybody but Your Highness riding the tiger. our conscience had always told us so."

"That's right. We will ride it!" announced the king

"Do ride, Your Highness," said all the senior and junior officers in chorus.

"But we can't! Don't you see we are fat?" groaned the king.

"It is so, Your Highness! Your Highness is too healthy to climb onto the tiger!" observed the officers

"But our son will ride it on our behalf. Fetch him. Immediately!"

The kotwal jumped onto his horse and galloped away.

The charming young prince resided in a lonely part of the capital, alone. Though heir to the throne, he disliked the pomp and hullabaloo of the court and devoted his time to study and meditation.

The crowd parted and raised slogans singing the praise of the prince.

The prince got down from his horse and greeted the king with due humility.

"Sonny! You are going to achieve a glory the like of which has never been tasted by any of our illustrious predecessors. Go and ride the tiger yonder," said the king.

The prince bowed, but said, "O king, I may please be spared the glory!"

Screamed the king, "What do you mean? You may not aspire to it as a private person. But as our son, as our representative, as the scion of a great dynasty, you have to take the glory upon yourself!"

"Pardon me, O king, but this seems rather meaningless to me, to be frank, nothing more than a competition in arrogance and ignorance," pleaded the prince.

"Shut up!" hollered the king trembling with rage. "I shudder at the thought that our son fails to realise the importance of riding the tiger before such a big crowd."

"Who will ride the tiger?" "Our prince, our hero!" shouted the crowd.

"Be pleased to proceed, sir," the minister and the commander were eager to show the prince the way to the tiger.

The prince sighed and advanced. The happy king himself took the lead in shouting slogans hailing him. All co-operated, splitting their throats. The senior officers danced with joy.

The prince settled on the tiger. Amidst a din of applause the commander snapped the trap-ropes with his sword. The tiger began to walk.

"It is our son!" chuckled the king.

"Entirely, Your Highness," observed the commander.

"The glorious sun in the luminous firmament of the long history of our great kingdom," remarked the minister in an ecstatic tone.

"Poetry, eh? Ha! Ha!! We withdraw the suspension order against you two," the king whispered. The officers lay down on their huge bellies and kissed the tips of the king's shoes.

The tiger was seen speeding up. Soon it disappeared inside the forest.

The slogans stopped. All looked on towards the dark forest for several minutes.

Suddenly the king stared at his officers and asked, "What now?"

The officers looked at each other.

"How will the prince return?" demanded the king in a cracking voice.

All kept quiet.

The king burst forth, "Get out of my sight! Go and bring our son back!"

The commander, accompanied by his deputies, galloped into the forest. The crowd clapped their hands and at that the king screamed, "Drive them away!"

The crowd melted before the rushing soldiers.

The commander returned after two hours. He had brought a piece of garment that had belonged to the prince — a souvenir soaked in blood.

MANOJ DAS

MATRIMANDIR MEDITATIONS

WORK TAPASYA

Tap: "to burn" in Sanskrit
 unrelenting flame within
 a concentration riveter
 in fire to forge a link
 to You that ring by inner
 ring of *tapas* steel in
 spires of offering may
 rise flame-white as sky.

MY MANY I'S

My many i's
 of fools and lovers tangled
 in one breast are blind
 as eyes of peacocks until
 spreading wide to catch
 a love, surprised
 they catch the Light.

SEYRIL,
 Peace, Auroville

MEDITATING ON THE SHORE

THE craving swell of Thee penetrates me
as I sit motionless.

Through every pore I inhale holiness
while the Sun shines and I cry out
I've perceived the cosmic stillness.

The Solemn Solo of my Soul
in unison with the wounded voice
of this species lost in nuclear negation
sends a phantom

whirling with lilted Waves of Thee

— O ancient ascetic

while my self is lost

in the luminous lull eternal.

The phantom rolls unable to free
itself from the grooves of yore —

It is in unison

with this planet

entangled in the unison of stars.

SABYASACHI MANNA

PANTHEISM PLUS...

DEDICATED TO SRI AUROBINDO

STARING fixedly at the trapped, caged atom
The scientist bemoaned, bemoaned and cried, bemoaned and cried:
“Has everything in the universe been tested and tried
Or is there a new dimension I can fathom?”

Long ago I learnt that the planet earth moves round the sun
I saw the rise and fall of the tides when the moon was full
I know for sure that stars have gravitational pull
That tiny electrons around your nucleus run.

Is all that lies beyond time and space for me taboo
Or has the dark cloud blurring my mind a silver lining?
What is your secret? Please open your mouth a little to share it!”

All of a sudden the mighty atom split in two
A flame of fire, the very face of God came shining
A voice shouted through the storm: “Behold the Spirit!”

VICENTE CORREIA-AFONSO

EUROPE 1974

A TRAVELOGUE

(4)

ONCE out of Rome, we had our first taste of the superb Autostrades of Italy.

I cannot tell exactly who built them and when, but they are obviously an inspiration from Hitler's Autobahns, and equally well done. The paving is in concrete or tarmac, there are usually three lanes on either side, the up and down track, and a continuous hedge separates the two tracks. This by the way seemed to me the only disadvantage; for if you chance to have forgotten something behind and decide to turn back, you may have to drive for miles before you get a chance to switch off to the other track. The Autostrade is meant to be a speedway, and there are no limits to the speed you can make — sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety miles an hour, depending on your nerve and the power of your car. All traffic on the Continent is of course by the right, so that the lane farthest to the right is reserved for the daredevils. Ours was a luxury coach that easily made sixty miles an hour, so the driver chose the middle path. The lane to our right was for the heavier vehicles, making a bare forty or fifty miles an hour.

No one seems to blow a horn on this fast-moving track; and one does not hear any curses from the driver who wants to overtake, even though the driver be a proverbially excitable Italian; strange to say, ours was from Naples, the seat of noise and volubility, but he was as tight-lipped as any phlegmatic Briton. The tracks run for miles and miles on end straight ahead of you, and on week-ends these miles are simply jam-packed with caravans and cars of holiday-makers. They say Europe has been running short of petrol. One would hardly believe it on the roads. But there was one thing that struck me as rather unusual in this year of Grace 1974; it was the series of toll-gates we had to pass through, exactly as the medieval coachman did. Right across the road and at regular intervals there appeared in the distance a tall barrier and, as we approached, it divided itself into a number of booths at the road level where the toll-collector sat and handed out his receipts to the drivers as they stopped and paid the dues. Our escort explained this strange medieval phenomenon thus: the construction of these costly Autostrades had been undertaken out of funds provided by a consortium of financiers and they would hand over the roads (along with the toll-posts, I presume) to the Government when their money was fully repaid. But there is a general feeling that the Government would find it profitable to continue with their method of raising money. The transit through the toll-gates is fairly rapid and seems to have been accepted as a matter of course.

The drive through the Italian countryside was extremely pleasant. Right from the beginning, the sign FIRENZE pointed the way to Florence, with its lovely associations. As soon as our coach turned towards that city of culture and romance, and of beautiful girls, our hearts easily caught up the refrain on the tape recorder, "I love you as I do." The route lay through the foothills of the Appenine chain whose high lines appeared in the distant horizon to the right. Everything was green and lush. The only reminder that Italy was not so young came in an occasional glimpse of an old Etruscan city built invariably on top of a little hill to evade the attentions of an invader. These Etruscan cities were once rich in art treasures which can now be seen only in the great Museums; they were in more senses than one the forerunners of the greatness of ancient Rome.

But Florence has very little of the Roman about it. It stands apart, in a class by itself. To me it seemed at first sight more a "hill-station" in the Indian sense, than a great metropolis of culture. It reminds one more of Ootacamund than any other city I have known.

Florence stands on an eminence, or rather the best part of the city, and from there it commands a fine view of the valley of the Arno, the celebrated river that flows through the city and on to Pisa on the western coast. This eminent position sufficiently high above sea-level gives the city a bracing climate which to my mind is not a little responsible for its high eminence in thought and science, literature and art. It too may be at least one factor in making its men and women, particularly the women, so very handsome.

I do not know if, outside the Kashmir valley, there is anywhere in the world such a profusion of beautiful faces as one comes across in Florence. Legend says that Dante had a brief glimpse of Beatrice's face and that inspired him to write one of the immortal poems in history. One is inclined to believe that the legend is not all moonshine. At least ninety per cent of the young women of Florence look as though they have stepped just out of a painting by Botticelli or Fra Angelico. Florence was the birth-place of the European Renaissance. The Renaissance spirit still hovers over the city. Among the ruins and old monuments of Rome one cannot help feeling with the poet, "Babylon has taken wings,/But we are in the calm and proud procession of eternal things." Here, among the living verdure of the Florentine scene, one still finds the mind and heart and body of Europe taking a new birth out of the medieval chrysalis, preparing for a flight into the unknown.

Two of the great Florentines, Dante and Petrarch, made Italian, once derided as the language of "bakers and cobblers", into a vehicle of expression fit for the gods. Another Florentine, the much-maligned author of *The Prince*, made the first serious contribution to modern political thought and set the standard for all diplomats. Florence had in the Renaissance period at least two despots, Cosimo and Lorenzo the Magnificent, both of them Medicis who not only sought to make Florence supreme on the political chess-board of Italy — we need not look too closely at their methods for they were "Machiavellian"; they also made their city while they lived the centre of

Renaissance learning and art. The Academy which Cosimo founded had members who "disputed on the Platonic mysteries like another Plato" and tried to reconcile Platonic philosophy with Christian doctrine. Petrarch had laboured hard to make the Greek classics available to fellow-citizens. His dreams were fulfilled when after his death the University of Florence invited from Constantinople a professor of Greek, Chrysoloras, whose lectures attracted a number of students, and soon the Greek classics became as well-known as the Latin.

It had been given to an early Florentine, Giotto di Bandone of the 14th century, to break away definitely from the Byzantine tradition in painting and make it possible to represent figures as living and moving. His "Death-bed of St. Francis" still adorns the walls of the church of Santa Croce in Florence. He was also the architect of the Florentine Campanile which has been described as "lace-work in stone". Next comes Fra Angelico whose pictures were "windows into heaven", followed by a long series of illustrious names, like Fra Lippo Lippi, Botticelli and Michelangelo, to mention only the most well-known, who for a time made Florence the centre of Renaissance art. All their works are no longer in the native city, but Michelangelo's "David" still adorns a Piazza. The Uffizi gallery remains one of the great mementos of their art.

Much has been written about Italian art, but nobody seems to remember that near the Uffizi gallery there is a workshop that is one of the wonders of the world. The workshop once belonged to Benvenuto Cellini, the goldsmith whose many affairs with ladies of high renown in Renaissance Florence have made him immortal in Nerli's biography. His workshop still carries on the old tradition of craftsmanship in gold and silver ware, of which there are some magnificent specimens still preserved in an exhibition. We were shown how precisely these ornaments are made. But what impressed us most was a glass cigarette lighter, about six inches tall. As soon as the flame comes out, we hear a beautiful tune played from within, and a couple emerges, a man and a girl in evening dress and they dance around the glass case. The price marked on the piece was a mere ten thousand rupees. ... Husbands beware!

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We were taken to the hill where Galileo Galilei used to spend his nights watching the sky — Galileo the founder of modern astronomy which revolutionised thought. We all know about Galileo and his "Eppur si muove" (the earth moves all the same) uttered with bated breath for fear of persecution for blasphemy. But did you know that England got her L.S.D., short for pounds shillings and pence, from the Florentine Lire, Soldi, Denari,—L.S.D. that ruled the world till the almighty dollar took charge? Florence could offer some surprises.

(To be continued)

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