



# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

OCTOBER 1976

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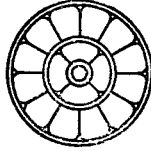
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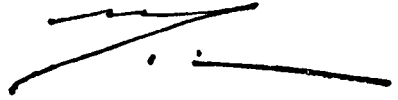


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."*

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## STOP PRESS

### FAREWELL TO A NOBLE SPIRIT

Surendra Mohan Ghosh passed away on September 7 at the age of 83. Tributes have been paid to him from all over the country and from every party and most movingly by the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

A single-minded yet multi-visioned lover of India, he was a fighter from his early youth for her freedom—freedom first from foreign rule but also from the dead hand of the past and especially freedom to grow towards a future greater even than happy independence or revival of glories gone or arrival of dynamic modernism in a more and more interrelated world. As such, he will be centrally remembered and appraised for his close association with Sri Aurobindo who sought to rebuild both India and the world in the light of a rare spiritual knowledge.

Surendra Mohan was considered by Sri Aurobindo his own man in the field of Indian politics as surveyed from an inner sight and an over-view beyond mere political issues. Whenever he visited the Ashram at Pondicherry he had the privilege of walking into Sri Aurobindo's room and giving him a picture of the country's state and receiving guidance from him. The guidance was for constructive action in the outer life's dust and heat no less than for the soul's movement into depths and heights of calm creativity. If circumstances could always have allowed it full play, many a blunder by the nation would have been avoided.

It was this frequent contact with the Master of the Integral Yoga that took Surendra Mohan's natural smiling temperament to its fulfilment in the "sweetness and light" which accompanied his strength and won him the popular designation "Madhu Da" ("Honeyed Elder Brother").

During his long public career he hobnobbed with the greatest in the land and was present at every turning-point of the nation's contemporary history. But his most significant relation was with the Nehru family. The illustrious Jawaharlal and his no less renowned daughter Indira looked up to him for both his common and his uncommon sense. To them he was a revered as well as intimate figure—a trusted guardian whose word could illumine the core of every national or individual problem. And through him the two of them came into touch with the Pondicherry Ashram and the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The Editor of *Mother India* is proud to have been a confidant of Surendra Mohan. A more fascinating *raconteur* could hardly be met with. He had interminable stories to tell of the fateful moments of Indian politics. If the living heart of it was to be felt beating, one had only to sit and listen to him. If he has left any memoirs, they will give the world the inmost truth of the stirring events that have woven India's progress within the world community during the life-time of this towering patriot, sincere sadhak and beloved friend.

## WORDS OF THE MOTHER

It is not so easy to do work. Don't think that somehow finishing the outward form of the work is doing the work in the true sense. It is much more difficult to work than to do "sadhana" as it is ordinarily understood. In meditation your consciousness goes higher and remains there in conditions of light and peace. In true work this has to happen also—and much more. You have to do all that a Yogi does, you have to reach the highest heights and bring down those conditions of consciousness, light and peace and manifest them in your everyday jobs. For you no job can be insignificant or trivial.

There must be order and harmony in your work. Mahasaraswati is not at all satisfied with your work if even the slightest disharmony, disorder or confusion is found in it. Even what is apparently the most insignificant thing must be done with perfect perfection, with a sense of cleanliness, duty, harmony and order. For example, even when you sweep a room, you must try to make it as clean as a first-class operation theatre.

There are honest people but they do not have the capacity to work. There are capable people but they are not honest in their work. When I find someone both honest and capable, he becomes very precious.

It is one of the greatest weapons of the Asura at work when you are taught to shun beauty. It has been the ruin of India. The Divine manifests in the psychic as love, in the mind as knowledge, in the vital as power and in the physical as beauty. If you discard beauty, it means that you are depriving the Divine of this manifestation in the material and you hand over that part to the Asura.

There is an old axiom, and it is completely true, that you can have absolutely no right to criticise others or complain against them unless you can set things right and get them going in a better way.

To stand for the truth in all circumstances, to declare it if necessary in the teeth of the worst opposition and to be ready to do all you can for its sake, is the definition of heroism

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of June 1976)

*(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. 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 its first publication as a book in French, came out in book form in 1973. We are giving this translation here.)*

MARCH 20, 1957

*“The delight of victory is sometimes less than the attraction of struggle and suffering; nevertheless the laurel and not the cross should be the aim of the conquering human soul.*

*“Souls that do not aspire are God’s failures; but Nature is pleased and loves to multiply them because they assure her stability and prolong her empire.*

*“Those who are poor, ignorant, ill-born or ill-bred are not the common herd; the common herd are all who are satisfied with pettiness and an average humanity.*

*“Help men, but do not pauperize them of their energy; lead and instruct men but see that their initiative and originality remain intact; take others into thyself, but give them in return the full godhead of their nature. He who can do this is the leader and the guru.*

*“God has made the world a field of battle and filled it with the trampling of combatants and the cries of a great wrestle and struggle. Would you filch His peace without paying the price He has fixed for it?*

*“Distrust a perfect-seeming success, but when having succeeded thou findest still much to do, rejoice and go forward; for the labour is long before the real perfection.*

*“There is no more benumbing error than to mistake a stage for the goal or to linger too long in a resting-place.”*

(Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, Cent. Ed., Vol. 16, pp. 391-92)

ALL that Sri Aurobindo says here is aimed at fighting against human nature with its inertia, its heaviness, laziness, easy satisfactions, resistance to all effort. How many times one meets in life people who like to become pacifists because they are afraid of fighting, who long for rest before they have won the battle, who are satisfied with a little progress and in their imagination and desires consider it a marvellous realisation so as to justify their stopping half-way.

In ordinary life, of course, this happens so much. Essentially, this is the bourgeois ideal, that which has deadened mankind and made man what he now is: “Work

while you are young, accumulate wealth, honour, position, have a little foresight, put by something, lay up a capital, become an official—so that later when you are forty you may be able to rest, to enjoy your income and later your pension and, as it is said, enjoy a well-earned rest”.—To sit down, stop on the way, not go forward, sleep, go down into one’s grave before one’s time, cease to live the very purpose and aim of life—to sit down!

The minute one stops going forward, one goes back. The moment one is satisfied and no longer aspires, one begins to die. Life is movement, it is effort, it is a marching forward, the scaling of a mountain, the climbing towards ever-new revelations, towards future realisations. Nothing is more dangerous than to want to rest. It is in action, in effort, in the marching forward that repose must be found, the true repose of a complete trust in the divine Grace, of the absence of desires, of victory over egoism.

True repose comes from the widening, the universalisation of the consciousness. Become vast as the world and you will always be at rest. In the thick of action, in the very midst of the battle, in the full swing of all effort, you will know the repose of infinity and eternity.

THE MOTHER

## DAWNING BEAUTY

*(Inspired by Swan Lake, Wordsworth’s Prelude and the sunrise)*

O NAMELESS Beauty, essence of all,  
 Who light my bosom with your peaceful fire,  
 None in this world can deny your call.  
 One heart-felt sunrise is enough  
 To launch the soul on a lifelong odyssey.  
 We are beckoned evermore  
 By the stillness of ocean’s breast of gold —  
 Or the crowd of tinted airy precipices  
 And the whisper-flight of birds  
 Across the magnificent imagination of Time  
 Bridge the loneliness within to your giant embrace!  
 Captivated by Nature’s daily grace  
 Of all moods gathered in one harmony,  
 We go, rapt form and silent face,  
 From dawn to dawn, from life to life.

ARVIND HABBU



# ON THE BRINK

## MUSINGS

(1)

A GOD is a single undivided being, even as an asura is a single undivided being. But man is a divided dual being; on one side he is a soul, on the other he is predominantly a body complex. By his soul he is akin to the gods, by his external being he is neighbourly to the asura.

He is thus the link between Heaven and Earth. He is the twice-born, *dvija*: he is planted in the mud of earth—he has the proverbial feet of clay—and his head soars high, bathes in the sun's light. He is an "emergence" out of earth, a being of evolution; he is also an "immergence", a descent into earth from heaven: one part in him is godly, the other asuric. As the divine he is Brahman; as the asura, Aham.

So man occupies a central place in the scheme of the universe. Above him are stationed the gods, the region of the higher mind and the heart, below him upon the earth rule the asuras, the powers of the lower mind and the vital. In between is man, the intermediary being.

The gods and the asuras are in eternal struggle for the mastery of the three worlds: and it is curious to note that they both seek the help and aid of man. We know of legends in which human beings, kings and warriors, are invited by the gods to come over to their side in the struggle. We have heard of the Raghus whose war-chariots drove right up to heaven from the earth to come to the help of the gods—*anaka-ratha vartmanam* (Kalidasa). Asuras however have a greater sway over man, in a natural manner, because of man's earthly constitution. For the natural man is moved and controlled mostly by his external mind and vital; over him the earth's gravitation pull holds almost complete sway. The world and men in their external life and action are the fief and domain of the asura. They have to be reclaimed and remoulded. The possibility lies in the fact that along with the forces of gravitation there are forces of regeneration and elevation; only they seem to be slow in their action and not efficient enough under the present circumstances.

But man's destiny is not to be confined to this sphere of the triple world. He has a higher destiny transcending these lower worlds and that is being worked out elsewhere deep within him. He has a destiny which even the gods envy; for he has the Divine's own home in him. It is God himself who is implanted in him, in the cavern of his soul—it is his soul.

\*

I may leave you here. I have led you to the door of the mystery of mysteries: There is the cavern where the great Being is installed—*guhāhitam gabbharestham*—

the supreme key to the solution and resolution of all problems, the attainment of divine perfection. It is for you to enter, and find for yourself the final consolation. Even so I am reminded of the great poet and seer Dante who was led by Virgil to the formidable door on which was inscribed in flaming letters the terrible heart-rending line:

“Give up all hope, you who enter here.”

It is the door to eternal hell.

But I bring you to the luminous door on which is inscribed in golden and gleaming letters the blissful line:

“Keep up all hope, you who enter here.”

(2)

There are two realms—the physical realm of action and the subtle realm of feeling (*bhāva*), it is not that the physical is the only real realm and the subtle is unreal or less real. The subtle may be equally real, even more real and concrete, even more physical. A physical blow is painful, but King Lear went mad because of a subtle blow, the blow of ingratitude which hit him more than the slashes of howling wild winds. One may forget the joy of physical embrace but there is a delight of sheer love, pure unshared love is an exquisite experience, remains indelible, puissant in the memory. The love of Dante for Beatrice is made of pure concentrated consciousness, has nothing physical in it, but it carried Dante in his peregrinations through all the worlds even to the very presence of God in heaven, to the presence of his divinised Beloved (in and with his very physical body, it is said).

You have to create the subtle world of feeling: it may be dwelling within you or enclosing you, surrounding you, it may be immanent and circumambient—both are the same in that sphere of existence or consciousness. The outer world is more or less independent of you, you have not much control over it but the subtler ground is more pliant and plastic and obedient to your will and purpose. In the midst of all trouble and tribulation, the greatest misery, this other realm you can build up to a great extent after your heart and make it the source of your life and delight. That can be your home of happiness and your celestial refuge. This realm will have as its basis love for the Mother and, at its apex, aspiration for her consciousness, and from base to apex entirely composed of the Mother's peace and quiet.

You can do it yourself, the capacity has been given to you—for the capacity is nothing else but the Mother's Presence.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

# WORKS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE VEDA

## THE VIEWS OF SRI AUROBINDO AND RADHAKRISHNAN ON THE TWO SECTIONS

### I. Introduction

BROADLY speaking, the Veda is regarded as having two portions, the works-section (karmakāṇḍa) and the knowledge-section (jñānakāṇḍa). While the part comprising the Upanishads comes under the second section, the rest of the Veda, the Mantras and Brahmanas, are brought under the first. Though they are parts of one work, scholars find it difficult to explain how the two sections are related to each other. The difficulty is mainly due to the fact that the content of one seems to be at variance with the content of the other: while the first has for its content the hymns emphasising rituals and outward forms of sacrifices, the content of the second is highly inward, spiritual and metaphysical as it is concerned with the pursuit of self-knowledge (ātmañāna) and God-knowledge (brahmañāna).

The later Indian scholarship is of the view that the contents of the two sections have very little in common, and therefore concludes that the knowledge-section is independent of the works-section. But Sri Aurobindo points out that this view is unwarranted. According to him, their contents are almost identical though their forms differ. He maintains that the works-section is not really about works, as is believed to be by the scholars, but about the same kind of knowledge which is the subject-matter of the knowledge-section. Given the thesis of Sri Aurobindo, the conclusion that the knowledge-section must be a natural growth out of the works-section becomes inevitable and, consequently, the difficulty of explaining the relation between the two sections ceases to exist.

### II. The Views of the Indian Tradition and Western Scholarship

Explaining the relation between the two sections, the later Vedantic thinkers hold that from the point of view of the aspirant or the sadhaka the performance of the rituals as enjoined in the works-section is a necessary *pre-requisite* in so far as it has a purificatory effect on his soul and this makes him eligible for the pursuit of self-knowledge as expounded in the knowledge-section. Here the explanation is offered from the practical or subjective point of view. Sureshvarāchārya, the commentator of Shankara's Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad Bhasya, is in favour of this explanation.

All rites effect only purification; or they are to be regarded as subsidiary to the knowledge-section (jñānakāṇḍa).<sup>1</sup>

According to Sureshvara, if the sacrificial rites of karmakāṇḍa are performed in a spirit of detachment, then they open the way for self-knowledge taught in the

jñānakāṇḍa. Hence the works-section is to be regarded as a *step* to the knowledge-section.

If the karmas (of karmakāṇḍa) are performed without a desire for prosperity, they purify the aspirant and open the way for knowledge. In the jñānakāṇḍa it is the knowledge of the non-dual self that is taught.<sup>2</sup>

A similar view is held by Ramanuja<sup>3</sup> and Madhva.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the explanation of the traditional Indian thinkers there is also another explanation offered by those brought up under the influence of Western scholarship. Radhakrishnan, one of the well-known contemporary Indian thinkers, is a case in point. He considers the relation between the Rig Veda and the Upanishads, or the works-section and the knowledge-section, as one of mere *historical succession*. That is to say, the knowledge-section succeeds the works-section with a view not so much to bring out the undeveloped or ill-developed content as to *infuse a new and valuable content* into the ideas of the works-section by suitable methods of *protest* as well as *allegorising* and *reinterpretation*. For Radhakrishnan believes that the content of one differs basically from the content of the other, though in a limited sense an element of similarity may exist in them. He says:

(a) The religion of the Vedas... was a lower form of religion, where thought never penetrated beneath the husk of things.<sup>5</sup>

(b) In the Rig Veda we have the impassioned utterances of primitive but poetic souls which seek some refuge from the obstinate questionings of sense and outward things. The hymns are philosophical to the extent that they attempt to explain the mysteries of the world not by means of any superhuman insight or extraordinary revelation, but by the light of unaided reason.<sup>6</sup>

(c) The authors of the Upanishads transform the past they handle, and the changes they effect in the Vedic religion indicate the boldness of the heart that beats for freedom.<sup>7</sup>

(d) The advance of the Upanishads on the Vedas consists in an increased emphasis on the monistic suggestions of the Vedic hymns, a shifting of the centre from the outer to the inner world, a protest against the externalism of the Vedic practices and an indifference to the sacredness of the Veda.<sup>8</sup>

(e) The authors of the Upanishads had a sufficient sense of the historic to know that their protest would become ineffective if it should demand a revolution in things. They therefore ask only for a change in the spirit. They reinterpret sacrifices and allegorise them. In some passages we are asked to meditate on the horse-sacrifice... While adhering to the forms they try to refine them. They say that all sacrifices are for the sake of realising the self of man.<sup>9</sup>

(f) In view of the distinctive character of their contents the Upanishads are regarded as a class of literature independent of the Vedic hymns...<sup>10</sup>

From these quotations it may be gathered that while the Rig Veda is a product of a primitive humanity bound by the conditions of sense-oriented life, the Upanishads are the works of a later humanity characterised by deep intellectual and spiritual dev-

elopment. Hence there is no means by which the knowledge-section can relate itself to the works-section except through protest against, or reinterpretation of, the latter. In other words, all the references in the Upanishads or the knowledge-section to the Veda or the works-section are to be construed as a sustained attempt to refine the crude elements of the latter by appropriate methods of condemnation and allegorising. This, in brief, is the relation between the two sections according to Radhakrishnan.

There is a basic difference between the explanation given by the traditional scholars and the one given by Radhakrishnan. Whereas the former does not rise to the level of *objective* or *intellectual* explanation—for the explanation is from the point of view of the aspirant—the latter does and thus helps us to understand the relation between the two sections from the point of view of the Veda itself.

### III. The Criticisms and the View of Sri Aurobindo

In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo neither of the two explanations is acceptable. As for the first, he points out that from the intellectual point of view it is far from satisfactory. For it does not show the *logical elements* that make the transition from one to the other possible.

No doubt the Karmakanda was regarded as an indispensable stepping-stone to the knowledge of the Atman. That was an article of religious faith, and as an article of faith I do not dispute its soundness. But it becomes valid for the intellect,—and in an intellectual inquiry I must proceed by intellectual means,—only if the Karmakanda is so interpreted as to show how its performance assists, prepares or brings about the higher knowledge. Otherwise however much the Veda may be revered in theory, it will be treated in practice as neither indispensable nor helpful and will come in the end to be practically set aside,—as has happened.<sup>11</sup>

An examination of the practical attitude of the later Vedantic thinkers bears testimony to the observation of Sri Aurobindo. Both Shankara and Ramanuja practically identified the Veda with the *jñānakāṇḍa* as the *karmakāṇḍa* was regarded as devoid of metaphysical content. Perhaps realising this error Madhva wrote a commentary on the Rig Veda to show that it was not merely a collection of liturgical hymns but also replete with knowledge about the supreme Being.<sup>12</sup> But Madhva could not fully succeed in rectifying the error of his counterparts, as he could not explain why that metaphysical content should be mixed with ritualistic ideas, or dressed up in the garb of sacrificial rites. This is the reason why he also, like his counterparts, subscribes to the view that the works-section is a step to the knowledge-section.

As regards the other explanation, Sri Aurobindo tells us that he dissents from both its premise and conclusion—the *premise* that the hymns are nothing but “the naive superstitious fancies” of primitive men and the *conclusion* that the Upanishads have to be considered as a revolt against “the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas”, and that the writers of the Upanishads foisted upon “the Riks a meaning which was not there but read into it”.

(a) From both premise and conclusion I have dissented and I have finally described, not only the Upanishads, but all later forms as a development from the Vedic religion and not a revolt against its tenets<sup>13</sup>.

(b) This [the explanation of the type given by Radhakrishnan]...really explains nothing. Such profound and ultimate thoughts, such systems of subtle and elaborate psychology as are found in the substance of the Upanishads do not spring out of a previous void. The human mind in its progress marches from knowledge to knowledge, or it renews and enlarges previous knowledge that has been obscured and overlaid, or it seizes on old imperfect clues and is led by them to new discoveries. The thought of the Upanishads supposes great origins anterior to itself and these in the ordinary theories are lacking.<sup>14</sup>

It therefore becomes clear that according to Sri Aurobindo, the works-section also contains the essential elements that constitute the content of the knowledge-section. On this view, the two sections must be organically related to each other, the latter presenting itself as a logical development of the former.

But then there is one question which remains to be answered. If the ritualistic hymns (works-section) contain elements that afterwards became the profound ideas of the Upanishads (knowledge-section), then how are these elements related to the ritualistic form of the hymns of the Veda? Unless this question is answered the theory Sri Aurobindo is in favour of, that the jñānakāṇḍa is a natural development out of the karmakāṇḍa, cannot effectively function. Sri Aurobindo comes forward with a suitable answer, an answer which has brought about a revolution in Vedic interpretation.

According to Sri Aurobindo the authors of the Vedic hymns were great mystics. Their one preoccupation was self-knowledge and world-knowledge. This helped them discover secrets and powers of Nature and acquire an occult mastery over the physical world and physical things. Naturally they were greatly concerned about systematising this occult knowledge and power. But in this process a strict secrecy was maintained in order to prevent misuse of the occult knowledge and power by those who had not undergone the necessary training, discipline and purification of mind and heart. In consequence, a system of symbols was invented and the occult knowledge came to be systematised in terms of these symbols, the meaning of which was known only to the initiated and not any one else. It is therefore clear that the relation between the ritualistic form of the hymns and the philosophical content which it is made to hold within is one of the symbol and the symbolised. Using this theory Sri Aurobindo has interpreted a considerable portion of the Veda in his epoch-making work, *The Secret of the Veda*.

Applying his theory to the hymns of the Rig Veda, he shows that their secret sense can be set free if we see them as symbolic representations of profound meta-physical truths. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The hypothesis I propose is that the Rig-veda is itself the one considerable document that remains to us from the early period of human thought of which

the historic Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries were the failing remnants, when the spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race was concealed for reasons now difficult to determine, in a veil of concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it to the initiated. One of the leading principles of the mystics was the sacredness and secrecy of self-knowledge and the true knowledge of the Gods. This wisdom was, they thought, unfit, perhaps even dangerous to the ordinary human mind or in any case liable to perversion and misuse and loss of virtue if revealed to vulgar and unpurified spirits. Hence they favoured the existence of an outer worship, effective but imperfect, for the profane, an inner discipline for the initiate, and clothed their language in words and images which had, equally, a spiritual sense for the elect, a concrete sense for the mass of ordinary worshippers. The Vedic hymns were conceived and constructed on this principle. Their formulas and ceremonies are, overtly, the details of an outward ritual devised for the Pantheistic Nature-worship which was then the common religion, covertly the sacred words, the effective symbols of a spiritual experience and knowledge and a psychological discipline of self-culture which were then the highest achievement of the human race.<sup>15</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's theory about the double significance of the Veda throws a flood of light on its true nature and hidden knowledge. It sets at nought all meaningless conjectures which only emphasise the non-essential at the expense of the essential. It also shows that the knowledge-section, in so far as it brings out the mystic sense of the Vedic hymns in less symbolic or non-symbolic language, has its previous foundation in the work-section.

The Upanishadic seers are conscious of the double significance of the Vedic language (*vide* VI), and this is the reason why they are against taking the Veda literally (*vide* Mundaka, 1-1-14 and 5). But to take this opposition as an attitude of indifference to "the sacredness of the Veda", as Radhakrishnan does, is to read into the Upanishads a thought they are not meant to convey.

## VI. Radhakrishnan's Criticisms Against Sri Aurobindo's View

Commenting on the view of Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan says that he is hesitant to accept Sri Aurobindo's lead in Vedic interpretation.

Mr. Aurobindo Ghosh, the great Indian scholar-mystic, is of opinion that the Vedas are replete with suggestions of secret doctrines and mystic philosophies....When we find that this view is opposed not only to the modern view of European scholars but also to the traditional interpretations of Sāyana and the system of Purva-Mīmamsa, the authority on Vedic interpretation, we must hesitate to follow the lead of Mr. Aurobindo Ghosh, however ingenious his point of view may be.<sup>16</sup>

Having stated that Sri Aurobindo's view is inconsistent with three reputable positions,

Radhakrishnan tries to explain a little more clearly why he cannot accept this view. He writes:

It is not likely that the whole progress of Indian thought has been a steady falling away from the highest spiritual truths of the Vedic hymns. It is more in accordance with what is known of the general nature of human development, and easier to concede, that the later religions and philosophies arose out of the crude suggestions and elementary moral ideas and spiritual aspirations of the early mind, than that they were a degradation of an original perfection.... This interpretation is in entire harmony with the modern historical method and the scientific theory of early human culture, and accords well with the classic Indian view as put forth by Sāyana.<sup>17</sup>

But a close examination of the arguments of Radhakrishnan shows how faulty his arguments are and how true Sri Aurobindo's theory is.

(To be concluded)

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Sambandhavartika*, Tr T.M.P Mahadevan, University of Madras, 1958, verse. 301

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p XXVI

<sup>3</sup> Anima Sen Gupta, *A Critical Study of the Philosophy of Ramanuja*, Varanasi, 1967, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> B.N.K. Sharma, *A History of the Dvanta School of Vedanta and Its Literature*, Bombay, 1960, p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1929, p. 146 (hereafter *IP.*).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>11</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Centenary Edition, 1972, p. 546 (hereafter *SV.*)

<sup>12</sup> B. N. K. Sharma, *Op cit.*, p. 240

<sup>13</sup> *SV*, p. 546.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 5-6

<sup>16</sup> *IP.*, pp. 69-70

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70



## A FEMININE IMAGE OF GOD

*(We are glad to serialise in two instalments this fine article specially submitted to Mother India by Beatrice Bruteau. The author is not unknown to our readers, but it may be well to introduce the present work with some notes on her: Ph. D. (Philosophy), Fordham University, U.S.A. Founder and Coordinator, Teilhard Research Institute at Fordham; then Executive Director of Foundation for Integrative Education in New York; now Director of Philosophers' Exchange, Winston-Salem. Author of Worthy Is the World: The Hindu Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, and of Evolution toward Divinity: Teilhard de Chardin and the Hindu Traditions, and of various articles in American and Indian journals. Published pieces relevant to the women's movement: "God of My Life," a prayer to the Divine Mother, in New Catholic World, Nov. 1972; "The Divine Mother and the Convergence of the World," World Union Conference Souvenir Volume, Dec. 1973; and "The Image of the Virgin-Mother," paper read to The American Academy of Religion, The American Theosophist, Fall Special Issue, 1973. Works in progress: In the Temple of Athene: A Woman's Self-Discovery; The Psychic Grid (metaphysical and epistemological thesis); A Systematic Theology of the Divine Mother (transcendent, immanent, integral.)*

IN the midst of the current vigorous discussion of the relation of theology to women's liberation, one of the liveliest questions is (or ought to be): To what extent feminine imagery can bear the weight of classical theological conceptions, and to what degree traditional religious emotional and mystical life can be focused through a central feminine figure onto the Transcendent? A complaint often heard in this connection is that we would be doing ourselves a disservice if, having successfully emancipated ourselves from the andromorphism of the Western tradition, we then deliberately subjected ourselves to an equally obscurantist gynemorphism. This is, to my mind, a valid protest whose truth should be recalled at all times. Nevertheless, I would offer two arguments in favor of pursuing the suggested speculation.

In the first place, the imagination is inescapable. Whether we welcome the fact or not, the images associated with values in our culture have a tremendous bearing on our psychology. One's self-image is a reflection of one's God-image, which in turn is a compaction of all the highest values recognized in the culture. The presence or absence of a feminine image of Deity, therefore, has a definite, though indirect, effect on the self-image of women. And since self-image is a concern to which we are devoting a good deal of attention just now, it may be worth-while to explore also this theological contribution to it.

In the second place, the imagination is positively valuable to us in the progress of the spiritual life. It is true that we intend and expect to transcend it—as we must transcend also the conceptual forms in which we clothe the Ultimate—but we cannot

totally dispense with it while we are on the way. A purely conceptual approach to the Highest Reality would probably not succeed in reaching It, because it would not be able to integrate the whole of the human personality. But images and concepts so coordinated that they appeal simultaneously to the affective, the volitional and the intellectual faculties should have the desired integrating effect and therefore should be sought out by us as a means towards focusing our energies on the amorphic Transcendent, beyond both images and ideas.

With these considerations in mind, then, I would like to examine the proposed question of whether a feminine image can support theological propositions and magnetize religious feeling. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, with the possible exceptions of the vague figure of the Wisdom of God and the mysterious history of the Virgin Mary in the lives of her devotees, there is no feminine imagery of the divine. And it has been amply documented (and debated) that the image of the human woman projected by this tradition has been that of an imperfect, subordinate, and often evil being. In order to see in an actual tradition, therefore, what the feminine image can do, we will have to turn to another culture.

The tradition I will present briefly here is the Hindu worship of the Divine Mother, or simply the Goddess, Devi. It is sometimes objected that for all their worship of a female Deity the Indians still keep women in a very low position in the home and in society, showing that feminine theology cannot always be relied upon to upgrade social conditions. On the other hand, there are prominent and recognized women religious leaders in India, as well as an extremely capable Prime Minister, while in the United States women have difficulty attaining even minor positions in the religious institutions, and suggestion of a female President still only evokes laughter. A careful sociological study of the Indian situation, taking care to distinguish between groups especially devoted to the worship of the Goddess and those not so oriented, might give us some useful information. Meanwhile, we can at least say that the theoretical materials are there, the theology and the cult of the Goddess are developed and available for whatever personal and social use of them we or others may make.

Devi appears in various roles in the various Hindu scriptures. In her least dominant position she is the consort of a male Deva and represents his Shakti, or energy: his power to perform whatever functions are particularly attributed to him. For some sects, such as the Shaivite, she thus serves as the solution to a theological problem. In the Svetasvatara Upanishad, for instance, it is said that the "self-power of the Divine" is the cause of the world. Furthermore, this God pervades the whole world and is in every being. In fact, this (personal) God *is* the whole world. Yet, the Upanishad also holds that the Self is actionless, infinite, and eternal. How are these two positions to be reconciled? The answer is: through his Shakti the actionless Transcendent is the cause, the substance, and the pervading energy of the world. The Divine is one, yet by its Shakti it is manifold. She, the Shakti, is herself unborn and produces manifold offspring. She is the Evolver of all differentiated beings.<sup>1</sup>

In a position of equality with the male figure, Shakti is the complement of

Shiva: He the inactive Transcendent principle and She the active phenomenal principle which creates, preserves, and dissolves the world. They are represented as a united couple, neither capable of separate existence. The *Kulachudāmani Tantra* says, "From the union of Shiva and Shakti unfolds the world" And the *Kularṇava Tantra* says, "The world is made of Shiva and Shakti."

According to this view, Shiva and Shakti are ultimately one and there is no creation without union of the opposites which they represent. The world is experience and experience is a union of perceiver and perceived. Neither has any meaning without the other, and manifestation, or phenomenal universe, means precisely a situation of perception, necessarily constituted by a union of perceiving and being perceived. In Vira-shaivism, Shiva and Shakti are identical in the original state, that of pure consciousness, eternal and self-luminous, the ultimate ground of all internal and external experience. It is originally homogeneous but contains virtually all distinguishing characteristics. The *Vayaviya-saṁhita* says that everything proceeds from Shakti, limited by the will of Shiva, and in a certain order. Shaiva Siddhanta teaches that Shiva and Shakti are one as Intelligence and Energy, and from their union come will, action, and knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Shakti is not always considered as complementary to Shiva, but when she is, she is always the active principle and he the inactive. She is the dynamism of time, the consciousness that informs and guides, the power that executes the manifestation of the eternal reality represented by Shiva. Sometimes the eternal continuum is regarded as superior to the phenomenal manifestation, and sometimes the dynamic energy is considered superior to the inert substance.

When the latter point of view prevails, the Goddess assumes a dominant position, and the male Deity is represented as living only through his contact with the female; without her, he is only a "dead body." The *Kubjika Tantra* declares: "Not Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra create, maintain or destroy; but Brahmi, Vishnavi, Rudrani. Their husbands are but as dead bodies." Similarly, the *Jñānārṇava*: "Pure Sadashiva without Shakti is without motion like a corpse, for without Shakti He can do nothing." The *Agastya Saṁhita* tells the story that Shiva performed austerities to obtain the vision of Rama, who told him: "If you wish to know my inner nature, you should worship my transcendent power of delight. Without her I stand nowhere....I am dependent upon her. Without her I could not for an instant remain in existence; she is my innermost life."

The representations of "Kali on Shiva-Shava" summarize this whole doctrine in a single image. Kali—the power of time—expressing both her creative and destructive aspects, stands on the prone body of Shiva, who in turn rests upon a corpse (Shava). The meaning is that when Shiva is not in contact with Shakti, he is dead. The Shava figure is imaged as a bearded ascetic, the contemplative principle withdrawn entirely from the world, dead to phenomenal expression. The Shiva figure is youthful and alert; he lifts himself toward the Goddess who dances on his breast. Through his contact with her he is alive. And she, based on these two, exhibits her

emblems of life and death.

Another representation of Shakti and Shiva is a highly abstract one, the Sri Yantra. This is a diagram composed of a triply walled square possessing four gates, within which are three concentric circles, containing a sixteen-petaled lotus enfolding an eight-petaled lotus. In the heart of the inner lotus there are four triangles with apex upward, representing the male principle, overlaid by five triangles with apex downward, representing the female principle. The intersecting lines make a fine puzzle, creating many further triangles and other figures, and offering to the eye a vibrant dynamic pattern. At the very centre of all, within the innermost female triangle, which has no matching male, there is a point. The diagram as a whole represents the relation of the manifest to the unmanifest, both in the universe and in the individual human being. Also, it represents the order of evolution and the inverse order of involution (or devolution), again both for the macrocosm and for the microcosm. The central point represents the neutral Transcendent Principle, and the female Shakti (the innermost triangle) is the first formation enclosing It. The larger triangles and the many subordinate triangles made by their overlapping represent the various transformations of reality which finally culminate in the universe of mind and matter of our daily experience. These are the limitations or measures (*maya*) which the Power of Reality (Shakti) has imposed upon herself in order to create the universe.

The aim of using the diagram as a devotional instrument is to realize how both the universe and the devotee himself have evolved out of the original undifferentiated consciousness through the action of its own power, and have become—macrocosmically and microcosmically—this universe of name and form. Beginning from an ordinary experience of being cut up and divided among the many categories of the phenomenal world, the devotee strives to recover his lost identity as the living union of Shiva and Shakti at the center of being. He does not seek to escape from the intricacies of the various triangles but to see them in order and to realize himself as the Whole, a well-ordered multiplicity, rooted in a transcendent central Unity.

In the course of this striving—*sadhana*—to recover the lost wholeness, the *sadhak's* guide is, inevitably, the Shakti principle itself. The whole story of his life takes place within Her, in terms of Her energies. Therefore, from the point of view of the aspirant, the Divine Mother is the chief of all divinities. The action which has produced the universe of his perception and the self with which he is presently identified is only the action of Devi. And it is Her action again which will reverse the process, lead him to the realization of the truth, and liberate him. Without Her, the contemplative principle (or masculine element) is inert, insignificant for the *sadhak's* purposes. Energy is the source of all, the origin of the phenomenal world, of the conscious plan of its creation, and the principle through which it can be known. Pure contemplation without action is dead contemplation, say the Shakti worshippers, and so is mere feeling without the strength of expression. Without Devi, therefore, the gods (the self-luminous aspects of Ultimate Reality) are powerless. The very divinity of Divinity is in energy.

There is a story in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* which illustrates this. The gods had

been unable to subdue their enemy, a bull-demon. Gathered in council with Vishnu and Shiva, they gave vent to their rage and frustration. The flames of wrath issuing from all of them joined in a single fiery cloud, in the midst of which appeared the Goddess, the primeval energy. With Her many arms She reassumed the various powers differentiated as the several emblems and weapons of the assembled gods, and going forth destroyed the demon. The fact that the gods surrendered to Her their individual powers reveals that whatever power they possessed was originally derived from Her, and that when the Power is reunified no evil can stand against it. All the powers of the gods (*i.e.*, all the powers of the world) are in fact but a single Shakti, in whom the essence of divinity is to be located.<sup>3</sup> Shakti, therefore, say many hymns in Her honor, should be worshipped above Vishnu and Shiva, for they are but Her creatures.<sup>4</sup>

So imaged, Shakti holds the primacy in Tantrism and in related cults in India. It is under the feminine form of the Divine Mother that the Creator and Lord of the universe is the chief object of worship among large sections of Hindus. She is addressed as *Paramjyotiḥ*, Supreme Light, *Paramdhāma*, Supreme Abode, and *Parātpara*, Supreme of the Supreme. But of this, Her supreme form, no one knows. She is said to have also a subtle form, consisting of mantra, or the Divine Word. And Her gross form appears in a variety of human representations.

She is called Durgā, the one beyond reach, who is the remover of grave dangers, because She destroyed the demon Durgama. For having subdued Shiva—also named Kala (Time)—She is called Kali, conqueror of time. She is known as Umā, Peace of Night, in which the potentials for the day's work find their rest. She is also eternal knowledge, Sarasvati, seat of wisdom and source of creation. As Tārā, She leads souls out of delusion and suffering into peace, wholeness, and bliss.

Some of these figures, and others, appear in the ancient hymns of the Rig Veda. There Sarasvati is referred to as the "ocean of light," "the Guardian of the higher intellect," and "the supremely divine."<sup>5</sup> Rig Veda I.3. 10-12 and 188. 8, and Rig Veda VI. 61.4 are hymns in Her praise and prayers that She share Her intellectual treasure by inspiring the worshipper's mind. Rig Veda I. 164. 49 speaks of Her inexhaustible breast which "nurses all that is noble." The Yajur Veda hymns Aditi as the "Mighty Mother" of the just, the "Queen of Eternal Order ... the great Ruler, undecaying, far-expanding."<sup>6</sup> One notable hymn is the *Devi Sukta* (Rig Veda X. 125), composed by the Rishi Vac, daughter of the Rishi Abhrina, in which the Divine Mother declares Herself as the support of all the gods. "I am Queen," She says, "the Gatherer-up of treasures, the Knower, the First among the Holy Ones. The Devas have established in many places Me who live on many planes, in many a form." She is the source of all life, and She it is who sets "all existing worlds in motion." "Beyond heavens and beyond the earth am I, and all this I have become in my splendour."

(To be concluded)

BEATRICE BRUTEAU

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Svetasvatara Upanishad I.3, II 16-17, III 15, 20-21; VI. 5-13; IV. 1,5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), V. 58-59, 120-21, 157.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Pantheon, 1946), pp. 190-91 Also cf. Rig Veda III. 55

<sup>4</sup> See Arthur and Ellen Avalon, *Hymns to the Goddess* (Madras: Ganesh, 1964). Also very useful for this whole subject are the other works of Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), such as *Shakti and Shakta* and *Mahamaya*.

<sup>5</sup> Rig Veda II 41.16.

<sup>6</sup> Yajur Veda 21.5.

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## THE ANCIENT TRINITY

IN that vast luminous silence  
 All the splashing and restless gropings  
 Of the Titan soul grew numb and ineffective....  
 As if lit by a thousand suns. ..  
 The ever-broadening horizons of deathless Light  
 Outshone our mortal days.  
 Only an all-pervading witness-gaze  
 Watched the Divine Scene  
 Being re-enacted on the secret stage  
 Of creator Time....

The inextinguishable crimson flame called desire  
 Mounted whirling heights in a blind passionate prayer.  
 As in a thunder-clash of the Gods  
 The white word rolled out across the star-sown skies.  
 Veil upon magic veil lifted from the tremendous Truth  
 Of Love, God, Man.  
 The glad discovery of the Ancient Trinity  
 Relived once more in that union mystic and unutterable.

VINAY

# HOW IS HUMAN UNITY POSSIBLE?

## AN AMERICAN'S PROFOUND SEARCH

*Richer by Asia* by Edmond Taylor<sup>1</sup>—here is a book of persistent relevance, an extraordinary cultural study, remarkable for the acuteness of its judgments, even more for the originality of its standpoint and approach. The author seems to have keenly appreciated that human affairs in their last analysis are the workings of the inner experience of man, normal and abnormal. He is, therefore, not subject to the illusion of measuring progress or judging a cultural situation by their conventional or supposed objective results. The results and manifestations are to him the clues for assessing the form of experience which motivates and determines them.

This approach has led him to make many startling discoveries in the cultural life of the West as well as of the East. For instance, he identifies the conflict of ideologies in the West as being mostly a conflict of institutional delusions. He also feels that imperialism is really race pride and oppression of others, that the Western appeal for "one world" is in fact a demand for bourgeoisie-democracy domination, and so on. In the East, in spite of the "technological backwardness" and poverty, squalor and disease, he sees what he calls a "pantheist mood", a concrete feeling of oneness with all the universe. He soon overcomes the bewilderment caused by the social and political life of the East, in particular of India, and realises the essential cultural attitude which considers contradictions as reconcilable. He understands why Indians while carrying on a fight among themselves or with the British could yet hold negotiations, as though war and peace were not opposites.

The psychological standpoint in humanistic studies has now come to be widely recognised. However, Taylor's is no general lukewarm sort of psychological standpoint. It recognises the larger determining power of the subconscious motivations and is, therefore, properly speaking, psychiatric, without being pedantically Freudian.

But it exceeds even that. The standpoint is virtually Yogic, because the approach is from beginning to end that of self-understanding, self-discovery and self-growth. It is a standpoint which transcends the distinction of subjectivity and objectivity, private and public, theoretical and practical. At its best, it tends to become distinctly spiritual and mystical. Through such self-development, the author maintains, we generate within ourselves a power and an influence, which is "transformed but never lost" and thus a "mystic conviction" grows in him that there is "an imperative mission to preserve, by transmitting, the influences of our human world until they are ripened for whatever unimaginable cosmic conversions may take place in the fullness of planetary time."

Edmond Taylor came to India in 1943 as an officer of the American contingent of the South East Asia Command, which was under Admiral Mountbatten, and his own responsibility was "to reduce Inter-Allied frictions which had

<sup>1</sup> Secker & Warburg, London, 1948.

already assumed serious proportions in that area". Later on, he became the Commanding Officer of all activities of the Office of the Strategic Services in India and S. E. Asia. His official work was thus psychological, that of achieving the maximum harmony between the British and the Americans and that of assessing psychological situations arising in the conduct and progress of the war in the Asian theatre.

This by itself involved for him a proper understanding of the people of the territories concerned. But he had also an independent interest in understanding Asia and during the two years that he was here he intensely sought to know the oriental cultures and, thanks to his sincerity, humility and sympathy he eminently succeeded in understanding the East and in particular India. It is most remarkable how he was able to transcend the habits and formations of the occidental mind and feel one with new patterns of experience.

Undoubtedly he had approached Asia with a keen desire to see how "one world" could be made a realizable dream. And, it appears, his occidental prepossessions of progress, organization and the rest were not too strong. He was thus mentally in a happy situation to recognise and appreciate the strong elements of oriental life by "cultural opposition", as he says, and achieve a clear sense within himself how "one world" and "human unity" could become a reality.

The book, which is truly a record of "adventures in self-understanding", develops its theme through twenty-nine chapters divided into six Parts. The first Part is "Prelude to Discovery" wherein he affirms his quest for world government. But he did not approach the subject in the political way. It is rather the "psychological and cultural aspects of the problem as they concern the individual", which interested him most. He personally sought "a felt unity of human experience" in all his Asian contacts. His method consisted in "the principle of finding a strayed horse by thinking where you would go if you were a horse, and then going there". We can call it the method of sympathetic identification in trying to know and understand an object.

But the author, at times, seems to possess a concrete appreciation of the process of telepathic knowledge or spiritual intuition. In Algiers in 1943, he "discovered" the assassination of Admiral Darlan more than a week before it took place, and felt so confident of his discovery that he informed his superiors! And in explanation of it he says, "I was neither in the confidence of the assassins nor did I read their minds, but I was in close personal contact with them and the assassin in my own mind recognized in the furtive steeliness which came into their eyes and their voices the tensing for a kill." In this Part he also confesses "the absence of Asia" in the outlook of the Westerners and seeks to develop "The Art of Awareness".

The second Part is "The Pathology of Imperialism". Here he attempts an "analysis of 'the sahib's mind', " which he contacted first in India, and discovers the tragic limitations of the colonial ideology, which never permitted a real meeting between the East and the West. He was shocked by the "individual sahib's morale" and his "spiritual vitamin deficiency". But he soon outgrew "the sahib-sickness", which had then infected the land, and awoke to the "rediscovery of humanity in its oriental as-



pects". His chapter "The School of Delusion" in this Part is most important as here he develops his main psychological thesis to explain why world government and human unity are so difficult to realise. He affirms that delusion or obsession by an exclusive sort of belief is the mental condition which separates one nation from another and makes *rapprochement* and understanding difficult. Further, delusions can be of two kinds: private and personal, institutional and public. The latter are worse, because "we tend to assume that everything which is public must be real". Here he gives a true psychiatric analysis of the delusion of grandeur and the delusion of persecution, the Paranoid and the Schizoid states of mind, the workings of suspicion, fear, brutality and the resulting "dictatorship of the ego" and "the soul-fascism" within us. He pursues this study and disengages and identifies some of the delusions of the Western mind, amongst which the chief is "the virus of Race"; he thus personally gets into a better form to approach the Asian life and culture.

The next three Parts unroll the author's discovery of the Indian values of social relations, politics, truth, religion, Karma, reincarnation, the new personality and human unity, and it can be said that he has, on the whole, arrived at a true appraisal of these values. He can, undoubtedly, claim a rich growth for himself and a real contribution to the East-West understanding and an ultimate enrichment of general human culture. Here he rightly discovers that the Indian attitude towards conflict rests upon a view of truth, which is all-comprehending and infinite-faceted. Therefore the Indians "can remain friends despite their differences". He observes, in this connection, that "the Indian delusions are neither tempered nor reinforced by our master delusions of rightness". Surely the delusions of exclusive rightness must make the gulf between two contending parties unbridgeable.

The contradictions and the anomalies of Indian politics during the years 1944 and 1945 soon became clear in his mind. He saw their relations with the British policy and the circumstances of Indian life. What fascinated him most was the new form of Indian personality, which was appearing. Here he saw the activism of the West and the quietism of the East realised in one. Says he, "The unmeetable twain have met precisely at the point of widest divergence." This personality-value is of supreme importance to him from the point of view of human unity.

His approach to Religion was particularly happy as he was able to set aside the bias of a credal religion and "concentrate attention upon the simplest Hindu and Buddhist forms of religious experience".

The last Part of the book is "Back to Man". Here he returns to his theme of world government and human unity, takes stock of his mental adventures and tries to reap the harvest of his experiences. In two chapters, "The Problem of Personality" and "The Philosophy of Integration", he offers his best thoughts on the subject.

We have thus tried to follow broadly the experience of this cultural adventurer. We want now to understand more fully his fundamental hypothesis, that delusions—primarily of the institutional kind—are the causes of conflict and division in mankind. A delusion is a belief which does not correspond to reality and is charac-

teristic of the psycho-pathological state of Paranoia. Like an individual, nations too develop, and even cultivate through modern leadership and propaganda a delusion of persecution and of grandeur and the resultant feelings of suspicion, fear, rightful claim and unfair frustration and all that. A conflict then becomes an inevitable consequence.

The explanation is understandable and convincing. But if we try to go a little deeper we are sure to ask ourselves, "What is exactly the nature of the mind, which so easily lends itself to the pathological and exclusive sort of beliefs we call delusions and what is exactly the character of reality, which is capable of correcting them?" These questions have not been raised by the author but to us they seem inescapable.

The author's reading is correct that Western culture essentially involves a philosophy of "Nothing-but-ism", of absolutely right and mutually exclusive thought-systems, while, on the other hand, "the perception of wholeness is the most joyous of all experiences to the Hindu mind" and further that the Eastern religions differ from the Western "not only in belief but in their attitudes toward belief". In this connection we would also mention a most extraordinary experience the author underwent when he found himself faced with what appeared to be contradictions of Indian life. He writes: "I noticed a strange thing, the more I was willing to let my view remain confused, the less blurred my feelings became; the more contradictions I admitted in my ideas, the fewer contradictions (I had) in my sentiments."

Now if we consider the above positions and study them long enough to get at complete clarity we discover that they virtually involve two planes of experience: one governed by the logical Law of Contradiction, the intellectual, and the other a comprehensive kind to which contradictions themselves are complementaries, the spiritual. We would wish our seeker-author to achieve this further differentiation in addition to the so many he has had the privilege to acquire. The real responsibility of our modern cultural crises, global wars and upheavals, will then appear to rest on the intellectual premises of our Western culture, which, because of the law of contradiction, naturally offer the right ground for our exclusive sort of delusions to strike root and thrive. But delusions, which are beliefs unsupported by reality, and the normal beliefs supported by reality, both when they become too insistent and are not backed by a larger perception of wholeness, in which the contradictories themselves become reconciled, will equally tend to create division and conflict. Thus delusions themselves are not ultimately responsible for thwarting our dream of human unity. It is our failure to appreciate the plane of experience, which our author seems to be contacting when he says, "the more contradictions I admitted in my ideas, the fewer contradictions (I had) in my sentiments." Mind and the mentally apprehended reality are both the cause of division; spirit and the spiritually apprehended reality are what make for unity.

Here we feel drawn to say a few confirmatory words from Sri Aurobindo whose unique personal development through Western intellectualism and Eastern yoga and spirituality has given him a vision of true unity and global reconciliation. He says,

“our nature, our consciousness is that of beings ignorant of each other, rooted in a divided ego, who must strive to establish some kind of relation between their embodied ignorances; for the urge to union and forces making for union are there in Nature. Individual and group harmonies of a comparative and qualified completeness are created, a social cohesion is accomplished; but in the mass the relations formed are constantly marred by imperfect sympathy, imperfect understanding, gross misunderstandings, strife, discord, unhappiness. It cannot be otherwise so long as there is no true union of consciousness founded upon a nature of self-knowledge, inner mutual knowledge, inner realisation of unity, concord of our inner forces of being and inner forces of life.”

We are sure the yogic paths of self-understanding, self-discovery and self-growth, which our author has adopted, will lead him to the true goal of spiritual unity of mankind, provided he is prepared to walk the full length of the path.

His approach is perfectly correct. He is right when he says, “We must begin by treating ourselves so as to correct the disorders or deficiencies which our culture has produced in us.” He calls upon the West to recognise its “delusion of rightness” in its “doctrine of national sovereignty”, in its “myth of progress which takes little or no account of the social context of progress”, in its tendency to think in terms of “such rigid categories that relationships of things escape them”. Above all, the West must recognise that “there is probably no culture which does not surpass all others in some useful field”: it must cease to preach “globalism with the bias of a cultural particularism”.

Yet the true beginning, our author knows full well, has to be made in and by the individuals who are convinced of human unity and who seek to realise a felt unity of experience within themselves. He has learned to appreciate that “any victory over delusion in a single mind is a blow struck at the accumulation of group delusions”. “The enemy,” he remarks, “is within each one of us” and “every personal unification is an act of public unity, indeed the very perception of wholeness is an act of wholeness, both public and private.” This process of personal unification carried on long enough will inevitably lead to the “felt unity of human experience”, the true spiritual unity, in the individuals, who then will be the rightful leaders of human unity and a world government.

INDRA SEN

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# AN UNKNOWN CARTOGRAPHER OF HEAVEN

## THE GREATEST MYSTIC OF FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

THE treatise known as *The Cloud of Unknowing* was written by an English mystic of the fourteenth century whose name has not come down to us. The idea of an English mystical teacher may seem a little surprising. But if it is true, as the Abbé Bremond has suggested, that there exists a close link between poetry and mysticism—poetry being one of those ‘profane’ states of nature in which it is possible to mark some of the signs of the mystical states of the soul—it will not seem quite so startling as a first survey of that practical people might suggest. For England has one of the richest poetic mines in the world, and poetry is the work of the feminine element in the being—the singing of Anima. Anima is passive, intuitive, contemplative; she is a mystic in embryo. In the fourteenth century—if we may borrow Claudel’s parable,—she and Animus were still living together in comparative harmony. But their divorce was approaching. The influence on men’s minds of the medieval synthesis between contemplation and action still endured, but its power was waning, as the unity of Christendom was waning. Left alone after the Reformation to evolve their own form of Christianity, and being a people in whom the active, or masculine, element predominates, the English let Animus have his way. He made religion a matter of morals; inflated the value of humanitarianism, which sanctified his passion for action under the cloak of service, and produced the over-active Christianity we have today. It was, indeed, no mere act of theological anti-scepticism that rooted out from the Godhead all representation of the feminine element which had survived, however feebly, in the figure of the Virgin Mary, but the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual schism. Anima could not be quenched. She poured herself out in poetry and is still singing. It is from her inwardness, her secret impulses of love and surrender, fructifying in a Christianity that could nurture them, that the notable band of fourteenth-century English mystics lived and wrote, and among them the author of *The Cloud*.

### Background, Author, Style

Their background was the violent and chaotic century—Dante’s century—which saw the Great Schism of the West, and the Great Plague which swept Europe from the Crimea to Ireland, taking multitudes in its wake. England was interminably at war with France and the miseries of the time found vent in religious and social agitation. In *The Vision of Piers Plowman*—one of the most wonderful of English poems, with the most magical of all opening lines—mystical vision and an impassioned social consciousness poured itself into verse. It is perhaps symbolic that these two great fourteenth-century works, *The Cloud* and *The Vision*, are both virtually anonymous—fittingly in the case of the former, for the man who wrote it wished for himself “nought” and “nowhere”: and in the case of *Piers* equally fittingly,

because although it has been ascribed to Langland, in essence it is the cry and confession of a whole people. In some ways poem and treatise have common features. Both were written in that Middle English hallowed by Chaucer; both inherited an alliterative style that had come down to them from Old English, and a natural use of allegory; both authors were mystics—one a poet on fire, the other a contemplative cool with the detachment and practice of continual self-effacement and aspiration. Both were works of maturity, brooded upon by a lifetime's experience.

Don Justin McCann, the last editor of *The Cloud*, has suggested that the author was most likely a Cambridge "master", who became incumbent of a parish in East Anglia, and there "pursued the study and practice of the contemplative life." The flower of his mystical thought was gathered up in seven treatises, the chief being *The Cloud*, and its pendant *The Epistle of Privy Counsel*. These, as we learn from *The Cloud*, were written for a young aspirant of twenty-four. The author's own spiritual masters were, first and foremost, Dionysius the Areopagite (St. Denis), and in a lesser degree Vercellensis and Richard of St. Victor. Like all the fourteenth-century English mystics, the quality of his writing is pungent, homely, often poetic, firmly rooted in the earth even while it soars to heaven. Charles Williams said of *The Cloud* that it "aspires translucently, and no colours of earth shade it." That is true of its essence, which is the "deep but dazzling darkness". But its style is as vivid, natural and simple as homespun tweed. The author permits his gleams of humour. He will "speak playfully", neither is he too solemn to resist making his point through a little pleasantry, for he has the simplicity, the *sureness*—yes! and the gaiety—of all those who live near to God and have thereby what he would call "rightfulness of spirit." Sometimes he will fall deeply into that alliteration so reminiscent of Piers, as in the words "wretchedly and wantonly welter," and "fester in fantasies feigned by fiends," and his discourse is gemmed by words and expressions of noble and ancient lineage, some of them surpassingly expressive, which we have allowed to go into desuetude. He can illustrate with homely little examples taken from everyday life, as in his picture of the enemy who cries for help when his house catches fire. "Then," he says, "without any regard to him for that he is thine enemy, but for pure pity in thine heart stirred and raised by the dolefulness of his cry, thou risest up—yea! though it be about mid-winter's night—and helpst him to quench his fire, or to still and rest himself in his distress." He can pungently and robustly clothe his points. Short prayer, he remarks, "secretly meant in the depth of the spirit" is the truest expression; "rather it pierceth the ears of almighty God than doth any long psalter unmindfully mumbled in the teeth." Again, talking to his disciple of the stirrings of sin which may disturb the serenity of the soul, he expresses himself with forceful alliteration. These stirrings, he tells him, "thou must every day smite down and be busy to shear away with a sharp double-edged sword of discretion."

### The Teaching: Its Goal and Method

Within the idiom of *The Cloud*—which carries so definite a signature of individuality and century and yet is so timelessly beyond it that in the language of mysticism it is as contemporary in its message as it was in the England of Edward III—within this idiom lies the pearl of its teaching. And this is revealed in such profound exposition that an early commentator was moved to voice a doubt whether mystical matters of such a high order should be allowed to general access. The author himself was well aware of the danger and no mystical treatise has ever begun with so grave, so awesome an injunction to the reader. The prologue opens with an invocation to the Trinity, which is followed by a solemn exhortation:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, I charge thee, and I beseech thee, with as much power and virtue as the bond of charity is sufficient to suffer, whatsoever thou be that this book shall have in possession, whether by property or by keeping, or by bearing as a messenger, or else by borrowing, that inasmuch as in thee is by will and advisement (deliberation), thou neither read it, write it, nor speak it, nor yet suffer it to be read, written or spoken, by any other or to any other, unless it be by such a one as hath (in thy supposing) in a true will and by a whole intent purposed him to be a perfect follower of Christ.

This injunction is again repeated at the end of the treatise with the words: "I pray thee for God's love that thou let none see this book, unless it be such a one as thou thinkest is apt." As Charles Williams observed, it makes his book well-nigh impossible to read.

The "work" of *The Cloud*, as the author calls it, is nothing less than the aspiration to reach the Pure Being of God. The method is that which is usually known as the Way of Negation: the silencing of the discursive mind and the abstracting of the soul from sense. It is "nought else but a naked intent directed unto God himself." In this effort the disciple is taught to begin by lifting his soul simply to God with the desire of aspiration and with "a meek stirring of love." These two things, holy desire — "hst" as the Middle English has it, meaning "a glad zest and sweet fervour of a spirit" — and love, are the twin lights which will lead him to his goal. He tells his disciple that his life now "must always stand in desire," and he warns that though God "asketh no help but only thyself," willing that "thou do but look upon him and let him alone," he is "a jealous lover and suffereth no fellowship, and ... liketh not to work in thee unless he be only with thee by himself." Likewise the young contemplative, when he lifts his heart with a meek stirring of love to his Creator, "must mean himself and none of his goods." In this meek stirring of love lies the core of *The Cloud's* teaching. For there are two principal working powers of the being—namely, knowing and loving—and God is only comprehensible to love. When the author asks himself: *What is God?* he does not return, as did St. Thomas Aquinas, a profound formula: *He who is*, but with sovereign simplicity: "I know not .. God him-

self can no man think. Therefore I would leave all the thing that I can think, and choose to my love that thing that I cannot think. For why, he may well be loved, but not thought. By love may he be gotten and holden, but by thought never." Again he says: "love may reach to God in this life, but not knowing." Sheer away the desire of knowing, he directs; be blind: no "means" (methods) of man may come to this work. "All good means hang upon it, and it on no means; nor no means may lead thereto." By the failure of his bodily wits, man comes to the knowing of ghostly (spiritual) things; by the failure of his ghostly wits, to the knowledge of God. That is the supreme noughting of *The Cloud*; its joyous gesture of absolute surrender and emptying. "Have a man never so much ghostly understanding in knowing of all made ghostly things, yet may he never by the work of his understanding come to the knowing of an unmade ghostly thing the which is nought but God. But by the failure he may. Because that thing that he faileth in is nothing else but only God. And therefore it was that St. Denis said: *The most godly knowledge of God is that which is known by unknowing*"

### The Two Clouds

When the heart is lifted to God it experiences a darkness, or *cloud of unknowing*. It is in this cloud that is between God and the contemplative that the soul must always, if it sees or feels God, experience him. "Bide in this darkness," he writes, "crying after him whom thou lovest." Though "unknowing" usually expresses this "cumbrous cloud" between the soul and God, it sometimes means a state of being without knowledge, or ignorance. In the process of concentration the soul must give itself to the impulses of love, to willings and stirrings. It is the higher will, above intellect, in its noumenal working, that must support the spiritual effort made by the soul. The author calls the will "the principal working power of the soul" and God "the highest willable thing." But it is plain that he means by will the activity of what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being, for he also refers to it as the "ghostly heart." "Lean meekly," he writes, "to this blind stirring of love in thine heart. I mean not in thy bodily heart, but in thy ghostly heart, the which is thy will. And beware that thou conceive not bodily that which is said ghostly."

It would appear that in a "fallen" state man cannot recollect these stirrings in his will—an allegorical way of saying that it is the divided consciousness that separates man from God; but the perfected soul lives in a continual communion, being aware every moment of its stirrings. He calls this "heeding the time," being, in fact, self-aware. The work of the contemplative "is but a sudden stirring, as it were unadvised, speedily springing unto God as a sparkle from the coal." In the same way only "a devout and a meek stirring of love" can begin the work.

There is another "cloud" of which the disciple must hear, and this is the *cloud of forgetting*, in which he learns detachment and loss of the sense of personal being. In it the discursive mind is silenced and all matters that distract from God hidden away, for "unless thou bear him (the understanding) down, he will bear thee down."

The labour of the contemplative is "all in treading down of the thought of all the creatures that ever God made, and in holding of them under the *cloud of forgetting*." He describes the distracting effect of paying attention to thoughts that seem, indeed, good and holy, and how the soul, following a train of thought, ends by being "scattered thou knowest not where." All thought, then, must be repressed. The soul must not allow itself to be haunted by the memory of its imperfections, but, in entire forgetfulness of all creatures and most of all itself, to "beat evermore on this *cloud of unknowing* with a sharp dart of longing love." To assist its concentration the soul may utter one word—"that thou mayest have better hold thereon take thee but a little word of one syllable"—but he adds later that the best prayer is "a ghostly cry...when it is in pure spirit, without special thought or any pronouncing of word; unless it be seldom, when for abundance of spirit it bursteth up into word."

The author is careful to warn the disciple at some length to discriminate very carefully between the "loving power" of the soul, and the intellection of the wit, which with the imagination, must be "stiffly trodden underfoot" for the work "to be truly conceived in purity of spirit." He does not mince his words over the fate of those who strive to comprehend God intellectually, and he directs his disciple to God against disaster by meeking, or humbling, himself. His definition of meekness is "nought else but a true knowing and feeling of a man's self as he is." There are two degrees of meekness, perfect and imperfect. "Swink (toil) and sweat in all that thou canst," he says, "for to get thee a true knowing and a feeling of thyself as thou art; and then I trow (trust) that, soon after, thou shalt have a true knowing and a feeling of God as he is." Perfect meekness would seem to be an involuntary revelation, following the mystical experience; imperfect meekness, that knowledge of himself for which a man strives consciously. "He who might get these (meekness and love) clearly, he needeth no more; for why, he hath all "

### Man's Preparation and God's Grace

How shall a man prepare himself for the contemplative life, and how shall he know when he is ready? The *Cloud* teaches that no one shall come to contemplation without forsaking worldly things "in a true will," or without much meditation, or "full special grace, or long use in special grace." Those who are called to the work must first purify themselves and cleanse their consciences, for it is "privy love set in cleanness of spirit upon this dark *cloud of unknowing* betwixt thee and thy God (which) subtly and perfectly containeth in it the perfect virtue of meekness, without any special or clear beholding of anything under God." Some men need "long ghostly exercise" to prepare them; others "be so subtle in grace and in spirit, so homely (familiar) with God in this grace of contemplation that they may have it when they will." All men have difficulty in the work, both "sinners" and "innocents." Sinners have the hardest labour, though it sometimes happens that those who have been "horrible and customary sinners come sooner to the perfection of this work than those that have been none." He adds a remarkable pendant to this in his assertion:



“not what thou art, nor what thou hast been, doth God regard with his merciful eyes, but what thou wouldst be.” And if the work is hard and strait in the beginning, when devotion comes, when the soul really surrenders itself, “it shall be made full restful and full light.... And thou shalt have either little travail or none; for then will God work sometime all by himself. Then wilt thou think it merry to let him alone.” This insistence on God taking up the work himself occurs very often in *The Cloud*. Let grace “do with thee and lead thee wheresoever it willeth. Let it be the worker, and thou but the sufferer; do but look upon it and let it alone. Meddle thou not therewith as though thou wouldst help it, for dread lest thou spill all. Be thou but the tree, and let it be the carpenter; be thou but the house, and let it be the husband dwelling therein.” Then may God send out a beam of ghostly light to touch the soul — but of this, he says, he dares not speak with his “blabbering fleshly tongue.”

Love all men as kin, for all must be “loved plainly and nakedly for God.” Offer all actions to God: “whoso clotheth a poor man and doth any other good deed for God’s love, bodily or ghostly, to any that hath need, let them be sure they do it unto Christ ghostly.”

Finally, how shall men know when to pass from meditation to contemplation? They will know by the stirring of their soul when it reads of this high work. But most surely will they know their readiness when they feel that nothing they do is complete “unless this secret little love set upon the *cloud of unknowing* be in a ghostly manner the chief of all their work.”

It would be impossible to understand the teaching of *The Cloud* without special reference to the author’s conception of grace. Man cannot be “knit to God” in love and will by nature, but only by grace. He is “made a god in grace” because the soul in union with God is “all one with him in grace, yet ... full far beneath him in nature.” Grace is the gift of God, by which he reforms the soul. The work of the contemplative can never be done by his own unaided power; it is “never gotten by study, but only by grace.” The aspirant can do the spade-work to compare with divine help, but the stirring of love “that is the work of God only.” Grace to come to contemplation is also given solely by God “in whatsoever soul he liketh, without any merit of the same soul.” “It is neither given for innocence nor withholden for sin. Take good heed that I say *withholden*, and not *withdrawn*.” In the same way God adapts himself to the capacity of the soul, which, by virtue of reforming grace, is enabled to comprehend him by love, who is incomprehensible “to all created knowing powers... incomprehensible, I mean, by their knowing and not by their loving.”

### A Wholeness of Outlook

The Negative Way of this fourteenth-century bhakta, with his emphasis on “nought” and “nowhere” rather than “everywhere” and “aught” (anything) may seem at first sight austere and wholly renunciatory. Nothing could be further from the truth. The author knows exactly where to lay the pruning knife; but he never

cuts unnecessarily. Though the spiritual psychology which he seems to have inherited through Richard of St. Victor from St. Augustine is a primitive one, his intuitions surpass and transform it. Always his discourse is sweetened by his good sense, his humility and wisdom. Something of this may be caught in his axioms. "The nearer men touch the truth, the more wary must men be of error." If the reader cannot grasp what he reads, "lay it beside thee," he says, "till God come and teach thee." Keep healthy, he instructs his young friend, "I tell thee truly, this work asketh a full great restfulness, and a full whole and a clean disposition, as well in body as in soul." Too great straining of body and spirit may lead to derangement, and the contemplative "fall into fantasy in his ghostly wits." And he advises "listiness of spirit" not "boisterousness of body." "Learn to love listily with a soft and a demure behaviour as well in body as in soul," then the body "by the virtue of the soul shall set itself upright." Again, "God forbid," he says, "that I should separate what God hath coupled, the body and the spirit. For God would be served with body and with soul, both together, as seemly is, and reward man his meed both in body and in soul." This wholeness of outlook is reflected in his refusal to depose reason, which is greatly helpful to meditation and "a beam of the likeness of God." Neither will he separate action and contemplation. "A man may not be...fully contemplative (as it may be here) except he be in part active." Likewise he gives the sovereignty to love and puts askesis in a subsidiary place. He encourages his disciple to be cheerful in the right spirit and not to let his failures depress him, and that though he must love all creatures in God, "familiar affection" to friends is permissible, for even Christ had a special love towards the disciple John. Be temperate in all outward activities, he advises, "as in eating and drinking, and in sleeping, and in keeping of thy body from outrageous cold or heat, and in long praying or reading, or in communing in speech." The contemplative life, rightly practised, will carry its own sanctions and restraints. "They have God, in whom is all plenty; and whoso hath him—yea, as this book telleth—he needeth nought else in this life."

*The Cloud of Unknowing* needs reading in its entirety, not once but many times. Nevertheless, as Charles Williams said, "The charge and challenge of that most blessedly unknown cartographer of heaven cannot be easily overcome." He prayed that all those who had towards his book only a curious wit should not read it. Those who choose its way will find in it that extraordinary power to transmit light which is the mark of the master. Wrapped in his anonymity he remains one of the purest and truest voices in English mysticism: "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." He ends his book with the words:

"Farewell, ghostly friend, in God's blessing and mine! And I beseech Almighty God that true peace, whole counsel, and ghostly comfort in God with abundance of grace, evermore be with thee and all God's lovers on earth. Amen."

## TO A FRIEND, ON PARTING

ACROSS the windy teartorn spaces  
    Of my life you came,  
Laughter bold and shining in you  
    Like a golden flame,  
Singing like the morning sunlight  
    On a dewstreaked tree.  
Within the rapt and hushed deep secret  
    Gardens of the heart,  
The blooms of joy are wild and sweet  
    Though swift to drift apart,  
Like the silver murmur of the moonlight  
    On a midnight sea...

As you seek your truth's stern trail  
    On that dim and burning plain  
Where a dragon dances in the darkness  
    Coiled with subtle pain,  
I kneel within the twilight chambers  
    Of my soul and pray—  
That the stars may whisper dreams to you  
    Across the shadowy sands,  
And the clouds weave cloaks of crystal quiet  
    Spun from their pale soft hands,  
As She leads like still bright fire  
    Your lonely, radiant way...

24-7-1976

JEAN

## MR. ALVARES AND SRI AUROBINDO

### WEIGHING IN THE BALANCE OR RUNNING AMUCK?

*(This article, which is a rejoinder by the editor of Mother India to an attack published in the Bombay bi-monthly Quest, was originally offered to that very periodical. Professor A. B. Shah, co-editor of Quest, had been eager from the beginning to have a counter-attack by a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. But he wanted it to be about 6000 words long. The present piece, although shortened a great deal from its first detailed draft, still considerably exceeded the required length. So he wrote to the author: "I see your point in trying to deal with Mr. Alvares's article as thoroughly as possible, but I am afraid in the process your rejoinder has become much too long for Quest. From the point of view of the non-specialist reader I would be committing an unpardonable error, particularly in view of the fact that it would be more than 18 months after the publication of Mr. Alvares's article that the rejoinder appears in print. I am, therefore, much against my personal inclination, returning the typescript. However, I shall look forward to its publication in Mother India.")*

*As Mr. Alvares has already shot his bolt, Mother India will not afford space to any reaction he may now have to our attempt at exposing his pretensions. The controversy will be considered closed with each party having once had his say.)*

It is over a year and a half since Mr. Claudé Alvares declared in effect Sri Aurobindo a spiritual charlatan and his philosophy nonsense.<sup>1</sup> I chose to ignore his attack, in spite of requests by friends to join issue with him. "This absurd article," I said to myself, "will soon be forgotten." But now I learn that he is busy writing a whole volume on Sri Aurobindo in the same vein.<sup>2</sup> I should like to warn unwary readers against any such projected magnification of the ineptitudes with which the article teems.

Mr. Alvares has decided that science and contemporary world-insights flatly contradict Sri Aurobindo. But is he truly *au fait* with them and does he at all know, even in outline, what Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is?

According to Sri Aurobindo, the ultimate Reality is an Absolute, an Eternal, that is at once a self-merged freedom beyond conception and a fullness self-manifested in a multiple unity as Sat-Chit-Ananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss) and Vijnana, a creative Supermind or Gnosis which brings forward the hidden truths of Being-Consciousness-Bliss and organizes them into an ideal harmony of the infinite and the finite, an archetypal or perfect cosmos. In addition it formulates various subsidiary cosmic "planes" and sets going the time-process of our universe. In relation to that process it acts in a diversity of ways the role of God—One who is the Lord and Lover of His creatures or else the World-Mother, no less than the Self of all things, a secret Omnipresence at once constituting and containing its creation even

while outwardly projecting each individual and object as other than the deity. But here Sat-Chit-Ananda and Supermind have also an opposite aspect of themselves, the Inconscient, a state of entire involution or apparent self-loss as the starting-point of an aeonic evolution by grades and degrees towards their plenary state in the form of a totally transfigured and divinized humanity upon earth.

Mr. Alvares has failed in several respects to express Sri Aurobindo's philosophy correctly. Thus he has not understood Sat-Chit-Ananda and Supermind as ever-existing plenitudes side by side with their own involution. To him the Aurobindonian Sat-Chit-Ananda "is the world and its forms, progressing through an evolutionary process from the initial stage of Complete Ignorance (matter) through Life and Mind to Supermind (Spirit, absolute consciousness)."<sup>3</sup>

This is a lopsided presentation, leaving no scope for the central theme of Sri Aurobindo's "Integral Yoga": descent of the Truth-conscious Supermind into our fumbling humanity. The supramental Light is to be invoked to come down into our nature in order to change it. That "gnostic" Power would perfect the organization of this nature around our inmost soul-element or psychic being and call forth the Divinity which is involved in material existence and which serves, by its covert presence there, to give that existence ultimately a permanent Divine Life as an intrinsic luminous right, a *dharma* or self-law, rather than as a mere superimposition, however brilliant, a *siddhi* or infused and hence insecure capacity.

Intellectual acumen is obviously not Mr. Alvares's *forte* in face of a comprehensive and therefore complex spiritual vision. But a true grasp will not make any difference to his verdict on the Aurobindonian philosophy, for it must still bring in terms like "Absolute" and "Eternal", to which he is acutely allergic beyond any restraint by reason. Oblivious of Sri Aurobindo's terrestrial aim, he affirms: "I prefer to stick to the fundamental insight of Heidegger's being-in-time, and relegate all non-temporal conceptions to the sphere of non-being, non-existence, non-meaning."<sup>4</sup>

He falls foul also of certain linguistic turns in Sri Aurobindo in connection with the Eternal's self-deployment as space and time, and he cannot make head or tail of some subtle distinctions Sri Aurobindo makes when discussing the Eternal's diverse possibilities of poise in regard to past, present and future. He talks of Sri Aurobindo's "stylistic gaucheries" and "excruciating gibberish".<sup>5</sup> Obviously, again, he is ill-acquainted with the occasions for an intricate play of thought and word in the difficult universe of metaphysical discourse.

But what most strikes us in Mr. Alvares is not only a blind animus and a chronic incompetence in his chosen field but also a huge muddle-headedness and a pretentious exploitation of "little learning".

To expose briefly the inadequacy behind his persistent "name-dropping" would be almost enough to disqualify his approach to Sri Aurobindo. For, it is on the basis of this appeal to modern thinkers that he condemns Sri Aurobindo as irrelevant "for our times".<sup>6</sup> However, we shall take him up in essentials on the other count, too—the hostility that sees no good at all in his subject.

## I

**The Misfire about Heidegger**

Whenever an original thinker expresses profound ideas, a number of his formulations are bound to seem at first obscure and prolix to most readers. One needs to get steeped in an innovator's vision before one can see its lines in sharp focus everywhere. There are also in such a writer large areas of lucid depth-exposition. To ignore these and fasten on the apparent densities is to falsify the picture. But glaring indeed would the falsification be if one picks, as does Mr. Alvares, on a treatise like *The Life Divine* of Sri Aurobindo, which Aldous Huxley, as a pronouncement published in *Mother India* (July 1956, p. 10) proves, considers "a book not merely of the highest importance as regards its content, but remarkably fine as a piece of philosophic and religious literature".

And surely it is "batty" and self-defeating to accuse Sri Aurobindo of being awkward or unintelligible and show partiality for the most forbidding of modern German philosophers, who is an "oddball" in style if ever there was one. As a note to a subsequent reference shows,<sup>7</sup> Mr. Alvares has drawn upon Heidegger's *Being and Time*. On the style of this work, Marjorie Grene, an authority, comparing it to that of his later writings, pronounces: "The earlier book is written as though with a sledge hammer: repetitive though its blows are, they are heavy and the syntax is notoriously twisted and obscure."<sup>8</sup> Heidegger's later works are smoother in construction, but, as H. J. Blakham observes, they are "oracular in tone and one can have no confidence in interpreting the cryptic sentences in which his thought is condensed".<sup>9</sup>

Linguistically, Heidegger is "tough going" in one way or another. His substance, too, is a stumbling-block to a lot of readers. It is not only a Logical Positivist like Carnap who considers "much of metaphysics like Heidegger's 'The nothing naughts' ...meaningless".<sup>10</sup> Many outside the Vienna Circle have had to struggle with his concepts no less than his phraseology. Particularly his copious talk of "Nothing" has rendered him for realistic or rigorous minds a purveyor of "non-being, non-existence, non-meaning".

Patient and sympathetic students, however, have worked their way to the central Heidegger. And the message they have found makes one wonder whether Mr. Alvares, invoking his name, appreciates in the least the true drift of this philosopher's system.

To give another instance of Mr. Alvares's muddle-headedness we may well ask: "Is his claim really justified that Heidegger, as a contemporary witness, is at odds with Sri Aurobindo?" One has only to look at Grene's article in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* to see that Mr. Alvares has grasped Heidegger very partially when he writes: "Temporality...is the primordial state of being or existence, for each of us exists 'toward our end', which is death. What Heidegger calls 'within-time-ness' is something *given along with* existence itself .."<sup>11</sup> Mr. Alvares refers only to Heidegger's *Being and Time* with its stress on dread or anxiety (*Angst*) over one's finitude; but that

book is not all of this philosopher. Even if Mr. Alvares be taken to represent its thesis correctly, his version would merely be of the early Heidegger. *Being and Time* was published in 1927. A work like *Introduction to Metaphysics* which appeared in 1953 makes almost a contrast as if feeling an incompleteness in the old theme and widening it out to its true shape and thus, without annulling it, playing on it a most momentous variation.

To the mature Heidegger, we have “fallen out of Being”, we have lost Being’s “nearness and shelter”. We run after one thing or another instead of seeking the “Ground” through which all things are—Being in its own self, Being that is “the Holy” (*Heilig*) and that is “Healing” (*Heilen*) and is “Whole”.<sup>12</sup> We should not get lost in the superficial mass-man nor in the outer life’s disconnected “beings” —“from genes to space-ships”, as Grene puts it:<sup>13</sup> an inner return to a direct experience of the one Being should be our pursuit. The negative inner intensity of each of us existing “toward our end”, which is death, and thus facing Nothingness, has been transformed into a positive expansion of the self into its basic reality which, as the absence of all separate superficial states, is a superb Nothing.

Even in *Being and Time*, contrary to Mr. Alvares’s perception, there is a sort of oblique mysticism. The negative inner intensity is sought to be so deepened that, in the act of confronting in one’s very marrow, so to speak, one’s own “death” in prospect and one’s past “guilt” for not living authentically, one attains a paradoxical liberation, such a peak of subjective pain at one’s finitude that a sheer breaking through one’s false surface life takes place. It is natural and not freakish that two great theologians, Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann, have based themselves on the “existential” analysis in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.

As if guarding himself against the possible narrowness attaching to the label, Heidegger repudiated the description of himself as an “existentialist”. More properly he is that *bête noire* of Mr. Alvares: an “ontologist”, concerned with that which underlies or persists through the fluctuations of time and history.

Another authority than Grene is A. B. Naess who writes in the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1975). Naess distinguishes the nature of Heidegger’s Being from the psychological means by which it is to be attained. Those means are dreadful and dark, yet they conduct us to a different state, one of radiant happiness. Quoting Heidegger, Naess tells us: “... ‘Knowing joy ... is a door to the Eternal’ ... Being is associated with ‘light’ and with ‘the joyful’ .. Being ‘calls the tune’; ‘to think Being’ is to arrive at one’s (true) home.”<sup>14</sup> After referring to Heidegger as “a critic of technological society and of the role of science”, Naess also notes his turning away from common religion but acutely remarks: “Heidegger has no place for God, whose absence nevertheless plays an important role in his thinking. He does not exalt human goals but sees human existence as a cult of Being—a notion not unlike certain notions of God.”<sup>15</sup>

Without any direct naming, we have in the account of both Grene and Naess the great formula of the Upanishads: Sat-Chit-Ananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss)

as the Ultimate for Heidegger. Sri Aurobindo's Absolute and Eternal is essentially here. Is it surprising that Frederic Spiegelberg, once a student of Heidegger's in Germany, later Professor of Asiatic and Slavic Studies at Stanford University, California, should inform us that "back of Heidegger's system ... there is a great deal of mysticism" though "Heidegger would be the last one to admit that", because he does not want to use "the expressions of traditional theology" and "remains unaware of his interrelation . . . with the great thoughts of Indian philosophy"?<sup>16</sup>

Similar is the considered opinion of Rhoda P. Le Cocq in her methodical survey, *The Radical Thinkers: Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo*. She concludes: "To the present writer, reading Sri Aurobindo's works makes Heidegger's meaning more explicable, and *vice versa*."<sup>16</sup>

## 2

### The Fumble with Weizsäcker

Another of Mr. Alvares's *gaffes* is to summon to his aid "the German physicist Carl F. Von Weizsäcker" as the author of *The History of Nature*.<sup>17</sup> We are made to think that Weizsäcker stands at the opposite pole to Mr. Alvares's bugbears—a system like Plato's, which focuses on a stable realm of "Being-Ideas" beyond time and history, and a concept like Sri Aurobindo's Eternity and Supermind. But what do we actually find in the chapter "Man: Inner History" in Weizsäcker's book? Talking of religion, he writes:

The rationalistic explanation quickly comes to mind that man has made God in his image. The Bible has it the other way: God created man in His image ... This, I believe, is the profounder truth. In non-mythical language: the image in which God appears to man does not show what man is but what he might be. It is the image of man's potentiality of being, that which determines his life ...

I do not say that this image of the objective potentiality exhausts the idea of divinity. The metaphysics behind the fact that the divine reveals itself to us in this fashion, that is something I do not dare touch upon.<sup>18</sup> Then Weizsäcker dwells on how this image helps us to understand "the combination in religion of the supra-historical with the historical", and he goes on to speak of the "challenges" posed by the image "in different ages, among different peoples". "But every one of the challenges is as such inescapable and absolute. The challenge cannot be derived from history, since it determines history."<sup>19</sup> Basically, "the German physicist" is worlds away from Mr. Alvares.

I may add that Weizsäcker visited the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo a few years back. A major theme in his talk with some of us for nearly two hours was that modern scientific theory needed to link up in its own way with the essentials of Plato. Before he left, he presented me with a copy of the only book of his which he had with him in



English translation, *The History of Nature*, and, using my Ashram name, he inscribed it:

To Amal Sethna  
from C. F. Weizsäcker  
who is leaving Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
with a thankful heart.

10.12.69

Well might Weizsäcker have felt happy in the Ashram, being in mind very different from Mr. Alvares. If he were not different, he would not be sufficiently interested in the idea of that mysterious power of Yogic psychology, the kundalini, to contribute a 47-page introduction to a book about it.<sup>20</sup> Touching on what he calls “the esoteric concept of prana” he comments: “prana is not necessarily incompatible with our physics. Prana is spatially extended and vitalizing. Hence above all it is moving potency. The quantum theory designates something not entirely remote from this.”

3

### **The Miscalculation from Simpson, Monod and Dobzhansky**

Coming to the topic of evolution Mr. Alvares gibes at Sri Aurobindo’s phrase about biological history: “the fact of a successive creation with a developing plan in it ...”<sup>21</sup> According to Mr. Alvares, the elements at work in this history “have now been mapped out in such great detail by scientists like Simpson, Monod and Dobzhansky that no vestige of any ‘plan’ is anywhere in evidence”.<sup>22</sup> Random genetic mutation and unseeing natural selection are the agencies of evolution these scientists have stressed. But it is unphilosophical to decide for evolution’s planlessness without first paying attention to what Teilhard de Chardin calls “the Phenomenon of Man”. The crucial question is: “Can an utterly planless universe be conceived as giving rise to so inherently planning an animal as Man, who is admittedly its highest product?” Is it not possible to think of an animal like man as the result of a hidden or disguised plan in the universe, which by being hidden or disguised would naturally create a large initial impression of planlessness? One has no right to make with a sweeping finality the choice of an alternative which seems highly improbable, while the other—which equates to the Aurobindonian view of an involved Supermind within the “Inconscient” from which evolution starts—is at the worst ingenious. As we shall see later, even scientifically the theory Mr. Alvares accepts for evolution’s phenomena is under fire.

I venture also to query whether Dobzhansky can be lumped, without any reservation, with Simpson and Monod. Whatever be his look backward, his look forward is at total variance with theirs. And, quite unlike them, he is an ardent though not indiscriminate admirer of Teilhard and devotes the whole last crowning chapter of his most significant book, *The Biology of Ultimate Concern*, to the theme: “The Teil-

hardian Synthesis.”<sup>23</sup> His attitude in general towards the future is best summed up in the words: “Modern man ... needs nothing less than a religious synthesis. This synthesis ... must include science but it cannot be science alone, and in this sense it cannot be ‘scientific’.”<sup>24</sup>

The Teilhardian Synthesis ends with a vision of a convergence of human beings on a planetary scale in a sort of super-organism charged with super-consciousness—the famous “Omega Point” in which progressive evolution goes past “reflective” individuality to a “co-reflective” collectivity. Here the developing character Sri Aurobindo mentions of the successive creation becomes relevant to the issue of a planned or unplanned universe. Not that the development is in a straight line: there are zigzags, ups and downs, blind alleys, and yet we mark an overall advance. It is as if a plan leading to Man across innumerable hurdles were secretly unfolding. Mr. Alvares himself admits: “It appears that there has been a tendency in evolution for matter to assume increasingly complex forms of organization in a hierarchy whereby the more complex are assembled out of the less.”<sup>25</sup> How is this tendency to be accounted for? Mr. Alvares accepts it complacently, feeling no need for an explanation. But even so anti-Teilhard a scientist as Medawar confesses:

We have...no convincing account of evolutionary progress—of the otherwise inexplicable tendency of organisms to adopt ever more complicated solutions of the problem of remaining alive. This is a ‘molecular’ problem, in the newer biological usage of that word, because its working out depends on a deeper understanding of how the physicochemical properties and behaviour of chromosomes and nucleoproteins generally qualify them to enrich the candidature for evolution...<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere Medawar pinpoints the problem by speaking of “nucleic acids and the chromosomal apparatus” proffering “genetical variants...more complex and more elaborate than the immediate occasion calls for.”<sup>27</sup> On the very “level of the microsphere”, where “the elucidation of evolutionary processes” are claimed by Mr. Alvares to go against Sri Aurobindo,<sup>28</sup> we have a kind of *msus* towards a series of successive increasing developments. The Aurobindonian alternative to the one which Mr. Alvares favours on the authority of Simpson and Monod is certainly more plausible.

Nor is it that apart from the spot of “finalistic” mystery here—albeit a central spot—everything promises to reduce biology to a science of molecules, as Monod would claim, and so to a special branch of inorganic physics. Everybody knows that modern physics has grown rather peculiar and is no longer such as nineteenth-century materialism thought it could rely on. But, leaving aside ultimate reaches, do we have a riot of reductionist triumphs in all its observable phenomena?

The biologist Barry Commoner, Director of the Center for the Study of Natural Systems at Washington University, St. Louis, is explicit in returning a negative answer: “The *complete* experience of modern physics does not support the precept—however deeply rooted this may be—that all complex systems are explicable in terms of the properties observable in their isolated parts.”<sup>29</sup> A prominent ex-

ample is "superconductivity." No explanation has been found by putting separate electrons together. Superconductivity was explained by John Bardeen only by considering the interaction of the electrons with the pre-existing molecular structure of the metal.<sup>30</sup> Here is a "holistic" approach entirely at odds with reductionism. Similarly, says Commoner, the property of self-duplication, which is "uniquely associated with the intact living cell", fails to be accounted for by "the properties of those separable cellular constituents, such as DNA, which participate in this process".<sup>31</sup>

The Watson-Crick "template" theory of DNA, synthesis on which the notion of DNA's self-duplication rests—the theory which is the mainstay of Monod and thus of Mr. Alvarez—has proved too simplistic in the face of accumulating evidence. Various elements outside its terms have become basic data, thanks to the researches of Kornberg, Khorana, Karam, Ehrenstein *et al.*<sup>32</sup> Commoner sums up: "There is no known mechanism, apart from the unknown one which exists in the intact cell itself, which provides a specific co-ordination of these elements sufficient to insure precise replication of a complex DNA fiber, nor is there any good evidence that this has yet been achieved *in vitro*. It cannot be said, therefore, that precise replication of DNA, which is the hallmark of biological reproduction, is due solely to the inherent chemical capabilities of the DNA molecule."<sup>33</sup> Rightly does Commoner title his article with the critical query: "Is Biology a Molecular Science?"

## 4

### The Confusion About Entropy, Evolution and Supermind

Closely connected with the question of a divine plan of progress is the great play which Mr. Alvarez, to show his acquaintance with scientific ideas, makes with the second law of thermodynamics which is also the law of entropy. This law expresses the observation that in energy-changes within a closed system more and more energy gets dissipated in the form of heat beyond practical use, thereby causing increasing randomness and disorder among the molecules. It suggests that ultimately the energy of our universe will reach a maximum of dissipation and disorder devoid of any prospect of "mechanical work".

Mr. Alvarez's main theme here is the bearing of entropy on the future of evolution. But before we come to grips with this problem we may touch on a bit of fanciful philosophical naiveté pompously paraded by him in the matter of entropy and time. He says:

...Time-sense is a primary fact of consciousness.

Time itself is not however a part of the external world, as Aurobindo believed. *Change is a fact of nature*. And biological change within our own organism is experienced subjectively in consciousness as time. Our human condition is firmly linked to the order of nature, throughout which there is a single direction of change. To the subjective awareness this is the direction of time.

The direction of time, or *time's arrow* as Eddington put it, we perceive

from the operation of the law of entropy...This law...stands for a definite trend in the natural order. And this trend points to a direction in time.

...Of course, it is not suggested that the experiencing subject recognizes his internal change as change of entropy, but that change which is so characterized in the language of physical science is what underlies temporality as a fact of consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

It is most curious how Mr. Alvares fails to perceive that in noting the dissipation of energy the physicist has to remember the order in which he took the readings of his thermometer. He has to know which record was "before" and which "after", for the purpose of detecting the increase of entropy in what appears to be an irreversible direction.<sup>35</sup> To be aware of "before" and "after" in the study of entropy is to be aware not of spatial positions but of temporal ones, what is "earlier" and "later" in time. This sequence which cannot be reversed in any particular context gives us an irreversible temporal direction, "time's arrow". Entropy can be found to increase only as time proceeds uni-directionally in the universe independently of entropy-increase.

The uni-directional time-factor is always involved in every exposition of the law of entropy. Thus Isaac Asimov tells us that the briefest way he knows to state the first and second laws of thermodynamics is: "In any closed system the total energy-content remains constant while the entropy continually increases with time."<sup>36</sup>

The given-ness of time is also accepted by Eddington: "Progress of time introduces more and more of the random element into the constitution of the world"<sup>37</sup>— "Like other physical quantities time enters [our consciousness]...as a particular measurable relation between events in the outside world..."<sup>38</sup> The sole thing Eddington does not grant is that objective time enters our consciousness with an arrow. He differentiates time's "duration" from its "going on" which he associates with increase of entropy.<sup>39</sup> What he overlooks is that time has still its "before" and "after", "earlier" and "later", to indicate its irreversible uni-directionality, its intrinsic arrow.

Even Mr. Alvares indirectly discloses this character of time when he says: "... Mankind and history must one day find an end, if the law of entropy follows its rigorous course."<sup>40</sup> The implication is that entropy will reach its maximum at some point of time enormously "after" or "later": this is the oblique suggestion in Mr. Alvares's "one day".

If time has an intrinsic arrow in the sphere of what he calls "nature" and "change", it is absurd to propose that entropy-increase within our organism underlies temporality as a fact of consciousness. Subjective time consists essentially of an experienced movement in the present away from the past towards the future. This movement, for all its difference from objective time, shares with it a perception of "before" and "after", "earlier" and "later" and it continuously causes an inner sense of change as the present keeps handing over its character to the past and assumes a new one. Change is already a part of subjective time and is not confined to the physical world. Also, even more than there, entropy is irrelevant here where the uni-direc-

tionality of time is an immediate datum of our inner life.

Mr. Alvares comes a cropper at all points. What one can really say is not that the trend of entropy constitutes or determines time's arrow but that it makes us see an already existent arrow of time in a special light.

Turning to evolution Mr. Alvares sees Sri Aurobindo as bypassing the law of entropy and not realising that it is a brake to his ideal of human beings evolved beyond themselves and transformed into supramental ones leading a collective divine life on earth of unity-in-diversity and illumined dynamism. How it could be a brake is not quite clear. Is it because such a life would mark a supreme height of energy-organization and thus flout the second law of thermodynamics? Or does a supramental fulfilment assort ill with a world which must entropically end "not with a bang but with a whimper"? In our opinion, Mr. Alvares has completely confused the relevance of entropy to evolution and Supermind.

The amount of available energy for evolutionary and transformative use may be diminishing, but surely for a very long time a good deal will be to hand. It is not after the prophesied "heat-death" of the universe that Sri Aurobindo's "gnostic beings" are envisaged as developing out of us by human aspiration and the response of divine grace. Long before the anticipated low-temperature dead-end the involved Supermind will have evolved in co-operation with the free descending Supermind. And the evolution of something beyond the mind is warranted by the very tendency Mr. Alvares has admitted for matter in evolution to assume increasingly complex forms of organization. His own intended argument here is that, with this tendency before us, there is no "logical or empirical need" to posit an involved Supermind for any evolutionary rise.<sup>41</sup> But indirectly his argument grants that both logically and empirically a rise in evolution like the advent of the Supermind may be expected anyhow. If so, surely something supramental can evolve in the future, like life and mind in the past, despite "the limitations put on nature by the law of entropy".<sup>42</sup> To think thus is precisely to bypass entropy, as does Sri Aurobindo who never refers to it, in a survey of evolutionary progress.

The only difference is that Sri Aurobindo looks behind the "tendency" which Mr. Alvares admits. Scientifically, by virtue of the unity of nature, all that is manifested must be already present in some mode, however rudimentary or latent. Such presence is one aspect of the Aurobindonian "involution". Sri Aurobindo points out another aspect: "... if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realisation of that which she secretly is."<sup>43</sup> In that case, we should accept the "Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind"—states towards which we are directed by "the unconquerable impulse in man towards God, Light, Bliss, Immortality".<sup>44</sup>

The contingency that "mankind and history must one day find an end, if the law of entropy follows its rigorous course",<sup>45</sup> cannot with its remotely far future stand in the way of the Aurobindonian super-evolution. And, if indeed "gnostic beings" come to be, who can say what they will do about the problem of entropy? Put an active Supermind both below and above the evolutionary process and you immediately imply a divine intention to manifest God from a starting-point which seems totally antithetical to Him. Because of God's self-chosen adventure of that antithesis the entropic movement is quite in place—just as much as is the apparent lack of purpose in genetic mutation and natural selection—but cannot be taken as the last word for Heidegger's "being-in-time" by which Mr. Alvares sets much store. The whole biological history which science sees as a line of "increasingly complex forms of organization" for many hundreds of millions of years and which Sri Aurobindo reads as "the fact of a successive creation with a developing plan in it" is an index of a counter-entropic current. Not only is biological history irreversible on the whole, as Julian Huxley puts it, but also, as he stresses, the rise in the level of physical organization goes hand in hand with "the emergence and increasing organization of what we must call 'mental properties'".<sup>46</sup> Here we have an index to the possibility—nay, the certainty—of a triumphant divine life on earth with new organs and faculties supremely supra-physical in power and therefore likely to be capable of changing the inexorable-looking second law itself of thermodynamics. A universe like ours, though seen running down in physical energy at present, is not necessarily such as to render a supramental fulfilment improbable as an event in the time to come or even as an indefinitely sustainable phenomenon of the future.

The law of entropy, let us remember, is an empirical discovery and carries no *a priori* validity. Eddington has argued, along with all other physicists, that if the universe is held to run down completely at some calculable future point, we must postulate a calculable point in the past when its organization was at a maximum.<sup>47</sup> How did it come to be in that totally wound-up state? If entropy must always increase, such a state is impossible. Weizsäcker conceives that perhaps our universe passes through a periodic round of world-beginning and world-end.<sup>48</sup> A cyclic universe of this sort must imply at some epoch a framework even of purely physical events lacking the rule of the second law. Or if, with Eddington, we refuse that framework, nothing save a supra-physical power is left in to reverse that rule *in toto*.<sup>49</sup>

In any case, on the strength of the entropy-law we cannot negate a universe of the Aurobindonian type with a Supermind *plus* Sat-Chit-Ananda as its secret motive-force progressively manifesting itself.

## 5

### The Unawareness of the Problem of Life and Mind

Even apart from biological history's ascending gradation of what Teilhard terms "complexity-consciousness", the study of the living and perceiving organism has led a

number of distinguished scientists to believe that there are vital and mental forces transcending physical ones. These scientists help to cast grave doubt on the Monod-Simpson picture of a planless evolution. Mr. Alvares is blissfully unaware of their existence.

Perhaps he does not bother to be aware because he declares, in connection with life and mind, that "there is no more any necessity to think of 'critical' points of transition" in the evolutionary process.<sup>50</sup> May I remind him of Dobzhansky's words: "The origin of life and the origin of man are, understandably, among the most challenging and also most difficult problems of evolutionary history. It would be most unwise to give a fictitious appearance of simplicity to these singularly complex issues.... The flow of evolutionary events... contains crises and turning points which, viewed in retrospect, may appear to be breaks of the continuity. The origin of life was one such crisis, radical enough to deserve the name of transcendence. The origin of man was another. .. The appearance of life and of man were the two fateful transcendences which marked the beginnings of new evolution."<sup>51</sup>

Mr. Alvares's attitude is strange, since Monod, his master, although a materialist, is honest enough to notice a few eminent contemporaries as upholders of "vitalism". He first names Elsasser and Polanyi, then adds with some astonishment: "Even the great Nils Bohr himself, it seems, did not dismiss such hypotheses. But he did not claim to have proof that they were necessary,"<sup>52</sup> Monod forgets to include the equally great Erwin Schrodinger who went to the length of envisioning mind as the unifying and indeed unitary principle of all reality.<sup>53</sup> We have also the famous zoologist Alister Hardy who has cogently argued even for a telepathic background to the psychic factor he demonstrates as constituting through "behavioural selection" the main evolutionary determinant, with genetic mutation and natural selection its blind-looking helpers.<sup>54</sup>

Further, there is Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, twice awarded the Nobel Prize (1937, 1955), researcher in Monod's own field of molecular biology.<sup>55</sup> On various grounds he supposes "an innate 'drive' in living matter to perfect itself" and humorously remarks: "I know that many of my colleagues, especially the molecular biologists, will be horrified, if not disgusted, to hear me talk about a 'drive' and will call me a 'vitalist' which is worse than being called a communist..." Not that he advocates a dogmatic vitalism but he repels the charge that he has been a vitalist "while the real situation was clear and simple". To him "many of the greatest problems of biology are unsolved, if not untouched" and "physics in its present state" hardly allows the analysis of the underlying mechanisms" and "we may have to wait for the discovery of entirely new physical sciences till we can penetrate deeper into the nature of life". This is not a position built on "gaps" in knowledge, though gaps in plenty are visible. Also, "physical sciences" have to be there, but with the sense of an ultra-physical background by which the harmonious organizations typical of vital events acquire a true rationale and are not explained away in terms of what are in fact merely instrumental processes. Those sciences have to be newly oriented both in experiment and understanding. Seeing

that Sidney Fox in Florida built protein-like substances without the intervention of living matter, Szent-Györgyi dares to cross the very borderline between the “inorganic” and the “organic” and write: “Maybe this drive is not an exclusive property of living systems, but is the property of matter in general.” His last word actually is still more extreme: “Since I was not afraid to use the word ‘drive’, I might as well be even more audacious and use the word ‘wisdom’.”

Of course, mental phenomena are to Szent-Györgyi totally beyond the possibility of detailed physical analysis. Monod himself confesses about the mind-body question: “There lies the frontier, still almost as impassable for us as it was to Descartes ... Brain and spirit are ideas no more synonymous today than in the seventeenth century.”<sup>56</sup> A few sentences earlier, Monod, though ever hopeful of materialism’s triumph, candidly notes about “subjective experience”: “Physiological experimentation has so far been unable to help us.” Does the “analysis of language” give us help? Again, Monod confesses that this analysis discloses the subjective experience only after it has been “transformed” and “certainly does not reveal all its operation”.

A whole troop of master-neurologists and cerebral specialists—Sherrington, Hinshelwood, Burt, Russell Brain, Eccles, Penfield—can be cited as the support of Monod’s negative statement on “physiological experimentation”. They are at one with what Penfield writes in an article in the Spring 1974 issue of *The American Scholar*, drawn from his latest book, *The Mystery of the Mind*:

... After years of striving to explain the mind on the basis of brain action alone, I have come to the conclusion that . . . it will always be quite impossible to explain the mind on the basis of neuronal action within the brain.... The mind is peculiar. It has energy. The form of that energy is different from that of neuronal potentials that travel the axone pathways.

In fact, “mystery” to the extreme degree enfolds not only the mind but also in another way the mind’s very instrument, the brain, making it outstandingly an “evolute” inexplicable in sheer neo-Darwinian terms. Hinting at a secret planning *élan*, one of the authorities on genetics and evolution, A. Téry, has pronounced:

... it is hard to believe that such complex organs as the human brain really have resulted from purely fortuitous mutations. Complex organs introduce new elements, new co-ordinations and a different architecture and organization. In order to be effective an evolutionary mutation must adjust itself to the preceding mutation and occur at precisely the right place and time. Even large-scale pleiotropic effects are unable to account for the characteristic correlations and co-ordinations found in all living organisms.<sup>57</sup>

Thus scientific attitudes and contemporary world-insights in many fields are not so materialistically simple and single-tracked as Mr. Alvares pretends. They leave ample room for and even demand a vision like Sri Aurobindo’s of the universe and man, in which one sole yet multi-powered divine Reality acts in numerous forms and modes, through changing degrees and designs, with various oppositions and interplays, by diverse disguises and revelations, of itself.



### The Muddle over Einstein

A favourite tactic of Mr. Alvares is to appeal now and again to Einstein's theory of relativity in order to castigate Sri Aurobindo for speaking of an Absolute, an Eternal, or even a cosmically manifesting Supermind. Mr. Alvares strikes me as having not the slightest glimmer of either Einstein's mentality as a physicist or the total philosophical "aura" of his relativity theory and his basic theoretical method.

Not that we can directly annex Einstein to religion or spirituality. He has plainly repudiated belief in a Personal God occasionally tampering with the cosmic process, and in belief in the survival of death by the human personality. But such beliefs are not the only possible sign of the religious-spiritual temperament. Even Buddhism with its Nirvana and Adwaita with its impersonal Absolute Brahman do not subscribe to them. Einstein has acutely characterized his own stance in regard to such beliefs as well as to membership of any established church by calling himself a profoundly religious unbeliever. And, on the positive side, he has expressed his profound religiousness by his very commitments in scientific thought.

These commitments are wittily stated by him in a famous pair of epigrams. One is: "God may be sophisticated but he is not malicious." Einstein means by this that though reality may be very complex it has a structure of rationality and is not impervious to definite and objective formulation in causal terms. The other epigram runs: "God does not play dice with the world." Both the utterances involve a denial, by relativity physics, of the basis of quantum physics—namely, the unavoidable disturbance of reality by our measuring instruments and therefore the formulation of it in terms of probability alone. Because of that denial many physicists today look on Einstein as a "metaphysician", one who introduces assumptions which are not demanded by the pointer-readings on our measuring apparatus—the very type of "metaphysics" which in an older form he set out to banish when he threw overboard Newton's absolute space, time and motion. His ultimate attitude is thus more akin to that of Newton than Mr. Alvares realizes. And the kinship extends significantly to the free use of the word "God".

Mr. Alvares is also quite in error in believing that Einsteinian physics has rendered every concept of absolute reality invalid. He prates of relative space and relative time. Does he not know that science can never rest with relative quantities? Its whole quest is for absolute quantities. Science busies itself with two kinds of measurements: local, variant, relative measurements and universal, invariant, absolute measurements. What any observer records from his limited frame of reference is measurements of the former class. Science begins with them but aims at discovering what will hold for all observers: such measurements are of the second category. There is an Einsteinian universal, invariant or absolute and it is couched not in the old-fashioned linkage of three space-readings with one separate time-reading but in what Min-

kowski designated as the four-dimensional continuum of indivisible space-time—with a semi-Euclidean or “hyperbolic” geometry in the special theory of relativity and a “curved” Riemannian, instead of a “flat” Euclidean, geometry in the general theory. The perspectives achieved for both the theories can be gathered from Einstein beyond any misconception.

“According to the special theory of relativity,” he writes, “the four-dimensional continuum formed by the union of space and time retains the absolute character which, according to the earlier theory, belonged to both space and time separately ...”<sup>58</sup> In the general theory, absolutism or relativism would result from the way we answer the question: “Are particles to be thought of as singularities of space-time or is space-time to be understood as a system of relations between particles?” Einstein’s own trend of mind is evident from his assiduous quest to launch from general relativity into a unified field theory. Such a theory would give us a complete mathematical picture of particles as being simply regions of a certain “curvature” of space-time: we should have nothing more than point-instants of a single ultimate field. The theory of relativity, whether special or general, was to Einstein not only an exposure of the old physical quantities as relative but also a trail blazed towards a new absolute.

No doubt, “absolute” here does not connote quite the same thing as in philosophy. But we are in the same realm of mental disposition: we seek to overpass mere relativities, merely limited visions of spatio-temporal events. It is illuminating in this context to mark what Lincoln Barnett in his book *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*,<sup>59</sup> to which Einstein contributed a foreword, sees when looking forward to the unified field theory: “the urge to consolidate premises, to unify concepts, to penetrate the variety and particularity of the manifest world to the undifferentiated unity that lies beyond.” Barnett could not help discerning in that theory, which was Einstein’s ideal, an affinity to Platonism: “More than twenty-three hundred years ago Plato declared, ‘The true lover of knowledge is always striving after *being*. ..He cannot rest at those multitudinous phenomena whose existence is appearance only’.”

Along Barnett’s line of vision, the fusion of time with space must imply that they are expressions, essentially alike, yet with a dual functional shade, of one and the same reality which is a substratum existing beyond immediate experience and appearing in that experience as relative space and time.

We seem to be in deep waters. If, as Mr. Alvares says, “the theory of relativity...is the most perfect *representation* of external reality available to us” for “the purposes of natural philosophy”,<sup>60</sup> we are plunged indeed in “metaphysical” depths. But the view we have taken is in full accord with Einstein’s own mental bent. In addition to the pair of epigrams we have quoted, there are those memorable and penetrating pronouncements: “Religion without science is blind; science without religion is lame”—“The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible to our mind”—“Cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest incitement to scientific research”. Einstein conceives of a secret harmony pre-established between a universal Intelligence and the human mind, a harmony creating the possibility for

this mind to understand the workings of the cosmos.<sup>61</sup> He has avowed himself a Spinozist,<sup>62</sup> one to whom the pantheos of Spinoza—the rational Intelligence immanent in the world—is the God science must recognize. Does Mr. Alvares get the hang of such a statement? Einstein was not a practising philosopher, but Spinoza was, and the foundational implication of Spinozism is a single infinite world-substance with an infinite number of attributes, each of which is infinite, but only two of which our human minds can deal with: infinite thought and infinite extension. Spinozism is pretty close to something like an Absolute, though in pantheistic and not transcendental terms.

We are in deep waters too with the revolution in scientific theoretical method Einstein's discovery of general relativity brought in. Formerly the physicist believed he reached his fundamental axioms by a generalization from observed phenomena through a kind of inductive reasoning. In the place of that picture has come the mode of mental activity which Karl Popper calls 'hypothetico-deductive'. A scientist builds a hypothesis (often resting on a "hunch"), then makes deductions from it and submits the end-product of the long logical process to an experimental test. Experiments decide the ultimate validity of the hypothesis: the hypothesis itself subsists in a domain which experiments do not directly touch at all. Since the validated hypothesis is logically demanded, however distantly, by the experiments, it cannot be rated even by quantum physicists as "metaphysical" in any pejorative sense. But, unquestionably, it has to a high degree a non-empirical status.

One may try to water down the starting-point of the theorist to mean "guess-work", but Einstein warns us against equating the theoretical effort to "idle day-dreaming".<sup>63</sup> A great ardour and rigour of the inner consciousness are needed. And when he asks the theorist to "give free rein" to the faculty which a carping critic might dub "fancy" he exacts "much intense hard thinking".<sup>64</sup> The theoretical flight which leaps far beyond observed phenomena is best described from Einstein's own account<sup>65</sup> as an act of free fiction or free invention or free creation of the mind.<sup>66</sup> No wonder he could assert: "In a certain sense, therefore, I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients dreamed."<sup>67</sup>

A creative activity of the mathematical consciousness, akin to the activity of the artist in the non-mathematical sphere, lies at the base of the Einsteinian method. The fundamental concepts of Einstein are compassed by a species of inner vision, divination, "intuition" (Einstein's own word).<sup>68</sup> Somehow the mind at its acutest is able to have direct insight into reality, to be one with reality and know it from the inside, as it were, by getting a touch of merger with it. The oneness, the inside knowledge by a glimmer of identification, argues for reality itself a secret nature analogous to the mind. We could hardly be surprised then to find Einstein, for all his aloofness from conventional religion, subscribing to—as he puts it<sup>69</sup>—"the firm belief, which is bound up with deep feeling, in a superior mind revealing itself in the world of experience".

Here, on a certain level, we have a straight contact of the world of science with that of Sri Aurobindo.

Here light is shed also on the background of Einstein's indifference to survival of

death by the human personality. When the body falls apart, the individual mood in the mental component would be gone. But the "superior mind" to which it had responded in its scientific explorations would still have the essential mind-stuff that had once formed Einstein's genius. In the information we have about Einstein's outlook on death a hint of his instinct of such a result can actually be traced. Boris Kuznetsov, Chairman of the International Einstein Committee, has recounted:

In Einstein's attitude towards death we find a certain synthesis of Tolstoy's sense of kinship with nature and the absorption in human problems characteristic of Dostoyevsky. When a visitor once asked Einstein how he would judge his life on his death-bed, Einstein answered: 'I would not be interested in such a question, either on my death-bed or at any time. After all, I am only a tiny particle of nature.'

He gave a similar answer in 1916, when he was seriously ill, to Hedwig Born (Max Born's wife), who asked him whether he feared death. 'No,' he said, 'I feel myself so much a part of everything living that I am not in the least concerned with the beginning or ending of the concrete existence of any person in this eternal flow.'

This awareness is not only of the eternal flow of natural processes but also of the eternal flow of human knowledge and activity.<sup>70</sup>

Above all, the awareness is a far-off touch of pantheistic mysticism's sense of the ever-living universal Whole that is the Spinozistic "superior mind" self-revealed in Nature. And in this touch, which is organic to the totality of the scientific posture of consciousness associated with Einstein, we have once again a sympathetic sign towards Sri Aurobindo's world.

## 5

### **Blunders and Slanders about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and the Ashram**

Sri Aurobindo's world, however, is not merely of speculative philosophy, of conclusions "we reach...by a process of thought, by abstraction", as Mr. Alvares opines.<sup>71</sup> It is a world of spirituality with philosophical systematization coming in its wake. Immediate spiritual experience and mystical realization are here concerned. Mr. Alvares appears to be congenitally incapable even of asking whether any value can be attached to what William James broadly termed "the varieties of religious experience".

How, with such a handicap, is he to take anything Aurobindonian by the right end? For instance, he is puzzled that Sri Aurobindo, while giving importance in his philosophical scheme to the fact of evolution as discovered by science, refuses to bind himself down to any specific theory of the manner in which the evolution of forms has proceeded. Mr. Alvares waxes indignant that a stand like this would ignore even the

theory advocated by Simpson and his followers. But, supposing science to have the final say, is the Simpsonian construct really the last word from its mouth?

An impartial survey in *Science in the Twentieth Century* tells us about "the so-called 'synthetic' or neo-Darwinean theory of which G.G. Simpson has been one of the leading exponents":<sup>72</sup> "...despite its many advantages and despite the mathematical analyses of Fisher (1930), Wright (1931) and Haldane (1932), the synthetic theory fails to account for all the observed phenomena." At the end of our section 5 we have already mentioned perhaps the most serious failures, those listed apropos of the human brain. Now we may place them in their proper order and quote the entire roll of the synthetic theory's failures and follow on with the general conclusion of the author:

Thus, it cannot really be said to explain the emergence of co-aptation (Cuénot) or of 'tools' (Cuénot and Tétry) based on the mutual adjustment of two independent parts. And it is hard to believe that such complex organs as the human brain really have resulted from purely fortuitous mutations. Complex organs introduce new elements, new co-ordinations, and a different architecture and organization. In order to be effective, an evolutionary mutation must adjust itself to the preceding mutation and occur at precisely the right place and time. Even large-scale pleiotropic effects are unable to account for the characteristic correlations and co-ordinations found in all living organisms. No wonder, therefore, that J.K. Kālin has called the synthetic theory a kind of 'synthetic euphoria,' and that even such eminent members of the American school as Waddington and Olson have mentioned difficulties and raised objections.<sup>73</sup>

We are finally told: "In point of fact, none of the theories we have been discussing provides an entirely satisfactory account of all the facts of evolution, particularly of the emergence of taxonomic groups and of adaptations."<sup>74</sup>

Hence from the scientific viewpoint itself Sri Aurobindo would be justified in his indifference. Besides, we have marked how the factors set in prominence by the Simpsonians can themselves acquire a different over-all meaning so as to accommodate non-physical agents: all depends on where the stress for explanation is put.

Centrally, however, what we have to understand is that Sri Aurobindo founds his perception of the evolutionary ascent of consciousness not on the current data of biology but on his vision of both involved and free Supermind. Science has provided a helpful milieu for his call upon man to evolve from the limited mental into the boundless supramental in consonance with the two earlier impossible-seeming harmonizations of opposites: the accord of apparently brute matter with sentient life and the accord of instinctive and apparently non-reasoning vitality with self-aware, nature-probing, value-questing, ever-aspiring intelligence. Sri Aurobindo is not essentially tied up with one explanation or another which science at the moment offers of changes in the organism and of species-development. Were science to deny evolution, his call to man would still go forth. But most probably there is an inner relationship between the modern evolutionist age with its emphasis on matter's configurations and the epoch of Sri Aurobindo's experiential philosophy of Supermind with its basic transforma-

tive drive, its world-acceptance and its demand for concrete results of spirituality on the material plane.

As for the problem of spirituality in general, we cannot but admit the occurrence of numberless inner "encounters", during human history, between man and what he has been convinced of as superhuman or divine realities. Sri Aurobindo is fundamentally in the line of the seers of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and the world's other scriptures. If we are to run down those seers and later mystics like St. Francis and St. Teresa, Rumi and Baha-ullah, Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi as deluded fools, we needs must keep away from Sri Aurobindo. But all these mystics were, in a high sense, empiricists, practical masters, demanding that their followers subject themselves to strict disciplines, experiment in extraordinary experiences without the aid of any drugs and go beyond hallucination or even a flash-in-the-pan mystical moment to a permanent realization which would leave them calmer, wider, deeper, sweeter, stronger. As compared to mere philosophers, they would actually merit the title of super-scientists.

Sri Aurobindo stands in very commendable company and there is no cause to accuse him, as Mr. Alvares does,<sup>75</sup> of inventing on after-thought an *ādes̄h*, a divine command from within, to lend a halo to his abrupt departure from British India in 1910. Mr. Alvares pictures him as flying perforce from imminent arrest and deportation. This is a perversion of fact. Every student of the political history of those days is aware that by a timely astute article Sri Aurobindo made arrest and deportation impossible. Nor, as Mr. Alvares suggests,<sup>76</sup> was it necessary for him to go into political exile in order to start Yoga. The experience of Nirvana—silence of the mind in the Absolute Brahman—is dated to 1908; the realization of the Cosmic Krishna—*Vāsu-deva sarvam*—came later in the same year during his detention in Alipore Jail; even the vision of what he afterwards was to call the "overhead planes" of "gnostic consciousness" began in prison. Of course, Mr. Alvares is free to look on all this as bogus, but he must at least get right his chronology of the bogus before leaping to certain historical conclusions or to "debunking" inferences.

And how ridiculous is all his talk of "the mystification of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother"<sup>77</sup> to anyone who has come into touch with either of them! Whoever has stood in Sri Aurobindo's presence can testify to its wonderful illuminative and peace-creative effect. The same applies to the one whom he put at the centre of his work: the Mother. None of the prejudicial accounts Mr. Alvares constructs can make the slightest impression on those who, like myself, have been in long contact with her profound understanding of our nature, her guiding technique of *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*, her happiness-giving radiance of look and gesture, her charmingly human blend of sympathy and irony, seriousness and wit. There was also her keen sympathy with the underdog, so that any servant could appeal to her over the head of his boss. Above all, no-one can ever forget how with her eyes and her smile she could produce an astonishing impression of beauty. Many of us perhaps carry this impression as our strongest and dearest memory of her. Possibly knowing this, Mr. Alvares has pre-

pared that phrase which marks the nadir of his bad taste: "...when she died—this must be admitted—she was one of the ugliest women in the world."<sup>78</sup> Another vulgar stroke is his joining hands with Morarji Desai in saying disparagingly that she "dressed in costly saris and used all the modern accessories of make-up".<sup>79</sup> Morarji Desai, a prudish puritanical mind with old-world ideas of spirituality, cannot be expected to understand the Mother or Sri Aurobindo. The Mother was modern and had lived once in the finest art-circles of France. Sri Aurobindo was also modern and fully approved what she did. The "costly saris", however, were never the Mother's own purchases. They were people's gifts and the givers expected her to show her appreciation by wearing them. Sometimes, in spite of her exquisite taste, she put on somewhat loud clothing just for the sake of pleasing the devoted but indiscriminate donor. She had no attachment to anything. We can appreciate the non-attachment also when we mark that, contrary to Mr. Alvares's statement, she completely dropped "the modern accessories of make-up" after "the time of Aurobindo": there was no "later" for them such as Mr. Alvares insinuates.<sup>80</sup> He shows himself irresponsible, carried away by what I have called his "blind animus".

He keeps suggesting that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo must always be split apart: "...no serious student of Aurobindo's philosophy considers the Mother's ideas as part of the sage's system."<sup>81</sup> The word "sage" is a little odd in Mr. Alvares's mocking mouth; but surely Sri Aurobindo could be no sage at all if he, when he put her side by side with himself on *darshan* days for twenty-six years, failed to see as potential in her the perversity Mr. Alvares with a super-sage vision has been able to discern. It would be, on Sri Aurobindo's part, a more than Himalayan blunder to make her not only the heart of his Ashram's Yogic activity but also the cynosure of all aspiring eyes turning everywhere in the world towards his earth-oriented, life-embracing, time-fulfilling Yoga of integral transformation of bodily existence no less than of mind and vital force by the power of the Supermind which holds the secret truth, the perfect original, of all manifested modes. From day-to-day relationship with the Mother we knew that Sri Aurobindo had her in mind when he penned those lines about the chief character of his epic *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, lines beginning with an occult yet vividly moving vision and continuing to a clear large play of luminous language:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance  
 A priestess of immaculate ecstasies  
 Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault  
 Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,  
 A heart of silence in the hands of joy  
 Inhabited with rich creative beats  
 A body like a parable of dawn  
 That seemed a niche for veiled divinity  
 Or golden temple door to things beyond.

Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;  
 Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense  
 Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight  
 Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.  
 A wide self-giving was her native act;  
 A magnanimity as of sea or sky  
 Enveloped with its greatness all that came  
 And gave a sense as of a greated world.<sup>82</sup>

Mr. Alvares will most probably make nothing of this burst of poetic inspiration. He has a rare genius for not understanding heights and depths. But more marvellous still is his genius for misunderstanding even surfaces if they are a little unusual. I shall give one supreme instance.

Charging Sri Aurobindo with "megalomania", he writes:<sup>83</sup>

Such an attitude of general superiority is radically evident in Aurobindo's claim, for example, to have written *the* perfect poetry, the future poetry. The literary critic, Mr. Nissim Ezekiel, has mercifully laid that claim to rest. What could *any* critic do when confronted with passages such as these? :

'In poetry anything can pass—for instance, my "voice of a tilted nose":

O voice of a tilted nose,  
 Speak but speak not in prose!  
 Nose like a blushing rose,  
 O Joyce of a tilted nose.

This is high poetry but put it in prose and it sounds insane.'

Mr. Alvares is convinced that Sri Aurobindo is dead serious here. But any reader can see what Sri Aurobindo is driving at. He is in one of his tomfooling moods, his warmly human bouts of humour. We have only to focus on that pun—"Joyce"—to realize the tricks the writer is up to. And, if we care to look up the context of this hilarious outburst, we shall gather at the same time how utterly lacking in a sense of humour is Mr. Alvares and how utterly absent is even a moron's perceptiveness in this self-appointed authority on literary style no less than philosophy and science. Here is the context, to which Mr. Alvares himself refers in a note.<sup>84</sup> I wrote to Sri Aurobindo:

The English reader has digested Carlyle and swallowed Meredith and is not quite unwilling to re-Joyce in even more startling strangenesses of expression at the present day. Will his stomach really turn at the novelty of that phrase which you wouldn't approve: "the voice of a devouring eye"? "The voice of an eye" sounds rather idiotic, but if the adjective "devouring" is added the phrase seems to become effective. "Devouring eye" is then a synecdoche—isolating and emphasizing Shakespeare's most remarkable quality, his eager multitudinous sight, and the oral epithet provides a connection with the idea of a voice, thus preventing the catachresis from being too startling. If Milton could give us "blind mouths" and Wordsworth



Thou Eye among the blind,  
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,  
is there very much to object to in this visioned voice?

In Sri Aurobindo's reply, the passage which Mr. Alvares has quoted came on the heels of the following:

Can't accept all that. A voice of a devouring eye is even more re-Joycingly mad than an eye pure and simple. If the English language is to go to the dogs, let it go, but the Joyce cut by the way of Bedlam does not recommend itself to me.

The poetical examples have nothing to do with the matter. Poetry is permitted to be insane—the poet and the madman go together: though even there there are limits. Meredith and Carlyle are tortuous or extravagant in their style only—though they can be perfectly sane when they want.

From Mr. Alvares's presentation of Sri Aurobindo's laughing answer we can infer one of two things. Either Mr. Alvares is deliberately dishonest and tries to distort Sri Aurobindo or else he is a dunce of the first water. Here he seems to be the latter.

As for his ideal critic, Mr. Nissim Ezekiel, I would refer Mr. Alvares—if I could believe that he was capable of a lucid spell freeing him for a moment from his peculiar schizophrenia of duncehood and dishonesty—to the article, "A Cross Critic Cross-examined", on pp. 447-72 of my book *Sri Aurobindo—the Poet*.

I must close now, but not before I illustrate most clearly an act of deliberate dishonesty by Mr. Alvares. He tells us:

The tiny town of Pondicherry is conveniently sliced into two residential units, a 'white' section and a 'black' section, by an 18-foot-broad canal called the *Quai de Gingy*. When the French ruled the roost, they occupied the white section and the local Tamils the other. The white section is bounded on the East by the sea.

When the French left in 1954, the Ashram and its inmates came to monopolize this white section (the buildings are all painted white)...<sup>85</sup>

Mr. Alvares distinctly says that white is the colour in which the buildings occupied by the Ashramites and standing in the old white section are painted. In itself the statement would be harmless and one may even surmise that somehow an impression of white was produced. But the subtle insinuation of his bracketed phrase is that the Ashramites are the successors of the once-roost-ruling French and have put themselves against the poor black Tamils whom the French must have despised and exploited. There was no need to specify the colour of houses except for the sake of that suggestion. The section was called white in the days of the French because white people lived there, not because the houses were painted white. Surely the other section was not called black because its buildings were painted black? A strong hostile hint is what Mr. Alvares is after. And its barb gets sharpened when in the course of his article he begins a sentence with: "The week I was in Pondicherry..."<sup>86</sup> We acquire the sense of an eyewitness talking. Yet the fact remains that, from long before the French ceased to be the rulers of Pondicherry, the buildings owned by

the Ashram and its inmates have been blue-grey and the houses rented by them brick-coloured.

It is possible that at some distance the blue-grey, acted upon by the sun over years, may look whitish in the exposed parts. But what about the unexposed parts and those buildings whose colour has not faded enough and especially the buildings which have had—as all do have at some time or other—their coat of blue-grey renewed? A survey of the several phases of one and the same colour, which is never pure white, must prevent one from making a statement like Mr. Alvares's. To make such a statement, in spite of the unmistakable varied evidence before one, is to stand convicted of deliberately distorting the truth.

Or else one is so careless an observer that one lets oneself be carried away by the whitish appearance of some houses and never uses one's eyes to make a correct all-round appraisal. The conclusions of an observer of this type, even if honest, are worthless and lead one to disvalue his testimony in other matters, too. If Mr. Alvares really believes all Ashram houses to be painted white, he is a poor witness to the state of the Ashram and of Pondicherry. But can we write him off with a bit of pity as an innocent myopic? Everywhere in his account of the Ashram's activities in the town he claims acuity of observation and judicial perceptiveness. Can we let him off here as having slipped somehow just in one place? This is hardly possible. For, having visited or at least looked at the main complex of buildings which is technically known as the Ashram, the complex within which there are the Samadhi and the house of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as the Meditation Hall, he could not have missed seeing from the Ashram gate a huge house diagonally opposite the Ashram block and painted yellow because it was not an Ashram property. (At present it is and has the typical blue-grey.) In spite of seeing it he could write that the Ashram has *monopolized* the old white section of the town. It should be obvious that he is bent on falsifying facts. How then shall we excuse him for the whiteness ascribed to the Ashram buildings? Here is a case of wilful mendacity no less than of pushing forward a minor aspect like colour with malice prepense.

Nor is it only one building in the old white section that was a non-Ashram property when Mr. Alvares paid his visit to Pondicherry. The Indian Government House and various Government offices, the Town Hall, the town hospital, the public library, the courts, the two biggest banks, several Roman Catholic institutions, the Institut Français of Indology, a number of non-Ashram hotels, several shops, many non-Ashram families both Indian and European—all these have been for years in the section "bounded on the East by the sea". To generalize that the Ashram and its inmates have monopolized this section is a gross exaggeration, a "terminological inexactitude", as Churchill would have ironically said, on a grand scale.

A third calculated inaccuracy is the glaring implication that no Ashramites or Ashram activities are to be found on the West side of the canal. Scores of followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have their houses there. I lived for 10 years on that side. An Ashram restaurant and guest-house are also just beyond the canal.

Neither is it in the least true that, as Mr. Alvares reports,<sup>87</sup> all local people on the west of the canal live in "pretty gruesome conditions". Some of the richest Tamil families have their fine houses there. And can we speak of the long varied market-place, which is beyond the canal, as all subsisting in conditions that are pretty gruesome? Mr. Alvares makes statements too sweeping for a week's tourist. Perhaps he could not find out enough. But then he should have held his peace.

About the East side, however, he has gone out of his way venomously to babble nonsense in order to put the Ashram in the wrong box. And this kind of "ulterior motive" creating mischief by twisting truth or withholding inconvenient facts is at play in different forms all over the article. I was present during many an event he reports and my direct testimony negates the conclusions he tries to draw. He has not attempted to weigh things in the balance: he has just run amuck. But his running amuck is actually no more than "sound and fury, signifying nothing"—"nothing" in a non-challenging and non-regenerative connotation that Heidegger would have been ashamed to have encouraged in this world of "being-in-time".

"Being-in-time": the expression is a most meaningful one to end with, for it is on the temporal existence that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother concentrated whatever perfection of Eternity, whatever power of Supermind, they could reach and draw earthward, hoping with their high and happy light to convert into Superman even such resistant material as Mr. Alvares.

K. D. SETHNA

#### NOTES

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4. P. 20, col. 1
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