

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JANUARY 1977

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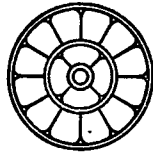
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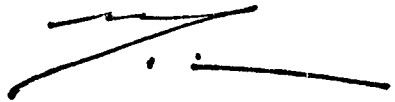


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXIX

No. I

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

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## A NEW-YEAR'S PRAYER

LIKE a lotus bud, on palms outstretched, I offer  
Each coming day, at dawn, to You.  
Dedicated to Your sweet Care of us—  
Anxieties fade, as in the warm sun the dew.

The troubled heart, the weighted mind  
Awaiting fulfilment, the anxious fears,  
Each rough like the feel of a prayer-bead,  
Offered to You, are Felicity instead of tears.

Take then, I plead, to keep within Thy clasp,  
Each of my loved ones' faces I turn towards Thee.  
My beggar-bowl is eager for just one Mothered "Today",  
Let the future be full of just such "Todays" for me.

MINNIE N. CANTEENWALLA

## WORDS OF THE MOTHER

AFTER all, what is freedom? To go about doing whatever you like? But do you know what is “you”? Do you know what is your own will? Do you know what comes from you and what comes from elsewhere? Well, if you had a strong will I could have allowed you to work. But it is not like that; it is only impulses that move you and they are also not your own. They come from outside and make you do all sorts of stupid things. You fall in the hands of the Rakshasas. First they make you do stupid things and then they laugh. If you have a strong will, if your will, your impulses and all else were centred around the psychic, then and then alone can you have some taste of liberty and freedom; otherwise you are a slave.

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Devotion is love and respect plus consecration. Without self-giving there is no love. But self-giving is very, very rare in human love which is full of selfishness. Even a baby's love is quite selfish, because it asks for something in exchange, but the so-called human love is much worse. It only wants to possess its object. Devotion is much superior to human love. It is the first step towards self-giving.

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Your observation is very crude. No rule can be laid down about the suggestions and voices coming from “within”. Your “within” may mean anything. You must train your observation and try to distinguish between the sources from which the suggestions come. The voice or the suggestion may come from your own subconscious or it may come from something higher. If you know from where it comes, then you can decide whether you should follow it or not.

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1=The One; 2=Decision for Creation; 3=Beginning of Creation; 4=Manifestation; 5=Power; 6=Creation; 7=Realisation; 8=Occult Formation; 9=Power of Static Fulfilment; 10=Power of Expression; 11=Progress; 12=Perfect Manifestation Stabilised.

\*  
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I want people to be happy when they are here, otherwise they cannot have the full advantage.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of September 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 22, 1957

The following story was narrated by Mother during a "Friday Class".

THIS evening I am going to read to you a short story which seemed to me quite instructive. It is a tale of olden times, of what used to happen before there were printing presses and books, of the days when only the Guru or the Initiate had the knowledge and did not give it except to those he considered worthy of having it. And for him, usually, "to be worthy" of having it meant *putting into practice* what one had learnt. He gave you a truth and expected that you would practise it. And when you had practised it, he agreed to give you another.

Now things happen quite differently. Everybody and anybody at all can have a book, read it right through and he is quite free to practise it or not as it pleases him. All this is very well, but it creates a certain confusion in many minds, and those who have read many books think that that's enough and that all sorts of miraculous things should happen to them because they have read many books, and that they don't need to take the trouble of practising. So they become impatient and say: "How is it that though I have read all this I am still just the same person—have the same difficulties, haven't any realisation?" Such remarks I hear very often.

They forget one important thing, that they have obtained the knowledge—intellectual, mental knowledge—before having merited it, that is, before having put into practice what they have read, and that naturally there is a clashing between their state of consciousness and the ideas, the knowledge they can speak about at leisure but which they haven't practised.

So it is for the impatient ones that I am going to read this story, to tell you how things happened in the days of old when there was not a book to be had nor the possibility of reading the book, when one depended upon the Guru or the Initiate to get the knowledge which he alone had; he had received it from another Guru, another Initiate, and he transmitted it to you when it pleased him, that is, when he found you

worthy of having it.

So here's my story (*Mother reads*):

A STORY OF INITIATION  
(Translated from the Gujarati)

Once upon a time there was a Mahatma who was a great ascetic and pandit. He was honoured by all, full of years and wisdom. His name was Junun. Many young boys, many young men used to come to him to receive initiation. They stayed in his hermitage, became pandits themselves, then returned home after a long and studious retreat.

One day a young man came to him. His name was Yusuf Hussein. The Mahatma wished to keep him there quite close to himself without even asking who he was. Four years went by thus, when one morning Junun sent for Yusuf and for the first time questioned him: "Why have you come here?" Without further thought Yusuf answered: "To receive religious initiation." Junun said nothing. He called a servant and asked him: "Have you prepared the box as I had asked you?"

"Yes, Master it is there quite ready."

"Bring it without further delay," said Junun.

With great care the servant placed the box before the Mahatma. The latter took it and gave it to Yusuf: "I have a friend who lives down there on the banks of the river Neela. Go and take this box to him from me. But take good care, brother, don't make any mistake on the way. Keep this box carefully with you and give it to its appointed recipient. When you come back I shall give you initiation." Yet once again the Mahatma repeated his advice and described the route Yusuf had to follow to reach the river Neela. Yusuf bowed down at his guru's feet, took the box and started on his way.

The retreat where the Mahatma's friend lived was quite far away and in those days there were no carriages or railways. So Yusuf walked. He walked the whole morning, then the afternoon came. The heat was intense and radiated everywhere. He felt tired. Hence he sat down in the shade of an old tree by the roadside to rest a little. The box was very small, and not locked. Besides, Yusuf had not even taken care to observe that. His guru had told him to carry a box to his friend, and he had started off without asking another question.

But now, during the afternoon resting time, Yusuf began to think. His mind was quite at leisure with nothing to occupy it...Very rare would it be if in such cases the idea of some foolishness did not cross the mind...Thus his eyes fell on the box. He began to look at it. "Quite a pretty little box!...Why, it seems not to be locked even ... And how light it is! Can it be that there is anything inside? So light... Perhaps it is empty?" Yusuf stretched his hand as though to open it. Suddenly he thought better of it: "But no....Full or empty, whatever there be in this box is not my concern. My guru has asked me to take it to his friend, just that. And that's all that concerns me. I



ought not to think of anything else.”

For some time Yusuf remained quietly seated there. But his mind would not remain quiet. The box was still there before his eyes. A pretty little box. “It seems quite empty,” he thought, “what harm would there be in opening an empty box? If it had been locked I would understand, that would be bad.... A box which is not even locked, that’s not very serious. I’ll just open it for a moment and then shut it again.”

Yusuf’s thought turned round and round that box. It was impossible to control this idea that had slid into him. “Let us see, only a quick glance, just a glance.” Once again he stretched out his hand, drew it back yet once more, then sat still. All in vain. Finally Yusuf made up his mind and gently, very gently, he opened the box. Hardly had he opened it than pfft! a little mouse jumped out and disappeared. The poor mouse all stifled in its box did not lose a second in leaping to freedom!

Yusuf was quite abashed. He opened his eyes wide and gazed and gazed.... The box lay there empty. Then his heart began beating sadly: “So, the Mahatma had sent only a mouse, a tiny little mouse. and I couldn’t even carry it safe and sound to its destination. Indeed I have made a serious mistake. What shall I do now?”

Yusuf was full of regrets. But there was nothing left to do now. In vain he went round the tree, in vain he looked at the road. The little mouse had indeed fled.... With a trembling hand Yusuf closed the lid and in blank dismay resumed his journey.

When he reached the river Neela and the house of his master’s friend, Yusuf held out the Mahatma’s present to him and waited silently in a corner because of the mistake he had made. This man was a great saint. He opened the box and immediately understood what had happened. “Well, Yusuf,” he said, turning to the young aspirant, “you have lost that mouse, then...Mahatma Junun won’t give you initiation, I am afraid, for in order to be worthy of the supreme Knowledge one must have a perfect mastery over one’s mind. Your Master had evidently a little doubt about your will-power, that is why he had recourse to this little trick, to test you. And if you are not able to accomplish so insignificant a thing as to keep a little mouse in a box, how do you expect to keep great thoughts in your head, the true Knowledge in your heart? There is nothing insignificant, Yusuf. Return to your Master. Learn steadiness of character, perseverance. Be worthy of trust so as to become one day the true disciple of that great Soul.”

Crestfallen, Yusuf returned to the Mahatma and confessed his fault. “Yusuf,” he said, “you have lost a wonderful opportunity. I gave you just a worthless mouse to take care of and you couldn’t do even that! How then do you expect to keep the most precious of all treasures, the divine Truth? For that you must have self-control.... Go and learn. Learn to be master of your mind, for without that nothing great can be accomplished.”

Yusuf went away ashamed, head down, and thence forward he had but one thought: to become master of himself....For years and years he made tireless efforts, he underwent a hard and difficult tapasya, and finally succeeded in becoming master of his nature. Then, full of trust Yusuf went back to his Master. The Mahatma

was overjoyed to see him again and find him ready. And it was thus that Yusuf received from Mahatma Junun the great initiation.

Years went by, Yusuf grew great in wisdom and mastery. He became one of the rarest and greatest of the saints of Islam.

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(*Mother speaks to the children*) So, it is to tell you that one must not be impatient, that one must understand that in order really to possess knowledge, whatever it may be, one must put it into practice, that is, master one's nature so as to be able to express this knowledge in action.

All of you who have come here have been told many things; you have been put in touch with a world of truth, you live right inside it, the air you breathe is full of it; and yet how few amongst you know that these truths are valuable only if they are put into practice, and that it is useless to talk of consciousness, knowledge, equality of soul, universality, infinity, eternity, the supreme truth the divine presence and...of all sorts of things like that, if you make no effort yourselves to *live* these things and feel them concretely within you. And don't tell yourselves: "Oh! I have been here so many years! Oh! I would very much like to have the result of my efforts!" You must know that very persistent efforts, a very unyielding endurance are necessary to master the least weakness, the least pettiness, the least meanness in one's nature. What is the use of talking about divine love if one can't love without egoism? What is the good of talking about immortality if one is stubbornly attached to the past and the present and if one does not want to give anything in order to receive everything.

You all are still very young, but you must learn *right away* that to reach the goal you must know how to pay the price, and that to understand the supreme truths you must put them into practice in your daily life.

*Voilà.*

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# DO OUTER NECESSITIES BLOCK THE WAY TO INNER REALISATION?

## FROM A TALK OF THE MOTHER

At the beginning of my present earthly existence I came into contact with many people who said that they had a great inner aspiration, an urge towards something deeper and truer, but that they were tied down, subjected, slaves to that brutal necessity of earning their living, and that this weighed them down so much, took up so much of their time and energy that they could not engage in any other activity, inner or outer. I heard this very often, I saw many poor people—I don't mean poor from the monetary point of view, but poor because they felt imprisoned in a material necessity, narrow and deadening.

I was very young at that time, and I always used to tell myself that if ever I could do it, I would try to create a little world—oh! quite a small one, but still...a small world where people would be able to live without having to be preoccupied with food and lodging and clothing and the imperative necessities of life, so as to see whether all the energies freed by this certainty of a secure material living would turn spontaneously towards the divine life and the inner realisation.

Well, towards the middle of my life—at least, what is usually the middle of a human life—the means was given to me and I could realise this, that is, create such conditions of life. And I have come to this conclusion, that it is *not* this necessity which hinders people from consecrating themselves to an inner realisation, but that it is a dullness, a *tamas*, a lack of aspiration, a miserable laxity, an I-don't-care attitude, and that those who face even the hardest conditions of life are sometimes the ones who react most and have the intensest aspiration.

That's all. I am waiting for the contrary to be proved to me.

I would very much like to see the contrary but I haven't yet seen it. As there are many energies which are not utilised, since this terrible compulsion of having something to eat or a roof to sleep under or clothes on one's back does not exist—as one is sure of all that—there is a whole mass of energies which are not utilised for that; well, they are spent in idle stupidities. And of these, the foolishness which seems to me the most disastrous is to keep one's tongue going: chatter, chatter, chatter. I haven't known a place where they chatter more than here, and say everything they should not say, busy themselves with things they should not be concerned with. And I know it is merely an overflow of unused energy.

That is all.

May 30, 1956

# UDAR REMEMBERS

## VIII

THE following two stories will show how sometimes what we consider to be virtues are, in a spiritual vision, mere stupidities. This is because the virtues generally stem from our moral and ethical concepts which arise from a high mental vision but are limited even at their highest, within that range of sight; whereas a spiritual vision goes much beyond it and looks from a high summit of the Truth, unhampered by mental limits. Both stories illustrate the same point, the virtue of humility.

There was once a rich American lady who had financed a visit to India of a team of small-scale industry-machine manufacturers to demonstrate, in an exhibition, several machines which would be very useful. I went to Madras to see the exhibition when it was set up there and found it of much interest. I had a special visit arranged by a good friend who was then the American Consul at Madras. Later, my friend suggested that I invite the lady and some members of her team to visit the Ashram. He had himself visited the Ashram and was sure that she would be greatly impressed by what she would see there, and would perhaps make a substantial offering to the Mother. So I invited the lady. She accepted to come on a visit.

After a few days she arrived with some members of her team and I took them all to the Mother and showed them around the Ashram. They seemed to be very happy with what they saw. The lady, in particular, seemed much impressed as I arranged for her to meet some of our poets, she herself having pretensions to write poetry.

Then, at the end of a long day, when the group was ready to go back to Madras, the lady asked me of her own if it would be in order for her to leave some money for the Ashram. I assured her that it was very much in order though I did not mention that it was perhaps the main purpose of my invitation. Then she opened her purse and gave me *five rupees*. I was really shocked and also hurt as I saw at once that it was as a tip to a guide that perhaps she gave this five-rupee note. And because I was hurt I wanted to refuse it and say to her: "No, I think you better keep it as your need is greater than ours."

But I refrained both from refusing to take it and from saying what I wanted to say. I felt within me that I had no right to refuse. The money, however little it was, was offered to the Mother. How could I refuse to take it just because my pride was hurt? So I took it graciously and mumbled some thanks. Then later in the evening when I went to the Mother, I told Her the whole story and gave Her the note, really expecting a nice pat on my back for the control of my tongue and for accepting the note. But She was furious with me. She threw away the note and said She did not want it. The truth was that the words which had come to me to say to the lady had been put into me by the Mother Herself, and my stupid humility had stopped me.

The next story also concerns a rich, a very rich American lady. This lady had as a spiritual guide a family parson. This parson had been a student of Sri Aurobindo's

Yoga and was very much interested to come to the Ashram and stay there for some time. So he persuaded the rich lady to set up a programme of a six-months' visit to the Ashram. Rooms had been booked for them at our finest Guest House and all the best arrangements made that were possible. The lady with her parson landed first at Calcutta which was then passing through a very difficult time. When she saw the abject poverty of the people and the surrounding dirt that such poverty generates, she was shocked and is supposed to have said: "How can there be any spirituality in a country where such conditions are permitted to exist? I will go back. I do not want to stay here." But apparently her parson persuaded her to come to Pondicherry saying that things would be a lot different at the Ashram. So they came; but she was already very embittered and, being quite a spoilt child with all her wealth, she found nothing right anywhere in spite of all that had been done to make her comfortable. She wanted to return the same day but, as it was already late, had to spend the night at our Guest House. The next morning she was determined to leave and apparently her parson was not able to dissuade her except that he may have succeeded in getting her to stop at the Ashram on her way so that at least he could himself go to the Samadhi.

I had heard all this story as it had been going round the Ashram, with many embellishments perhaps but basically in a correct form. I had not met the lady but just at that time I myself was going to the Samadhi and I saw the car outside, with a lady sitting in it, a bitter grim look on her face. So I guessed that this was the person concerned. Then an idea entered my head to go up to the car, stand beside the car-door near which she was sitting, and say to her in a very grave and solemn voice, in my best actor manner of a prophet of doom, the great words of Jesus Christ: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

But I refrained, saying to myself within: "What business is it of yours? Do not try to be a missionary. This is just the kind of things they say. Leave her to her bitterness." And I walked on to the Samadhi.

Later in the day, when I recounted all this to the Mother more as a pleasantery than anything serious, the Mother again became furious with me. She said "Udar! I put those words into your head and your stupid humility stopped you. Do you know that the lady's whole life would have been changed just by hearing those words? Really, Udar, you have been very stupid and I am not pleased. You have lost a great opportunity for opening her to me." I was really downcast as I saw the immensity of my folly. I can only beat my breast and say "Toba! Toba!" and I can retell the story with the hope that it may prevent someone else being as stupid as I was that morning, having

Replaced by a manufactured virtue and vice  
The frank spontaneous impulse of the soul.

*Savitri*, Book II Canto VII

## MY STORY—A TURN OF THE WHEEL

A TALK OF 1971 BY LT.-COL. G. L. BHATTACHARYA

Friends,

A few days ago the Ashram Notice Board displayed a programme of talks to be given to participants of an Orissa Youth Camp group then visiting. There was to be a talk on Sri Aurobindo in his daily life by Nirodbaran.

The lecturer's name sounded pleasant; the subject matter, quite unknown to me, was of abiding interest to my wife. The time was 3 p.m., rather hot in the sun at the end of March. I went by myself.

Nirodbaran's appearance and performance intrigued me. I had expected a Bengali gentleman, Tagorelike, with long hair, perhaps a flowing beard, gentle, with dreamy eyes. Instead I found one who looked like a soldier of the Assam Regiment in 'mufti'. Bright, alert eyes, constantly moving round the room, hands restless, toying with a paperweight on the table, he began by provoking everyone with the language problem! He made everyone awake fully, and then started regaling us with humorous anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo, deeply personal, intimate, human. He made Sri Aurobindo live before us, a most lovable personality. Yet he rounded up his examples, linked them into a chain, and brought out the significance and relevance of the incidents to the ordinary mortal.

For me, as to many of his listeners, the talk was too short. It was no more than a glimpse of the Divine lighting up the daily routine of life with a change in emphasis, into beauty, purposefulness, harmony and joy.

After a few days I espied him walking towards the Ashram gate. I overtook and accosted him. He turned about, glared at the stranger but kindly agreed to give me an appointment at 3 p.m. I went to see him, introduced myself and wanted to know if my wife and I could come and hear a little more from him about Sri Aurobindo.

I found Nirodbaran had a habit of keeping disconcertingly quiet and then starting off with pointed questions. He asked me about Calcutta, almost blamed me for not doing anything to put things right, wanted me to meet leaders of "Sri Aurobindo's Action". I promised politely and got him to agree to give us anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo.

Next day at 3 p.m. my wife and I came, hoping to hear a few more stories of Sri Aurobindo. He did not seem to be in the mood. Instead, he asked me pointedly to give a talk to his students about myself. He was satisfied that it would not be a waste of time. Of course, he left me the option of not agreeing. There could be only one answer to such a man.

So here I am at his orders. Do not blame me if I fail in my hope to entertain you. I shall speak about how I came to the Ashram before 1961, of my capture by the Pakistani army on 4th April 1961, my detention and jail life, Sri Aurobindo's writings, how I came by them and what they have meant to me.

We tend to generalise from individual experience. So I shall stick to mine and give you my own versions of everything. It is my story—but it is connected with the Ashram.

## I

As I look back on my past, I feel as if a firm, gentle, powerful Hand moulded the events of my life so that they form into a pattern. Particularly my misfortunes and whatever I had disliked were my real friends, not withstanding the anguish they had caused me at the time—I was a professional soldier by choice from 1941.

In about June 1948, while posted at Army Headquarters, New Delhi, I had to visit Avadi near Madras. We had a boy about one year old. He was very interesting, as children of that age are, and I was very attached to him as new fathers are. So when my wife said she would accompany me, I was very happy. My wife's cousin was on a visit from Calcutta. She joined us. We made a nice party and came to Madras.

Here, suddenly, my wife said that I could go to Avadi and carry out my official duties but she, her cousin and the boy would go to Pondicherry. It was a bomb-shell to me—but then my wife, possibly like all wives, has the gift of being unusual to her husband. I had no idea of the significance of Pondicherry to her. She told me then that she had known about Sri Aurobindo from her student days at Lahore from Mrs. Chattopadhyaya, her Principal at Sir Ganga Ram College during her B. T. Unknown to me, she had arranged her visit to the Ashram through Dr. Indra Sen who had known her from her childhood. She had the Mother's permission.

To me Pondicherry was a foreign territory, a French settlement. As soldiers we were then having the Hyderabad problem on our hands. I had then no knowledge of Sri Aurobindo or of the Ashram, nor did I know anything of the Mother.

So when my wife told me all this at Madras my heart sank. I asked her whether it was not too early. You see, we had been married only five years before, in 1943. I thought she was leaving me for good and I knew I had not made the grade. She had much interest in our Scriptures, had read the Upanishads and many other books. I, on the other hand, had made a "plan" of my life in which I was to begin studying religion at the age of 45. In any case, I used to tell her I was still certain to go to heaven, gripping a corner of her "sari", as she was such a good Hindu and, fortunately for me, my wife. You see I used to irritate her much.

I, however, dropped her at Pondicherry, with my son and her cousin, went back the next day *via* Madras to Avadi, and then to my job at Delhi, fairly fed up.

Alone in Delhi, I missed my son intensely. I took leave. I got a free ticket to Pondicherry after declaring it as my home station. I had no home as such anywhere and officially I used to call myself an Indian with no organised religion. So there was no sense of 'moral' guilt. I did not inform my wife of my coming but longed to meet my son.

I reached the Pondicherry railway station at dawn on 15th August 1948. I had no idea of the spiritual significance of the day. I did not find my family

in their room, a ground-floor place, where Shri Prodyot Bhattacharya now lives. Someone told me that they had gone for 'Balcony Darshan'. Someone else directed me to a road. I knew nothing of the Balcony Darshan given by the Mother. I saw a gathering of pleasant, cheerful and cleanly dressed men, women and a few children. I could pick out my son being held up by a lady. I went and took him in my arms. Then Nilima, my wife's cousin, asked me to wait for the Mother's Darshan. In about five minutes, I caught a glimpse of a figure in white on a balcony. There was an atmosphere of joy and childlike cheerfulness all round. The figure stood for a while. Then the Mother went back. The Balcony Darshan ended.

After explanations were over, I found my wife rather pleased with me. So that was something. I went out for a walk along the sea. On my return, my wife told me that her cousin and she were going to the big Darshan, where they would see Sri Aurobindo as well as the Mother. Casually, typical of her, my wife said I could also come along if I wanted. Out of politeness to her feelings, I said that most certainly I would, displaying the repaired husbandly co-operative attitude.

I saw people ahead of me in a very disciplined manner, standing before Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, bowing, turning left, so that others could follow and have their chance.

When my turn came, I was taken completely aback. In my childhood I had read in the Mahabharata about our Sages. I saw a silent, still figure looking at me, the lower lip as if in a gentle smile, eyes a little humorous. The body was light-golden, well built, a white dignified beard, a majestic personality, near yet far. The Mother's eyes I could not see—they seemed covered—my attention for that very short time was on Sri Aurobindo.

Here there was no superficiality. There was an eloquent stillness, a warmth, a glow.

The memory of the Darshan granted to me so gracefully and kindly, the image of the majestic figure, that draws tears and brings out deep reverence from within, remain ever fresh. Dignity and kindness, a holiness that was friendly, a touch of sweet humour in the face ever-living.

I had a glorious and restful holiday. The atmosphere was one of freedom—I was particularly struck by the frank, free, courteous speech and movements of the Ashram inmates, particularly the women.

I asked a gentleman once, respectfully, as I was walking in the evening with him, what he did for reading. He was then carrying a rather thick volume and showed it to me. I did not find a single picture in it. It was *The Life Divine*, Vol. I. I returned it to him promptly with thanks.

However, the next day or so, I went to the Library. And here in the first room, on a top shelf in an almirah I was most pleased to see a few novels by P. G. Wodehouse. Some of them had Sri Aurobindo's name written inside! Here was a Sage of my liking, I felt—one who also admitted P. G. Wodehouse into his scheme of things.

In the mornings there used to be Pranams to the Mother. In single file devotees



would proceed, take a turn to one side, stand in front of Her, bow, open out their palms and receive a flower from the Mother who used to hold a medium-sized plate in her lap. Then they would take again a turn in the right direction and pass out. The general atmosphere was always charmingly pleasant and sweetly innocent.

Being used to drills, I followed the procedure. Once I duly bowed, opened my palms, fully ready to close them after the flower had been dropped, but lo! nothing happened. Rather puzzled, I looked up into amused deeply bluish-violet eyes. I felt very shy. But I bowed again my head, and then the open palms got their reward.

On another occasion my wife told the Mother about her accommodation where she was having some difficulty with our son. There was a flashing smile, a pat on the head and in exactly 24 hours she found herself moved to an airy and spacious flat.

These and many other incidents of 1948—like the Mother playing tennis, then going to the playground and later returning to her room—remained permanently inscribed in my memory.

Thinking that it would please my wife I purchased the entire works of Sri Aurobindo as available in 1948. It cost me only Rs. 150/- or so. I felt that with all these books to read, particularly *The Life Divine*, my wife would not need to come to Pondicherry for some time at any rate. I left. She returned home after a few more months.

That was in 1948. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were gracious and kind to me.

Blind as I was I did not turn to their books even afterwards. Their precious riches remained unknown to me. I made the usual excuses to my wife: I would wait till I became 45, I had professional work, and so on. Nor did my wife insist.

Then in 1961, the Mother decided to get tough with me. By then I was professionally very successful; had been considered “outstanding” to “Above Average” in my annual reports and was a substantive Lt.-Col from 1958. I was stationed in Calcutta. I was carrying out very interesting Intelligence Duties. I had lots of free scope, because of support from my superiors who were very pleased with me.

On 4th April 1961, my wife wanted to see a picture and gave me money to purchase tickets for a 3 p.m. show. I did the needful. At 1 p.m., for professional reasons, I left Calcutta on my own initiative and responsibility. I returned after four and a half years. My wife met me in jail after one year.

## 2

At about 4.30 p.m. on 4th April 1961 near the border between West Bengal and East Pakistan I got involved in some shooting. I found too many Pakistanis unexpectedly against me—about ten with rifles and Sten Guns. My pistol was inadequate. Something, the duty of an officer to his subordinate, flashed through me. I went forward after directing my subordinate to run away. He was saved. I got shot at, surrounded, overwhelmed, captured.

Permit me to give no further details, as these belong to my Government.

I, however, shall give you some conclusions:

(a) I was considered efficient and clever for years up to 4th April '61. After that I was considered a fool. Success had brought me praise; failure brought its own condemnation; I, however, remained the same—yet growing by experience.

(b) I found the distance between success and failure to be 30 years or so! I had advanced 30 years more than planned—I could have become successful with less, had I not gone another 30 years.

(c) I had taken on many earlier occasions greater risks and less precautions. Yet here I clearly lost. Incidents do not happen only through omissions or commissions, however much we may indulge in ratiocination.

(d) Lastly, I assure you this incident happened on our side of the border. In fact, all the shooting happened to injure me as I was not going in as deep as was desired by some.

(e) What was defeat to me was victory to another human being. It was so peculiar.

These reflections would come with many variations and much anguish; I would many times re-live, step by step, stage by stage, as if I could turn the clock back—there was much suffering.

My bullet injuries were not deep. The kidney was missed. I was flown to Dacca on 5th April.

Here I was kept in a room till 10th November '61 — about seven months. I was carefully guarded by 45 men under an officer and a J.C.O. There used to be a sentry at the door, one at the barbed wire window, one at the bathroom window. Three pairs of watchful eyes looking at one for months is trying and unpleasant.

The interrogation was an interesting experience. It lasted for about three weeks. I saw miracles happen. The whole thing took a direction which saved everything. My Government, rightly, had no great apprehensions. Somehow I experienced no fear. I was sincere and loyal to my country. Something moulded events; something strengthened and guided me. It was through me—but it was untrue to say I was myself so clever. I could have been broken; only it just did not happen.

I was now 43 years; two years before my target, religious books were the only ones I received. The only book allowed was the Bible at my request. They would not give me any writing material. I must have read the Bible hundreds of times. I used to keep fit by walking one and a half miles morning and evening inside my room. Sixty turns used to make a mile. The first sixty used to be the most difficult.

The Bible was useful and fascinating. I would read some hymns cursing the enemy; that took care of my anger at the continued detention. Then there was the history in the old Testament—lastly, Jesus who soothed, and I used to try and bless my enemy. So all moods could be suitably exercised. The Bible kept alive defiance, faith and charity in me.

So much for the hard knock. Then sometime in July/August 1961 I fell ill. The floor was always damp, moisture used to seep in from below. I got breathing trouble. I wrote to the General about my health and suggested I might be "finished

off” instead of being subjected to the slow mental and physical restrictions. Doctors examined me soon after and I was told that I was to be allowed to “sit on a chair on the verandah” from 9 to 11 a.m.—two hours a day.

It was with great excitement that I looked forward to 9 a.m. on the first day when I could go out! The Army bell struck nine. A junior officer came with his revolver out. They used to be very nervous about me. I told him not to get agitated: I wouldn't run away. Nevertheless he conducted me out. There was an easy-chair. I was to sit—not to move or stand. One sentry was ready with his loaded rifle behind; another 20 yards in front; next to me on a chair my young friend with his revolver. An absurd setting but I did not bother. The heart was singing.

I sat down and put my hand out to touch the sun. It was sweet and warm—something so wonderful yet something I had taken for granted for so many years. There was a flower-pot—I touched a green leaf, I remember a gentle shiver. There was a ceiling above me so I could not see the sky. It was later during my trial that I could once persuade my Pakistani Army Major to let me have a look at the stars and the moon—under escort just outside—and it was so beautiful.

So you see I learnt the charming friendship of the sun's touch, the tender friendship of a leaf and was moved to grateful wonder at renewed acquaintance with the starry sky—and a half-moon floating in the clear autumn night of Bengal. Riches that cost no money.

In September 1961 my trial began. After I had declared my innocence in open court and after I had defended myself for about five days, our Government insisted that I have an Indian Counsel. I told the Deputy High Commissioner that it would be a waste of my country's money as they had planned to convict me in retaliation for a similar treatment of some senior Pakistani officer by an Indian Court in Kashmir. Yet he insisted and since the trial was *in camera* I thought the Government probably was worried for some disloyalty on my part or of my having confessed, etc.,—either of which could have happened. So I agreed and applied as directed. I also had a purpose.

One Mr. Ghattak came. I insisted on seeing him at my place for consultation. I had previously applied and got a Pakistani Major of my own Army ostensibly to help my defence—but frankly so that I could talk to someone. Please remember that after my interrogation in April '61, for over four months I had talked only to myself, trying to apply the technique of Richard. The Pakistani Major was to be present during the interview. He was very respectful to me.

After discussions, I showed Mr. Ghattak to the toilet and passed on to him a short sweet sentence which I made him repeat. I knew why he had come. My purpose was achieved. The case mattered nothing then.

Before leaving, Mr. Ghattak said he was going to Calcutta to get further legal advice (really to convey my message). He told me that he would see my wife, and asked me if he could bring anything. I said he must tell my wife the truth as to what could happen to me. He said, “Maximum 14 years.” I was first taken aback; then laughed and said, “Please tell my wife, now I shall have time to read *The Life Divine* Please

bring it from her." He agreed.

He returned on 12th September and the following day at Court he gave me *The Life Divine*, Vol. 1, and *Gitanjali* in Bengali, which I had read only in English and, I think, Tagore's *Balaka* in Bengali.

On return from Court I started on *The Life Divine*—and it just enveloped me. I read it with a thrill greater than what I used to experience reading Agatha Christie. I enjoyed the questions posed; the answers given; the development of the theme—the summing up. I was being taught by a wonderful teacher; he framed, in more apt words, my own questions. He answered in language which lit up what was within me. He summarized clearly for me stage by stage and I forgot my sorrow, I forgot my bother. I was in a world of happiness.

The trial ended—my daily outings stopped. But now I was so contented that, apart from exercises, I even asked for and got a pack of cards. After dinner I used to play contract bridge alone—call all the four hands, using different voices. I used to play and keep the score for all the voices for exactly one hour every evening. Then I would turn to *The Life Divine*. It had no end then for me, as apart from the general theme, which was so extraordinary to me, I had deliberately put question-marks at individual doubtful places but had carried on. So I could come back again and again, read and re-read. And every time I found something I had missed earlier.

By this time I had an Exercise Book given to me all duly paged so that nothing would be misused to send secrets. I found that writing passages out, copying extracts, helped in enjoying the book more.

On 10th November at about 10 p.m. four or five officers ordered the door to be opened and came to see me. They were Lt.-Cols and Majors. I was told I was to go away the following day.

On 11th November I was told that my articles, a few letters, exercise books, etc., would be sent on later through I.B. No one would tell me where I was to go. Release? Acquittal? Anyhow, I put on the same clothes I had worn on 4th April '61, requested for and carried with me *The Life Divine* Vol. 1, then heavily underlined in many places, as I felt I could spend hours without any other book just reading and re-reading what I liked in it. This book was my dearest friend and my only companion.

I was taken to Court. I was sentenced to 8 years' rigorous imprisonment. I told the Judge that the evidence against me was based on falsehood, forgery and fraud—and this was so. He said I could appeal. I was taken to Dacca Central Jail. I bade good-bye to my Army Escort. Inside, someone wanted to see if I had a blade in my shoe. The greatest tragedy, however, was that the jailer took away my book for censoring by I.B. as per Rules.

So I entered jail friendless. I was located in a place called Old Hajat, till then occupied by Security Prisoners who had been moved to make room for me. Eight convicts, experts in murders and dacoities, were to be with me to take care of me from within—to be there. I was to be in one part of a big hall and they in another part. There

was an open door to separate the parts. I did not know then that they were to watch me at night within the barred room, nor that they would soon become my friends.

Anyhow, here were trees, flowers, the open sky and more space. I was happy at the location. I was told I could move about within with some wardens. It was a jail within a jail and I was alone. I had on the first day nothing to read. I was duly locked in at about 5-30 p.m. Before that, a lot of food was brought in. There was a dim light as night descended in my room. Disgusted I stood on my head—for a while. The food was cold and very spicy and smelt of fish.

The next day, I was told that my books could not be given to me early because of censorship regulations—but I could take books from the Jail Library. A handwritten catalogue was brought. There I saw the Bengali *Gitar Bhumika* by Sri Aurobindo.

I had no idea of the Gita—but I knew Sri Aurobindo. So I began with *Gitar Bhumika*. I started step by step, copying passages, writing reflections, trying to understand and absorb. I summarized the book. It took three weeks. My own books were restored to me by the end of the year. My wife, in April 1962, brought to me *The Life Divine*, Vol II, *The Bases of Yoga*, *Lights on Yoga* and a Gita. The whole lot was all fantastic, novel and fascinating to me.

In 1964, after 3 years, I found certain things written in *The Bases of Yoga* to be true. I served my sentence and was released on 31 October 1964.

So here I am back, to acknowledge before you with humility the infinite love and care that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother take for all of us. They awaited with infinite patience to grant me that which I needed, yet of which I was superficially unaware. They tried their gracious kindness first with me in 1948. Then in 1961 they administered just the hard knock that I needed to turn to them. I was fully protected. No fear touched me. No harm was done. They have granted me gifts and kindness in abundance when I was in jail and ever after. So that is my story and I hope it satisfies you and Nirod-da a little.

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## THE CISTERN AND THE FOUNTAIN

*"The Cistern contains: the Fountain overflows."* (William Blake)

THERE are some ineffable moments which are always worth retrieving; for, they act as signals from the Everlasting Ones that we are not merely derelict vessels abandoned on a cold, pitiless sea floating without choice and direction. They convey to us unmistakably a message from some Eternal source that there is a guidance, a destiny, a divine fulfilment awaiting us in the fullness of time. They are not to be dug out of the archives of memory but are perpetually reassuring us, fortifying our faltering courage, dispelling the gloom that weighs us down on our upward ascent. Such are the moments spent in the intimate company of a Divine Luminary like the Mother. Does not the word Upanishad connote sitting before an enlightened one and receiving light from that fountainhead?

One such occasion was granted to me on 16th March, 1961 when I sat before the Mother upstairs in the room where she was wont to give us Darshan blessings. This interview marks a watershed in my spiritual career in the Ashram. Quite a few years had gone by, following a humdrum routine, but then many circumstances conspired to jolt me out of this state and suddenly a strong resolution began to take shape in my mind that I should give myself entirely to Yoga and meet unflinchingly all its rigorous demands and banish all dilly-dallying and stop dawdling away time. This belated awakening inevitably calls up all the accumulated stuff that can, if stirred up, play havoc with the sadhak's will to advance.

All through the winter I had been battered by bouts of Broncho-asthma brought about by the chilly northwind that sweeps down over Pondicherry and which year after year drives me to the edge of existence. It is only after the second week of March that the northwind gives way to the mild, temperate and salubrious south breeze. The respiratory passages relax and I can breathe restfully and count myself among the living. I could say that the Mother's words on that calm and tranquil morning came,

O'er my ear like the sweet south  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour..... *(The Twelfth Night)*

I had requested her to grant me an exclusive interview; for, I badly needed clarification of some spiritual problems. I was to meet her at 10 a.m. and was ushered into the room by Champaklal. Soon after taking my seat I heard the swish and rustle of her silken robes and the soft sound of her footsteps. I stood up and bowed my head and she blessed me by placing her hand on my head and then settled herself on the highbacked arm-chair with her feet on the foot-rest. With her benign smile she turned her concentrated gaze on me and I broke the ice by relating to her how during the last months my aspiration had been stepped up vigorously and

that I was determined to devote my life exclusively to Yoga. She was pleased and very quietly uttered these words, "It had to come one day." These portentous words rolled over me like a peal of thunder. In a lightning flash I beheld how she had been reorienting and refashioning me unweariedly with her mild but sure touches like a supreme artist.

The Mother's utterance is inextricably linked in my mind with the following lines from *Savitri*:

The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch  
 Persuaded the inert black quietude  
 And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.  
(*Savitri*, Book I Canto I)

Every word in these lines significantly gives us a glimpse into the nature of the divine handling of the crude human stuff. Sri Aurobindo very often used the words 'persuade' and 'touch', for humanity has to be gently coaxed and not coerced to submit itself to the divine working. A touch here, a little push there, carried on persistently bring about a sea-change one day. A few lines further on we again meet these two words in close companionship:

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;  
 Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:  
 It fears the pure divine intolerance  
 Of that assault of ether and of fire;  
(*Savitri*, Book I Canto I)

-and yet there are occasions when most unexpectedly

A touch can alter the fixed front of Fate.  
 A sudden turn can come, a road appear,..  
 Ascending from the soil where creep our days,  
 Earth's consciousness may marry with the Sun,  
 Our mortal life ride on the spirit's wing,  
 Our finite thoughts commune with the Infinite.  
(*Savitri*, Book II Canto X)

Then I told the Mother how I had discovered a psychic way of awarding marks to students on their written work and I wanted to know from her whether this novel technique of assessment would meet her full approval; for, it did not fit into any stereotyped marking scheme. My other colleagues might scoff at it as subjective or less unkindly say 'impression marking'. The student, too, might grumble that he had got a raw deal. The Mother said that there could not be a better way than the one

I had adopted. The flare of the psychic light was the best guidance. I felt greatly reassured because when the fate of others is involved one must be hundred per cent sure of the fairness of one's appraisals.

And now I braced myself to bring up the subject of my failing health and expressed my desire not to take recourse to the strong drugs customarily prescribed by doctors. She knew very well that I would not be able to ride out these agonies without medical help of some sort but she did not also want to dampen my new-born self-confidence. She simply remarked, "In matters concerning the physical ailments one needs enormous resources of endurance in order to dispense with the help of the doctors." But I persisted that I wanted to be whole by calling her spiritual power. Meanwhile she seemed to have gone to some other plane of consciousness and spoke out these words in very quiet tones, "Those who fall ill in the course of their ordinary lives can be helped by the doctors but for others they cannot be of much help." And then came this revelatory flash: "To those who are on the path, diseases are sent to keep them awake. And when the need is over they are withdrawn." These words opened up an entirely new insight into the root cause of the many afflictions that beset us. That is why Virgil had written:

Happy is the man who can know the causes of things.

I felt very light; for, a heavy and worrisome load had slid off my chest. A couple of months prior to this I had written to her how the shadow of death had been haunting me. She immediately sent me this letter:

Ravindra Khanna

This suggestion of death comes from the "ego" when it feels that soon it will have to abdicate. Keep quiet and fearless—everything will be all right.

With blessings

The Mother.

Once again informing her about my physical suffering I wrote to her that I had a feeling that these were mere shadows cast on me so that I should be day and night in a state of aspiration—intense, luminous, complete and powerful. She wrote on the same letter: "This is *quite right* and my blessings are with you for the establishment of such a consciousness." She had underlined the words "quite right". This is how in spite of her multifarious responsibilities she never failed to attend to our letters or our calls for help.

Still the question that weighed on my mind was how to dispel these morbid suggestions that magnified each minor complaint into the forerunner of a terminal disease. She got a word in edgeways and said, "Such fears are everywhere in the atmosphere." I said one way to thwart them was to say emphatically, "No, no such thing will happen!" To this she said, "That is what I tell people." But then I said



that there was the other way and that was to say, "Even if all this happens..." These words had a magical effect. The Mother who had been all through this interview a sweet, benign and patient listener at once straightened up and became someone grand, awe-inspiring, no longer the Mother but the Eternal Purusha. She waved her right hand with all the fingers closed except the forefinger and said in a grave and heavy voice, "Yes, a moment *does* come when one has to say, whatever the Lord wills."

And now I sought her guidance about another common experience of mine. I told her that when the psychic flame reaches a high intensity I experience a Grace showering on my head like rose petals. She asked me what the nature of my feeling was. I said that I felt as if I were melting away. "Oh!" she replied, "That is Ananda. It *is* Grace, but it is Ananda." I heard some bustle and stir from the adjoining room. Turning my head to the right I noticed that sitting too long had earned me unfriendly looks from the next interviewer whose patience had been overtaxed. The Mother blessed me again and handed me a fresh rose full of perfume. I packed up and took my leave. Would it be pretentious on my part to say that I felt something like Dante after the beatific vision.

So was my spirit gazing, all surmise,  
 steadfast, intent, in absolute repose,  
 and evermore enkindled through the eyes.  
 In presence of that radiance one grows  
 so rapt, it is impossible the soul  
 could yield to turn aside to other shows....

(Translation by Anderson)

RAVINDRA KHANNA

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## THE SECRET LOVE-SONG OF THE EARTH

*“Who’s living it, this life? God, is it you?” (Rilke)*

ON the wings of the midnight wind comes Your swift call,  
And like a star that would the darkness sear  
With the gold and sapphire glory of its fall,  
Tearing across my flesh’ reluctant fear,  
Your passion is a shimmering silver fire  
That breaks across my cliffs of barren pride  
And consumes me in Your breath of white desire  
Like a fogswept shoreline rent by a fierce floodtide.

When through the slumber of dusk Your wild song is burning  
And the moonlight’s pale music sings keen and fiery and high;  
When above the dim moors that murmur their twilight of yearning  
The stark hills lift their still eternal cry,  
With the taut swaying limbs of a stormtorn tree I reach  
Vague hungry hands of prayer into the night,  
Or roam like a child a foam-enchanted beach  
And with the grey voice of the sea chant hymns of light.

Like a rapt and lonely thing I walk apart  
To wander where the slow waves stir and roll,  
Traversing the tremulous darkness of my heart  
Toward the dew and sundrenched daybreak of my soul,  
To seek through shadows quivering like a fawn  
The sunlight singing on the morning’s streams,  
To where Love opens in me like the dawn,  
Hushed with vastnesses, radiant with dreams.

Oh Lord, I have been Yours, been captive to You,  
An impetuous player in Your mad, sweet mime,  
Danced bold and restless to Your drumbeat through  
Wheeling starvast spans of endless time.  
Has not the quiet whisper of Your care  
Made the boundless universes burn,  
Made my bones fling off antique despair  
And in helpless rounds of emerald rapture turn?

When my twilight is lit by Your joy like a soft candleflare  
The delicate crystal cup of my heart shall be filled

With tears as silent and shy as stars and as rare,  
 A wine of tenderness from the mists of the moon distilled.  
 I shall plunge my soul in pools of cool violet laughter  
 Where golden smiles like shining fountains leap,  
 Drift careless on a mirror of clouds, then after  
 Lie drowned in azure ecstasies of sleep.

Like a bird of secret gladness I shall fly  
 To where God sits like tireless Time and spins  
 From the iridescent haze that veils the sky  
 The rainbow colours of His silken winds.  
 Then, casting off my tattered cloak of shame,  
 I shall grow green and fragrant as a tree,  
 Be robed in gentle splendour like a flame  
 That through the dark soars luminous and free!

JEAN

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## AQUARIUS

ENIGMATIC water-carrier  
 Bearer of a new and secret force  
 Your eyes betray blue streams behind  
 Your darkened face belies.

From what dark forests of the west  
 Brought you your burden here to rest  
 And water flowers in the sand?

Deep-rooted in darkness, the cold rock  
 Can pour out rivers clear enough  
 To mirror sky and nourish grass  
 If but the prophet's blow can touch the source.  
 O dark god— nourish us.

SHRADDHAVAN

## A SHEAF OF SYMBOLS

*(Some years ago we published a series of verse-compositions: 21 pieces of 21 lines each, dubbed "Vingt-et-uns". We are now publishing a second series (two units every month) equally interesting as the prior one: not high poetry indeed in entirety, but highly engaging by dint of ingenious idea, image, allusion, rhythm, style and, above all, a glint of aspiration which gives a sanctifying touch even to their playfulness.)*

### I

O LIGHT of Lights, let all my life be lit  
A lucent Prism reflecting rainbow-hues:  
A Prism through which perchance Thy Whiteness views  
Wonder and Wealth Thou hast condensed in it!  
O Singer Superb, let all my being be wrought  
A Reed-Flute hollow whereon Thy fingers ply:  
A Flute through which some distant hints be caught  
Of Thy divine Brindavan-Harmony!  
O Master-Dreamer, dreaming dreams intense,  
And, haply, straying into our sense-worlds dense:  
Dream on through us Thy sweetest dreams for aye,  
And bring Delight to us of Discovery-Play!...

So rose the incense of my maiden Muse,  
Right to Thy Feet, in Aspiration High—  
A little grandiose, a little over-strained:—  
But Thou hast blessed it with Thy Token-Touch!...  
And Thou hast roused me and dazed me, too, at times,  
With splendid Flashes of Thy Javelin-bolts:  
Releasing pent-up streams, long-parched and dry,  
And sent them running on their course once more—  
Singing and ringing—over rough and smooth, ever-harking back to Thee!

### 2

I am my Mother's Pet, vehicle elect  
Of mighty Durgā the unassailable:  
Ever-Couchant about Her Feet, whose Presence mere  
Wards off all influences vile or base;  
Ever-ready, at Her beck and call, to strike  
And new-create worlds in larger puissance-moulds  
Fit for Her children to play with, Bharata-wise!

And I am another Pet of that same tribe,  
 Fell horror striped, gruff, dire, implacable:  
 Whom only the Majesty and Beauty and large-hearted Love  
 Of the Great Mother Ambā can charm and tame—  
 Whose self-rapt fiery gaze can be met and matched  
 By Hers alone who can wondrous magic work  
 Transmuting brute stone-stuff with Lotus-Eyes!

Long have Earth's trepidant children cherished hopes  
 Of encountering either of us at quarters close—  
 Long have they lingered by ironic Zoo-cagebars  
 For a firsthand glimpse to size up the mystery:  
 But none have ever come near us in stark strength  
 Of Heart or Nerve, to reciprocate the Joy  
 We feel in being but Vehicles both—of Grandest Powers That Be!

CHIMANBHAI

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## TRUE BEING, TRUE LIVING

I

Be not proud,  
 Be not humble.  
 Then  
 Be astute?  
 No.  
 Nothing artificial.  
 Only be absolutely yourself  
 Totally guileless  
 Totally calm.  
 Be nothing by exertion  
 But only by relaxation.  
 Be easy, not difficult.

2

Who lives well?  
 He who amasses wealth?  
 Or power or learning?  
 No.  
 Then who?  
 Only he who does God's will  
 And transfers to God  
 His worldly responsibility.  
 Only he lives well  
 Who feels no burden  
 At any point of his life.

GIRDHARLAL

# CHARCOAL

## A SHORT STORY

In the beginning of so-called civilization there were immense areas where the rays of civilization had not yet reached. In spite of this, in the extreme and most unapproachable areas a thin population was taking shape towards civilization in a gradual manner.

This is an Upanishadic story based on the facts about a mountainous region in the extreme south several hundred miles away from Bangalore in a thick forest. In that area amongst a very small population there was a Chieftain or a Monarch who ruled and conducted the destiny of a small clan. The name of the Chieftain was Padampasa. Every family in his domain was given a reasonable piece of land to use with imagination and liberty to fulfil their desires and ambitions and also to find a solution for their livelihood, food and shelter, etc.

In this clan there was one small family consisting of wife and four children. Even in those days children used to go trekking several miles to a legitimately noble person who was responsible for teaching and guiding the young ones to conduct their lives according to the possibilities, needs and culture of the times.

The Head of the family was Chakrapada. This man held a big piece of hilly land covered with a thick forest. He was recklessly cutting the trees down to their roots, using the wood for cooking and making fire for winter and at the same time collecting good pieces of charcoal from the burnt wood. As soon as he could collect a full bag of charcoal, he would trek down to a distant town and sell the charcoal for a small amount and with that amount purchase his food provisions and other articles of necessity for daily life.

This was the arrangement with which he started his career and he never thought or struggled or bothered to improve upon it for a better, more useful and fruitful way of life.

Years rolled by and suddenly he found that he was at the edge of his land-holding and practically all the trees had been cut down and exhausted. He was not supposed to go beyond the limits of his land and could not imagine or think of any solution for the livelihood of his family for the next day. He fell on the ground and started weeping and crying.

This incident was naturally reported to the Chieftain who immediately appeared on the scene as it was his responsibility, duty and dharma to look after his subjects. He tried to find out the reasons for the depression and frustration but there was no answer from Chakrapada. He came to his hut to see whether there was any quarrel in the family. Chakrapada's wife said that she had absolutely no knowledge of any reason for such a tragedy. And similar impressions were given by the four children: they were quite happy and regularly worked for their education.

After a good deal of patience shown by the Chieftain it was revealed that Chakra-

pada had fully consumed his forest and he could not think of any solution for providing food to his family the next day. The Chieftain was very noble and considerate and assured Chakrapada that he would be immediately allotted another big piece of land to carry on his life, and he should not worry at all on any account. But at the same time the Chieftain hinted and warned Chakrapada that he should be careful and judicious in cutting and consuming the trees; otherwise he would again land himself in the same trouble and there might not be any further solution. He also cautioned that Chakrapada should not cut the trees from the roots.

The orders were issued and Chakrapada was allotted another big forest which he started destroying and consuming in the same manner. He had to burn the wood for cooking and making fire for winter and also for making charcoal to sell in the market and derive food articles, etc. out of the yield.

Again the years rolled by and one fine morning he suddenly found that only five trees were left and he spontaneously remembered the advice and the warning of his benefactor and at once fainted.

The episode was again brought to the notice of Padampasa, who immediately appeared on the scene with his queen. Both of them were very sympathetic and felt much concerned.

Chakrapada was brought home and when he recovered he narrated the true cause and felt extremely ashamed and frustrated as to what would happen after a week or so when those remaining five trees were also exhausted and consumed.

At this time the Chieftain sat in the hut of Chakrapada in a calm and meditative mood with his queen and advised Chakrapada that in future he should never cut the trees for making fire or charcoal. For cooking food for the family he should collect the refuse from the jungle and use it as firewood. And for his subsistence he should cut only one branch of a tree at a time and cut the same into small pieces, put them in a bag and, instead of going to the nearby town, take them to the most famous market of perfumes in the city of Bangalore and sell those pieces of wood in that market.

Chakrapada was not only amazed but also surprized at the suggestion of the Chieftain which he considered most foolish. What could he get by mere pieces of wood when compared with charcoal?

The city was far-off and it took him several days to trek to the suggested market. He was completely tired and exhausted when he put down his bag in the heart of the market. He wiped his sweat and leaned on the bag to rest.

In the meantime, there was a great stir and sudden movement in the atmosphere and the whole market was flooded with a peculiar, strong and pleasant fragrance. Every one started running here and there to find out the reason and the source of such a fragrance which they had never experienced before.

Ultimately an astray employee of one of the perfumers' establishments traced the source of the fragrance to the bag on which an aboriginal was leaning. Gradually the shopkeepers and traders started offering bids from one *mudra* to one hundred, two hundred, three hundred and ultimately five hundred *mudras*.

Chakrapada was simply bewildered and could never understand what was happening and what the meaning was of all these bids and offers and was feeling badly harassed.

Eventually the governor of the city came to his rescue and got him five hundred *mudras* and sent him back to his place in the mountainous forest under an escort. He reached there almost in a fainting condition, the money tied to his body.

Suddenly the news spread like wild fire and the Chieftain with his guard appeared on the scene and found to his satisfaction that his advice and guidance had worked and borne the desired fruit.

Now in the course of time Chakrapada came to his senses, realised what foolishness he had been doing in burning tree after tree of the most sacred and rare quality of sandalwood everyday throughout his life and making only charcoal out of them whereas the original wood was so valuable a mine of treasure inexhaustible. Now those four or five trees left behind were sufficient to give livelihood to many for centuries.

So the Rishi of the Upanishad says that the human race has been given by the Divine as a gift a body more sacred and precious than any amount of pearls and diamonds for his manifestation and yet it is being burnt like firewood into charcoal.

SURENDRA NATH JAUHAR

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# THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE FUTURE

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

(Continued from the issue of December 1976)

10 (Contd.)

“COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS”, SRI AUROBINDO’S “SUPERMIND” AND HIS VISION OF THE DIVINE LIFE, THE DEMANDS OF AN EVOLUTIONARY WORLD-VIEW, TEILHARD’S “PLEROMA”, HIS LATE CONTACT WITH SRI AUROBINDO’S THOUGHT

(c)

A FULL “Life Divine” on earth, *à la* Sri Aurobindo, prepared by mysticism and Yoga in the light of the all-perfecting Supermind, leading to entire transformation, entire divinisation in the most literal and comprehensive sense, is very different from Teilhard’s objective. Commonly, when he speaks of “divinising”, he means “consecrating” or “sanctifying”. Even applied to the final stage of evolution, his “divinising” and “transforming” would have another colour. To say this is not to run down the Teilhardian divinisation and transformation. We should not be misled by such prophecies as: “Under the combined efforts of science, morality and association in society, some super-mankind is emerging....”<sup>1</sup> There is a mystical component in the typical Teilhardian push of the consciousness towards the evolutionary summit. That component may be suggested with fair adequacy by a few passages like the following which may serve as a final confession of his faith and the determining matrix of his “Yoga”:<sup>2</sup>

“For the believer whose eyes have seen the light, souls are not formed in the world as discontinuous and autonomous centres, nor do they so leave it. Even more fully and more blissfully than in any pantheist dream, sanctified monads are atoms immersed in, nourished by, and carried along by one and the same unfathomable primitive substance; they are elements that are combined and given a special character by a network of intimate interconnexions, in order so to constitute a higher unity. *While Christianity is a supremely individualist religion, it is at the same time essentially a cosmic religion*, since, when the Creation and the preaching of the Gospel have completed their work, Christianity discloses to us not simply a harvest of souls but a *world of souls*.”

“If we look at this world, we see that the fundamental substance within which

<sup>1</sup> *Writings in Time of War* (Collins, London, 1968), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-9.

souls are formed, the highest environment in which they evolve—what one might call their own particular Ether—is the Godhead, at once transcendent and immanent, *in qua vivimus et movemur et sumus*—in whom we live and move and have our being. God cannot in any way be intermixed with or lost in the participated being which he sustains and animates and holds together, but he is at the birth, and the growth and the final term of all things. Everything lives, and everything is raised up—and everything in consequence is one—in Him and through Him.

“Worthily to describe the rapture of this union and this unification, the pantheists’ most impassioned language is justified, whether unspoken in the heart or given expression by the tongue: and to that rapture is added the ecstatic realization that the universal Thing from which everything emerges and to which everything returns is not the Impersonal, the Unknowable and the Unconscious, in which the individual disintegrates and is lost by being absorbed: it is a living, loving Being, in which the individual consciousness, when it is lost, attains an accentuation and an illumination that extends to the furthest limit of what is contained in its own personality. God, who is as immense and all-embracing as matter, and at the same time as warm and intimate as a soul, is the Centre who spreads through all things; his immensity is produced by an extreme of concentration, and his rich simplicity synthesizes a culminating paroxysm of accumulated virtues. No words can express the bliss of feeling oneself possessed, absorbed, without end or limit, by an Infinite that is not rarefied and colourless, but living and luminous, an Infinite that knows and attracts and loves.

“Souls are irresistibly drawn by the demands of their innate power, and still more by the call of grace, towards a common centre of beatitude, and it is in this convergence that they find a first bond that combines them in a natural Whole. The paths they follow inevitably meet at the term of the movement that carries them along. Moreover, grace, which introduces them into the field of divine attraction, forces them all to exert an influence, as they proceed, upon one another, and it is in this relation of dependence, which is just the same kind as that which links together material systems, that there lies the so astonishingly ‘cosmic’ mystery (we might almost say the phenomenon) of the *Communion of Saints*.

“Like particles immersed in one and the same spiritual fluid, souls cannot think or pray or move without waves being produced, even by the most insignificant among them, which set the others in motion; inevitably, behind each soul a wake is formed which draws other souls either towards good or towards evil.

“There is an even more striking similarity with the organisms that life on earth forms and drives, in mutual interdependence, along the road of consciousness, in that souls know that the evolution of their personal holiness reaches its full value in the success of a global task that goes beyond and is infinitely more important than the success of individual men.”

Spiritual Teilhard in all his “complexity-consciousness”, so to speak, is here. There is the love-hate relationship with pantheism. He is instinctively aware of

the fullness and bliss of its dream and the impassioned language this dream's realisation evokes, but he intellectually figures with supreme inconsistency the pantheist experience as the disintegration and loss of the dreamer in an Unconscious as if such disintegration and loss could ever inspire so full and blissful a dream or get described in language of such passion. Again, while seeing the disintegration and loss as the result of absorption, he still goes on to speak of the Christian as also getting at his mystical height lost and absorbed and yet not disintegrating—as if a living and loving and luminous Infinite could make any difference. Surely, to be lost in and absorbed by anything or anyone must always mean the disintegration of what undergoes the loss and absorption. The separate little personality must inevitably vanish. The process of disintegrating might be different, but the end would be the same. Nor is it clear how the process could differ when the dream of pantheism is acknowledged to be of fullness and bliss. And why are the pantheist loss and absorption considered different when the plunge into the Unconscious gives rise to a language of impassioned description just as the Christian's loss and absorption do? Further, whatever the pantheist gets lost and absorbed in cannot be the Unconscious when it is most joyously longed for and most intensely remembered. Lastly, if there is no real disintegration any more than in the Christian experience, the pantheist must also be in some way an Other and not intermixed with the existences we know.

Teilhard's usual illogic and ambiguity, due to secretly running with the hare and openly hunting with the hounds, is in evidence again. But he does succeed in putting his beautiful *élan* of spirituality across and we get the impression of a great genuine Yoga beyond mere science and morality and association in society. But the Yoga, grand though it is, does not go beyond extending to all mankind, in virtue of the general evolutionary push, one of the Gita's Yogas, the Yoga of Bhakti (Devotion) for the Personal God who is also the Cosmic Divinity holding all things and beings—except that the Gita explicitly views those things and beings as in one aspect the Transcendent's and Immanent's own projections and, in another aspect, as distinct from Him. The supracosmicism, the manifesting power, the all-pervasion and yet the non-intermixture of the Lord come out in several stanzas<sup>1</sup> “He is called the unmanifest immutable; him they speak of as the supreme soul and status. . . . But that supreme Purusha has to be won by a bhakti which turns to him alone in whom all beings exist and by whom all this world has been extended in space. (8.21.22) By Me all this universe has been extended in the ineffable mystery of my being; all existences are situated in Me, not I in them.... All existences return into my divine Nature in the lapse of the cycle; at the beginning of the cycle I loose them forth... (9.4.9) I am here in this world and everywhere, I support this entire universe with an infinitesimal portion of Myself... (10.42). His hands and feet are on every side of us, his heads and eyes and faces are those innumerable

<sup>1</sup> *The Gita*, with Text, Translation and Notes compiled from Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*, edited by Anilbaran Roy (George Allen & Union, London, 1946).

visages which we see wherever we turn, his ear is everywhere, he immeasurably fills and surrounds all this world with himself, he is the universal Being in whose embrace we live... (13.14)." The last phrase is reminiscent of the Pauline: "in whom we live and move and have our being", which Teilhard quotes and goes on to reformulate: "Everything lives, and everything is raised up—and everything in consequence is one—in Him and through Him." And we may add that, however Teilhard may seek to guard himself against pantheism, some of his words, without diminishing the Divine Transcendence, echo the Gita which too keeps that Transcendence always in view. These words, corresponding to the Gita's about all things being originally loosed forth by the Supreme Person from Himself and returning to Him at the end, are: "the ecstatic realization that the universal Thing from which everything emerges and to which everything returns... is a living, loving Being."

To match the Gita in one of its Yogas is no small feat of insight, and to give that insight a cast in keeping with the light brought by modern evolutionism in both its individual and its collective sweep towards a unified future renders Teilhard *the Man of the Age in the West*. But he is so in spite of himself: continually he interposes a veil between his illumination and his message. Even the illumination falls below the intrinsic demands of modern evolutionism turned spiritual. Not only does it miss all hint of the Supramental Yoga's integrality of consummation. It also misses the possibility of accelerated progress which any Yoga collectively followed would bring. Does not Teilhard look only to a remote future of unification—a future millions of years away? In addition, for all his stress on advancement ahead in the true spirit of evolution, his vision amounts finally to a denial of the evolutionary truth: it executes a sudden *volte-face* in favour of the other-worldliness that has characterised all pre-evolutionism and is the typical sign of every religious aspiration, whether Western or Eastern, which has lacked the clue of the Supermind. Teilhard did catch something of the clue, but let it slip through his fingers. No doubt, he was not of the stuff of the supreme mystics and could never have realised even a moiety of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experience. But he stood on the threshold of an intellectual and intuitive perception of what this experience signified. Had he not abjured, under the Christian religious climate, his innate pantheism on the one side and on the other his extraordinary evolutionary understanding—had he not averted his face from Eastern mysticism without caring to enter into its manifold revelation which could have helped him to reconcile what he imagined to be opposites—he could have been the greatest index from the West to the spirituality of the future. That he failed and that all he achieved was a blend of discordant tendencies most fascinatingly worked out, a many-sided exquisite ambiguity, with occasional bursts of his natural orientalism but on the whole weighted with a *penchant* too conventionally Christian—this is indeed the gravest tragedy of modern European science and religion.

But here also there was a sharp "moment of truth"—in two phases—in which

Teilhard saw his real role. It is connected with the question Zaehner<sup>1</sup> raises in wondering how "Teilhard never came to hear of Sri Aurobindo... whose thought so closely resembled his own". Actually, Teilhard did hear of Sri Aurobindo.

Unlike the latter, who passed away in 1950 before Teilhard's works got published, he could have read Sri Aurobindo even as far back as 1914-1915. For, a French edition of Sri Aurobindo's monthly review, *Arya*, made its appearance for seven months under the title: *Revue de grande synthèse*, and found its way to France. Teilhard, however, never knew any of its contents—until April 1949. In that month Jacques Masui wrote to Philippe Barbier St. Hilaire of Sri Aurobindo's Ashram that he had acquainted Teilhard with the thought of Sri Aurobindo.

The next we hear of Teilhard's contact with that thought is in 1954 from Mrs. Eleanor Montgomery who was in charge of the Sri Aurobindo Library in New York. Teilhard was living a few blocks away and he was brought by Masui to the Library. Mrs. Montgomery presented him with a copy of Sri Aurobindo's booklet, *Evolution*.

This was just a year before Teilhard died. Prior to it, there was a development whose witness again is Masui at the meeting on December 4, 1965 in Paris, to which we have already referred, for an exchange of views on the evolution of man according to Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard.<sup>2</sup> Masui was one of the speakers. In the course of very interesting reminiscences and reflections he said that between 1946 and 1954 he had had talks with Teilhard and often spoken to him of Sri Aurobindo. At last he had succeeded in making him read the first twelve chapters of *The Life Divine*. On returning them Teilhard had remarked: "J'ai l'impression que c'est la même chose que moi, mais 'pour l'Asie'"—"I have the impression that it is the same thing as myself, but for Asia."

This pregnant sentence is the first phase of the "moment of truth". On a straightforward approach, it can only mean that Teilhard and Sri Aurobindo share in common an evolutionism which sees in the future a spiritual completion of man fulfilling in a luminous earth-life all the terms developed by Nature of being and becoming. The completion would lie in a realised unity-in-multiplicity on all levels, the emergence of a harmonised collectivity of individuals into the Universal and Transcendent, a manifestation of the Transcendent and Universal in the whole of mankind in the process of time, a super-personalisation of souls within a God who is a Super-Person and the Centre of all centres. One sole difference would be present between the Teilhardian evolutionism and the Aurobindonian—namely, that Sri Aurobindo would have a Vedantic starting-point while Teilhard would proceed from a Christian *point de départ*. And here comes for us the crucial question. The Vedantic starting-point is: the One Reality variously self-deployed. Can the Christian *point de départ* be taken as identical? It must, if Sri Aurobindo's evolutionism is "the same thing" as Teilhard's. The evolutionist Christianity of Teilhard cannot, therefore, be equated with Christian orthodoxy turned evolutionist.

<sup>1</sup> *Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Oxford University Press, 1970), p 9      <sup>2</sup> A typed report of the seven speeches made is with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

An approach subtle rather than straightforward would probe the closing phrase which declares Sri Aurobindo to be fit for the East and implies Teilhard to be suitable for the West. This phrase appears to bring in a significant qualifying note. Does it mean simply that for the West the One Reality has to be called Christ and explicated in a terminology linked with the Roman Catholic Church? Logically it should—and then Teilhard's Christianity would indeed be a "new religion". But there is a touch of rejection in this phrase modifying the total-seeming acceptance in the preceding, as if the Aurobindonian evolutionism lacked in comprehensiveness and as if it did so not just because it expresses the identical truth in a terminology other than Teilhard's but because the Vedantic terminology fails to do justice to the truth and would not find favour with a West which has had the advantage of the Christian revelation.

Then there would not quite be the One Reality variously self-deployed: the many-sided monism of Sri Aurobindo would be absent and the Teilhardian splitting of shades between "false" and "true" pantheism would come back.

Does it actually come back in appreciable force? It is difficult to make a positive pronouncement. In the light of the sweeping impression of sameness recorded in the opening part of the statement, merely the ghost of a genuine dissidence appears to haunt the closing part. The ghost, however, is typical of the wide-spread Teilhardian ambiguity emanating from the born pantheist playing in and out of the intensely nurtured Christian. Its presence is perhaps the faintest here and, in the upshot, we may well adjudge Masui's quotation to be suggesting an Aurobindonian Christianity as the key to the core of Teilhard's ultimate message. Yes, the core, but not the environing matter which prevented it from radiating its full substance or even recognising in itself all it contained.

And the same curious relation of the shining core with the veils around it is found in the second phase of the truth-moment. Masui recollects Teilhard making another remark apropos of Sri Aurobindo: "Au fond Aurobindo n'a pas de pensée véritablement dogmatique. Peut-être est-ce une faiblesse, mais peut-être est-ce une force; car il faut bien reprendre les choses dans leur fondement pour aller très loin dans l'avenir"—"At bottom Aurobindo does not have a really dogmatic thought. Perhaps it is a weakness, but perhaps it is a strength; for it is indeed necessary to reconsider things from their basis in order to go very far into the future."

Masui himself confirms Teilhard's reflection on Sri Aurobindo. He says: "In fact, we do not find in Sri Aurobindo once more a dogmatic thought but a thought supported always on intuition and experience—the intuition and experience of all the attempts of man to understand himself." Masui touches here a double point: not only the intuitive and experiential nature of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy but also its comprehensive sweep, its regard for all lines of knowledge, its move to take up every side of human aspiration, its integrality of world-vision. The very first chapter of *The Life Divine* sets forth the all-round objective of the evolutionary energy, of the conscious force secretly at work to harmonise apparent opposites. And the next

two chapters deal with one fundamental pair of them—"The Denial of the Materialist", "The Refusal of the Ascetic"—and seek to reconcile in the light of the very logic of progressive evolution the spiritual consciousness as the reality emerging in Matter and the material scene as the natural *locus* of Spirit's fulfilment through the evolutionary process. This combination of God and World is not underlined in Teilhard's second pronouncement but it is implied in his first where he discerns an essential identity between himself and Sri Aurobindo. What this pronouncement throws into relief is a certain apparent distinction of the Aurobindonian philosophy from the Teilhardian. If Sri Aurobindo has a Vedantic starting-point, it is because his own intuition and experience have validated it—and Vedanta is after all no more than a starting-point: he goes beyond and ahead of Vedanta, develops its potentialities, introduces possibilities seen in his own sadhana, envisages realisations taking full stock of universal history and multifarious modernism. Vedanta is itself rather a free spiritual exploration in many directions than a fixed and faithful religion; but even its terminology, even its categories are not indispensable to Sri Aurobindo. He can afford to wash away all colour of Vedanta in a recognisable form. Teilhard, on the contrary, constrains himself to be Christian—and not only Christian but also Roman Catholic. A number of dogmas which he considers crucial he cannot do without. He is often at pains to throw them into relief. In many respects the past holds him. However, face to face with Sri Aurobindo's utter freedom from dogmas he is in two minds about his own posture.

On the one side he feels that it would be a lack in his thought to free himself from his Roman Catholic moorings and that it is a lack in Sri Aurobindo to have no such grip from the past. On the other hand he feels such a grip to be a disadvantage in view of the future, and the Aurobindonian adventure to be the right thing for the age to come: that adventure allows one to do what one truly should—namely, to probe and plumb all things without preconceptions so as to reach their own basic nature and let this nature shape one's vision in the context of the new spirit that is abroad today and sallies towards tomorrow. Teilhard understands that unless one de-dogmatises oneself one cannot serve the vast time ahead, so full of a marvellous promise given by the revolutionary changes of inlook and outlook the discovery of cosmic evolution has brought about.

Teilhard is here at the peak of his perceptiveness and truest to his own mission as innovator in the religious as well as the scientific thought of the West. And from this peak his attitude cannot help removing whatever reservation has got expressed by him about Sri Aurobindo with those words: "but for Asia." Here too there is the reservation in the word "Perhaps". But the tinge of doubt it carries applies both ways. It is attached not only to "strength"—it is attached also to "weakness". Some little dubiety lingers—again the typical Teilhardian posture because of his double personality. Yet the sum-total in the assessment of Sri Aurobindo is positive and the unspoken sense is: "Sri Aurobindo may very well be for the whole world and not merely for Asia—even though I, Teilhard, the irreducible hyper-Catholic, cannot quite make up

my mind to be different from what I am, a bit of a paradox with a new religion sending out its rays from my core through a fairly dense medium of Christian dogma.”

How dense the medium was may be gauged from the fact that even in 1950 when he wrote “Some Reflections on Two Converse Forms of the Spirit” and in 1954 when he penned *Le Christique* he could declare his own loneliness of vision, his despair at discovering no published work in sympathy with his thought. Of course he was referring to the West, but he could surely have hailed a light from the East. And surely again he could have refrained from uttering, as he does even in that period, a sense of the inadequacy, the falsity, of Eastern mysticism.

(Concluded)

K. D. SETHNA

## LIFE'S HIDDEN BEAUTY

### FROM A LETTER TO AN AMERICAN FRIEND

You have asked me how to let the hidden beauty of life disclose itself constantly instead of alternating with the horror you sense all around. I know of only one way.

First, you have to develop a tranquil wideness of being so that you don't feel caught in the skull-box and rib-cage and pelvis-prison but experience a cool spread-out state—not by getting identified with the common circumambience but by pushing outward more and more the boundaries of your being, a fanning-forth of what is held packed in the soul rather than a furling in of what is out in the world's ordinary nature.

The next step is to instal in the midst of this calm extension of the inner reality an incessant practice of remembering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and offering to them whatever one does. Thus an upward-burning steady fire will be set in a vast windless air. And the light of this fire will blot out all the horror and reveal an unbroken beauty in that great clear space.

Perhaps the *grand finale* will be the rapture expressed by a poet in a phrase which I consider one of the peak-points of artistic mysticism:

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

AMAL KIRAN



# THE CHARACTER OF LIFE

## A CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE

### I

#### Introduction

MODERN civilisation has developed as a result and expression of man's evolution as a mental being. In the process the physical and rational mind of humanity has become a powerful instrument for the observation and comprehension of material phenomena codified as the various branches of physical and biological science. But this unprecedented advancement in the material realm has not been accompanied by a corresponding growth in knowledge of human psychology and the more general field of life events. In fact it seems that with the growth of these mental faculties, man has for a time lost an earlier capacity to see and know life directly through his own vital being. Most scientists approach psychology as a branch of biological science which in effect delegates man to the same treatment as his non-mental ancestors in the animal kingdom. Where psychologists venture beyond these physical limits, they are always on precarious ground and most often end in constructing mental theories with little relevance to living realities. When it comes to a science of life itself, as opposed to a science of matter and material forms of life, science has simply refused to address the topic and has attempted to dismiss it by the premise that life movements are a combination of natural physical determinisms and chance events with no underlying principle of order or harmony.

But when we turn away from the sphere of modern science, we discover that knowledge of man and knowledge of life have been perceived and comprehended in great depth and clarity by mystics and yogis of different countries and historical periods. In Vedic India these truths were codified as scripture and institutionalised as the social customs of the community. As man gradually evolved his mental faculties to the fine pitch which they have now attained, this subtler perception of life and adherence to its laws has been lost in the same manner as he has lost many of the physical instincts of the animal. But this loss is merely a temporary one allowing the mind full freedom to develop its own mode of knowledge. What has been lost can and must be rediscovered through man's further evolution, no longer as mere vital instinct or subtle vital perception, but as a refinement of the mental faculties to their highest reach where the pure intellect shades off into illumined and intuitive vision.

The entire foundation and body of this knowledge is available in the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. They have revealed the basic principles of Consciousness applicable to all planes of existence and shown how these principles express themselves at each level of the evolutionary consciousness. Basing our-

selves on these principles we shall attempt to shed some further light on the character of life in its manifold movements and expressions.

To aid in this endeavour we may have recourse to another source of knowledge concerning the character of life which if not as pure, systematic, comprehensive and profound as the knowledge of the ancients, is yet more easily intelligible and acceptable to our modern minds. That source is the entire written literature of the human race and for our present purposes the modern literature of the English language. The greatest writers have always been recognised for their capacity to reveal truths of life as well as truths of spirit through the style, thought and imagery of their works. Sheer beauty of word, rhythm or imagination has never been sufficient to make literature great. Always these are combined with some deeper revealing vision of realities hidden from the outer sense and intellectual thought.

Of course, for the present purposes we cannot accept all literature as equally useful. Prose works appeal primarily to the intellect and aesthetic taste, not the deeper life sense or soul sense, as their judge. But among prose works there is an infinite gradation within this limited sphere. We may exclude from consideration those works which portray life according to a fixed moral or philosophical system of beliefs or ideas, for these mental constructions interfere with a true portrayal of its character. So also works that are chiefly subjective and imaginative, no matter how beautiful the expression or true the portrayal to some other plane of existence. In prose literature we will select authors and works that portray life in its objective reality, not the mere surface reality of external beings and movements, but the deeper truths of human behaviour and human nature and the character of life events in which man participates and by which he is affected. In this category there is a large group of modern English novelists such as Hardy, Dickens, Trollope, etc. as well as translations of other Europeans like Hugo and Balzac who possess profound insights into man and life without penetrating the deeper realities of the spirit, which are beyond the scope of our present study.

While prose addresses primarily the intellect, poetry goes beyond the thought-mind and employs its images and rhythm to evoke sheer vision. Its aim is to make the thing presented living to the imaginative vision and spiritual sense. Poetry expresses the hidden and infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning carried by the word. For revelation of life's deepest secrets and for all expression of spiritual truths, poetry is the supreme artistic medium. As with prose, there is an infinite gradation of types and quality among the world's poets. Here we will be concerned neither with the poets of imagination and subjective emotional experience nor the mystic poets of the Spirit. Our interest is in the great revealing poets of life among whom Shakespeare is the supreme example. To quote A.C. Bradley, world-renowned Shakespearean scholar, "... Shakespeare almost alone among poets seems to create in somewhat the same manner as Nature."<sup>1</sup> His portrayal of the minutest details of human character and life is true to life "and it

<sup>1</sup> A C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd Edition, Macmillan & Co Ltd., London, 1905, p 168

is just because he is truthful in these smaller things that in greater things we trust him absolutely never to pervert the truth for the sake of some doctrine or purpose of his own."<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo more than confirms this view: "...life itself takes hold of him in order to recreate itself in his image, and he sits within himself at its heart and pours out from its impulse a throng of beings, as real in the world he creates as men are in this other world... It is this sheer creative Ananda of the life-spirit which is Shakespeare... He is not primarily an artist, a poetical thinker or anything else of the kind, but a great vital creator and intensely, though within marked limits, a seer of life."<sup>2</sup>

These quotations reveal clearly not only the content but also the method of Shakespeare's revelation of life, and though we cannot expect other writers to compare with his genius, we can yet understand that which is true to life in their work as a momentary adherence to the same principles. The great artist of life does not see life through the mind and mentally translate his vision into understanding and understanding into literature. Rather he identifies with the force of life and lets it express itself through him. Mind comes in only to supply the outer form for this revelation, not the substance.

The task confronting us differs from that of the artist who sees and expresses. Our aim is to make life intelligible to the intellect and reason, to seek for the underlying order and purpose and harmony of life which has eluded modern science. For this purpose all life experience is proper raw material. Mankind possesses extensive records of life in its written literature and historical records, both of which are suitable for a comprehensive consideration. Literature focuses attention on the narrower field of the individual man in society and thereby portrays best the movements of life in their subtlety and detail. History focuses on the broader field of national and international activity and sees life's movements from an evolutionary perspective. Nevertheless, it is always life that is active regardless of the scale and we must expect the principles applicable on one level to be relevant to the other as well.

We will begin with a study of life in literature, drawing our material from the works of Shakespeare. In doing so our task will compare with that of the literary critics. In the words of I.A. Richards, "Criticism is the endeavour to discriminate between experiences and evaluate them."<sup>3</sup> Only in this case we shall not be considering the substance of literary work as artistic creation but as real life events. Our discrimination will be an attempt to identify and distinguish the various movements of life and our evaluation will be an effort to discover the underlying principles which describe and explain these movements.

Before turning to life experiences for validation, we must lay out the broad theoretical outlines of the science of life based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Life is a manifest form of spirit existing as a plane of vital consciousness in

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195. — <sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, Centenary Edition, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> I. A. Richards, *Principles of Criticism*, Preface

the gradation of universal existence. On its own plane the substance of life is force. This force of life expresses itself on the physical plane on earth as the animating principle of matter which gives life and movement to inert substance.

Out of this living matter plants and animals have evolved, culminating in the appearance of mental man. In man there is a meeting of the three planes of earthly life—material, vital and mental. Human life is a complex interaction of physical forces, vital forces, higher vital or emotional forces and mental forces as well as spiritual forces. The field in which mental and emotional forces grapple with life is the field of human consciousness, which is the concern of the present study.

Life, as we have said, is a vibration or group of vibrations more rarefied than matter, which expresses itself as seeking for enjoyment, possession and expansion, and this force of life is constantly evolving into higher more complex and more powerful forms. To understand the character of life in the field of human consciousness, we must discover the basic principles or laws which describe the way the life force expresses itself and the nature of its interaction with the other planes.

An analogy can be made between the laws of life and the laws of physical science. By the laws of physics (statics and dynamics) man can explain and predict the movement of ocean tides with very great precision. But 1000 years ago no one would have believed this was possible nor would they have accepted the existence of these immutable laws. Today the same precision is not possible for the psychologist because he does not know the laws governing human behaviour and would deny their very existence as his great ancestors would have denied the laws of physics. The forces of life are more subtle and rarefied than physical forces and seemingly incapable of codification. But in actuality the laws of the physical plane are manifestations of laws on the subtle planes.

To carry the analogy further: as a number of factors determine physical movements such as material force, gravitation and friction, so also for life movements the corresponding factors are force, strength and intensity. What we call force of character or moral force can be reduced to its component vectors of strength and direction.

Certain physical phenomena are best explained by the laws of chemical reactions involving changes in substances and energy levels. These changes are decided by the nature of the substances, the temperature, pressure and conditions of interaction. The field of life is parallel to this; only the significant determinants are more numerous and less easily measured.

The principles describing the character or psychology of life fall within the category of natural or universal laws. Yet it is essential to bear in mind that by the term law we do not mean a fixed invariable rule without conditions or exceptions. Rather the term is used to indicate a general propensity of nature, a certain habit of behaviour which repeats itself over and over in the greater and lesser movements of life, subject to a large number of variables and innumerable exceptions in the form of higher laws of the cosmos and interventions from other planes. Our attempt is to uncover the chain of causality concealed beneath the surface of chance, accident, fate and fortune

in life without touching on the more profound depths and wider vistas of cosmic existence. These principles “belong to a middle region between the inmost or supreme Truth of things and the impartiality of material Nature.”<sup>1</sup> With this qualification we may proceed to formulate some of the basic principles of the psychology of life.

(To be continued)

GARRY JACOBS

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 814.

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## A LITTLE-KNOWN FEATURE OF MAO TSE-TUNG'S COMMUNISM

COMMUNISM, said Mao, would go through many different phases, experience many revolutions. As Prof. John G. Gurley of Stanford University, a close and sympathetic student of Maoist economics, has observed, Mao does not see Communism as the last stage of world development. Indeed, Mao does not see human beings themselves as the final stage of development, but holds forth the secular and Messianic vision of higher forms of life to come when mankind has died out.

“Mankind will eventually reach its doomsday,” Mao prophesied. “When theologians talk about doomsday, it is pessimism used to scare people. When we speak about the destruction of mankind, we are saying that something more advanced than mankind will be produced.”

(From “The Great Schism” by Leonard Silk, *The New York Times*, 6 April 1976, p. 35)

# DIALOGUES

(Continued from the issue of October, 1976)

## Synopsis:

*The soul as Isabella, the Italian Renaissance princess, narrowly escapes madness, and is subsequently married to a powerful neighbouring prince, Ludovico, while her father quietly passes away on their wedding night.*

*Thereafter, Isabella enjoys many years of happy family life during which she is left free to indulge her meditative bent and her inward contact with the divinity who nurtures her.*

## Chapter XII

As fate would have it, the gods did not permit Ludovico to share his wife's good fortune and tranquillity into old age. Debilitated at fifty-five from a hectic life as warrior and statesman, he suffered two heart attacks in rapid succession and then succumbed to the third.

The effect on Isabella of his passing was overwhelming. At first it was almost feared by those who had known her in her earlier days that she was reverting to her former madness. Her children scarcely recognized in this stark, black-clad figure the smiling, gracious, richly bejewelled noblewoman they had known a few days before as their mother. The warm, kindly eyes no longer seemed to see, so lost were they in their pained withdrawal. The smooth, peach-coloured skin of her face was no longer flushed with health, but flat and pallid with an inward shrinking of spirit. Even the very contours of her features appeared suddenly to have lost their roundness and become severe and angular. She had nothing to say to her eldest son upon his accession to his father's throne but sat through the ceremony in aloof detachment, perhaps even disdain—none could say which. Immediately afterwards, she retired to the seclusion of her quarters and would see no one.

In actual truth, the world misjudged Isabella. She had indeed been fundamentally affected by her husband's passing, even to the extent of deep inner shock, but she had not returned to madness. The sole realization that gripped her was that, as far as her own life was concerned, a whole way of being had come to an end. Now she must be born again into a new existence without the convenience of actually dying herself. It would be, instead, a conscious crossing with all her human faculties intact, and she was seeking with all her might to find the new direction, the new path that she must now tread on her own.

For long months she saw nothing, found nothing. The world around was drained of colour, her inner being of will and motive force. It was as though the gods were deliberately hiding something from her. And indeed they were, for the new plant

they were fertilizing in Isabella was a delicate one. It showed no signs of existence for at least half a year, and then ever so grudgingly began to reveal itself.

All at once she found the languid luxury of her married life more than ever a thing of the past, never again to be resumed. Never again could she accept her wealth passively, unquestioningly, or the alternating beauty and ugliness of the world, or anything whatever without asking or wanting to know the how and the why. For as her age-old passivity withdrew from her like a vast receding tide, she found herself alone on a dry, shingled shore of an unexplored continent called knowledge. Strange how this continent had grown from a tiny, sheltered plant too frail to grow in the full light of day. And then a continent from a plant? But such were the anomalies of the inner kingdoms—devoid of logic, yet more ultimately logical than anything on earth.

The continent of knowledge—but how did one proceed in such a place? All was new to her, all a source of hesitation. Where was she to turn? She found her answer in a nearby abbey and its library—custodian of a rare collection of both religious and secular texts. Into this she released the new-born impetus of her mind—much hampered by its lack of training and development, but urgently inspired nevertheless by a curiosity that seemed suddenly to have leapt out and possessed her from nowhere she could discern.

Soon, she found herself becoming so attached to the monastic institution where she now spent so much time, that another resolve formed itself within her and quickly forced itself into the open. Only a month more passed before she finally went to her son—now in full command of his position as head of the princely house—and informed him that she had decided to take the veil. Such a course well befitted an elderly widow of her rank, she explained, as she had lost all interest in the world and wished to spend her remaining days in prayer and study.

The disclosure momentarily stunned the family, for all its members still dearly loved the dowager princess despite her recent aloofness. Yet all were able to discern that the taking of holy orders would perhaps be the wisest course, considering Isabella's present state of mind. With a final pang then, as of something being torn out of her flesh by violence, she bade farewell to all her loved ones, to all her faithful, weeping servitors, to her family's ancestral home, and departed to embark upon her new life.

Confined now to the abbey alone, she felt every last shred of gaiety, colour, even of light itself stripped from her. She entered first into an area of grey austerity and then into a long inner tunnel of almost total darkness. Nor was there any bright goddess to illumine the way, pagan or Christian, despite the pious atmosphere of the institution. All that had slipped away—all sustaining divine force, seemingly all divine protection, all guidance of inner heart or soul. For the first time she found herself truly alone, and yet—incredibly—unafraid, because she knew that the night in which she found herself was a thing of her own creation, her own inward will and choice. It was the original enquiring night of the mind that did not know but

felt the need to learn, the mind that sought its own answers to the plight of man, the mind that wished to struggle rather than take anything for granted, even the gifts of the gods themselves.

In that primeval darkness all the first-born questions of man's mind rang out: "God or demon, whoever you are who stand in the void behind our being—why are some blessed and others cursed?"

"To what end does this universe seek to travel—this universe in which we are such minute, albeit conscient parts?"

"What secrets do the seas and the immensities of the heavens hold for man?"

"What secrets, what destiny does man hold within himself, within his own nature that must yet unfold and reveal itself?"

The questions rang out and echoed through space but neither god nor man nor demon was quick to provide the answers. Isabella grew tired and old as she pored over the books on divinity and logic, alchemy and astronomy. She had the feeling that perhaps somewhere upon those reams of dusty parchment was the knowledge she sought, but that it was in a form so strangely distorted, so unrecognizably twisted as to be inaccessible to a living, breathing human being.

She began at last to languish, not because she regretted her quest—she felt more than ever that for her now there could be no other—but because she found no way forward. Her dark tunnel was full of doors she could not open. The very confinement of her vows, her cloister, her ageing body—all weighed upon her—so that at last in the most orthodox tradition of her order, she began to pray for release.

But when the divine Mother came for her she did not know it, for the very orthodoxy of her life and death in the abbey prevented her from seeing the universal deity she had known and worshipped since the dawn of human time. Once across the barrier something in her began to stir again, to know, to reach out, to speak as it had been used to doing—

"Great Mother, take me in your arms and hold me more tightly than you have ever done before. My very being aches and cries out to be healed. Where have I been and what have I done to hurt myself so?"

"Hush, dearest child, and nestle closer to me," the beloved, familiar voice answered. "Here, with a kiss on your brow I heal your pain. But why do you weep? I have seen you grow before my eyes this past life of yours, as I have rarely seen you grow before."

"Oh no, Mother, how can it be, when in the end I had lost the vision of your face and touch, when I had altogether forgotten what it was like to have you near?"

"It only seemed so to you, child. For all the while I lurked concealed behind everything that you sought—all your new searching and questioning—and urged you on."

"Ah, if only I could have seen you there—"

"The world will yet take long to see," the deity answered cryptically. "Meanwhile each façade it presents to you, each wall and bastion of physical reality shall



be a screen behind which I shall hide. Now, now, child, nestle ever closer and do not sigh as though your heart would break. We have some time together."

"But, Great Mother, already I feel the next life's call—it pulls me even while I cling to you—why—?"

"Because you have so much to do, my little love, so much that had been left over from the last time, for then truly you had only just begun. But no—you mustn't go prematurely. It would serve no end. Hold on more tightly then, and let destiny curb its impatience. This small eternity shall belong to us alone and may none of the Fates disturb so much as an instant of it."

In the measured forever that followed there were no words, no shapes, nor anything else that had a defined form. There was only a self-merging of mother and child in a bliss of being—immeasurable and all-absorbing.

Where it stopped and where a new life began the soul that had been Isabella never really knew, for one seemed to flow imperceptibly into the other. Merely, at a certain time, she felt a shadow reflection of herself moving and living, acting, thinking and sensing somewhere beyond her state of inward dreaming—somewhere beyond a wall at the end of a long dark passage. . . . But hadn't it all happened this way before? That passage—she knew she would have to travel to the end of it to see what was going on outside. But why? Wasn't it more comfortable and secure where she was? No, she would have to go—she felt it throughout her whole being. She had had to go the last time, and now she would have to go again. But if she went she would once more lose her beloved goddess. Yet it appeared to her to be a loss that had been written in her destiny—almost as though she had penned it there herself. Even the goddess had said so—she would remain invisible behind her many veils. Now at this very moment—dear heaven!—the deity had vanished even from that sacred inner space where they had both been together for so long. In anguish the cry of the soul rang out:

"Dearest Mother, why can't I see you any more?"

"Fear nothing, child, I am here," the familiar voice replied from nothing and nowhere. "I am here and here shall I be waiting for you till the end. But seek not to see me—only know that I am always present. Go now—your moment has come. If we wait and put your advent off any longer your outer being shall already be in its dotage before you arrive."

"Ah, I am flying out as though on the wings of the wind!"

"Farewell, child!"

"Farewell, Mother of my soul, watch over me, watch. . . ." Then all at once both voice and presence were gone and the dark passage had closed behind the one who had last been Isabella.

*(To be continued)*

BINA BRAGG

# EUROPE 1974

## A TRAVELOGUE

*(Continued from the issue of September 1976)*

### II

WE would not embark before eight o'clock in the evening. So there was no urgency to reach Bruges early. We could have done the flower-fields easily, had it been the season. But now it was summer and the season was over. The tulip has become the emblem of Holland. No one could think of Holland without the dykes and the dams, the wind-mills and the tulips. No description of Holland is complete without some account of the world-famous flower-fields.

A little to the west of our main route lay the flower-fields covering about 18,000 acres. During the season this area forms a unique variegated carpet of tulips, daffodils and jonquils of surpassing beauty. There never was a sight more pleasing—a creation of man where Nature gave her full co-operation and consent. It is hard to find a parallel. And it was not done in a day or by magic. It was the result of three centuries of intensive cultivation, sustained research and hard work. Yet the tulip is not quite native to Holland.

During the Crusades, the soldiers while they crossed Asia Minor found these flowers growing wild in the meadows. They gathered the flowers, and took them as a present to the monks in the monastery where they would take shelter during the night. The monks, enchanted by the ethereal beauty of the flowers, planted them and tended them with loving care. The cultivation of the tulips spread far and wide, so much so that at the Sultan's court there used to be at one time a festival of the tulips every year during the season. When and how the tulips travelled west and reached Holland it is difficult to say, or why of all the countries in Europe Holland should become the guardian of the beautiful flower. Perhaps the soil and the atmosphere of Holland are most congenial to the temperament of the tulips.

The 17th century was the Golden Age of Holland. The merchants at this time became very fond of speculation and the tulips became the "Wind trade". The flower bulbs became as valuable as gold. One variety of the bulb called the *Semper Augustus* was worth 4,600 guilders each or a carriage and two horses. Sometimes a single bulb was bought for 10,000 guilders. And fortunes were made or lost in a single day. Soon this dangerous state of affairs came to the notice of the Dutch government. An Act was passed to stop all gambling and the tulip trade was put on a surer basis. Today the tulip bulbs are bought by Britain, Sweden, France, Canada, South Africa, Argentina, Ceylon, Turkey and Vienna. The biggest buyer is Britain. The income derived from the sale is great, considering the fact that very little has to be imported for the cultivation of the flowers. Everything depends on the hard work of the Dutch.

For research work a college has been founded at Keukenhof. This college too has become world-famous. Students come to it from all over the world. And the results of research and other information are sent out on demand to all

Botanical Gardens. Keukenhof has become a show-piece of Dutch flower-culture. It is a paradise for flower-lovers. The tulips have beautiful names. There is first of all the Darwin with a long stalk; there is then the double called the Extravagant; Triumph is another kind which is really dazzling. The Daffodils too have very beautiful names, the Trumpet and the Poeticus are magnificent flowers. The sheds, although they are called sheds, are actually modern buildings with arrangements for heat and light control, where intensive research goes on to improve the bulbs, the flowers and the plants. Keukenhof has become world-renowned for its studies in botany and entomology. If one tours Holland during the spring one must never miss the flower-fields.

We were nearing Belgium. This, one may recall, is Van Gogh country. Vincent Van Gogh, born (1853) in the frontier province of Brabant, was the pioneer of the Impressionist style of painting. Rural themes, rustic people, still life attracted him most. He was one with Nature. For example, when he painted a tree he could not rest quiet with just drawing what he saw. He became attuned to the tree's aspiration, and it was thus that he laboured to express. Unpretentious and contemplative by nature, he treated his subjects with infinite compassion. He was one with struggling humanity. That is why he could express simplicity and purity with exquisite beauty devoid of all ornamentation. As it usually happens with most great artists, his first works were rejected by art-dealers. This did not, however, dampen the fire within him. He went on improving his style.

He went to Paris in 1886. And there he saw the Japanese paintings. Japanese paintings and prints at that time flooded the European market. Van Gogh was particularly impressed by the bright colours and the novel style of this oriental art. Automatically he came under its spell. It was an influence for the better. His painting improved immensely. Two of his paintings of this time were almost completely Japanese in style.

Van Gogh settled at Arles in Provence. There he invited Gauguin to come and live with him. But their temperaments clashed and they separated. Recognition was late in coming and he was desperate and overwhelmed by sorrow at times. Little did he imagine then that the smallest of his paintings would one day fetch 1.3 million dollars. Harassed and mentally sick, Vincent Van Gogh, one of the greatest of the Dutch masters, died a poor man. Sri Aurobindo has used such epithets as "excellent, wonderful, impressive" on seeing some of his work in print.

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We passed the Belgian border without much fuss. This was King Baudouin's kingdom. Perhaps the youngest monarch of Europe, he became king when his father King Leopold abdicated in 1951. Baudouin was only 25 at that time. Well educated, liberal, with charming manners he is a very popular king. He knows French, Flemish, English, Dutch, and even a little Swedish. Of him and his beautiful queen Fabiola we can say like the fairy tales, "And they lived happily ever after."

Belgium is one of the "new" nations of Europe in the political sense, newer even

than Holland. At various periods in history it had been under Spain, Austria, and France. In language and culture the Belgians are predominantly French. The Flemish language is also spoken by most Belgians. By the Congress of Vienna, Belgium was made part of Holland thus forming the "political" Netherlands which was formerly only a geographical entity. But the Belgian people soon started to aspire for freedom, and a separate Belgium. In the Revolution of 1830—the Revolution that shook all the capitals of Europe—Belgium became an independent state. And Leopold I became its first king. The newest and one of the smallest nations of Europe, Belgium took an enormous part in the opening up of Africa in the 19th century.

Africa, so near Europe and mapped in outline long ago, was yet the last place occupied by the Europeans, perhaps because of its inhospitable coasts. It was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt that awoke England to the fact that Africa was important as a passage to the East. This, plus the industrial revolution which demanded raw materials and also markets, aroused the desire for more land among all the nations of Europe. To this was added President Monroe's policy of "Hands Off America", known as the Monroe Doctrine. Several Associations were formed in London with a view to conduct explorations in the Dark Continent. Livingstone was sent out and he landed on the west coast, travelled across the continent and was about to reach the east coast. He took such a long time that people thought he was lost. So they sent out Stanley. Although a Britisher, Stanley's expedition was financed by King Leopold of the Belgians. While Stanley was still in Africa Leopold II convened a great International Conference in Brussels, to which he invited all the geographers of Europe to find ways and means for more explorations. An International Association was founded. When Stanley finally arrived, having travelled through the Congo Basin, this area was given to King Leopold as a present. Thus little Belgium acquired an empire ten times its own size.

The gains were enormous. Rubber trade brought Belgium a fortune. Finally, at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, all the treaties concluded by the nations with the native chiefs were ratified and the partition of Africa was complete. The Scramble for Africa was over and the miracle of it is that it was done quickly and without war or bloodshed. Belgium has recently given up its African Empire. Yet it enjoys unique prestige of another kind. Brussels is the headquarters of the European Economic Community. Hardly a month passes when some great conference is not taking place in Brussels. With all the new buildings, Brussels is an interesting place to live in. Belgium's main exports today are armaments. Before the war Belgian diamonds and Belgian mirrors flooded even the Indian markets. Belgium has fully justified its independent existence.

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We arrived at Bruges late in the afternoon. Bruges has been a famous town from of yore. It was an active member of the Hanseatic League. Its trade was mostly in woollen goods and lace. All the beautiful lace we see in the pictures of great kings and

queens during the medieval and Renaissance periods came from Bruges. Even today in the main shopping centre there are innumerable shops that display exquisite lace of all kinds. It is difficult to find a parallel to such fine workmanship. The threads are almost invisible and the designs are simply superb. Indian women are generally very fond of lace. So some dollars were spent by our party on Belgian lace. The town is very representative of Belgium. There are beautiful wooden houses that are four centuries old and are specially preserved as show pieces. Bruges is described as one of Europe's most enchanting cities. And the nearby city of Ghent is known as the Florence of the North. In Bruges there is an old castle that almost takes one back to the Feudal Age, and there is a church and a convent founded in 1245. We had tea at one of the fashionable cafés. The cakes and the cookies were as tasty as those of Holland.

We drove another ten miles and reached Zee Bruges. That was the port from where we would cross the English Channel. The Ferry boat was still not visible. The sea looked beautiful. It was eight o'clock, yet streaks of sunlight were still there, and the sea seemed to catch all the colours of the setting sun. Although the boat is called a ferry, in reality it is a small-sized ship with some fifty cabins, and four glass-covered decks that can accommodate four hundred second-class passengers. Thanks to the American Express we were provided with cabins. The cabins were four-berthed, and the berths were as comfortable as in our air-conditioned coaches in India. The floor was covered with a thick pile carpet. On one side was a basin spotlessly clean, with four fresh towels and a big roll of tissue paper and soap; on the other side was a wardrobe with four hangers. The ferry boat gave all the comforts that a voyager might ask for.

The Belgian customs officials were like the Austrians, happy-go-lucky and always smiling. The customs formalities over, we boarded the ship and the first thing we did was to change our currency at the bank. This was the first time in this trip that we heard English spoken with the pleasing Oxford accent. Then at about ten o'clock we were served one of the most delicious dinners we have had on our tour. The fish was excellent, freshly caught from the sea, Brussels sprouts and all sorts of vegetables and huge cups of ice-cream. The crossing would take a long time, for Zee Bruges to Dover was a little over fifty miles. The Dover-Calais crossing is only twenty miles. We were happy that our escort chose this crossing. Although the Channel cannot quite be called the high seas yet they are very much alike. The water in the Channel is always choppy and the weather invariably cloudy and even stormy. And as luck would have it, it was stormy that night. A tremendous wind wailed, and the rain lashed against the glass window of the cabin. It was exactly what we had wanted. We even went out on the open deck to have a taste of the storm and get a little wet. We could have slept soundly for six hours. But there were the White Cliffs of Dover to see. We had heard so much about them that we did not want to miss the sight. Misty and unearthly the White Cliffs beckoned us to England.

*(To be continued)*.

CHAUNDONA & SANAT K. BANERJI

# Students' Section

## HOW THE ASHRAM IS RUN

*(This article was first published in Vers l'Avenir, the periodical brought out by the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. It was written by one of them, Damel, with the notes, ideas and help of two others, Ajit P. and Marc-André. It is not meant to be an official statement from the Ashram: it is the impression of what some students have felt.)*

BEFORE beginning, it may be interesting to tell you how this article came about. Our original intention was to write a report on how the Audit Office functions and how the auditing of the Ashram's departments and various undertakings is done. After a initial interview we realized that it was too limited in scope. Too limited, because the Audit Office is involved with all the Ashram departments and it is a vital part of the process of running the Ashram. We felt that to explain only the Audit Office (if you will pardon the image) was like trying to study a spider by tearing it away from its web, thus cutting it off and leaving its links dangling. The only approach, we felt, was to look at the Ashram organisation as a whole.

"...The Ashram was founded or rather founded itself in 1926."<sup>1</sup> "My aim is to create a centre of spiritual life which shall serve as a means of bringing down the higher consciousness and making it a power not merely for 'salvation' but for a divine life upon earth. It is with this object that I have withdrawn from public life and founded this Ashram in Pondicherry (so called for want of a better word, for it is not an Ashram of Sannyasins, but of those who want to leave all else and prepare for this rule) .."<sup>2</sup>

Over the years many changes have occurred in the Ashram, but the aspiration for a transformed being is still its focus. Renunciation of the world, liberation of the soul, escape from Matter are the basis of other "similar" institutions; the idea of a new, different existence, a "Divine life in a Divine body" is ours. Here all is welcome since no aspect of life can be or is excluded; all is necessary since all must eventually be transformed. This explains why the Ashram has an infinitely more difficult task. For, contrary to other such institutions there is and must be an extraordinary diversity, both of activities and of people plus the fact that here there are absolutely no formalities, rituals or cults. There is only the presence of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. We will now look into how this Ashram is organised and run.

Besides the minimum basic needs of an individual, namely food, clothing, shelter, here in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, every need and facet of the ideal life is and has been provided for by Mother in an organised way. Mother gave to certain persons the task of concerning themselves with these needs. Over the years, organi-

<sup>1</sup> *On Himself*, SABCL vol. 26, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Supplement*, SABCL vol. 27, p. 416.

sations established themselves naturally around these needs and persons; which we now call departments. Examples: Prosperity, Department of Physical Education, the School, Electric Service, the various industries and crafts: Harpagon, Atelier, Handmade Paper Factory, Soap Factory, Embroidery Department, Marbling, Art Gallery. Many of the departments we see today began in a simple, almost naive way; a need arose or Mother saw a need—it could be physical, intellectual, artistic, spiritual, and Mother asked someone to take care of it. In the course of time, the work grew and a department was formed.

Each department was personally looked after by Mother, and each person in a department was guided by Her. People were given jobs of which they knew nothing and they learnt, guided by Mother and dedicated entirely to their task.

She chose for each department a head, because it is not physically possible to give each worker direct instructions. Every minute detail, however, was arranged by Her and the department heads were trained by Her to observe Her methods. Although Sri Aurobindo and Mother often said that the fact a person was a head did not mean that he was in any way superior to the other workers, they also stressed the importance of “subordination and cooperation”.

However, why such a strong emphasis on work and departments in an Ashram? Sri Aurobindo often said that to only read and meditate and dwell inwardly was not his Yoga, but that physical work done for Mother was essential. He stressed that both aspects—work done for Mother and inner experience—were involved in Sadhana and He also said that the right inner consciousness would flow from the work itself if one was absolutely sincere and open. Therefore, actual work is given particular emphasis in the Ashram and not for the purely practical reason of supplying the necessary material needs of the community. In fact, the Ashram is not self-sufficient and depends greatly on outside aid to subsist. The work is done with another goal, that of offering and consecration—material considerations are secondary. Neither efficiency nor productivity are the criteria—only self-giving. An Ashramite falls short only when he does his work out of self-gratification. That is why our Ashram is so different. As I write this I wonder about the reason for writing this article and whether it is done as an offering to Mother or for my own pleasure. And I realize that it is this attitude that is all-important.

In the Ashram each one is entirely responsible for the work Mother has given him; he does it in his own way and is totally involved in it without concerning himself with other jobs being done by other people. It is only when he has some work with one of them that he turns in that person’s direction; otherwise the relation is strictly between himself and Mother. This relation or absence of external relations was much stricter in the early days of the Ashram: in those days if one wanted to meet another sadhak one had to have Mother’s permission. The austerity of those days vanished, however, when children were admitted to the Ashram and a school for them was started. Ideally a person working in one department will hardly concern himself with what is being done in another department, unless he has some

need to do so. Similarly the head of a department coordinates the work done, and he does not interfere in anyone's work, he helps and advises only if asked. Before, when She was here physically he would report to Mother and She would often correct what was being done and relay Her specific instructions through him; now that She is not there the relation between the head and the other workers does not change, each one is to continue his own one-pointed relation with Mother. Ideally, one would be able to describe the relation as a garden full of sunflowers all turned towards the Sun—Mother's Consciousness.

In the Ashram there are certain departments and persons that have to coordinate the other departments and the overall needs of the Ashram, they take care of a particular aspect of the entire Ashram's life. This is due uniquely to the kind of job they perform and does not imply a hierarchy (of any sort) over other departments or persons. These jobs therefore involve management—of the Ashram as a whole—not just the management of a single department. We have for example: the Labour Office which deals with all the Ashram's servants and paid workers, the Audit Office which checks the expenditures and accounts of the various departments and prepares the audits for submission to the Government, there is the job of distributing work to the sadhaks and arranging for the departments to be staffed as adequately as possible; there is the managing of Prosperity which involves acquiring and distributing most of the material needs other than food (such as clothing, soap, paper, umbrellas, medicine, etc.) of the sadhaks, and also the boardings' general supplies; there is the management of finance; there is the job of looking after the Ashram's houses and lands, finding suitable accommodations and paying the rents; there is the management of the technical services such as electricity, water, building, etc., there is the management of food from production to cooking, from purchasing to serving, and there are many others

Then there are the Trustees. The Trustees themselves have their own jobs, they look after some of the above-mentioned areas. But the Trustees, in addition to their own work, have to look after the questions and problems which do not fall in the above-mentioned categories; questions which used to be submitted to Mother in the past. Their job is a difficult one, they must make decisions not based on opinion but on their sincerity to Mother. The decisions that they make are unanimous: if any one of them has some reservations, the idea is dropped. A decision is taken because of its innate correctness and not because the majority of the Trustees want it. Thus the pervasive atmosphere in which the Trustees work is one of goodwill, understanding, harmony and unity. Yet when they take decisions, they are criticized. But if Mother chose and trusted them, why can't we?

When we began interviewing the Trustees we wanted to know how they managed the Ashram and what they did to make things work. They told us and we soon realized that they were not running the Ashram in the way we had supposed. Before the Trustees, the Ashram was under the full control of Mother, She personally looked after every practical aspect and taught how everything should be done.



When Mother gradually retired from the Ashram, She left the sadhaks to follow the path Sri Aurobindo and She had shown them. For the Trustees to try to assume Her mantle and run the Ashram, would be to destroy all that Mother had achieved, since they would be imposing their own consciousness on the work to be done. They manage the Ashram now that Mother is no longer here physically, but they generally do not concern themselves with the internal affairs of the departments and only do so when asked for advice or when complaints are made about a department. In which case they speak with the head to see what is the matter and, if changes are needed, suggest them.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust was formed in 1955. It was a lawyer from Bombay who advised Mother that the Ashram should form a public charitable trust so that income tax would not be attracted when Pondicherry came under Indian rule, and so that the Ashram would not be regarded as Mother's private property in which case it would be inherited by Her family after Her demise. However, the French were reluctant to give up Pondicherry to India. Though they turned it over *de facto* (in fact) in 1954, they turned it over *de jure* (by law) only in 1962; that is to say that although it belonged to India in 1954 it was still under French laws until 1962 when Indian laws were introduced and the Trust was declared. In 1955, Mother chose the following people to be Trustees, some of whom were not keen: Amritada, Dyumanbhai, Nolinida and Satyakarmaji. With herself as President, they were the five required by law to constitute the Board of Trustees. In the beginning the Board of Trustees existed only on paper as the resolutions used to be written according to Mother's decisions and signed by Her first; the others would sign without even reading since they were signing below Mother's signature.

In 1968 Amritada was ill and so it was necessary to choose another Trustee: Mother chose Counouma. In 1970, Satyakarmaji passed away and Mother chose Pradyotda. The Board of Trustees which in the beginning had been merely a legal necessity gradually had to take decisions and meetings began to be held in 1974 after Mother left Her body. In 1968 Mother had given Counouma by power of attorney the right to sign documents on behalf on the Ashram and also the right of signing on Her behalf. This was because signatures on legal documents were sometimes challenged in court and so it was necessary for the person who signed to appear in the courts. Mother gradually left people to run things on their own, relying on their sincerity to Her, rather than Her physical intervention. The department heads tried to disturb Her less and less with their difficulties. She would only ask them if everything was all right, and everything generally was. During the months preceding Her departure, Her only material action was that She blessed the important files. From May 1973 She stopped seeing anyone and rarely talked to Her attendants. She gave Her last Darshan on August 15 and She left Her body on November 17.

This physical departure did not cause any visible upset to the Ashram's organisation. Everything continued and continues as before. Though Mother is no longer

present in Her room, Her room remains our Sun, Her Presence and Help are felt stronger than ever. The procedures established then continue today unchanged. Letters addressed to Mother still come in as before. The money for the Ashram is still channelled through Mother's room, the daily money for the Dining Room and Corner House are put into packets there and taken by the respective heads. Flowers, offerings, birthdays and work, everything down to the smallest detail continues as it used to when Mother was there. One might think they are burying themselves in tradition, but it is not out of a tamasic longing for the past nor any vain sentimentality, it is a means to remain sincere to Mother's Presence and to retain one's close contact with Her.

Of course, changes must be made, just as Mother often used to change Her ways. The point is, these changes must come about dictated by an inner awareness and executed in total sincerity if the Ashram is to manifest Her Will.

"...The work in the Ashram was not meant as a service to humanity or to a section of it called the sadhaks of the Ashram....The work was meant as a service to the Divine and as a field for the inner opening to the Divine, surrender to the Divine alone, rejection of ego and all the ordinary vital movements and the training in a psychic elevation, selflessness, obedience, renunciation of all mental, vital or other self-assertion of the limited personality. Self-affirmation is not the aim, the formation of a collective vital ego is also not the aim. The merging of the little ego in union with the Divine, purification, surrender, the substitution of the Divine guidance for one's own ignorant self-guidance based on one's personal ideas and personal feelings is the aim of Karma-yoga, the surrender of one's own will to the Divine Will."

In spite of all that they have done, one still finds discord and dispute in the life of the Ashram. This criticism is nothing new. A glance through Sri Aurobindo's correspondence reveals that there has always been accusing and reporting about others going on. Sri Aurobindo and Mother had to fight each step of the way. However, in those days there was a final authority to rely on, now there is none—on the physical plane. These difficulties, we feel, must therefore be met in the way Mother always spoke of, by rising above the situation by going inside oneself and finding the true solution. As an example of a genuine problem arising: supposing two persons are each working in complete dedication and sincerity to Mother, a situation arises which concerns them both, each person's view is diametrically opposed to the other's. How does one proceed? There are three basic alternatives: to clash (that is to hold rigidly to one's position), to resign, and the third is to continue the work, but to leave the result to the Divine, to collaborate as much as possible. Mother has taught us and expects from us the latter. Whenever there is a clash, it is a clash of egos, whenever there is a giving-up, it is a refusal to progress, when one overcomes all desires even regarding "our" work (as it is not ours but the Lord's), when one acts on Her mantra "Ce que Tu veux", then one truly does Mother's work.