







# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE

AUGUST 15, 1977: SRI AUROBINDO'S BIRTHDAY

Price : Rs. 2/-

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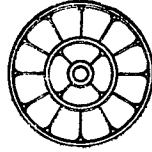
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Editor's Phone: 782.

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

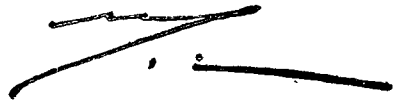


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

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. 8

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

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Published by: P COUNOUMA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST, PONDICHERRY-605002

Printed by: AMIYO RANJAN GANGULI

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry-605002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No R. N. 8667/63

## AUGUST 15

### TWO TALKS BY THE MOTHER

#### I

*Mother, has this day, the fifteenth of August, an occult or a simple significance? For, in history, important events occurred on this day.*

WHAT exactly do you mean? The fifteenth of August is Sri Aurobindo's birthday. Therefore, it is a date which has a capital importance in the life of the earth, from the physical point of view. So?

*On August fifteenth other important events took place?...*

What, the liberation of India? Is it because the liberation of India came about on the fifteenth of August? And so, it is necessary to tell you why it happened, you can't find it out by yourself, can you? It needs to be said, does it? I think Sri Aurobindo has written it also, hasn't he, in the message he gave? Hasn't he said it?<sup>1</sup>

*Yes, it is exactly that .*

Today, there came into my hands one of those greeting cards which people send on puja days or for the new year or other such festivals; and on this card was written something like this—I don't recall the exact words—but anyway they were, "Greetings on the occasion of this memorable day of the birth of our nation." It is sent by someone who, I think, proclaimed himself a disciple of Sri Aurobindo quite a long time ago. . That seemed to me one of those enormities which human stupidity alone can commit. If he had said: "On this memorable day of the birth of Sri Aurobindo *and* its natural consequence, the birth of the nation", it would have been quite all right. But still, the important point was left out and the other mentioned, which is quite simply a consequence, a natural result: it *had* to be like that, it could not be otherwise.

But people always think like that, the wrong way up. Always. They take the effect for the cause, they glorify the effect and forget the cause.

And that is why the world walks on its head with its feet in the air. Quite simply, there is no other reason.

August 15, 1956

<sup>1</sup> The Mother is referring to the message Sri Aurobindo gave on 15 August 1947. There Sri Aurobindo takes the coincidence of India's independence with his own birthday "not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition". He speaks of his work as concerned with four dreams which were now "arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement", and adds "The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India."



As today is Sri Aurobindo's birthday I thought that I could read to you something which will interest you and show you how Sri Aurobindo visualised our relation with the gods.

You know, don't you, that in India especially, there are countless categories of gods, who are all on different planes, some very close to man, others very close to the Supreme, with many intermediaries

You will understand better what I want to tell you if I mention the gods of the Puranas—like those we saw the other day in the film—who in many ways are, I must say, inferior to man (!) although they have infinitely more power

There are gods of the Overmind who are the great creators of the earth—until now. There are the gods of the Vedas who are mentioned in everything that has come down from the Rishis. And there are the gods of the Supermind, those who are going to manifest on earth, although of course they exist from all eternity on their own plane.

Here Sri Aurobindo is speaking mostly about the Vedic gods, but not exclusively nor in a very definite way. At any rate these gods are higher than the gods of the Puranas.

Here is what Sri Aurobindo tells us. In fact, it is a prayer:

Be wide in me, O Varuna,  
 be mighty in me, O Indra,  
 O Sun, be very bright and luminous,  
 O Moon, be full of charm and sweetness  
 Be fierce and terrible, O Rudra,  
 be impetuous and swift, O Maruts,  
 be strong and bold, O Aryama;  
 be voluptuous and pleasurable, O Bhaga,  
 be tender and kind and loving and passionate, O Mitra.  
 Be bright and revealing, O Dawn;  
 O Night, be solemn and pregnant  
 O Life, be full, ready and buoyant,  
 O Death, lead my steps from mansion to mansion  
 Harmonise all these, O Brahmanaspati.  
 Let me not be subject to these gods, O Kali.<sup>1</sup>

So Sri Aurobindo makes Kali the great liberating power who ardently impels you towards progress and leaves no ties within you which would hinder you from progressing.

I think this will be a good subject for meditation.

15 August 1958

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts and Aphorisms*, Cent. Vol. 17, p. 85.

# THE AVATAR

## FROM A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TODAY I have been asked to speak to you about the Avatar

The first thing I have to say is that Sri Aurobindo has written on this subject and the person who has asked me the question would do well to begin by reading what Sri Aurobindo has written.

I shall not speak to you about that, for it is better to read it for yourself

But I could speak to you of a very old tradition, more ancient than the two known lines of spiritual and occult tradition, that is, the Vedic and Chaldean lines, a tradition which seems to have been at the origin of these two known traditions, in which it is said that when, as a result of the action of the adverse forces—known in the Hindu tradition as the Asuras—the world, instead of developing according to its law of Light and inherent consciousness, was plunged into the darkness, inconscience and ignorance that we know, the Creative Power implored the Supreme Origin, asking him for a special intervention which could save this corrupted universe; and in reply to this prayer there was emanated from the Supreme Origin a special Entity, of Love and Consciousness, who cast himself directly into the most inconscient matter to begin there the work of awakening it to the original Consciousness and Love.

In the old narratives this Being is described as stretched out in a deep sleep at the bottom of a very dark cave, and in his sleep there emanated from him prismatic rays of light which gradually spread into the Inconscience and embedded themselves in all the elements of this Inconscience to begin there the work of Awakening.

If one consciously enters into this Inconscient, one can still see there this same marvellous Being, still in deep sleep, continuing his work of emanation, spreading his Light; and he will continue to do it until the Inconscience is no longer inconscient, until Darkness disappears from the world—and the whole creation awakens to the Supramental Consciousness.

And it is remarkable that this wonderful Being strongly resembles the one whom I saw in vision one day, the Being who is at the other extremity, at the confines of form and the Formless. But that one was in a golden, crimson glory, whereas in his sleep the other Being was of a shining diamond whiteness emanating opalescent rays.

In fact, this is the origin of all avatars. He is, so to say, the first universal Avatar who, gradually, has assumed more and more conscious bodies and finally manifested in a kind of recognised line of Beings who have descended *directly* from the Supreme to perfect this work of preparing the universe so that, through a continuous progression, it may become ready to receive and manifest the supramental Light in its entirety.

In every country, every tradition, the event has been presented in a special way, with different limitations, different details, particular features, but truly speaking, the

origin of all these stories is the same, and that is what we could call a direct, conscious intervention of the Supreme in the darkest matter, without going through all the intermediaries, in order to awaken this Matter to the receptivity of the Divine Forces

The intervals separating these various incarnations seem to become shorter and shorter, as if, to the extent that Matter became more and more ready, the action could accelerate and become more and more rapid in its movement, more and more conscious too, more and more effective and decisive.

And it will go on multiplying and intensifying until the entire universe becomes the total Avatar of the Supreme

28 May 1958

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## A SUDDEN VAST

A SUDDEN Vast breaks forth above the brain—  
 Form, feature vanish in that rapt Inane—  
 God is free light, an unwall'd timelessness! ...  
 But, when the soul settles in the Infinite's day  
 And sees no more the Eternal from cooped clay,  
 God is a golden form wearing the bond  
 Of limb and visage: the immense beyond  
 Is but His aura of love limitless  
 Bent on a flooding down of skies to bless  
 The human body so time's slave may find  
 Through deep self-sight crowning a life long blind  
 The immortal sun-face that is Supermind!

AMAL KIRAN

# “MIRACLES” AND SRI AUROBINDO

## THE MOTHER REMINISCES

From a Talk of March 6, 1963

*Why didn't you or Sri Aurobindo make a great use of miracles as a means of overcoming resistance in the external human consciousness? Why this kind of self-effacement where outer things are concerned, this non-intervention or discretion?*

As for Sri Aurobindo, I only know what he told me several times. People give the name of “miracle” only to interventions in the material or the vital world. And the interventions are always mixed with ignorant and arbitrary movements.

But the number of miracles that Sri Aurobindo performed in the mind is incalculable; but naturally you could only see it if you had a very straight, very sincere, very pure vision—a few people did see it. But he refused—this I know—he refused to perform any vital or material miracles, because of this mixture.

My experience is that in the present state of the world, a direct miracle, material or vital, must necessarily take into account a great many elements of falsehood. And they are unacceptable. I have seen what people call miracles; I saw many of them at one period, but this gave a right of existence to many things which to me are not acceptable.

What men call “miracles” now-a-days are almost always performed by vital beings or men who are in contact with vital beings, and this is a mixture—it accepts the reality of certain things, the truth of certain things that are not true. And this is the basis on which it works. So that is unacceptable.

*I did not quite understand what you meant by saying that Sri Aurobindo performed miracles in the mind.*

I mean that he used to introduce the supramental force into the mental consciousness, the mental consciousness that governs all material movements, he would introduce a supramental formation or power or force which immediately changed the organisation. This produces immediate effects which seem illogical because they do not follow the normal course of movements according to mental logic.

He himself used to say that when he was in possession of the supramental power, when he could use it at will and focus it on a specific point with a definite purpose, it was irrevocable, inevitable: the effect was absolute. That can be called a miracle.

For example, take someone who was sick or in pain; when Sri Aurobindo was in possession of this supramental power—there was a time when he said that it was completely under his control, that is, he could do what he wanted with it, he could

apply it where he liked—then he would apply this Will, for example, to some disorder, either physical or vital or, of course, mental—he would apply this force of greater harmony, of greater order, this supramental force, and focus it there, and it would act immediately. And it was an order: it created an order, a harmony greater than the natural harmony. That is, if it was a case of healing, for example, the healing would be more perfect and more complete than any obtained by ordinary physical and mental methods.

There were a great many of them. But people are so blind, so embedded in their ordinary consciousness that they always give “explanations”, they can always give an explanation. Only those who have faith and aspiration and something very pure in themselves, that is, who truly want to know, they were able to perceive it.

When the Power was there, he even used to say that it was effortless; all he had to do was to apply this supramental power of order and harmony and instantly the desired result was achieved.

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## PRESENCE

### I

PEACE of a sudden. You are here,  
 Holding the horses, Charioteer.  
 They went three ways,  
 Their whipping manes in my face.  
 They step at your will,  
 And I am the car they roll  
 Into the Sun's light  
 (Purest gold, syringa-white)  
 Through the disc of it, and still on—  
 Still on,  
 Past the lies  
 To the peace  
 Of all seen, entered, occupied, known.

### 2

You having the reins, I travel through  
 All seen things to a that-shaped You,  
 All seen things—clovers, a scarlet fly—  
 Nodding toward me a God-shaped I.

JOYCE CHADWICK

# THE MOTHER ON SRI AUROBINDO

## SOME GLIMPSES

### The Incarnation

“It matters not if there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest darkness. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness will be transformed into Light and Thy reign shall be established on the earth.” Thus arose the canticle from the Mother’s heart when she first met Sri Aurobindo on the material plane, on March 29 in 1914, at Pondicherry.<sup>1</sup>

Long before that, even in her teens, she had come to know him as Krishna; he was the being who would appear before her mind’s eye during her body’s sleep, and instruct her in the ways of the spirit. She had also made an impressionist painting of him. She recognised him the moment she saw him in his physical frame.<sup>2</sup> She knew him to be the Avatar.

How long did she keep the knowledge to herself? The small group of disciples that had gathered round Sri Aurobindo and the Mother during the early decades must have had an inkling, even if they did not proclaim it to the world. The Mother wrote the words, “The Avatar, Sri Aurobindo”, on top of the red lotus painted by one of the disciples. This was in early 1940.<sup>3</sup> One is not sure if this was the first announcement.

In any case, during the forties, and especially after his passing away, the Avatarhood of Sri Aurobindo was no longer a secret. One remembers the series of extraordinary pronouncements she made immediately after the Event of December 5, 1950. “Lord,” she begins on December 7, “this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved...” On December 9, the day of the interment, she gives the words that she had a few days later engraved in marble on the Sepulchre for all to see: “To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude ..” And again, on December 26, she adds, “our Lord has sacrificed Himself for us ..”<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo “is a permanent Avatar of the Lord (as Krishna is),” she explains later, in a letter to a young disciple.<sup>5</sup>

Was he the last Avatar? This is an intriguing question; and the Mother’s answer to the question is equally intriguing. “I have always heard it said that Sri Aurobindo was the ‘last Avatar’ ” Does she mean it as a joke about herself? We know there is a strong conviction with some people that a Woman can never be an Avatar. Was she making fun of that? She however concludes her remark thus: “but without a doubt, he is the last Avatar in a human form;—afterwards, one does not know...”<sup>6</sup> We may perhaps leave the matter at that.

### The Mission and Work

The Avatar is “the Supreme Divine manifested in an earthly form—generally a human form—for a definite purpose”<sup>7</sup>

What was that purpose in this case? The Mother’s answer is as clear and precise as it is succinct:

“Sri Aurobindo came on earth to announce the manifestation of the supramental world. And he has not merely announced this manifestation, but also embodied in himself in part this Supramental Force, and has given us the example of what should be done in order to prepare ourselves for manifesting it.”<sup>8</sup>

In the Birthday Message of 1972, we read: “Man is the creation of yesterday. Sri Aurobindo came to announce the creation of tomorrow: the coming of the supramental being.” A year earlier, inaugurating Sri Aurobindo’s centenary year, she had given this Message to All-India Radio: “Sri Aurobindo belongs to the future; he is the messenger of the future. He still shows us the way to follow in order to hasten the realisation of a glorious future fashioned by the Divine Will.”

She had earlier explained to the children of the Ashram, in simple terms, what was this “glorious future” that Sri Aurobindo had come to announce and prepare for men. “He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realise it.”

The Manifestation will in time create here on earth a New World “that we think of when we come out of our ordinary conceptions, simply, shall we say, a world of harmony, peace, understanding, wideness of mind, goodwill, absence of egoism, disinterested consecration to a high ideal, forgetfulness of self,—there are many more things, if you like. But one has to make a beginning with a little at first,—simply that,—have some ideas that are a little liberal, a comprehension somewhat vast, not be sectarian ...”<sup>9</sup>

In more erudite language, this Manifestation will, in its principle and process, imply “an ascending transformation which will lead back this inconscient and mortal creation, step by step, towards the eternal and all-powerful Consciousness of the Lord”<sup>10</sup> This will naturally mean an immense change in our ways of living, thinking and acting. Instead of acting under the guidance of an ignorant mind, most of the time at the mercy of an equally ignorant and misguided vital nature, we shall be made to live and act under the direct guidance of the Lord. This will imply what the Mother describes graphically as a “transfer of power”.<sup>11</sup> The whole crux of the problem, the entire difficulty of the change lies in effecting this “transfer from the falsehood to the truth”. We do not normally want this transfer, and Sri Aurobindo’s Work has been, for the most part, to help us want it.

## The Teaching

It is the soul in us that wants this Truth of right living. "Sri Aurobindo came to tell us, 'It is not necessary to leave the earth in order to find that Truth, it is not necessary to give up the life in order to find one's soul, it is not necessary to abandon the world nor to have limited beliefs in order to enter into relations with the Divine. The Divine is everywhere, in everything, and if He is hidden, it is because we do not give ourselves the trouble to find Him'. We can, simply by a sincere aspiration, open a door in us that is sealed, and find this Something that will change all the meaning of our life, give an answer to all our questions, solve all our problems, and will lead us towards that Perfection to which we aspire without knowing it, that Reality which *alone* can satisfy us and give an everlasting joy, harmony, force, an enduring life'"<sup>12</sup>

This is the gist of Sri Aurobindo's Teaching, in its most practical aspect, the aspect that concerns us most

There is naturally the vast body of metaphysical and other writings on which this practical aspect of the teaching is based. The Mother has given a summary in a few words, so that even children can understand "There is an ascending evolution in Nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, Nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result, she endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance. Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men."<sup>13</sup>

This is but a bare outline. For, his teaching embraces practically everything under the sun. The Mother asks a question: how many of us who claim to be his disciples have really understood him and his teaching? She even doubts the possibility "Who is it who can understand Sri Aurobindo?" she asks "He is vast as the universe and his teaching has no limits..."<sup>14</sup>

In this connection she has drawn pointed attention to the "formidable mass of imbecile prejudice which consists of placing in an unshakable antagonism the material life and the spiritual. And this is a thing so deep-rooted in the human consciousness that it is very difficult to root it out, even in those who think they have understood the teaching of Sri Aurobindo....Even those who outwardly profess to understand, when they think of the spiritual life, they think at once about meditation."<sup>15</sup> So long as this "stupidity" is not rooted out of the human consciousness, the Mother warns us, "the Supramental Force will always find a considerable difficulty in not being engulfed in an obscurity of human thought which understands nothing"<sup>16</sup>.

Considered in this light, the perfection of the material life, the outer instruments



of mind, life and body, both in the individual and the group, assumes a capital importance in this Teaching. That explains in part why so much attention is being given in the Ashram to the culture of the body, as well as of the mind and the vital being through its multifarious activities. The two poles of existence must be joined, if the Supramental Manifestation is to have its full effect

### The Writings

Are the writings of Sri Aurobindo difficult to understand? Many people think so. The Mother gives an explanation—and a warning to be careful about coming to hasty conclusions. She also indicates the way out.

The difficulty proceeds from two sources: first, the substance of the thought and its unfamiliarity and, secondly, the method of exposition. Sri Aurobindo came, as the Mother has never been tired of insisting, not to repeat what others have been saying through the ages, but to open up new horizons for man. "What he says is said with the object of breaking the ordinary conceptions, so as to make you touch upon a truth more profound."<sup>17</sup> This demands an effort on the part of the reader, an effort and a sincerity of approach which not everybody is prepared for. Most of us have been accustomed to look at things in a particular way, and when we find in Sri Aurobindo something that is not quite in conformity with our notions, we either fail to appreciate it at all or, more often than not, give it a twist to suit our predilections. The Mother speaks amusingly of a gentleman—his name does not appear in the published text of her Talk—who told her that he thought "it was Sri Aurobindo who had worked out the teaching of the Buddha".<sup>18</sup>

The situation becomes a little more serious when "unscrupulous people . . . when they wanted to prove that their own theories were correct have quoted paragraphs from Sri Aurobindo, without mentioning what had come before and what came after, in support of their own theory. 'You see, Sri Aurobindo has said that in his *Life Divine*,' they have been saying."<sup>19</sup> This is easy enough to say, for, in his method of exposition, in a book like *The Life Divine*, for example, Sri Aurobindo is all the time presenting "the different arguments, the different points of view, the different conceptions, and once he has placed all these problems before us, he then comes and gives the solution".<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes there is the danger of a misunderstanding arising out of the very simplicity of his manner; for, "in his Writings, Sri Aurobindo had a genius for expressing in the most ordinary words the most extraordinary experiences, thus giving the impression that his experiences are simple and obvious."<sup>21</sup> This applies with particular force to his *Aphorisms*, and to *Savitri*, "that wonderful prophetic poem which will be the guide for humanity to its realisation of the future"<sup>22</sup>

What then is the best way of approach to his writings? One way is to read everything that he has written on a particular subject. "You will then see that he has apparently said the most contradictory things. But when you have read everything and

understood a little, you will see that all the contradictions are complementaries which organise themselves and are unified in an integral synthesis ”<sup>23</sup> The Mother gives one or two precious hints about the way to read and understand

“In a general and almost absolute way, if you really want to profit from...all that Sri Aurobindo has written, the best method is this. After gathering together your consciousness and fixing your attention on what you read, you must come to have a minimum of mental quiet,—if you can get a perfect silence, that is the best thing,—and arrive at such a state of mental immobility, I might say, a cerebral immobility, that you are able to produce an attention as tranquil and immobile as a mirror or the surface of an absolutely still water. Then the thing you read is reflected in this mirror and penetrates deep into the being and is received with the minimum of distortion. And afterwards, at times long afterwards, that re-emerges from the brain with its full power of comprehension, not as a knowledge acquired from outside but as if a light you carried within yourself. And like that you have a maximum power of comprehension ”<sup>24</sup>

There are many other aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s writings, such as their utility in training the mind, giving it a jolt that helps remove its inertia, kindling the aspiration to a higher life and making the reader a recipient of the Divine Grace, which the Mother has emphasised. She has also described the various ways in which he used to help the disciples, and she speaks of his Aura which radiated far beyond the limits of the Ashram. These are matters of considerable importance; but many among those who have had personal contacts with the Ashram are more or less familiar with these things, which one is constrained to pass over in a brief and very inadequate account like this.

### The Withdrawal and After

We may perhaps conclude with a few words about his leaving the physical body and what it has meant to his Work

The Mother has made it amply clear that “Sri Aurobindo was not compelled to leave his body; he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality” <sup>25</sup> She has assured us more than once that he is present in our midst, and is fully conscious of all we do and think and feel. He “is still with me, day and night, thinking through my brain, writing through my pen, speaking through my mouth and acting through my organising power”,<sup>26</sup> says the Mother. She has heard Sri Aurobindo saying, in May 1959, about people in the Ashram: “Henceforth whoever dies here, I will put my seal upon him, and in any condition, unconditional protection will be given.”<sup>27</sup>

And how did he further his Work? The Mother announced, soon after his withdrawal: “He sacrificed his physical life in order to help more fully his Work of Transformation.”<sup>28</sup> We know now, in vivid detail, how he passed on the Supramental Force from his own body to that of the Mother, on his withdrawal from the body. Here is the Mother’s description

“He had accumulated in his body a great amount of the Supramental Force. And as soon as he left ..You see, he was lying in bed. I was standing by his side And, in an altogether concrete manner,—concrete in my feeling it so strongly that I thought it could be seen,—all this Supramental Force that was in him passed from his body into mine And I felt the friction of the passage It was extraordinary, extraordinary. That has been an extraordinary experience ..I was standing next to his bed, and that was passing ..almost a sensation, it was a physical sensation ..For a long time ”<sup>29</sup>

This must have been a tremendous help to the Mother in her work since 1950. But that was only the beginning.

“And now I see,” the Mother was speaking of things as they stood in March 1970, “I see how his work, so ..so immense, yes, and constant, in the subtle physical, how much, how much that has helped. How much he has helped in preparing things, changing the structure of the physical.”<sup>30</sup> She goes on to add, “The whole beginning of my existence, right till the departure of Sri Aurobindo, I had been in the consciousness that one can rise, high, one can know, one can have all the experiences (in fact I had them), but when one came back to the body, it was those formidable old mental laws that ruled over things And now, all these years have been the years for preparing,—preparing and liberating oneself and now, during these last few days, it was—ah, the physical verification, made by my body, that it had been changed. This has to be ‘worked out’, as they say; it has to be realised in all the details. But the change *has been made*, the change has been made....This was the work Sri Aurobindo gave me Now I understand....How he has been working since his departure!. .Oh, all the time, all the time ”<sup>31</sup>

### The Eternal Birth

What in the ultimate result is the significance of Sri Aurobindo’s coming on earth?

The Mother has spoken of it in prophetic words which will resound for ever. They have to be read in the original French to realise their vibrant power and their majestic beauty.

“Physically, it means that the results of this Birth will endure as long as the earth. The results of the birth of Sri Aurobindo will be palpable throughout the entire existence of the earth....

“Mentally, this is a Birth of which the memory will last eternally. Through the ages, they will remember the birth of Sri Aurobindo and the results it has had.

“Psychically, this is a Birth that will repeat itself eternally, from one epoch to another. This Birth is a manifestation that has taken place periodically, from epoch to epoch, in the earth’s history. That is to say, the Birth itself is renewed, is repeated, is reproduced, bringing in, perhaps every time, something more—something more complete and more perfect. But it is the same movement of Descent, manifestation, birth in a terrestrial body.

“And lastly, from the purely spiritual point of view, one may say that it is the Birth of the Eternal on earth. For every time the Avatar takes a physical form, it is the Birth of the Eternal Himself on earth.”<sup>32</sup>

SANAT K. BANERJI

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- <sup>3</sup> *Champaklal's Treasures*, p. 45.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Advent*, February 1951, pp 5-6.
- <sup>5</sup> *White Roses*, p 61.
- <sup>6</sup> The Mother, *Commentaires sur les Aphorismes*, Nos. 157-58.
- <sup>7</sup> *Champaklal's Treasures*, p. 93.
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- <sup>9</sup> The Mother, *Entretiens*, 1.6.55.
- <sup>10</sup> The Mother, *Commentaires, etc*, No 126.
- <sup>11</sup> The Mother, “Notes sur le Chemin,” 21 8.65.
- <sup>12</sup> The Mother, *Entretiens*, 13.8 58.
- <sup>13</sup> The Mother, “To the Children of the Ashram”, 24 7 51
- <sup>14</sup> “Mère Répond”, 4me Série, *Bulletin*, November 1974.
- <sup>15</sup> The Mother, *Entretiens*, 17.4.57.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>17</sup> The Mother, *Commentaires, etc*, No.2.
- <sup>18</sup> The Mother, *Entretiens*, 23.5.56.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 8.1.58
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 27.11.57.
- <sup>21</sup> The Mother, *Commentaires etc*, Nos. 435-38.
- <sup>22</sup> “Mère Répond,” 4me, Série, *Bulletin*, November 1975
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 12.64.
- <sup>24</sup> The Mother, *Commentaires, etc*, No 2
- <sup>25</sup> *Champaklal Speaks*, p. 249.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 251.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p 135
- <sup>28</sup> *The Advent*, February 1951, p. 7
- <sup>29</sup> The Mother, “Sur le Chemin”, 20.12.72.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 14 3.70.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>32</sup> The Mother, *Entretiens*, 4 9 57.

## A PERPLEXING QUESTION ABOUT SRI AUROBINDO AND ITS ANSWER

WHILE reading Sri Aurobindo's Bengali book of jail-reminiscences *Karakahim* (*Tales of Prison-life*), many readers have been puzzled by certain passages depicting the distressed state of mind in which Sri Aurobindo found himself.

Knowing that already before going to jail he had the experience of Nirvana shortly after his meeting with the Maharashtrian Yogī Lele in Baroda, one is apt to wonder how the distressed state could ever occur.

The answer can be derived from a statement of Sri Aurobindo's in the course of the talks which Nirodbaran has recorded. On December 22, 1938 Sri Aurobindo refers to the Nirvanic realisation and explains:

“My experience of peace and calm after my first contact with Lele never left me, but in my outer nature there were many agitations and every time I had to make an effort to establish peace and calm there. Ever since that early experience the whole object of my Yoga has been to change the nature into the mould of the inner realisation.”

K. D. S.

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# THE TEACHING OF SRI AUROBINDO— AND RELIGION

## SOME WORDS OF THE MOTHER

*Many people say that the teaching of Sri Aurobindo is a new religion. Would you say that it is a religion?*

PEOPLE who say that are fools who don't even know what they are talking about. You only have to read all that Sri Aurobindo has written to know that it is impossible to base a religion on his works, because he presents each problem, each question in all its aspects, showing the truth contained in each way of seeing things, and he explains that in order to attain the Truth you must realise a synthesis which goes beyond all mental notions and emerge into a transcendence beyond thought.

So the second part of the question does not make sense. Besides, if you had read what was published in the last *Bulletin*,<sup>1</sup> you could not have asked this question.

I repeat that when we speak of Sri Aurobindo there can be no question of a teaching nor even of a revelation, but of an action from the Supreme; no religion can be founded on that.

But men are so foolish that they can change anything into a religion, so great is their need of a fixed framework for their narrow thought and limited action. They do not feel secure unless they can assert this is true and that is not; but such an assertion becomes impossible for anyone who has read and understood what Sri Aurobindo has written. Religion and Yoga do not belong to the same plane of being and spiritual life can exist in all its purity only when it is free from all mental dogma.

26 April 1961

## THE DIVINE'S SOLICITUDE

You have always believed in Guruvada: I would ask you then to put your faith in the Guru and the guidance and rely on the Ishwara for the fulfilment, to have faith in my abiding love and affection, in the affection and divine good-will and loving kindness of the Mother, stand firm against all attacks and go forward perseveringly towards the spiritual goal and the all-fulfilling and all-satisfying touch of the All-Blissful, the Ishwara.

28-4-1949

SRI AUROBINDO

You are the Mother's child and the Mother's love to her children is without limit and she bears patiently with the defects of their nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

<sup>1</sup> "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation, it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme."

*Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, April 1961, p. 169.*

# TROUBLES OF BODY AND MIND

## SOME GUIDE-LINES FROM SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

I REMEMBER a sadhak saying under an attack of hiccough, "I shall die if it goes on." I told him, "What does it matter if you die?" At once the hiccough stopped. Very often these fears and suggestions bring in the adverse forces which then catch hold of the person. By my blunt statement the sadhak realised his folly and perhaps didn't allow any more suggestions.

SRI AUROBINDO

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People think that their condition depends on circumstances. But that is all false. If somebody is a "nervous wreck", he thinks that if circumstances are favourable he will improve. But actually even if they are favourable he will remain what he is. All think they are feeling weak and tired because people are not nice to them. This is rubbish. It is not the circumstances that have to be changed. What is required is an inner change.

THE MOTHER

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The only thing I can suggest about diseases is to call down peace. Keep the mind away from the body by whatever means—whether by reading Sri Aurobindo's books or meditation. It is in this state that the Grace acts. And it is the Grace alone that cures. The medicines only give a faith to the body. That is all.

THE MOTHER

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Peace will come when you will turn your thoughts away from yourself.

THE MOTHER

## A TALK OF THE MOTHER WITH TEACHERS

*Q: What is the best way to prepare ourselves to make a true progress towards what you expect of us?*

MOTHER: Naturally it is to enlarge and clarify your consciousness . but how to do it!...your own consciousness. .to enlarge it and to clarify it. And if you could, each one of you, find your psychic and unite yourself with it, all the problems would be solved

The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That's it, isn't it? The Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you, but you are not fully aware of it. Rather you have...at the moment it is more like an influence, rather than a Presence. It ought to be a conscious Presence ..so that at each moment you would be able...to ask yourself what is...how...how the Divine sees. It's like that— first, how the Divine sees...and then how the Divine wills, and then how the Divine acts. And it is not to go away into inaccessible regions, it is right here. Only, for the moment, all the old habits and the general unconsciousness...make a sort of covering which prevents us from seeing and feeling. One must...one must lift...one must lift that up.

Basically, it is necessary to become conscious instruments, conscious, conscious of the Divine.

Usually, that takes a whole lifetime, or sometimes, for some people it is several lives. Here, under the present conditions you can do it...in a few months. For those who are...who have a burning aspiration...in a few *months*...they can do it.

(*Silence*)

Do you know what the fourth dimension is? Do you know what it is?

*Q: We have talked about that...*

MOTHER: Do you have the experience...?

*Q: No, Mother.*

MOTHER: Ah! Well, that is exactly the best approach of modern science...the fourth dimension. The Divine, for us, is the fourth dimension...it is...*within* the fourth dimension. And.. it is everywhere...isn't it ..everywhere, always. That does not come and go, it is there always—everywhere. It is we, our foolishness, which prevents us from feeling it. There is no need to go away, not at all, at all, at all.

To be conscious of your psychic being, one must once be capable of feeling the fourth dimension, otherwise you cannot know what it is ..*Mon Dieu!*

(*Silence*)



Indispensable! Indispensable! Life begins with that. Otherwise one is in the falsehood....In a confusion, and in a disorder and in a darkness. Otherwise, to be conscious of your own consciousness you have to mentalise it. It's frightful, frightful! There!

*Q: The new life, Mother, it does not follow on from the old, does it, it springs up from within it.*

MOTHER: Yes, yes

*Q: There is no common point between...*

MOTHER: There is...there is...but you are not aware of it. But...you must...you must...it is the mental which prevents you from feeling it...You must be...you mentalise everything, everything...you.. what you call consciousness is the thought of things...that's what you call consciousness. But it's not that at all. That is not consciousness. Consciousness...ought to be able to be completely clear and *without* words!

(Silence)

See...everything becomes luminous and warm....*Strong!* And peace...the true peace, which is not inertia and which is not immobility.

*Q: And, Mother, can one give that as a goal to all the children?*

MOTHER: All...no! They are not all of the same age, even when they are of the same age physically. There are children who . who are elementary. It would be necessary... if you were fully conscious of your psychic, you would know the children who have a developed psychic. There are children. . where the psychic is only embryonic. The age of the psychic is not the same, it depends on many things. Normally the psychic takes several lives to form itself completely, and it is that which passes from one body to another and that is why we are not conscious of our past lives...it is because we are not conscious of our psychic. But, sometimes, there is a moment when the psychic has participated in an event; it has become conscious, and that makes a memory. One has sometimes, one has sometimes a fragmentary memory, the memory of a circumstance or an event, or a thought, or even of an action...like that...it is because the psychic was conscious.

(Silence)

The body...the body is a material which is still very heavy...and it is the material itself which has to change before the supramental can manifest.

8 February 1973

(Translated by Shradhdavan from the French)

## TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

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

JULY 13, 1940

P. There is a rumour that Pétain may retire and Flaudin may take his place. Pétain is having a disagreement with Germany.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, first it was Laval and then Flaudin. Flaudin is pro-German and worse than Laval. But will the name of Flaudin be enough to enthuse the people?

S. 15th August is nearing.

P. Yes, Hitler said he would dictate peace-terms on that date.

S. Not only that. He will go to England, he said.

SRI AUROBINDO: And not come back? *(laughter)* Did he say that?

S. Yes, it was on the German Radio.

SRI AUROBINDO: There does not seem to be any preparation for the invasion of England. But, of course, he does not do what is expected. Evidently he has no intention of going to the Balkans. Could it be Spain he has in mind? Gibraltar won't be difficult for him to take and then he may cross over to Morocco. In that case it will be difficult for the English ships to cross the strait of Gibraltar. If thus he can break the British Empire in Africa with the help of the possessions of the French whom he will oblige to hand them over, it will be a great stroke. Unless he achieves this, I don't see how he can invade England. No doubt, Ireland is a weak point. But the British are raising a 10,000-strong army.

S. That would be nothing.

SRI AUROBINDO: But combined with the Air Force it can prevent Hitler's landing

JULY 15, 1940

S. The British Government has issued a notice that French European and African possessions will be treated as enemy countries as regards trade. All trade is forbidden with them. They don't mention Indo-China or Pondicherry perhaps because they have declared a *status quo*. They know that if there is no trade, they won't get anything from outside.

SRI AUROBINDO: And nothing from inside. *(laughter)*

P. Sammer must be glad over the arrest of workers in France. He says that Fascism will help towards bringing about Communism in France.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? It is Germany that has arrested the workers because they refused to work.

P. Oh, I see.

S. But that was one of the conditions of the Armistice.

SRI AUROBINDO: The workers didn't make the Armistice! (*laughter*). Gandhi ought to be happy because of their passive resistance.

P. I think Germany may try to push the French soldiers to war against England.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not likely, because for that Hitler will have to arm France which he won't like to do. He hoped to get the Navy

N. He must have made a mistake if he hoped that.

SRI AUROBINDO: Evidently he hoped. Now that he can't get it, he is getting whatever he can by plunder.

S. Yes. All the money and jewels in the banks. Investments are prohibited without permission.

N. England has made a 3-month agreement with Japan regarding the Burma route. But China may not be affected much.

SRI AUROBINDO: It will be affected considerably.

S. The Japanese Radio has been declaring that England must concede the demands. Otherwise they will have to take the necessary steps. So England has given way.

SRI AUROBINDO. England can't deal with anything else now except Hitler. She can't deal with Japan or Russia.

S. Churchill saw long ago the necessity of alliance with Russia and also the need of increase of air force.

N. And Chamberlain did neither. And still he has a big influence.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because he looks after the class interest while Churchill sees what is good for England.

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NIRODBARAN

## SRI AUROBINDO AND PLATO

WHEN a poem by a disciple was read out to Sri Aurobindo he expressed special admiration for the line:

Seer-suns beyond the gold of Plato's brain.<sup>1</sup>

We may legitimately surmise that Sri Aurobindo admired this flight of poetic imagination not only because it winged with the right words a certain view of Plato but also because it summed up his own insight into the truth of Platonism *vis-à-vis* the Ultimate Truth as seized by his yogic consciousness.

The line by Amal Kiran suggests at the same time that Plato had his mind set glowing with a wonderful perception of spiritual reality and that, for all the extreme brilliance of this perception, there is a realm of revelation filled with a greater light of Eternal Verities than Platonism could compass.

Sri Aurobindo's general outlook on Plato may be appreciated from some statements found in his letters to his disciples. The longest of them runs: "Plato was a great writer as well as a philosopher—no more perfect prose has been written by any man—in some of his books his prose carries in it the qualities of poetry and his thought has poetic vision."<sup>2</sup> The historical background to the poetic vision in Plato's thought is touched upon by Sri Aurobindo when he writes apropos of Heraclitus and the Age of the "Mysteries" in Greece:

"To ignore the influence of the mystic thought and its methods of self-expression on the intellectual thinking of the Greeks from Pythagoras to Plato is to falsify the historical procession of the human mind. It was enveloped at first in the symbolic, intuitive, esoteric style and discipline of the Mystics,—Vedic and Vedantic seers, Orphic secret teachers, Egyptian priests. From that veil it emerged along the path of a metaphysical philosophy still related to the Mystics by the source of its fundamental ideas, its first aphoristic and cryptic style, its attempt to seize directly upon truth by intellectual vision rather than arrive at it by careful ratiocination, but nevertheless intellectual in its method and aim. This is the first period of the *Darshanas* in India, in Greece of the early intellectual thinkers. Afterwards came the full tide of philosophic rationalism, Buddha or the Buddhists and the logical philosophers in India, in Greece the Sophists and Socrates with all their splendid progeny; with them the intellectual method did not indeed begin, but came to its own and grew to its fullness. Heraclitus belongs to the transition, not to the noontide of the reason; he is even its most characteristic representative. Hence his cryptic style, hence his brief and burdened thought and the difficulty we feel when we try to clarify and entirely rationalise

<sup>1</sup> "Lammergeyer", *Altar and Flame Poems by Amal Kiran* (Aspiration, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1975) p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *The Future Poetry and Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972), p. 546.

his significances. The ignoring of the Mystics, our pristine fathers, *pūrve pitarah*, is the great defect of the modern account of our thought-evolution."<sup>1</sup>

What is particularly relevant for us is the juxtaposition in the phrase: "from Pythagoras to Plato" The coupling of the two Greeks is meaningful, there is a line of thought joining them But, in the context of mysticism, they are not on a par. "A mystic," Sri Aurobindo declares, "is currently supposed to be one who has mystic experience, and a mystic philosopher is one who has such experience and has formed a view of life in harmony with his experience. Merely to have metaphysical notions about the Infinite and Godhead and underlying or overshadowing forces does not make a man a mystic. One would never think of applying such a term to Spinoza, Kant or Hegel: even Plato does not fit into the term, though Pythagoras has a good claim to it. Hegel and other transcendental or idealistic philosophers were great intellects, not mystics."<sup>2</sup>

Yes, Pythagoras, unlike Plato, is unchallengeable; actually elsewhere Sri Aurobindo has gone so far as to say: "Pythagoras was one of the greatest of the mystics."<sup>3</sup> But, although Plato is different, we should note the way in which the Master of the Academy is excluded from the company of the mystics: "Even Plato..." This means that Plato has something about him which the other eminent intellectuals lack Sri Aurobindo sees in him a subtle sight such as cannot be traced in his encyclopaedic contemporary Aristotle. Sri Aurobindo read the *Republic* and the *Symposium* in the original when he was at Cambridge, he also went on to imitate the Platonic dialogue-form in a remarkable work, fairly long yet unfinished, of his late teens, *The Harmony of Virtue*; and a deep sense of the value of both the Platonic matter and the Platonic manner persisted. About Aristotle he has said: "I always found him exceedingly dry It is a purely mental philosophy, not like Plato's."<sup>4</sup> In Plato Sri Aurobindo recognises an inspiration from above the mere mind, creating simultaneously a profound philosophy and a superb style through which his thought comes to us "in large streams of subtle reasoning and opulent imagery."<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's estimate of Plato crystallises further in two brief phrases. One of them again brings in the adverb "even": "We may reasonably doubt whether even a Plato or a Shankara marks the crown and therefore the end of the outflowering of the spirit in man"<sup>6</sup> Here Plato stands for the highest reach of evolution which nevertheless to Sri Aurobindo is not the grand terminus: he looks forward to a superhuman achievement, with a more-than-mental "gnosis" as the day-to-day instrument of self-awareness and world-awareness.

The second phrase occurs in a letter where Sri Aurobindo answers the question: Can any part of our nature, the mental or the vital, be retained after death by the true soul, the psyche, and carried over to the next birth instead of there being a complete

<sup>1</sup> *Heractius* (Calcutta, 1947), pp 8-9    <sup>2</sup> *The Future Poetry*, p 547.

<sup>3</sup> *On Yoga*, II, Tome One (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1958), p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953), p 339.

<sup>5</sup> *Heractius*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *The Life Divine* (Sri Aurobindo Library, Greystone Press, New York, 1949), p 679

reinsouling, the taking up of an altogether new subtle vehicle along with the physical by the psyche? Sri Aurobindo's answer is that, while a person with "a strong spiritual development" could certainly retain his vital-mental being, the carrying-over is possible also to "one like Shelley or like Plato for instance" who has a developed mental personality centred around the psychic individual.<sup>1</sup> Here Plato represents the philosopher, just as Shelley represents the poet, who has lived intensely in the light of his inmost being which is ever open to divine influences.

The fact that Plato, though acutely intellectual, yet reflects a supra-intellectual source of knowledge affines him essentially to Sri Aurobindo. What is more, the mode in which he embodies in mental terms the substance of the "seer-suns" creates an intimate affinity in Platonism to Sri Aurobindo's mystic philosophy. This affinity comes of—to quote Sri Aurobindo's own words on Plato—"his eternal, ideal plane of fixed ideas, by which he seems to have meant at once an originating real-idea and an original ideal schema for all things."<sup>2</sup> Real-idea: that is an Aurobindonian expression of capital significance. It connotes something quite other than the mental idea which is a thing apart from the reality concerned. The mental idea creates an abstract figure of an existence outside itself. Whether we regard that existence as of a different kind from the stuff of ideation or of a similar kind, there is always the sense of detachment of the subjective being from objective reality in order to observe, understand and judge. The real-idea belongs not to Mind but to a superior Consciousness which Sri Aurobindo names Supermind. Supermind is an infinite Reality bringing out as Idea the truth of its own being. This idea is a coming forth, in creative self-knowledge, of that which lay concentrated in uncreative self-awareness. It is a pregnant vibration of reality itself and therefore a real-idea. Differentiations of the one truth, a multiplicity and diversity of real-ideas expressing what is infinitely implicit in the Absolute, are held in the Supermind, which is the ultimate existence itself in its aspect of Creator, and there they are organised in a perfect harmony before they are cast into the mental-vital-material mould which we know as our universe. "Mind, Life and Body," says Sri Aurobindo, "are an inferior consciousness and a partial expression which strives to arrive in the mould of a various evolution at that superior expression of itself already existent to the Beyond-Mind. That which is in the Beyond-Mind is the ideal which in its own conditions it is labouring to realise."<sup>3</sup>

Sri Aurobindo goes on to sum up: "the Real is behind all that exists; it expresses itself intermediately in an Ideal which is a harmonised truth of itself; the Ideal throws out a phenomenal reality of variable conscious-being which, inevitably drawn towards its own essential Reality, tries at last to recover it entirely whether by a violent leap or normally through the Ideal which put it forth. It is this that explains the imperfect reality of human existence as seen by the Mind, the instinctive aspiration in the mental being towards a perfectibility ever beyond itself, towards the concealed harmony of the Ideal, and the supreme surge of the spirit beyond the ideal to the transcendental. The very facts of our consciousness, its constitution

<sup>1</sup> *On Yoga II*, Tome One, p. 463

<sup>2</sup> *Heractus*, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *The Life Divine*, p. 110.

and its necessity presuppose such a triple order; they negate the dual and irreconcilable antithesis of a mere Absolute to a mere relativity.”<sup>1</sup>

And, just as between the Absolute and the relativity there stands the Supermind (or the Truth-Consciousness, as Sri Aurobindo often designates it) to connect the overwhelming multiplicity of the latter to the all-absorbing unity of the former, Sri Aurobindo sees standing between the Supermind and our sphere of ignorance a delegate power of the Truth-Consciousness, an inferior or diminished supramental Knowledge-Will from which a lapse into the mental-vital-physical diffusion and division can occur. This is the Overmind. “The integrality of the Supermind keeps always the essential truth of things, the total truth and the truth of its individual self-determinations clearly knit together; it maintains in them an inseparable unity and between them a close interpenetration and a free and full consciousness of each other: but in Overmind this integrality is no longer there. And yet the Overmind is well aware of the essential Truth of things, it embraces the totality, it uses the individual self-determinations without being limited by them: but although it knows their oneness, can realise it in a spiritual cognition, yet its dynamic movement, even while relying on that for its security, is not directly determined by it. Overmind energy proceeds through an illimitable capacity of separation and combination of the powers and aspects of the integral and indivisible all-comprehending Unity. . The one total and many-sided Real-Idea is split up into its many sides, each becomes an independent Idea-Force with the power to realise itself.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus the Overmind, itself above Ignorance, can be a first parent of it. “For if each principle loosed into action must follow its independent line and carry out its complete consequences, the principle of separation must also be allowed its complete course and arrive at its absolute consequence; this is the inevitable descent, *facilis descensus*, which Consciousness, once it admits the separative principle, follows till it enters by obscuring infinitesimal fragmentation . . into the material Inconscience. . .”<sup>3</sup> The line at which the fall takes place is the formulation of the mental consciousness which can either build a constructed whole out of separate units or else grasp a commonality or an essentiality of things by an insubstantial-seeming abstraction. And, when out of the material Inconscience, the One emerges on its way back, it is again at the dividing line of the Mind that the self-aware reaching upward takes place. In the philosophic mentality, the *point de départ* is a piecing together of things to find a whole or a penetrating through abstractions towards their unity.

Plato is the example *par excellence* of such a starting-point. But with his poetic vision he was able to have some glimpse of spiritual realities instead of spinning out mere dialectic. All the same the terms in which he caught a reflection of them could not help remaining somewhat uncertain, if not wavering. He was not quite sure whether he was dealing with what logicians label as Universals, each idea the general

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 256-7.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

and common essence of a class of objects, or with the laws according to which things operate, the Pythagorean "numbers", the mathematical constancies and regularities ruling the sensible world, or with archetypal models, divine originals, forms of perfect purpose, whose broken shadows and faulty imitations we perceive around us. He was not quite sure also whether the world-creative Power whom he called the Demiurge is one with the supreme reality of Ideas, their self-manifesting aspect, or a subordinate deity copying out in mutable phenomena transcendent patterns passive for ever. Nor was he quite sure again whether these phenomena were created out of nothing or compounded of the ideal realities and an alien "chaos", an enigmatic "non-being" on whose vacant flux they set their shaping seals.

Many of his ambiguities appear to stem from his mind's translation of the Overmind's version, rather than the Supermind's authenticity, of the Real-Idea. Pertinent here is a reply by Sri Aurobindo to a question concerning the following quotation from Plato: "The world of sense is the copy of the world of Ideas. In our visible world there is a graduation of beings.... The same holds true of the intelligible realm or pattern of the world; the Ideas are joined together by means of other Ideas of a higher order; .. the Ideas constantly increase in generality and force, until we reach the top, the last, the highest, the most powerful Idea or the Good, which comprehends, contains or summarizes the entire system." The question put was, in effect: "Is not Plato here nearly on the verge of understanding in mind the realisation of the Overmind? Can the passage be taken as due merely to mental ideas?" Sri Aurobindo wrote back: "He was trying to express in a mental way the One containing the multiplicity which is brought out (created) from the One,—that is the Overmind realisation. Plato has these ideas not as realisations but as intuitions which he expressed in his own mental form."<sup>1</sup>

In passing we may remark that here we have the key-word to the setting apart of Plato from Pythagoras on the one hand and from Aristotle on the other: "intuitions." It points to flashes of truth which hail from above the mental plane and which are to be distinguished from "realisations" that are established spiritual experience as well as from the mental plane's typical seekings to build truth by its limited and uncertain though ingenious and multi-mooded power.

The key-word recurs when Sri Aurobindo discusses some correspondences between Indian spirituality and the mystic thought in the background of a certain line of Greek philosophy. Broadly he writes: "The ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in much of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profoundest part of Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West."<sup>2</sup> Again, observing how the Greek intellectuals give by their philosophy "some light on the destiny of man",<sup>3</sup> Sri Aurobindo tells us: "Plato, who was influenced by Heraclitus, tried to do this...; his

<sup>1</sup> *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual*, 1963 (Pondicherry), p. 1

<sup>2</sup> *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (The Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, 1953), p. 306

<sup>3</sup> *Heraclitus*, p. 82



thought sought after God, tried to seize the ideal, had the hope of a perfect human society. We know how the Neo-Platonists developed his ideas... and how they affected Christianity. The Stoics, still more directly the intellectual descendants of Heraclitus, arrived at very remarkable and fruitful ideas of human possibility and a powerful psychological discipline,—as we should say in India, a Yoga,—by which they hoped to realise their ideal”<sup>1</sup> Yes, an India-Greece *rapprochement* on the spiritual plane cannot help being seen. But simply because Sri Aurobindo is Indian by birth he does not attribute to India all that bears the stamp of spirituality in Greece. He has himself mentioned some proofs of the independent growth: the Appollonian mystics, Pythagoras, the oracles, the reformed Mysteries. And in this connection a letter of his throws into sharp relief the originality of Plato.

Now the answer is to a straight query about India. The query, inspired by a passage from Plato on the Idea of the Good and on God the Creator, wondered whether Plato had obtained his thoughts from Indian books. Sri Aurobindo said: “Not from Indian books—something of the philosophy of India got through by means of Pythagoras and others. But I think Plato got most of these things from intuition”<sup>2</sup>

However, the Platonic intuition is far from being perfect. And, in relation to his realm of ultimate Ideas, the ambiguities of it arise from lack of knowledge of the “various evolution” that Sri Aurobindo speaks of. Evolution implies in the Aurobindoman scheme the hidden activity of real-ideas within the phenomenal flux, their godhead lying in a state of “involution”, and gradually awaking to its own glorious plenitude until what is flawless above is manifested in flawlessness below. That complete self-disclosure of the Divine on earth in a radiant future was utterly beyond Plato’s conception, however much he might dream of a political Utopia. Dim approximation, temporary *à peu près*—this constituted in his philosophy all that was possible of the True, the Beautiful and the Good in the kingdoms of man. But once we accept the process of evolution within a Platonic cosmology we have not only to think of a divine counterpart to the whole triple strain of mental-vital-physical being: we have also to think of a divine mentality, a divine vitality and even a divine physicality as forming the covert nature of the Platonic “chaos” and unfolding on earth in answer to that counterpart in the Supermind. For, the fluctuant “non-being” in which the Real-Idea comes to have a partial play is nothing save the supreme existence projected as a total “Inconscience”: there everything of that existence seems lost, but the loss is as if by a tremendous wager of the Supermind with itself to bring forth its perfection under the initial terms of its own dire opposite.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that the ancient Indian scriptures have pointers to the Supermind. But the nearest philosophical statement in the past of the broad basis though not of the detailed superstructure and still less of the many-splendoured crown of his Yogic knowledge of it is in Plato. A modern seeing of the Platonic

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>2</sup> *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual*, 1963, p 2

Ideas in a spiritually new dimension bringing out their true significance and value may be considered Sri Aurobindo's greatest work in the context of his interchange with Greece the metaphysician, just as a modern revival of the Homeric hexameter with its Olympian pace naturalised in a new language—English—may be counted his greatest accomplishment *vis-à-vis* Greece the bard.

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True, Sri Aurobindo has not devoted a special essay to either that metaphysician or that bard—and this omission may lead us to underestimate their presence in his consciousness. At least we may tend to overlook the full force of Plato's impact. We cannot do so with regard to Homer, since Sri Aurobindo has several substantial passages on him in *The Future Poetry* as well as in his numerous letters and there is a whole long epic *Ihon* (over 4,500 lines) which directly takes up a Homeric theme and treats it masterfully with a Homericised Aurobindonian art whose blueprint, as it were, is in his extensive disquisition, *On Quantitative Metre*. But how an awareness of the Athenian Academy's Master no less than of the singer from "Scio's rocky isle" glowed within Sri Aurobindo the Yogi is evident from a number of signs. It is not only to be surmised from declarations like: "I had steeped myself... in the original Hellenic spirit..."<sup>1</sup> It can also be glimpsed time and again from their spontaneous alignments in his writings.

Thus, when he laughs at the pseudo-scientific reduction of mind to matter on account of "a response, interaction, connection, a correspondence if you will" between them, he begins by saying that no amount of this can prove that "love is a chemical product" and concludes with three dissimilar yet concordantly decisive examples of what can never be shown as "only a combination of physiological reactions or a complex of the changes of grey brain-matter or a flaming marvel of electrical discharges". These examples are: "Plato's theory of ideas or Homer's *Iliad* or the cosmic consciousness of the Yogi."<sup>2</sup>

K. D. SETHNA

<sup>1</sup> *The Foundations* . . . , p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> *The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 30

## UDAR REMEMBERS

### XIII

WHEN we first came to the Ashram in 1937 and for many years after, The Mother gave us Her Darshan daily from the balcony on the first floor at the north of Pavitra's room, overlooking rue St Gilles. Then later, when we came closer to The Mother, some of us would wait in the corridor leading from that balcony to The Mother's room. Then, after giving us Her Darshan, She would give a flower to each of us. To me and some others She gave a red rose and that rose became so much part of me that I feel naked without one and even today I put one into my buttonhole each morning

One day, after She had given Her Darshan and was coming into the corridor She called out to me to come to Her. Then looking through the shutters of a window She said to me—"Look, Udar! While I am giving Darshan it begins to rain. That is nothing but Grace coming down and the people there below put up their umbrellas to stop that Grace!" This shook me very much and when I went home I threw away my umbrella. Never again would I use one to stop Her Grace from falling on me. This has given rise to interesting situations. Sometimes, when I am going out it is raining, not very heavily but quite well. Then I just get wet and my clothes dry on me with no ill effects at all. At other times, when I am due to go out, I see it raining very heavily but just at the time I have to leave the house the rain diminishes or even stops.

This brings me to a very important remembrance of what The Mother said to me. This time it was about the heat. It was around mid summer and some of us were complaining of the heat when The Mother said, "Why do you complain? You feel uncomfortable with the heat, so you complain. But this is because you are fighting the heat. If you can make friends with it and not fight it you will not be uncomfortable and will not need to complain!" The Mother explained that one can make friends with all kinds of weather—not only the heat. One can be friends with the cold also and with rain and snow.

This advice I took very much to heart and I have always tried to be friends with whatever weather I have to face—the heat here, the cold in Europe and America. And I really did not suffer as others did because of my friendliness. Then there is, most particularly, the walking in the sun. Here when the sun is full up, and in summer, most people like to walk in the shade; but The Mother explained to me that this is not good. "The sun is our friend," She said, "our very dear friend, our lover. If we did not have the sun we would suffer very much. So why hide from your lover? Walk in his fullness and let him embrace you with his love. Of course, I know, that sometimes his embrace is a bit too intense and warm, but what to do? Some lovers are like that. If you let him embrace you, he will never harm you and, on the contrary, will give you strength and good health" I pass on these wonderful words to others so that as many as possible may benefit from them.

## MY RECOLLECTIONS OF SRI AUROBINDO

THIS was about sixty years ago, but I remember it vividly. I was then but a lad of 14, a young fellow of little experience. It was the beginning of the Swadeshi movement. The whole country was in a turmoil. Bengal had just been divided into East and West. But Khudiram's sacrifice was yet to come. The heads of the nation met once a year during the Congress session but were quite at a loss how to acquire independence for the country. Our hearts were seething. The formula suggested by Surendranath Banerji in his moderate paper *Bengalee* seemed to be the only remedy. Some great men of Bengal, at this juncture, founded a nationalist paper with extreme views, called *Bande Mataram*. The office was located in a two-storied house in Creek Row which was, and still is, by the side of a narrow street. Very fortunately, the Chief Editorship of this paper was offered to Aurobindo Ghose shortly returned from England. He was a master of the English language and had just escaped from the tempting bondage of the I.C.S.—an act on his part, which I, of course, thought to be unwise. My family at this time having been rather poor, I had accepted a job in the paper, leaving aside my studies for a while.

The very first day, on going to my office, I met him. He had been allotted a small room on the first floor, entirely to himself. I never found anybody else in the room. He was not yet Sri Aurobindo, but simply Aurobindo Ghose, and I had no fear or worry about my work, which was simply to take his article from his hand and read it out to the Proof Readers in another room. I could do it easily, for his handwriting was one of the very best I had ever seen and his English perfect. Yet one day I thought I found a mistake in his writing, or rather to me it appeared to be a mistake. I showed it to others and they also were inclined to agree with me. They advised me to take it to him, which I did without hesitation. I asked him whether it was a mistake. He looked at it and said "No" He spoke no other word either to explain it or to disparage a cheeky boy but remained immersed in deep thought, as he always was.

His dress at this time was one of the plainest: an ordinary coat buttoned up to the neck and a common dhoti. It seemed nobody cared to clothe him properly, while he himself was too preoccupied to give attention to it. He seemed oblivious of his body even. He was always meditating deeply about something. When he looked at one, he seemed not to view one, as if mentally he were soaring far, far away. I found him always sitting in the same posture with a pen in his hand, deeply immersed in thought. That he had few words for others was not due to any inherent pride or superciliousness. It was probably in his nature. After the first day I was not at all surprised that he was the only person in the office who did not talk to me.

*Bande Mataram* grew increasingly popular, probably it gave vent to what was boiling in men's hearts. It said things which others did not, could not or dared not articulate. It campaigned for the freedom of India, freedom from the hands of the British. To utter such things was rank sedition in those days, but somehow it touched the hearts of a people lulled into slavery for so long. One day, however, I found the

room vacant as I entered the office and no one was sitting on his chair. I learnt that he had been arrested in a bomb case along with some others and was lodged in prison. He might have been awarded the death sentence, but the inspired defence put up by Mr. C R Das forced the British Judge to order his release. After this he went to Pondicherry, and concentrated his creative powers on initiating a new life of spiritual consciousness not only for India but also for the whole world

NIRMAL DUTT

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## VISIT TO SRI AUROBINDO'S ROOM

MOUNTING the stairs in soul alert, up and upward I go,  
 Not wearing them out, time-measuring, nor echoing the interfering thoughts  
 Like chords ran amok on ordinary days  
 Urged by a call, movement and desire wed, I move  
 Slowly walking, as in dreams, not knowing limits,  
 Carrying my heart in my palms, at the chamber of Sweet promise  
 I halt.  
 Peace touches down strongly, a wave descending  
 Yet effortless to hold—beloved, I have come.  
 Below the baldachin of bliss rarely touched by mortals  
 So silken, I stand receiving the crown of joy.  
 Motionless, transfixed, utterly overcome, empty of resistance I am,  
 Nerve by nerve unfolding, cell upon cell dissolved and am no more.  
 I become weightless, a substance of molten flow and am received,  
 Taken, contained and held in measureless embrace.  
 Is this union?  
 Like coupled birds, gem-coloured and richly plumed,  
 Who motionless through ethereal spheres glide,  
 In speechless state am poised—then with loving care released.  
 Slowly from possessor my body repossessed—I stir enriched,  
 Made blissful, filled with wonder rise,  
 Still trembling, I leave again descending,—  
 Will there be fruit?

GEORGETTE COTY

# HOW I WAS ATTRACTED TOWARDS THE MOTHER AND THE MASTER

## A TALK

GENERAL Kalkat, after knowing that I had been associated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for over twenty years, has requested me to give a talk on the subject.

At the outset I must confess that 20 years' association is not a measure of my spiritual attainment. Some people can do things in a much shorter time than others. I suppose the same thing applies to spiritual attainment. I can vouch, however, that over 20 years of noble association with the Mother and with the Ashram has brought a deep peace to me. And also I am now loved by known and unknown people. Large as life is, so are its innumerable puzzles, but now I can claim to have some clues to them. These I consider as blessings of the Mother and the Master. Thus it is a rare privilege for me to talk about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother whenever such an occasion arises.

Now with their blessings I venture to speak to you of rather a personal episode of mine—that is, how I was attracted to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. For that was the beginning of the fruition and, as such, is important as an experience.

When I returned from the U.K. after graduating from Sheffield University in Metallurgy in August 1940, and took up a job in Bombay, I felt I was a more developed person than any of my colleagues there. I was disciplined, I observed punctuality, I was more practical and straightforward in my dealings, understood the value of money better, could meet without an inferiority complex anybody from a high court judge or a top political leader to a peasant. Further, I could freely mix with ladies without any inhibition. I dressed fairly well and thus felt in a way superior to many and was proud of it. I had also picked up certain other Western traits. I became more selfish, more vulgar, more disrespectful to my elders and to society in general. I started finding fault with most people around me, with our customs, manners, sometimes rightly sometimes wrongly. It seems now I certainly developed a lot of intolerance. A friend once bluntly said I was conceited. At that time I did not realise or care to think about my own defects, *i.e.*, what I was lacking in and how to improve myself. I was only finding fault with others. In the long run I lost all sympathy and fellow-feeling from the people around me.

For nothing I made enemies of a large number of persons, who not only crowded upon me with enmity but were bent upon crushing me out of existence. It was a strange feeling, for I did not bear any ill-will towards them. I did not exploit them in any way whatsoever. I did not seek any favour from anybody either. I did not make any personal gain by any underhand method. I never took advantage of their weakness. I was not even jealous of anybody's wealth, power or position. And yet I found life was almost unbearable amongst my friends and colleagues.

Strangely, however, I was admired and loved by several individuals. Maybe this

was because I was in a sense a patriot and resisted European domination and supremacy. But the admiration and love were in secret. When it came to open voting, almost everybody left me in the lurch. Even my nearest and dearest ones were not happy with me. They criticised me all the time. Gradually I felt I was a stranger from another planet. Nobody cared to understand me or to see my point of view. Life was really miserable for me then. When I was in this state of mind, I was once invited by my younger sister to her house. The day was Bhatridwitia (Bhaiyadu). It falls two days after Dewali and is widely celebrated in Bengal. My brother-in-law was on tour at that time. After the tilak ceremony I had an excellent breakfast. Soon afterwards I started searching for a suitable book from a dust-covered rack. For, there was no one to talk to, and my sister was busy preparing the lunch. Bengalees are very fond of eating. And it is one of their luxuries to eat a variety of dishes. Thus I thought it would take at least three hours for my sister to finish cooking. So I started looking through the magazines. After that I fancied one of the smallest books on the shelf. It was really a tiny one. I opened it in the middle and started reading it. It seemed to me a strange book, the like of which I had never come across. I was struck not only by the style of its English but also by the depth and wideness of its meaning. A lot of it I could not fathom at all. It was like the first experience of a boy standing by the shore of a turbulent sea trying to fathom where its vastness ended.

I was overwhelmed, lost, and suffocated by my own feelings. I kept on reading, and deep down in my heart I felt peace and tranquillity as never before in my life. As a Science-student the whole book seemed to me a book of Science, the only difference being that it dealt with human life: a book which told you with certainty how to lead a life without trouble, pain and suffering.—in short how to lead a peaceful life on this turbulent earth. I was completely gripped with emotion when suddenly I heard my sister calling me for lunch. I quickly looked over to find the title and the author of the book. The book was named *The Mother* and the author was Sri Aurobindo.

The name of Sri Aurobindo seemed familiar to me at that time. For, in my childhood my father used to quote him now and then to his friends during an argument.

Vaguely I remembered some of my father's remarks about him. Sri Aurobindo was a great revolutionary, who thought India a living mother and not dust, clay or an inert object. What son could resist fighting for her to free her from humiliations and sufferings? And then my father would say that he was a great Yogi, but how great he did not know.

Lunch over, I asked my sister how she had managed to get this book, *The Mother*. She said that Professor Haridas Chaudhuri who was a tenant in our house at Calcutta was a great devotee of Sri Aurobindo.

She used to go to him for some lessons in Philosophy while appearing for her M.A. Examination. One day Professor Chaudhuri told her that Sri Aurobindo's birthday was very near and he asked whether she could write a poem on him. She was completely taken aback. For she had never written a line of poetry before. She could

not, however, refuse professor Chaudhuri either, for she was much indebted to him.

So she had a go at it. And within a week she wrote a poem. Professor Chaudhuri posted it to Sri Aurobindo. From Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo sent her the book, *The Mother*, with his autograph and blessings

That day, before returning home I had an intense desire to borrow the book from my sister. But somehow I could not ask for it. Yet the whole of the next day which was a Sunday I was yearning for it. On Monday as soon as my office duty was over I rushed to the College Street book-market to buy the book. But to my utter disappointment I could not get it in any bookstall there. When I was almost in desperation, one of the book-sellers told me I could get it round the corner from Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir. I went there, bought the book at the cost of Re. 1/ only. From then on for nearly six months, I read it every day from end to end. In the beginning I did not understand most of it. But still it attracted me and I kept on reading it. Gradually it revealed itself to me. I felt most assured. And life seemed to me more peaceful and meaningful. I felt there was a purpose in my living. I became a member of the Sri Aurobindo Society and started regularly attending its Saturday lectures and discourses. Thereafter I felt an inward urge to go to Pondicherry. On 21st February 1957 on the Mother's birthday, I went to Pondicherry and received blessings directly from the Mother. Since then I have gone there four or five times.

The teachings of Sri Aurobindo are so vast and varied and deep that they can be absorbed only by reading his books again and again. But there is nothing wrong to give here my own experiences, however small and limited they may be. The beauty of Sri Aurobindo's spirituality is that it does not bar anybody on grounds of caste, creed or religion. This can thus be called a World Yoga. A spirituality for everybody.

The first benefit I have gained from the Master's teachings is that it has given me an aim in life. I have realised that the longer I live the greater is my chance to correct myself, lessen my ego and attachment and sink deep into the spiritual way of life.

The theory of evolution of consciousness as enunciated by the Master is of a unique nature. There is evolution from matter to plant, from plant to animal, from animal to man with mind. And now man with mind has come up to a certain point. The Master says that we should not think evolution stops there. The evolution of consciousness has to proceed further and further. Between mind and overmind consciousness there are several layers. On reaching overmind the ancients thought they had reached their goal. Here Sri Aurobindo deviates from the past. But there is a continuation of our past spiritual heritage. In Science, Newton's theory of gravity has been further illuminated and enlarged by Einstein's theory of relativity, revealing more deep physical secrets of nature. The theory of relativity does not in the least discredit or lessen the scientific achievement of Newton. It only adds a further step to it. Who knows, another scientist may come up in the future to add a further step for the scientific benefit of humanity. And that should not discredit Einstein's achievement either. This should be the motto of every



spiritual seeker too. Every great saint or sage has added a new pillar to the Indian spiritual heritage through the ages. That is how the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and other scriptures have come up with the progress of time. Thus one should never feel disloyal to one's own scripture while adhering to Sri Aurobindo's spirituality of evolution beyond Overmind to Supermind.

To help the needy with money and to nurse the sick are noble acts, no doubt, and should be valued highly by every individual who seeks to lead a spiritual life. Such acts, however, can never be considered to be of the same value as the direct attainment of the spiritual consciousness. Thus the aim of Sri Aurobindo's teaching is the divinisation of life. As a metal is melted and refined to get rid of its dross and slag, similarly human beings should get rid of their ego defects and drawbacks and gradually divinise themselves. For the ultimate purpose of being is a divine life on earth. There Sri Aurobindo differs from all the saints and sages of the past. He believes this world is a reality and not Maya. He does not believe in personal Nirvana. He believes that the higher consciousness so far brought down on earth is not powerful enough or pure enough to remove falsehood and ignorance from the face of earth. He says the supramental consciousness has to be brought down to transform human ignorance and falsehood. This descends at times but people in general are not capable of holding it. It has been Sri Aurobindo's aim and endeavour to establish it on the human level, and set it working for transformation of human nature. Thus first the effort should be to reach the Supermind (which he calls ascent) and then bring it down to the terrestrial level (descent) so that anyone can benefit from it. This effort shall go on till victory is attained.

Salute to the Master and the Mother from their humble son.

4.3.77.

KITEN SIRKAR

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# TOWARDS THE HIGHER LIFE

(Continued from the issue of July 1977)

## CHAPTER II

### THE BUILDING OF THE INNER TEMPLE

WHAT must form the first brick to lay the foundation of this temple? Sri Aurobindo has devoted two chapters to 'purification' in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. It is only on the solid foundation of purity that the edifice of this temple can be erected without any fear of its being destroyed or demolished by the sudden stroke of lightning or the tremor of an earthquake.

This is what Sri Aurobindo said in a letter: "Purification and consecration are two great necessities of sadhana. Those who have experiences before purification run a great risk; it is much better to have the heart pure first, for then the way becomes safe. That is why I advocate the psychic change of the nature first—for that means the purification of the heart."

My suffering is an example of this truth. We shall deal with it later on.

In my desire to establish an inner contact with the Mother, I imposed on myself a profound discipline unmindful of various onslaughts. I made it a point to shut myself up in a room at least an hour each day and keep my consciousness exclusively turned to her, making myself dead to all distractions. I adhered to the routine rigorously and tried not to miss a day. Though the mind insinuated that it was all mechanical and nothing but an offering of a morning quota to the Divine, still I continued undeterred. In the course of time it procured for me fine materials for the "building of the inner temple".

What prevents the purity? The answer is there in *The Synthesis of Yoga*: "The vital craving of hunger, thirst, lust.... The hunger which is infinite because it is the hunger of an infinite being."<sup>1</sup>

Whenever the vital refused or resisted to obey the higher law I drew nourishment from the lines: "The human vital is almost always of that nature; it is by the use of the mental that they discipline it, compelling it to do not what it wants but what the reason or the will sees to be right or desirable. In yoga one uses the inner will and compels the vital to submit itself to *tapasyā* so that it may become calm, strong, obedient...."

I did all in my power to check the downward pull and that is what Sri Aurobindo says is the first necessity. In the beginning the pilgrimage to the inner temple appeared tedious and tiresome but the result of even this half-hearted pursuit was rewarding. The first result of the self-imposed discipline was that any deviation from the chosen path, any mischief done during the day, made me guilty

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, 6th edition, p. 613.

before my own eyes and I could not stand before the Mother with a clean heart. Further, it greatly helped to study the crudities and absurdities of my nature, discover the insincere parts and lay them bare before the Mother. Whenever the responses to my prayers were immediate, or the pictures of the Master and the Mother sprang into life, or I felt an invisible touch, my heart was thrilled and my eyes flooded with tears of gratitude. All this greatly helped to light the unlit lamp of the temple.

But why does the light get extinguished the very next moment? "Only a moment's fine release it gave" and I found myself where I had been.

A question was put to the Mother apropos of the evening distribution of groundnuts: "When we come to you for the distribution, at times we feel free and glad, but at other times we feel nothing, we become empty. What does that mean"?

The Mother's answer was: "When you are glad, it means that you are open and you receive the Force; and when you feel nothing it means you are closed"<sup>1</sup>

This reminds me of the days when, during the evening meditation in the Playground in front of the Mother, I sat like a solid block. Nothing, absolutely nothing, penetrated my being and it was so not for days or months but years and years. So stubborn was the inner make-up that even by writing to the Mother I found no relaxation. Half an hour's meditation before the Mother appeared so boring, dull and dry that I opened my eyes again and again to see whether the light was on and it was time to disperse. In between there rose voices, obviously from the vital, "Torture, it is torture". I have seen many such gloomy days.

The Mother, Herself posing the question, "But what is it that makes you open and what is it that makes you shut up?", answers:

"For each one it is different. . . ."

"Generally, in the ordinary life there are people who, because of their very constitution, the way in which they are built, are in some kind of harmony with Nature, as if they breathed the same rhythm; and these people are usually always happy and content; they succeed in everything they do, they avoid a good deal of trouble and catastrophe. . ."<sup>2</sup>

"And there are days when you are in contact with the divine consciousness which is at work, with the Grace; in that case everything dyes itself, colours itself with this Presence; and things that generally appear to you dull and without interest become charming, pleasant, attractive, instructive; everything lives, vibrates; all is full of promise and force. Then when you are open to that, you feel stronger, freer, happier, full of energy; everything has a meaning."

And then the Mother added significantly:

"There are other moments when for some reason or other you are obscured,

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin*, April 1961, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> These words of the Mother bring to mind the picture of my cousin, a self-made man having hundreds of friends and well-wishers. A man of high principles and character, he leads an ordered life. He had once come to the Ashram in 1936. Sri Aurobindo said about him that he would be a successful business man. And he proved to be one, but no urge for something higher moved him.

closed or fallen into a pit; then you feel nothing... you are like a piece of walking wood.<sup>1</sup>"

Here must be appended another quotation in which the Mother counsels:

"Each represents an impossibility and one has to face it whether he knows it or not. When you represent the possibility of a victory, you have always in you the thing opposed to this victory, which is your constant trouble...."

"When you see a dark shadow anywhere—very dark—something which is really painful, you may be sure that you have in you the possibility of the corresponding light."

What appeared years before as an utter impossibility, a fantastic dream, now seems to be within the orbit of possibility. This will be better understood if I give one or two instances.

In the evening meditation at the Playground, the moment the Mother's sonorous tape-recorded voice enters into my ears, her luminous figure comes floating before the mind's eye and I find myself passing into the inner recesses of the mind, in no time. The consciousness often gets so absorbed that there remains no sense of the body or the Playground. Among hundreds of people sitting around me, merged in meditation, I feel myself all alone—a solitary figure, at times encircled by white light—or within my own aura.

This intensity of concentration I am now able to maintain even at home. Occasions are not rare when a heat is generated in different parts of the body. But when something comes from above and settles on the crown of the head, giving a cooling sensation, meditation becomes extraordinarily pleasant. Thus I have passed from the gloomy days of the past to not exactly a luminous but at least a promising future. More details are not called for here.

In continuation of what we have said in the last chapter, what should be well grasped here is that the principal factor in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is the change of consciousness. It is to that end we are expected to direct our energies; all else is a means. Concentration too is a means—of course a powerful one but not an end in itself. Purification of the heart, conquest of desires, etc. are its aids. My attempt to check the downward pull unconsciously led me to the Rajayoga method of which I had no knowledge. I acted just as I was led from within. Long after, when I read the following lines, I remembered my own case:

"...the Rajayogin must arrive at a certain moral and spiritual purity; he must get rid of the lower or downward activities of his mind, but afterwards he must stop all its activities and concentrate himself in the one idea that leads from activity to the quiescence of status"

This helped me to adopt the third process which is demanded of an aspirant of the Integral Yoga. To quote the Master again: "A third process is neither at first to concentrate in a strenuous meditation on the one subject nor in a strenuous contemplation but to still the mind altogether....When this secret peace is unveiled, a great

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin*, April 1961, page 45.

calm settles on the being ”

To calm the waves of thought and still the mind the method of Rajayoga proved quite helpful. Only the secret of peace has not unveiled itself as yet.

The one dominant thought those days was how to “break open the barriers of mentality”. Failing to mark any tangible results even after ten years of hard labour I turned to the regions of the heart. Here the resistance was much more fierce than in the regions of the mind. It seemed there stood an impregnable rock of darkness and all attempts to get through meant knocking the head against it. Many times I lost heart and gave up all attempts, but the inner urge compelled me to resume it after a time.

Baffled and beaten by “the blind refusal of Ignorance” to let in the Mother’s Light I resorted to the common method of *japa* (the repetition of a *mantra*) without moving the tongue. When I had passed the period of endless tests and tribulations, signs of happy changes were visible in the regions both of mind and of heart, filling the being with high hopes. How I reached this stage is a long story. To mention a couple of signs.

Once I saw in a vision that the heart had turned into a transparent glass-house with nothing there. A high-storeyed beautiful marble building bathed in light came into view at another time. But till a deity is installed there it cannot assume the name of a temple. My case is that of a well-built house ever filled with electric wire but not habitable because the connection has not yet been obtained from the power house.

(To be continued)

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# A POET IN THE MAKING

## A LYRIC WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENT

*In the early days of my stay in the Ashram, I wrote as follows to Sri Aurobindo about a poem by my sister Minnie, now Mrs. N. F. Canteenwalla, who had come with my mother and brother on a visit:*

*"My sister has off and on been writing poetry for some time past. She sent me two or three pieces and I made suggestions and corrections. This is one of her most recent efforts: my corrections here are very few and I have left it substantially as she had written it. Will you kindly give your opinion on it as well as advice, if possible, as to her potentialities and the method of developing them?"*

*Amal Kiran*

### At Eventide

The original had

"I by my. " On many an eve at the gloaming hour,  
I at my cabin window sit;  
The shore is barren, and lonesome am I:  
My mate is the light-house with beacons lit.

Sri Aurobindo's remarks  
(his corrections in the poem  
are italicised)

"deep, deep  
sea "

An amber twilight floods the beach;  
It dances on the wayward sea;  
*It lights*  
(Lights) the cliff with a purple hue,  
And stops at my cabin to peep at me.

"These six lines are the best; they could have been the work of a mature poet already master of his instrument. The same can be said of the two lines marked in the last verse "

The ocean croons a lullaby  
To the wild sea-birds wending home.  
But, always, it is a sad, sad song  
That comes from the heart of the gleaming foam.

I hear a call, a sigh, a strain,  
*It mingles the*  
(Mingled) with (that) song each day,  
*so*

"some far-  
away ."

Oh! unlike any earthly music—  
A yearning chant from far-away.

*it's*

The fishers say ('tis) the dreaded call

*a*

"seductive vampire" Of (the) phantom vampire of the deep,  
*Or they say it's the winds that laugh and frolic*  
 (Or maybe 'tis the winds at frolic)  
 As in and out of the caves they leap

"Maybe" won't do, it is a little prosaic "

But to me it sounds a sweeter thing;  
 As I shut my eyes at that peaceful hour,  
 I can hear the voices of angels sing  
 Out of the clouds as from a bower.

"It is more poetic with this punctuation " (In the original the semi-colon was after "hour ")

And thus I sit with eyes locked fast,  
 Till the night comes creeping from afar |  
 Beside me stands my faithful light-house

"By me stands" style="text-align: center;">*a*

Returning the blinks of (the) distant star. |

10 - 11 - 31

## Sri Aurobindo's Comment.

Your sister is surely a born poet. There are just a few slight mistakes in the rhythm and turns of language; but the only serious blunder is the "seductive vampire." There are of course echoes—a mixture of Christina Rossetti and Heine (I don't know if she has read translations of Heine, it may be an indirect influence), but that was inevitable. I have suggested a few changes (in addition to yours) for the sake of perfection; but, even as it is, the poem is remarkable for a beginner. Advice? I don't know; let her remain true to the spontaneity of her gift and allow it to develop from within.

24 - 11 - 31

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## TWO REVERIES

### ROAD TO PHOENIX PARK

I KNOW the road that leads to Phoenix Park  
Winding swiftly through the quiet of dream-sleep  
Where the fire-birds drink the dew-sparks of the unknown  
Cool waters rush variedly in that calm  
Of garden filled with pearls and onyxes of song.  
No flowers and golden-red apples of thought  
Springing from the sweet-scented soil of night  
Bedeck the road, but past the frill of light-and-shade  
Sometimes is seen the phoenix of vast and fiery wings  
Beating its way untraceably through vision's sky.  
Who knows the home of this utter loveliness  
Where space is terminated and time comes to a stop?  
When I sit in that orchard of meditation  
Viewing the sun-brilliances of its play  
It becomes clear: what gravitates the urge  
For the forbidden fruit is the sound of self  
It is because from Knowledge Ignorance was born  
That Phoenix Park is now the eternal Road.

### THESE BIRDS

THESE birds have a high legendary sense,  
For they come from the far-off golden clouds  
And into the dusk of song quietly depart.  
From the eternal sound is their flaming  
Glimpsed sometimes through vision's hurried calm.  
Now they fill the sky with sparks of the sun-fire.

These hours are the flight of a mountain peak  
Burning in the air of a super-dense blue.  
Agonies of ages raise their rocky hands  
Of prayer in the silence of azure height  
And disappear like dreams in a blazing sleep.  
A superconscient glow is now their breath.

The birds meet the hours at the end of Time  
Whose winged splendour is but Eternity's beat

RENUKADAS DESHPANDE



## THE FALL OF BHISHMA

Is that you, Kshatriya,  
Crouched in the chariot,  
Hiding behind the hermaphrodite?  
The grandfather calmly advances,  
Awaiting karmic consummation—  
Why do you hesitate?

Yet there is time, Arjuna,  
An infinitesimal infinitude,  
For the moan of terror,  
For the sound of death, O Partha,  
In both crippling clatter  
And terrible twang of the bow.

The war machines stop.  
Grudgingly warriors turn away  
From slaughter's fascination.  
Slokas drift over the field.  
A young Kaurava, brain-pierced,  
Screams into the quivering sky.

In that inert moment, sacred  
Sun steams through the dust  
And once again He reins the horses.  
An incandescent divine glance  
Invades your island of grief  
And the throbbing air shivers.

Then, while the suspended arm  
Totters on the verge of action  
Hanging over death's silent abyss,  
Suddenly arrow leaps from bow  
In a way you will never know,  
Armed with a smile of bliss.

GORDON

## A SHEAF OF SYMBOLS

(Continued from the issue of July 1977)

15

*"Sun, go not down!"*

WE are running a race with Time—yes, all of us!  
Our watches and clocks are vying (on very face)  
To catch up with some vanguard Runner old;  
Our heart-beats run a winning or losing race  
With hurrying hands that mock dull hours' peace;  
From rhythmic movements of periodic Ebbs and Tides  
The cyclic dances of seasons and of spheres,  
All Nature marks time with some Bandmaster of yore.

But there's another static-dynamic Race,  
Trans-dimensional, cutting at the core of all:  
We have but to hold the Hour-Glass in our hands,  
And invert it readily when the sands are run;  
We have not to look at hoary Taskmaster stern,  
Waiting at the winning-post with never-doled-out awards:  
We have only to spot out his sporting-smiling self  
Within ourselves, running on parallel tracks  
And lo! tomorrow will follow tomorrow yet,  
Granting its respite—and energy—and insight sure  
To perfect whatever is left imperfect still.

'The work is vast and the labour great,' indeed:

But 'Ripeness is all'—and Perfection all—and may the sun go down (as it must)!

16

*"On Shiva's breast is stayed the enormous dance."*

(*Savitri*, II.10)

Will Lord Ganesha clear up: 'stayed' or 'staged'?  
Are both correct by a happy paradox?  
Or both amphibious—alternate Red and Green?...

For what else than Lord Shiva's Peace Profound  
Can act as 'Brake' or 'Check', or work as Ground  
For the whirling dance of Kali the Intoxicate,

Ever making-breaking rhythms, creations, worlds?  
 And what else than Yogeshwara's Ingathered Strength  
 That bears the onrush of celestial streams,  
 Can act as 'Grid', or serve as Platform-Stage  
 For the infinite variety of Shakti's Play?...

The Platform must be vast, massive, impeccable,  
 Commensurate with the Dynamo-Plant thereon;  
 And forces centripetal-centrifugal find  
 A stable support for all stress and strain,  
 And children aspiring to be Yogeshwara's toe,  
 Must learn first lesson of his mighty Poise—  
 Indrawing with every breath deep draughts of Peace,  
 And pumping in strength into every pore and cell—  
 Before they can hope to find their rightful Place  
 In Yogeshwara's Lila-Dance where Light-Delight join hands to striking-circling  
 notes!

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CHIMANBHAI

## THE POWER OF SOUND

SOUND originated the whole of creation. The Logos is the divine Word, the Mother of creation. The Logos is a Ray of the Unknown First Cause and gave birth to the Logoi or Builders of form, the Elohim, the Gods and Goddesses of the Bible's first chapter, Genesis. (Elohim is incorrectly translated as God in the singular.) According to the Vedas, *Vāch* or the Divine Mother sang the world into being. God's life force entered the sound and multiple forms evolved. Hence we learn that our words can create according to the power of our thoughts. Inspired words, beautiful poetry and music are powerful agents for awakening and tuning into higher regions of consciousness.

The value of a word depends upon the force of thought behind it. The more powerful, precise, and clear the thought, the greater the impact of the word in one's life. Religions have built up certain associations with their holy words, hence these words invoke certain religious feelings and attitudes. So has medical science built up detailed pictures of the physical conditions behind the names of diseases. Utter the words "cancer", "arthritis," and immediately pictures of unhealthy states come before the mind and create, if we are not consciously self-aware, an impression and even a fear and horror in the vital and physical parts of our being. To find the secret word or mantra (powerful thought-sounds) that could bring about healing of these sicknesses is yet to be achieved. Just as there is a specific herb to heal every disease, so there must be a word or mantra to counter every illness. The Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda and the Tantric secret teachings have such a magic art, but rarely will they share this wisdom with the uninitiated or spiritually unprepared.

Modern psychology has begun to understand the power of negative and positive thinking and speaking. The mental and soul contact with God who is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient is a spiritual science or an Integral Yoga (complete union with God) which will in time be realized as a very important aid to the healing of the human body. The words of wisdom of a spiritual teacher have a deep effect. They inspire because of a concentrated force of living experience behind the words. Every word is a vibration, a channel of force. The nature of the thought behind the word may produce a curse or a blessing. Our very daily greetings "Good Morning", "Good Afternoon" and "Good Night", what is their value? It depends on the cheer and sincerity of the wish. If said negatively or automatically, without thought or as a mere habit, they produce a very mediocre vibration. If said positively and cheerfully with a heart full of good will, a blessing is endowed and harmonious vibrations ring forth. When the concentrated power of the Divine radiates from the body of a sage or saint, words, the outer form of thought, are not even necessary, for his very presence, his silence speaks, acts to give the help and uplift needed.

The power of the mind to give shape to thought is considerable. Worry, fear,

mental formations of disease are like mud thrown into the body. Good formations of harmony and faith help to make the body receptive to higher vibrations that can make dark and undesirable body-problems disappear. In time there will be found as many ways to heal as there are many paths to God.

The type of music we hear as children, the first lullabies crooned to us, the phonograph records, the bands, the concerts all build our standards of what music is, and each creates certain moods and reactions. Those who are more consciously aware of the influence of different types of music will use music in education for developing the higher, more aesthetic parts of the nature. As band music awakens the warrior spirit, as church music is inclined to produce a sacred mood, so there can be music composed to aid meditation, music that engenders an indescribable subdued ecstasy. In the New Age upon us with the seeking and finding of greater glories within, new music of a loftier kind will come into being. Just as the mute strings of the Indian *vina* respond to ones being played, so the nerve-plexus of the body respond to various types of music and the tones and words of those around us. Some of the music of César Franck, Beethoven, and Bach come from high states of consciousness and therefore inspire us. Inspiration and power to express are both needed for the perfect music. We even learn from the wise that flowers are brought into being through the vibration of some virtue being expressed powerfully in someone's life.

Confucius of China taught that the dual role of music is to produce a harmonious life in the individual and to establish a harmonious unity in society. Plato, the Greek philosopher, believed that the primary role of music was to build the character and considered it an important part of education.

The ancient Egyptians chanted the seven vowels to the seven rays of the rising sun, thus evoking divine powers from higher regions of the universe. History tells us that Amphion, 'the divine' built the walls of Thebes. At the sound of his lyre the stones came and ranged themselves one upon another. In the Old Testament we read of the walls of Jericho being destroyed by the sounds of the trumpet-blasts of the priests of Israel. The stories of the songs of Orpheus who subdued wild beasts, arrested the course of the waves, and made the trees and rocks dance, is well-known. Pythagoras taught that the human soul was basically formed of harmony and that music could restore this pre-existing harmony to a mind troubled by contacts with the lower world. In the songs of Finland we hear of Wainamoinen changing the sands of the river into diamonds by the music of his lute. Polybius relates that music was necessary to soften the manners of the people of Arcadia which was a cold and dull country.

Jesus says in the *Pistis Sophia* that the greatest occult mysteries lie in the seven vowels. The Tantric doctrines teach that every being has its own vibrational sound, a sounded word that can be used to work on the being either destructively or creatively. Thus the Tantric magician, knowing the correct word for each animal, can influence them in any way he wishes, turn a snake into a mongoose, for instance

There are Vedic chants for producing the various elements and moods desired. In India the power of these Vedic chants is well-known. Once in the reign of Akbar, the celebrated singer Mīa Tansen sang a *raga* consecrated to the night in open day. Immediately the sun was overshadowed, and darkness spread as far as the voice was heard. Akbar heard of a *raga* that produced fire and could burn the musician singing it. Desiring to prove it he ordered a musician to sing this song while immersed in water up to his chin. Obeying the king, the singer became consumed by the flames.

There is a charming story told in Hindu legend of the great musician Narada. Famed for his beautiful playing of the Vīna, he became proud. The Father of the Gods, seeing this, appeared to him and asked him if he would like to take a visit to the heavenly worlds. Consenting gladly, he accompanied Brahma. On reaching heaven he saw the gods and goddesses with maimed limbs and asked how this came about. Brahma told him that there was a musician called Narada on earth who did not always play in perfect tune and that the imperfect sounds injured these heavenly beings. Surrendering his pride, he thereafter became an even greater musician.

When a poet has spiritual vision and expresses it in the Spirit's own name and language, its native rhythm, and power of beauty, it becomes the substance of revelation. In mystic poetry the seer-poet speaks of the wonders of other realms of consciousness in a delicate and subtle style. A prophet announces the Truth in the word or command of God, he is the giver of the message that rings down the ages. Thus we speak of Holy Scriptures: the Bible, the Vedas, the Zend Avesta, the Qabbalah, the Koran, the Bhagavad-Gīta, etc. Have you ever read a poem, a Scripture or a Holy Book and found something new each time you read it? Higher sources of Truth lie within, sources of wisdom which the present state of consciousness cannot yet understand. The Divine keeps our inner eye shut until the nature is ready to reap the harvest hidden in the words.

Sri Aurobindo in his book, *The Future Poetry* and in his Letters on literary themes describes the nature of the languages originating from the Overmind or Cosmic Consciousness as perfect word-music and supreme immortal rhythm and illuminating revelation. For the Overmind consciousness sees universal beauty touching and uplifting all things, expressing itself through them, feels a universal love toward all beings and a bliss upholding all. It sees that all things, even in their contrasts, have their meaning, their value, their deeper significance. A vast harmony is sensed in all, an underlying design, and the Divine is seen everywhere. Sri Aurobindo quotes the following verses of great poets as examples of the Overmind consciousness

Shakespeare—"In the dark backward and abysm of Time "

Milton—"Those thoughts that wander through Eternity."

Virgil—"Sunt lacrymae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt."

Wordsworth—"The marble index of a mind forever  
 Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone"  
 and  
 "The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep"

The occult science of Sound is more understood and investigated in India than in any other country. The art of sound is an open sesame to regions of higher consciousness and power. In Initiation into the higher life a *Mantra* is given to awaken the Divine within. A *Mantra* is the sound-body of some inmost truth or of some divine being and when repeated with concentrated mind can gradually bring to birth similar divine qualities and revelations into one's life. This repeating of God's name or the symbolic word representing a truth is called *japa*. It is like a divine chariot carrying the power of the divine being or truth into our outer lives. As a flame is strengthened by the wind so the initiate's or individual aspirant's spiritual power is awakened by the *japa* or *mantra*.

The Vedic poets were seers with a spiritual vision so their revelations of spiritual experience in poetic symbolic form are mantric and can evoke similar realizations as they are recited or chanted with ever increasing faith and devotion. The repeating of the thought-directed sound vivifies the presence of God and opens the nature to the power of divine grace which blesses and makes success possible and brings love, joy, wisdom and beauty in one's life which can radiate and affect other lives.

The Tantras tell us that there are spiritual arterial passages in our inner being, each making a different sound as the wind generated by the divine Fire within is set in motion. This acts like a call to the divine powers who respond and share their gifts. In other words our very aspirations are the music of the God within us calling us to new adventures of the spirit. The quality of our thoughts, words and acts determines the nature of the vibrations going forth from us. Quite a responsibility! Life is basically Joy. God expresses his joy of being and all comes into being with music. Do not the birds sing with joy in the morning? "To live, to love are signs of infinite things," says Sri Aurobindo. The mystic of India will even tell you that the declaration of a truth is more excellent than silence if that truth is the song of the heart in tune with the Divine, for it lives down the ages and blesses others with its immortal power.

Carrying the name of God in the heart, or being consciously aware of and surrendered to the God within produces a vibration, a music that attracts and draws to us the divine influences that protect and bless us in all circumstances of life.

Sri Aurobindo in his great epic, *Savitri*, describes here and there in beautiful words the secret science of sound. Hear him on the Mantra

As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,  
 Its message enters stirring the blind brain

And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sounds;  
 The hearer understands a form of words  
 And, musing on the index thought it holds,  
 He strives to read it with the labouring mind,  
 But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth.  
 Then, falling silent in himself to know  
 He meets the deeper listening of his soul:  
 The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains,  
 Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self  
 Are seized unalterably and he endures  
 An ecstasy and an immortal change;  
 He feels a Wideness and becomes a Power,  
 All knowledge rushes on him like a sea;  
 Transmuted by the white spiritual ray  
 He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,  
 Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech:  
 An equal greatness in her life was sown.

So we see that there is a higher magic, an occult science of sound. We create through spiritual living a mass of radiant energy, a flow of magic power for the building of a divine life on earth. We can use words, poetry, music, and mantra to bring here the Divine Harmony that is fundamental to life itself, for God is its very being.

JUDITH M. TYBERG (JYOTIPRIYA)

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ERRATA

*Mother India*, July, 1977

“I WON'T LET YOU GO” :

p. 528,	l 15	:	“baggages” in place of “luggage”
p. 538,	l 10	:	“Hugging it to her bosom, voices aloud,”
p. 531,	last line	:	“mused” in place of “used”.

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## FOOTNOTES TO THE FUTURE

4

### A Shared Faith

THERE should be a recognised relationship, a relationship of inner mutuality between what the Future expects of us and what we expect of the Future. It cannot be that we want the Future to give us everything, to work and to do everything for us, and we do not reciprocate. For that might mean an act of betrayal,—an act of faithlessness. And faith is an inner covenant, ever-present within us, which the Future makes with the Present. It is an uplifting link, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fact that we now belong to an inferior present does not eliminate the possibility of our ascent to a luminous Future. Remember the Mother's Message:

*“Let us take a leap into the Future”*

The Future expects more of us, rather the best from us, and we too should start expecting more of ourselves—and perform better each time. This will improve our self-image as well as our possibility to perform. The Future wants to see us as glorious winners, and it will be marvellous indeed to prove ourselves worthy. Let us always remember that man is “a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation”<sup>1</sup> Nature wills to manifest God. We cannot therefore bid Nature stop her evolutionary endeavour, nor allow her to lapse into an amorphous oblivion of primeval chaos. “If it be true that Spirit is involved in Matter and apparent Nature is secret God,” Sri Aurobindo is prophetic, “then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realisation of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth.”<sup>2</sup>

The possibility is not limited to any single race, country or culture but extends to all those who consciously need to transcend themselves. But unhappy are those who though initiated and given a foretaste of this Future waste ‘the force or misuse the moment’, for one of the puzzles of the ways of Spirit is that it is difficult to rehabilitate those who, though ready, are insincere and complacent. Does not the Master warn us: “All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is the worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph.”<sup>3</sup>

‘The breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being’—the decree of destiny is sent forth, and the principle of the self-fulfilling prophecy is at work

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Centenary edition, vol 18, p 4

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Hour of God*, Centenary edition, vol 17, p 1.

*now*, a little conscious effort on our part is sure to bring down the rain of His bounty. We have the spiritual strength and are certainly capable of greatness, and with God on our side should be able to rise to great performance. If this be true—and we have the Mother's assurance to the effect—then those who aspire to belong to a New Humanity should surmount all hurdles put forward by the Adversary. That which often throws up in our midst what might be described as a self-defeating activity can only be short-lived; by its very nature, it should give us an opportunity for greater conquests. Far from depressing us it should stimulate us to battle relentlessly against the forces of the old world. For the warriors of Light no problem is insurmountable. We have in us, deep in our being, the golden grain of Truth, the Mother's Golden Presence, on which to build the life divine.

In the world of spiritual progress, faith is of the essence. But faith seems to be out of style, it is taken by men of mere reason to be a mark of the sheerest superstition. It is promptly discounted as a part of totemism. There is a naive optimism about modern life. But ours is another kind of optimism that recognizes not only life but its deeper and inner resourcefulness—the optimism born out of our shared faith that man was designed for struggle, for war against the forces of darkness, death and ignorance and for an irrepressible striving towards light, immortality and truth. The prayer of the Upanishadic rishis goes up:

*asato mā sadgamaya  
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya  
mrtyor mā amṛtam gamaya*<sup>1</sup>

From falsehood lead me to truth,  
From darkness lead me to light,  
From death lead me to immortality!

The greatest tragedy of the human condition is that the human being does not want to escape his threefold tragedy. If there is a chance that we can replace falsehood with truth, darkness with light, death with immortality, we must certainly try. And the chance has been given us by providence, the possibility fully worked out, and everything already achieved and accomplished for us at a deeper or higher level. The chances are the brighter and better if only we cling to the Divine, and convince ourselves of His immediate manifestation. An effective action is fuelled by faith, it is faith alone that can help us to grasp the larger and secret design of life.

Today, living as we are, in a world of rapid and significant changes never before conceived of in human history, we are exposed to virtually every value system ever held by any culture. This welter of contradictory and distorted values conceals within it the certainty and promise of their harmony, integration and transcendence. Our contemporary preoccupation with their surface conflict can only retard our

<sup>1</sup> *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, I 3 28

forward movement. The only possible solution lies in approaching the problems from an inner perspective. Prisoners as we are of a mental framework of life, it is well-nigh impossible to be friends of received beliefs and old-world assumptions; nonetheless any enlightened skepticism should only be the beginning of a greater discovery—of a mighty adventure of consciousness. Otherwise we are apt to become subjects of strange psychological ailments. The times are that we can no longer thrive on any brand of skepticism, for the pressure and demand of the New Consciousness are too great for any one to take refuge in any known psychological shelter. What we need is some core of conscious conviction around which to re-organise our lives. And that has been graciously granted us by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

A New World is born. It is time that we come out of the old creation. The road to reach there is a new road, a road that there never was, therefore it is an absolutely unexpected adventure. To those who love adventure and want to walk the untraced path here is the Mother's call: "I invite you to the great adventure, and in this adventure you are not to repeat spiritually what the others have done before us, because our adventure begins from beyond that stage. We are for a new creation, entirely new, carrying in it all the unforseen, all risks, all hazards,—a true adventure of which the goal is sure victory, but of which the way is unknown and has to be traced out step by step in the unexplored. It is something that has never been in the present universe and will never be in the same manner. If that interests you, well, embark. What will happen to-morrow, I do not know. You must leave behind whatever has been designed, whatever has been built up, and then on the march into the unknown. Come what may."

The need to believe is fundamental. Those who have fought their way out of the world of yesterday would do well to approach the New Covenant with great certitude, with greater courage and total commitment. Let us leap at it heartily and thirstily with a child's enthusiasm and sincerity. The old-world value-systems are breaking down; their disintegration is only a matter of time. Even the liberating power of Science is now a proven myth. There is a vast area of life and experience into which Science has no entry; it is into this area that we will have to move with instruments of knowledge other than reason which are as yet concealed within us. It is these wholly *other* means of knowledge that can awaken us to the grandeur of the universe within and around us, and help us to realise our oneness with it. Splendid are the joys of man's inner ascent!

Perhaps the first step toward the ascent to Truth is to fight the way out of total imprisonment by the past; it is the Future that is the only source of spiritual nourishment. Secondly, extreme care should be taken to see that our aspiration for the *new* is not in any way institutionalized; let not ritual replace the vision. Lastly, and the most essential, is to keep the faith. Hold on to the vision, to the ideal, and do not allow whatever has been accomplished to accumulate false fronts. It is in the service of Truth and its manifestation that the flame of faith should be constantly kept burning, for faith itself is sacred.

From the beginning of history mankind has struggled for a few fragments of Truth, and each of these realised truths was enshrined in the form of a sacred sect, religion or cult. More often their claims have been exclusive as well as conflicting. The strivings of the race have nonetheless been praiseworthy, but today as we stand on the brink of the past in utter exhaustion and bankruptcy in search of the totally *new*, let the deep yearning of the contemporary soul be answered fully; let the total Truth now manifest upon earth. We seek the fulfilment, the crowning achievement, of Nature's evolutionary process; we seek the full and integral release of the spiritual potential of man. We seek to restore Spirit to human life; we seek the divinisation of life. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have dreamed, have struggled and suffered and sacrificed their all to contribute to this secret design of Nature; they have achieved all, accomplished everything, have brick by brick built the *new world* of tomorrow at a higher level of existence. If this has to be manifested in the gross physical we are required to pay its price—the price of our unshakable faith and sincere and complete surrender to the Will of the manifesting Future. Surrender is another name for meditation in action, for continued consecration, for renewed decision to be exclusively on the side of the Divine. Let us in such faith transcend all doctrinal boundaries, transcend all traditions, transcend our ego, and actively aspire for the moment of supreme triumph.

An inner identification with the Truth is *the* essential pre-requisite before we undertake the real and heroic task of helping Truth to manifest first in the individual and second in the sensitive community,—the group of 'meek' souls which seeks to inherit the Future. Rather, the process is one of mutual exercise—of the individual ascending into Truth, and the Truth descending into the seeker. There is the attending grave danger, in such periods of greater illumination, of the old religious and ethical norms wanting to acquire a new lease of life—a new wave of revivalism taking hold of the less vigilant individuals and nations, a consequent inrush of beings from the vital worlds to distract the heroic seekers. The soul alone sees through the game; and those who have their station permanently in the psychic being need not fear.

All revelation is unfoldment of the Spirit through heightened human experience. The recurring fact of humanity's attempt through history to transcend itself bears evidence to this unfoldment. It is only in the deepest depths of our being that we can have glimpses of our divine essence and origin. We have the roots of our life in two seemingly antagonistic domains of existence: we belong not only to earth but also to heaven. To-day, we believe, more than ever before, in God, and certainly as never before in the truth and reality of the world we live in. Of man, as at present, we only know the history and biology of his bones; we have yet to succeed in developing a satisfactory thesis of his consciousness. In the midst of a world of our knowledge only this formidable phenomenon is left unexplained. Consciousness is the key to the universe we live in: that alone can hold the mirror to our mechanistic cosmogony and explain it convincingly and totally. The mass of our phenomenal universe on closer scrutiny presents itself to us as an evolutionary process inexorably moving

towards the unfoldment of a higher consciousness. As a leading component of this process the human being feels himself constantly directed towards an ever-expanding consciousness. This is the eternal birth of Spirit in and through the human condition. A deepening of knowledge and of love, a widening and heightening of self-awareness are the attending phenomena of this covert realisation. The Spirit in us grows without limit, making all that is possible also realisable. In the course of our long history, consciousness has grown quite impressively but not adequately to manifest the Spirit in its fullness. All our aspirations, our efforts, and our prayers for self-transcendence seem to have at last succeeded in making a dent in the desired direction. The evolutionary process takes a leap into a new cosmic order of existence forcing mankind to think globally and live spiritually and integrally. There is therefore Eternity in front of us.

This is no Utopia, it is the Divine's own dream taking shape in the human framework. The choice is always open: whether we would remain satisfied with a faint glimmer of the spirit captured by the human psyche that is bound and burdened by an animal body or escape into the infinite impersonality of the Divine altogether discarding the body, or help nature to yield a flawless, radiant metabolism capable of manifesting the endless splendour of Sachchidananda. The choice is between that of a perfected animal-human existence or to become luminous centres of the Divine's conscious self-expression in humanity. Hearken to the call:

*“Men, countries, continents—  
The choice is imperative:  
Truth or the abyss”*<sup>1</sup>

For those who are sincerely concerned to reach the luminous summit, there is a road: it is the path of faith that leads to Supreme Felicity, Beatitude, Light—Eternity. It is the path of hard-climbing, but certain is the victory. It does not require any extraordinary talent, position or accomplishment to succeed: what it needs is sincerity, quiet joy, openness, constant aspiration and love for the Divine. Faith is an illuminating battle, a creative adventure that constantly brings the nourishment of light to the faithful. It is by faith that we live and progress. The Mother's words, as always, give nourishment to our parched hearts:

*“Have faith and He will do everything for you”*

At this crucial moment of inner crisis, of inner realisation and stabilisation, and in this hour of supreme manifestation all we need is a shared vision, a shared faith, a shared prayer and a shared consecration. For let us not forget even for a moment that ours is a collective yoga—a shared sadhana.

V MADHUSUDAN REDDY

<sup>1</sup> A New Year Message of the Mother

# THE CHARACTER OF LIFE

## CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE

*(Continued from the issue of July 1977)*

### **The Character of Life in Hamlet (*contd.*)**

Now let us turn to the text and follow the movements of life. The appearance of the Ghost and the news of war are simultaneous. The violent act of murder, though unknown to the public, evokes a violent challenge from abroad.

When we first meet Hamlet he is sunk in deep melancholy. When his black attire is being noticed, he tells the queen:

But I have that within which passeth show:  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (I ii 85)

Once alone he reveals the nature and depth of his suffering. His mother's behaviour has sickened and disheartened him. She, who clung to the king like a vine and whom Old Hamlet treated so lovingly, has proved most venal:

within a month—  
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman!—  
A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe, all tears:—why she, even she—  
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,  
Would have mourn'd longer—married with my uncle (I.ii.145-151)

Hamlet is in a profound vital depression. His mind is paralysed and morbid. All he can do is contemplate the horror of his Mother's incestuous wedlock. He had seen the lowness of her character and his mind generalises it as a truth of life and the world.

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely (I ii.133-137)

But essentially his response is vital, not mental. He feels identified with his mother. As J. Dover Wilson writes, "For his blood is tainted, his very flesh corrupted, by what his mother has done, since he is bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. .

Hamlet felt himself involved in his mother's lust, he was conscious of sharing her nature in all its rankness and grossness; the stock from which he sprang was rotten<sup>39</sup> As he later tells Ophelia in the nunnery scene:

I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us. (III.i.123)

It is this feeling of his own defilement and impurity which causes his melancholy, paralyses his will, and brings the constant thought of death and suicide

When Horatio seeks out Hamlet to tell him of the Ghost, there is an interesting example of a type of subtle perception quite common in life which we usually dismiss as coincidence.

Ham: My father!—methinks I see my father.

Hor: Where, my lord?

Ham: In my mind's eye, Horatio.

Hor: I saw him once; he was a goodly king.

Ham: He was a man, take him for all in all,  
I shall not look upon his like again

Hor: My Lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

Ham: Saw? who?

Hor: My lord, the king your father (I ii 184-91)

Before Horatio can speak a word of seeing Hamlet's father, Hamlet says he saw him and when later the Ghost tells Hamlet of the murder, he replies, "O my prophetic soul!" indicating the nature of his earlier vision.

When the Ghost appears, Hamlet shows both courage and a reckless abandon born of despair:

Why, what should be the fear?

I do not set my life at a pin's fee. (I.iv.64)

The Ghost relates how Claudius wooed his queen to adultery with wit and gifts, then poisoned the sleeping king and robbed him of his life, his crown and his queen. The Ghost commands him to

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder (I V 25)

and

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be

A couch for luxury and damn'd incest (I.V.82)

On top of the already crippling weight of his mother's incestuous marriage comes knowledge of her adulterous infidelity and his father's murder. There is no anger in Hamlet's response, no furious resolution to revenge. Rather he feels himself collapsing and his mind fainting away from the knowledge.

O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;  
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,  
But bear me stiffly up (I.v 93)

He responds to the Ghost's words—to remember and avenge him—with a decision of the mind and attempts to impress on his memory the command:

Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
That youth and observation copied there,  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmix'd with baser matter: Yes, by heaven!  
O most pernicious woman!  
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!  
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain: (I.v.98-108)

The implication is that if he does not write it down he may forget. How to forget unless from utter horror and despair? Hamlet's mind and heart and body rebel against the knowledge. His emerging power of mental consciousness is oppressed by an enormous burden which threatens to destroy it.

Yet almost immediately we see the strength and adeptness of his mind reassert themselves. He knows exactly how to handle his companions, refuses to reveal anything, and elicits an oath of secrecy from them. At the same time he decides on his course of action, "To put an antic disposition on" (V.v.172), and prepares them for a change in his behaviour. We agree with the critics who have argued that Hamlet's madness is only half feigned and that he chooses the guise of an antic disposition to conceal his failing personality-strength. But the madness is not merely a secondary result of his mother's and his uncle's acts. Rather from a wider viewpoint it can be seen that the existing social forces are covertly working through subconscious life channels to weaken or destroy the nascent mental consciousness in Hamlet by presenting it in its weak condition with an intolerable burden. It is the same movement that overtly confronted Socrates, Copernicus, Jesus and innumerable others who repre-



sented in themselves some new manifestation. Hamlet is not a symbol or a metaphorical image of an allegory. He is a living example of the process by which human life evolves and the dynamics of that evolution. We have stated earlier that his mind achieves primarily a negative power of insight rather than a positive will to action or an intuition of higher truths which could have saved him from despair. Had his mental will been developed he may have had the power and initiative to act definitively instead of endlessly delaying. But as it is he lacks the strength and balance of a mature mind. He finds himself in a time and conditions foreign to his nature and not conducive to the flowering of his mental consciousness.

The time is out of joint O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right! (I.v 188)

This hostile movement of social forces has a variety of expressions. First there is the question of succession. If Dover Wilson is correct in his comprehension of Elizabethan values we must understand that the queen committed not only adultery but also incest in marrying her husband's brother and that Claudius was guilty not only of murder but also of usurping the throne from Hamlet, its rightful heir. It appears that the transition of power occurred quietly and smoothly without disturbance and once Claudius is King, he seems to have the full confidence of the court. How is it, we may ask, that no one has raised a vocal complaint against incest and usurpation—unless there is a subconscious consent in the collectivity to the illegitimate marriage and coronation?

Not only is there a lack of resistance or objection to Claudius but there are several conscious initiatives against Hamlet. The most powerful is the work of Laertes and Polonius to discredit Hamlet in the eyes of Ophelia and prevent the lovers from further meetings. It appears as simply the loving concern of a father and brother and we do not imply that they were conscious of anything more. But it is noteworthy that Ophelia was left free to her romance up until Old Hamlet's death and Claudius's ascension. The clear implication is that their attitude has changed after Hamlet was dispossessed of the crown. But is he not still a prince and a very fitting marriage partner? Why, then, the change? Their action has the effect of one final blow to Hamlet's sense of life's value and goodness. At a time when he is mourning his father's death they deprive him of his one remaining support and the conclusion Hamlet draws from it is devastating. What else can he think but that Ophelia like his mother is weak, unfaithful, and has lost her affection for him? When later Hamlet breaks into her room with dishevelled clothes and shaking body he is obviously not feigning distress. It is one last desperate effort to find some emotional support and to confirm or deny his worst fears of her. Ophelia is a weak personality unable to respond to his need and frightened by his intensity. She remains motionless and he withdraws.

Laertes touches a deeper truth in his warning to Ophelia about her relationship with Hamlet

His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own;  
 For he himself is subject to his birth:  
 He may not, as unvalu'd persons do,  
 Carve for himself; for on his choice depends  
 The safety and health of this whole state! (I.iii.17)

The phrase "subject to his birth" reminds us of Hamlet's words before the Ghost's appearance:

That for some vicious mole of nature in them,  
 As, in their birth—wherein they are not guilty,  
 Since nature cannot choose his origin— (I.iv.24)

Hamlet's situation does not arise simply from his character. It results from this particular character of emerging mind being placed in the position as rightful heir to the throne. "His will is not his own" because he is caught in a wider movement of social evolution. On his life and action depends the future of Denmark. Laertes refers to the positive challenge placed on Hamlet by his birth while Hamlet refers to the negative burden of impurity he has inherited from his mother.

Polonius takes an active initiative against Hamlet. He tells Ophelia

I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,  
 Have you so slander any moment leisure,  
 As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet. (I.iii.132)

He is a foolish man but incapable of intentional malice. His great weakness is his pretense of knowledge and his constant urge "To case beyond ourselves in our opinions" (II.1.115) which is in direct contradiction to his advice to his son Laertes

Give thy thoughts no tongue  
 Nor any unproportion'd thought his act (I.iii.59)

Polonius's action here and elsewhere is an expression of the conventional wisdom of the time followed ignorantly and blindly. He accuses Hamlet of false vows of love to Ophelia while completely accepting Claudius's "seemings" of virtue. He is essentially a good man but not honest, and Hamlet tells him so.

Then I would you were so honest a man (II.ii.176)

Subconsciously Polonius responds to the pressure of social forces moving against Hamlet and he becomes a willing instrument for their purposes. Both for his ignorant assertion and his unconscious collaboration, he reaps a swift reward. He is the first bystander to take sides and initiate a negative action and he is the first to fall

One further example may be cited of the general movement against Hamlet. It is the readiness with which his old schoolmates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, respond to the lure of royal recompense:

Your visitation shall receive such thanks  
As fits a king's remembrance (II 11.25)

They become willing agents of Claudius in his effort to discover Hamlet's real motives and in his later attempt to send him to England for execution. Again we may claim that the agents were unconscious and meant no harm to Hamlet, only to serve the king and help their disturbed friend. Or at most we may accuse them of responding to a bribe. But life knows better than our naive concession of justifiable motives. The very fact that a man becomes a channel for negativity to reach another person indicates some desire or willingness in him to see the other suffer. It is one expression of the law of inner-outer correspondence. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern respond to the general vibration of hostility and lend themselves as channels for its expression.

*(To be continued)*

GARRY JACOBS

NOTE

<sup>39</sup> J. Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p 42

## EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

An EDUCATION RESEARCH WORKSHOP is to be held from November 2nd to 16th 1977 inclusive, by the DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT of the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry. The purpose is an introduction to SRI AUROBINDO's educational psychology and a reflection on fundamental world problems in education. The sessions will be conducted by the staff of the Department and by professors from India and from abroad.

The workshop is programmed for men and women of all ages, trained teachers, directors of Educational Institutions. It is also open to anyone interested in the Education of the Future.

Proficiency in English is required. Applications will be received up to October 1st, at the latest. Further information and applications can be obtained directly from:

NORMAN C. DOWSETT  
Director  
Department of Educational Research and Development  
Sri Aurobindo Society  
Pondicherry 605002

# THE TORTOISE AND THE MOUSE

## A STORY

### I

IN Tortoise-land, there once lived a mature, respected and much loved tortoise. His name was Angus Ranjit le Tournois and he came from an old and noble family that had produced numerous talented terrapins and a small number of geniuses. But never had this family given Tortoise-land a being of such all-round accomplishment as Angus and certainly never any who was so well loved. People came from far and near just to spend a few minutes in his presence. He had wise though rather short-sighted eyes and often when he gazed at someone their troubles just seemed to drop away. He was a marvellous conversationalist and an even better cook who could whip up delicious little dishes out of anything that he happened to have in the kitchen when you arrived. And then too because he was a man of parts people came to him for all sorts of other things, writers wanting their articles read, artists wanting their pictures admired, even people who wanted advice about hanging their curtains or digging their gardens, or mending their roofs. And the nice thing about Angus was that he never refused even though when first approached he would invariably disappear into his shell. He was a very timid tortoise.

Though Angus's own work was constantly being interrupted he never seemed to resent this. I have forgotten to mention what his own work was. Officially, he was a councillor to the Tortoise King, His Most Serene and August Majesty King Harold Hardshell, the 90th, or Harold Hardshell the Impenetrable as he was admiringly called by his subjects. This was Angus's work both by appointment and tradition, for the members of his family, except for one or two of the erratic geniuses, had always held such posts. But the work of Angus's heart was a definitive history of Tortoise-land on which he had been working for many years. King Harold Hardshell had put him in charge of the archives so that he could have ready access to them. He had given him several generous grants and put a number of secretaries at his disposal and everybody was waiting for the great opus to be finished. Not that anyone was in a hurry, for "hurry" does not come readily, if at all indeed, to tortoises. Everyone understood that such things take time and was content in the knowledge that Angus would some day present them with the most comprehensive and perspicacious history of Tortoise-land ever written.

If you are aware that the shell of a tortoise, like the rings of a tree, reveals the age of its owner, the idea of a tortoise keeping a history will seem less strange to you. In a sense every tortoise keeps a history though most tortoises being rather limited creatures can keep no more than a personal biography on their backs. It takes a tortoise of wide, indeed of all-embracing, vision to carry the history of his whole people. It is all a question of consciousness. Whatever a tortoise knows one might say in

his very cells will be recorded on his shell. Thus a tortoise's shell is far more than merely a protective adaptation: it is an instrument of creative expression and, potentially, a rich element of the tortoise cultural heritage.

After this lengthy explanation let us come to the evening on which our story begins.

Angus was sitting down to dinner with his best friend Maurizio Mouse of the rodent people. Of all the creatures in the world, Maurizio was the one he felt most comfortable with. On this particular evening they were both very excited because it was the eve of Angus's birthday and on the morrow he was to give the first reading from his *History* to a small and select coterie of high-ranking intellectuals and influential tortoises. The king himself and all the top officials were to be present. When I say they were excited it should be borne in mind that they expressed this emotion in very different ways: Maurizio, who was sitting on Angus's back reading it, would jump down and run around laughing and laughing whenever he found anything that particularly delighted him; while one would have had to know Angus very well indeed to detect any sign of excitement. He just sat smiling benignly, now and then perhaps a bit more frequently than usual, withdrawing for a few moments into the reassuring darkness of his shell.

They were enjoying themselves so much that they hardly noticed that it was three o'clock in the morning. In fact, what happened was that in the middle of his reading, Maurizio fell asleep just where he was on Angus's back and though Angus, being a very tidy tortoise, wasn't too happy about leaving all the plates unwashed, he, being even more a considerate creature and not wishing to disturb his friend, simply slid his head in and went to sleep. But while Angus had the sort of mind that could switch everything off and sleep quite soundly, Maurizio had an excitable nature and could do no such thing. He had the temperament of the artiste and, in fact, he was very highly strung with a great deal of nervous energy and was always nibbling or gnawing at something; when he was especially excited or apprehensive his need to nibble increased. When there was no cheese or biscuit to nibble he would gnaw on anything that came to hand—paper or wood or even his own nails. Well, on this particular night, as we have said, he was in anything but a calm mood to begin with, and because he had eaten a garlic cheese soufflé with gusto and then a heavily spiced Mediterranean eggplant dish that was one of Angus's specialities, the wee hours found him tossing and turning on the back of his friend who, moderate in all things, now slept soundly despite the scrabbling and tickling on his shell.

But Maurizio knew no rest. At last, thinking a light snack might soothe his nerves, he jumped down and went scrounging through the kitchen. All that remained from the evening's repast were a few of Angus's lightly seasoned lettuce leaves which he chewed up quickly and with no more feeling of satisfaction than he had expected from such insubstantial fare. Then being sleepy and reluctant to go and look for a piece of wood, he climbed up on his friend's back again and began chewing his own toenails. There wasn't much of them left anyway, but he went

on and on and at one point half woke to find that they tasted more delicious than he could have ever imagined. Everything tasted so much better in dear old Angus's house, even his own nails. He woke up at dawn still gnawing and nibbling and licking his chops and found to his sleepy surprise that what he'd been gnawing away at was Angus's shell. In his half-awake state as he had so often in his waking one, Maurizio now thought that he really must take himself in hand and reform his uncontrolled habits and untidy way of life. He really must. He wasn't just a promising young actor any more who could indulge in any whim or fancy. He so much wanted to be more like Angus, dear old Angus, patient, ordered, indulgent Angus. And it really didn't do to gnaw at a friend. But since Maurizio wasn't more than half-awake this resolution had little power over his jaws which, in fact, went right on nibbling at the shell. If you think of the great lengths to which gourmets will go to procure turtle soup, you will not be surprised to learn that tortoise shell has rather a subtle flavour; indeed, it was one of the most delicious things MAURIZIO had ever tasted and he thought dreamily of how amused Angus would be at his discovery.

Angus woke with a distinctly uneasy feeling. He put this down to the general untidiness of his surroundings, for he was an archivist as we have already said, an extremely orderly and methodical tortoise, and he was always much put out by any physical disarray. Certainly it was not unnatural to have a sinking feeling at the pit of one's stomach on such a day as this, yet he knew that he was perfectly prepared for the reading and found it odd that he should be so affected. He thought he'd better do some deep breathing exercises to get his nerves right but his attempts turned into heavy sighs and he couldn't quite get rid of the feeling that all his certainties had been nibbled at.

He called out to his friend in a faint voice, "Morry."

"Hullo there, Angus. How did you sleep? I had rather a rotten night. In fact . . ." He was trying to find a way of confessing what he had done.

"I say, Morry," asked Angus rather anxiously, "did you ever suffer from stage fright?"

"Rather Oh yes indeed. I must have given, in fact I did give, four thousand and fifty-two performances, including charity affairs and Command performances and I was as nervous before the children's matinées as before the Command performances. The *trac*, the French call it. Sometimes I had to be pushed onto the stage. The first few times I was actually carried on." Maurizio tried to make his voice sound cheerful but it trembled slightly. In fact he was himself suffering from something which felt very much like the *trac*.

"What does it feel like?" sighed Angus.

"Oh, like a sinking feeling in the stomach I'd say," called out Maurizio, who was combing his whiskers with his paws and making them stand out as far as possible.

"I suppose it's all right then," said Angus. "That's what I feel all right. Does . . . does the mind feel quite chaotic too?"

“Absolutely.”

“Then I suppose everything’s all right.”

“Yes, yes; quite in order. Once I got onto the stage I always sang and danced or strangled Desdemona without another thought to my stomach.”

“Thank you for telling me, Morry.”

“And don’t forget, Angus, that you have a great advantage. If you really are feeling shy, you can just tuck your head in.”

“Thank you for reminding me, Morry. Yes, I can do that, can’t I?” Actually Angus had thought of that already but he had hoped he would not have to do it. He had never revealed to anyone, not even to Morry, how ashamed he was of his lack of courage. He yearned to be able to look his critics in the eye and in his most soaring flights of fancy occasionally imagined a future in which he and his race would no longer need shells for withdrawing into.

“It would look very modest. And you are a modest tortoise, you know. For one so gifted it wouldn’t be out of character at all.”

“Ah thank you. You almost give me confidence. Thank you, friend.” And much encouraged, Angus glided out into the garden intending to give the breathing exercises another go in the fresh air. At that moment from behind a cloud the sun slipped and even as Angus paused with eyes half-closed and neck swaying gently from side to side to bask in the warm rays, Maurizio’s paw flew to his mouth just in time to stifle a scream. For in the bright sunlight the full effect of the night’s nibbling was starkly revealed: Angus’s once-beautiful shell, the living text of his *magnum opus*, was badly mauled, even ravaged in parts.

Maurizio was just about to throw himself at his friend’s feet and beg forgiveness when he realised that this would make it all the worse for Angus. He’d better wait, and break the news gently and try to explain. After all, once Angus was on the platform he would no doubt be able to piece together and explain any missing bits of history from memory, and in case his excellent memory failed him, the tortoise archives would be ready at hand. No, there was no point in rattling Angus at this stage of the proceedings. Best was to get the whole thing over with as quickly as possible. Maurizio was for hurrying straight to the venue but Angus insisted on tidying up.

“It soothes me,” he explained. “Tidying things always soothes me. It seems to re-order my mind.”

But this morning it did neither.

At last they set out. Maurizio could never bear to pace along at Angus’s speed and whenever he accompanied his friend anywhere he always rode on his back, pretending that he was an Indian raja and that the great swaying bulk beneath him was his favourite elephant. But today Maurizio who was a hundred times more nervous than usual scampered about continually dashing far ahead of the tortoise and then back to his side.

“Why don’t you climb up today, Morry?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I don’t know that it would look dignified for you today, Angus.”

“You could always slip off just before we get there, couldn’t you?” said Angus who would have liked the solace of his warm-blooded friend’s scrabbling on his back.

“No, no. Someone might see us.” Maurizio was determined to keep as far away from the poor shell as possible; the last thing he wanted to see was the havoc he had wrought.

They finally arrived at the clearing where the notables of Tortoise-land were waiting. To one side an awning had been erected above the waiting archives which, or rather who, consisted of representatives of all the families in which anything notable had happened. Beneath another awning waited the not inconsiderable number of VIPs who had assembled for the occasion. Besides virtually the entire intelligentsia of Tortoise-land, many of the leading figures of business and industry, creatures with little interest in the subject of Angus’s presentation *per se* but obliged by their positions not to miss the function, were present. The diplomatic corps, not only of Tortoise-land itself but of numerous other kingdoms, were also well represented.

From the tortoises came an interested stir: they had noticed something strange about Angus’s shell when he arrived, but since it was Angus’s shell and since he had promptly mounted a special podium at some distance from the audience, they presumed that he had merely found a new way of presenting his material. They could hardly wait for King Harold to arrive and for the preliminaries to be over so that they could start reading Angus, but they had to wait. Nothing can happen before the King arrives in Tortoise-land and in any case Harold was rather an authoritarian ruler.

At this point something strange happened which was afterwards spoken of as the first sign of Angus’s lunacy. The discomfort which he had been feeling all morning had grown acute but after a moment of severe apprehension in which it seemed that everything was falling apart, he suddenly felt quite gay and light-hearted and not the least bit timid. It was as though a great weight had been lifted from him.

“Mouse,” he said, “let us slip away for a while and have a look at those flowers that we passed along the way.”

“What flowers?” asked Maurizio.

“The little pink flowers,” said Angus.

“Little pink flowers!” echoed Maurizio incredulously. “Whatever for? What good would that be?”

“Oh yes, that would be very good,” said Angus with an irrelevant smile which sent an anxious quiver through his friend.

“I mean, what would that have to do with this morning’s... everything?”

“Well, it’s difficult to put it in words...” Maurizio had never heard Angus



starting a sentence like that. He was always so good with words. "It would have everything to do with this morning and nothing," and without once mentioning his history Angus went off into a rambling consideration of the relationship between the little pink flower and the universe which included a lengthy description of his uncle's success in Monkey-land (where he had gone to study Simian philosophy), a similarly lengthy exposition on the subject of cats' whiskers (Angus had a whole drawer full of them—gifts from friends and well-wishers, awards for meritorious service and best essays, etc.), as well as various other totally disconnected topics. Maurizio's heart sank lower yet, for he recognised the symptoms all too well. How many times had he heard the same discourse from fellow actors who had been out of work for too long and had eaten too meagrely or hardly at all until their reason collapsed? But he had never expected to hear it from his friend Angus. And it was all his fault. For surely the damage to Angus's shell had disrupted his metabolism and with it his reason. He could only pray frantically that this condition might not last.

"Just wait here, Angus," he said and sped off to consult Renaldo, the oldest and wisest and kindest (after Angus) of all the King's counsellors

"What do you think I should do?" he asked, convinced that this perspicacious tortoise must have already grasped the situation.

"Why, how about a tap dance number on Angus's shell. I really love your rendition of Hernando's Hideaway, or perhaps the Prince of Denmark?"

Maurizio hid his eyes in his paws and moaned, "How does Angus look to you?"

"Well, as you know I'm a bit short-sighted but from what I can see he's going to present us with something quite *unusual*, *quite unusual*." He peered. "I would even say unprecedented. Something which will far outstrip his rearrangement of the archives there. If it weren't for the fact that I love dear old Angus so much I would be frightfully jealous. I'm quite excited. I feel this is a day that our children and their children and their children will remember. There's a sort of something in the air. Can't you feel it?"

"Well yes.. something," said Maurizio and scampered back to Angus, whose condition had further deteriorated. "A little pink flower," he was murmuring. "Who would have thought of that?. The whole thing in a little pink flower." But even worse than the words was Angus's crooked smile. There was nothing modest about it now. It was gleeful and childlike and hardly suitable to his three hundred odd years or the solemnity of the occasion.

"Angus. Angus dear friend."

"Yes, dear Mousie, dear little rodent," and Angus tried to embrace him.

"Angus, you simply must pull yourself together. Today. It's your birthday. Happy Birthday, Angus. Did you remember it was your birthday?"

Angus burst into laughter. "That day he opened in his widely acclaimed role as Angus Ranjit le Tournois? Is that what you mean?" and again Angus burst into laughter.

“Angus, I do beg of you, don’t laugh like that. Don’t forget where we are. Look, there are all the ambassadors. There are your friends. There are the critics.” Angus looked around obediently but never lost his gleeful smile. “And there,” said Maurizio pulling out his trump card, “there are the archives that you spent so many years training and reorganising.” Angus looked at the archives ranged in a complicated L-shaped pattern traversed by interlocking B’s and threw his head back as far as it is possible for a tortoise to throw his head back and laughed more heartily than ever. All Maurizio’s efforts seemed only to make things worse. He sat still and despondent while Angus quietly snorted with laughter. Suddenly he realized:

“Angus, He’ll be coming any moment. King Harold, He’ll be coming up here to congratulate you. What if he finds you like this? He may think you are laughing at him. You know how touchy he is. What do you think would happen then?”

Angus was trying to stuff his foot into his mouth. His whole shell was rocking. Maurizio had never seen a tortoise laugh like that. Mice often giggled. But tortoises were usually grave creatures who could be relied upon to behave consistently. He was trying to remember whether he’d ever seen a tortoise laugh at all when a blast of trumpets announced the approach of the king.

*(To be continued)*

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