

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

DECEMBER 1979

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TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

The enormous rise in the cost of paper, production and distribution and the change in some other factors have forced us to raise by a small margin our subscription from 1980. We have kept the margin as small as possible because the cost of living is everywhere on the increase. In passing, we may state that the cost to us of each copy of *Mother India* is more than Rs. 3/-. It is only the donations and advertisements that help us out to a great extent.

Among the other factors mentioned above, there is our decision of reverting to the use of envelopes instead of wrappers for posting in India. Complaints have come in that the edges of the copies got crumpled and that sometimes the wrappers got torn so that the copies were not delivered. But the cost of envelopes has shot up from the rate of Rs. 55/- in 1976 to the present rate of Rs. 200/- per thousand (a 300% increment). We have already had them made, and as soon as the wrappers in stock are exhausted—most probably by April 1980—we shall start with the envelopes.

The Indian postage per copy is now 15 paise instead of 10. Posting abroad by sea-mail now costs Rs. 1.50 instead of 50 paise as in 1976.

With a view to simplify our accounts for those whose subscriptions end in months other than December 1979, we shall adjust the period according to the new rate or ask them to pay the extra amount when it is due.

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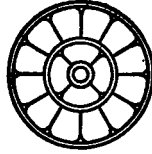
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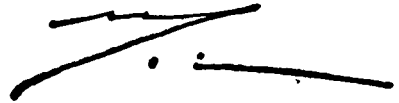


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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AN APPEAL TO OUR WELL-WISHERS

Mother India is in need of donations of any amount that can be spared.

The scheme of Life-Membership is still in force. If attended to, it can also help.

Advertisements too can be a good contribution. Tariff cards can be had on application.

Increase in the number of subscribers is always welcome.

We shall be grateful for help in any form, and particularly in the form of donations.

The donations will be tax-free if sent ear-marked for us through the Ashram Trust.

AN EXPLANATION TO OUR WELL-WISHERS

The good number of our advertisements must not be taken as a sign of great gain. We pay a very large commission on several of them, and after deducting press-charges our profit is small on the whole.

A BIG STRIDE . . .

FROM A TALK BY THE MOTHER ON 10 DECEMBER 1969

SURELY a big stride will have been taken when man will naturally turn to perfect himself instead of waiting to find perfection in others....This reversal is the very basis of all true progress. The first human instinct: "It is the fault of circumstances, the fault of people, the fault...this one is like this, that one is like that, the other one..." And this goes on indefinitely. The *first step*, the very first step is to say: "If I were as I ought to be or if this body were as it ought to be, all would be perfectly all right for it." If in order to progress, you were to wait for others to progress, you would have to wait indefinitely. That is the very first thing that is to be circulated everywhere. Never put the blame on others or on circumstances, because whatever the circumstances, even those that appear the worst, if you keep the true attitude and have the true consciousness, they will have no importance at all for your inner progress, no importance—I say this and I include even death.

Indeed, that seems to be the first lesson to learn.

(*Silence*)

Sri Aurobindo had written (I translate freely) that the notion of sin has been introduced to hasten progress, and immediately (*Mother laughs*) man saw sin in all others—he never saw it in himself! Sri Aurobindo's sentence is charming, but I do not remember it.¹

¹ "The sense of sin was necessary in order that man might become disgusted with his own imperfections. It was God's corrective for egoism. But man's egoism meets God's device by being very dully alive to its own sins and very keenly alive to the sins of others." (*Thoughts and Aphorisms*, Cent. Vol. 17, p. 86).

REGULARITY OF THE SEASONS—RAIN AND THE MOTHER—SUBTLE ENTITIES

SOME PERSONAL AND GENERAL COMMENTS BY THE MOTHER IN DECEMBER 1955

(A question was put to the Mother about the regularity of the seasons, but was not recorded clearly enough for transcription.)

WHAT, in fact, is regularity? I know that from the time I have come here I have seen all possible things and only on a few days—very few—I could say, “Look! we are at the height of summer, it’s summer’s “weather” and that was at the beginning of November. It was much hotter than it was in May this year. Only we think like that: “Now it is summer; after that comes autumn, then winter will come.” And so we adapt ourselves, but it is not true. Well, look! there are things like that. The people of the country told me...I came in the month of April the second time...the first time, the first time, as we know, it was on 29th of March, that is, April follows. In those days it was understood: it never rained here for at least three months—not a drop of water, all used to become dry, the leaves which are put on the roof used to dry up so much that suddenly one day they burst into flames, it was like that. I come, and a terrible rainfall! Then the people looked at me (here they have a little of something like a feeling that things are not altogether mechanical, you see). “How does it happen to rain?” Then I answered, “I don’t know, it’s not I, but I have friendship with the rain.”

I went to Pau in the South of France at a time when it never rains there—that is, people who could remember from their very infancy had never seen a drop of water—it rained in torrents.

I went to South Algeria, naturally it was dry and there was torrid heat—it began to rain!

And then here the same thing happened, and they said that it had been seen only once before...I don’t know any more...something like two hundred years ago. They remembered this, and that someone had come and it had rained, and they had taken it as an absolutely auspicious sign, you see, that it was the sign of an exceptional destiny. They have ideas here about auspicious and inauspicious hours, and auspicious events and inauspicious events. Well, when someone arrives at a time when it does not rain and the rain falls, it seems to be a very auspicious event.

Therefore things are as one looks at them. But I have seen other things which are like this, but not very pleasant. It is from the time men have invented—not invented but discovered—and begun to play like babies with things they did not know, and have made atom bombs and other worse things still. This has truly disturbed *terribly* all these little entities which lived indeed according to a certain rhythm which was their own, and were in the habit of commanding at least foreseen events,

this has disturbed them very much, they have suffered terribly from it, and it has made them lose their heads, they no longer know what they are doing. There was a time at the end of the War, when things had truly become terribly chaotic up there, they lived in a kind of absurdity; and as these unfortunate experiences continue, they have not yet come out of their panic. They are panic-stricken. Truly men play with things which they know only from outside, that is don't know at all. They know just enough to make a wrong use of them. Anything may happen, including, alas, catastrophes which were foretold long ago. It may happen... It depends... on what will intervene.

There is something to be done. I told you this. I said, "If you don't want it to rain, pray." You took it as a joke.

What is the cause of this rain?

Ah! it seems... there must have been a fault somewhere. Someone has been displeased... Who is displeased?

What we do on the first¹ can anger somebody?

Not what we do. Surely not that. Perhaps something in the way we do it. You want me to tell you something... my experience of things... because all this interests me, and I observe it. Unfortunately I am on the side of the spectators, I don't intervene. It is very difficult to make me intervene in these things. Still, I wanted to know and I observed... and this... today I saw, saw this... how to put it?... it is neither heard nor seen, it is at once heard and seen and known and everything you like.

All this work which you have done, which has taken almost a year, all these efforts you have made, all the difficulties you have overcome, all this you have done as an offering to the divine Work, you see, with all your sincerity and goodwill, the best of your ability and a complete good-heartedness. Yes, you have put into it all that you could, you have succeeded to a certain extent, in any case you have done things as well as you could. Then "this" added with a smile which, indeed, was a little impish: "What is it to you whether a few stupid fools see what you have done or not? Now you have done the work, you have accomplished it. You have shown what you could do. What is it to you whether a few foolish spectators see it or not?" It was *clear*, you see. I am expressing it; in expressing it I may take away something from it. It was a state of consciousness, and then, indeed, it troubled me a little, because... trouble! that's a way of speaking... I told myself: "Heavens! if it is like that after all, we can't be sure that the rain will stop. For if truly it is of no importance that some thousand odd people should see what we have done, if our offering has been accepted as an offering made as well as possible and with all our heart, the attitude

¹ December 1 is the day of the Annual Programme of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. In 1955 it took place in the Playground where the spectators had to sit in the open.

is not to be anxious about the result—we do not care for the result. Then perhaps, the rain will continue.”

I am continuing my investigation, I don't know what is going to happen. But in any case, I ought to tell you that I have not yet taken any decision to stop the rain. I am still at the stage of looking on. We shall see. In any case, it was charming. I said, “Was there someone who introduced an egoistic or self-interested feeling into this, and who did not do the thing as it ought to be done, in the right spirit? Where is the fault?” and all that. There was nothing of all this. We were perfectly satisfied with what we had done. It was work well done, done in the right spirit, as well as we could do it. Everybody was happy. There was some impishness somewhere. Was it impishness? It was something much higher than that: it was an observation. So we are going to see. As for me, it interests me, these things. Unfortunately it is like this, I can't take sides, I look on, and it amuses me.

I ought to say that if I consider all the effort you have made, and made so well, I tell myself, “Oh, they are very sweet. Truly they should be able to show it.” But it's like that, you see, it's like that, it is not a will which wakes up and says, “Now that's it!” When that wakes up, everything goes well, everybody obeys, even the little entities up there. And that is why I told you, “You must pray to them”, because if you begin praying, you, I shall naturally be with you in your prayer. That is it, that's the trick.

THE WIND...

THE wind blows ever in loneliness
 And never comes reply,
 Across the abysm's vacancies,
 Across the weird dark sky
 It howls to us eternities
 That long ago have died,
 A host of haunting phantoms
 Upon an endless ride,
 Summoned in obscurity
 From realms we seek to hide,
 The caverns whose grey darknesses
 Forgotten yet abide
 On a dragon-base of strength whose tail
 Lies wrapped around a shining grail.

ROGER HARRIS

THE NEW CREATION AND THE ADVERSE FORCES

FROM A TALK BY THE MOTHER

WHEN the world is ready to receive the new creation, the adverse forces will disappear. But so long as the world needs to be tempted, kneaded, churned in order to be prepared, the adverse forces will be there to be the temptation and what strikes you, pushes you, prevents you from sleeping, compels you to be absolutely sincere.

A being that is absolutely sincere becomes the master of the adverse forces. But so long as there is egoism in a being or pride or ill-will, it will always be the object of temptation, of attack; and it will always be fully subject to this constant conflict with what, under the appearance of hostile beings, toils despite itself at the divine Work.

The time is not absolutely determined. I have already explained this to you several times. There are many fields of consciousness, zones of consciousness superimposed upon one another; and in each one of these fields of consciousness or action there is a determinism which seems absolute. But the intervention in one field of even the next higher field, like the intervention of the vital in that of the physical, introduces the determinism of the vital in that of the physical, and necessarily transforms the determinism of the physical. And through aspiration, the inner will, self-giving and the true surrender one can enter into contact with the higher regions or even the supreme region; from up there the supreme determinism will come down and transform all the intermediate determinisms and it will be able to bring about in a so-to-say almost inexistent span of time what would have otherwise taken years or lives to be accomplished. But this is the only way.

If at the time of some event or circumstance—take for instance, to simplify things, of a danger—if at that time instead of trying to struggle in the domain where one is, one can traverse in a great soaring all the domains which are rungs in the consciousness, and go to the supreme region, what Sri Aurobindo calls the Transcendent, if one can enter into contact with this Transcendent, in a state of a perfect surrender, it is He who will act and change everything, in all circumstances—to the extent that this will be what people call miracles, because they do not understand how it can happen.

The sole secret is to know how to climb up, right up to the top.

9 November 1955

DESTINY AFTER DEATH AND RETURN TO EARTH

WORDS OF THE MOTHER

Mother, when one is here and is following the integral yoga here, isn't...

“ONE is here” means “one is in the Ashram” or “one is in the class”? In the class? No! (*Laughter*)

We are in the class and in the Ashram also.

Ah, good! So?

Is it sure that in the next life too one will be here or in the Ashram? Or will it be that one will go somewhere else for other experiences?

This depends on the cases. First, what do you call the next life? You mean for people who have left their body and will take another?

Yes.

Well, it depends absolutely on the condition in which they died and their last wish, and on the resolution of the psychic. It is not a mechanical or imposed thing, it is different for each one.

I have already told you many times that, for the destiny which follows after death, the last state of consciousness is usually the most important. That is, if at the moment of death one has the intense aspiration to return to continue his work, then the conditions are arranged for it to be done. But, you see, there are all the possibilities for what happens after death. There are people who return in the psychic. You see, I have told you that the outer being is very rarely preserved; so we speak only of the psychic consciousness which, indeed, always persists. And then there are people for whom the psychic returns to the psychic domain to assimilate the experience they have had and to prepare their future life. This may take centuries, it depends on the people.

The more evolved the psychic is, the nearer it is to its complete maturity, the greater the time between the births. There are beings who reincarnate only after a thousand years, two thousand years.

The closer one is to the beginning of the formation, the closer are the reincarnations; and sometimes even, altogether at the lower level, when man is quite near the animal, it goes like this (*gesture*), that is, it is not unusual for people to reincarnate in the children of their children, like that, something like that, or just in the next generation. But this is always on a very primitive level of evolution, and the psychic being

is not very conscious, it is in the state of formation. And as it becomes more developed, the reincarnations, as I said, are at a greater distance from one another. When the psychic being is fully developed, when it no longer needs to return to earth for its development, when it is absolutely free, it has the choice of no longer coming back to earth if it finds that its work lies elsewhere or if it prefers to remain in the purely psychic consciousness, without reincarnating; or else it can come when it wants, as it wants, where it wants, perfectly consciously. And there are those who have united with forces of a universal order and with entities of the Overmind or elsewhere, who remain all the time in the earth atmosphere and take on bodies successively for the work. This means that the moment the psychic being is completely formed and absolutely free—when it is completely formed it becomes absolutely free—it can do anything it likes, it depends on what it chooses; therefore one can't say, "It will be like this, it will be like that"; it does exactly what it wants and it can even announce (that has happened), at the moment of the death of the body, what its next reincarnation will be and what it will do, and already choose what it is going to do. But before this state, which is not very frequent—it depends absolutely on the degree of development of the psychic and the hope formulated by the integral consciousness of the being—there is still the mental, vital and physical consciousness, united with the psychic consciousness; so at that moment, the moment of death, the moment of leaving the body, it formulates a hope or an aspiration or a will, and usually this decides the future life.

So one can't ask a question saying, "What happens and what should be done?" All possible things happen, and everything can be done.

16 March 1955

THE PSYCHIC BEING AND REBIRH

SOME CLARIFICATIONS BY THE MOTHER

Q. You say that the psychic being is the same thing as the divine spark...

No, I never said that—it would be foolish! The psychic being is organised around the divine spark. The divine spark is one, universal, the same everywhere and in everything, one and infinite, of the same kind in all. You cannot say that it is a being—it is “the being”, if you like, but not *a* being. Naturally, if you go back to the origin, you may say that there is only one soul, for the origin of all souls is the same, as the origin of the whole universe is the same, as the origin of the entire creation is the same. But the psychic being is an individual personal being with its own experience, its own development, its own growth, its own organisation; only, this organisation is the product of the action of a central divine spark.

But the day an external being (physical, mental, vital) enters into direct and constant contact with the psychic being, one may say in the same way that the physical being of this person is organised by the central divine consciousness. The moment you put yourself in contact with it, submit yourself to it, you are organised by it, by the central divine consciousness; one may say that the body is organised by it, but it is a *body*, not a soul. The mere fact of being organised by the divine spark does not make it a soul.

...I must tell you that when it is fully formed, the psychic being has a distinct form which corresponds to our physical form. It is not altogether similar, but it has a definite form. Every psychic being is different from another—they are not all cut out, modelled to one pattern. They are different, each has an individuality, a personality....

This is what happens. Let us take a divine spark which, through attraction, through affinity and selection, gathers around it a beginning of psychic consciousness (this work is already very perceptible in animals—don't think you are exceptional beings, that you alone have a psychic being and the rest of creation hasn't. It begins in the mineral, it is a little more developed in the plant, and in the animal there is a first glimmer of the psychic presence). Then there comes a moment when this psychic being is sufficiently developed to have an independent consciousness and a personal will. And then after innumerable lives more or less individualised, it becomes conscious of itself, of its movements and of the environment it has chosen for its growth. Arriving at a certain state of perception, it decides—generally at the last minute of the life it has just finished upon earth—the conditions in which its next life will be passed. Here I must tell you a very important thing: the psychic being can progress and form itself only in the physical life and upon earth. As soon as it leaves a body, it enters into a rest which lasts for a more or less long time according to its own choice and its degree of development—a rest for assimilation, for a passive progress so to

say, a rest for passive growth which will allow this same psychic being to pass on to new experiences and make a more active progress. But after having finished one life (which usually ends only when it has done what it wanted to do), it will have chosen the environment where it will be born, the approximate place where it will be born, the conditions and the kind of life in which it will be born, and a very precise programme of the experiences through which it will have to pass to be able to make the progress it wants to make.

I am going to give you quite a concrete example. Let us take a psychic being that has decided, for some reason or other, to enter the body of a being destined to become a king, because there is a whole series of experiences it can have only under those conditions. After having passed through these experiences of a king, it finds that there is a whole domain in which it cannot make a progress due to these very conditions of life where it is. So when it has finished its term upon earth and decides to go away, it decides that in its next life it will take birth in an ordinary environment and in ordinary conditions, neither high nor low, but such that the body which it will take up will be free to do what it likes. For I do not tell you anything new when I say that the life of a king is the life of a slave; a king is obliged to submit to a whole protocol and to all kinds of ceremonies to keep his prestige (it is perhaps very pleasant, for vain people, but for a psychic being it is not pleasant, for this deprives it of the possibility of a large number of experiences). So having taken this decision, it carries in itself all the memories which a royal life can give it and it takes rest for the period it considers necessary (here, I must say that I am speaking of a psychic being exclusively occupied with itself, not one consecrated to a work, because in that case it is the work which decides the future lives and their conditions; I am speaking of a psychic being at work completing its development). Hence it decides that at a certain moment it will take a body. Having already had a number of experiences, it knows that in a certain country, a certain part of the consciousness has developed; in another, another part, and so on; so it chooses the place which offers it easy possibilities of development: the country, the conditions of living, the approximate nature of the parents, and also the condition of the body itself, its physical structure and the qualities it needs for its experiences. It takes rest, then at the required moment, wakes up and projects its consciousness upon earth centralising it in the chosen domain and the chosen conditions—or almost so; there is a small margin you know, for in the psychic consciousness one is too far away from the material physical consciousness to be able to see with a clear vision; it is an approximation. It does not make a mistake about the country or the environment and it sees quite clearly the inner vibrations of the people chosen, but there may happen to be a slight indecision. But if, just at this moment, there is a couple upon earth or rather a woman who has a psychic aspiration herself and, for some reason or other, without knowing why or how, would like to have an exceptional child, answering certain exceptional conditions; if at this moment there is this aspiration upon earth, it creates a vibration, a psychic light which the psychic being sees immediately and, without

hesitation it rushes towards it. Then, from that moment (which is the moment of conception), it watches over the formation of the child, so that this formation may be as favourable as possible to the plan it has; consequently its influence is there over the child even before it appears in the physical world.

If all goes well, if there is no accident (accidents can always happen), if all goes well at the moment the child is about to be born, the psychic force (perhaps not in its totality, but a part of the psychic consciousness) rushes into the being and from its very first cry gives it a push towards the experiences it wants the child to acquire.

(Questions and Answers, 1950-51, pp. 124-129)

PRAYER

MOTHER: I would believe
That you have been hidden
Within all the women I have known,
Drawing me with burning thread of need
Into your shimmering web
Never again to be freed.

And yet, now that I hover
So near to your source,
I find the strong cord
That has pulled me so far
Must be discarded—replaced
By a thread of such fineness
As cannot be now discerned
By my careful, groping mind
Caught by its own darkness.

Refine, I pray, by holy dread
These strong bonds of desire,
Burn away my sacred thread
With the heat of your golden fire.

GORDON

A LYRIC BY NIRODBARAN

WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS

great

To a marble house of Time
I came a lonely guest.

own

He said, "Whatever riches you (have),
and
Jewels silver and (all) the rest

Submit to me and I will bestow

On you my costliest

(My precious) boon,

B

(To you, beauty and immaculate love,
Life's crowning desire, hewn
From heaven's perfect peace and joy;
In a frail mortal frame

M

(Nectarous) moments of immortality
And God's red passion-flame."

proud

In his bright mansion (grand) and high

very

I lived (like) a king,

Love flowed around me

(With love flowing) like a stream

ed, a

And beauty blossom (like) golden spring.

none has

Happy was I as (never have) been,

glinting

Lost in a (glowing) world,

All my dreams intimately woven

In

(With) wavy locks and golden-curved.

My eyes drank
 (Eyes drinking) like (a) delicious wine
 Gaze of a white felicity
 ed as
 And glow(ing) with a starry fire
 Of (the) wide sky-ecstasy.

But *a*
 (Then slowly) winter came and (the) chill frost
 Froze the heart of the moon,—
For
 (Sweet smiles of) morning buds and laughing streams
 A
 (Fell to a) grave of snow-white swoon.

There came a deep and quiet voice
 (All things fade and beauty dies),
 his
 “Love has (a) short-lived hour (”),
 His red fire fades and beauty dies,
 (Whispered a gentle and soothing voice),
Turn to
 (If you seek) a greater power,

Pass (him) by (and) his transient earthly gifts,
 Only by a bleeding sacrifice
 cherish
 Of all you hold and crave and (yearn)
 Is won
 (Can be attained) the timeless Paradise.”

24.6.37

Q: Black despair has swallowed me up to the neck, except for the hand with which I write. As regards sadhana, no rosy tint anywhere, all clouded and shrouded. As re. poetry, the same story.

A: Whoosh! anyhow as regards your poetry, it doesn't seem to me there is any ground for any indulgence in this black luxury.

Q: See today's poem and you will know what I mean.

A: What the deuce is the matter with the poem? It has a very distinct quality of dream like the other dream poems.

SRI AUROBINDO'S VIEWS VIS-À-VIS THE MOTHER'S

SOME QUESTIONS AND THEIR ANSWERS

A Reader's Letter to K.D. Sethna

September 5, 1979

Kindly read this patiently.

Your series of articles, "The Development of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual System and The Mother's Contribution to It", is *very very very* much liked and appreciated by me. But you seem to have stirred a hornet's nest! Some people might have attacked you as saying that Sri Aurobindo had not the total knowledge about the Supermind and its "derivatives" from the very beginning. Well, I am not that orthodox. I fully agree with your views expressed so far (except the concept of an independent subtle-physical typical layer of consciousness, p. 534, *M.I.*, 9/79, though it is reasonable to expect not only a typical subtle-physical layer to exist but all the *combinations* of the Mental, Vital and Physical to have typical counterparts).

I for myself would never conceive that the Mother would tell a lie or contradict or step on the foot of Sri Aurobindo, but sceptics doubt some of her statements. I relate them below (as many as I can remember just now—more I may write later).

1) Sri Aurobindo's prime interest in Education (mentioned by the Mother in the inaugural address at the All-India University Convention in 1951).

There is no proof for this. No indication by Sri Aurobindo that Physical Education or educational activity by the Ashram was the only pursuable object (after his departure).

2) The Mother's statement about the Supramental Consciousness or Power flowing into her from Sri Aurobindo's body at the time of his death.

Is the Supramental like watery fluid that it can flow from one body to another? Then why did it not do so earlier? Why did it not flow from the Mother into any other sadhak later?

3) The Mind of Light was first mentioned by Sri Aurobindo in his last articles in the *Bulletin*.

This is said to have been realised in the Mother on 5-12-'50. But it was never mentioned by Sri Aurobindo in the *Arya-times* or many years thereafter. So your statements that the Supramental concept grew from time to time are very true.

According to your line of reasoning there might be a typical layer of the Mind of Light. (I won't mind, even if it is newly created by the Mother's efforts.)

4) If the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's consciousnesses are one....

a) Why did she not know that he had decided to leave his body? Why was

- she shocked?
b) Why did she not know the “mathematical formula” of transformation till her end. (*Vide* “Notes on the Way”.)
- 5) The Mother’s statements about visualising *Savitri*-lines night after night while Sri Aurobindo was writing them in the next room and before he recited them to her later.
- a) What was she visualising when he was correcting, emending, remoulding, expanding continuously the same parts?
b) Is she right in insisting that *Savitri* is *complete*, as it is and no more additions were intended by Sri Aurobindo?
- 6) The sadhana through the opening of the Sahasradala-Chakra changing to sadhana through the opening of the psychic being.
- Sri Aurobindo has again reverted to Chakras for transformation, in his book *The Supramental Manifestation*.
- 7) A sadhak asking the Mother whether one could go straight to Supermind without the intermediate planes.
- The Mother snubs him saying why not, and inquired where Sri Aurobindo had said that. (The last chapters of *The Life Divine* allude to it, though.)
- 8) The Mother saying that Sri Aurobindo told her of at least 300 years being required for transformation.
- No proof from Sri Aurobindo’s pen so far!
- 9) Supramental being, Superman, Superhuman being, distinguished variously by the Mother PLUS Superman consciousness (latest).
- Then what about Sri Aurobindo writing in *The Life Divine* about various types of Supramental beings having various intermixtures of *planes* between the Mind and Supermind? (Last chapters of *L.D.*)
- 10) The Mother’s announcement of the descent of Supermind in February 1956.
- Later she corrected herself that it was the descent of the “Power” aspect only. This compares with Sri Aurobindo classifying the 1926-descent (later) as not of Supermind proper but of Overmind.
- 11) The Mother’s announcement of Superman consciousness arriving.
- Where is it at present? What did it do? There is no mention in her “Notes on the

Way" of her getting any help or otherwise from that being or consciousness.

12) The Mother's stress on the psychic opening and, later, on the transformation of "cells".

Was this a correct line? She would have later to go on to transform chromosomes, RNA-DNA, atoms, protons, electrons and almost 300 subatomic particles! She admitted that Sri Aurobindo had not disclosed to her his "mathematical formula" till the last. So was this her own experimentation? The same would apply to the psychic-opening approach because he had reverted to Chakras in his last articles. In any case, the psychic-approach stress or priority has no precedent in the old Yogas, while Sri Aurobindo's approach has the full Force of the past Yogas.

Well, this will be all for the present. I did not wait for your series to be completed, so that you can take all these things into consideration when you write to "reopen and reconsider" the issue raised in the opening article. If so impelled, I might write to you further.

It hardly needs to be mentioned that I am not pitting Sri Aurobindo against the Mother or *vice versa*. I have full faith in both. But seeming (or apparent) things have to get a correct assessment in one's thought. There is no use in anyone being dogmatic and rebuking you for your extremely lucid and fine analysis.

K. D. Sethna's Reply

September 12, 1979

Thank you for your keen appreciation of my recent articles. Your various questions in the assumed role of *advocatus diaboli* are welcome. I have attempted below to satisfy their demands. I know that you would never doubt the Mother's word: so there is no misunderstanding on my part. I regard as a necessary intellectual exercise the representation you have made of the doubts in the minds of "sceptics".

Before I get down to the main task, let me say a word on the problem of what you call "the subtle-physical typal layer". When I wrote of the earth's subtle-physical layer (or "atmosphere", to use the Mother's metaphorical term) I did not dub it "typal". Whatever pertains to the earth or, for that matter ("matter" is rather an apt turn of speech here!), to the universe of which the earth is a member is not typal

but evolutionary—at least in essence even if not everywhere so in process. We usually think of our universe as the world of Matter. But actually the world of Matter belongs to the same typical series that contains the worlds of Life and Mind, etc. Our material universe is an evolute of the Inconscient, which is not, any more than the sheer Superconscient, a plane in the sense in which the typical worlds are planes. The real material universe is a typical level. In relation to ours we name it “subtle-physical”. As I have briefly mentioned, this subtle-physical level is not the same as the earth’s “atmosphere”: the latter is an evolutionary dimension, not a typical one. When the typical world of Matter presses down from its own free plane upon the Inconscient which holds all the planes “involved” in it, and when the “involved” counterpart of the typical world of Matter pushes upward both by its “evolutionary” urge and in response to the pressure from above, there emerges a composite of gross and subtle-physical stuff, just as later in evolutionary history we have vitalised and mentalised emergents of the Inconscient with their own composites of gross and subtle Life and Mind. All these evolutionary composites are to be distinguished from the typical dimensions, though they are connected with them. At least this is how I look at the phenomenon of the evolving Inconscient in relation to the non-evolving ladder of existence. The subject is rather complex, and light from other Aurobindonian interpreters may be solicited without rigid dogmatism on one’s part.

Now I come to the main burden of your song set to the tune of the “sceptics”.

1) During Sri Aurobindo’s lifetime and with his approval and inspiration, it was projected to convert Pondicherry into a University town with an independence of its own within the Indian Union. Sri Aurobindo was prepared to be the Director of the University. Of course, not education as such but sadhana is the chief activity in a life along Aurobindonian lines, but the preparation of the psychological and physical being of the young by a special system of education within the permeating spiritual atmosphere of the Ashram-consciousness can be considered a very important mode of building with the minds and bodies of aspirant youth a new illumined future. I believe we can consider Sri Aurobindo to have been keenly interested and concerned here. There is “proof” for the Mother’s reference at the 1951 Convention. The reference itself is not to an exclusive primacy of Education. The Mother speaks only of *one* of the best means. And even this, essentially, is just a particular channel for sadhana.

2) The Supramental Consciousness can flow from one bodily being to another not before it has been brought down into the embodied system—and even then it can flow in its own proper form not before one is ready for it. That is what happened between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at the time of the former’s “death”. In an indirect way, the Supramental Consciousness has flowed from both our Gurus to their disciples throughout the years I have been in the Ashram. In the Master-disciple relationship, the flow of the Master’s spiritual consciousness to the disciple is the most potent factor in the sadhana. Even when the Master is no longer embodied, the call to the Master-consciousness to flow into one remains the central

mode of the Yogic life. Surely one has to practise aspiration and rejection but the crowning process for advancement is surrender, the laying open of oneself to the Divine Presence and offering oneself to its Peace, Light, Knowledge, Power, Ananda as much as possible so that they may flow into one. The doubt over the Mother's "flow"-image is misconceived.

Besides, Matter is not the only concrete reality that can do concrete things like flowing. Supraphysical realities are the source and cause of Matter's concreteness which is actually a diminished version of theirs. Sri Aurobindo has written of psychological movements coming literally in streams or waves: *e.g.* someone's anger.

3) The Mind of Light is not a typical overhead plane. That is why it does not figure in Sri Aurobindo's old hierarchy of planes. It is a creation in the physical mind by the Supramental Light's reception there. Merely because it is "involutionary" in the Mother's sense—that is, a Light descending from above—it does not rank as typical.

4) The Mother's Consciousness and Sri Aurobindo's are essentially one but in the dynamics of the play they are both one and two. Each has a specialised role in certain fields and knowledge can be veiled between them for the purposes of the world-game and because of the circumstances within whose framework they have chosen to act their parts. No mental "why" has any ultimate rationale here.

5) What you call the Mother's "statements" about visualising *Savitri*-lines are actually reports. I believe there is some misunderstanding here. As far as I know, the basic truth simply is that, as she once told Huta,¹ whose account she subsequently read and fully confirmed, the Mother long before she came to Pondicherry had passed through a series of visions and experiences which later she found expressed in *Savitri* when Sri Aurobindo read it out "to her day after day at a certain period of the Ashram"—visions and experiences about which she had not spoken to him during the time he had been composing the epic. If you read the very first article of my series "Our Light and Delight", you will get the correct perspective in two of the opening pages.² Let me quote from them:

"Owing to my sustained aspiration to write what Sri Aurobindo has termed 'overhead poetry', that is, poetic inspiration caught from secret levels of consciousness above the mind, levels of a superhuman light and delight, Sri Aurobindo generously granted the incredible favour of letting me see portions of his epic, which was then still in the making. Without letting anyone know, he started sending me, every morning, in sealed envelopes the opening cantos. On October 25, 1936, written in his own fine and sensitive yet forceful hand, there burst upon me the beauty and amplitude of the first sixteen lines of the poem's prelude of 'symbol dawn' as it stood at that time. The precious gift of passages kept coming to me in private for months and months and a happy discussion of them went to and fro. Before enclosing them, usually with the Mother's 'Amal' inscribed on the covers, Sri Aurobindo must have

¹ "Spiritual and Occult Truths", *Mother India*, February 21, 1978, p. 172

² "Our Light and Delight", *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1.

daily read the verse out to her prior to breaking up their joint sessions of correspondence with the sadhaks through the night and the small hours of the morning. Some time in early*1938 the Amal-ward stream of *Savitri* ceased like the fabled river Saraswati of the Rigvedic symbolism.... The year and a half from nearly October's end in 1936 to almost the close of February 1938 must be the 'certain period of the Ashram' to which Huta's article refers...."

Apropos of your argument in the second column, I may remark that line-visualisation during the correcting, emending, remoulding and expanding of *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo does not necessarily follow from the "statements" mentioned in the first column, though one may feel prompted to posit it as a sequel. Especially if the substance remained the same, the positing would be all the more a *non-sequitur*. But, of course, the picture I have given of "the basic truth" of the situation renders the whole problem raised by you irrelevant.

Regarding the length of *Savitri*, I may recall that when I announced to the Mother that the poem ran to 23,813 lines she at once exclaimed: "It should have been 24,000!" The number 24 is the double of 12 which is Sri Aurobindo's number according to the Mother and which, according to Sri Aurobindo, signifies the all-fulfilling integral New Creation, towards which our evolutionary earth tends.

6) To speak of the Sahasradala, "the thousand-petalled lotus", which is at the top of the head and whose opening was emphasised by Sri Aurobindo in the early days, is not to speak of an order of reality essentially different from the psychic being; for the latter is the inmost part of another Chakra, the Hrit-padma, the heart-lotus. The Sahasradala has also a spiritual reality centred within it, the Atman or Supreme Self. More accurately, we may say that this Chakra is the seat of the Jivatman, the true individual Self which is not divided from the universal and infinite Atman—the free Jivatman, whose delegate in the evolution is the psyche.

The attention Sri Aurobindo paid to the Chakras in his last writings is related to the transformation of the gross body with the aid of the potentialities of the Chakras in the subtle-physical sheath: it does not imply any lack of attention to the psychic being, the spiritual core of the bodily transformative process.

7) What Sri Aurobindo said in *The Life Divine* and even afterwards was before the manifestation of the Supermind in the earth's subtle-physical layer. Conditions must change to a good extent after this event. Now it is conceivable that especially the psychic being can have a direct contact with the Supermind. But one may wonder how far the general consciousness can absorb the Supramental Presence without this consciousness having been prepared by contact with the planes intermediate between mind and Supermind.

8) Sri Aurobindo has not mentioned, in his writings, 300 years for the body's transformation, but he has definitely said in his letters that such transformation is a matter of a rather distant future and cannot figure among the immediate or even near-future realities of his Yoga.

9) In the Mother's scheme the true supramental race will come without the

sex-process, but only after the realisation on earth of supramentalised man who is=superman=superhuman being=intermediate race. In *The Life Divine* scheme, supramentalised man is the crown of evolution. The embodied mixtures of Supermind with other planes may be compared to the intermediate race in its various stages.

10) It is a mistake to speak of the *descent* of Supermind in February 1956. I have already used the right term given by the Mother: *manifestation*. "Descent" is in relation to the *individual embodied being*—with its upper and lower directions, its ladder of levels: physical, vital, mental (corresponding to certain lower and upper parts of the body) and "overhead". Where the universe is concerned, such a ladder has little meaning. So descent and ascent are irrelevant terms.

As to what manifested, the Mother has clearly said that the Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness came but not the Supramental Ananda. There was no declaration that the whole Supermind had manifested in the earth's subtle-physical. In regard to "Power", what she has said is that the primary aspect the embodied Supermind would need is "Power" so as to defend the new beings against attack from the millennially entrenched lower consciousness's instruments.

11) There is a good deal of Talk ("Notes on the Way", Jan. 1, 4, 8, 18; Feb. 15, 1969) on the arrival of the Superman-consciousness and on its mode of working and its quality and texture, so to speak, as felt by the Mother. But we have no detailed comments on it later on—except for one very important set of statements on its subsequent action. On 14 March 1970 we are told of a great change in the Mother's sadhana. It is crystallised in the words. "The physical is capable of receiving the higher Light, the Truth, the true Consciousness and of *manifesting* it... It took a little more than a year for this Consciousness to win this victory. And still, naturally, it is not visible except to those who have the inner vision, but it is done... This is the fourteenth month since the Consciousness came..." A footnote identifies what the Mother is referring to: "The superman consciousness which manifested on 1 January 1969."

We have also a brief reference on 5 August of the same year to its pressure for "sincerity"—and on this occasion the Mother has used "He" to designate the Superman-consciousness.

Perhaps an indirect commentary may be understood from all that she has said about the Intermediate Race which is the Superman precursor or preparer of the advent of supramental beings or the Supramental Race by a straight materialisation.

12) The Mother's stress on the psychic opening and afterwards on the transformation of the "cells" has nothing to puzzle one. In an Integral Yoga, which is an adventure into the unknown, all sorts of different stresses are put at different times. The final centring in the psychic is the logical conclusion of a process coming down increasingly to the transformation of the embodied being. The psychic is the pivot of the evolutionary progress—it is the embodied being's ever-growing core. Whether other Yogas had the stress on it or not shouldn't bother us. You say that, in contrast to this stress by the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's approach has the full force of the past

Yogas. The words "full force" are incorrect. If they were quite appropriate, his approach would be merely an extra-luminous rehash of Veda, Upanishad and Gita. It certainly is not that and Sri Aurobindo has emphasised this point time and again. What he has granted is that in them there were intuitions or even experiences whose true development would be a sign-post towards the Aurobindonian vision. Thus he has given original interpretations of the Rigveda, the Isha and Kena Upanishads and the Gita, bringing out the trend in them which would show itself because ultimately the Supermind is secretly pushing to its own earthly fulfilment through all human illuminations. Also, Sri Aurobindo has accepted the essence of the great basic realisations of old—Nirvana, the All-Brahman, the Ishwara-Shakti, the Cosmic Consciousness, the great Gods and Goddesses, the Jnana, Bhakti and Karma Yogas, the Tantra. The Mother accepts this essence just as much, though she may not employ the ancient Indian terminology as easily. In the stress on the psychic being, Sri Aurobindo is on a par with her from a certain stage of their jointly developed Integral Yoga. The stress need not conflict with the talk of Chakras. These too are factors in the Integral Yoga, even if not exactly in the old way.

You say that the psychic being was not a part of the past Yogas. But the psychic being is the true fountainhead of spiritual evolution. Even the urge towards a supracosmic realisation comes ultimately from it. In fact the psychic being hails from the Transcendent, the negative aspect of which is the Supracosmic in the sense of the Extracosmic Unmanifest. Since the past Yogas did not envisage a fulfilment here and now but strained in one way or another towards the Beyond, the psychic's full play was never known or allowed. Even so, in the Bhakti Yoga, especially of the Vaishnava kind *à la* Chaitanya, the play of the psychic is extremely intense. What was not seen still was the complete direction of its intensity. From the age of the Rigveda with its Agni, the flame of aspiration, "the Immortal in the mortal", and from the age of the Upanishads with their Purusha no bigger than the thumb of a man in the cave of the heart—the Chaitya Purusha or Antaratman, as Sri Aurobindo doubly calls it—the psychic being was known. The Upanishadic Yoga is actually a universalisation of consciousness into the infinite and eternal Self from the heart-centre where the Chaitya Purusha, the Antaratman, the thumb-like Purusha, is seated. The Gita with its call for total surrender to the Divine beyond all dharmas is fundamentally a call to the psychic being from the Purushottama, the Super-personal Transcendent who is higher than the mutable (kshara) and the immutable (akshara) Purushas—the Super-personal Being from whose transcendence the "soul" in its earthly embodiment in life after life has derived.

Of course with the transformation of the cells, all their constituents—chromosomes, molecules, atoms, electrons, quarks and what else—will automatically get divinised in the individual body. One need not be surprised at such a consummation being involved by the Supermind's work in the cells. The constituents no less than the cells have potential divinity. Don't you remember the octave of that sonnet of Sri Aurobindo's?—

The electron on which forms and worlds are built
 Leaped into being, a particle of God.
 A spark from the eternal Energy spilt,
 It is the Infinite's blind minute abode.

In that small flaming chariot Shiva rides.
 The One devised innumerably to be;
 His oneness in invisible forms He hides,
 Time's tiny temples of eternity.

I shall end now—repeating your phrase: “Well, that will be all for the present.”
 Let me express again my gratefulness for your frank praise of my many-sided
 and somewhat “unorthodox” analytical treatment.

The Reader's Comment

September 18, 1979

You have very well explained all the points and your explanation about the subtle-physical is so elaborate and convincing to my understanding that I could hardly have clarified it better. I am grateful to you for your favour.

A FIRE-FLY

A FIREFLY in the darkest night—
 What message does it bring?
 A tender smile from the Mother of Light,
 Some splendour of the spring.

Its tiny glow it multiplies,
 Weaving a garland bright.
 Mirroring on Earth the watchful eyes
 Of silent sombre night.

The penumbra of my mental sky
 Is flushed with mystic rays.
 The lucent gesture of this fly
 Announces brighter days.

It beckons my soul to a fairy place
 Of bounty, beauty and song;
 Where none is ever reft of grace—
 All are divinely strong.

SAILEN

MY ANIMALS IN BOMBAY AND THE MOTHER'S GRACE

SOME RECOLLECTIONS BY LALITA

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1979)

THERE was hardly anything in our life in Bombay, which naturally included our cats, about which I did not write to the Mother. She rarely sent a written answer, but never failed to help us inwardly. Many a time the illness was gone or the problem was solved much before my letter reached Her.

Neloo in Trouble

One day, all of a sudden Neloo developed urine-trouble. He was moaning and miserable, so we rushed him to the Animal Hospital. A kind friend had given me a special cage for transporting sick animals in our car or a taxi, so it was not too difficult. The surgeon examined Nelson and said that a stone was obstructing the passage of the urine, and he would try to remove it after giving an injection, but if he was not successful, he would have to perform a major operation. We told him to do whatever he thought best, for after years of experience we knew very well how kind and competent was the whole staff including the doctors, nurses and servants. Thanks to them, hundreds of animals have been saved. I sent an urgent letter to the Mother, and by Her help and grace the operation was successful, though Neloo took a long time to come home. Its companions at home (specially Masky) missed it, and were very happy when it returned.

Daffoo

Another tomcat which we called Daffoo, because he was somewhat of a duffer, had to be adopted by us, because his master suddenly died of a heart-attack and so the poor animal got thrown out. It was big and very handsome, but after some-time it developed a swelling over its right eye, which we could not cure. We took it to the hospital, where the doctors were much puzzled. I wrote to the Mother about Daffoo, but at that time the Mother was not well and nothing could be communicated to Her.

After a few days a servant from the hospital came running to us, saying that poor Daffoo was dying; so we rushed there as fast as we could. The doctors told us that it was cancer, and nothing could be done to save the animal. I insisted on taking Daffoo home, for it looked at me with such appealing eyes as if to say that it preferred to die at my place rather than there. All the way home I held it close to my heart and did my best to comfort it because it was feeling very neglected and lost. But within a few hours it passed away with its eyes fixed on me. I was constantly calling the

Mother to take it away peacefully to the cat-world. My only regret was that owing to pressure of work I was not able to visit it often at the hospital.

Pichoo

One day it was raining very hard and I was at the Chaupati bus-stop when I heard a very sad cry of a tiny kitten. It was half drowned in the rushing water. Suddenly my bus came, so I closed my umbrella and, lifting the kitten and placing it inside, I boarded the vehicle. All the way I fervently prayed to the Mother that it might remain inside quietly; otherwise the conductor would stop the bus and tell me to get down. To add to my fear, my neighbour's servant who was sitting a few seats ahead started asking me how my cats were faring. All eyes were turned upon me, but I tried to calm myself and called for the Mother's help which never failed me.

Finally I got off, and as soon as I entered my flat I pulled the kitten out of my umbrella and explained to Mehelli what had happened. We decided to send it to the hospital the next morning to be put to sleep quietly, as we already had too many cats. But, strange to say, this little kitten as soon as it was placed on the ground made its way to our kitchen at the back of the house, as if it knew the place. All the other cats followed it and, instead of growling or spitting, they smelt it all over and then licked it dry.

I gave it some milk, and named it Pichoo because it was just like my cat Pichun at the Ashram. We sent it to the hospital later to be spayed and then kept it. This little one became so attached to me that as soon as I returned home from my work and sat on a chair, it would jump on to my lap and tell me all sorts of things in its cat-language which was very amusing. But when I came to the Ashram on a visit it would refuse to take its food from anybody and would search for me all over the place. Once for three days and nights it took nothing and poor Mehelli had a hard time of it.

Black Rose

One day the daughter of an English lady living in the next house came to me suddenly, bringing the most beautiful black cat I had ever seen. "Please, aunty, I beg of you to keep this she-cat of mine as you have been kind enough to keep the others because we are shifting to the suburbs and cannot take it. It will run away at the first opportunity, and get beaten and even killed on the way. You know how people here hate cats, and specially black ones."

I consulted Mehelli and he agreed to keep this cat, and from the beginning it got attached to him. It had a coat of shining black fur, a fine black bushy tail and glowing amber eyes. I named it Black Rose, but it would not always remain inside the house and insisted on going out from time to time.

We first sent it to the hospital to be spayed, and when it returned it was more quiet, and gradually it adjusted itself to its new home and its fellow-creatures.

However, Black Rose did not live long with us. We had no idea how old it was when it came to us.

One evening, as it was sitting on Mehelli's lap, it suddenly jumped down moaning, and went to a door and repeatedly banged its head against it. We could not understand what was the matter, so Mehelli dressed up and fetched the local vet who came and examined her and told us that he could do nothing as it was a hospital case. So we placed Black Rose in our cage and, accompanied by the vet, took it to the hospital.

The surgeon there told us that nothing could be done to save the cat and that it would be much more kind to put it to sleep, as it was in agony. We agreed, and poor Black Rose was given an injection in the heart. Looking at both of us, it passed away quietly. The manager of the hospital, a sincere animal-lover and a great friend of ours, insisted on having an autopsy performed in order to learn what had so suddenly taken place. They found that not one of her organs was in a normal condition and a tumour had burst inside and given her that terrible pain. It was a miracle that she had lived with us for even a few months—all due, I am sure, to the Mother's inner help. The Mother was apprised of this sudden death and must have taken care of Black Rose in the other world.

Sweetie

After Pichoo and Black Rose, we had only one more cat called Sweetie, brought to us by a friend who had helped us a lot for many years and who was leaving for Switzerland and France. It had already been spayed, and was a beautiful gold-white cat. After it, I put my foot down and refused to accept any more. I had had enough. Besides, Mehelli had a serious motor-cycle accident in which he broke his leg and was in the Bombay Hospital for a long time. I had sent a telegram to the Mother about this, and kept Her informed all the time of all that was taking place. Thanks to Her Grace and constant help he eventually recovered and was able to come and see Her once on his birthday.

College

Attached to the Animal Hospital was a college for students who wished to become vets. I used to dislike going there because I had heard that vivisection was done in it to teach the students. I had seen pictures in some foreign magazines which had made me very unhappy. If only men were more conscious, undoubtedly they would not indulge in this sort of hideous cruelty towards poor, dumb and helpless animals. It is surely our state of unconsciousness and ignorance which makes us resort to such acts in the name of science, and hurt and kill animals for their furs or skins and other things. We have a long way to go before a higher consciousness can be realized. I remember very well reading about a convict who had been sentenced to death and who offered himself for any kind of medical experiment that the doctors wished to try, even the most painful one. The authorities

agreed and not one but a few experiments were tried on him which proved helpful to the medical profession (because a man, unlike an animal, can always report with accuracy all that he feels as the result of an experiment). This spontaneous act of self-sacrifice by the convict was so much appreciated that his death-sentence was changed to life-imprisonment. And as long as he lived he helped not only the doctors but also the other convicts in the best way he could.

Nowadays, I am told, those firms which produce toilet articles are also trying all kinds of experiments on animals to find out how the new preparation affects their skins, eyes, nails, etc.

Vivisection

On page 491 of Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga*, Vol. 22 of the Centenary Edition, the Master says regarding vivisection:

"I feel inclined to back out of the arena, or take refuge in the usual saving formula, 'There is much to be said on both sides'. Your view is no doubt correct from the common sense of what might be called the human point of view. Krishnaprem takes the standpoint that we must not only consider the temporary good of humanity, but certain inner laws. He thinks the harm, violence or cruelty to other beings is not compensated and cannot be justified by some physical good to a section of humanity as a whole; such methods awake, in his opinion, a sort of Karmic reaction apart from the moral harm to the men who do these things. He is also of the opinion that the cause of disease is psychic, that is to say subjective, and the direction should be towards curing the inner causes much more than patching up by physical means. These are ideas that have their truth also. I fully recognise the psychic law and methods and their preferability, but the ordinary run of humanity is not ready for that rule and, while it is so, doctors and their physical methods will be there. I have also supported justifiable violence on justifiable occasions, e.g. Kurukshetra and the war against Hitler and all he means. The question then, from this middle point of view, about the immediate question is whether this violence is justifiable and the occasion justifiable. I back out."

Sri Aurobindo on Animals

About the animals Sri Aurobindo says on page 499 of *Letters on Yoga* :

"Even the animal is more in touch with a certain harmony in the things than man. Man's only superiority is a more complex consciousness and capacity but terribly perverted and twisted by misuse of mind and the ability (not much used yet) of reaching towards higher things."

On page 500 of the same book Sri Aurobindo says :

"Yes, it is a more simple and honest consciousness—that of the animal. Of course it expects something, but even if it does not get, the affection remains. Many animals, even if ill treated, do not lose their love—which means remarkable psychic development in the vital."

“The emotional being of animals is often much more psychic than that of men who can be very insensitive. There were recently pictures of the tame tigress kept by a family and afterwards given by them to a zoo. The look of sorrow on the face of the tigress in her cage, at once gentle and tragically poignant, is so intense as to be heart-breaking.”

“Most animals do not usually attack unless they are menaced or frightened or somehow made angry—and they can feel the atmosphere of people.”

“Cats have very sure vital perception.”

“Yes—to watch the animals with the right perception of their consciousness helps to get out of the human mental limitations and see the cosmic consciousness on earth individualising itself in all forms—plant, animal, man, and growing towards what is beyond man.”

What Sri Aurobindo has written about animals feeling the atmosphere of people was proved very true once in Bombay. A dog which had rabies was being beaten terribly. I intervened and took the animal and caressed it, and it became quiet and stood beside me till the hospital van came and took it away. Everybody was shocked when they saw me actually holding this poor dog by the collar. After it had been removed they advised me to take several things as a prevention against getting the same disease myself.

“I will do nothing of the sort,” I said. “And if I get the rabies I will first go and bite all the people who have beaten this poor helpless animal.” This made them laugh. Of course the Mother’s help and protection were always with me. So I was not afraid.

Here in Pondicherry too there are some animals, which know me and come to me to be caressed, specially a cat at the place of the Consul-General of France. I lift it up and it nestles in my arms and purrs. But alas ! ever since I am obliged to walk with a stick for support, they are afraid to come close to me, lest I should beat them—the last thing I would ever do. The stick counteracts my sympathetic atmosphere.

The Landslide

Before Mehelli had the motor-cycle accident a very unfortunate incident occurred in our life.

A building contractor was erecting a very tall house behind ours on the Malabar Hill.

For this purpose he had to use some dynamite to break the huge rocks and boulders on the hill. The work had been going on for some months when suddenly terribly big boulders and other rocks came tumbling down and damaged some houses on our road. An alarm was sounded and, clanging their bells loudly, all the fire engines came to rescue everybody. The landslide was not actually behind our house, still the firemen insisted on our vacating our flat immediately. But where to go? And

what about our cats? If there had been two or three only, the hospital would have kept them, but there were many more, I phoned my sister-in-law and she said that we could come to her flat at Gowalia Tank but not our cats, and the firemen were in such a desperate hurry to get us out that they would not even allow us to take our dinner or to feed our cats. However, I left some fish and milk for them; and both of us, taking only one set of clothes, stepped out of the house.

The firemen closed every door, window and ventilator, and did not care at all what would happen to our cats.

We spent a restless night at my sister-in-law's place and the first thing I did the next morning was to send a reply-paid telegram to the Mother, informing Her about our trouble. I also wrote an air-letter to Her. Then we went to our flat to do something for our cats, but the firemen refused to let us enter. We pleaded and did our best, but all in vain. Then I prayed fervently to the Mother for her kind help and intervention. A few hours later a Parsi friend, who was an officer in the Government, came to see what had happened and when he came to our house we told him everything. He at once ordered the fireman outside our door to let us enter our flat. I took this friend right in and showed him all my cats and the condition of our house. He told the fireman firmly to let us enter our flat at least three times a day to feed the animals, and see to our other needs. After this the Mother's answer too came of only one word—"Blessings"—by telegram so we were assured of Her help and protection. Who else could have sent this friend all of a sudden to inspect the site of the landslide? But the most wonderful part was this that although our cats had been left starving and with no fresh air, they did not seem to have minded at all. One by one they got up and came to us to be petted and fed, then returned to their resting-places. This was nothing but the Mother's Grace, and I kept informing Her of all that took place.

While we were in the house I used to open some windows and doors, then once again feed them and leave some fish and milk near the kitchen. But we were told to hurry up and get out after closing everything. When the fish in the refrigerator was finished, I had to go to the market, bring some more, clean and cook it, and keep it ready in the refrigerator for the cats. Our Gujarati neighbours across the street were specially kind and understanding and would phone and let us know all that was taking place. And as for my sister-in-law and her daughter and son-in-law, they were extremely good and helpful throughout.

We passed through a terribly trying period and, had it not been for the Divine Mother's constant help and Grace, I cannot imagine what would have happened. Not only did she save us and our cats but all the inhabitants of the ten houses that were vacated.

At last we were allowed to go back to our house and you can imagine the joy of our pets when they found that we had come to stay.

All those days that we were away, not a cry was reported to us by the fireman who was on duty outside our door.

“Who would believe that there are so many cats inside?” he said. “The flat is always so quiet.”

This was proof positive of our animals having been open to the Divine Mother’s Force all the time, and of Her constant help and Grace, for which we had no words to thank Her.

TWO POEMS

POETRY

WHAT is rhythm? A metred step
 Like walking to and fro.
 And what is a poem, my friend?
 A cadence that rushes and flows
 And captures heart and soul unaware.

Who, then, is this poet, this stealer of hearts?
 The Lord Himself, laughing,
 Through sound and colored image,
 Using the Word like a rainbow arc of utter sight.
 Now, is that not reason enough to write?

POET

A Ray unseen, uncharted
 Calls the consciousness to Beauty’s Unknown.
 A wide, unfettered, fleeting Spirit,
 He has come to this baffled, groping world.

To draw him near me is my heart’s yearning call,
 But who can possess that which belongs to All
 And plays like dancing sunlight through many souls?

Yet perhaps if I can love him best,
 His inner self will not escape my ken,
 And I will embrace at last this Triumph-Song of Delight!

PATTI

TO COMMEMORATE HIS LAUGHTER

His most famous story goes like this :

One day a fisherman was rowing his boat upstream, not paying much attention to his task, when suddenly he became aware of a fragrance in the air. Looking about him he was surprised to find himself in a place he had never seen before. The river was placid and the banks were lined with blossoming peach trees. All was peaceful with no movement in the air except for the flowers which detached themselves from the branches and fell to the ground or onto the surface of the slow-moving water. Entranced he rowed on until at the end of the peach tree forest he came to the source of the river at a cave in the mountain. He beached his boat and climbed up and entered the cave. Inside he saw that there was another opening through which shone a bright light. He passed through this second opening and found himself in a beautiful land quite unfamiliar to him. It was like his own country...and yet it was quite new.

The people he saw working in the fields wore the same kind of clothes that he wore, the farmhouses were similar to the ones he knew, as were the methods of cultivating the soil. There were terraces, streams, lakes with boats upon them; paths threaded across the land; there were mulberries and bamboo. He heard dogs barking and cocks crowing.... And all the faces of the people were filled with contentment and joy. When the people caught sight of him they were astonished and asked him many questions. They listened to his tales of the life outside but they understood little by them, not even having heard of the name of the dynasty which ruled. And although they welcomed him into their homes and gave him food and wine they told him little about themselves except that they had found this place a sanctuary in a time of trouble long, long ago and, once settled, had never wanted to leave. They invited him to stay with them but he declined, saying that he had to return. At the time of their farewells they hesitatingly said : "Perhaps it would not be worthwhile to speak of us to those outside."

The fisherman left by the same way as he had entered, found the boat where he had left it, rowed back down the river, and hurried to the Governor of the Province to relate his discovery. The Governor immediately sent soldiers with him to find and chart this new land. But although they searched up and down the river they never found the groves of blossoming peach trees, or the cave...or the country beyond.

This story by Tao Yuang-Ming was written about the year 400 A.D. In most countries this would be at the very dawn of literature but in China it could be considered her golden middle age. Lao Tzu had written the Tao Teh Ching 1,000 years earlier and, perhaps 600 years before that, King Wen and his son the Duke of Chou had begun the work of changing the I Ching from a book merely of divination to a book of wisdom. Already in China there was a great cultural tradition; poetry was already a refined art. Yet nothing quite like this tale had ever been written before, and although it was written in prose and despite its apparent lack of substance it has had an immense influence on all poetry that came afterwards. Because of this

influence it is sometimes included in anthologies of poetry (the line between poetry and prose is not so clearly defined in Chinese writing as in other literatures) and is often discussed as if it were a poem.

Tao Yuang-Ming gave to the story the title "The Peach-blossom Fountain." Singular: fountain. Which raises more questions than it answers, a not unusual case with titles of Chinese poems. Often, in Chinese poetry, it seems as if titles are added merely for their beauty, for their sound, perhaps for the look on the paper. And then there is the problem of translation. To translate is to traduce; to translate Chinese poetry is to risk an act of treachery. How, as Voltaire says, does one translate music? All goes together: meaning and music and method. The texture of the silk or the antique paper, the skill of the calligrapher, the colour of the ink and of the seal, the place of the characters on the page, even the characters themselves—each one a tale, a poem, a picture. To rearrange all this into short, straight lines, few in number, on a white and numbered page is to change the experience. Even the interpretation of the ideogram itself poses almost insurmountable problems. For the ideogram functions not as something which names a thing but as a symbolic representation of the idea behind the thing without expressing its name. One word might allude to a thought so complex that it may require a page of elucidation. Robert Payne, writing in the introductory essay to the beautiful "White Peony" anthology, says: "There is not one single word in these ancient Chinese poems whose precise significance we understand." Ten translations of the same poem read like ten different poems. And the best of the translations seems to owe less to scholarship or poetic interpretation than to some sort of divine inspiration no less miraculous than the original poem. So perhaps it should not be surprising then that we come to expect little enlightenment from a title. Still, it is not often that one is left with a feeling of something unresolved, unexplained, something not immediately apparent, something hidden, as one is left with in the "Peach-blossom Fountain." And it is not only the title....

Chinese poems are usually short and simple, records of peasant life and feudal wars: what is described is what they are about. Except for the occasional elaborate allusion to the sexual game (scholars of Chinese literature tend to have sex on the brain, finding sexual significances everywhere, even in the "Peach-blossom Fountain") and to less frequent and more carefully disguised mockery of kings and their courts and their wasteful wars, everything is as it seems to be. The lines, usually suggestive, non-intellectual, are filled with everyday things, the epic contained in the commonplace. Robert Payne makes an astonishing point: "Chinese poetry does not change with the times." There is no illusion about human nature and so, perhaps, no disillusion. If the poems seldom show deep compassion they at least have understanding. And this is based on the belief that nothing changes except the surface. And what interests them is that which is changeless: civilizations can come and go but nature is always.

There lies the reassurance. Forget the turmoil, the struggle, the incomprehen-

sibilities of life, the poetry seems to say: here is the harvest, here is the wine, here are the chrysanthemums, the white cranes at the edge of the lake; here is the waning moon; there alas is the warrior and his wound, there the lover without his love. There is the peach tree in bloom. Peach blossom means peach blossom, little more. At the most, maybe, a hint of the coming of the time of fruitfulness or of the poignancy of something lovely but transient. Fountain, everything seems to say, means fountain—here no more than a poetic image of the blossoming trees sending forth their sprays and froth and foam of flowers.

I am not so sure. The boat, the river, the cave, the new land... the peach-blossom fountain. Singular.... There is something here unspoken.

An ancient saying has it that every Chinese wears a Confucian hat, a Taoist robe and Buddhist sandals. Maybe it originated in the time of Tao Yuang-Ming, for all three religions were by this time well established and nudging up against one another. Tao Yuang-Ming's poetry shows influence of all three: he quotes Confucius, his observations are often expressed with a Buddhist's concern for living things, but it is the Tao that structures most of his writing. And it is in Lao Tzu that we may find the clue to "The Peach-blossom Fountain."

In one of the early pages of the Tao Teh Ching we see this verse:

"The spirit of the fountain never dies:
it is called the mysterious feminine.
The doorway of the mysterious feminine
is called the root of heaven-and-earth."

Is this the fountain? Is this the cave? If so, what is this heaven-and-earth?

"Heaven and earth and I," says Sojo the scholar monk, "are of the same root. The ten thousand things and I are of the same substance."

"The idea of return," says the I Ching, talking about the hexagram so named, "is based on the course of nature. The movement is cyclic, and the course completes itself.... Everything comes of itself, in the appropriate time. This is the meaning of heaven-and-earth...."

The return. The return in Tao is as important, if not more so, than the way. For the movement of Tao consists of the ever-going back. What is Tao? It could be said, quite simply, that it is the path taken by natural events without the intervention of man's will.

Although by the time of Tao Yuang-Ming Taoism was a fully developed religious system with its ceremonies and established monastic order it was devoted to the attempt of escaping from the entrapment of desire through the means of contemplation, and about this time was concerning itself with the search for the Philosopher's Stone and with the mystical transmutation. Tao was a concern, said one scholar, "for a reality beyond measurement, but not beyond apprehension by a mind that is still."

The Tao Teh Ching says:

“Attain to emptiness,
cling to interior peace.
While all things are stirring

I contemplate the return.
All things are flourishing
and all will return to the root.”

Heaven and Earth and I are of the same root....

“Before Heaven and Earth were born
there was something formless yet complete.
We say it is the Mother of all things.”

The Mother of all things. The return to the Mother. To the once and future, the once and always universal love. To the primal simplicity, the primal arrangement where the seed is awakened, where the cycle of becoming continues uninterrupted; to the infinite, the boundless, the vast ocean from which all comes. To the place beyond vision, beyond sound, beyond substance; to function within functions, form without form. To the place where all things remain, ever changing, changeless, where strength is renewed and flowering follows; where the transformation is ever possible.

“The flowing out of God,” says Ruysbroeck, “always demands a flowing back.” But that, perhaps, leads us elsewhere....

The best of Chinese poetry all the time suggests this return to the root, acknowledging the in-and-out-going of the universe, the cycle of the seasons, the movement of the instruments of heaven, becoming aware of the changing reality in the flower bending beneath the bee, the dew drying on the grass, earth sifting through gnarled fingers, the silent patterns of migrating birds... or the settling of a blossom on moving water. All is a source of wonder, ever renewed.

“The return,” the I Ching says, “always calls for a decision and is an act of self-mastery.” The moment of decision is not well shown in this story, but then the hero surely fails, returning from his return, as it were, with nothing. Surely with nothing. Leaving a Taoist world and returning to a Confucian world without even his Taoist robe. Did Tao Yuang-Ming then also fail? I think not. Did he decide? I think he did.

River, boat, blossoms, fountain, cave, the opening-to-the-light, the new country: it is futile to attempt psycho-analytical comments as if these were dream symbols of western man. Yet they move one. Whatever it is these images invoke, they invoke it strongly. The trouble is that Tao Yuang-Ming relates it all as if he were on a

Sunday walk. It seems an everyday occurrence in an everyday scene. There is no emotion (he once wrote of his grandfather whom he admired: "You could hardly detect from his expression whether he was pleased or angry") and we are almost misled. We almost murmur "nice" and turn the page. But something prevents us. We are left looking off into space, not sure why, with a thumb stuck in the book to keep our place.

This moment.... This moment when one steps out into a bright world one has never seen before. This moment.... How this moment? When this moment? We are led to look in his poetry for more about this moment. But we look in vain.

"So wonderful is the mountain air at sunset,
and the birds flying homewards in flocks.
In all these things are secret truths:
though I try to explain it, words are of no avail."

That is as close as he comes.

Perhaps for him it was always the new country, and all he needed to do was to put down the truth in the vision, uncoloured by emotion. Here, he seemed to say, is all it is. "All there is, is truth," says Shankara. "All that's left is false." Everything true. Everything timeless. Everything bright. Always the new country.

"To and fro along the stream of eternity.
Scarcely has the year begun
when we are halfway among the constellations."

It is not possible to over-emphasize the impact of his vision on Chinese poets. Tu Fu, perhaps the greatest of them all, wanting to express his worldly regrets, would write:

"Dreaming of a distant peach-blossom land,
always I deride the senselessness of my wayward life."

Tao Yuang-Ming would have been astonished to know that he was to be quoted 400 years after his death by a poet greater than he, and that later still he would be listed among the immortals.

He was born poor. "The room is full of children," he wrote, "the cask of wine is nearly always empty." He could easily have been born wealthy had his family followed tradition, for members for many generations had held government posts but none, apparently, could accept corruption. Poverty finally forced him also to apply for a government position and he was appointed magistrate to a small district. Although the appointment was to a place only 30 miles away he was homesick for his farm. In a country where the civil servant is often also a poet it is not easy to understand his scorn. "To serve there was against my instinct and could not be put

right by affectations," he wrote. "Hunger and cold can cause physical suffering but to do things against my conscience tortures my spirit. There is a precious lesson that I have derived from hard experience: one who indulges in worldly affairs merely satisfies his mouth and his stomach."

He lasted in the job just 83 days. "I will not crook the hinges of my back," he said, laughing at himself, "for five pecks of rice a day."

More seriously, he wrote:

"There, for a while, I was imprisoned in a cage.
But now once again I return to myself."

At 33 years of age he went back to his poor farm to crook the hinges of his back, to play his lute, to cultivate his chrysanthemums (he liked best the pale yellow, the colour of light), to play jokes with his children, to drink his wine. There, passionately, yet properly, he lived the life of a recluse.

"My heart remains in the house
near the lakes and the hills.
Looking at clouds I am ashamed
by the nigh-flying birds.
Seeing fish swimming
I stand abashed near the water."

And he never left again. Although never quite at home with civilization it could not be said that he withdrew from the world: he merely withdrew into quietness. Spiritual withdrawal he would not have understood, for his was not the withdrawal of a saintly man. Yet all his poems are meditations.

He describes himself well when he writes: "He was quiet, even taciturn, had no desire for riches or fame. He amused himself with books, but never to such an extent that he would trouble himself with exact interpretations....The four walls of his house were bare and tattered, and did not shelter him from wind or sun. Wearing a short flax-cloth jacket, all torn, and carrying an empty rice bowl, he was perfectly content....He amused himself by writing occasional poems, wherein his aspirations are revealed, having no interest in worldly success or failure. And so his life passed to its end."

He was only about 50 when he died; somehow one imagines a more venerable man. He lived his last days, in the lovely words of Robert Payne, "in a cloudy serenity," loved, respected, looking always to the next dawn.

"No, I shall not waste my sighs on the past.
I shall lift my spirit towards the far future."

He loved children, birds, music, flowers, wine, the seasons—particularly Autumn. And quietness. And, although it is not seen so much in his poetry, laughter.

One day, it is said, he and a famous Buddhist scholar were walking in the countryside with a Taoist monk. They had just passed over a bridge on the Tiger River when they heard the roar of a tiger. Looking at each other they all suddenly laughed together, and walked on. On that very spot, by the side of the river, a temple was erected to commemorate their laughter.

NAVODITTE

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD 1979

THIS is a composition especially to be appreciated because it is by one who can be considered well within the meaning of the term “child”, being no more than 14 years old.

A GROWING BABY

The sweet and innocent face of a child
 His tender ways so mild
 His beautiful eyes
 That never told lies.
 His tiny feet
 Had a soft beat

And with his toys beside
 He would go for a pram ride,
 Smiling at every passer-by
 And waving at every bird in the sky.
 Pointing at every pet
 He wouldn't even fret.

Like a flower, he every day blooms,
 Entering a happy life, throwing aside glooms.
 The way he drinks milk
 And sleeps on his bed of silk
 He makes our life so merry and gay
 With the little words he tries to say.

JAHNVI P. SETHNA

LIFE—YOGA—POETRY

FROM THE LETTERS OF A DISCIPLE

I

WE must not blaspheme against life. Life is a glorious gift. As Matthew Arnold makes Empedocles say in a poem: "Is it so small a thing to have seen the sun?" And what about the vast wealth that is scattered through infinite space—the inexhaustible starry silver? Beauty is abroad in the world, and through beauty there is the call to multi-mooded Bliss. Of course earth brings many a hurt too—but every hurt is intended to break open our dense being: every wound should be like an eye suddenly awaking in the body's blindness: whatever bleeds does so to bring the deep heart's colour to the surface. And even if we do not have the wisdom to utilise our miseries for our own growth, there is enough splendour and exquisiteness in the twenty-four hours of delicate dawn and passionate noon and dreamy twilight and mysterious darkness to drive home to us the sweet sacredness of life, the endless opportunity given us of being grateful to God for putting us in the midst of so wide and wonderful a play and pageant.

Surely, tears either of self-pity or of compassion for others' woes are not all that we are capable of. Self-pity, of course, we must try to outgrow; but even compassion is a poor substitute for the joy we are meant to radiate to our fellow-creatures. But how can we radiate joy unless we unseal within ourselves a fountain of happy gratitude to God, a spring of laughing courage? Never must we allow our hearts to run dry and grow barren and rocky. Never must we get filled with bitterness, wasting not only the glory that is life in ourselves but also the richness that flows from those around us.

2

Your mention of "Lewes" and of your studio-flat there brings me a strange nostalgia. I haven't been to the place, but all places in England are, like the Kingdom of Heaven, within me! I have only to let my thought dwell on them and I feel them as part of my soul's history on earth. It is the same with Greece. Ancient Athens is never dead for me. More than Rome of the Caesars, more than Renaissance Italy—with both of which I feel rather familiar—I am at home in the circle of Socrates and the assembly of Pericles. It is a little disturbing at times to find oneself with so many native lands. There is Persia too, from which my forefathers came to India with the sacred fire saved from extinguishment by the loud fanatic cry of "Allah!" The Oxus, "rejoicing through the hushed Chorasmian waste", flows still through my dreams and the white pillars of Persepolis have not fallen yet for me, nor have the great winged bulls taken flight. Every time I enter a Fire Temple the ages are abolished and the presence of Zoroaster mingles with the aroma of sandalwood rising from the

flames. But, of course, the strongest “country of my mind” is the India of the Vedas and Upanishads, the Gita and Sri Aurobindo. There are many Indias and, though all of them meet and fuse somewhere, it is spiritual India that particularly holds me its native and in fact shuts me off to a certain extent from the other Indias, for when a country’s very core is spiritual the lack or diminution of the inner light in the outer ordinary domains renders them all the more foreign by contrast to that core than the same domains in any other country. But one thing kins me to the masses in India in spite of so many things that make me a stranger to them: let them hear a flute playing and immediately the touch of a far-away twilight comes into their eyes and their heart-beats echo, however vaguely, however ignorantly, the footfalls of Krishna.

How different is the flute’s effect in India from what it is anywhere else! Plato speaks of flute-music as being martial. I suppose that in the modern west it sounds a note of rich gaiety. With us here it is the very voice of the secret soul—the lure of a divine distance across a mist of tears that are sweeter than any joy.

3

To Sri Aurobindo, sweetness and light are outstanding attributes of the psychic being, the true soul in us. But they are not the only outstanding attributes: according to him, there is also strength.

Yes, these qualities in their sheer forms belong to the inmost depth of us. But surely in some shape or other they can be active in our ordinary consciousness as well. And I might say that they are life’s essentials. Without them we merely exist instead of living. However, all the three must go together all the time if living is to be at its finest—that is, if it is to reflect, no matter how remotely, something of their psychic extremes.

Sweetness without strength becomes indulgent and ineffective sentimentality. Strength without sweetness grows rigid and harsh. When light is not there, both sweetness and strength may lead to folly and lack the right direction, the right application. Light unaccompanied by strength will hover in mid-air and never make dreams come true. Unaccompanied by sweetness, its wisdom will miss the human touch that is so necessary in a world of complex relationship and temperamental difference.

4

Evidently the best time to meditate is when you are most meditative. Fixed times are good in general but they must not become too hard-and-fast.

I myself do not meditate at any fixed hour. Sometimes I wonder whether I do any meditation. I know very little beyond the rule: “Remember and offer.” At various hours of the day—I wish it could be at all hours—I feel a warmth in the heart, a glow in the mind and there is a movement of self-giving to the human-divine presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in front of my imaginative eye, figured as

I have known them in personal contact—or to the encompassing tranquillity of their “atmosphere”, within which I am held protected—or to the immense mystery of them above my head. With this gesture goes also whatever work I may have in hand—a laying of that work at their holy feet, as it were, or the submission of it into their secret splendour. This is all that I know of meditation, if meditation such a wide-awake state of consciousness can be called. But, of course, meditation differs with different people and those who have the capacity to go inward concentratedly and be oblivious of their physical surroundings should do so by all means. Only, they must not become commonplace when they are not thus entranced.

5

Why should the Mother’s answer have shot up your temperature? She told you why she let you remain in the Ashram so long in spite of your rigidity: there is never an utterly hopeless case and many people take long to make a fundamental change which makes them feel the Mother to be the most important, the all-in-all factor in the Ashram and the chance given by her the greatest grace that could ever come their way.

Her patience, her sense of a fair trial and her expectation of the unexpected are what leads her to keep her children with her for years and years. Why should this serve as a knock on your head except to make you realise that she does nothing except for the good of us? Were you visited with a prick of conscience for forgetting how grateful you should be for her letting you “waste” your three years?

As for your “full chance”, I see no implication that you have exhausted your life’s opportunity. It was you who wanted to go: the Mother did not dismiss you. Not even once did she speak of sending you away—nor has she told you that it would be better for you to stay hundreds of miles away from Pondicherry. She was prepared to let you be here as long as you wanted. Since you felt very strongly that you were better off out of the Ashram and since she knew how hard you found it to change yourself, she did not disapprove of your departure. That does not amount to her writing FINIS to your spiritual career.

After all, others have gone from the Ashram—one man stayed away for 17 years at a stretch and even remarried! Nothing can put a close to one’s spiritual life if one still keeps some aspiration burning somewhere in oneself. As the Mother has clearly said in the *Bulletin*, she can and will pick one up a thousand times if one sincerely wants her to do so. Where then is any indication that you have reached the dead-end?

6

There are two ways of working abroad for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In one you carry them, so to speak, to the people you deal with so far away from the Ashram. You make these people aware of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother : they get the sense

that wherever they may be they have them present. This way of working has a great truth. But it is not enough. The other way adds something to it. Then you make people eager to drink at the very source. What you do is not only to carry the Mother and Sri Aurobindo abroad but also to send the abroad to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. And this is exactly what you have done. X and Y and Z and one or two more who have visited the Ashram are the most substantial evidence of it. But one can't make people want to drink at the source without being in some definite fashion at the source oneself all the time—a conscious subsistence within the sweetness and light and strength that in their super-shapes characterise our inmost self, the psychic being, the true soul.

7

I read your *Salutation to Arthur Symons* with pleasure because it is written with some artistry, but it seems to me to err on the side of youthful over-enthusiasm. Symons is a fine prose-writer and his sensitive appreciations of the Symbolists are certainly valuable, but you have chosen to laud him as a poet. He has, as far as I remember his work, some striking moments of part morbid, part sensual, part dreamy verse, at once acute and exquisite—the product of a mixture of seventeenth-century Metaphysical and late nineteenth-century Aesthetic. But these moments are not very frequent, and Symons, on the whole, has neither profound lyricism nor elevated power.

Taking the quotations you have made, I may say that the lines

And might not our proud hopeless sorrow pass
If we became as humble as the grass

are attractive, the first a middle level of Yeats, the second a middle level of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, the combination not negligible but amounting at the most to a very fine kind of fancy. The phrase

What is man but a God afraid?

is rather felicitous and has certainly some depth in it, but sheer poignant greatness making an absolute poetry is found only in

His life a calm preparedness for death.

None of the other excerpts that you have given—that is, the major part of your citation—is more than highly talented verse, the work of a very skilful artist but lacking in the true breath of the Muse. And I can't help feeling a sort of painted anaemia in Symons's poems.

Perhaps I am being too severe, but your estimate, on the other hand, is too high and, though written with grace as well as sincerity, hasn't enough of the keen insight and balanced judgment which I would esteem in a piece of criticism for *Mother India* where Aurobindonian values of both poetry and criticism form broadly the basis of all literary vision and practice.

It is a pity that something so well-turned has yet to be turned back to you.

8

The dramatic effect of Saheed Suhrawardy's *An Old Man's Songs* is considerable and in one or two places remarkable, but that is not the same thing as saying that the poetic effect is throughout satisfying. I say this with regret because the poetry too in some places is truly remarkable and there is scarcely a poem in which there aren't lines of suggestive delicacy or power. No greater praise in this genre of writing is possible than that one is reminded in general of the new style W.B. Yeats fashioned for himself in mid-career after wearying of Celtic wizardries and incantations; but the besetting danger of the new Yeats is either a too intellectual or on the rebound an over-colloquial cast of phrase.

Again and again in *An Old Man's Songs* the genuine poetic utterance in which a simple directness rises to inspiration or a complex beauty of passion starts glowing is interrupted by prosaic turns and weak rhythms. The sentiment is not often at fault and I dare say it would make appealing if not exquisite literature if a prose form and rhythm were adopted, but in the form chosen it tends to be flat when it is not supported by that subtle intensity of word and metrical movement which is the life and soul of poetry.

Perhaps it will be argued that in speaking of trivial things a trivial tone has to be employed and poeticising would mean pompousness and falsetto. But what is really wanted is the poetic vision of trivialities: take the line,

Odol and powder before going out to friends,

with its successful mockery but not successful poetic mockery such as we find in

Lips painted to the crimson of a wound.

With these two instances it is not hard to see what I mean by poetic vision—a quality which can find expression in various styles and not necessarily always in a highly coloured one, but in some form or other it must be present if a poem is to be through and through a success. Certain poems in the series are a success of this kind, though perhaps not the most beautiful or forcible sort of success, for the finest lines occur in pieces which are rather unequal. All the same, it has been a pleasure to come across those memorable lines. It is not every day that one chances upon gems like

Beware, my love, beware,
 Lest in your riotous hair
 There might not be a dream of mine that sighs,

or,

At rest
 In the crystal halo of your years,

or,

I stretch torn hands to reach your piteous hands;
 I seek through tattered space your ample eyes.

You may be interested to know that I submitted this write-up to Sri Aurobindo, asking him: "How do you like the criticism?" He replied: "The criticism seems to be all right." (6 July 1937)

AMAL KIRAN

BECAUSE

BECAUSE, beloved, You are,
 A granite faith endures
 Blind ignorance's cruel night,
 An endless dark's corrosive blight,
 For an unseen splendour lures—
 Your Grace is the dim-discerned Delight,
 The constant, guiding hand is Yours.

Because, beloved, You will,
 A mighty radiance pours
 Through the vaulted gloom of pain and dread
 To battle ills from darkness bred,
 And to joyous hope restores
 The shackled souls so long misled.
 You lead them out all prison doors.

Because, beloved, You smile,
 On golden glance You bear
 Truth-freedom to a chosen few
 Who strive to lose themselves in You,
 And Your luminous vision share,
 For in You rest the cosmic View,
 The ageless Wisdom, the Ecstasy rare.

A LIFE-STORY THAT IS A PHILOSOPHY*

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY R. G. COLLINGWOOD

To many of us the lives of great men are more interesting than their works. Very few can read with relish the writings of professional philosophers, if their manner is heavy and their matter abstruse, though their biographies would be read with considerable interest and in some cases even with amusement. To a large extent it is the fault of the philosophers, in that their style or lack of style has created a prejudice against their subject and given rise to the "Ivory Tower" conception of the philosopher, as one whose feet are not on this earth, though his head may or may not be amid a crowd of stars.

The philosopher, freed from the vanities of life, is supposed to discourse in a strange tongue about supersensible entities which have as much bearing on our practical life as the gibberings of an unbalanced mind. Thus to the mass of men, who regard themselves as guardians of sound common sense, the philosopher commits the two grave errors of renouncing Practice in the interests of pure Theory and of ignoring all considerations of literary style in giving expression to his barren ways of thinking.

And yet there have been philosophers, like Plato, Berkeley and Hume, to mention only a few, whose writings on even difficult themes could be ranked as pure literature, and if the layman holds that even the writings of these philosophers are not such as he who runs may read, it is sufficient to say that the rich significance of literature as of all things is not for those who can do no better than run through their readings. Professor Collingwood is one of those who believe and insist that the philosopher must observe literary manners when he writes, for indeed to him philosophy *is* literature. We are familiar with Berkeley's injunction to philosophers to "think with the learned and speak with the vulgar." But this is hardly enough. The philosopher may think as learnedly as he pleases, provided he goes to school with the man of letters and speaks with him. Professor Collingwood's *Autobiography*, as indeed all his books, amply illustrates his own view that good philosophy is also good literature, for he writes in a style which would call for praise from the best man of letters. What is more refreshing is that Professor Collingwood is no mere "Ivory Tower" philosopher, for he would say with Aristotle that philosophy is not only a guide to the best mode of life, it is the best mode of life, and that in separation from life it stagnates and dies ingloriously as in the case of the Realism of the "minute" philosophers, which he describes as "the undischarged bankrupt of modern philosophy."

The autobiography is also a complete piece of philosophical thinking, for as the writer remarks in the preface, "the autobiography of a man whose business is thinking should be the story of his thought." It is the business of everyone who is engaged on any sort of problem to think. Scientists and philosophers do their business more methodically than ordinary men, but perhaps it is the privilege of the philosopher

* This article was written in 1949 but has a relevance that is not confined to a period.—Editor.

alone to think about the nature of thought itself. A large part of the book is devoted to examining the way in which the mind works in dealing with scientific, philosophical and historical problems. A clear understanding of the nature of knowledge and what it implies is not only important for the scientist concerned with special problems, but is indispensable for a proper handling of human situations created by political and economic maladjustments, which, when they get out of control, lead to war, with all its disastrous consequences.

After giving us the barest glimpse of his truly amazing mental powers while yet a child, the writer tells us that at the age of nine he read Descartes' *Principia* which let him into the secret of the natural sciences; that they do not contain bits of truth piled into a heap, but form an organic whole capable of endless modification and that their historical development is not a passage from the ages of error to truth, but consists in the successive clarifications of our insight into truth. He discovered later, through his own historical research, the importance of the method proposed by Bacon in acquiring knowledge, which consisted in propounding our own questions to nature and compelling nature to answer them. This questioning activity is not a preliminary to knowledge, but an essential part of it, whose other part consists in supplying an answer to the proposed question.

In a rather outspoken criticism of the "minute" philosophers he points out that their theory of knowledge as a simple intuition of independent facts described something other than knowing, for it was incompatible with what he had learnt about knowledge in connection with his historical research. Professor Collingwood develops the view that all knowledge is an answer to a definite question which we ourselves propound, into a systematic logic of Question and Answer, which he thinks differs not only from the Realism of the "minute" philosophers, but also from the Idealistic logic of those with whom otherwise he is in great sympathy. But the distinction he draws between his position and that of the Oxford Idealists seems to be a distinction without much difference. No doubt Professor Collingwood feels himself to be a very isolated thinker in a university which in recent years has been quick in giving up its old traditions and following the lead of Cambridge in philosophy; and this feeling of isolation is perhaps what leads him to remark, "So far as my philosophical ideas were concerned I was now cut off not only from the 'realist' school, but from every school of thought in England, I might almost say in the world."

But the logic of Question and Answer according to which the truth or falsity or even the significance of a statement is never determined in itself, but is relative to a complex in which the question to which the statement is an answer is of primary importance, is not different from the Idealistic logic which lays stress on the relevant context or universe of discourse for determining the value of ideas. The truth underlying these two logics is that no significant statement stands by itself or is hurled into a discussion like a bolt from the blue, but arises in a definite context which determines its nature. It is merely the surface of a solid body of truths and as such cannot exist in separation. Thus, to take an extreme case, if a stranger or even a friend stops you

in the street to remark, *à propos* of nothing, that Henry the Eighth had six wives, or that 2 and 2 make 4, you would rightly become suspicious of his sanity, though the remarks themselves would be quite unexceptionable.

It seems to me that insanity consists not in an incapacity to make true statements, but rather in an unaccountable inclination to make them at inappropriate moments. It is unfortunate that many whose business it is to think ignore entirely this important truth that in every statement we make we present merely the surface of our mind and hence our meaning is never confined within the four corners of our expressed statement. No man ever means merely what he says or, to put it differently, no man ever succeeds in saying wholly what he means. If this truth were more universally recognised, many futile controversies and misunderstandings would be avoided and communication between minds would become easier. We would not be hasty in convicting our opponents of error or even of inconsistencies, if we trained ourselves never to allow the face-value of a statement to prejudice us against it, but always to probe into its underlying significance. Hence the injunction: Reconstruct the problem "whose solution you are considering" or "never think you understand any philosophical statement until you have decided with the utmost possible accuracy what the question is to which it is meant for an answer."

This, as the writer truly points out, is a historical way of dealing with problems. The "minute" philosophers tended to discourage the study of the history of philosophy, for they believed that the problems of philosophy were eternally the same, only their solutions differed with different philosophers; and thus, failing to reconstruct the problems, they were too prone to dismiss the solutions as mere errors.

This insistence on historical thinking in philosophy brings about a *rapprochement* between History and Philosophy and what is needed now is a true philosophy of history. Professor Collingwood is equally eminent as a historian and those interested in the teaching of history will be delighted to read his scathing condemnation of what he calls "scissors and paste" history, according to which history is a closed subject in which we get from set authorities a narration of events which are past and buried. This was more or less the conception of history until the late-nineteenth century when something like a Baconian revolution occurred, which leads one to expect that History will occupy in our age the same place of importance that natural science occupied during the last three centuries. This revolution consisted in treating history as an open subject, in which the historian, disregarding the set authorities, propounds his own questions and tries to elicit answers from all the evidence he can lay his hands on.

History then is not the study of a dead past, but a past which survives in the present which is simply a transformation of the past, so that in a sense all history is history of our present times. Further, it is not merely a study of events that happened, but of the thoughts and purposes of men that were responsible for them; and to study the thoughts of men of the past, it is necessary that the historian should think himself into their minds. This training gives him a unique insight into human situations

in the present and enables him effectively to deal with them. It is only thus that history may hope to become a school of moral and political wisdom.

The solution which Professor Collingwood offers for the grave crisis which threatens European civilisation is a fresh study of history and the development of the historical insight. Many writers have in recent times emphasised the need for a psychological understanding of the causes of war. But we should now recognise that it is history and not the hybrid science of psychology which is the true and most comprehensive science of human nature. But what appears to me to be the best part of the argument is where Professor Collingwood maintains with great insight that history does not and need not provide us with a body of ready-made rules for dealing with fresh situations. Rules, even if they be rules of right conduct such as the moralists preach, keep action at a low potential, for they enable us merely to react to certain types of situations instead of meeting them in their individuality. The highest moral actions, like the creations of art, are always improvised, while actions, according to rules, characterise what Socrates called the morality of the market place.

This *rapprochement* between Philosophy and History brings about a further *rapprochement* between Theory and Practice, and the rejection of the false division of humanity into thinkers and men of action. Philosophy gives understanding, but it is understanding that completes itself only in action. It is the historical insight which enables us to improvise actions to meet the concrete situations of our practical life. Professor Collingwood thus enlarges Plato's dream of the philosopher-king. To him the ills of the world will continue to be our heritage until philosopher-historians are kings.

J. N. CHUBB

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THREE STORIES FOR CHILDREN

I

DING-DING-DING

A GREEDY merchant went on accumulating wealth by evil means. When he reached old age he had wealth enough to support his successive five or six generations. So he planned to lead a peaceful life. He bought a house in a village so that he might be away from the noise of the town. The house was surrounded with big trees and beautiful shrubs full of flowers. In the backyard of his house he had a fine garden where many-coloured birds sang lovely songs. So the merchant was immensely pleased with the scenery around. There was nothing to offend his sight except two shops that stood on either side of the house. Two fat blacksmiths worked there with hammers and anvils and made a hell of a noise. They were called Jack and Mack.

The merchant before buying the house saw those two shops and thought of the disturbance. But he said to himself, "Such tumble-down sheds can be bought at the cheapest rate possible and these shops shall not stay here long."

One day he moved from the town to his newly bought house in the village with his wife and daughter. Then he furnished it in an elegant way.

"Away from the town, surrounded with joys, I shall hereafter be free from noise and I shall hereafter have sound sleep," so saying the merchant went to bed. He slept but was roused by the anvils' ring. The ding-ding-ding sound never stopped. If the ding-ding-ding stopped from one side, it came from the other side and there was a continuous ding-ding-ding for all the twenty-four hours of the day.

Irritated by the maddening noise of the anvils, one day the merchant decided to bid good-bye to the blacksmiths. He called Jack and Mack to his house. He asked them, "Tell me, gentlemen, what I should do to make you move from your places—give money or anything else."

The blacksmiths said, "Sir, if you give us money, we are ready to move any moment you say."

Pleased with the answer of the blacksmiths, the merchant said, "Very good. I will give you ten pounds each to move from your places."

The blacksmiths shook their heads and said, "No, no. That is not enough."

"You should not be tough, gentlemen. Ten pounds are more than enough to remove yourselves," said the merchant.

Jack and Mack whispered awhile to each other and then came to an agreement. "All right, Sir. We are ready to move this very day, if you agree to pay us twenty pounds each."

The merchant finding no other alternative to get rid of them gave them immediately twenty pounds each. He was well-pleased with the bargain he had made. He bade farewell to Jack and Mack and said, "My friends! It is really kind of you to move from your places. Wherever you go, I wish you success. Let not your bellows

stop blowing and let your anvils ring well while you strike the bar. My blessings to you.... But one thing let me know. Do you go very far?"

"Very far! What do you mean, Sir? Moving away to a very far place is not our plan. But I move to Jack's shop and Jack moves to mine," replied Mack, the blacksmith.

2

THE PRECIOUS RING

A rich old man divided his property equally and gave it to his three intelligent sons. But he kept one ring, a precious diamond ring, for himself. When he was asked why, he replied, "After all I have only one diamond ring. Dividing it is an impossibility. So I should find out, first of all, who amidst my three sons is a true Christian, and to him goes the diamond ring."

The father sent his three sons away to travel till a certain day. It was decided that during that period whoever did the noblest deed should have the precious diamond ring.

The three sons went in three different directions. Time flew very swiftly. The appointed day came. The three brothers returned to their father's house. One by one they started narrating their experiences during that short period.

The eldest began thus: "Listen, my father! One day a stranger came to me. He gave all his wealth and requested me to keep it safely till he came back to get it. I said, 'Yes.' Taking my word as a written bond, he walked away. After a few days he came to claim the amount. I might have kept the amount, but as I am a true Christian, I gave him back the sum he had lent, with interest added. So now tell me, my father, am I not worthy of the diamond ring?"

"But, my son," replied the old father, "you have only done what all in this world with conscience are expected to do."

"During my voyage," started the next son, "a storm blew suddenly, accompanied by rain and thunder. At that time an innocent child standing alone on the deck lost his balance and fell into the deep sea. Though everyone pitied the child no one was bold enough to jump into the sea and save him. But I, a true Christian, plunged beneath the threatening waves and saved the life of the innocent one. Now tell me, my father, am I not a true Christian?"

The father replied, "Well done, my son. Indeed you risked your life, and it is a noble deed. But any man who is not a coward at heart would have done the same thing. He who has done what is of far higher worth should claim the ring."

The youngest came out with his experience, "Father! While tending sheep the lovely breeze lulled my enemy to sleep. He rolled in his sleep and came very close to a precipice. Another roll would have caused his death. I did not leave him there. But I woke him up and saved him from the impending danger, though he was my fiercest enemy."

The father with pride and joy cried, "My son, you have done the noblest deed. To dismiss enmity and revenge from one's mind needs the noblest heart. You are the true Christian and the diamond ring, without doubt, is yours!"

3

WHO IS THE FITTEST?

A muslim king of India grew old, feeble and grey. He became weary of his work and found that he had become very slow in doing things. So he seriously began thinking of his retirement. But the moment he thought of stepping down from the throne, the question of the efficient successor arose.

The old king had three sons. All of them were strongly built. Wit and wisdom they had in plenty and they were second to none in looks. So "How to select the successor?" became a tormenting question to the king. He consulted his chief minister. The wise man schemed out a plan to find out "Who is the fittest?"

The old king pleased with the plan started carrying it out. He sent a slave to call his sons into his presence. All of them came and stood before him with bowed heads and folded arms to show their respect towards their father. The king began his lecture: "My sons! The time is ripe for my retirement. My memory fails me due to old age and I doubt if I should still rule. So I should like to know which of you I may entrust with my throne, sceptre and kingdom. That end being in view, I request you to answer me: "Which of my three sons loves his father best?"

The eldest spoke, "My Lord! You can even fathom the great sea but not my love and affection towards you. It is deeper and broader than the fathomless waters."

"My father and my king", started the second, "I love you so much that words can never express it. And there is nothing in the universe to compare with my love. Allah, the Almighty, has not yet created anything to mark the scope and measure of my love."

The youngest simply said, "My father, I love you well. I cannot tell you anything more than this."

The old king, pleased with the three, sent them away with a tender word. Then he called his council of ministers and told them, "My wise ministers! I wish to go on a pilgrimage to the far-famed Mecca alone, barefooted and bareheaded. None but Allah, our Lord, knows whether I shall return or not. But it is my command that my three sons together rule the land."

After a month of the king's departure news reached the land that the wise and just king had died. Almost every citizen burst into tears and mourned his death deeply.

Months rolled by. The calendar had marked another year. An old beggar, balancing his trembling body because of age and hunger with a long stick, moved towards the town and sat on the platform outside the open gate. As he had become

tired with the long travel, he stretched himself on the shady platform to sleep awhile. But he was startled by a man running here and there, stamping his feet and shouting at the top of his voice, "I loved him best. I loved him best." The beggar looked at him closely. The man was unclean, shaggy-looking and wore torn garments. Now and then he sighed, wept and beat his breast and moaned, "I loved him best."

The old beggar, taken by pity, called the mad man near him and inquired the cause of his grief. The mad man replied, "Old man! I mourn the king that's dead. You will never see such a wise and gentle king again. He was my father. I am his eldest son." So saying, the man beat his breast once more, tore his garments further and cried, "I loved him best."

The beggar sighed and said, "Allah should prize such true love. And what about your brothers? Do they also mourn like you?"

"Not at all, Sir. My first brother mourned for a few days and forgot about it completely. He spends his days in hunting with horse and hounds to the great shame and sorrow of the court. The youngest shed no tear over our father's death. But he works out our father's plans, bears the pains and cares of the state. He is loved and honoured in the land."

The beggar stood up and straight away went to the court. There he threw off his beggar's clothes to reveal his royal robe and proudly told the courtiers and commons, "My people, I am your old king standing before you in flesh and blood. By the intelligence of our chief minister, I was able to find out the fittest successor to rule our kingdom. My eldest son is madly in love with me, and the second with sports and games. So they are unfit to wield the sceptre. My youngest son, you know very well, did his duty as a king ought and so my power, crown, sceptre and my throne all go to him." So saying he embraced his youngest son, the present king, kissed him and said, "Whoever loves his father's work best loves him best."

P. RAJA

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INDIAN LIFE IN ENGLISH WRITINGS

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1979)

Part II: Of Land and People (Contd.)

ANOTHER woman to chronicle the Indian contemporary scene was Jane Henderson in her book *The Tender Heart of India* which was akin to Margaret Parton's *The Leaf and the Flame*. Parton recorded merely events but Mrs. Henderson attempted to read some of Indian Sanskritic texts, learn their significance and enter into the secrets of Indian culture. We come across the author's deep sympathy for India.

Not that she was profound, but she was less journalistic and more sincere in her appraisal, without the typical western bias which we encounter in Huxley or Maugham or Forster. Mrs. Henderson's view was not that of Godden who lived in India for so many years. India and the Indian life entered Godden's consciousness and, while her sympathy was natural and inborn, Henderson's was more sophisticated and studied: she attempted to understand India.

Another factor: an American had a less prejudiced mind, more open to cultural impacts, whereas the British belonged to the conquering nation and it became difficult for them to reconcile themselves to the fact that they once owned India and that the sun had never set on their empire.

Further, a woman is less dogmatic and more plastic in her approach. She absorbs and inbibes new ideas and, when travelling, her curiosity is keener and open to the impact of influences of the countries she visits or comes into contact with.

A man stands apart, with his reasoning and, in the case of a Britisher, his superiority-complex debars him from a greater or clearer understanding. We can take the example of Arthur Koestler as typical. The evaluation of Gandhi was, no doubt, fairly accurate, but the ruthlessness that accompanied this assessment was typically male in character. A woman writing on the same topic would not have been so intolerant an iconoclast.

Jane Henderson realised that India's culture was complex, its religion, its ways of life many-sided. She kept an open mind and questioned on every topic and aspect. Reaching Bombay, she met a Parsi, with whom she discussed the main tenets of Zoroastrianism. She says she visited the Fire-temple, attended a Parsi wedding. She read parts of the writings of Zoroaster.

Similarly when she met a Sikh, she read parts of the Guru Granth Sahib in translation—she attempted to trace the difference between Sikhism and Hinduism and their similarities.

She naturally had many Hindu friends. She read the Gayatri with its English translation, also many important Sanskrit slokas revealing the Indian way of life. She was a guest with a Telugu family at Hyderabad, where she spent some time. She almost became one of the family, the children began to address her as Auntie Jane.

Others addressed her as their sister. The affinity was so great that she confessed that she must have been a Hindu in one of her past incarnations. One of the members declared that Auntie Jane was 99 per cent Indian.

She quoted the famous Sanskrit proverb: '*Kayeshu dasi, Karaneshu mantri, Rupeshu Lakshmi, Kshamaye Dhatri, Bhojeshu Matha, Sayaneshu Rambha, Shatakarma Yukta Kuladharmā Patni.*' (*Tender Hearts of India*, Bombay, Vikas, 1970, p. 55)

That is to say: 'A slave of toil, a minister to work, an Aphrodite in beauty, all-enduring as the earth, a mother in the kitchen, yielding pleasure in bed and all-attentive to our needs—this is the religiously wedded wife.'

Thus, 'the Indian housewife is a pillar to the house of a man's life... as a woman is dependent on man for food and clothing, the man is dependent on the woman for everything else... the Indian housewife is not a "poor woman"' (*Ibid.*)

Henderson's first impression of Bombay runs: 'My guide and I caught another gorgeous view of the spreading wings of the shore of Bombay. In our immediate foreground trickled an unusual waterfall. Across the road lies the Hanging Gardens with its animal-shaped shrubs. (*Ibid.*, p. 20)

From Bombay she flew to Delhi to witness the Republic Day celebrations and parade. From a special stand for journalists she saw the many-coloured ribbon of marching contingents of army, navy, air-force, the school and college formations. She was greatly impressed by the panorama. The evening was none the less spectacular, 'Delhi was resplendent in her formal evening attire for Republic Day celebrations. Her diamond necklace was actually hundreds of thousands of light-bulbs outshining the heavens above. They outlined the clean-cut government buildings from Parliament to less imposing structures.' (*Ibid.*, p. 26)

About Qutab Minar she said, 'Qutab Minar in the southern part of Delhi is a 236 ft. high tower of victory, leaning a trifle with the weight of the ages on its shoulders (it's over 700 years old). Climbing the twisting steps is as hard on the calves as is the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Italy. The lower sections of Qutab Minar are of a red and yellow sand-stone and white marble has been used in the top sections—the tower being built in different reigns.' (*Ibid.*, p. 28)

Here is her picture of the temples of Khajuraho, 'The main temple is impressive when viewed from a distance with its graceful spiral and many "roofs", each "roof" having its own tower. There is a decided rhythmic beauty to the temple and you must reach the steps and start to ascend, you suddenly know you are amid Hindu mythology with all the royalty, the mendicants, the soldiers, the horses and all the amorous couples.' (*Ibid.*, p. 115)

She was a guest in Dr. Subba Rao's residence. She almost became part of the family. In the company of this family, she visited Golconda fort, which had nothing spectacular to offer.

She also witnessed a Bharat Natyam dance-performance at Madras. Her host explained to her the origin of this dance-form, its symbols of hands, feet, body and eyes. She also noted with great interest the different components of this dance-style:

Allaripu, Jatiswaram Shabdam, Abhinayam, Varnam, Padam, and Jhellari. In other words, Bharat Natyam consisted of pure dancing, acting, facial expression, dancing to a song etc.

From Hyderabad and Madras she travelled to Cochin.

'A boat ride through the back-waters of Cochin is a silent drama, the backdrop created by the Heavenly Decorator, the blue waters, and lush green of swaying palms painted by the Divine Brush. Vasco de Gama had sailed these waters and landed nearby as he searched for spices.' (*Ibid.*, p. 147)

Her next step was Mysore. She compared the Brindaban gardens to celebrated Italian gardens and found the former breath-takingly beautiful, a thing missed by Aldous Huxley.

'Steps flanked the cascading falls, and after a climb I stood breathless looking over the vast array of beauty through which I had just trod. Such magnificence is just not to be believed. I had viewed the tremendous gardens of Versailles, the ne'er-to-be-forgotten Keukenhof of Holland, the majestic Villa d'Este, the Villa Carlotta of Lago di Como in Italy, and many others of equal magnitude. None can beat the Brindaban at night, fully lit.' (*Ibid.*, p. 191)

The Taj Mahal described as 'the gleaming tear-drop on the cheek of Time' by Tagore, was found obnoxiously ugly by Huxley. But Jane Henderson fortunately did not share this view. So too Ruth P. Jhabvala in her novel *Esmond in India* which we shall have occasion to examine later.

'Since early childhood I had dreamed of this spot built by the Emperor Shah Jehan in 1635. Years of travel and reading convinced me it must surely be the most magnificent single piece of architecture in the world.... All was serenely quiet. A few visitors mutely trod the paths beside a slumberous reflecting pool. Nothing marred the beauty as the Queen of heavens shone down upon the classic marble. Jewels danced near the top as if flickering little beams of fairy dust upon us.' (*Ibid.*, p. 213)

Later she reflected, 'I can only say that you have brought me to a hallowed spot, not so much for the two bodies which lie within the tomb, or the great love they represent, but a spot where I can see the symphony in marble and jewels.' (*Ibid.*)

Earlier she had visited Banaras, Baudha Gaya and the shrine of *Mulgantha Kuti*. At Banaras she was the guest of one Mr. Chatterjee with whom she had many and prolonged discussions on Hinduism. In the last steps of her journey, she visited Rajasthan. At Amber, which is seven miles beyond the city of Jaipur, she reported, 'Here, the beauty of the building and its inner works of art make the thought of a return trip desirable. The ramparts are in excellent condition and, though started in the early 17th century, took one hundred years to complete. The main hall, the *Diwan i Am*, is pretentious. The beautiful gateway leads to the inner court and royal apartments.' (*Ibid.*, p. 238)

One of the cherished memoirs of Jane Henderson was her participation in an Andhra wedding. It was a sumptuous affair where over 5,000 persons, among whom were many dignitaries such as ministers, etc., attended the feast. Here she was a

guest of honour and she forgot that she was an alien.

India was indeed colourful, be it in the South or the North. She described these colours, 'Good old Rajasthan displays the true brilliant rose, magenta, crimson, scarlet and hot pinks of that pink family, not to mention all the yellows and other colours. Even the dress of the women is different in this state. They seem to prefer the full skirt or *ghagra*, the half-sleeved bodice of other places or *kanchli*.'

Jane Henderson left India, deeply impressed by its culture, its way of life, its scenes, its architecture and its hospitality. She disproved Kipling's adage and revealed that the East and the West really were coming closer in ties of friendship, mutual understanding and reciprocal sympathy.

End of Part II

(To be continued)

ROMEN PALIT

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MAY I venture to comment on the brief note prefixed to the article "The Fifteenth August" published in *Mother India*, October 1979, p. 592?

(1) So far as I know, the writer of the article was Sri Aurobindo himself, as may be even guessed from the beauty of the piece.

(2) It was the special issue not of *Khulna* but of *Khulna Basti* which originally contained it. This was a Weekly printed and published from our Kamala Press, of which my father, the late Benoyendra Nath Bose, was the proprietor in the pre-Independence days.

(3) The article appeared on the page, as I recollect, of our Special Issue, on the eve of the 15th August, either in 1939 or 1940.

(4) Dr. K.D. Ghose, father of Sri Aurobindo, was the Civil Surgeon at Khulna. Of course, he was very popular there.

My father was known to Nolinida. My statements may be corroborated from him, if possible.

SUDHIR KUMAR BOSE

TOWARDS THE HIGHER LIFE

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1979)

CHAPTER III

Change of Consciousness

To be more and more conscious, to bring into consciousness the hidden defects in one's being, to take one's consciousness from the surface to the depths, to change it from lower values to higher ones, to become conscious of the Divine through a series of inner experiences and to link the illumined inner to the outer self in spiritual harmony—such is the process we are meant to undergo in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

To work on one's consciousness in various ways is our main endeavour. The Mother pointedly says, "It is a vain chimera to hope to bring a change in the world without a change of consciousness."¹

But this change is not effected by impressive externalities. While going on in life unostentatiously—without doing extraordinary things in the surface life—we have to proceed forward. People are not able to understand our sadhana because very little catches the eye. The age-long habit is to spend hours and hours in diligent asceticism and forced meditation. But no such discipline is imposed on us. Struggling and straining on our part has not been to the liking of the Mother. All has been left to us that we may try to "eliminate unconsciousness" and awake inwardly. But how we err, fall into inertia—in the name of surrender—and shrink from labour or suffer ourselves to be lured into a life of ease and comfort!

It is not that the Mother did not know all this, her eyes saw everything that was going on in the Ashram. But she was loved at the same time as feared. That was the beauty of her personality. So inexhaustible was her patience that she took no action, enforced no rule, exerted no compulsion, but waited, waited and waited till our eyes opened to our own folly and there grew an inner awakening and an aspiration to open to a new consciousness.

The consciousness of the ordinary man is tied down to a lakh of things. How should we secure the release of the "prisoned consciousness" and keep it unhooked?

The Mother gives a simple formula: "Gather all the threads of your consciousness spread all round and take a plunge."

It was this that brought some wholesome change in me. Without adopting any ascetic method of outer renunciation, I went on cutting one after another the ties that kept my consciousness entangled. It is not easy to cut family ties and inward attachments. There are other ties in which the vital takes *rasa* (enjoyment) and keeps us chained. The parting gift of each of them was pain—as if I was using a blunt knife on the sensitive nerves. It was this that earned for me the joy of exclusive turning to the Divine—taught me to live alone with the Alone and feel the sweetness of inner solitude.

¹ *Bulletin.*

“In order to reject anything from the being one has to become conscious of it, to have the clear inner experience of its action and to discover its actual place in the working of the nature. One can then work upon it to eliminate it.... The process of raising up the lower movements into the full light of the consciousness in order to know and deal with them is inevitable; for there can be no complete change without it.”¹

Q: Once in the growing dusk, while I was in meditation the front and the back of my body seemed to be two different parts and slowly they began to join together. When they became one, my consciousness began to rise upward. Above my head I saw a huge globe of white-red colour into which I saw myself passing.

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose it was the joining of inner and outer consciousness preliminary to an ascent to a true freedom of the higher compassion. (30-10-1936)

Q: One day while merged in prayer I saw my frontal part (mouth, heart, etc.) separated from the back part. Any significance?

SRI AUROBINDO: The back part was the inner consciousness, the front part the outer. It is an experience of the double consciousness in symbol. (1936)

The process still continues with long or short gaps. Today the Yogic Force takes up one part and then leaves it for years. It takes up another part and then a third part. I think it will continue till all are ready for a simultaneous working.

For some months now I have been regularly feeling an action in the lips. Often they get locked up making me loath to talk. Action has also been felt in the tongue, at times causing a mild burning sensation as is felt on taking hot milk. The lips felt and looked like a child's, with a soft rosy tint on them. But this appearance could not last long.

Action in the eyes also is not lacking. Twice I distinctly perceived there was only vapour-white light instead of eye-balls in the sockets. But I never felt any working of any kind in the throat until the seal was broken in September 1979. The existence of the throat disappeared. There stood a space bathed in light. I remember Sri Aurobindo's words: “The pressure is that of the Force of the higher consciousness above the mind pressing on the mind (the mind centres are in the head and throat).... Once the head centres and spaces are open one feels it descending freely as a current or otherwise...”²

There hangs a fine story upon the opening of the neck. Once the thread of consciousness started from the heel and went on rising up and up and passing through the neck reached the crown. From there it began to descend and through the chest moved downward till it reached the toes. Thus the whole physical frame got spanned by one golden cord of consciousness. It was one of the most beautiful hours of my life.

The higher Force seems to be penetrating into every nook and corner of the being, even the lowest stratum of the body.

Here lies the beauty of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. Here also lies its newness. It wants to overhaul the whole system and leave nothing untouched.

¹ *On Yoga* II, Tome Two, pp. 687-8. ² *Ibid.*, p. 286.

Hathayoga, for instance, is concerned with the body and promises wonderful results in one's lifetime. One Ramananda Yogi by name could keep himself buried under the strict observation of some scientists for twenty-eight days. The whole stress of Rajayoga is upon breath-control. It is Tantra which insists on the change of the lower nature to awaken the Kundalini.

It may not be out of place to mention an experience of mine in the lower vital when I felt the same serenity and felicity which one usually gets in the mental region. I perceived the whole area below the navel full of white light.

"The vital energy" left to itself runs in "ruinous circles". "It must be connected with the dynamic power of the higher consciousness... There are two movements necessary for this connection to be established. One is upward; the vital rises to join the higher consciousness... the other is downward; the vital remains silent, tranquilised, pure, empty of the ordinary movements, waiting till the dynamic power from above descends.... That is why the sadhak feels sometimes... the necessity of going back into the vital, doing sadhana there and bringing down into it the true consciousness."¹

"To ascend is easier than to bring down the higher consciousness."² Mine is just the reverse case.

"It is the aim of the sadhana that the consciousness should rise out of the body and take its station above."³ 1951 was the year when this boon was first granted to me. In September 1979 I found to my surprise that I could keep my consciousness stationed nearly a foot high above the head for more than an hour, all the time feasting my eyes on wonderful visions at 2.30 a.m. I may mention one: the full view of a passage resembling a tunnel for an underground train, as if carved out of a rock, with five or six wide openings, one after another, at the end of which glittered pure white light.

"When the being opens then all in you, the mind (head), emotional being (heart), vital, even something in the physical consciousness begin to ascend in order to join themselves to this greater consciousness. One has when one sits with eyes closed in meditation the sensation of going up which you describe. It is called the ascension of the lower consciousness."⁴

Ascent is not something foreign to my nature. Quite a number of times I have seen myself flying in the air with extended hands and feet moving with the clouds or soaring merrily like the birds between the blue sky above and the blue sea below. But from 1938 it stopped altogether. It was replaced by a regular descent.

The ascent I had in 1979 was perhaps "the ascension of the lower consciousness" quoted above. The first uplift, if I remember well, was from the sex-centre. The heart centre and other parts remained inert because, as says Sri Aurobindo, they were "unprepared"⁵ to share the experience. A month later I found myself separated into two. The frontal part began to ascend and, bypassing the limitations of the body, went on rising and rising to a higher level. It was like going up slowly in a lift. When

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 390-1. ² *Ibid.*, p. 238. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 239. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 241 ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

it could not move further, it stopped. After a time, again I found the whole of me—perhaps my subtle body—rising steadily and it tended to soar to the sky which appeared ahead but it was met by an obstruction. Unable to break through the barrier it sank down. At another time the whole of my physical frame—head, heart, stomach, etc.—seemed to expand and expand to such an extent that I felt like a balloon!

“When you rise with the vital from its lower reaches your vital is filled with pure aspiration.”¹

Experiences are for us an oasis in a Sahara. In 1965 I could pass into the state of Samadhi once in a year or two. One moment’s coughing and the consciousness fell “back where it was”. This explains how difficult it is to maintain oneself at the highest pitch. A single spasm of the throat and what was gained after a long space of two years was gone.

A forward step was taken on February 2, 1966. Just after I had reclined on a chair my consciousness deepened. Far beyond, there opened before my inner eye a spacious scene as of daybreak. (Commenting on a similar scene once before, Sri Aurobindo had said that it indicated “liberation”.) The experience repeated itself more than two decades afterwards.

A little later, the vision of daybreak was followed by that of a golden rising sun. Again, after a time there opened before me a scene of morning hours. All this happened at night. Just after this, the consciousness relaxed and I felt a mosquito bite. This was enough for the experience to vanish. The heart now yearns not only for “high glimpses” but for “lasting sight”.

The following are not visions but delightful experiences. Occasions were not rare when nights merged in dawns, keeping me wrapped in thoughts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Q: One fine morning I saw that I stood somewhere above and looked from there upon the body as a house or a thing quite separate from me. Was it an experience of the Purusha consciousness?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the Purusha consciousness in one of its experiences. The Purusha has to know itself as separate from the mind, separate from the life activities, separate from the body.

Q: I heard a voice, “I am Brahman”, “I am Sachchidananda”. Was it a glimpse of the reality?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is in the higher mind that the self-realisation and the Brahman experience can first come, so it may be that was the promise.

Despite so much preparation and purification, my psychic being has not yet found a chance to give the sadhana a triumphant lead and constitute for me a major change of consciousness.

(To be continued)

¹ *Ibid.*