

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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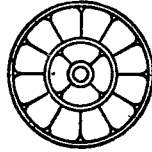
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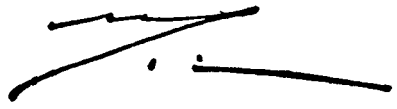


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry-605002, India

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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXI

No. 8

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

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# SRI AUROBINDO AND LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES

## EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

BUT what strange ideas again!—that I was born with a supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardships, starvation in England and constant dangers and fierce difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry external and internal. My life has been a battle from its early years and is still a battle: the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character. But, of course, as we have not been shouting about these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life and Nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!

\*

Fits of depression and darkness and despair are a tradition in the path of sadhana—in all Yogas, oriental or occidental, they seem to have been the rule. I knew all about them myself—but my experience has led me to the perception that they are an unnecessary tradition and could be dispensed with if one chose. That is why whenever they come in you or others I try to lift up before them the gospel of faith. If still they come, one has to get through them as soon as possible and get back into the sun.

9 April 1930

\*

As for faith, you write as if I never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work. But even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible), I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do, and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe. But why should I feel that all this may come to nothing when I see each step and where it is leading and every week and day—once it was every year and month and hereafter it will be every day and hour—brings me so much nearer to my goal? On the way that one treads with the greater Light above, even every difficulty gives its help and has its value and night itself carries in it the burden of the Light that has to be.

December 1933

\*

NIROD: For this greater Truth if some fall out, what matters? The wheel of Jagannath must roll and the Divine has no tears for them, for he is beyond all dualities.

SRI AUROBINDO: Even if I fall out myself, I will not weep! I will try again.

\*

NIROD: We hear that you also had to undergo a lot of suffering and despair, even to the extent of wanting to commit suicide!

SRI AUROBINDO: What nonsense! Suicide! Who the devil told you that? Even if I knew that all was going to collapse tomorrow, I would not think of suicide, but go on to do what I still could for the future.

2 January 1935

\*

The worst thing for sadhana is to get into a morbid condition, always thinking of lower forces, attacks, etc. If the sadhana has stopped for a time, then let it stop, remain quiet, do ordinary things, rest when rest is needed—wait till the physical consciousness is ready. My own sadhana when it was far more advanced than yours used to stop for half a year together. I did not make a fuss about it, but remained quiet till the empty or dull period was over.

8 March 1935

\*

*Q: Bergson writes that the progress of Life is marked by tensions succeeded by flowerings. What do you think of that, since the great philosopher too agrees with our way of marching to Beatitude through struggles and sufferings?*

Humph! Such a method is all very well, but one has so much of it in life and in this Ashram that I yearn for some other non-Bergsonian evolution. Even if Lord God and Bergson planned it together, I would move an amendment.

# AN INTEGRAL TRANSFORMATION

## SOME WORDS OF THE MOTHER

WE want an integral transformation, the transformation of the body and all its activities.

Formerly, when one spoke of transformation one meant solely the transformation of the inner consciousness. One tried to discover in oneself this deep consciousness and rejected the body and its activities like an encumbrance and a useless thing, in order to attend only to the inner movement. Sri Aurobindo declared that this was not enough; the Truth demanded that the material world should also participate in the transformation and become an expression of the deeper Truth. But when people heard this, many thought that it was possible to transform the body and its activities without bothering in the least about what was happening within—naturally this is not quite true. Before you can undertake this work of physical transformation, which of all things is the most difficult, your inner consciousness must be firmly established, solidly established in the Truth, so that this transformation may be the final expression of the Truth—"final" for the moment at least.

The starting-point of this transformation is receptivity, we have already spoken about it. That is the indispensable condition for obtaining the transformation. Then comes the change of consciousness. This change of consciousness and its preparation have often been compared with the formation of the chicken in the egg: till the very last second the egg remains the same, there is no change, and it is only when the chicken is completely formed, absolutely alive, that it itself makes with its little beak a hole in the shell and comes out. Something similar takes place at the moment of the change of consciousness. For a long time you have the impression that nothing is happening, that your consciousness is the same as usual, and, if you have an intense aspiration, you even feel a resistance, as though you were knocking against a wall which does not yield. But when you are ready within, a last effort—the pecking in the shell of the being—and everything opens and you are projected into another consciousness.

I said that it was a revolution of the basic equilibrium, that is, a total reversal of consciousness comparable with what happens to light when it passes through a prism. Or it is as though you were turning a ball inside out, which cannot be done except in the fourth dimension. One comes out of the ordinary three-dimensional consciousness to enter the higher four-dimensional consciousness, and into an infinite number of dimensions. This is the indispensable starting-point. Unless your consciousness changes its dimension, it will remain just what it is with the superficial vision of things, and all the profundities will escape you.

4 January 1951

\*

In the old Chaldean tradition, very often the young novices were given an image when they were invested with the white robe; they were told: "Do not try to remove the stains one by one, the whole robe must be purified." Do not try to correct your faults one by one, to overcome your weaknesses one by one, it does not take you very far. The entire consciousness must be changed, a reversal of consciousness must be achieved, a springing up out of the state in which one is towards a higher state from which one dominates all the weakness one wants to heal, and from which one has a full vision of the work to be accomplished.

I believe Sri Aurobindo has said this: things are such that it may be said that nothing is done until everything is done. One step ahead is not enough, a total conversion is necessary.

How many times have I heard people who were making an effort say, "I try, but what's the use of trying? Every time I think I have gained something, I find that I must begin all over again." This happens because they are trying to go forward while standing still, they are trying to progress without changing their consciousness. It is the entire point of view which must be shifted, the whole consciousness must get out of the rut in which it lies so as to rise up and see things from above. It is only thus that victories will not be changed into defeats.

26 December 1956

\*

If we consider that the child should learn and know only what can keep him pure of every low, crude, violent and degrading movement, we would have to eliminate at a stroke all contact with the rest of humanity, beginning with all these stories of war and murder, of conflict and deception which go under the name of history; we would have to eliminate all present contact with family, relatives and friends; we would have to exercise control over all the impulses of their being.

This was the idea behind the enclosed monastic life of convents, or the ascetic life in caves and forests.

This remedy proved to be quite ineffectual and failed to pull mankind out of the mire.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the remedy is quite different.

We must face life as a whole with all the ugliness, falsehood and cruelty it still contains, but we must take care to discover in ourselves the source of all goodness, all beauty, all light and all truth in order to bring this source consciously into contact with the world so as to transform it.

This is infinitely more difficult than running away or shutting our eyes so as not to see, but it is the only truly effective way—the way of those who are truly strong and pure and capable of manifesting the Truth.



## A SONNET BY NIRODBARAN

### WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS

*In vastitude* *unhorizoned*  
(Deep) (in the blue wideness) of the soul  
"concordant" is *ing*  
*rather prosaic.* Reigns a supreme concord(ant) ecstasy (;)  
*And* from Time's (grave) clutches free, eternal(ly), whole  
Reflects the many-hued sky-Mystery.

*laugh*  
Figures of infinite beauty (smile) like Dawn,  
Shadows of earth recede far, far away;  
*a*  
Thoughts cease and, motionless, (in) silent lone  
Majesty holds (the) unconquerable sway.

In constant flux, (yet) a timeless mystic Bride,  
Queen of the seas girdled with emerald waves,  
She casts her might of heaven-begotten pride  
*dun*  
Upon the seeking heart's (dark) prison-caves.

*A* *and* *she*  
(Of gloom and) song of rapture release brings  
*fire-*  
With the large sweep of her (fire-) lightning wings.

4.5.37

Guru,

How do you find the poem as a whole?

A: Very fine, sir, very fine (except the subjectless predicates and the bad metre of the last line but one). You have certainly got the inspiration in a high measure.

Q: Now, about the details:

The first line is wrong metre, I discover. I give two alternatives:

In the unhorizoned vastness of the soul  
or, In the vastitude of unhorizoned soul

A: Either, In unhorizoned vastness (without the)  
or, In vastitude of the unhorizoned soul

The last is perhaps better.

Q: 3rd line—"free" spoils the effect by internal rhyme?

A: No, but "grave clutches" is queer and what the deuce is the subject of the verb "reflects"?

Q: 4th line—Image of many-coloured mystic sky would be better?

A: Certainly not. But again where the deuce is a subject for the verb "holds"?

Q: 9th line—"constant flux" seems doubtful since, above, there is motionless.

A: In my version this difficulty disappears.

But where does this She come from? There is nothing about her before. But at any rate she being something new can be in constant flux since the motionlessness does not apply to her.

Q: 10th line—instead of "emerald waves" how about "maiden-waves"? But maiden trying to girdle a bride is a surrealist conception!

A: Why? A maiden can always girdle a bride.

Q: Lastly the couplet—I don't like this "Song of... etc."

A: The song is all right. What is wrong is gloom and the metre. 'Gloom after dark is tautologous and feeble—not needed.

"Fire-lightning" means nothing—so have altered.

Q: You have surely marked that in the octet I haven't mentioned who reflects, holds, etc. Implicit? Does it matter?

A: Of course it does. It is not implicit. It is simply ungrammatical.

Q: What's the rule of using truncated foot? "Deep" in the 1st line can be scanned in that way?

A: It can, but does not sound well.

There is no rule—it is a matter of the ear. Prosody formerly banned it, now it admits it like many other new-born irregularities.

## AUGUST MEMORIES

It is an irony of history that the nearer vision is not always the clearer. Perhaps, familiarity breeds contempt, or public memory is short. The birth and death of great individuals, the rise and fall of empires, creation and destruction are all totally forgotten with the march of time. Let us take a leisurely walk in the glorious month of August along memory-lane and reminisce for a moment.

In the ancient Roman calendar August was called Sextilis, or the sixth month, and it had only thirty days. It was named August in honour of Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, Caesar's adopted nephew, who was given the title of Augustus (meaning venerable or revered) by the Senate.

India's most important festivals—Krishna Janmashtami, the birth of Sri Krishna, Narali Purnima (cocoanut full moon) chiefly observed by those dwelling by the sea-coast, Avani Avittam, a special ceremony connected with those who change the sacred thread in Southern India, and Onam, commemorating the time-honoured legend of Vishnu's destruction of Daitya Bali, regularly celebrated in Malabar—all fall during the month of August. As if to give an important lesson to erring man that all differences disappear with a change in consciousness, the patron saints of the West seem to have joined hands with the Oriental gods and goddesses. The Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, and those of St. Bartholomew, the twelve apostles, and St. Augustine are all held in the month of August.

Some of the most famous literary artists of the world who have contributed so much to enrich our lives were born in August—Herman Melville, the novelist of the sea and author of *Moby Dick*,—the English poets John Dryden, P.B. Shelley, Alfred Tennyson, Rupert Brooke—Izaak Walton, known as the father of angling, Sir Walter Scott, the Scottish poet, novelist and antiquarian, Thomas De Quincey, the English essayist, scholar and critic, and John Galsworthy, the English novelist and master of the didactic drama—to name only a few. This was not just an insular gift to England. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Germany's greatest poet, Guy de Maupassant, famous French short-story writer, Count Leo Tolstoy, Russia's colossal novelist and essayist, moral philosopher and social reformer, Oliver Wendell Holmes, American poet, brilliant conversationalist and wit, Maurice Maeterlinck, Belgian dramatist and poet, Bret Harte, American author and poet, were all children of August.

Poetry and drama are, undoubtedly, related to principles of beauty, and the art of the painter and sculptor is the aesthetic expression of vision and emotion through the medium of colour and form. As though to justify this truth, Titian, the illustrious Venetian painter, Walter Crane, the English painter and decorator, Ivan Mestrovic, the Serbian sculptor of international reputation chose the month of August to be born in.

If August has given us the charm of poets, who are rightly called the unacknowledged legislators of the world, it has not denied us the wisdom of patriots,

statesmen, philosophers, social reformers, historians and empire-builders. August inevitably brings memories of Daniel O'Connell, the Irish patriot and statesman, Napoleon I, Corsican by birth, soldier by profession and emperor by achievement, Lawrence of Arabia, the British adventurer, scholar and soldier, William Wilberforce, English statesman and early opponent of the slave trade, Confucius, the celebrated Chinese philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the German philosopher of the Idealist school, and John Locke, the English philosopher and the 'intellectual ruler of the 18th century.'

We live in an exciting age. Technology and science have made giant strides. Achievements which look like miracles are playthings in the hands of scientists. By a meaningful coincidence Orville Wright, the illustrious American inventor and airplane-manufacturer, Ernest Rutherford, the British experimental physicist and the first to push into the subatomic domain, John Torrey, the American botanist, physician and chemist, Pliny the 'Elder', the Roman naturalist, Lee De Forrest, American pioneer in the development of the radio, and Antoine L. Lavoisier, the French chemist, were also born in August. Even Christopher Columbus waited till August 3, 1492 to sail from Palos (Spain) on his first voyage Westward in search of a route to China and the Far East.

This is one side of August. It also brings to us melancholy remembrances and nightmarish associations. It was the month of destruction and it almost brought the entire human race to the point of total annihilation. Nearly four centuries ago the Spanish Armada was destroyed. The British also captured Washington D.C. and burnt the capital on August 24, 1814. Again the First World War began on August 1, 1914. But the world's most astonishing tragedy was yet to come. It was on August 6, 1945 that the first atomic bomb used in warfare was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, from an American superfortress. Three days later, a second bomb was exploded on Nagasaki. These bombs killed 70,000 people, made 12,000 homeless and destroyed two large cities. But we must also bear in mind that the worst carnage in history—the Second World War—ended on August 14 with Japan's surrender. Out of evil comes some good. Significantly, many countries of the world became free, and it is once more in the month of August that the Swiss Independence Day, Bolivia's Independence Day, India's Independence Day and the Independence day of Ecuador are celebrated. The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving suffrage to women was also proclaimed in August. The Atlantic Charter was made known to the world on August 14, 1941. The Panama Canal was officially opened to commerce on the 15th August, 1914 and Melbourne (Australia) was founded on August 29, 1835.

In India's history, August stands out most prominently. Lokmanya Tilak passed away on August 1, 1920. It was on the same day many years later that Gandhiji decided to start the non-cooperation movement against the British. Above all, August 15 not only happens to be the birthday of Free India but also marks the birthday of Sri Aurobindo, who stands foremost among the great architects of India's

Renaissance. The month that gave us Sri Krishna also gave us Sri Aurobindo, the poet, revolutionary scholar, prophet, seer, mystic and Purna Yogi. In the seclusion of his prison cell he experienced the call to a new life and saw the vision of Vasudeva. He discovered the deeper meanings of life. He has taught us how to integrate the world. He has shown us the path to change our consciousness and divinise Earth Nature. Let us enter the month of August with hope, faith and courage. The Dawn of Satya Yuga (the Age of Truth) is at hand.

G. KRISHNAN

*(Adapted from the Newsletter of the Vishnu Hindu Parishad of Vancouver, Canada)*

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## TO SRI AUROBINDO

I AM in love with you, my Lord!  
 My heart is bound by Your name's gold cord.  
 O never will You let it free,  
 But catch it close—for eternity.

Each word that You have written has brought  
 A song of bliss beyond all thought.  
 To Your light alone let me be true—  
 It has changed my life to heavenly blue.

How cease to love You, sweetest Lord,  
 When You are all my heart has adored?

LALITA

## SPIRITUAL ACHIEVEMENT: THE ANCIENTS AND OURSELVES

*We are reproducing, from an old issue of Mother India, in the early period when it was a fortnightly, an authoritative article by the late T.V. Kapali Sastry on a subject of constant interest.*

*Mother India* has asked me to take up the question of spiritual achievements of the ancients with special reference to the ideal of Supermind as conceived and described in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. The request is prompted, I understand, by discussions and doubts in some quarters in regard to the statement of Sri Aurobindo that the Vedic sages did not arrive at the Supermind for earth or did not make the attempt at all.

In taking up this subject let me at the outset state that there is nothing of importance left unsaid or obscure by the Master which we can think of and put in writing here. Besides, basing themselves on the authority of his statements, well-known writers have followed in his footsteps and discoursed upon the nature of the Supermind and the preliminary, the preparatory work that is done and yet to be done for its advent. I propose, therefore, to contribute to this subject, not anything new or different from what has been said by others, but something that may induce the discriminating mind to know and find for itself the basis or bases of Sri Aurobindo's statement in regard to the Supermind; and in doing so it is necessary to clarify at the very beginning what the term connotes and what it does not. We shall also take into account the ancient achievements in the realm of the Spirit and their conceptual imagery, where *anna*, *prāṇa*, *manas*, Matter, Life and Mind, etc. are spoken of in the Upanishads and in the later Vedantic texts.

### The Supermind

Now, first about the Supermind. It is a term coined and used by Sri Aurobindo in a definite sense to denote a principle which governs the fourth term, *vyāhṛti*, in the hierarchy of the sevenfold plane of being. It is a principle, yet not a mere principle, but a plane and a world—a plane of Knowledge and Truth in which the Many and the One are harmonised naturally, a spontaneous manifold unity in which Knowledge and Power are inalienable, or the one is the figure of the other. This Supermind which is a Divine world and plane above the Ignorance, above the triple world of Matter, Life and Mind, is a world of Light and Truth. Something essential in it could be brought down and made a part, a central part of the human being and consciousness, and as a result man can be changed into the terms of the Divine descending with the Supermind, his body and life and mind transfigured into the superior spiritual and divine counterparts in the Truth-Consciousness whose plenary home is the "Sun-World." The Sun is the symbol used by the ancients to connote this Supreme

### Light of the Truth.

Such an advent of the supernal Light for Earth is not only possible, but is inevitable, says Sri Aurobindo and he has elaborated upon this theme in hundreds of letters in addition to the volumes of his well-known writings on the subject. Now let us quote his very words in this connection from *The Riddle of This World* (p.2): "The Vedic Rishis never attained to the Supermind for the earth or perhaps did not even make the attempt. They tried to rise individually to the supramental plane, but they did not bring it down and make it a permanent part of the earth-consciousness." The last part of the sentence requires elucidation for a fuller grasp by the reader who is not quite familiar with the central thought of this teaching. We shall come to that later on; here we may first dispose of the question of the basis of the statement quoted above.

A disciple, an intelligent follower of Sri Aurobindo, does not raise the question because he has no doubt whatever in this regard. For when words fall from the Master, he knows and is convinced that Sri Aurobindo never utters anything from sheer speculation concerning matters of the Spirit. When he sees a truth, he primarily bases his utterance on that perception and secondarily adduces reasons where necessary for the enlightenment of the enquiring mind. When a hunter enters a forest his observing eye detects the kinds of denizens, tiger, bear, deer, lion or porcupine that inhabit it by the footprints they leave and other marks they throw on the surrounding wild vegetation. A man, when he is in a wood, can easily discover if human feet have trodden the earth there and if he finds marks of human habitation or finds a trodden track, he can follow where it leads and discern the parting of the ways, if any, or he can still walk alone until the path ends abruptly or meets with obstruction from an impenetrable block of wood or rock and then finds that the wild country is not passable and no man has ever walked it. The same can be said of the yogi, especially of the path-finder of the Integral Yoga. For a set purpose when he shuts the doors of the senses and withdraws the outgoing mind and gets above it, in order to rise to the higher levels of being, he does so to discover the hidden truths in the higher consciousness and lays hold on the clues, wherever possible, that may lead to the higher heights, studies the actualities of the situation, discerns the achievements of the past, ponders over and decides upon the possibilities of the present endeavour. Rising from height to height, as did the Vedic seer, exploring plateau on plateau, peak after peak, he sees much that is yet to be done and achieved, but has not been ventured so far by any before him. He finds no sign, no pointer, no evidence in the vast country of the highest levels of the pure and luminous mind and still above in what is called the Overmind, to show the track, if any, trodden before, that freely leads to the Sun-World, the world of Truth-Consciousness, much less does he find any trace of a return passage that leads step by step down from the Supramental World of Solar Light to the world of Mind, Life and Matter.

### The Vedic Yoga

This actual seeing, this direct perception of what has taken place, of what has not

taken place before, is the basis of the statement that the Vedic sages did not arrive at the Supermind for the earth. This is convincing enough so far as the disciple and a faithful follower of Sri Aurobindo is concerned. But for others, this may not be enough, they may require other proofs based on grounds of reason. Well, here we shall confine ourselves to the Hymns of the Rig Veda, as it is the Vedic sages that first concern us most. Let us then have a clear idea of the spiritual goal the Vedic seer set before himself and strove after; and this we can gather directly from the hymns.

As a matter of serious concern we leave aside the exoteric religion and ritualistic meaning of the Riks, as they have come down to us through the Brahmanas and some popular beliefs, and look to the true significance of the Yajna, the inner sacrifice and call it for our purpose here the Vedic Yoga. The Rishi's goal is to arrive at the Sun of Truth, the World of the Supernal Light. The means he adopts and the process of the Yoga and arrival at the goal may be stated summarily in a few sentences so that we may later cite instances from the Hymns to substantiate our view of what the sages strove for.

The Sadhak of the Vedic Yoga by tapasya, discipline, qualified himself for initiation into worship of Agni, the youngest of the Gods who carries the offerings of the Sadhak to the other Powers of the Godhead, the Gods of whom Indra is the chief. He is the Divine Will, the Immortal; when born in man the mortal, he manifests himself as the flaming force that mounts higher and higher burning and devouring on the way all that opposes the onward march, lights up the darkened passages and lightens the burden of the worshipper since he takes upon himself the lead to arrive at the realm of the Gods and bring them down also to crown the worshipper's worship with success. Once he is born in man, and accepts his mission there is no halt, he brooks no opposition, and in his advance he assumes, or is reborn or transforms himself into, other Personalities of the Godhead and functions accordingly. Or he retains his Personality and in conjunction with the other Higher Powers achieves the object of the worshipper, the offering of the Soma, the delight of all his experiences, to Indra, the Divine Mind, the Lord of the luminous pure Mind, Swar. When he accepts and is pleased, drunk with delight he gets stronger and stronger in man, dissipates all darkness, breaks through the clouds of Vritra, the Asura who obstructs and covers, and releases the Waters, streams of Conscious Energy from the rock, the hill of material existence, or pours down the Rain from the Immortal's world of heaven, the Rain of Consciousness-Force that descends from above. As a result he effects the release of the Cows—the Rays of the Sun—and lastly the Sun, the Sun of Truth-Consciousness, Truth-Light, is won for the worshipper, the Sadhak of the Vedic Yoga.

This in sum is the process of the Vedic Yoga which aims at the winning of the Immortal Truth for the Sadhak. The beginning is made when Agni, the Divine Will, the Immortal in the mortal is kindled and fully awakened and grows into flame increasing in volume and strength by the progressive surrenderings of the Vedic Yogi himself and whatever is his to the Godhead; and when the process advances something



of the Cosmic Powers of the Godhead is manifested in the Yogi enabling him to prepare for the great consummation which is the Revelation of the Sun of Truth which he beholds for ever, *sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ* or which he arrives at and to live in which he prays for.

In all this nowhere do we find that the Rishi prays for the advent of the Sun of Truth for the benefit and transformation of man in his kind. But he always prays for the favour of the Immortal Powers while he lives on earth, and for life in the world of Immortals hereafter. There are prayers quite plain to show that the ultimate goal set before the Vedic seers is to get established in the immortal world of undying Light where the Sun of Truth shines for ever. We may refer the reader to a hymn in the ninth Book of the Rig Veda, the last hymn but one where the Rishi describes and prays for arriving at the Sun-World where he may get settled in the Immortal. Riks 7 to 11 are an apt and typical illustration of the longings of the Vedic seer:

“Settle me in that immortal world that never decays nor dies, wherein the Light of Heaven, the Sun-world is set and the Lustre shines for ever...” (7)

“Make me immortal in that realm where the brilliant Vivaswan’s son reigns, where flow the Waters, the mighty streams (of conscious Energy).” (8)

“Make me immortal in that realm where the luminous worlds are full of lustres...” (9)

“Make me immortal in that world where are found fulfilled all eager wishes and strong longings, where is found the Domain of the Sun...” (10)

“Make me immortal in that realm where are all joys and raptures, where are all delights and contentments...” (11)

These are a few relevant passages chosen from the last five Riks of the hymn, a full translation being found not necessary for our purpose here. From them, we can have an idea of the supreme aim of the Vedic Rishis which is to arrive at the Sun-World, symbol and occult form of the Truth-Consciousness, the Eternal Light and Joy Undecaying which in our parlance is the Supermind. This much as regards the Vedic goal. Even in the means adopted for its achievement there are indications in the hymns that the Rishi aims at this goal. As stated earlier, the means adopted is first the kindling of Agni, the awakening of the Immortal Flame, the Divine Will, and feeding it by self-offering to grow and lead towards the Godhead, the Sun of Truth which is his own home. In a hymn addressed to the All-Gods, *viśve devāḥ*, the Rishi proclaims that his soul is travelling onwards with the help of what he designates as the Pole, the shaft as of a car, which the commentator Sayana explains to be the indwelling Godhead, *antaryāmi devaḥ*: here is an English translation of the Rik (V. 46.1): “I have yoked myself well-knowing, like a steed to the Pole. I bear that which bears us and gives succour. I seek no release, nor do I turn back. May he who knows the path, the Leader, lead me straight.”

Here again, one finds that the Vedic seer offers himself to the Indweller, that he may lead in the path of the Sacrifice, Yajna, the goal of which is, indeed, the Sun-

World. Instances can be multiplied to show that the common conception of the Vedic sages, and their ideal, was to win for themselves the World of the Solar Light of Truth and Immortality in the Beyond, *tamasasparastāt*. They did not aim at, or even seem to have conceived the idea of, bringing down something of the Solar Splendour here on earth and for earth. They had realisations of the Cosmic Gods and the Godhead, and that qualified them for getting established, on departure from earth, in that Immortal World of the Solar Effulgence. It is not that they were unaware of, and insensitive to, the sufferings of fellow-beings groping in the dark, but they did not seek the remedy for the countless ills of the darkened earth in the descent of the Truth-Consciousness from the Solar World. On the other hand, what they sought and prayed for were a common thought, common feeling, common goal, which would pave the way for an increasing harmony that would make for less misery and increasing happiness among fellow beings. The hymn 191 in the tenth Book of the Rig Veda is clear on this point.

Sri Aurobindo had obviously this hymn in mind when he wrote in *The Ideal of Human Unity* these lines: "For that essentially must be the aim of the religion of humanity, as it must be the earthly aim of all human religion, love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, a living sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life, the ideal which was expressed first some thousands of years ago in the ancient Vedic hymn and must always remain the highest injunction of the Spirit within us to human life upon earth."

Now, we can very well say that the Vedic sages did not conceive the cure for human ills to lie in the establishment of the Truth-Consciousness in man on earth, and therefore the question of an attempt to that effect does not arise. Sri Aurobindo himself says that they "perhaps did not even make the attempt." And this can also mean, according to some, that perhaps they made the attempt and did not succeed. This is quite possible; only we do not find instances in the Rig Veda that would enable us to hold that an attempt was made, but was uncrowned with success. There is another alternative and that is perhaps the well-established idea in the minds of the Vedic sages that it was an impossible proposition to think of: viz. to bring down the Truth-Consciousness so as to make it part of the earth-consciousness and, because of this idea of impossibility settled in their minds, there was no attempt, not to speak of getting hold of the means, not even a proper conception of the question at all. The absence of a tradition to this effect is a factor that must be taken into account to appreciate the authentic words of the Master in this context. Indeed, well-equipped they were with their high achievements in the Godward spheres for such a high endeavour and could have made an attempt. The failure to make the attempt, or the failure to succeed in the attempt if it had been made at all, which is a gratuitous conjecture, has had its consequences in the trend of philosophic thought of India in later times.

### The Yoga of the Upanishads

Let me now turn to the Upanishads: on the same page in *The Riddle*, the Master has stated: "Even there are verses in the Upanishad in which it is hinted that it is impossible to pass through the gates of the Sun (the symbol of the Supermind) and yet retain an earthly body." "Through the gates of the Sun they pass there where is the immortal Being whose self of Spirit wastes not nor perishes," says the Mundaka Upanishad. There are passages in the Maitri Upanishad to this effect, and this idea is present in some of the Yoga Upanishads also. In addition to this, if the ideal of the Vedic sages had been to bring down the Solar Truth for the earth, the Upanishads, the major ones, could very well have made mention of it; but they proclaim the ideal of Brahma-loka, the supreme World of Light Immortal which is the same as the Sun-World of Supermind, as the ideal to be achieved. And that is a world from which there is no return. *Sālokya*, equal status, and *sāyujya*, conscious union, form the goal of the endeavours of these ancient sages. Knowledge of Atman, realisation of Brahman as the All while man lives on earth is the goal here and on departure one goes forth to the worlds above, the highest of which is the Supreme Abode, called variously Brahmaloaka, the Sun-world, etc.; or one realises the Atman in the depths, and is absorbed, *laya*, in which case the question of departure does not arise. And this last kind of liberation which is absorption, *laya*, is supported by some of the major Upanishads, notably the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in some of its sections. Barring this, the Upanishads—we confine ourselves to the ten major ones—speak of the soul arriving at the Supreme World from which there is no return. As for the body, it is taken for granted that it does not escape from the grasp of death. We can state in a few lines what the Upanishads say about this body and the soul's departure and non-return from the world of Supermind.

The Isha Upanishad which takes a comprehensive view of the Creation and its Lord, the apparently irreconcilable opposites such as Enjoyment and Renunciation, Knowledge and Ignorance, Birth and Death, etc. says: "Of this body ashes are the end." The Kena says: "If here thou hast known Him, then thou hast lived truly. If thou hast not known Him in this mortal life, then great is the perdition." Here it is taken for granted that the body perishes some day, and the soul departs, there is nothing further for the body to achieve, when the soul has known the Supreme. The Katha Upanishad says: "If before the body drops down one has been able to apprehend (It) here, then is one fit for embodiment in the worlds (that are His creations)." In the Prashna Upanishad the sages approach Pippalada the teacher for that Knowledge by which they can be taken to the other shore across Ignorance. And in the answer to the first of the six questions, we find that the Sun-World is the source of all forces and is the Immortal, free from danger. It is the supreme resort from which there is no return. Again in the Mundaka Upanishad (III. 2.6): "The strivers after Truth, they who have made certain of the nature of things by knowledge that is the end of the Veda and are purified in their being by Yoga of renunciation, in

their time of ultimate end become absolute and immortal and they are released into the worlds of the Eternal." (Sri Aurobindo's translation.) The last passage in the Mandukya puts in brief the ideal it sets before the seeker: "The Om without parts is the transcendental state of supreme Bliss, void of phenomenal existence and duality. This Om is Atman. He who knows this enters the Atman." And the Aitareya says that Vamadeva, having got over this world by means of Brahman as awareness, *prajñāna*, and got all objects of his desires in the regions of Heaven, became immortal.

The Taittiriya which of all the Upanishads best affords, like the Isha in some respects, a broad basis for the Yoga and Philosophy of the Supermind, teaches that the Knower of Brahman attains to the Supreme and indeed it reveals the truth about the gradations, levels and aspects of the Brahman, and the coverings, rather sheaths, of the Purusha which have a great bearing upon the practical aspect. For that leads to the realisation of the separate elements severally that ensheath the being, the Purusha, with the corresponding layers of consciousness or on the various levels of being. We shall return to this part of the teachings of the Taittiriya when we come to consider the difference between the spiritual achievement of the ancients in regard to Vijnana and the present endeavour to achieve the realisation of the Supermind for earth. One more among the major Upanishads is the Chhandogya and its last word is that the soul arriving at the Brahmaloaka which is the same as the abode of the Supreme, the Sun-World in the symbolic sense, what we call the Supermind, does not return, *na cha punarāvartate*. And this is also the phrase which forms the last aphorism of the Brahma Sutras. This has become a well-known and oft-quoted line to support the idea that there is no rebirth for one who has attained to the Brahman. But neither in the Prashna Upanishad nor in the Chhandogya where the same phrase occurs is any express statement about the rebirth though it can be so interpreted. Straightly and clearly the idea is expressed that when one reaches that world of Immortality, from there he returns not.

Now from what has been stated regarding the ideal of the sages in the Upanishads, it can be easily gathered that the goal aimed at was not anything nearer to the line of Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Supermind, but it was the Knowledge of Brahman, the realisation of the Self, Atman. And they seek the support of the hymns of the Rig Veda for their conclusions quite often. They nowhere seem to hint that the idea of bringing down the Truth-Consciousness was there in the minds of the Vedic seers, nor do themselves state anything to indicate that they thought even of a remote possibility of such an endeavour, not to speak of the inevitability of such an advent of the Supermind.

### The Spiritual Achievement of the Ancients

Now an important distinction must be made when we speak of the spiritual achievement of the ancients. The sages of the Upanishads have tried to recover something of the Vedic wisdom and from their own experiences and intuitions they

have spoken of two lines of realisation of the Truth, and both are valid in their own ways. The one realisation is related mainly and solely to the Atman, the Self of selves or Brahman that is the All. In the Consciousness of the Atman, of Brahman, the soul may be gradually absorbed and merged without any relation whatever to the world or plane in which it lives and gets the realisation. In other words, this line of realisation is essentially one that is indifferent to or does not admit of being related to the Cosmic manifestation.

Another line is that in which the soul's progress is related at every turn to the existence of the world-order in the Cosmos. Obviously, it is to this latter kind we refer when we speak of the achievement of the ancients as compared to the Aurobindonian Yoga. From this point of view, the ancient achievements, whether of the Vedic seers or Upanishadic sages, or the later Vedantic Yogis, or those who followed the path of devotion and love, or the path of the Karma Yoga, were all essentially for individual attainment; even when the realisation, whether it is God-realisation or Self-knowledge, was dynamic and could be easily related to the Cosmic manifestation, and may have, as a matter of course, influenced the environment of the experiencing soul on the path either of knowledge or devotion or any other line, it was chiefly meant for and related to the individual concerned, and not for anything else even remotely resembling the ideal of Supermind for earth. For it was taken for granted that this world is meant to be given up, and it is *jaḍa*, eternally damned, the field of incurable ignorance, naturally wedded to Evil, or it is a false appearance, Maya. All have sailed, and even now those who profess the religions of different sects sail, in the same boat. None has had this conception—the idea itself that the world can be changed, and made the manifest dwelling-place of the Divine.

So we have come to the closing part of the theme that there has been neither a conception of anything similar to the Supramental ideal, nor any notable endeavour in the past for which there is textual evidence, nor even the feeble testimony of tradition that the Truth-Light can come down for earth.

### **The Aurobindonian Ideal of the Supermind and Its Descent**

Now about the term Supermind used by Sri Aurobindo: in the hierarchy of planes it is Mahas, the fourth term, *vyāhṛti*, above the triple world of our being—matter, life and mind in the ignorance. As a Truth-principle, it is called Vijnana, a term used in the Taittiriya Upanishad, and it has a definite connotation in the parlance of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and philosophy. Vijnana, ordinarily in classical Sanskrit, at any rate in the Buddhist and post-Buddhist Sanskrit literature and philosophical works means Buddhi, intellect. Even when the term is used in the Taittiriya Upanishad pundits and scholars take it to denote only Buddhi. But the term Vijnana following the Manomaya Purusha, mental being, in the ancient scripture connotes that which is subtler and higher than the mental. Sri Aurobindo's discerning eye has seen the distinction in sense attached to these terms, Prajnana, Vij-

nana, Sanjnana and others, and has used Vijnana in the sense of Supermind of his description, especially because it is above the mind, and the Manomaya in the Upanishad includes the Buddhi also just as the English word mind includes intellect.

Now let us have some idea of the Upanishad's mention of Vijnana in the context. We know that it is a great dictum of the Upanishad that all this is Brahman, not merely in a general way, as the Chhandogya puts it, but in every detail, as the Svetasvetara Upanishad proclaims: "Thou art man and woman, boy and girl; old and worn thou walkest bent over a staff; thou art the blue bird and the green and the scarlet-eyed..." But this refers obviously to the world that we see around us. But there are other principles of existence, other elements not visible to the outward senses and mind, other worlds behind and above this world of Matter which is not the Sole Reality that is Brahman. The Taittiriya Upanishad says all Matter, *annam*, is Brahman; then subtler and higher is Life, *prāṇa*, that is Brahman; then Mind which is still higher and subtler is Brahman; and above it is Vijnana (Supermind) that is Brahman; and last is Delight, Ananda, that is finally to be realised as Brahman. Now instead of making a general statement, which is true and beneficial in so far as it goes, that all whatever is, is Brahman, the Upanishad makes a broad classification of the principles of Cosmic existence and calls upon the seeker to realise the Brahman in every part of the being, in all elements severally that make up the being, in the universe or the individual and teaches the way of fulfilment.

We can now see how this Upanishad gives a broad basis for the Yoga which does not stop with the radical or basic realisation of the ideal, God, Brahman or Self, but proceeds to realise Him in every aspect of the World-being, and since He is the All, even while not manifest as such, He could manifest himself in the mind, in the life, in the body of matter, and need not stop with manifesting himself in the Soul of man.

One word more about the difference in conception of Vijnana between the Yogis of the Vedanta and ourselves. When they speak of the five sheaths, *koṣa*—matter, *anna*; life, *prāṇa*; mind, *manas*; *vijñāna* and *ānanda*—each successive sheath is concealed in and covered by the preceding one until one reaches the last, *ānanda*, which is not a sheath, though loosely termed so, but the Purusha himself, one gets more and more absorbed within, gains intensity and goes ever deeper to the spiritual being which is the centre and inmost part of the being, the heart, the seat of the Divine Being or Self. At the same time, one gets increasingly gathered up in the intense depths and endeavours to establish himself in the core of his being, which is indeed laudable and indispensable for any serious and genuine Yoga, not to talk of the Supramental. But if we grasp the spirit of the Upanishad and its elucidation by Sri Aurobindo, our conception and image of the sheaths, which are true and necessary indeed for inward development, give place to a larger vision of things developing a Cosmic breadth of view in which vast vistas are open before us—the world of matter, itself infinite in spatial extension—a poise of Brahman—the world of life, behind and above it making its presence and activity felt upon it, the world of mind overtopping the world of life and informing it and, through it, living matter, and

still above, far above, the world of Vijnana, the Supermind about which it is not necessary to say anything here.

The mental perception and thought-vision one gains in pondering over the statements of Sri Aurobindo on the planes and worlds of matter, life and mind, not to speak of the higher and still higher ranges beyond the mind—the Overmind, the Supermind—are so overpowering that the ego-bound personality is humbled and dwindles into a nothingness lost in the Impersonality of a global infinitude, or in the infinite variety of the One in the manifold Existence, in the Immensity of Being itself. This, then, is the difference between our conception of the various elements, matter, life and mind, etc. that make up the individual and that of the Vedantin's fivefold sheath of the being.

One more point, small but important, we promised to consider in the opening paragraphs. That is the question of Supermind for the earth. What exactly is meant by the expression "for the earth" must be clearly grasped for the appreciation of the supramental descent. We know that the evolution of the Supermind on earth is brought about by the descent of the Supermind, with something substantial of the splendour in its plenary home above. Then, when it so descends, it does come into the earth-consciousness, and is to become part of it, the central and dominant part.

This is what we mean by the Supermind for earth, and as I had occasion to say elsewhere, the earth does not welcome and lodge the Supermind in her dark and dense body of inert matter, *annam*, nor into her life, *prāna*, in the vegetable kingdom, nor in her crude mind in the lower or higher animal, man. She receives it in her best developed part, in the most highly evolved element which is the aspiring soul in the human kind. Here too it is not that all individuals of the kind are at first prepared and suited to receive, accept and hold the higher spiritual principle of Supermind in its descent into the evolutionary earth-nature. The choice, therefore, falls upon that human vessel which is most ready and born for it, the being in whom the flame of Aspiration mounts up from Earth to Heaven solely for the Divine Descent to the exclusion of everything else. For it is he who can and does lay bare absolutely open without reserve all the elements of his being surrendered to the Will and Power of the descending Light of the Truth-Consciousness, that it may establish itself as the ruling Divine principle of human life on earth. From such a one there flow, like light from the sun, the influence, the light and power of the now settled Supermind transmitted to those who in the heights of their being are prepared or born competent to receive them. Well has it been said that the dawn breaks upon the peaks when the valleys are still dark in the night.

We have come to the end. What has been stated should go far to clear the doubts that may linger in the earnest mind about the past achievements and the present endeavour in the realm of the Spirit. The achievements of the ancients, especially of the Vedic mystics, are nothing short of marvels. But to say this is not the same as to admit that nothing more was left to be done by posterity. There are indeed certain types of men representing the forces of atavism in the extreme, who would

and do go so far as to say that all that was to be discovered and taught is to be found in the Vedanta, the Gita, the Upanishads and nothing new can be found, said or propounded that could be of substantial benefit to man in the field of the Spirit, Religion, Philosophy. But, then, theirs is the logic of Caliph Omar who, historians tell us, gave orders for destroying the famous Alexandria Library on this ground: "If the writings of the Greeks agree with the Book of God, they are superfluous, therefore useless and need not be preserved; if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed."

Therefore it is only for the seeker, for the expanding intelligence, not for the narrow mind that moves in trodden grooves, that the question discussed here can be of some use and interest.

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## MEMORY OF THE FUTURE

### Sonnet before Sunrise to the City of Dawn rising in India

THE Camp that dreams of being the Divine's  
 is still asleep; and you, O City, rest  
 in memories of Dawn, its potent signs  
 that will imbue this musing isle of the blest

when you have realised your Self, your free  
 soul know. Hushed in the memoried Presence here  
 who fragrant walks the night, its Power to be  
 the Future flowers amidst the trees; and near,

its farthest fondest hope though yet unseen,  
 touches remembrance. Have we not known delight  
 in you some life before? Have we not been  
 amongst your people in your courts of Light

when Dawn first opened like a bud unfurled  
 to show in our own hearts your bright new world?

SEYRIL

Mâtrimandir Camp, *Peace*, AUROVILLE



# THE DEVELOPMENT OF SRI AUROBINDO'S SPIRITUAL SYSTEM AND THE MOTHER'S CONTRIBUTION TO IT

## I

SRI Aurobindo and the Mother followed from the beginning the same Yogic process of integral development towards an identical goal of spiritual manifestation. But they followed it according to their own psychological and cultural circumstances, with some variations of initial stress and route. Neither the vision nor the spiritual practice was complete from the start. They grew with the years, and from time to time fresh shades were added, fresh vistas opened.

Even though Sri Aurobindo was an Avatar of the Supermind, he manifested as a representative of evolutionary humanity and it is but natural that he should undergo the travail of evolution and trace its steps for us by a gradual attainment and realisation of his own origin. Thus alone could he be a pioneer and a model for us. And the mode of self-revelation chosen for his Avatarhood explains the progression of meaning we find in his use of one of the key-words of his Integral Yoga: "Supermind."

In the days of his monthly periodical *Arya* (1914-1921) he took all the ranges of spiritual dynamism above the mind as different statuses of the Supermind, the Supramental being a continuous climb "overhead" from light to greater and more dynamic light of Perfection. The terms "super" and "supra" were used in the literal connotation of "above"—except that they would not refer to the static Ineffable, the silent "quality-less" Brahman, the sheer Nirvana, which also is beyond the level of mentality.

One quotation should suffice to show the general comprehensive sense of the *Arya's* Supermind: "The highest organised centre of our embodied being and of its action in the body is the supreme mental centre figured by the Yogic symbol of the thousand-petalled lotus, *sahasradala*, and it is at its top and summit that there is the direct communication with the supramental levels."<sup>1</sup>

Compare this statement with the various references made nearly twenty years later to the *chakra* concerned:

(1) "...the thousand-petalled lotus—*sahasradala*—above commands the higher thinking mind, houses the still higher illumined mind and at the highest opens to the intuition through which or else by an overflowing directness the overmind can have with the rest communication or an immediate contact."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *On Yoga I: The Synthesis of Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1955), p. 919. This book was partially revised by Sri Aurobindo at a fairly later period than 1914-1921. Only the unrevised portions remaining would illustrate our point.

<sup>2</sup> *On Yoga II, Tome One* (1958), p. 369.

(2) "...the thousand-petalled lotus above the head...commanding the higher thinking mind and the illumined mind and opening upwards to the intuition and overmind."<sup>1</sup>

(3) "...the thousand-petalled lotus...where are centralised the thinking mind and higher intelligence communicating with the greater mind planes (illumined mind, intuition, overmind) above."<sup>2</sup>

(4) "...the *sahasradala* which centralises spiritual mind, higher mind, intuitive mind and acts as a receiving station for the intuition proper and overmind."<sup>3</sup>

(5) "... the *sahasradala padma* through which the higher intuition, illumined mind and overmind all pass their rays."<sup>4</sup>

It is overwhelmingly borne in on us that, when a number of overhead planes came to be distinguished among themselves and from the Supermind, the Supermind is the one plane conspicuously absent in relation to what the *sahasradala* communicates with and receives from among the levels above the mind. The levels other than the Supermind are called by particular names and never labelled in general as "supramental". On the contrary, as our third extract proves, they are spoken of as "the greater mind planes"; so, unlike as when the *sahasradala* is mentioned in the *Arya*-days, the label "supramental" would be a sheer misnomer for them and could never be applied either to "the higher thinking mind", "the illumined mind", "the intuition proper" or even "the overmind".

Quite frankly and explicitly a letter of Sri Aurobindo's on 24 October 1934 puts the early situation in regard to general appraisal and nomenclature. It comments on a person's experience: "What he probably means by the supramental is the Above Mind—what I now call Illumined Mind—Intuition—Overmind. I used to make that confusion myself."<sup>5</sup>

We have said "general appraisal and nomenclature" because there is no uncertainty about Sri Aurobindo's knowledge in a broad manner, when he was writing the *Arya*, of the whole Above-Mind range, including, as a letter<sup>6</sup> concerning the last chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* in the *Arya*, makes clear, "the highest Supermind or Divine Gnosis...quite above" all the levels he then classified as also supramental.

In one place in the *Arya*,<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo uses the term "Overmind" as a synonym for "Supermind", as is clear from a reference elsewhere<sup>8</sup> in the same series of essays on the future poetry. Thus he has the phrase: "...nearer to the direct vision and word of the Overmind from which all creative inspiration comes", as well as the sentence: "The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a Supermind which sees things in

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>5</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1953), p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>7</sup> The chapter "The Ideal Spirit of Poetry" in the issue of 15 August 1919. The context is on p. 291 in the later publication, *The Future Poetry* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1954).

<sup>8</sup> *The Future Poetry*, p. 392, the chapter "The Word and the Spirit"

their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity....” So it is not correct to say that the *Arya* is quite devoid of the appellation “Overmind”. But the usage recalls, though in a different psychological context, the Overmind-Supermind equivalence in Sri Aurobindo’s first employment of the two terms in very early days previous to his arrival in Pondicherry.<sup>1</sup>

He was translating the Gita during his Baroda period. Verses 49-50 of Chapter 2 ran: “For far lower is action than the Yoga of the Supermind; in the Supermind seek thy refuge, for this is a mean and pitiful thing that a man should work for success and renown. The man whose Supermind is in Yoga casteth from him even in this world both righteousness and sin...” Verse 63 of the same Chapter is rendered: “...And when memory faileth, the Overmind is destroyed and by the ruin of the Overmind the soul goeth to its perdition.” Then there is verse 42 in Chapter 3: “High, say the wise, reign the senses but the heart is higher than they, and the Overmind is higher than the heart; he who is higher than the Overmind, that is HE.” As is evident from his later *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo means in all these instances the higher intelligence or superior mind in man, the Buddhi or intellect, what he also called “the intelligent will”. Here is no going beyond the mental plane.

It is not easy to pinpoint the time of the radical distinction which he later habitually made between the two beyond-mind ranges of consciousness concerned. The earliest published occurrence of the distinction from his own pen seems to be in a letter of 16 April 1931: “The Indian systems did not distinguish between two quite different powers and levels of consciousness, one which we can call Overmind and the other the true Supermind or Divine Gnosis...”<sup>2</sup> But the Mother has recounted how, some months after 24 November 1926 (which was a landmark in the Integral Yoga), he told her that the divine world she was ready to precipitate upon earth was not the Supermind but the Overmind and that he wanted the former and not the latter. This shows that in the wake of 24 November 1926 the word “Overmind” had already come into use to set apart the Supermind from the other planes which are above the mental and to mark the highest plane below the supramental.

However, it is doubtful whether the radical distinction between Overmind and Supermind was reached before 24 November. It is even conceivable that what happened on that fateful day was originally taken to be the descent of the Supermind into Sri Aurobindo’s body rather than that of the Overmind as afterwards clarified.

The reasons prompting the notion on our part may be briefly enumerated. First, we may attend to some reports. In early November 1926 we have A.B. Purani recording Sri Aurobindo’s words: “I am trying to bring down the Supramental; things will happen; conditions for its descent will be created...”<sup>3</sup> On 6 November he notes Sri Aurobindo saying: “I spoke about the world of the Gods because not to speak of it

<sup>1</sup> *Mother India*, November 24, 1975, p. 883: “Sri Aurobindo’s First Use of the Terms ‘Supermind’ and ‘Overmind’.”

<sup>2</sup> *The Riddle of This World* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta 1933), pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Talks*, Second Series (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1961), p. 293.

would be dangerous. I spoke of it so that the mind might understand the thing if it came down. I am trying to bring it down into the physical as it can no longer be delayed, and then things may happen..."<sup>1</sup> Taken in conjunction with the other statement, "the world of the Gods" shows itself as a part of the Supermind, a very high part though not necessarily the highest. A basically corresponding version of what Purani has reported is available from the notes of V. Chidanandam for the same month: "I did not speak of many of these things before, for then it was dangerous. Now not to speak of them may be dangerous, for I am pulling down the supramental into the physical...(which) means the coming of the supramental Purusha, the supramental Principle and also supramental beings and personalities. It can be delayed no longer..."<sup>2</sup> The "supramental beings and personalities" appear to be identical with the "Gods" whose world was sought to be brought down.

There is only one issue which might raise some misgiving. In *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Purani writes: "From the trend of the evening talks just before and after 15 August 1926 it was becoming clear that the importance of a link between the highest supermind and mind was being emphasized. Sri Aurobindo called this link the Overmind."<sup>3</sup> The suggestion is that Sri Aurobindo actually used the designation "Overmind" in that period and demarcated the Overmind plane from the Supramental. But nowhere in *Evening Talks* is the designation to be met with. Nor anywhere, except for one context, is the "link"—the world of the Gods—divided from the Supermind. This single context, reproduced like all the others from memory and called "Summary of some evening talks about the descent of the Gods in November 1926, i.e. before 24th Nov. 1926", runs:

"There is the Supreme beyond description, who manifests himself as Sat, Chit, Ananda; in this Sat is the universal individuality of beings. Then comes the Supermind with its four Maha Shaktis, great powers. In the Supermind unity is the governing principle.

"Then comes the world of the Gods, below the Supermind and behind the manifestation. The Gods of Hindu culture—Shiva, Vishnu, etc.—are names and representations in the mind but they point to the Gods who represent the Divine Principles governing the manifestation of the universe. There is a hierarchy of these beings.

"Below this is the manifested universe. The purpose of this is to go back to the Ananda."<sup>4</sup>

The question for us is: Did Sri Aurobindo really put the world of the Gods below the Supermind? Purani's statement in *The Life* speaks of "a link between the highest supermind and mind." The epithet "highest" (used later by the Master similarly in his remarks on some last writings in the *Arya*) is of crucial moment. It brings up the vision of supramental degrees. Below the Supermind which can be considered "high-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> "Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk", *Mother India* (Pondicherry), July 1970, p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1978), p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Pp. 292-3.

est", there can be a lesser range of supramental existence. The "link" can be regarded as such a range. The context which is our sole stumbling-block would stop being obstructive if in the three places where "Supermind" occurs we attached to the noun the epithet "highest". The world of the Gods would then be subordinate to the highest Supermind without itself ceasing to be supramental. And this is precisely what we can demonstrate to be the case from a close study of the talks before 24 November.

On 17 August Sri Aurobindo speaks of the first condition for ascending to the plane of the Gods: you cannot approach "the true Gods" with "your ego".<sup>1</sup> Then he says that "Gods" is a very wide term and there are Gods on every plane: *e.g.*, vital Gods.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently he mentions the higher mental plane as the one up to which goes the conception of the Gods worshipped by the Hindus.<sup>3</sup> But about "the true Gods" there are two illuminating snatches of conversation confirming each other. One is in the same talk of 17 August:

DISCIPLE: Can we say that the true Gods are the powers of the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are the personalities of the Divine.

DISCIPLE: On what plane are they?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are on the Supramental plane and above.<sup>4</sup>

The other snatch comes on 24 August:

DISCIPLE: The world of the true Gods, you said, is the Supramental.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is somewhere there.

DISCIPLE: Is it *in* the Supramental or does it go even beyond it?

SRI AUROBINDO: It begins in the Supermind and goes further.<sup>5</sup>

In view of the repeated assertion that the Supermind is the initial *locus* of "the true Gods", the critical query must be: Are these Gods the ones whose descent was being emphasized as the needed link between the mind and the highest Supermind? We have to remember that in the obstructive context the Supermind is characterised by "its Four Maha Shaktis" and below it is put "the world of the Gods...behind the manifestation". No Gods are attributed to the plane of the Maha Shaktis. May we not conclude that "the true Gods" who are termed "the personalities of the Divine" and are placed "on the Supramental plane" and whose plane "begins in the Supermind and goes further"—may we not conclude that these "true Gods" belong to a Supramental level below the highest which is that of the "four Maha Shaktis"? The answer seems to be a firm "Yes"—and such an affirmative appears to be clinched when we listen to the conversation on 9 November 1926:

DISCIPLE: Do you promise that the world of the Gods will descend?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't promise anything. If the Supramental comes down: that is what I say.<sup>6</sup>

Here the coming down of the Supermind is made the condition for the descending of the world of the Gods. Evidently, the Supermind's first touch-down would signalise that the world of the Gods has descended.

<sup>1</sup> P. 283.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>3</sup> P. 285.    <sup>4</sup> P. 284.    <sup>5</sup> P. 287.    <sup>6</sup> P. 296.

With the ground thus cleared, we may move to our second reason. There is the exclamation of Datta (Miss Dorothy Hodgson), one of those present on the occasion of the descent of "the world of the Gods". Here we have three testimonies. Purani makes her cry out by inspiration in the pervading silence: "The Lord has descended into the physical today."<sup>1</sup> Rajani Palit writes: "Now Datta came out, inspired, and declared: 'The Master has conquered death, decay, hunger and sleep.'<sup>2</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta tells us: "Datta...suddenly exclaimed at the top of her voice, as though an inspired Prophetess of the old mysteries, 'The Lord has descended. He has conquered death and sorrow. He has brought down immortality.'<sup>3</sup> Obviously, a Supreme Consciousness is indicated, beginning on earth a new life in which the capacities associated by Sri Aurobindo with the Supermind at its highest would in the end be naturally at play. The Overmind at its utmost is specifically said by Sri Aurobindo to bring a great deal of immunity and even a phenomenal longevity but never absolute security and perpetuity as if the physical being's *svadharma*, self-law, were to be immortal. The Mother's observance of 26 November that very year as "the Immortality Day"<sup>4</sup> is a further index to the emphatic sense of an all-transformative Power poised at the start of its physical work. The ultimate Dynamic Divinity is understood to have descended into the body of Sri Aurobindo (and therefore also into that of the Mother).

Thirdly, we have to look at the name given to 24 November 1926: "the Siddhi Day." "Siddhi" means "Perfection", "Fulfilment", "The accomplishment of one's spiritual goal." The day is also known as "The Victory Day". Surely for Sri Aurobindo, the Victory, the Perfection and Fulfilment can only be related to his goal which is nothing else than the descent of the Supermind into the body promising a Divine Life upon earth. Referring to his own Sadhana for the Supermind's descent, Sri Aurobindo says on 15 August 1925, his forty-third birthday: "I am not doing an isolated Yoga...It is true that my Yoga is not for humanity [it is for the Divine], but it is not for myself either; of course, my attaining to the Siddhi is the preliminary condition to others being able to attain it."<sup>5</sup> An occasion deserving to be called the Siddhi Day in Sri Aurobindo's sense has to mark a descent considered as the Supermind's.

This should be axiomatic also from the letter he wrote to his brother Barin in April 1920: "After these fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when this Siddhi will be complete, then I am absolutely certain that God will through me give to others the Siddhi of the Supermind with less effort. Then my real work will begin."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> "24 November, 1926", *Mother India* December 5, 1962, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> "Reminiscences, IX", *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Mother India*, February 21, 1976.

<sup>5</sup> Purani, *Evening Talks*, Second Series, p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 211.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> "24 November, 1926", *Mother India* December 5, 1962, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> "Reminiscences, IX", *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Mother India*, February 21, 1976.

<sup>5</sup> Purani, *Evening Talks*, Second Series, p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 211.

Not on 24 November but some time later Sri Aurobindo must have realised that the Supermind proper had not arrived. What had arrived was distinctly explained by him in several letters in the subsequent period. The one of October 1935 is perhaps the most definite as well as succinct:

“It was the descent of Krishna into the physical.

“Krishna is not the supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.”<sup>1</sup>

About the “Immortality Day” a letter of 5 March 1932 elucidated what actually had been attained: “It was not the immortality of the body, but the consciousness of immortality in the body; that can come with the descent of overmind into Matter or even into the physical mind, or with the touch of the modified Supramental Light on the general physical mind-consciousness. These are preliminary openings, but they are not the Supramental fulfilment in Matter.”<sup>2</sup>

We may now formulate the whole position from the *Arya* period till just after the Siddhi Day. Sri Aurobindo, in his letter of 16 April 1931, has said of “all attempts at the discovery of the dynamic divine Truth”: “I know of none that has not imagined, as soon as it felt the overmind lustres descending, that this was the true illumination, the Gnosis...”<sup>3</sup> He was himself no exception for quite a length of time, although, unlike the others, he was aware of an ascending range in this “Gnosis” and a far-away culmination of it which he later demarcated as the true Supermind. Asked why the Overmind was not clearly distinguished from the Supermind in the *Arya*, he replied on 20 November 1933:

“The distinction has not been made in the *Arya* because at that time what I now call the Overmind was supposed to be an inferior plane of the Supermind. But that was because I was seeing them from the Mind. The true defect of Overmind, the limitation in it which gave rise to a world of Ignorance is seen fully only when one looks at it from the physical consciousness, from the result (Ignorance in Matter) to the cause (Overmind division of the Truth). In its own plane Overmind seems to be only a divided, many-sided play of the Truth, so can easily be taken by the Mind as a supramental province. Mind also when flooded by the Overmind feels itself living in a surprising revelation of Divine Truth. The difficulty comes when we deal with the vital and still more with the physical. Then it becomes imperative to face the difficulty and make a sharp distinction between Overmind and Supermind—for it then becomes evident that the Overmind Power (in spite of its lights and splendours) is not sufficient to overcome the Ignorance because it is itself under the law of Division out of which came the Ignorance. One has to pass beyond and supra-

<sup>1</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> *My Pilgrimage to the Spirit* by Dr. Govindbhai Patel (Gift Publications, Ahmedabad, Revised Edition, 1977), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *The Riddle of This World*, p. 5.



mentalise Overmind so that mind and all the rest may undergo the final change.”<sup>1</sup>

To appraise the situation after the *Arya* period we must ascertain the time at which Sri Aurobindo moved from the mind level to deal with the vital and the physical. In the talk of 6 November 1926 he tells a disciple: “...when you are doing the Sadhana in the mind then outer activities like the *Arya* and writing, etc., can go on. But when I came down to the vital I stopped all that.”<sup>2</sup> Obviously, the *Arya* ceased publication because Sri Aurobindo began to deal with the vital. As a result, his vision of the “overhead” Consciousness underwent some change. But the vital plane did not feel enough the difficulty of the Overmind to achieve transformation. The Overmind’s limitation is seen definitively, as he says, “only when one looks at it from the physical consciousness”. We must find out the period in which the Sadhana came down to the physical no less than to the vital.

On 29 December 1934 he writes to a disciple: “I am myself living in the physical consciousness and have been for several years. At first it was a plunge into the physical—into all its obscurity and inertia, afterwards it was a station in the physical open to the higher and higher consciousness and slowly having fought out in it the struggle of transformation of the physical consciousness with a view to prepare it for the supramental change.”<sup>3</sup> To an inquiry whether with the Sadhana going on in the physical plane, all have to come down into the physical consciousness, Sri Aurobindo answers on 31 December 1934: “It is a little difficult to say whether all have to come down totally into the physical. The Mother and I had to do it because the work could not be otherwise done. We had tried to do it from above through the mind and the higher vital, but it could not be because the sadhaks were not ready to follow—their lower vital and physical refused to share in what was coming down or else misused it and became full of exaggerated and violent reactions. Since then the sadhana as a whole has come down along with us into the physical consciousness...”<sup>4</sup> Two clues are in our hands: the dealing with the physical consciousness has gone on “for several years” before 1934 and it has begun since the time of the sadhaks’ failure to respond to the working Sri Aurobindo and the Mother attempted “from above”.

Did the commencement of the changed action lie in the months immediately succeeding 24 November 1926? It would certainly be “several years” earlier than 1934. Have we any pointer to the type of working tried in those months? There is a significant letter of 18 October 1934:

“...if the Mother were able to bring out the Divine Personalities and Powers into her body and physical being as she was doing for several months without break some years ago, the brightest period in the history of the Ashram, things would be much more easy and all these dangerous attacks that now take place would be dealt

<sup>1</sup> The Centenary Edition, Vol. 26, pp. 369-70

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Talks*, Second Series, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself...*, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 387-8.

with rapidly and would in fact be impossible. In those days when the Mother was either receiving the sadhaks for meditation or otherwise working and concentrating all night and day without sleep and with very irregular food, there was no ill-health and no fatigue in her and things were proceeding with a lightning swiftness. The Power used was not that of the Supermind, but of the Overmind but it was sufficient for what was being done. Afterwards, because the lower vital and the physical of the sadhaks could not follow, the Mother had to push the Divine Personalities and Powers, through which she was doing the action, behind a veil and come down into the physical human level and act according to its conditions and that means difficulty, struggle, illness, ignorance and inertia. All has been for long slow, difficult, almost sterile in appearance, and now it is again becoming possible to go forward. But for the advance to be anything like general or swift in its process, the attitude of the sadhaks, not of a few only, must change..."<sup>1</sup>

Further light is thrown on the subject by a brief exchange between Nirodbaran and Sri Aurobindo on 10 December 1938<sup>2</sup>. Nirod said: "You once spoke of the brilliant period of the Ashram." Sri Aurobindo replied: "Yes, when sadhana was going on in the vital level. Then everything was joy, peace, ananda. And if we had stopped there, we could have started a big religion or a vast organisation. But the real work would have been left unattempted and unachieved."

Everything points to the sequel of the descent on 24 November 1926. The months after the descent were indeed of an almost miraculous nature, culminating in the moment when the Mother, as she told me as well as recounted in one of her talks at the Playground, got what she termed "the Word of Creation", the power to materialise all that she expressed as the thing to be done. A whole unknown world of super-human reality was prepared by her in the subtle dimensions and, as we have already mentioned, she felt ready to precipitate a new creation upon earth. The sequel too we have touched upon. We may elaborate it a little. When she announced to Sri Aurobindo her project, he very calmly dubbed it a creation of the Overmind which would be so dazzling that it might stand for centuries in the way of the Supramental Manifestation. At once she went back to her room, concentrated for a few hours and dissolved the wonder-work that had been on the point of actualisation.

The wonder-work would have been something superimposed on the imperfect human realm. The lower vital and the physical which most fell short of the mark would have missed their proper transformation, their natural evolution by means of the ultimate divinity involved within them and waiting to be evolved under the pressure of the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo's discouragement brought to an end what all who lived near the Mother in those several months have testified as having been the period to which the Master refers in glowing terms. The end signalled a reorientation of the sadhana. Nolini Kanta Gupta reminisces about the period concerned:

"The Mother's endeavour at that time was for a new creation, the creation here

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 283-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Calcutta, 1966), pp. 5-6.

of a new inner world of the Divine Consciousness. She had brought down the Higher Forces, the Gods, into the earth atmosphere, into our inner being and consciousness. A central feature was that she had placed each of us in touch with his inner godhead. Every individual has what may be described as his line of spiritual descent and also ascent; for into each individual consciousness has come down from the supreme Maha Shakti an individual divine being, a particular godhead following a particular line of divine power, *vibhūti*. To bear inwardly the touch of this divinity and found it securely within oneself, to concentrate on it and become one with it, to go on manifesting it in one's outer life, this was the aim of the *sādhanā* at the time. This was a period of extreme concentration and one-pointedness, a 'tortoise phase' of the *sādhanā* one might call it. Like the tortoise one had to gather oneself in, limbs and all, and hide as in a shell by cutting off all outward touches...

"But after following out this line for some distance, the Mother could see that the new creation, even if it came about, would be something narrow and confined to a limited circle, and for the most part effective only for an inner action. But that has not been her aim. The new creation must embrace the entire human race, a new race of men must be created and not merely a small select group. And in that new creation must be included not only the inner being of man but also his vital and physical life. In other words, we have to come down to the lower levels and work for the purification there, in order to raise them beyond themselves by the infusion of the higher consciousness and make them fit instruments for the higher things. We are still continuing with that work, through the 'ups and downs of an uneven path' ...

"We have taken a plunge outwards, identified ourselves with the outer being, a tendency against which the Upanishads have used a word of warning: *parāñchi khāni vyāṅṅnot*, our senses have a natural pull towards the outer things. But this too was necessary and still is. We form part of the world, we are united with it and inseparable. We are an image of the entire world, its symbol and representative. We have to share in its work and suffer its deeds. Even Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have not spared themselves this ..."<sup>1</sup>

We should now have a fair picture of the time when the sadhana had "to come down to the lower levels" and when Sri Aurobindo brought the Overmind's power into action not only on the mind and the life force's higher level where "joy, peace, ananda" resulted from that action, but also on the lower vital and the physical consciousness. Seeking, while poised on these recalcitrant inferior planes, the power of total transformation, he looked for the real starting-point of it in the Supramental, clearly beyond the Overmind Godhead. Only after 24 November 1926 and before he told the Mother that the divine world she was about to materialise was the Overmind instead of the Supermind, did the experience of the deep distinction between the two blaze forth in the Integral Yoga.

This experience changed for Sri Aurobindo the boundaries he had set to the Lower Hemisphere (*aparārdha*) of Reality and the Higher Hemisphere (*parārdha*).

<sup>1</sup> *Mother India*, December 5, 1962, "Reminiscences", IX, pp. 31-2.

The general formulation in the *Arya*-days was as follows: "The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness-Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being; we ascend from Matter through a developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of Supermind towards the divine being. The knot of the two, the higher and the lower hemisphere, is where mind and Supermind meet with a veil between them."<sup>1</sup> The exact significance of this formulation, before the First Part of *The Life Divine* where it figures was revised, emerges from another statement of Sri Aurobindo's in a series that has not received revision. There we obtain a more particular focus on the "veil". In the commentary on the Isha Upanishad's verse on Surya, the Sun of Truth, Sri Aurobindo writes: "The face of this Truth is covered as with a brilliant shield, as with a golden lid: covered, that is to say, from the view of our human consciousness. For we are mental beings and our highest ordinary mental sight is composed of the concepts and percepts of the mind, which are indeed a means of knowledge, rays of the Truth, but not in their nature truth of existence, only truth of form.... We can only arrive at the true Truth, if Surya works in us to remove this brilliant formation of concepts and percepts and replaces them by self-vision and all-vision."<sup>2</sup> The "veil" between the Lower Hemisphere and the Higher is the perceptual and conceptual mental consciousness still unenlightened by what is above it.

This view of Reality's dichotomy changes after the Overmind is sorted out from the Supermind. Now we are told: "A line is drawn between the higher half of the universe of consciousness, *parārdha*, and the lower half, *aparārdha*. The higher half is constituted of Sat, Chit, Ananda, Mahas (the supramental)—the lower half of mind, life, Matter. This line is the intermediary overmind which, though luminous itself, keeps from us the full indivisible supramental Light."<sup>3</sup> About the Overmind we learn: "It is a power, though the highest power, of the lower hemisphere; although its basis is a cosmic unity, its action is an action of division and interaction, an action taking its stand on the play of the multiplicity. Its play is, like that of all Mind, a play of possibilities; although it acts not in the Ignorance but with the knowledge of the truth of these possibilities, yet it works them out through their own independent evolution of their powers. It acts in each cosmic formula according to the fundamental meaning of that formula and is not a power for a dynamic transcendence."<sup>4</sup> Sri Aurobindo, expressing his new vision, tells us: "...we discover a super-conscious cosmic Mind in direct contact with the Supramental Truth-Consciousness, an original intensity determinant of all movements below it and all mental energies, —not Mind as we know it, but an Overmind that covers us with the wide wings of some creative Oversoul this whole lower hemisphere of Knowledge-Ignorance, links it with that greater Truth-Consciousness while yet at the same time with its

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine* (American Edition, 1949), p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> *The Isha Upanishad* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1924), pp 95-6.

<sup>3</sup> *On Yoga II*, Tome One, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup> *The Life Divine*, p. 846

brilliant golden Lid it veils the face of the greater Truth from our sight, intervening with its flood of infinite possibilities as at once an obstacle and a passage in our seeking of the spiritual law of our existence, its highest aim, its secret Reality."<sup>1</sup>

The face of the Isha Upanishad's Surya is now seen as veiled not by our perceptual and conceptual mental consciousness but by the creative superconscious Overmind. The Upper Hemisphere now commences beyond the Overmind plane. That plane is now to be placed at the farther end (the "violet" end, we may say) of a broad spectrum which can be designated Mental in a general sense differing from the restricted sense of the *Arya*-days and even of a later period—a spectrum which bears at its nearer end (the "red" one, so to speak) "Mind as we know it". The Overmind plane marks the summit of the Cosmic Being as distinguished from the Transcendence. The Transcendence begins at the Supermind and completes an ultimate quaternary by holding Bliss (*ānanda*), Consciousness-Force (*chit-tapas*) and Existence (*sat*) at the back of the Supramental (*vijñāna*).

Once the World of the Gods was seen—in the wake of 24 November 1926—not as a province of the Supermind but only as a preparatory stage for the Supermind's descent, the *parārdha* ceased to start immediately above the mind with a rising supramental gradation: the Supermind was pitched far beyond with a ladder of ascending non-supramental knowledge in between.

(*To be continued*)

K. D. SETHNA

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

## MOTHER OF BENGAL

O DARK and holy Mother  
 Who dances through Bengal,  
 Fiery are your footsteps  
 A rapture is your call.  
 Your laughter harsh and vehement  
 With joy cuts through our care  
 Your eyes shot through with frenzy  
 In maddest pity stare  
 Upon a world whose blindness  
 Calls for you to come  
 And dance your love's destruction  
 So that the work be done  
 And all our earth's lost splendour  
 With man again be one,  
 A rapture and a laughter  
 And a golden age begun.

ROGER HARRIS

# WITH MY SWEET MOTHER

## REMINISCENCES BY LALITA

*(Continued from the issue of July 1979)*

4

### Manicuring

SHORTLY after my coming to the Ashram the Mother suddenly asked me, "Do you know manicuring?"

"Yes, Mother dear," I said.

"Then you will come on Friday and do my nails," She said.

So every Friday I went at the appointed time, when the Mother Herself opened the door and took me in. Strange to say, She always treated me as a friend and companion and not as Her child, which greatly surprised me. But later, an old sadhak explained that it must be due to the fact of my having been the Mother's companion in one of my past lives. "Don't you know," he asked me, "that you were Lalita when She was Radha? Otherwise why should Sri Aurobindo mention it when He changed your name?"

I pondered over this, and the more I thought of it the more I saw Radha in the Mother. Besides, the Mother frequently gave me flowers which had a significance connected with Radha such as "Radha's Love", "Opening of the Vital to Radha's Influence", etc.

Every Friday now became a wonderful day for me and I lived in its thought each time for the whole week. At that time there were not many people in the Ashram, so the Mother could give each one of us much more of Her time.

When She called me She would Herself open the door of the Meditation Hall and lead me across that room to the couch (the same one holding the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's joint photo) which was at that time placed against the wall, in the corner between the window and the door to Nirod's present office room.

After sitting comfortably on the couch with Her legs stretched in front of Her, and after I had sat on that carpet near Her, She would give me all the manicuring materials and Her hands. This was a good opportunity for me to tell Her anything I wanted to say, or ask Her things I wanted to know. But I rarely said or asked anything, and the Mother soon passed into a deep trance. When I had finished one hand, I kept holding it quietly till She came out of Her trance and gave me the other hand. Sometimes She would smile at me and tell me the thing She had seen, if it concerned me. The final polishing of Her nails was done by Herself.

She never applied liquid polish but some pink powder which was spread on Her polishing pad. She also gave me a full set of articles used by Her, which I have pre-

served carefully and still have. I remember telling Her once that I had a dream-vision in which I had seen Her as an Egyptian Queen, seated on a throne with an eagle-crown on Her head. I was seated with others on Her right playing a strange musical instrument. It gave me the impression that I was one of this Queen's court musicians.

"It is true," She said. "You were with me when I was a Queen of Egypt."

I believe it was Cleopatra, but I am not quite sure.

But how different was this Cleopatra from what Rider Haggard and others have made of her, I thought. I still remember the dress I was wearing and the small string-instrument I was playing.

In those golden days in the Ashram, time was of no consequence. As She has said somewhere in Her Prayers and Meditations: "And the hours pass away like dreams un-lived."

After I had finished the manicuring I would make my "pranam" to Her, and She would bless me for a long time. Then She would lead me to the door, holding me close, with Her hand round my waist, and mine round Hers, like two intimate friends.

Before opening the door She would say "Au revoir" with Her sweet smile or give me a kiss on the forehead.

I went home feeling extremely happy and lived in the memory of all that had passed and all that She had told me till the next Friday came. I was very aloof throughout the week. I never went anywhere, and hardly spoke to anybody except Amal, Sahana and Dilip.

### Cooking

Both Sahana and myself used to do a little cooking for the Mother, as taught by her. Sahana used to prepare and take daily to the Mother a plate of cheese sandwiches, whereas I used to prepare Ragi biscuits. Sri Aurobindo liked what both of us made.

We had also our special days of cooking. I prepared mushrooms (*les Champignons de Paris*), baked macaroni and vermicelli as taught by the Mother, as well as took some stuffed olives and asparagus for Sri Aurobindo. Sahana was a very good cook, but I do not remember now all the details of her preparations. And there was Mridu, living downstairs in the same house, who used to prepare some Bengali dishes for Sri Aurobindo. Her loochis were much liked by Him, I believe.

Vaun Macpheeter grew some asparagus-shoots for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. When they were ready, Jeannette prepared and took them to the Mother who offered them to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo smiled and said, "I will have to take a magnifying glass to see what they are like" and the Mother laughed. They were very tiny. In connection with Jeannette I once asked the Mother why she was not given some proper work to do, and the Mother said, "You see, Lalita, to those who have worked very hard before coming here I allow an easier life, but to those who have

been lazy or who haven't worked much, I give as much work as they can do without tiring."

When I was staying in Huta House, after finishing everything I used to light my kerosene lamp and embroider the Mother's crowns. In those days the electricity was switched off all over the town by 9 o'clock at night, so we had to use our lanterns after that.

One day the Mother saw a light in my room very late, so She asked me, "What were you doing at so late an hour?"

"I was embroidering Your crown, Mother," I said .

"Doing embroidery so late at night?" She asked. "Child, you will spoil your eyes. Don't you feel sleepy?"

"No, Mother dear," I replied, "not at all. I can work the whole night long and feel neither tired nor sleepy." The Mother was surprised and said with a smile, "Even if you don't feel sleepy, you must lie down with your eyes closed for five or six hours to give both your eyes and your body complete rest."

This reminds me of the time when we used to go to the Meditation Hall at midnight to meditate with the Mother. She looked so radiant and glorious in Her different aspects. The few sadhaks who were there had their own characteristic ways of sitting and meditating. Amal drew some amusing pictures of all of us.

We were wide-awake at midnight and hardly slept for a few hours after that. Our sadhana was on the higher planes in those golden days, so we had very little of "tamas."

### Illness

The Mother never approved of our taking medicines and running to the doctor each time we had an illness.

Once I had a severe cold which I could not cure, so I went to the Mother and told Her about it. "You are in good company," She said. "Sri Aurobindo also has a cold."

"But what is the remedy?" I asked. "Oh, the remedy?" She said, and looked far away for a few seconds and then said, "Every morning you sit outside on the terrace with your back to the sun, so that the sun's rays may fall upon the region of the lungs. Keep quiet for some time and then you say, 'Fill my being with Thy Light'. Take in a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds and let it out slowly. Then again you say, 'Fill my being with Thy Love', and do the same kind of breathing. Finally you say, 'Fill my being with Thy Life' and repeat the breathing exercise. Go on for some time, keeping very quiet and concentrated, and offering your whole being to the Divine, and all this trouble will disappear." She blessed me and let me go after I had made my "pranam" to Her, and received Her sweet smile.

I followed Her advice to the letter, and not only did the cold disappear, but I forgot what it was like to have fever. When I told the Mother about it She said, "It is very good. Forget about it." Much later I told the Mother: "Both You and the Lord have so much power. Why don't you work on us with it preventing all illness,



etc." She said, "It is true that we have a great power. If I wanted I could give you blue eyes and fair hair. But the Divine does not work by miracles." What a shame! I thought. How nice it would have been to have blue eyes and fair hair!

### **The Mother's Care**

The Mother was very careful as to what we were taking if we were not well, and She knew the medicine so well that She would never allow us to take anything which might have a bad effect later.

Once my papa had sent me a patent medicine for my diarrhoea which I had been taking in Bombay. I showed it to the Mother who studied the formula and then said, "It is better you don't take this—it contains opium." So I did not take it.

The glass of lime juice or coconut water which She Herself gave me daily from Her fridge was the best medicine for me and kept me strong and free from all illness.

I had a big pimple on my face once and I showed it to the Mother and asked for some ointment or cream for it. "It is not these things that will cure you," said the Mother, "but the renunciation of a desire of yours." I was surprised, and prayed for Her help to do it, and She said, "My help is always there, but you must be sincere and open to it."

Every month I had much pain during the first day or two of my menstruation period. I continued the Mother's work as usual, and when I was at home I used to lie down with a hot water bag on the lower abdomen. One day the Mother said to me, "I have spoken to Sri Aurobindo about this trouble, so it will surely be cured."

"To Sri Aurobindo?" I asked in a shocked manner.

"Why not?" She asked. "Do you think that Sri Aurobindo looks at things from the low human way? To Him a pain in the head or chest or any other part of the body is just the same, so you need not feel so shocked about it."

This was a good lesson to me and later, when the Mother was ill and Sri Aurobindo was attending to all our correspondence, I had no hesitation in letting Him know anything. I told my divine Parents everything, even when I was in Bombay and writing to Them. It often happened that even before my letter reached Them my difficulty was solved.

### **You Cannot Deceive the Divine**

The Mother asked me once to go to X's house and find out if he had been drinking. "I have a strong impression that he is doing it on the sly," She said, "so I want you to find out and tell me."

X had been my friend, so there was no difficulty in going to the place where he lived. As soon as I entered his rooms I felt a very bad atmosphere. Everything was disarranged and in a mess. He looked dark and untidy and was very much surprised to see me. He was simply reeking with liquor.

After asking about his health and of his companion I said that I had a lot of work to do and left the place.

I went to the Mother and told Her everything and She said, "I knew about it, but I wanted an outer confirmation. It is *impossible* to deceive me."

X left the Ashram soon after this.

### Being Ourselves

The Mother never liked us imitating anybody. In this connection one incident comes to my mind which may be useful to all.

One day I told the Mother that many people were doing a certain thing (I have forgotten what) but I was not able to do it, so I needed Her help. "What?" said the Mother in a surprised tone. "You want to do it because others are doing it! What does it matter to you if the whole world is walking on its head with its feet up in the air? Tell yourself that you will be *Lalita*, and nothing else, and do what *Lalita* has to do, and nothing else."

This was a good lesson to me. Thanking Her for it, I made my "pranam" to Her and came away.

### Old at Twenty-five

When I was twenty-five or so, once I told the Mother that I was quite old and that I had seen and experienced everything that life had to offer.

"Really?" said the Mother. "Old at twenty-five! If I were as young as you and had my whole life before me, I would make the best possible use of it by dedicating it to the Divine."

I was carrying the burden of my past on my shoulders which was hindering my progress, so the Mother told me, "Every morning when you take your bath, imagine that you are washing away all your past, and that you are a new person." This I did day after day and a time came when I could not recollect the past even if I tried to do it. I felt much happier and lighter.

### "Forgive and Forget"

A certain person had written some false and nasty things about me to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The Mother always told me of such things and even showed the letters to keep me on my guard, because in those days I never cared to look or to speak to anybody except those with whom I worked.

Some time later, the same person was in some serious trouble and came to me. He requested me to tell the Mother about it.

"What?" said the Mother when I spoke to Her. "He said those nasty things about you and now you come and ask me to help him?"

"Oh!" I said, "I had forgotten all about it."

The Mother was very pleased and smiling sweetly She told me that that was the right thing to do. "You must never keep a grudge or ill-feeling against anybody." I was very happy to hear this.

### **Upset About Small Things**

When I was upset about a small thing the Mother told me, in effect:

"Go to the sea beach, lie on the sand, look at the vast expanse of water in front of you and let your consciousness become as wide as the ocean.

"Go to your terrace at night and gaze at the stars. Think of the infinity of space in which the stars are moving, each star a world by itself, and there are millions and millions of them, only a few of which we have seen with our telescopes. Imagine the marvels that are in time and space, which is only a tiny part of the manifestation of the Divine. He is so much more than all this, He whom we are here to realise, and with whom we have to unite in consciousness. You must have noticed the Milky Way in the sky. How many stars are there that we have seen? And how many years it has taken for their light to reach us? How many millions of them are there which most probably we shall never see, even with our latest inventions? Just think of all this and you will soon feel the absurdity of your small troubles."

I felt so consoled and uplifted by these words of the Mother that I forgot my troubles, and even laughed at them thereafter.

From that very evening I did exactly as I was told and as I gazed at the stars. I knew they were moving at a fast speed and yet they did it so harmoniously and quietly as if they had all eternity in front of them. This helped in widening my consciousness and raising it above petty obstacles.

*(To be continued)*

# SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

(Continued from the issue of July 1979)

4 (contd.)

## The Mother's Conception of Teaching

Let us have a brief look at the way Norman made his class extremely interesting.

For the teaching of language he started giving lessons from Sri Aurobindo's poetry. He spoke with the children in English, narrated stories in English and created in them an interest in play-acting and recitation. All this made the class lively and kindled in the children the flame of curiosity and eagerness to know, with the result that in the course of one year they lost all shyness and began to express themselves in a foreign tongue.

This system continues even today, enabling the infants to express themselves in English or French with ease. Teachers were asked to send their reports to the Mother of the methods employed by them to teach.

It was in December 1945 that Norman made the Ashram his home and the Mother assigned to him the work of teaching. His first report on record is dated December 12, 1945. We can perhaps get some idea of the earnest approach he made to teaching, if we examine the correspondence that passed between him and the Mother right from the start.

"I have spent half an hour with each 'group' this morning mostly reading Sri Aurobindo's poems, to enable the pupils to get accustomed to my voice and intonation.

"I explained the necessity of talking slower than they are accustomed, a common fault, I think, with most of them.

"I noticed that the shyness encountered yesterday was not so apparent today in the pupils; I was happy to feel they had accepted me."

The Mother: "Surely they have, and soon they will consider you as a good friend." (14.12.1945)

"Today I have spent the whole time (1 hr. 20 min.) with 'A Group' first reading stories to them; after which I gave them some dictation, this I corrected in the classroom taking each one individually.

"The mistakes made were consistent with what an English child would make of the same age. Some errors in the use of 'there' and 'their'. Also the ei in 'receive', which was merely a case of reminding them of the rule (*i.e.*) i before e except after c. These things were discussed and I felt they were really absorbed."

The Mother: "This is very good, I am convinced the children will make speedy progress." (15.12.1945).

"Today has been a day of assimilation for me and in the end my thoughts turn to the coming examinations. I am trying to think of the method to use; if only questions are asked of each pupil, I feel this may be somewhat unfair to some, who are less confident. I would suggest the exams contain: Reading (10 marks), Questions (10 marks), Dictation (10 marks).

"The dictation need only be a few lines, but perhaps this may clash with another part of the examination?"

The Mother: "What you say is quite true from the point of view of the fairness in the examination. But the children had not been told that they would be examined and got very nervous when they heard they would be examined. To reassure them we decided to have only an oral test this year. Next year it will be more complete." (16.12.1945)

"It is quite easy to see how this class has improved, as there are only seven in the class. But I think it is perhaps mainly because they are so young. I asked them if they remembered a rhyme they had learned days ago; they all knew it. Today I wrote on the black board a little poem, beginning:

There was a little frog,  
He jumped, jumped, jumped;  
He jumped to his home  
In the pond.

"There were five verses, which means they have five verbs imprinted on their minds."

The Mother: "Very good". (19.1.1946)

Here is a very suggestive extract from Sri Aurobindo's writings.

"The mind should be accustomed first to notice the word thoroughly, its form, sound and sense, then to compare the form with other similar forms in the points of similarity and difference... thus forming the foundation of the literary and the syntactical faculties."

On January 10, 1946 the same teacher reported:

"This afternoon I took the classes E.2 and E.3. First I revised words which they had found difficult last time; then read them the story of 'Tom, the Water Baby', afterwards asking questions about the story. I spent the rest of the lesson on pronunciation, and in the phrasing of their replies. I wrote phrases on the blackboard and they read these out. I took special care with w's, u's and b's which they find most difficult. Phrases like 'In which we all wander' were repeated over and over again until they caught the right intonation."

The Mother: "This is indeed a very good exercise." (10.1.46)

"This morning it was the little ones, E.1. I took another animal story, 'The Lion and the Mouse'. One marked improvement I can see in these little ones is that they can all understand *what I say now*, whereas before they could not. I asked questions such as, 'What countries do lions live in? Why couldn't the lion gnaw the rope itself? What, then, can a small mouse do that a big lion cannot?'

“Write the opposites to little, tiny, small, wee, weak, etc.

“They are so eager to answer, that if I ask one a question they all want to answer it. The latter part of the lesson I devoted to pronunciation. All my love and gratitude for this work, Mother dear.”

The Mother: “My dear child, I am so very happy with the way in which you do the work.” (16.1.1946)

“Today I took an animal story in the ‘Realm of Reading’ Series; I read the story and then asked questions. I paid particular attention to pronunciation.

“I then spent some time in explaining the *value of words*, for example, I used the word ‘Yes’ and showed how in some cases it could even mean ‘No’. In this they showed a lively interest. But, Mother, there seemed a heavy atmosphere over the class, and I felt as if I had to fight to maintain the interest, but perhaps this had something to do with me.”

The Mother: “It happens often that the children are not attentive, but all their moods are passing and this like the rest.” (21.1.46).

“This morning the first half of the period I spent with Group ‘C’ reading Tolstoy’s story ‘The Candle’. The children stopped me when we came to words or sentences they did not understand, and I explained. Quite a few of the words were Russian, but fortunately I knew their meaning. The second half of the period was with Group ‘B’. Here they were learning four of Sri Aurobindo’s poems, viz. *Invitation, Who, A Tree, and God*, for the examination. I read them through, and then they asked me to explain various passages in the poems.

“I had a moment’s hesitation as to whether I was qualified to impart to them my interpretation of the poems. However, also in the moment of hesitation, I remembered quite forcibly that it was through the love of Sri Aurobindo’s writings and a realisation of their truth that I now found myself in their midst.

“Then I decided I would explain the poems to them as naturally and simply as possible; in this I felt I was right, but I should like your guidance on this in writing.”

The Mother: “You did quite well to explain. It is very useful for them.” (17.12.45).

“Today I started with such joy that I felt your whole presence pervading me. E.1 consists of 7 children, on an average age of 7 to 8 years. I took three short Tibetan fairy stories which run consecutively. They were simple stories about animals. The children showed delight at the mischievous Mr. Hare that saves the situation against Mr. Wolf and Mr. Fox. The children stopped me when there was a word they did not understand. This I wrote on the blackboard and explained its meaning, asking them to give me an example using the word.

“After the stories were told we spent the last 20 minutes of the lesson talking about the various characters. At the end of the lesson I asked the class casually, ‘Did you like your lesson?’ Only Gauri answered saying, ‘This was not a lesson, it was a play.’

“Mother, my one aspiration is to be a perfect instrument in thy hands and I feel

some confidence that slowly I shall attain this. At the moment I feel a tremendous happiness such as I have never known before. This may, I realise, pass but may the memory of it always be there, to enable me to do thy will as thou wouldst have it done, and grant that I may always give all of myself to thy service."

The Mother: "I am sure everything will be all right and the children will enjoy their lessons very much." (26.I.46)

It is difficult to check the temptation to quote a few more pages out of hundreds preserved by Norman as treasures. The following is about the first lecture to the teachers.

"This morning I had nothing to do between 9 and 10 a.m., so I went to my room in Golconde and sat quietly with the express purpose of opening myself to you, Mother. I had the idea of going to the Ashram to talk with Pavitrā about the school. At the time I could not see why. However, I went and waited sometime by the notice-board. After about ten minutes Pavitra came and to my joy was also expecting me. Regarding our conversation he will no doubt tell you."

The Mother: "Yes, Pavitra told me about your plans and I fully approve of them. Pavitra will call you to make the necessary arrangements for the teachers and he will also speak to Sisir." (26.I.46)

"I met Pavitra this morning and he told me of your approval and your ideas for me to lecture to the teachers and the students on organisation. It was my first intention to only lecture to the students, and I did not presume that I was qualified to do so in any higher capacity. This may have been false modesty or even introvert egoism. However, practical thoughts and suggestions have been crowding my mind, and I have already written them down as a basis for a lecture to the teachers. Pavitra suggested I give the first lecture to the teachers next Sunday. So should I leave it until the middle of the week before I submit these notes to you for your comments? The 'foreword' to the notes I have made reads:

"Sometimes it is necessary for teachers to take a refresher course; this is the trend with modern methods of education. But here it is only necessary to originate a plan of organisation, so that the full effort and resourcefulness of the teachers can be brought to bear on the preparation, presentation and operation of the lesson. The object of this lecture is to organise ourselves for this greater effort which is now necessary. The Divine Purpose of our concerted effort we all know full well. It is also, however, the Mother's wish that we should always be aware of needed improvement so that l'Ecole d'Ashram should gradually be brought into line with the modern trend and approach to education. It is now our duty to keep up-to-date with improved methods of teaching and improved means of transmitting our knowledge to the students. It is necessary that India catch up with the spirit of the time—Sri Aurobindo.

"Every teacher has his own particular way of teaching. He should however constantly ask himself whether this is the method that appeals to him or to the student."

In his talk the same teacher suggested that notes should be of equal interest to teachers and students, that the study-period should be supervised, that "dull" aspects of any subject should be approached from a new angle, preferably a graphic one and finally he reminded his fellow-teachers that simple and dramatic explanations appealed to the child's photographic memory.

"Forgive me for the length of this report. Perhaps my enthusiasm has run away with me. If I have the wrong ideas forgive also my ignorance."

THE MOTHER: "It is quite all right."

Book-knowledge stays in the mind, culture flows into life. It is worthwhile noting how conditions were created in which learning and culture thrived together. The emphasis on drama was first laid in Norman's English class. On November 28, 1946 he wrote:

"Today I spent the first half of the lesson explaining the corrections I had made in their homework. I have found that this is one way by which I can give individual attention in a large class and all may be benefited by the correction of mistakes. The second half was spent with the *little play*.

"I quickly formed a *small stage* by moving the teacher's table, and after choosing the characters we did the first reading. Their enthusiasm and joy in doing this was wonderful. I finished the lesson by giving them a little idea of 'stagecraft', drawing diagrams on the blackboard, which they copied into their books."

THE MOTHER: "How very nice. I feel sure it will be a success."

"As with the other classes, they have also received their new books. I read them the small play 'The Bell of Atri'. I have told them that I intend to devote 15 minutes of each lesson to this play, and by the end of the year I hope they will be able to perform it."

THE MOTHER: "This is perfect, just what I wished would be done." (26.1.46)

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The following talk I had with Norman throws more light on the theme of "Free Progress":

Q: The Free Progress system is not a new discovery. It has been tried in various places; then where lies the newness in our system of education?

N: Yes, it has been tried in America, Germany, England, etc. but it has failed. The difficulty was in reconciling freedom with discipline.

Along with freedom the Mother laid stress on discipline and physical education. Through mental education she herself directed the cultural activities and introduced a variety of them. This greatly helped the students to keep themselves occupied with something of their own interest that invoked inner growth.

Q: In what way does our kindergarten differ from Montessori?

N: The education at the Ashram started with Montessori but it was found unsuitable for our purpose. There is no Indianness in it. It is mostly for the West



and very costly. Later on the Kindergarten was organised when Padma came from Switzerland.

Q: To what extent is the education of the vital being helpful in the teaching of languages?

N: Between five and ten most children can learn four languages given the right climate of learning and environment.

These languages can be learnt through an environment of art and beauty. Painting, modelling, music, dance and drama can be the ideal medium for the teaching of languages.

Q: If the child shows interest today in painting, tomorrow in play and the third day in some other thing, how can he learn anything?

N: That's it. That is quite natural. It ought to be like that. Would you like a child to be pinned down to one and the same thing forever? Can even the adults remain stuck to one state of mind?

One has to allow one year to pass like that until the child's interest is defined. In Auroville there are areas of work. The whole thing is centred in this system upon "interest". One day you will find a young child absorbed in painting, the next day busy with a machine or working in a motor garage. The third day you may find him given to music. So long as a bee does not find a flower it goes on humming. The moment it finds one, the humming stops. The day the child finds something which captures his heart, then he will loiter no more. Here comes the role of the teacher. He is expected to help the child to keep up his interest and employ his energy in the right direction. It is necessary to point out what the Mother has to say in this respect:

"...to give them occasion to see many things, to touch many things, to do as many things as possible. It is very amusing. Above all never to try and impose on them what one believes one knows....If one could give them some drops of truth when they are very young it would blossom out naturally as the being grew. It will be a beautiful work."

A quotation from Summerhill may not be out of place here:

"A school should make a child's life a game. I don't mean that the child should have a path of roses. Making it all easy for the child is fatal to the child's character. But life itself presents so many difficulties that the artificially made difficulties which present themselves to children are unnecessary....

"In our educational policy as a nation, we refuse to let live. We persuade through fear. But there is a great difference between compelling a child to cease throwing stones and compelling him to learn Latin. ..I learned Latin as a boy; rather I was given Latin books to learn from. As a boy I could never learn the stuff because my interests were elsewhere. At the age of twenty-one, I found that I could not enter the university without Latin. In less than a year, I learned enough Latin to pass the entrance exam. Self-interest made me learn Latin."

There remained some important questions in my mind: "How were Sri Aurobindo's principles put into action? What was the practical outcome? How was

the difficulty of reconciling discipline with freedom to be overcome?"

I gathered some ideas from Norman who spoke from his experience of how the new philosophy was taking roots.

Sri Aurobindo gives us as the first principle in education: "Nothing can be taught." This posed a very challenging problem to our teachers for many years. If understood intellectually, it was extremely difficult to put into practice.

However, in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education we have been experimenting for nearly thirty years on various methods of approach to a more progressive and enlightened structure. This structure tackles the problem of discipline and freedom in a very practical and enlightened way.

The physical mind must form the basis for discipline and security...Physical education should always be compulsory and should, where possible, continue throughout school-life if not throughout all life. We shall deal with the subject more fully later on.

After the vital and the physical is sufficiently prepared the mental can accept the free progress system where the student's urge is to discover himself.

*(To be continued)*

NARAYAN PRASAD

## RED CATTLE

ARTIFACTS of the Sun—  
 Where there's division—  
 They surge through the bracken,  
 The cows like meteors  
 With burning young.  
 On my light-horse.  
 I would like to herd them  
 Where they began—  
 They were light-herds then—  
 And I think...  
 If I stare, I can. Yes, I can.  
 I can stare through the skins and I am there; the light sang:  
 Each dazzle of the moulding that was cattle-making rang—  
 And it does still—  
 Like a low-toned, or a clashing, or a sweet bell. Then...  
 Anyone can hear—if he tries to—the music  
 Of a cow's brilliant basis, a cow's  
 Furnace of completeness?

JOYCE CHADWICK

## A HYMN OF PARASHARA

### RIG VEDA I.66: A METRICAL VERSION BASED ON SRI AUROBINDO'S TRANSLATION

He is a richness of lucent joy, a vision supernal.  
He is Life and the breath of our being; our wonder-child eternal.  
An impetuous steed, he races through the woods of desire;  
Like a calm and milk-giving cow is the pure and resplendent Fire.

Like a pleasant and peaceful home, in his lap all our good does he hold;  
He is corn in the fields grown ripe; in the struggle a conqueror bold;  
Like a chanting seer he is. His name is proclaimed in our hearts.  
A swift and exultant steed, with his strength our growth he supports.

A flame on a crumbling hearth, he is Will that does not perish.  
Like a wife he is in our home; his touch we need and cherish.  
Blazing up in the many, his hues of the rainbow merge into white.  
He is like a chariot of gold, a flaming aid in the fight.

Like an army that runs to the charge, into men his might he pours;  
As the brilliant shaft of the Archer tipped with splendour he soars.  
As a twofold power is he born; he is that which is yet to be.  
The lover he is of the Virgins, and lord of the Mothers is he.

As cows come home to their stall, to the blissful Fire we come;  
By the Movement and by the Abiding we reach our radiant home.  
Like a sea above he sends down to earth his waters of might.  
The herds of the Sun move to him at the dawn of the heavenly Light.

RICHARD HARTZ

## NATURE'S FACES

O joy that in the sunlit wavelet leap  
And sparkling fill the shadowed heart once more,  
Are you grace-sprung from the same unsounded deep  
As grief's whirlpool with death its hungry core?

O peace that bless the mystic light of dawn  
And, radiant-eyed, the waking day await,  
Do further dim horizons hold indrawn  
The black and glowering thunderstorms of hate?

You shower, O plenitude, the sun-kissed gold  
Of nectarous fruit and rich-harvesting farms —  
Are rooted deep in the same vast nature's hold  
The anguished pleas of famine's upraised arms?

While on your tranquil face the sunbeams dance,  
O hope, your eyes are brimmed with visions of rose —  
Do you spy grey failure's shadow-whimsies prance  
As all your dreams into empty shapes he throws?

O harmony that lift in wonder-poise  
Nature's mysterious blend of form and hue,  
Will that silver song of yours be drowned by noise  
When discord's shrill and jarring tones ensue?

But if, Supreme! upon the brow You reign  
And melt away illusion's stubborn seals,  
The eye of mind begins to ascertain  
The silent Truth diversity conceals.

“U”

## MAN

FROM Stupor struggling to be free,  
Man's consciousness awoke—to see  
God's steady gaze fixed on his skin,  
Observing and surveying him.

Man, feeling a profound unease  
In mind and heart and even knees  
Quite irrepressively increase,  
Then begged the Lord, "Have mercy, please!

Lord, kindly look the other way  
Just for a little while, I pray.  
I promise that I will not stray  
One furlong from the goodly way!"

The Lord, in His all-knowing ways,  
Not for one moment shifts His gaze...

*(Free translation by Shanta of a poem in German by Eugen Roth)*

Translator's Note: Eugen Roth, Kurt Tucholsky, Christian Morgenstern and even Heinrich Heine amused themselves by making "hintergrundige" ("backgroundy") verses. Apparently it is sheer fun, humorous very specially in the choice of expression—but they have a second, more serious meaning lurking (so to speak) in the background. This translation tries to render this very particular flavour.

## “IRREGULAR VERBS”

BERTRAND Russell, on a British Broadcasting Company radio programme called the Brains Trust, gave the following “conjugation” of an “irregular verb”:

I am firm.  
You are obstinate.  
He is a pig-headed fool.

*The New Statesman and Nation*, quoting the above as a model, offered prizes to readers who sent in the best “irregular verbs” of this kind. Here are some of the published entries.

I am sparkling. You are unusually talkative. He is drunk.  
I am righteously indignant. You are annoyed. He is making a fuss about nothing.  
I am fastidious. You are fussy. He is an old woman.  
I am a creative writer. You have a journalistic flair. He is a prosperous hack.  
I am beautiful: You have quite good features. She isn't bad-looking, if you like that type.  
I day-dream. You are an escapist. He ought to see a psychiatrist.  
I have about me something of the subtle, haunting, mysterious fragrance of the Orient. You rather overdo it, dear. She stinks.

## OBJECTIVISM AND SUBJECTIVISM IN MODERN POETRY

IN the introductory chapter to *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo, trying to pinpoint what was “best and most characteristic of a new spirit in the age”, found it in “a greater (not exclusive) tendency to the spiritual rather than the merely earthly, to the inward and subjective than the outward and objective, to the life within and behind than to the life in front, and in its purest form, a preference of the lyrical to the dramatic and of the inwardly suggestive to the concrete method of poetical presentation”<sup>1</sup>. This was written in November or December 1917. Sixty years later we find poetry consciously exulting in the earthly and outward, we find the dominant trend, named appropriately “objectivism”, debunking the lyrical, the song element in poetry, and in one of its developments, called “concrete poetry”, attaining what would appear to be an acme of externality devoid of all suggestion or sense. I met a member of the concrete school in New York in 1970. His book, which had just been issued by a well-known publisher, consisted mostly of nonsensical patterns of letters arranged in bizarre typographical style: two pages covered entirely with “abbada abbada” (I quote from memory), being followed by two others in which hundreds of o’s set obliquely gaped at the incredulous reader. The most amusing thing about this production was the inscription at the close of the first poem. After twenty pages or so of the above sort of typesetting artistry, the writer put, with a slight flourish of pride, perhaps, something like: “Paris-London-New York—December 1967-February 1969”!

The author of this volume shared with me an interest in the spiritual element in poetry. He especially admired what he called the poetry of the “Transreal”. I was never quite sure what he meant by the expression, but when I asked him where in modern poetry there was any attempt to express the truths of the spirit, Transreal or Real or whatever, he gave me a rather wounded look and explained that this was what he was doing in his verse.

Sri Aurobindo undoubtedly had something else in mind when he wrote that the most important trend in the poetry of the day was “a distinct spiritual turn, the straining towards a deeper, more potent, supra-intellectual and supra-vital vision of things.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed he foresaw a return to “a sacred or hieratic *ars poetica*,”<sup>3</sup> a view of poetry not unlike that held by the rishis of the Veda. It was “to something *very like* the effort which was the soul of the Vedic or at least the Vedantic mind that we *almost appear to be on the point of* turning back in the circle of our course,”<sup>4</sup> he wrote. The italics are mine; Sri Aurobindo was a cautious prophet. He was of course aware that there were other trends, other forces at play, chief among them an unbridled intellectualism and a virulent upsurge of the worst vital elements in man. These are the forces which, in their global inter-shock, have made the present century one of continual war. The first, and in some ways the worst concretisation of this constant state of conflict, the long drawn-out, dehumanising agony of 1914 to 1918, was coincident with the birth

of the modern age in poetry. *The Future Poetry* was begun while the war was raging in Europe. By the time of the armistice, the face of the future had been changed.

The Mother has said that "with every war there descends upon earth a world in decomposition which produces a sort of chaos."<sup>5</sup> The result of this occult invasion upon art has been a degradation of feeling, a "taste for the sordid". "People were compelled to put aside all refined sensibility, the love of harmony, the need for beauty, to be able to undergo all that; otherwise, I believe, they would really have died of horror.... And when the war was over... they wanted only one thing, to forget, forget, forget. To seek distraction, not to think of all the horror they had suffered. Now there one sinks very low."<sup>6</sup> There naturally were other factors, but the role of the first and second world wars in bringing about the disturbing changes which have affected modern art and poetry cannot be overemphasised. Even today the effects can be seen, especially in work coming from the focal points of the conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Of course the roots of the revolution which transformed twentieth-century poetry go back further than 1914. Some date the new age from 1908, the year that Pound settled in London and Eliot, still in America, drafted *Prufrock*. That famous poem was published in the same year that saw the beginning of the war, and it would perhaps not be going too far to say, with an English writer, that the influence of it and the poetic theory it represented "upon the poetry of our time has been almost as disturbing as the murder at Sarajevo was to the peace of Europe."<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, in Pondicherry, was unaware of Eliot, Pound, the Imagists and all the other names and schools that took part in the modernist revolution. His knowledge of contemporary English verse was limited to what he could find in Cousins's *New Ways in English Literature*; namely, a few passages of AE and of the earlier Yeats. These Irish poets and the Indian Tagore, who became known in Europe in 1912 through his own English translations of *Gitanjali*, represented, Cousins felt, the beginning of an age of spiritual inspiration in English poetry. The new trend was aided, Cousins maintained, by certain poets of the recent past, Meredith, Carpenter and Phillips, and helped along by such poets as those who were publishing in the Georgian Anthologies. In retrospect it is difficult to imagine that the Georgians could have been regarded as a progressive or even revolutionary force in their day. But when it is remembered that the poetical atmosphere of 1910 was, according to Eliot, one of utter stagnation, that the popular poets of the time were effete post-Victorians trying to prolong Tennyson's swan song into the twentieth century, one realises that the lyrics of Brooke and his compeers represented something much more vital and important.

Brooke sang until 1915; but even before his mouth was stopped, the bitternesses and violences of Sassoon and Owen had begun. War makes for a hard, down-to-earth poetry, the gutsy realism which make the rural charm and sensual sweetness of the Georgians seem like namby-pamby. This hardness was in line with what the Imagists had been demanding. It was that towards which Yeats, weary of his "youth's dreamy load", had begun to turn. The last years of the war mark the beginning of the success of the outward and objective in poetry.



But objectivism had still a long way to go before its victory would be complete. And its chief adversary was not to be a Georgian nor anyone else who was attempting to continue the line of poetry, which, beginning with Wordsworth in 1798, had persevered, in one form or another, throughout the nineteenth century. The acknowledged master of the day was Yeats, who, having broken with the old, felt strongly the effects of the cult of the external, but never succumbed to it. He attributes the improvement of his verse during the last twenty years of his life to the supraphysical entities with whom he was in touch through the automatic writing of his wife. He maintained to the end that "the mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write."<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, degrees of the mystical life. Yeats's was always on a lower level than that of his friend AE, although the very vital and intellectual preoccupations which brought Yeats down from the spiritual heights saved his poetry from the insubstantiality which is the weakness of AE's more exalted verse. These Irish poets, especially Yeats, had their influence; but it was rather a writer from non-mystical America who would for long delay the triumph of objectivism, and this with a poetical theory and practice which were polar opposites of the victorious tendency's.

Eliot first read of Symbolism in Arthur Symons's study of the movement in 1908. One passage in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* is notable, and deserves to be quoted at length:

*Here then, in this revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition; in this endeavour to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realised by the consciousness; in this dutiful waiting upon every symbol by which the soul of things may be made visible, literature, bowed down by so many burdens, may at last attain liberty, and its authentic speech. In attaining this liberty, it accepts a heavier burden; for in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion has hitherto spoken to us, it becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual.*<sup>10</sup>

A sacred or hieratic *ars poetica*. Sri Aurobindo was not unaware of the work of the French symbolists, but his acquaintance with them must have been slight. There are references in *The Future Poetry* to Verlaine and Mallarmé, but none to Laforgue or Rimbaud or even Baudelaire. He saw Symbolism, so far as he knew it, as part of the trend towards the inward and spiritual in poetry. He certainly would have approved of every word in the passage of Symons quoted above; but he did not approve of what Eliot made of Symbolism in England.

*The Waste Land* was published in 1922. Before then the future of English poetry was still in question. Imagism had ceased to be an organised literary movement in 1918; Pound had moved on to other pastures. Traditional, formal verse was still accepted as the right, indeed, the only real poetry by all but a small *avant-garde*. Pound's boast was that he had destroyed the pentameter; but from the traditionalist

side came periodical announcements that *vers libre* had played itself out.<sup>11</sup> With *The Waste Land* the tide was turned. Eliot effected, soon after its appearance, an almost complete "capture of young intellectuals of creative energy in England and the United States."<sup>12</sup> From his dominant position in the Anglo-American literary world—an ascendancy in poetry and criticism which lasted for more than a quarter century—he was able, like a literary Napoleon, to extend and stabilise the results of the revolution (whose effects had been as yet only local), so that the old order, when it tried to re-establish itself, was obliged to talk on his terms.

(*To be continued*)

PETER HEEHS

(With acknowledgements to *The Banasthal Patrika*)

#### NOTES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971), p.4.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
4. *Ibid.*
5. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1953* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1976), p. 334.
6. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1950-51* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972), pp. 302-03.
7. I recently read, in two American magazines, examples of contemporary Polish and Hungarian literature in translation. Both selections begin with nightmares filled with torture-inflicting Nazis.
8. Quoted in Martin Gilkes, *A key to Modern English Poetry* (London: Blackie & Son Limited, 1946), p. 52.
9. John Press, *A Map of Modern English Verse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 12.
10. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
11. For example, in the 1924 edition of *Modern British Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company), a very conservative anthology, Louis Untermeyer wrote (pp. 322-23): "Recently, [Richard] Aldington, in common with most of the *vers libristes*, has been writing in regular rhythms and fixed forms." And in the Introduction to his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), Yeats asserts (p. xii): "*vers libre* lost much of its vogue some five years ago."
12. George Watson quoted in Press, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

## THE THREE AUTHENTIC CASES OF THE ROPE TRICK

WE incline to think of the Rope Trick as an isolated phenomenon. - As such, it passes belief, and no one believes that it has ever been done. When considered, however, in its proper setting, it is seen as arising out of certain Yoga practices. In particular, it is connected with levitation.

Various forms of levitation have been recorded by travellers in the East from an early date. We have, for instance, the flying cups described in Marco Polo's *Travels*. On the occasion of a great feast given by Kublai Khan, his golden cups, arranged on a sideboard some distance from him, were caused by his Tibetan monks to fly from the sideboard to his table without their contents being spilled. Marco Polo was not the only traveller to record this particular kind of levitation. Friar Odoric, who was in Peking shortly after Polo, was present on a similar occasion, and describes a scene which differs little from that in the *Travels*.

Another sort of levitation has to do with the curious gliding walk accomplished by the Tibetan mystics called Lung-gom-pas. The extraordinary manner in which these persons cover great distances in Tibet at a rapid pace by executing a sort of gliding leap, has been well described by Madame David-Neel in her *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*. Her account is one of many, for we have as far back as the fourteenth century a statement by the missionary Friar Ricold about some Indian mystics:

"They exhibit many illusions; for instance, one of eminence among them was said to fly; the truth, however, was (as it proved) that he did not fly but did walk close to the surface of the ground without touching it."

The more usual kind of levitation is when the Yogi sits on the air some feet from the ground without any support. I have been assured by persons with a knowledge of southern India that they have seen Yogis in such a position. References to this feat also go a long way back. We have the same Friar Ricold speaking of it, and Ibn Batuta, the famous Arab traveller of the fourteenth century, describes how he saw a case of levitation at the court of Sultan Mahomed Tughlak. More surprising still will be found a reference to it in *The Himalayas in Indian Art*, a book written by the distinguished oriental art historian, E. B. Havell.

He says: "It is very rare in this degenerate age to meet with Indian Yogis who claim to possess the power of levitation, but in 1887, when I was in a remote village of Madras, a Yogi of great reputation consented to demonstrate the power of Yoga for the village elders and myself. He remained for a considerable time before our eyes, at a distance of a few feet, apparently seated on air without any support, in the pose of the Buddha." Nothing could be more respectable than this testimony.

The Rope Trick is a combination of these various forms of levitation. The levitation of the rope can be compared to the levitation of the cups; the man who soars up the rope and remains at the top of it, out of sight, is a sort of extended form of the seated levitation just mentioned.

Let us now shortly cite the three known descriptions of the Rope Trick that have

come down to us; it has not been seen since the seventeenth century. The accounts are to be found in the *Travels* of Ibn Batuta of the fourteenth century; secondly, in the *Memoirs* of the Emperor Jehangir of the seventeenth century, and in a book by Edward Melton, the Anglo-Dutch traveller, written about 1680. They disclose the Rope Trick to have been far more elaborate than it is popularly supposed to be.

When Ibn Batuta was at the city of Hangchow in China, an entertainment was given by the Mongol Viceroy in the big palace courtyard. In the course of it, a magician employed by the Viceroy took a wooden ball, to which a rope was attached, and threw it into the air. It was night time. The ball passed out of sight, but seemed to remain suspended with the rope hanging from it. The magician then ordered one of his boy assistants to climb up the rope, which he did until he could no longer be seen. Whereupon, the magician called him three times to come down and, getting no answer, took a knife and himself disappeared up the rope. Presently there fell into the courtyard at the rope's foot the limbs of the boy, his trunk, and last of all his head. The magician then descended the rope covered with blood. After a prostration before the Viceroy, he laid the boy's remains together and gave them a kick. Instantly the boy got up and stood before the company. Ibn Batuta says: "All this astonished me beyond measure and I had an attack of palpitation of the heart." They gave him some medicine to calm his nerves. An Arab friend of his who was sitting beside him exclaimed that he did not believe there had been any climbing up or coming down, but that the whole thing was an illusion which the magician had caused them to see.

The Emperor Jehangir entered in his diary that the Rope Trick had been performed in front of him by magicians from Bengal. In that case first a chain seventy-five feet long was thrown into the air "where it remained as if fastened to something." A dog was brought forward and immediately ran up the chain, disappearing into the air. In the same manner a hog, a panther, a lion and a tiger were successively sent up the chain, which was then taken down and put in a bag, "no one ever discovering in what way the animals were made to vanish in the air."

Melton's account begins: "I am going to relate a thing that surpasses all belief, and which I should scarcely venture to insert here had it not been witnessed by thousands before my own eyes." He describes a ball of cord being thrown into the air and hanging there. A man "immediately climbed up the cord with incredible swiftness and got so high that we could no longer see him." He then tells how he saw a leg fall and then a hand, another leg, then the rest of the body, and lastly the head. They were gathered up by an assistant and put in a basket. "Then we saw with these eyes all those limbs creep together again and, in short, form the whole man, who got up." Melton was certain that what he had seen was not a trick, but was accomplished with the help of evil spirits.

So much then for the three accounts of the Rope Trick which have come down to us, and which show it to have been a kind of levitation in combination with the trick or illusion in which a man is put in a basket and cut up.

MAURICE COLLIS

# TOWARDS THE HIGHER LIFE

(Continued from the issue of July 1979)

## CHAPTER II

### Sparks Of Surrender

(2)

CITING her own example, the Mother once said: "The first time I knew—and nobody told me this, I knew it by experience—the first time I knew that there was a discovery to make within me, well, that was the most important thing! This had to be put before everything! And when I found, as I said, a book, a man, just to give me a little indication, to tell me, 'Here you are, if you do this the path will open before you', why, I rushed headlong like a cyclone, and nothing could stop me."<sup>1</sup>

We have to attend to so much routine work. It must not be allowed to suffer. Then how can there be an exclusive turning towards the Divine? How to reconcile the two? One way out may be: Yoga and work must go together. But even after life-long labour the two refuse to fuse into one. However, taking advantage of two holidays falling together I decided to give the precept a trial. But how to keep the enthusiasm burning all the twenty-four hours? It flags and dies down in no time. However earnest the yearning, it dissolves like foam despite all attempts to push oneself on and on. Why are we not able to live always in the higher consciousness? Because the lower is still active and it pulls us down.

What we have seen so far are mere preparations to reach that goal to which my soul aspires. Greatness does not come as a gift, one has to pay a heavy price for it.

I often read with great interest the life-stories of revolutionaries who staked their all to free the country from bondage. What fire did they carry in their hearts to serve the country? The question always intrigued me. Is it not possible to do the same in the field of spirituality? The aim is the same: their earnestness was to acquire freedom for the country; our eagerness is to free ourselves from the iron grip of the lower nature which keeps us always in fetters, in perpetual bondage.

When there shot forth the first ray of liberation, I felt I was released from a life-long confinement in jail. "The sense of release as if from jail always accompanies the emergence of the psychic being or the realisation of the self above. It is therefore spoken of as a liberation, Mukti. It is a release into peace, happiness, the soul's freedom not tied down by the thousand ties and cares of the outward ignorant existence."<sup>2</sup>

Some films have a great educational value. They arouse the spirit, give strength to the fallen to rise and to make an attempt at a new adventure. A youth in the heat

<sup>1</sup> *Glimpses of the Mother*, Part I, p 55.      <sup>2</sup> *On Yoga*, II Tome II, p. 118

of the moment puts himself under a vow that he will challenge Tansen—one of the “nine jewels” of Akbar’s court—and beat him in an open competition in music, whatever the cost. What an impossible dream! While wandering in search of Guru Haridas, he falls into the hands of a gang whose leader was a princess. She has organised a band of guerilla soldiers to recover her father’s lost estate. Enamoured by his musical talents she falls in love with him, but look at his tenacity. He refuses to be lured.

How to acquire an unquenchable urge, an undying fire? Thus seized by immediate hunger I plunged into concentration on return from the film-show. But to my utter bewilderment I found I could not dive even one inch into my heart-centre. Such is our plight when there is no opening to the Mother’s Force. But what is the use of beating the breast in despair? I embarked on a new voyage which led to the development of another consequence.

Since I was bent on doing something to break the inner deadlock, the newly gained strength roused in me the will to go ahead however stubborn the resistance.

“... it is you who should walk, nobody will take you on his back and carry you.” These uncompromising words of the Mother read some twenty years ago I have not forgotten and will never forget. My motto has all along been in the words of the 87-year old American lady to whom the Nehru award was given in 1968: “Better to get a candle instead of cursing the darkness.”

When I failed to open the tightly screwed inner doors by the power of persistent concentration my religious mind induced me to employ some auxiliary force, to take the aid of the Mother’s name and use it as a magic key. Sri Aurobindo has said: “When you use the name it is the Mother’s power that you call.”<sup>1</sup>

King Aswapati had entered the bottomless pit of the Inconscient with

A prayer upon his lips and the great Name.<sup>2</sup>

Savitri too in her moment of despair and despondency “fixed her thought upon the saviour name.”<sup>3</sup>

The Ashram does not involve itself in religious ceremonies. But the eye of religious India remains fastened upon the sky. It believes in consolidating its position after death. Our aim is to endow life with all that is in heaven: to soar high up in the sky like vapour, only to fall as rain drops to quench the thirst of the parched earth.

Here, I am raising a topic which might be widely questioned, for the modern mentality is against religion. The name of the presiding Deity has been recognised as a great purifying force by almost all traditional systems. It finds its rightful place from Sri Aurobindo’s pen: “The name of the Divine is usually called in for protection, for adoration, for the increasing of bhakti, for the opening of the inner consciousness....”<sup>4</sup>

There is a reason why the “Name” does not find an easy appeal to the man of the modern age, for it turns out to be mechanical and takes long to yield any tangible

<sup>1</sup> *On Yoga* II, Tome II, p. 317.    <sup>2</sup> *Savitri*, Part I, Bk. II, Canto 7, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Bk. VII, Canto 2, p. 132.    <sup>4</sup> *Cent.* Vol. 23, p. 746.

result. It is true the age of religion is over and we are entering the age of spirituality, but religion has a part to play in the evolution of man: "Its purpose is to link the human with the Divine" and must "end in an opening up of the spiritual consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

My turning to the Name was natural, for I was brought up in an entirely religious atmosphere. In religious India no one bothers about "yoga", all they care for is to be loyal to the family deity, sing songs in his praise, tell beads, and take delight in religious festivities. Right from the beginning my approach was not for heaven or happiness but Sri Krishna Himself. There was no bargaining spirit. In my search for how to make a start I came across a magazine which suggested that he who tells the name of God a hundred thousand times a day is sure to see Him face to face and I took the plunge from that very day though I had just crossed the border of adolescence.

By the very touch of the Ashram soil there came a new turning in my life. In the very first year, it seemed, the gate of heaven was flung open and I found myself drowned in meditation, the impact of which was felt mostly in the lower levels of the being. The habit of *japa*<sup>2</sup> dropped by itself. It went off from my consciousness to such an extent that when I fell ill and Dr. Becharlal who had a great faith in the evocative power of the Mother's name<sup>3</sup>, advocated its efficacy I ridiculed the idea. My reliance on the medicines at the time was more, I may say ninety-nine percent and not even one percent on the Divine. Despite a terrible pain in the eye by the half-yearly attack of iritis, no part in me was willing to tread the traditional path.

Dr. B had a soft corner for me. He often used to come to my place to examine my eyes. He tried his best to impress upon my mind the occult science that lay behind the method of whispering the Mother's name over a cup of water and taking it as medicine but I could never agree.

Long, long after—I do not remember when and how—I once happened to move, with the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's names on my lips, my fingers round the part which was aching and I obtained instantaneous relief (1965). Thus grew in me the faith in the healing power of the Guru's names and it proved unimaginably effective in the years that followed. It was this that helped to save me from running to doctors for more than fifteen years (1964-79) except when a minor operation on the abdomen was needed.

On January 31, 1978 at dead of night I felt a pain in the ear. Hours passed; I did not mind the trouble. In a tranquil moment almost automatically I drew a safety line round the ear moving my fingers gently, muttering the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's names only three times and very soon the pain was gone.

I must hasten to add that till now this method was found effective only in such

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, American Ed., p. 767.

<sup>2</sup> "Namajapa has a great power in it." Cent. Vol. 23, p. 746

<sup>3</sup> "One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine." Cent. Vol. 9, p. 507.

cases where nothing serious was involved. Once despite all efforts a toothache went on increasing. When the above process could not succeed, a solemn prayer rose from the shrine of the heart: "This too is thy gift, Mother! Give me strength to bear it calmly." I woke up, as if from sleep, only to find there was no pain at all. To believe it one must make his own experiment.

These minor episodes may not wear the appearance of miracles but for me they are very promising. On my return from the mental hospital, while walking, climbing the staircase I often stumbled and almost every time the saving power of the Gurus came to my rescue unasked. Quite recently (1979), while coming out from the bathroom I slipped. Had I fallen, my hip-bone would have certainly got broken, making me bedridden, who knows how long. But before the body could touch the ground the names of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo leaped out. My head struck against the frame of the door and the fall was checked. I escaped almost unhurt.

Now I do not hesitate to bring their names to my lips even for trifles. They just come up by themselves by the force of habit.

Reference of such matters to the Divine has not been discouraged by Sri Aurobindo. Rather it has elicited two statements from his pen. One of them runs: "...the unegoistic man...refers everything to the Divine."<sup>1</sup> The other reads: "It is evident that the lower vital has received the Divine Consciousness when even in the small movements of life there is an aspiration to the Divine, a reference as it were to the Divine Light for guidance or some feeling of offering."<sup>2</sup>

Once I saw "Ma" in Bengali characters—'ম'—inscribed upon my heart in dark blue colour. When I prayed to be enlightened, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "It was the impression of the Name with its power in some part of the being (vital mental)." I have the feeling that if I am killed any day, the first thing that will escape from my mouth is "Ma Sri Aurobindo" before I drop dead.

There is a curious story of how my faith in their names was strengthened. Putting a vessel of milk on an electric stove one night, I went to my room upstairs without switching off the current and forgot all about it. When I came down next morning and opened the door I found the room full of a burning smell. Had the fire spread to the electric line, what havoc it would have played! To my utter surprise, only a yard's length of wire from the switch had been damaged. Miraculously the fire had got extinguished by itself. It was from then that I began to invoke the Mother's protection in anything in which I sensed the possibility of trouble. My faith is growing into the conviction: "Take the Mother's name and you reach the safety zone."

*(To be continued)*

<sup>1</sup> *On Yoga II*, Tome II, p. 467.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.



# INDIAN LIFE IN ENGLISH WRITINGS

(Continued from the issue of July 1979)

## PART I (contd.)

### Reliving the Days Gone By

THE three novels we have listed—by three Englishmen—give us a coherent picture of the Sepoy uprising according to their own viewpoint. But this is only one aspect of the truth and not the entire sum of valid facts. The authors' particular interests, leanings, antipathies and frustrations find expression. To them this uprising was an erratic, capricious and fanatical revolt fostered by vested interests of the Moghuls on the one hand and by religious fanaticism on the other. But no reaction is engendered except by an original action, no effect is there without a sufficient cause.

It is the correction of this gap in the historical presentation and of some tomes falsifying or totally distorting the facts that has been attempted by Manohar Malgaonkar in his novel *The Devil's Wind*.

Discontent is the basic theme, discontent against the wrong done, the usurping of power, the misuse of it and treachery—practices which lay at the foundation of the British Empire. The revolt is the direct result of these factors. From Plassey to Oudh, from the Sikh wars and the Maratha struggles, to the wars in South India the fact of treachery stares in our faces. To divide and rule, to set one enemy camp against another is the true character of British diplomacy, by which the Englishmen won India, as many other places, and not so much by the sheer merit of straightforward combat.

But the British historians are naïve enough to pretend the opposite. That they came and occupied India was more as their inborn right, to protect the people, to uplift a barbaric nation; also because there was chaos in the land, they had to take up the ruler's dispelling wand. Conquest was, as it were, forced upon them. It was a gesture of benevolence which went to educate these savages by bringing Christianity to them in place of their idolatrous superstition.

The British were naturally shocked by the mutiny. They had come to harbour implicit faith in India's slave-like and thoroughly impractical and futile multitude. Such a violent action was beyond their wildest dream. They had, after a century, come to regard India as a land bestowed on them by Divine Providence. That the Indians should show ingratitude in the form of independence of spirit was a thing truly outrageous. The British had slowly grabbed province after province, kingdom after kingdom by strategy, by subterfuge: the Maratha States which had been weakened by division, the Rajputs, the Sikhs and finally South India, and all this, according to the conquerors, was naturally good for India herself. To protest against such a benefit was taken as the most unappreciating act possible.

Each Englishman in India behaved as if he was a *Nabob* in his own right, surrounded by an army of servants and hangers-on, piling up ill-gotten wealth and finally returning "home" as a little millionaire.

This is one of the many facts that should be eye-openers to us.

The following is the background of the novel. Baji Rao II, who adopted Nana Saheb as his heir, was a servile, cowardly and superstitious person. He played into the hands of the British by coming and seeking asylum with them while the Holkars, Gwaliors, Barodas and Scindias were won over by cunning and later their kingdoms usurped under the pretext that these kings had no legal issues. Baji Rao II was nicknamed 'Running Baji Rao' because of his cowardice. He was dispossessed of his kingdom and banished to Bithoor, a village a few miles from Kanpur. Here he adopted Dondu Pant, a Brahmin's son, who was later renamed Nana Saheb.

Baji Rao was a Peshwa only in name. The Peshwas, like other such Maratha monarchs, were actually generals of provincial governors under the Bhonsles in the 17th century. But gradually the Maratha confederacy split up and a vast domain from Marathawada to Uttar Pradesh or even the Punjab, including whole tracts of land from Madhya Pradesh right up to the border of Bengal and even in South India and Mysore, was split up amongst the governors and generals who assumed the titles of kings.

Pratap Rao was Baji Rao's ancestor. Baji Rao I, another of his ancestors, had killed his nephew Narayan to usurp the throne. A curse from that day was laid upon the Peshwas. None of the heirs survived. Hence Baji Rao II had to adopt Dondu Pant as his heir.

Dondu means actually a stone. Such derogative names are given to Indian boys in the belief that thus they may not die in their infancy. To avert such a curse, names like Ghasi, Punja or Kenaram are given to these boys.

Dondu's elder brother had died. But Dondu survived to be adopted by Baji Rao when he was ten years old, with a full religious ceremony of priests chanting Sanskrit hymns and gifts offered to the poor Brahmins. Not only that, Baji Rao proclaimed Dondu to be his rightful heir, who would succeed his *gaddi*, the wealth, family possessions, lands and *Deshmukhi*, the right to collect tribute from vassals.

From the age of ten up to sixteen he was accorded formal grounding in religious lore, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi. Later he learnt English, coming in contact with his English friends. He was also trained in wrestling, sword-fight and horse-riding. There were other boys and one girl in that *Wadi* or gymnasium, the offspring of vassal-chieftains. The girl was Mani, a tomboy who often outdid Nana Saheb. She was to be the great rebel queen of Jhansi in later years.

At the age of seventeen, he was given his first concubine, Champa, who became literally his wife and soon presented him with a girl Gangamala. But he was formally married to Girija who soon died of small pox incurred during her pilgrimage at Ujjain.

He was given his second concubine Ajijan, a voluptuous, over-sexed young

woman who later, during 1857, was to play a significant role.

He was married again ten years later to Kashi, a timid girl from South Maharashtra, with whom Nana Saheb had no relationship whatsoever while Champa continued to lord it over him and his household.

Soon after, Baji Rao died at the age of seventy-six, and with his passing Nana Saheb began to feel the pinch of John Company's policy. Without previous notice it stopped his allowance. Nana sent his representative first to Lord Dalhousie, then to Lord Canning who was then the Governor-General of India. All his petitions were summarily turned down. Both of them threw the following figures into Nana's teeth: the Company had paid to, or spent two and half million pounds sterling over, Baji Rao during these thirty years; hence no pension for Nana Saheb.

Why did John Company spend such a big amount on Baji Rao? It had to uphold a false image before the Indian mind or, in Malgaonkar's words, Baji Rao and others like him served as a dead bull-calf stuffed with hay to cheat the poor credulous cow. The kings were yet held sacred in India and the Company could not afford to destroy that superstitious faith overnight.

With the annexing of Oudh in 1856, that effigy was not needed. The whole of India was now under the British ensign. In fact, the annexation of Oudh awakened the minds of the people of India to the cruel reality of the British occupation. Even its pretence of acknowledging Bahadur Shah as the *Padshah* and as the *Gazi*, the greatest emperor and the supreme head of Islamic faith, was a sham.

Just as Bahadur Shah was lord over a few men and the Red Fort only, so too Nana Saheb was Peshwa in name without land or vassals, he owned no more than four and a half square miles of tract in and around Bithoor; that is all. While others like the Holkars and Scindias fawned on their new masters for favours, Nana Saheb, having courage and independence of mind, resented this disparaging treatment. The weighing scale of the ruler turned overnight into a ruler's wand, as Tagore puts it. He did not mind the stopping of the pension, for he had literally millions in the shape of family heirloom and jewels. But the ignominy which this entailed ate into his vitals.

He then sent his deputy Azim to England to place his petition before the queen. But unfortunately by British design or blind chance Azim could not get an audience with her. He returned, touring different countries of Europe but failing in his mission.

Not only he, but others too resented bitterly the treatment accorded. The chief among these were Zeenat Mahal, the wife of Bahadur Shah, whose son was not recognised by the Company, and Hazrat Mahal, the wife of the dispossessed Nabob of Oudh, Mohammad Shah, whose retinue, relatives, and dependences were literally thrown into the streets. The Company refused to offer a single farthing to these helpless persons.

While the British historians painted Zeenat Mahal as a witch and Bahadur Shah as a senseless debauchee, they failed to mention the heartless and inhuman action of the British. They overlooked the facts of forced conversions of the natives by the

British missionaries or the forcing of children at schools to read the Bible, and the atrocities that went to cripple Bengal's textile industry and farming.

A religious fanatic known as the 'Mad Mullah' arose. He incited the people with all the wrongs heaped on them. He visited the dispossessed princes and attempted to bring them together. This particular task of unifying these ex-kings fell to Nana Saheb. But he could not carry out his mission, for he was not free. He sought permission to go on a pilgrimage to different parts of India, which was of course a ruse. But the permission came too late. This was one of the reasons for the failure of the Sepoy uprising.

The supposedly greased heads of the new Dum Dum bullets became another weapon in the Mad Mullah's hands to rouse the Sepoys. The plans for open revolt came up and the date fixed was May 1857, the anniversary of the fall of Plassey.

Earlier in 1857, Nana Saheb spent his time paying visits to General Wheeler. Wheeler was nicknamed 'Hamla Wheeler' due to the singular courage of his previous exploits in his campaigns in Burma and North Western India. He would have become the Commander-in-Chief of India, had he not married an Indian woman, Janki, a woman of doubtful reputation and origin. He had three daughters, all comely, the eldest of whom was Eliza. Nana flirted with her.

Among other friends was Hillderson, the Collector of Kanpur.

The actual fact that sparked the uprising was the punishment of a company of Sepoys who had refused to handle the new bullets. For this act of insubordination they were made to stand in the glaring sun, stripped of their uniforms and fixed with iron fetters. The whole drama took several hours to enact, while the entire battalion was made to stand and witness this process of humiliation. The British authorities thought the punishment would scare the Sepoys. It had the opposite result; it hastened their uprising.

Many officers, including Wheeler and Hillderson, were told of the coming uprising and even of its scheduled date. But they simply ignored it as an impossibility.

The revolt began in Meerut, a few days earlier than the fixed zero hour. The Sepoys killed the officers and their families, a deed which has been overemphasised by the British historians. The revolt spread to Delhi where similar action took place. Then the Sepoys went in a body to Bahadur Shah and proclaimed, 'The land has returned to Allah, the government to Bahadur Shah.'

For Nana Saheb, his duty and position seemed to be ambiguous if not precarious, with trusting British authorities on the one hand and insurgent forces on the other. Both considered him to be their ally. He had done nothing to break their trusts or raise their suspicions regarding his integrity.

But his integrity was put to a test with Hillderson's requesting him to escort the European families in Kanpur to the entrenchment, a walled area across the river. Hillderson thought that Nana Saheb's presence would prevent harm to these families. This duty he fulfilled by accompanying the families comprising six hundred women

and children with his two hundred mounted guards. It was done in anticipation of the Sepoys' uprising in Kanpur, following the lead in Meerut and Delhi. For the tension continued to mount in the city; and its people, both the military part and civilian, were in a state of hypertension.

A further duty was laid on Nana Saheb; it was to safeguard the treasury. At night, he and Tanya Topi visited Ajijan, the former concubine of Nana, now the head of a well-known brothel. She brought to his notice the current rumours of the city: the British had deliberately mixed bone-meal with the wheat sold in the market in order to pollute the people.

The authorities, hearing this, collected all bags of wheat and burned them in order to pacify the citizens.

When Tika Singh of the 32nd cavalry came and requested Nana Saheb to lead the masterless Sepoys, he could not keep up the show and pretence. With him came Nane Khan, the gunner, and Nizam, the captain. In face of the situation in which he was placed, almost in spite of himself he had to accept.

The Sepoys went to raid the treasury where they found no resistance, because Nana Saheb's men simply stood apart and watched the raid.

Then Nana Saheb and his men attacked the entrenchment where heavy fusillade and cannonade stopped them. The six hundred besieged Europeans stood the ordeal, suffering the heat, the privations, the hunger and the sickness. But they were alert, and opened fire at the first provocation. The food-stock dwindled and starvation stared in their faces. Even the proud 'Hamla Wheeler' was brought down to his knees.

On Nana's side he was bored by the condition of the siege, and angry because he was unable to force his enemies to surrender.

A truce was settled upon. The white men were to be allowed to move to the *Satichaura* embankment. Nana Saheb was to provide escort and safe passage to these six hundred men, women and children until they embarked on the awaiting boats to carry them to a safe place up the river.

Everything was going well as agreed. But a new detachment of Sepoys arrived on the scene. They either did not know the conditions of the truce or simply could not check their temptation to fire. The guns rang out before Nana could prevent them and within minutes nearly the entire body of white men, women and children lay dead on the boats, on the steps of the *ghat* or in the water.

A few women who escaped were sent to *Bibighar* some miles away, where a woman fanatic, Hussaini Begum, whose son had been killed in a firing, barred the doors of this house and set fire to it, killing the rest of the poor English women victims.

In both the instances, Nana had no hand in the mishaps. He was caught amid forces he could not control or guide. English writers quote these instances to prove his unscrupulousness and treachery.

He was acclaimed as the Peshwa and he and the Sepoys enjoyed themselves for

a few days until the revolts in Delhi and Meerut were squashed and the rains set in. A military contingent, six thousand strong, under the joint leadership of Neil and Renaud, arrived from Calcutta.

It met Nana Saheb's band on the banks of the Ganges, where it was utterly defeated with heavy casualties. The new Enfield rifles and the much-condemned Dum Dum bullets which had a greater range created havoc.

Nana Saheb with two brothers Bala Saheb and Baba Saheb, his second-in-command Tantya Topi and a few faithful followers, escaped to a village where his former assistant Nizam had established himself, while the conquering forces reached Kanpur. The rebellious Sepoys fled. Only Ajijan and a few others, taking recourse to guerilla tactics, resisted. They too were finally rounded up, captured and publicly hanged.

Nana Saheb now realised that the cause was lost. Collecting all his heavier heirlooms and no less fabulous jewelry, he dumped them in a well and fled, arranging the escorting of his daughter and concubine to his house at Bithoor.

At Nizam's place he met Eliza, in the most dramatic circumstances. Nizam's wife had nailed her to the floor and was flogging her mercilessly because Eliza had murdered Nizam when he had tried to rape her, after having rescued her from drowning at Satchaura *ghat*. Nana Saheb killed the woman and rescued Eliza. Eliza, from then, remained with Nana Saheb for many years.

His daughter and concubine died, burned down in his house at Bithoor. The British had set fire to this house. Nana Saheb was grief-stricken but this was not a moment to grieve. So gathering a few fleeing Sepoys he encamped a little away from Kanpur and formed a band of resisters. The number came to about three or four thousand.

Delhi fell. Zeenat Mahal's valiant struggle ended. The British killed her three sons. From Kanpur and Lucknow news came of torture, innumerable acts of hanging, arson and rape by the white enemy—acts which were many times worse than the murders at Bibighar and Satichaura *ghat*. This part of the history the British historians gloss over or remain silent about.

The Maharaja of Nepal, in order to please the British, declared war on Nana Saheb. Nana faced a few skirmishes and held on for some time in a village near Kanpur till Sir Colin, the Commander-in-Chief, pounced with a vast army and rased everything to the ground. Not a brick in Bithoor remained standing.

Nanak Chand, a quisling, gave detailed information about Nana Saheb's wealth hidden away in a well. Pulleys and chains and buckets went into action and in a week's time Sir Colin had retrieved everything. The hoards were distributed according to rank, the Commander-in-Chief getting the lion's share.

Nana Saheb escaped again and became a fugitive. One hundred thousand rupees were offered as ransom for his capture. Once or twice he was espied by some villagers, but instead of informing the authorities they offered him hospitality, because the people bore respect for him as a hero of the rebellion and hated the British for their inhuman retaliation. Even an English officer, an old friend of Nana Saheb, set his

eyes on him on one of his patrolling duties. But he spoke a few words, shook hands and left.

Hiding in hamlets by day and travelling by night, Nana Saheb and his band entered Nepal. Here Jung Bahadur, the ruling Prime Minister, gave him asylum, on condition that Nana offered his wife Kashi to serve as Jung Bahadur's concubine. Not only that, he must also part with a few of his family jewels. Now Kashi was Nana's wife only in name. Champa shared his life and now in Nepal Elizabeth Wheeler was as good as a wife to him.

Nana Saheb was white with fury. But his life was at stake so he finally agreed to this most dishonourable proposal.

Now he and his companions moved to some huts in the Nepalese Terai. News reached him of Tanya's capture and death by hanging and of the demise of Amadullah, the Mad Mullah, due to betrayal and finally of the English Queen's assuming supreme authority over India.

This was in 1858.

Nana Saheb now sent a letter through couriers, with Jung Bahadur's aid, to the British authorities declaring himself innocent of the two carnages ascribed to him.

The British did not believe his part of the story but ordered his immediate return to give himself up. Nana Saheb was not a fool and he did not obey this command.

In 1859 Kusumabai, Nana's sister, was sent to Gwalior, to his brother-in-law, accompanied by a Nepalese escort. At the same time his brother Baba Saheb died of swamp-fever. His ashes were sent to the British authorities as being those of Nana Saheb. But the authorities were not duped.

The search for the fugitive continued and the police in India arrested two persons in Bombay as being Nana Saheb and his body-servant. Curiously, the picture that was circulated in India as being Nana Saheb's was not his at all. It was that of a merchant of Kanpur who bore a resemblance to him.

Anyway, in exchange for the few remaining family jewels, Nana Saheb and his followers lived in Nepal for fourteen years. His followers were tired of this existence. They wanted to return to India and give themselves up. The conditions there had become normal. But Nana Saheb refused.

In 1873 Jung Bahadur sold part of the Terai, where Nana Saheb was staying, to the British, because it was close to the Indian border. Now Nana had no alternative except to leave Nepal in the guise of a religious mendicant. Before his departure he gave away his remaining jewels to Eliza and their daughter Mani. He bequeathed the last precious gem to Kashi, his former wife. While Eliza and Mani went openly to British India, Nana Saheb went secretly to Kanpur. He visited Bithoor and was grieved at the total destruction of his house. He then sojourned to Gwalior where Jayaji Scindia welcomed him.

Scindia discovered a man resembling Nana Saheb. This man for a large reward gave himself up as the much-sought-for rebel.

Then Nana Saheb made several pilgrimages and finally came to Bombay. He

boarded a ship bound for Mecca; on board the ship he met Eliza, Azim and Mani.

According to Malgaonkar, Nana Saheb spent his last days in Mecca, financed by Jayaji Scindia.

Historians are at variance about the end of Nana Saheb. That he spent some time in Nepal is a recorded fact. But his journey back to Bithoor, Kanpur, Gwalior and finally Mecca is not recorded anywhere. In fact his end is veiled in mystery.

Malgaonkar, with his license as a fiction-writer, has invented some situations which could be an excellent story but very bad history. For example, Nana Saheb's going to Mecca seems to be outrageous if not impossible. Would he forsake his religion in order to live? If this was true we would have to declare him an unscrupulous man, a man without principles. This at once mars his image.

Merely the lack of data does not mean we could construe impossible facts. If Malgaonkar is correct, then we would have to agree with the British historians that Nana Saheb was a man who acted according to the situation he was placed in; in a word, he was an opportunist.

One thing yet remains to be cleared. Malgaonkar has presented two contradictory images, that of an indolent man, given to luxury, women and an easy life at the outset, and at the later stages that of a man of will, leadership, courage and organising ability. The two images clash and we have to pause and ask which of these is the true portrait of the hero.

His love for Champa and Eliza and his total disregard of his wife give us another occasion to reconsider our opinion of the man. Was he a family man, a philanderer or something else?

In the final analysis we have to say that he was not a tyrant by nature as depicted by the British historians. This has been well brought out by the author. The atrocities attributed to him are circumstantial and not essential. He became a rebel out of necessity and not out of his inherent nature.

*(To be continued)*

ROMEN PALIT



## SUPPLEMENT: THE FIRST ENGLISH NOVEL ON INDIA

*(With due acknowledgements to the Oxford University Press we have pleasure in quoting from A Cultural History of India edited by A. L. Basham, 1975, the following passages to complete the early part of Romen Palit's series "Indian Life in English Writings". The passages are insertions on pp. 473-74 by Basham in the article "India and the Modern West" by Friedrich Wilhelm and H. G. Rawlinson.)*

...HERE mention should be made of what is probably the earliest European novel about India, written from first-hand experience. This is *Hartly House Calcutta*, the work of an anonymous author, apparently a lady, published in London in 1789. Evidently the writer had had first-hand experience of the Calcutta of Hastings's day, and her work combines the characteristics of a novel and a travel book. Like many of the novels of the period it is in the form of a series of letters written by the heroine, Sophia Goldborne, to a close lady friend in England. It is of small literary merit, but a pirated edition appeared in Dublin in the year of publication and a German translation two years later.

The novel gives an interesting picture of the luxurious life of the Calcutta nabobs, as seen by their ladies. Its most significant feature, from the historian's point of view, is its very sympathetic attitude to Hinduism. Sophia, who admires their music and dancing, writes thus about 'the Gentoos': 'They live...the most inoffensively and happily of all created beings—their Pythagorean tenets teaching them, from their earliest infancy, the lesson of kindness and benevolence'. (Letter XII.) She meets a young brāhman, a student of 'the Gentoo university at Benares', with whom she falls platonically in love. She understands the broad principles of the Hindu class system, which she approves of, and she admires the brāhmins who have 'countenances such as Guido would have bestowed on a heavenly saint'. She seems to have no objection to Hindu idolatry and she even admires the devoted self-sacrifice of the *satī*. She is half-inclined to believe the doctrine of transmigration. She is taught the principles of Hinduism by her brāhman student, and in one letter she even states that she has become a Hindu. 'Ashamed of the manner of modern Christianity...I am become a convert to the Gentoo faith, and have my Bramin [sic] to instruct me *per diem*.' (Letter XXVI.) The convenient death of the brāhman ('O! he was all that heaven has ever condescended to make human nature—and I will raise a pagoda to his memory in my heart, that shall endure till that heart beats no more') makes it possible for Sophia to marry without misgivings the young East India Company officer who has been paying her court ('for much did he honour and prize my Bramin') (Letter XXXII), and return to England. The novel is a striking comment on the effects of self-confident nineteenth-century imperialism and of the rise of the Evangelical movement on the attitudes of the British in India.

A. L. BASHAM

# EUROPE 1974

## A TRAVELOGUE

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DURING our short sojourn in London this time, we had to make a list of the places we wanted to see in the city, with words "priority" or "first priority" and "secondary" before each name. The British Museum was our first priority. The fact that the British Museum is the greatest and the finest library in the British Commonwealth, and perhaps the greatest of its kind in the whole world, coupled with our own feeling of reverence for all libraries, kindled our desire to see it first. Libraries have become sacred places for us. Every time we step across the threshold of any library we are reminded of the fact, that it was on the lawns of our family library that Sri Aurobindo had delivered the famous Uttarpara speech. His infinite personality invades us and we are overwhelmed and hypnotised by that impact. He had drunk knowledge like a giant's wine and His presence and even the books on the shelves permeated with his presence invite us to do the same, in our own small way.

The British Museum is definitely not the oldest library in England. But none of the earlier ones has reached the gigantic proportions that the British Museum has acquired today. As the city of London grew in importance, Londoners started harbouring a desire to have a library befitting the great Metropolis. Sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century men of position and power truly started to think of building a library in London, and with this aim in view floated a lottery to raise funds. With all the efforts of those who sponsored the project, only 300,000 pound sterling could be raised. Most of the money went to buying a mansion that could adequately house a great library. From early descriptions we find that Montague House was actually a magnificent place, with walls and halls and staircase that could compare with the best in London. Progress would have been slow had it not been for Sir Hans Sloans who offered simultaneously his enormous collection of books, antiquities and pictures. In 1753 Parliament passed an Act authorising the trustees to buy Sloans' collection and the manuscripts offered by the Earl of Oxford. With this small beginning the British Museum started and grew gradually by the bequest of other great collectors; the most notable among them was the famous Elizabethan antiquarian Robert Cotton. This, plus Royal Patronage, has made the library what it is today, a wonder among libraries. George II and George III had, it seems, an enormous collection of books and they offered it to the British Museum. So important has become the institution that in its governing body are such eminent citizens as the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Chancellor.

The British Museum is on Great Russell Street very near one of the houses where Sri Aurobindo once lived. The library has about six million books and these are sheltered on shelves that would cover fifty miles if they were put side by side. The library

has a right to a copy of every book published in Britain. The result is that even one year's acquisition of books, if the items are juxtaposed, would cover a mile. From *Magna Carter* to *Alice in Wonderland* and *Kon-tiki*, everything is there in the British Museum. They say nearly 800,000 people visit the British Museum every year, and a staff of seven hundred men and women work there to keep it in tip-top condition. There are books and manuscripts so valuable or grown so brittle, that no one, not even the scholars, are allowed to touch them. A rare scholar, found worthy by the governing body, may be given permission to approach them; even then he would have to handle the papers with the help of the staff and in some cases handle them with instruments.

Apart from the library, there is a stupendous museum section in the British Museum that attracts thousands of sightseers. So enormous had this section become that some time ago the natural history section had to be removed to Kensington, as the main library had to remove its newspaper section to Colindale. As the Empire grew and with it the power and influence of the English people, excavation work was carried out at various sites all over the world. From these excavated fields priceless antiquities of all sorts poured in to add to the already vast collection of the British Museum. The British Museum exhibits today unrivalled and unparalleled varieties of antiquities illustrating the history, arts and crafts of many civilisations. The choicest Greek sculpture came in masses from the Parthenon in Athens. These are known as the Elgin Marbles bought from the Turks for a very nominal price. Greece was then in Turkish hands but the excavation was carried out by the British. Antiquities have come from the tomb of Mausolus (350 B.C.), antiquities associated with Assyria, Babylonia, Nineveh, ancient Egypt are all there. Wherever and whenever priceless objects were unearthed, they were transferred wholesale to Britain and found their way to the British Museum. The descriptions of how these marbles and other huge stone sculptures from Asia Minor were brought to the port and shipped to Britain read like a novel. Out in the deserts and on lonely riversides, far from civilisation, in terrible heat thousands of men were employed to excavate the sites; then when unique sculptures were dug up they made special rafters and crates and wooden trolleys to carry the new finds to their destination. When we actually saw the great Assyrian winged bull, about forty feet high, at the Museum we were awe-struck by its grandeur, and thought: 'How on earth did they manage to bring it here?'

Excavation work can generally be said to have been good, when we consider how much it has done to enhance human knowledge and how much it has added to history. But in some places at least it has not been auspicious. One of the places was Egypt. The Mother once told us that ancient Egyptians were highly developed people and their spirits are still alive and awake, and they did not like people meddling with their tombs, mummies and sarcophaguses. We have heard innumerable stories of misfortunes befalling people who tried to meddle with mummies. Even curators and workers have died packing mummies. So when we visited the Egyptian section we were at once reminded of the Mother's words. This, added to what we actually saw

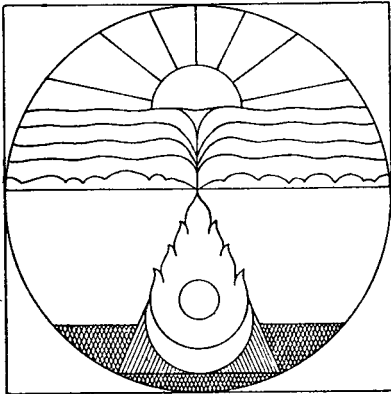
— mummies some still packed, some half-opened, lying in rows—filled us with a certain disgust. It was very gruesome.

Visiting the hall (as big as a football field), where the Elgin Marbles are kept, was a happy experience. Almost all the pieces were beautiful. Of special interest was a frieze on the wall, depicting the four-yearly festival of Athena known as the Panathenaea. There was a second one showing the contest between Athene and Poseidon. The coin section was also interesting. We were told of a coin section so precious that only scholars are allowed there. Gold and silver objects, porcelain jars and urns are kept in sealed glass-cases with special lighting arrangements. We had a happy time there and repeated in our mind the phrase of Keats on a Grecian urn:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness...

*(To be continued)*

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