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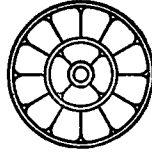
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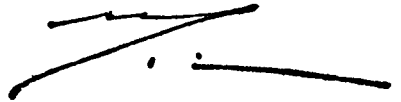


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Vol. XLI

No. 5

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
A TALK BY THE MOTHER TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 29 MAY 1957	... 293
THE TYPEWRITER OF SRI AUROBINDO <i>Shyam Kumari</i>	... 296
THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE IN THE LIGHT OF HER <i>Prayers and Meditations</i> <i>Nilima Das</i>	... 297
VIGNETTES OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO <i>Compiled by S</i>	... 300
HOW THEY CAME TO THE ASHRAM <i>Compiled by K</i>	... 301
IN MUSIC I LIVE (Poem) <i>Debanshu</i>	... 304
SRI AUROBINDO, PARTHASARATHY IYENGAR AND PONDICHERRY: A NOTE TOWARDS CLARIFYING THEIR CONNECTION <i>K. D. Sethna</i>	... 305
GLIMPSES OF PAVITRA FROM THE REMINISCENCES OF PAVITRA AND MRITYUNJOY	... 311
THE STORY OF A SOUL <i>Huta</i>	... 315
LOVE'S OMNIPOTENCE (Poem) <i>James Dillet Freeman</i>	... 321
THE HAUNTING ACTION-AT-A-DISTANCE THROUGH THE AGES <i>R. Y. Deshpande</i>	... 322
NOLINI KANTA GUPTA BIRTH CENTENARY BODY-ENERGY <i>Compiled by Shyam Kumari</i>	328 ... 329
MAN, MALADY AND MEDICINE <i>Samar Basu</i>	... 333
THE ETERNAL CHILD AND THE ETERNAL MARVEL GOLDEN AGE <i>B. Petris</i>	... 336

CONTENTS

FOR YOUR EARS ONLY

14. THE UNFORGETTABLE PENCIL *P. Raja* ... 340

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

A HISTORY OF PONDICHERRY BY
A. Ramasamy *Review by Shraddhavan* ... 344

STUDENTS' SECTION

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE—
16 AUGUST 1987 "IS SRI AUROBINDO'S
YOGA TO BE TURNED INTO A RELIGION?"

SPEECH BY *Vishwajyoti Pandey* ... 346

MOTHER INDIA INDEX 1987, PART THREE: TOPICS

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A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 29 MAY 1957

“A divine life in a divine body is the formula of the ideal that we envisage.... The process of the evolution upon earth has been slow and tardy—what principle must intervene if there is to be a transformation, a progressive or sudden change?”

“It is indeed as a result of our evolution that we arrive at the possibility of this transformation. As Nature has evolved beyond Matter and manifested Life, beyond Life and manifested Mind, so she must evolve beyond Mind and manifest a consciousness and power of our existence free from the imperfection and limitation of our mental existence, a supramental or truth-consciousness and able to develop the power and perfection of the spirit. Here a slow and tardy change need no longer be the law or manner of our evolution; it will be only so to a greater or less extent so long as a mental ignorance clings and hampers our ascent; but once we have grown into the truth-consciousness its power of spiritual truth of being will determine all....”

“It might be also that the transformation might take place by stages; there are powers of the nature still belonging to the mental region which are yet potentialities of a growing gnosis lifted beyond our human mentality and partaking of the light and power of the Divine and an ascent through these planes, a descent of them into the mental being might seem to be the natural evolutionary course. But in practice it might be found that these intermediate levels would not be sufficient for the total transformation since, being themselves illumined potentialities of mental being not yet supramental in the full sense of the word, they could bring down to the mind only a partial divinity or raise the mind towards that but not effectuate its elevation into the complete supramentality of the truth-consciousness. Still these levels might become stages of the ascent which some would reach and pause there while others went higher and could reach and live on superior strata of a semi-divine existence. It is not to be supposed that all humanity would rise in a block into the supermind....”

The Supramental Manifestation, pp. 20-22

It is precisely about this progressive transformation that I am going to speak to you this evening.... I have often been asked this question, “Why, after having posited as an ideal principle that when we deal with our body we ought to do it with the knowledge that it is only a result and an instrument of the supreme Reality of the universe and of the truth of our being,—why, after having taught this and shown that this is the truth to be realised, do we have in the organisation of our Ashram, doctors, dispensaries, a physical education of the body based

on modern theories accepted everywhere?" And why, when some of you go for a picnic do I forbid you to drink water from just anywhere and tell you to take filtered water with you? Why do I have the fruit you eat disinfected, etc.?

All this seems contradictory, but this evening I intend to explain something to you which, I hope, will put an end to this feeling of a contradiction in you. In fact, I have told you many a time that when two ideas or principles apparently seem to contradict one another, you must rise a little higher in your thought and find the point where the contradictions meet in a comprehensive synthesis.

Here, it is very easy if we know one thing, that the method we use to deal with our body, maintain it, keep it fit, improve it and keep it in good health, depends *exclusively* on the state of consciousness we are in; for our body is an instrument of our consciousness and this consciousness can act directly on it and obtain what it wants from it.

So, if you are in an ordinary physical consciousness, if you see things with the eyes of the ordinary physical consciousness, if you think of them with the ordinary physical consciousness, it will be ordinary physical means you will have to use to act on your body. These ordinary physical means make up the whole science which has accumulated through thousands of years of human existence. This science is very complex, its processes innumerable, complicated, uncertain, often contradictory, always progressive and almost absolutely relative! Still, very precise results have been achieved; ever since physical culture has become a serious preoccupation, a certain number of experiments, studies, observations have accumulated, which enable us to regulate diet, activities, exercise, the whole outer organisation of life, and provide an adequate basis so that those who make the effort to study and conform strictly to these things have a chance to maintain their body in good health, correct the defects it may have and improve its general condition, and even achieve results which are sometimes quite remarkable.

I may add, moreover, that this intellectual human science, such as it is at present, in its very sincere effort to find the truth, is, surprisingly enough, drawing closer and closer to the essential truth of the Spirit. It is not impossible to foresee the movement where the two will unite in a very deep and very close understanding of the essential truth.

So, for all those who live on the physical plane, in the physical consciousness, it is physical means and processes which have to be used in dealing with the body. And as the vast majority of human beings, even in the Ashram, live in a consciousness which, if not exclusively physical, is at least predominantly physical, it is quite natural for them to follow and obey all the principles laid down by physical science for the care of the body.

Now, according to what Sri Aurobindo teaches us, this is not a final realisation, nor is it the ideal to which we want to rise. There is a higher state than this, in which the consciousness, though it still remains principally mental or

partially mental in its functioning, is already open to higher regions in an aspiration for the spiritual life, and open to the supramental influence.

As soon as this opening occurs, one passes beyond the state in which life is purely physical—when I say “physical” I include the whole mental and intellectual life and all human achievements, even the most remarkable; I am speaking of a physical which is the summit of human capacities, of an earthly and material life in which man can express values of a higher order from the mental and intellectual point of view—one can go beyond that state, open oneself to the supramental force which is now acting on earth and enter a transitional zone where the two influences meet and interpenetrate, where the consciousness is still mental and intellectual in its functioning, but sufficiently imbued with the supramental strength and force to become the instrument of a higher truth.

At present this state can be realised on earth by those who have prepared themselves to receive the supramental force which is manifesting. And in that state, in that state of consciousness, the body can benefit from a much better condition than the one it was in before. It can be put into direct contact with the essential truth of its being, to the extent that, *spontaneously*, at every moment it knows instinctively, or intuitively, what is to be done and that it can do it.

As I say, this state can now be realised by all those who take the trouble of preparing themselves to receive the supramental force, to assimilate it and obey it.

Of course, there is a higher state than this, the state Sri Aurobindo speaks of as the ideal to be fulfilled: the divine life in a divine body. But he himself tells us that this will take time; it is an integral transformation which cannot be achieved in a moment. It will even take quite a long time. But when it is accomplished, when the consciousness has become a supramental consciousness, then action will no longer be determined at every moment by a mental choice or be dependent on the physical capacity: the entire body will spontaneously, integrally, be the perfect expression of the inner truth.

This is the ideal we must keep before us, for the realisation of which we must strive; but we must not delude ourselves and think that it can be a rapid transformation, miraculous, immediate, marvellous, without effort and without labour.

However, it is no longer only a possibility, it is no longer even only a promise for a far-off future: it is something which is in the making. And already one can not only foresee but feel the moment when the body will be able to repeat integrally the experience of the most spiritual part of the being, as the inner spirit has already done, and will itself be able to stand in its bodily consciousness before the supreme Reality, turn to it integrally and say in all sincerity, in a total self-giving of all its cells: “To be Thyself—exclusively, perfectly—Thyself, infinitely, eternally... very simply.”

THE TYPEWRITER OF SRI AUROBINDO

IN a corner cupboard of the ground-floor central hall of the Sri Aurobindo Library, is kept an ancient typewriter with a simple label: "Sri Aurobindo's Typewriter."

As one contemplates the faithful machine, time stands arrested. One is transported in one's mind to the region of an ineffable peace—a peace which raging storms could not shake—the peace of the room where Sri Aurobindo sat night after night, year after year, typing out reams of knowledge.

The soft fingers that coaxed effortless enchantments from a flute, the adamant hands that held the *Sudarshan Chakra*—the warrior's disk—in the twilight of another age, have chosen in this dawn-era a different tool—the Word—full of the light of the Integral Knowledge immortally enclosed in thirty published volumes and many yet to be published, to say nothing of those eaten up by white ants, destroyed by the police or lost and misplaced by friends, family and disciples.

At different stages of evolution the Divine uses different instruments. In this transitional phase between the *Kalyuga*—the Iron Age—and the *Satyayuga*—the Golden Age to come—he has approached man through his mind and reason with the word as his instrument. Iridescent notes of social, political, poetical, philosophical and above all spiritual knowledge were drawn incessantly from the iron keys of this machine. Minor or major, quick-paced or gravely moving, implied or explicit, briefly succinct or leisurely long-drawn-out—whatsoever the content or structure—the depths and heights of his word are unparalleled.

Sri Aurobindo's aim was to break into the kingdom of our souls through our minds. The Divine perforce gives divinely. Merely to illumine our circumscribed limited human brains this stupendous labour by the Avatar of Supermind was not needed. Even a small part of it would have sufficed. But maybe there was another purpose for this outpouring. As a powerful searchlight pierces a millennial darkness, Sri Aurobindo's seeing thought as expressed through his words pierced the thick veil of secrecy covering the face of life and reconnected matter with spirit.

Thus God who put that veil for some purpose of his, which separated, man from him, has paid his debt to Man. A glorious future awaits the human creature. Mighty and miraculous new mutations are round the corner. The animality in man will be eliminated and his humanity transformed to divinity.

With tears of gratitude one bows to this instrument of the Avatar—the typewriter of Sri Aurobindo—from whose keys he brought forth the message of our world's salvation.

SHYAM KUMARI

THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

IN THE LIGHT OF HER *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

(Continued from the issue of March 1988)

THE MOTHER met Sri Aurobindo for the first time on 29th March 1914 and wrote in her Prayers what she felt after she saw him:

“It matters little that there are hundreds of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth. His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into Light...”

Years later, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo’s younger brother who had just come back from the Andamans, asked Sri Aurobindo: “The Mother has written in her Prayers what she felt after she saw you. But what was your feeling when you saw the Mother?” Sri Aurobindo thought for a moment and told him: “That was the first time I knew that perfect surrender to the last physical cell was humanly possible; it was when the Mother came and bowed down that I saw perfect surrender in action.”¹

A similar and most striking picture of absolute self-surrender of the Mother rings in her prayer dated November 10, 1914: “O Lord, Thy presence is settled within me like an unshakable rock; and the whole being exults in belonging to Thee without the least reserve, with a wide and complete surrender.”

Quite a number of years later Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple about self-surrender. He gave a full interpretation of self-surrender in the following words: “Surrender means... to give up our little mind and its mental ideas and preferences into a divine Light and a greater Knowledge, our petty personal troubled blind stumbling will into a great, calm, tranquil, luminous Will and Force, our little, restless, tormented feelings into a wide intense divine Love and Ananda, our small suffering personality into the one Person of which it is an obscure outcome.”²

How to surrender? What is the vital process of the self-surrender? The Mother says: “Once you have turned to the Divine, saying, ‘I want to be yours’, and the Divine has said, ‘Yes’, the whole world cannot keep you from it. When the central being has made its surrender, the chief difficulty has disappeared. The outer being is like a crust. In ordinary people the crust is so hard and thick that they are not conscious of the Divine within them. If once, even for a moment only, the inner being has said, ‘I am here and I am yours’, then it is as though a bridge has been built and little by little the crust becomes thinner and thinner until the two parts are wholly joined and the inner and the outer become one.”³

Sri Aurobindo gives a brief yet penetrating exposition of the path of surrender in the following passages, the steps towards what the Mother has illustrated above. He says: “Surrender is the main power of the yoga, but the surrender

is bound to be progressive; a complete surrender is not possible in the beginning, but only a will in the being for that completeness,..."⁴

"It (the attitude of surrender) cannot be absolutely complete in the beginning, but it can be true—if the central will is sincere and there is the faith and the Bhakti. There may be contrary movements, but these will be unable to stand for long and the imperfection of the surrender in the lower part will not seriously interfere."⁵

"If there is not a complete surrender, then it is not possible to adopt the baby-cat attitude,—it becomes mere tamasic passivity calling itself surrender."⁶

The Mother has adopted the baby-cat attitude in her self-surrender. In her Prayer on 3 April she reveals the progression by which she attained it. "It seems to me that I am being born to a new life and all the methods, the habits of the past can no longer be of any use. It seems to me that what I thought were results is nothing more than a preparation. I feel as though I have done nothing yet, as though I have not lived the spiritual life, only entered the path that leads to it, it seems to me that I know nothing, that I am incapable of formulating anything, that all experience is yet to begin. It is as though I were stripped of my entire past, of its errors as well as its conquests, as though all that has vanished and made room for a new-born child whose existence is yet to be lived, who has no Karma, no experience to learn from but no error either which has to be set right. My head is empty of all knowledge and all certitude, but also of vain thought. I feel that if I learn how to surrender without any resistance to this state, if I do not try to know or understand, if I consent to be completely like an ignorant and candid child, some new possibility will open before me."

On October 10, 1918 the Mother has painted a complete picture of self-surrender. She says: "My father has smiled and taken me in his powerful arms. What could I fear? I have melted into Him and it is He who acts and lives in this body which He himself had formed for His manifestation."

On August 18, 1914 she has expressed an accomplished self-offering. Her Prayer runs to describe it: "In a most perfect surrender and most entire trust I wait: Thy voice showing me Thy path."

Sri Aurobindo has said: "The process of surrender is itself a Tapasya."

Self-surrender should be detailed and integral. The human personality is complex and obscure. Sometimes the central part is opened and ready to surrender itself but other parts do not co-operate fully. The Mother has given a full interpretation of the integral surrender in the following words: "There is only one way for you. It is a total, complete and unconditional surrender. What I mean by that is the giving up not only of your actions, work, ambitions but also of all your feelings, in the sense that all that you do, all that you are, is exclusively for the Divine. So, you feel above the surrounding human reactions—not only above them but protected from them by the wall of the Divine's Grace. Once you have no more desires, no more attachments, once you have given up all

necessity of receiving a reward from human beings, whoever they are—knowing that the only reward that is worth getting is the one that comes from the Supreme and that never fails—once you give up the attachment to all exterior beings and things, you at once feel in your heart this Presence, this Force, this Grace that is always with you.”⁸

What is the meaning of integral surrender? Sri Aurobindo affirms: “Surrender means to consecrate everything in oneself to the Divine, to offer all one is and has, not to insist on one’s ideas, desires, habits, etc., but to allow the divine Truth to replace them by its knowledge, will and action everywhere.”⁹

The Mother prays to the Lord in the following sweet and candid words: “Nothing will stop our impetus; nothing will tire our effort; and resting upon Thee all our hopes and all our activities, strong in our complete surrender to Thy Supreme Will, we shall march on to the conquest of Thy integral manifestation with the calm and certitude of victory over all that would oppose it.” (July 22, 1914)

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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VIGNETTES OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of 24 April 1988)

PROTECTION FLOWERS

ONCE three young girls sent a bunch of "Protection" flowers (Bougainvillea) to the Mother through X. While giving the flowers to the Mother, X remarked, "Mother, three monkeys have sent you these flowers."

The Mother understood whom he was referring to. She graciously took the flowers and remarked, "Protection against whom? Against themselves?"

SAVED

On his way to office, X was waiting at the bus-stand. The bus arrived but it was full. X tried to force his way in. He put his foot on the foot-board and took hold of the bar with his hand. Before he could get a secure hold, the bus began to move and X slipped. His hand was jerked loose and, falling beside the bus, he got somehow thrown or rolled in front of the rear wheel. The passengers and the onlookers shouted. In that split-second, X remembered the Mother and prayed, "Mother, this is my last prayer. Save me."

Now something inexplicable happened. Instead of passing over his body, the rear wheel swerved, injuring only the back of X's heel, which started bleeding. Meanwhile the bus stopped, people surrounded him and made solicitous inquiries. He was rushed to the hospital but there was no doctor or nurse on duty. An attendant bandaged his foot, and the bleeding stopped. With a grateful heart he returned home and sent a telegram to the Mother.

On receiving the telegram, the Mother remarked that accidents happened "...because the consciousness goes down." This was conveyed to X.

But we can see that a call re-establishes the connection with the Mother and saves her child.

CATASTROPHIC DREAMS

A certain lady had many dreams and they invariably came true. One day she dreamt of her husband dying in an accident. Greatly perturbed, she wrote to Y in the Ashram, "What should I do?"

Y showed the letter to the Mother.

The Mother said something startling. She said that the lady made her dreams come true by the force of her consciousness. Then the Mother put a big cross on the letter and said to Y, "The destiny of her husband has changed. Don't worry."

Compiled by S

Note: As the Vignettes are going to appear in book-form, other periodicals are requested not to reproduce or translate them for circulation beforehand.

HOW THEY CAME TO THE ASHRAM

9

X's GRANDFATHER was a householder but a deeply religious soul. He was greatly revered by even saints and sages to say nothing of ordinary people. Holy men came from far and wide for the benefit of his company. There are many stories of his spiritual powers. It is said that if he called, the Lord appeared before him. His house was always full of God-seekers. Pooja, chanting of the Name, etc. were a regular part of the life of everyone in the family. Two of X's cousins on the maternal side became Sanyasins.

One day X's grandfather was sitting in the verandah when he saw at his door a Sadhu who cried, "Narayan-Hari." In those days Sadhus did not ask for alms, they just cried "Narayan-Hari" and if, on hearing it, the householder so wished, he would give alms. X's grandfather called out to his wife to bring something for the Sadhu but she was taking her bath. Then he called out to his servant but by the time the servant came the Sadhu had vanished. X saw him rising straight towards the sky. He called out loudly "O Lord! why did you take so much trouble? I was coming to you myself." That night he left his body.

Naturally the old man's spiritual atmosphere left a deep mark on X. Even in his childhood he met many a God-realised soul. With one of them Sri Jeevan Mukta of Virakta Ashram he developed an intimate relation. The saint gave him the name Vigyanmal.

X was born on 24th February 1919 on a Tuesday. Interestingly all his children were born on a Tuesday and he received a house from the Mother on a Tuesday. In his childhood he loved to worship the Lord and sometimes passed as many as six to eight hours a day in worship. Many a time his father scolded him, "Do you want to become a Sadhu that you pass such a long time in pooja, etc.?" Since his childhood during meditation X used to go out of his body and sometimes he plunged deep within.

X's father was corresponding with Sri Aurobindo. In 1933 at the age of thirteen X, his brother and some others came to the Ashram for the first time. The Mother was walking on the terrace and from there she saw these youngsters. It was the turning-point in X's life.

In 1949-50 X came with his family for the Darshans. All the Ashram Guest Houses were full. Narayan Prasad rented a house for X on Mahatma Gandhi Road. On Darshan day the children were a little slow and they got delayed. It upset X to come so far for Darshan and then to be delayed. In this state of mind he went for the Darshan. There he felt such a descent of Force that he could not stand unsupported. Supporting himself by putting his hand on his son's head, he somehow came down the stairs but had no control over himself. So he went

by rickshaw to Narayan Prasad's place. There he lay seemingly unconscious for many hours, though inwardly he was fully conscious. Narayan Prasad understood his condition and told the others not to disturb him. At 9 p.m. he took him home.

In 1950 X had a dream-vision. It was the August 1950 Darshan. He came to the Ashram in his subtle body and joined the Darshan queue. He had the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Darshan. When he came down he saw Sri Aurobindo get up and come down the staircase. He was very puzzled as to where the Lord was going. Sri Aurobindo came down and then vanished. X was so puzzled that he wrote a letter to the Mother about the experience asking, "Where did the Lord go?" The Mother sent him a blessing packet along with a photograph of the place where now the Samadhi is situated and where in those days flower pots were kept on a raised pedestal.

On hearing of Sri Aurobindo's passing X and his family flew to Pondicherry. But they left before Sri Aurobindo's body was laid in the Samadhi. Only in 1951 when he came again X knelt at the Samadhi. At that time he clearly heard Sri Aurobindo say, "Didn't I tell you I am coming here?" In a flash X remembered that in his vision Sri Aurobindo had come to this spot and had then vanished.

In 1953 X came for some business work to Madras where his family had an office. While he was seeing off an Ashramite at the aerodrome a spontaneous aspiration rose in his heart, "Can't I also serve the Mother?" The Divine's response was swift and total. He wrote to the Mother for permission to come for the February Darshan. Earlier the Mother had told X's brother that X's two elder children would study in the Ashram school. Now she said, "Ask him to come and live here."

On 17th February 1954 X came to the Ashram forever. This is how all sincere aspirations are fulfilled. One night while in Calcutta X saw a light above his body. Suddenly a spontaneous prayer arose and he started saying, "O Lord! Thou art the only Truth. I cannot live without Thee. Without Thee all is joyless. O ocean of compassion—here I am, an odd mixture of different traits, whatsoever I am, with all my different impulses, with all the good and bad in me, I offer myself at Thy Feet. Accept me, and let only Thy Will be fulfilled through me." The prayer must have risen from some deep layer of his being for even after thirty years X remembers each word of it.

In 1963 X had to have an eye-operation here in the Pondicherry General Hospital. While he was lying on the operation table he received a blessing-packet from the Mother. After the operation was over he was taken to a room. Next night in a vision he saw a huge demon arrive with an iron club like Bhima's. The demon approached him but X felt as if he, the intended victim, was clad in an iron armour of the Mother's Grace. The demon saw that he could not frighten X. So he lifted the club and gave a mighty blow to X, but the club

rebounded from X's armour and struck the demon on his head. He ran away. X's life was saved but not his eye. He was taken to Madras for a re-operation. He was very depressed but at that time he received a blessing-packet from the Mother, a living token of Divine Solitude and all depression vanished. At night the same demon came once more and he struck X with his huge club a powerful blow which again glanced back from the armour and struck the demon, who beat an ignominious retreat.

This time X wrote of the whole thing to the Mother. The Mother sent him two blessing-packets, one with Sri Aurobindo's photograph, the other with hers. After that this particular demon never came to attack X.

But there are countless Asuric forces. Since his childhood X had been in the habit of going out of his body during meditation. In 1964, one day during meditation he went out of his body. His subtle being flew over hills, dales, valleys, rivers and lakes. He flew higher and higher. From the very beginning two demons started following X. He reached a place where Sri Aurobindo was seated. He sat in the lap of Sri Aurobindo. At once the demons vanished without doing any damage and X found himself safely back in his body. When the incident was reported to the Mother she replied, "Don't worry, don't disturb him, he is on the proper path."

April 22, 1979 was a very crucial day in X's life. About 2 a.m. he saw a dark force coming and surrounding him. This being wanted to take his soul away. Just then X saw Mahalakshmi descend. She said to this being, "Don't touch. Go away at once." After some time the evil Force went away. Then slowly Mahalakshmi also rose in the sky and vanished. But the Forces of the Dark are very persistent. After the above vision, X fell asleep. At about two-thirty he saw another black, fearful demon coming towards him and standing near his bed. Then he saw Durga descend and come near him. She ordered the demon to go away at once. This demon too could not harm X and disappeared. Then Durga also vanished. After the departure of Durga X saw two nice children. They came to him and asked him to play with them and not to worry about anything. They said, "We will be happy." X passed some happy time with them, then they vanished.

On April 23, X found himself surrounded by white light during meditation. He was rising higher and higher in it and entering in it, deeper and deeper. He was very happy. Suddenly two branches of a tree by his side were cut and they intercrossed each other. X understood that it was the attack of those evil Forces but their attack broke the tree while the Mother saved him. He came down from the spiritual height and prayed to the Mother for protection.

On August 16, after midnight, X saw in a vision a small baby sleeping beside him on his cot. In the vision itself he asked and prayed to the Mother: "Mother, is it my soul which has been salvaged from the body-consciousness and has come out for Thy future work? Thou alone knowest. Thy Grace alone

will guide me on my venture of sadhana and Thy Grace alone will do everything for me.”

Though old and infirm, even today X does his work sincerely. He hardly takes notice of his illnesses and after each attack, on recovering a little, resumes his work.

Compiled by K

IN MUSIC I LIVE

I sit alert—all my faculties on edge,
 Heart-strings toned and taut,
 not a single vibration or echo to be missed.
 A master performs—a painter in sound,
 A sculpter in rhythms, a poet extra-auditory.
 The magnet of music draws to its core the wayward flings
 Of scattered thoughts wanton and adrift,
 Emotions so long doused in darkness
 Blaze up, overrun the mind and soar beyond.
 I relish the thrill—what blooming rose ever failed in fragrance?
 Caressing cadences steal into my cells,
 Conjure up a spell-bound somnambulance.
 The mind winged to soar up to unknown skies
 In response to the flowery call of music—
 A searching bee is led to the honey-heart.
 Doors to the inner sanctum open one after another.
 The golden door at last: Sovereign Soul
 Extends its light of welcome to the enamoured newcomer.
 Something dies, something revives transcending my captive oneness.

DEBANSHU

SRI AUROBINDO, PARTHASARATHY IYENGAR AND PONDICHERRY

A NOTE TOWARDS CLARIFYING THEIR CONNECTION

This article by the Editor of Mother India is published at the request of readers who wanted his views on the subject apropos of some views already in print.

IN the issue of *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research* for December 1987 the "Archival Notes" are partly aimed at settling certain queries raised by some statements of the writer two years earlier in the same periodical. His new statements too have come in for criticism. It may be that his true drift has failed to be caught, but the cause of the failure, if any, must lie at his own door. For, whatever his intentions, a persistent trend in his way of putting things has led to an impression of inaccuracy and of hazing the real posture of some extraordinary events.

This is rather unfortunate, for in his article the dissatisfying portions are in the midst of much admirable analytic matter—acute comparative evaluation, pointedly phrased, of documents and of the various shades of historical fact. There should be no question of disqualifying all his work or doubting in general his talents. That would be sheer injustice to him as a researcher. We are now concerned only with one particular theme of his, which calls for serious reconsideration: "What role did the man named Parthasarathy Iyengar play in Sri Aurobindo's connection with Pondicherry?"

Parthasarathy belonged to a group of patriots which included his brother Srinivasachari and Subramania Bharati. They had established an office in the French enclave of Pondicherry for a Tamil weekly, *India*, in order to carry on more securely their anti-British work as well as their work of regenerating Indian Culture. Previously Parthasarathy was the Secretary of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company which the Iyengar family was financially supporting for patriotic reasons. During his tour in Northern India in that capacity he met Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta and discussed the nationalist and cultural activities in which both the parties were engaged, mentioned the group of patriots in Pondicherry conducting *India* and suggested that Sri Aurobindo might find Pondicherry more congenial for his mission than British India where he suffered constant harassment from the foreign government. Sri Aurobindo's meeting with Parthasarathy is confirmed by his own diary note of Tuesday, 20 July 1909, which was meant to remind him of the appointment.

Some time after Sri Aurobindo had gone to Chandernagore in French India he sent through Suresh Chakravarti a letter to Pondicherry requesting the friends there to make arrangements for his stay in that town. The letter was received

by Srinivasachari, but he has himself reported that it was addressed to "S. Parthasarathy Iyengar, 'India' Press". As Parthasarathy was away at the time, Chakravarty, on learning that Srinivasachari was connected with *India*, gave it to him and asked him to read it and do the needful. The fact that Sri Aurobindo remembered Parthasarathy more than half a year later than the meeting in Calcutta shows the significance of that meeting for him in relation to Pondicherry.

The readers' queries raised by the earlier *Archives* issue seem to centre on a passage which is reproduced now as a *point de départ* for, among other matters, a defence against a charge of minimising the role of the *ādes̄h* (divine command) Sri Aurobindo had received about going to Pondicherry:

"We have seen that Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry at the suggestion of no one, but in obedience to a divine command. But by speaking to Sri Aurobindo about Pondicherry, Parthasarathy may have played an instrumental role in his coming."

The opening sentence in the above makes it clear that the writer does not support what M.A. Narayana Iyengar, who had no idea of the *ādes̄h* which Sri Aurobindo had obeyed, wrote in his Foreword to Parthasarathy's posthumously published *Bhagavad Gita: A Simple Paraphrase in English*. After recounting, apparently from information supplied by his friend and relative Parthasarathy himself, the interview with Sri Aurobindo in which Pondicherry had been recommended to him and the story of the letter addressed to "Parthasarathy Iyengar, c/o *India*, Pondicherry" and opened by Srinivasachari in the addressee's absence from the place, Narayana ends: "It may thus be seen that a suggestion from Sri S. Parthasarathy Iyengar lay behind Sri Aurobindo's visit to Pondicherry, which led in turn to the establishment of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram." In fact, the *Archives* article says that Narayana "was evidently giving his relative's meeting with Sri Aurobindo more significance than it deserves". But the writer also tells us that, as a historian, his acceptance of the *ādes̄h* as the cause of Sri Aurobindo's coming to Pondicherry does not oblige him "to suspend all considerations of the political and other circumstances surrounding his departure" from British India. He bases himself on Sri Aurobindo's view in a letter of 1936 that the divine Force does not act independently of cosmic forces. Sri Aurobindo has written: "The Force does not act in a void and in an absolute way... It comes as a Force intervening and acting on a complex nexus of Forces that were in action and displacing their disposition and interrelated movement and natural result by a new disposition, movement and result." It seems to the *Archives* writer that an *ādes̄h* operates also within the same nexus and he concludes: "I think it at least plausible that the *ādes̄h* that directed Sri Aurobindo to go to Pondicherry operated within a nexus of forces that included the attempts of the British to have him arrested, and the recently established contact between him and the revolutionaries of Pondicherry."

The writer's impression is not unnatural at first sight. I was myself inclined

at one time to agree broadly. But a closer look should lead us to doubt if one can equate the action of the divine Force with that of an *ādes̄h* like Sri Aurobindo's. As far as we can gather, the latter has nothing to do, as the former has, with a nexus of other forces. It acts exclusively in the consciousness of one individual alone and it acts but once:- there is no continuity of action as with the divine Force which may be concerned with several circumstances outside an individual, circumstances on which it goes on exerting itself. The *ādes̄h* such as Sri Aurobindo received is also described by him in a letter of 5 January 1936 as "imperative": "it is clear and irresistible, the mind has to obey and there is no question possible, even if what comes is contrary to the preconceived ideas of the mental intelligence." The divine Force of which Sri Aurobindo has written does not seem quite like this single absolute momentary stroke from the Supreme within only one person. Its comparison with the *ādes̄h* would hold simply in both having their source outside the common natural world: the *modus operandi* of each appears to be different. But we can grant that the situation in which the imperative *ādes̄h* occurs may include political factors. The *Archives* writer demonstrates easily the impossibility of overlooking these factors in the case of Sri Aurobindo, but his summing-up is challengeable: "I have no difficulty in accepting that Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry as the result of an *ades̄h*, and at the same time accepting that there were political factors behind his departure."

What does the last phrase mean? Does it just mean that the *ādes̄h* operated in the midst of politics and with an awareness of their trends? If it does, there can be no quarrel, for here we have plain history and its call for attention. But the word "behind" gives us pause. It prompts the notion that "political factors" were pushing Sri Aurobindo towards what actually transpired. To put the matter in an extreme form: we may start thinking that even without the *ādes̄h* Sri Aurobindo would have gone to Pondicherry out of political considerations. Surely, the writer could not have meant this, though such an interpretation is possible on the ground of the unfortunate preposition "behind". A more likely interpretation would be that the *ādes̄h* operated for political reasons. If such was the idea, the writer has failed to plumb the depths of the spiritual intervention.

Among the documents quoted before the "Archival Notes" we find Sri Aurobindo saying in a talk of 18 December 1938: "I heard the *ades̄h* 'Go to Pondicherry.' ... I could not question. It was Sri Krishna's *ades̄h*. I had to obey. Later on I found it was for my yogic work that I was asked to come here." A variant of the closing words of this record by Nirodbaran is Purani's version: "I found it was for the Ashram and for the work." In either instance Sri Aurobindo takes us clean beyond any political causes for the *ādes̄h*. The divine command came in the midst of a political situation and must have had its current posture in sight but its drive was wholly spiritual. If Sri Aurobindo's

own gloss is to be credited, no political factors can be taken to lie behind his departure in answer to Sri Krishna's *ādes*h.

One may protest: "You are bringing in 'teleology' and explaining an event by what lay ahead and came later: you should act the historian and give weight to what went before." But should we not ascribe to the *ādes*h its own vision, its own aim? Although we may not know the goal it had in view, we should be certain that it did not come purposelessly. Hence its purpose was definitely in play *before* Sri Aurobindo went to Pondicherry. Once a historian admits the *ādes*h he has to judge things in terms of it. To cry "Teleology!" in such a case is a hasty move.

Besides, we are now looking backwards to 1910 and seeking explanations. We are not writing in that year itself, ignorant of the motive of Sri Krishna's command. With our present knowledge of it we cannot write of 1910 as though we knew nothing. From our coign of vantage today, all talk of "teleology" would be inapposite.

If the *ādes*h brought Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry for only his Yogic work, there is little point in being told after Narayana's exaggeration of the significance of Parthasarathy's meeting with Sri Aurobindo has been countered: "Still, it is not at all far-fetched to suppose that when Parthasarathy spoke to Sri Aurobindo about Pondicherry... he dwelt on its political advantages. After all, the *India*, with which Parthasarathy was connected, was being brought out from Pondicherry for political reasons." Whatever Parthasarathy had said was irrelevant in relation to the *ādes*h. We also perceive the oddity of the opinion expressed on the heels of the declaration about Sri Aurobindo's coming to Pondicherry at the suggestion of no one, but in obedience to a divine command: "But by speaking to Sri Aurobindo about Pondicherry, Parathasarathy may have played an instrumental role in his coming."

Apart from the causative irrelevance of politics to the *ādes*h concerned, the opinion I am discussing is couched in a questionable turn of language. *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1979), p. 680, col. 2, defines "instrumental" as "acting as an instrument or means: serving to promote an object: helpful." The word "instrumental" in the context of "coming" would imply either that Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry because Parthasarathy had put the idea into his mind at an earlier time, thus serving to promote the coming, helping to bring about the transition—or else that Parthasarathy was used by some causative agency other than himself to send Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry at a later date. The first alternative is impossible to entertain when it has been unequivocally said at the very start that Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry at no one's suggestion but in answer to an *ādes*h. There is a patent self-contradiction here. The second alternative makes Parthasarathy a "means" in Sri Krishna's hands, the mouthpiece of a plan by the Supreme Being to hint to Sri Aurobindo in advance at what was to happen. It is as if Sri Krishna played secretly in modern

Calcutta a variant on his great declaration to Arjuna at Kurukshetra in remote antiquity: "The Kauravas have already been slain by me in my mind. Be you only my instrument to slay them now." In our context we may imagine Arjuna's Charioteer (called "Parthasarathy" in the Gita) to have brought Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry already in his mind and was using his namesake of the Iyengar family as his instrument to let Sri Aurobindo know the advantages of settling there. However, there are a number of snags to this highly poetic picture.

Sri Aurobindo went to Pondicherry on the afflatus of a divine injunction and not on a hint from Parthasarathy: a special message from Sri Krishna himself had to be received. And this injunction differed radically from the hint: whereas the hint was in connection with politics as the moving power, Sri Krishna's message turned out, according to Sri Aurobindo, to have had nothing to do with them in its purpose. If we have to think of Parthasarathy as influencing Sri Aurobindo by acquainting him with the advantages of Pondicherry, we must seek a different light in which to look at him.

Before we do that, let us trace from another angle the incongruity we are trying to focus. How does Parthasarathy figure at all when the town outside British India to which Sri Aurobindo went from Calcutta, the sphere of the harassment by the British Government to which Parthasarathy had referred in his meeting with Sri Aurobindo, was Chandernagore in French India and not Pondicherry? In a letter of 15 December 1944 which the *Archives* quotes, Sri Aurobindo recalls the situation in the *Karmayogin* office in Calcutta where a search by the police was expected: "While I was listening to animated comments from those around on the approaching event, I suddenly received a command from above in a Voice well known to me, in the three words: 'Go to Chandernagore.' In ten minutes or so I was in the boat for Chandernagore.... I remained in secret entirely engaged in Sadhana.... Afterwards, under the same 'sailing orders', I left Chandernagore and reached Pondicherry on April 4th 1910."

The original *ādes*, taking Sri Aurobindo away from the obstructed political field mentioned by Parthasarathy, did not concern Pondicherry. Thus his advice to Sri Aurobindo had no direct relation to the latter's move out of British India. Surely, we cannot plead the general fact that Chandernagore no less than Pondicherry was a non-British French enclave? Their common Frenchness does not blur their geographical difference. Nor can we say that Chandernagore was obviously a stepping-stone to Pondicherry. The divine command did not tell Sri Aurobindo: "Go to Pondicherry *via* Chandernagore." Chandernagore alone held the stage at the time: Pondicherry was completely off it. Even when Sri Aurobindo reached Chandernagore we cannot claim to discern an involvement of Pondicherry in his thoughts. He continued to stay there as if there were nothing further to do or at least as if he had no notion of any future step. In the talk of December 1938, Purani adding to Nirodbaran's transcript makes Sri Aurobindo say: "some friends were thinking of sending me to France." In

Nirodbaran's transcript we read simply: "and there as I was thinking what to do next, I heard the adesh 'Go to Pondicherry.' "

It was after this second *ādesh* that, recollecting what he had learnt from Parthasarathy over six months earlier, Sri Aurobindo wrote the note to which we have already alluded. Apropos only of this note we have to set Parthasarathy in our picture. And he emerges in a role quite other than that which the *Archives* writer with unconscious self-contradiction surmises for him. The true role is to be spotlighted by the request Sri Aurobindo made to him from Chandernagore. Through Parthasarathy's group in Pondicherry about which he had learnt in the interview at Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo wanted arrangements to be made for, as Srinivasachari has put it in his memoirs, "a quiet place of residence... where he could live incognito without being in any way disturbed". While his coming to Pondicherry was due exclusively to the *ādesh*, his getting privately accommodated in that town was the result of his meeting with Parthasarathy.

Not that Parthasarathy actually arranged for Sri Aurobindo's residence. He was not present to do so. Srinivasachari and Bharati, accompanied by Suresh Chakravarty, made the proper arrangements. Direct credit in the concrete sense goes to them. But inasmuch as Sri Aurobindo's memory of Parthasarathy led him to write the letter given to Suresh Chakravarty to take to Pondicherry where the addressee was supposed to be, Parthasarathy formed a link between the *ādesh* at Chandernagore and Sri Aurobindo's finding a suitable residence in Pondicherry among solicitous friends. And as such he has a significance in Sri Aurobindo's life at an important turning-point.

In an earlier issue of *Archives*—Vol. IX, No. 27—we read: "Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry in April 1910 with no intention of staying more than a few months. He remained in the French colony for the rest of his life." This confirms that he had never thought of following Parthasarathy's suggestion of establishing his political headquarters in Pondicherry and acting from there. The indefinite prolongation of stay was due exclusively to his discovering Sri Krishna's far-reaching spiritual plan for him that was implicit in the *ādesh* to go to Pondicherry. But in the years after his arrival the patriotic group which included Parthasarathy, Srinivasachari and their associates contributed to his welfare. Srinivasachari's family is known to have been in intimate relation with him up to 1926.

K. D. SETHNA

GLIMPSES OF PAVITRA

FROM THE REMINISCENCES OF PAVITRA AND MRITYUNJOY

Introduction

“PAVITRA” is the Sanskrit name given by Sri Aurobindo to his French disciple Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire. At the age of twenty-six, Pavitra left France for the Far East—a young man in search of a spiritual teaching and master. He lived four years in Japan and then a year in China and Mongolia before coming to India in 1925 to meet Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He remained at their Ashram in Pondicherry for the next forty-four years, until his passing in May 1969 at the age of seventy-five.

One of those who worked closely with Pavitra during his years at the Ashram was a Bengali sadhak named Mrityunjoy. After Pavitra’s death, Mrityunjoy wrote down what his friend had told him about his early life. The narrative is sketchy, for as Mrityunjoy noted: “A detailed account of Pavitra’s early life is not possible, as he never gave much importance to it. But at times he let out small bits about himself.” Yet even these “small bits” are instructive. Mrityunjoy also began an account of Pavitra’s years in the Ashram, but broke it off with the early 1930s. Although incomplete, it provides an interesting perspective of the beginning of the Ashram and Pavitra’s role in it.

In the opening instalments of this eight-part series, Mrityunjoy’s recollections have been interwoven with an autobiographical talk given by Pavitra in 1964 to the students of the Ashram school. The two accounts complement each other and provide a completer picture of Pavitra’s life. Mrityunjoy’s reminiscences were written in English; Pavitra’s talk was given in French and appears here in translation.

Part I

Boyhood and Youth—France: 1894-1914

Mrityunjoy’s reminiscences begin with anecdotes from Pavitra’s childhood and student life.

MRITYUNJOY: Not much is known about Pavitra’s early life. While he lived in the Ashram he attached little importance to it and only mentioned small details or incidents for the sake of illustration. The picture that emerges from these anecdotes is incomplete, but nevertheless revealing.

Pavitra was born in Paris on the 16th of January 1894. His father, Paul Barbier Saint-Hilaire, an advocate, was a typical Frenchman: active, cultured, intelligent, well-bred in thought and bearing. His mother was an affectionate

woman, but also a disciplinarian. They had two sons, Albert and Philippe (Pavitra), and were alert to help their children. They believed in giving them freedom and full scope for learning, but at the same time did not wish them to exceed the limits set by their age.

When Pavitra was ten or eleven years old, his father bought him a bicycle for his birthday. He had already learned to cycle and now started roaming far and wide. One day, the housemaid—who had brought him up from childhood and was almost like a mother to him—had a celebration at her house. The place was quite a few miles outside Paris, but Pavitra took it into his head to go there, and cycled all the way without telling his parents! The maid and her husband were overjoyed to see him, but surprised that he had dared to make the long ride alone. They were in a festive mood and served their young guest with lots of food and drink, filling him with meat and cake and other delicacies, topped off with wine. Wine was something new to Pavitra, and he took far more of it than his hosts would have liked. Soon he felt drowsy and fell asleep. Meanwhile his parents grew worried. They didn't know where he was—perhaps he had been involved in an accident! Nobody could tell them anything. In the end Pavitra's father lodged a report with the police, and they issued an alert. The people of the suburb in which the maid lived discovered Pavitra sleeping but safe. The maid's husband, a washerman, put the boy and his cycle on a mulecart and took him home to Paris. Pavitra was still fast asleep! His parents were naturally relieved, but his father was also upset—the child had gone beyond his limits and needed to be taught a lesson. He did not beat or scold the boy, but rather shaved his head and painted it red. Pavitra discovered this only when he woke up the next morning. He felt sorry and ashamed, but was also a bit angry at what he thought to be unreasonable of his father. After all, what had happened? He had merely come back home a little late. His father, still upset, ordered him to be given only bread and water for the day. Pavitra did not go to school for several days, which was painful to him; but he learned his lesson.

On another occasion, probably not much later, he began to tinker with his bicycle, opening its nuts and bolts. He had been given a wrench along with the cycle. Soon the whole cycle was dismantled. His father discovered the child's unwise move, but did not reprove him; he only said: "Now put it back together again." And as a help he bought his son a booklet on cycle repairs and a few more tools. Pavitra found the job so difficult that he asked his father to let him take the bicycle to a mechanic, offering to pay the charges from his pocket money. But his father refused permission and quietly insisted that since he had dismantled it he would have to assemble it again. So the youngster went on labouring day after day, opening and refitting the different parts. It took twenty-one days, but at last he succeeded in putting the cycle back on its wheels! Much relieved, he also felt happy and proud. And his father praised him for his perseverance. Is it to be wondered at that in later years this boy became

an expert in all kinds of machine work?

On another birthday, Pavitra's father bought him a small electric motor with a set of metal-polishing components. Happy to have it, he used to busy himself opening the brushes, cleaning and refitting them. And of course he studied the electric motor, but this time he did not completely dismantle it. His experience with the cycle had made him wiser. He also helped his mother by polishing her small metal objects.

Another incident took place when Pavitra was studying in the upper classes of the school. Fond of chemistry, he was trying an experiment with combustible materials in his kitchen at home. There was some mistake, the experiment failed and the flasks broke. Flames burst out, clouds of smoke arose and black ashes settled on the food his mother had prepared. She was naturally displeased. Pavitra's father also rushed in to survey the situation. He did not get angry but gently told his son that he would get two unused rooms in the garden white-washed, so that Pavitra could set up a laboratory there. Once again his father's wise encouragement helped the child in his hobby; and we know that in later life laboratories and chemical experiments formed a part of Pavitra's activities. When he was in Japan, his lab was for some time his means of earning a living; and here in the Ashram, the Laboratoire he set up is an important aspect of the Centre of Education.

During the long school vacations children often conduct themselves lazily, but Pavitra and his brother Albert were different. They spent their holidays methodically pursuing their hobbies. Pavitra's hobby was to collect insects. He would go to the nearby woods, bring new specimens home, study them with the help of books such as the Encyclopaedia, note down interesting details, and preserve the insects that could be saved. Later he would compare his collections with those of other students. His brother Albert was interested in telecommunications, telephones and wireless telegraphy. He used to collect electrical components and build receiving and transmitting sets; when the sets were ready, he would invite his parents and friends to try them out. Later in life Albert became a telecommunications engineer in Indochina. Pavitra spent a month with him there on his way from Japan to India.

Stamp collecting was another hobby Pavitra developed in his childhood. Many children in Europe—and quite a few in India also—used to cultivate this hobby; stamp collections were even passed on from generation to generation, like money or other property. Pavitra's father had a good stamp collection, and later Pavitra inherited a large portion of it. He offered this collection to the Mother, who asked him to continue it for Her. Philately is a skilled work, and one needs to undergo a long patient study to be really good at it. But Pavitra was. In his early years in Pondicherry, some local young men used to come to learn the technique from him.

Pavitra was not very good at games and sports however, nor did he have

much inclination for them. He was far too interested in his studies. Students who stay in hostels usually go home during the vacations, but with Pavitra it was the reverse; he preferred to stay in his hostel. The reason, he explained, was that at home people were always coming and going—one could not concentrate on one's studies there!

Pavitra had a girl friend who used to visit him; but if she showed up late, he would not wait for her! And if he had started doing math problems, he would not see her that day! He mentioned this once, not as a joke but in all seriousness, when some teachers here were discussing how the children were wasting their time in gossip and neglecting their studies.

Pavitra passed the Baccalaureate, and then did one year of *Mathematique Speciale*. These courses do not have an exact equivalent in India, nor perhaps in England. He then went on to the *Ecole Polytechnique*, to study physics, chemistry and mathematics, and finally to specialise in his chosen field, engineering. The *Ecole Polytechnique*, it may be pointed out, is very different from the institutions in India which are called Polytechnics. The *Ecole* was established by Napoleon, and it is still the best technical institute in France. At that time each student was guaranteed a government job after graduation, and admissions were severely restricted. Pavitra had a high position in the list of entrants to the School.

Students of the *Polytechnique* were generally serious about their studies, but they also had their share of fun. On one occasion they figured out a way to lift a heavy cannon from the ground floor up to a terrace on the fifth floor. The feat created a sensation, even inspiring awe and admiration. But some people outside the *Ecole* were critical of the school authorities; they spread a rumour that the government had placed the gun up there in order to shoot at the civilians below! A youthful prank almost turned into a national problem.

Military training was compulsory for all *Polytechnique* students, which made it easy for them to get commissioned as officers if they were called to do military service. Pavitra too had to undergo a year's military training during his *Polytechnique* days. When war was declared in August 1914, he was called up and assigned to an artillery regiment for further training. He was then twenty years of age.

(To be continued)

THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1988)

The Mother's Message

This is the
interesting story of
how a being discovered
the Divine Life



Volume Three: 1959

No. 17

OCTOBER drifted into November. Raw, cold, wet weather gripped London in its remorseless fingers.

Days of anxiety and uncertainty lay ahead of me. My restored confidence ebbed away.

The adverse forces invariably found their means to destroy my peace. How

could I ever win with the dice so heavily loaded against me? God, if I were capable I would choke the life out of the devil.

I felt unhappy and full of unrest.

I stood near my window and watched the sky darken, the ashen clouds scurry across in the wild wind.

Gingerly I got ready to leave for college. Meanwhile the Mother's envelope waited for me in the pigeon-hole. I opened it and found a card which depicted frosted snow on the trunk of a big tall tree and on its branches, near a Church. Her words conveyed sweet warmth to my heart:

“To my dear little child Huta

Bonne Fête!

Cheer up! ‘All is well that ends well’ and the end will be all right.

My love and blessings.”

Her assurance brought a sense of relief. My mind started clearing, the mist of depression receding.

I felt that the Mother was my sole anchor in this dangerous and insecure world. *Grace à toi!*

Laljibhai and his wife sent a telegram congratulating me on my birthday. I penned a letter of thanks.

Ist November was my spiritual birthday. I completed five years in the Yogic field. Still a long, long way to go to achieve my goal.

On 7th November 1959 there was a dense fog which obscured the vision.

As Chetan and I stepped out of Mercury House to attend college, the fog swirled thickly about us. Our breath rose like a vapour and mingled with the mist.

Now the winter was with us—the days were grey and showery much of the time. I disliked going out in such inclement weather. Rushing and running—the hardship and the rigorous life were indeed exhausting.

We walked cautiously—shivering uncontrollably. Our teeth chattered.

I witnessed the drab buildings through the dimness of the short days and the inky blackness of the long bitter nights.

On our way home from the college, I recounted to Chetan: “When I visited London in 1952 with one of my brothers and his wife, we were told by our friends who lived in London that earlier that year a terrifying accident had occurred owing to the opaque fog, which had killed several thousands instantly including school children. The air had been packed with coal-dust mixed with the humid haze from the river Thames which had produced a dreadful, treacherous fog.”

Chetan was stunned. She suggested that we had better hurry up to Mercury House.

My monthly income did not match my expenditure. I needed more warm clothes and extra heating facilities.

One Saturday my nephew Suresh came to my house. We had tea together. He found my room ice-cold. He was so sensitive, so sensible and considerate that he told me he would write to my father to send me more money.

Yes, during the nights there had been always a howling draught, which resulted in the chilliness and dampness. It was impossible to keep the room warm more than two or three hours, because heating required more than one shilling.

Suresh took me to his place—London Academy, 15 Cadogan Gardens S.W.3—and introduced me to his professor: “Mr. Wakeley, meet my aunt.” He raised his eyebrows and remarked: “Eh! but she doesn’t look like your aunt. I thought she was your sister.”

It was true, many people in Pondicherry also took me for his sister. Amrita—the Manager of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram—once told me: “Your brother plays the piano very well.” I said amusedly: “Yes, indeed.”

So many times Suresh accompanied me to the Mother. He understood my goal and has always good will.

*

My college was severely cold, because there was no central heating except for the bars of electric fire in a big hall. I was too chilled—too weary. My fingers turned purplish-blue, stiff and numb—time and again I had to rub my palms vigorously to restore the circulation. Frequently I pulled out kleenex and blew my running nose. I was freezing to death. This temperature drove me to frenzy and I lost my good humour.

I could not gather speed in typing. Our teacher played music. According to its rhythm we had to type. Often I hammered the wrong keys on my typewriter—cursing the teacher, music, everything, everybody including myself. To crown it all, our vice-principal taught the frightfully boring subject: Duplicating!

“Before beginning to cut the stencil, make sure that the type is clear, examine the letters occasionally while typing, and brush them clean if they become clogged. Type with a rather heavier touch than usual, particularly for such letters as w, m, a, and their capitals with a slightly lighter touch for the letters o and e, in case they should fall out leaving only a blob. Switch off the ribbon or if necessary remove the ribbon from the ribbon holder. Place a carbon sheet coated side upwards between the stencil and its backing sheet. If the stencil is one that is likely to be used again put in two pieces of carbon in order that a carbon copy will be made on the backing sheet. Insert the head of the stencil into the typewriter and make certain that the stencil is *straight*. Notice that stencils are marked out in letter spaces across the top and in line spaces down the side.

“Correction of errors: If the error is a long one, insert a pencil between the stencil and the carbon sheet, brush over the error with ‘Correcting fluid (gestetner)’, allow it to dry and then retype. If the error is a short one, the pencil is not necessary.

“Signing and writing and drawing on a stencil: Use a stylus pen, remove the carbon and place a signature plate on the ‘Mica sheet’ between the stencil and the backing sheet. Write or draw on the stencil which must be perfectly flat.

“Reminders: Remember to remove the carbon before fixing the stencil on the Duplicator. Remember also to check the stencil while it is still in the typewriter. Remember not to cut one long line.

“The stencil can be preserved for future copies by being stored flat.”

In fact, I became “flat”! My head started whirling.

The second term at college proved to be hopeless for me. Activities in the college turned slack. I was counting the days to get rid of it.

My principal Miss Margaret Darval was on her way back from India to the U.K. She along with her friends had gone to climb Mount Everest!

During her absence the teachers taught us according to their own convenience. There were no real examinations save for some tests and a few visits to various places.

Then at the end of the final term they gave us recommendation papers and that was all.

I really felt that I had wasted money, time and energy. Nonetheless, I decided to finish the term and quit the college.

After a brief glance in the cloakroom mirror, a swift touch of lipstick, I picked up my coat and went out of the college building.

The brightness of the day became overcast, a grey veil spread across the sky. Mist began to gather. I walked and walked endlessly. It was a trial. The icy wind whipped my face and hair. I pulled further down my silk scarf with which I had covered my head and secured the ends under my chin. My eyes ached. I felt sick.

At last I reached home, washed and changed, made a cup of tea and sipped it leisurely. Then I stood at my window, which was my favourite resort.

The wind outside swished the bare branches of trees. Afterwards it started raining incessantly, noisily. Desperately I remembered the heat of Pondicherry—the changing colours and shapes of fleecy clouds—the sunset which I recalled turned the sky to a glory—crimson, rose-pink gold and amethyst mixed together beautifully. The moon suddenly appeared behind the wisps of trailing clouds, rippled over the sea—and then the star-strewn night!

I sighed and sat on a sofa. The evening drew to a close. Meanwhile I heard the sound of the gong. It was the time for our dinner.

Usually after the meal I took refuge in the lounge. The fire roaring in the hearth flickered brightly and the logs sputtered into sparks. The cosiness of the room was very welcome. For a long time I sat lazily on a sofa watching intently the fire—imagining the hidden fire which had burst into tumultuous flame, my aspiration which I knew would never be extinguished. Then I buried my face in my arms crossed upon my knees, closed my eyes to the fire-light and drowned in a thousand memories of my past years. I felt as if I were an empty shell wandering, floating over the vastness of the sea of time, gaining nothing—achieving nothing.

I counted the empty minutes as they went by.

Suddenly I lifted my head, saw an old Jewish gentleman sitting on the opposite sofa deep in thought. Then he inquired about my well-being. I too asked him the same. Afterwards he told me the harrowing stories of Hitler, the Gestapo and the concentration camps and how miraculously he and his son Rolf had escaped from the Nazi horror. His face was lined with sorrow. I listened to his account with a paling face and dilated eyes. Everything was dreadful, detestable.

He suggested to me to read a book—*The Diary of Anne Frank*. While we were still talking, the cat which I called Goldy meowed, hopped and settled on the sofa near me. After cleaning his paws on the edge of it, he snuggled into my lap and dozed. Goldy had a fine vibration which soothed me very much. Then after a while he woke from his snooze, leaped and sat near my feet on a rug.

Another gentleman, Mr. Thomson, came and asked me to find some words for a crossword puzzle. It was so absorbing that for a time I forgot the wretched winter.

When I entered my room it seemed half-filled with a frosty haze. I inserted a shilling in the slot of the electric bars to light the fire and peered at my watch. It was quite late.

There was a gust of wind under the door that lifted the rug. The window rattled.

I went to bed and closed my eyes against tiredness. But in the middle of the night something brought me upright, hugging myself as the chilliness of the room enveloped me. Iciness swept over my body from the tips of my toes to the top of my head. I shivered unrestrainedly. The electric heater had gone off. I did not wish to restart it, because I was unwilling to leave my bed. I drew the blanket close about me—still my teeth chattered. I was awake in the slow lengthening darkness of the mid-winter night. The hours dragged on with interminable dullness. Rain fell at intervals throughout the hours.

The uneventful week wore off except that I received an extra £ 50/- from my father for which I thanked him and Suresh.

The piercing cold made me miserable.

On Saturday the 21st November Sudha and I went shopping. We bought some warm clothes and two copies of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Then we saw a movie, *Sink the Bismark*. It was remarkable—all about an incident in the Second World War—full of suspense and struggle.

After our snack we parted saying that we would not meet the next day, but the following Saturday. Both of us were eager to read the book.

No sooner did I reach my home than hurriedly I undressed, put on my woollen nightie and went to bed, flicked on the table-lamp and started reading the book till my eyes refused to keep open. My heart was full of apprehension and anguish.

The succeeding day, after breakfast once again I took up the book and finished it in the afternoon, disregarding my lunch. I only made tea in my room and there were packets of biscuits and cheese.

It had just turned four o'clock. The sky darkened—crowded with heavy clouds moving ponderously before the bitter wind.

The summer and spring had been so brief yet so wonderful and now the harsh winter was in full form.

After my supper, I curled up on a sofa in the lounge before the fire—staring into the leaping flames. Meanwhile the Jewish gentleman came. I told him about the book he had recommended. He said: "So, now you know how we Jews were tortured indiscriminately." I responded: "Yes, I do. I could not check my tears, because I imagined putting myself in Anne's place, and felt an icy feeling in the pit of my stomach. Anne Frank was so young, so hopeful of the future. But everything that her fervent, yearning heart had cherished was crushed cruelly without any compunction by the Nazis. This reminds me of what the Prophet Mohamud has said in the book—*The Prophet of Islam*: 'All God's creatures are His family, the greatest enemies of God are those who without cause shed the blood of man.' I really feel extremely sad."

The gentleman remarked: "Like Anne, there were countless young innocent people killed by these demons."

Suddenly I was fatigued, rueful and weepy. In that mood I went to my room and brooded over what I had read: How the Jews were taken in cattle-trucks, eastwards to Auschwitz, the notorious extermination centre in German-occupied Poland. The majority of them were pushed into gas chambers and put to death. Some were sent off to prisons and lonely cells. The Gestapo without a shred of decency destroyed the life of six million Jews.

Anne Frank died of shock in March 1945 in a cell soon after her elder sister's demise.

Her diary is known the world over—through stage, screen and TV adaptations,

or in translations. This touchingly human document remains timeless in its appeal.

Anne Frank declared:

“I want to go on living after my death. And therefore I am grateful to God for giving me this gift of expressing all that is in me.”

Later, along with Sudha I saw the movie of the book. Audrey Hepburn played the role of Anne Frank superbly.

A passage of the book moved me very much:

“I know what I wanted, I know who was right and who was wrong. I had my opinion, my own ideas and principles, and although it might sound pretty mad from an adolescent, I felt more of a person than a child, I felt quite independent of anyone....”

This was exactly the echo of my childhood.

(To be continued)

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LOVE'S OMNIPOTENCE

SOMETIMES I think how little I know of me.
I am the unexplored, for the most part;
I stand, as it were, on the edge of a wide sea,
And the sea I gaze upon is my own heart.

For I have other dimensions and am more
Than I have judged I was from surface seeing;
This face, this body—these are but the shore;
How far beyond them stretch my seas of being!

I have thought I was an island, a rocky shelf
Of separateness, but the eternal deep
Forever breaks across my reefs of self.
In me and over me and through me sweep

The seas of God, and often now I sense
That I am one with love's omnipotence.

JAMES DILLET FREEMAN

THE HAUNTING ACTION-AT-A-DISTANCE THROUGH THE AGES

THE understanding of the solar system was a simple matter for the anonymous poet who wrote:

The very law that makes a tear
And bids it trickle from its source,
The same law doth make earth a sphere
And guides the planets in their course.

But obviously that was not the case for Kepler and Newton. For them a poetic understanding, even a speculative philosopher's sophisticated detailing, was not sufficient. The commonality of the law that makes earth a sphere and moulds a tear is a perception and not a reasoned statement based on any direct physical observation. The search of the scientific spirit is of a different kind. Following the revolutionary idea of Copernicus about the motion of planets around the sun, Kepler formulated his three famous laws which paved the way for Newton's Universal Gravitation. It was a beginning in which the world saw a new approach in scientific empiricism with the certitude of seizing the tangible and of knowing the knowable of the unknown.

Based on his teacher Tycho Brahe's meticulous observations, Kepler came to the conclusion that the planets move around the sun in elliptical orbits with the sun as their common focal point. The perfection of the heavenly path in the form of a circle that had come down all the way from Pythagoras and Aristotle had to be immediately discarded in the wake of these accurate measurements. Then, after a painstaking labour of 18 years, Kepler discovered that the time required for a planet to go around the sun (its period) has a definite relationship with the distance from it. The exact mathematical formula tells us that the square of the period is proportional to the cube of the distance.

Newton's great genius lay in getting a law that could completely account for this relationship. The discovery was announced, after a hesitation of about 20 years, in his famous *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* published by the Royal Society of London in 1687. Aiming at an understanding of the System of the World, he postulated in Book III of the *Principia* a force of attraction between two objects essentially governed by the quantity of matter possessed by them. According to him, this force is directly proportional to the product of the masses of the two objects and is inversely proportional to the square of the distance separating them. Suddenly, in this discovery, "a mind for ever/Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone" was glimpsed in the dimness of the centuries that were preparing for the revealing hour. Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation was an epoch-ushering event. The long and arduous

work of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe and Kepler related to the solar system immediately became understandable from this simple postulated force; indeed, it brought a great order to the heavenly phenomena in the minds of terrestrial creatures. The immense and unfailing clockwork of the sky was thus mechanically set into motion eliminating the need of "divine intervention" in the processes of the physical world. Calculations done in a small corner of this vast Universe became pointers towards new planets in the sky and success followed success. Even landing on the Moon, the wonderful satellite which provided Newton a confirmation for his Law of Gravitation, became possible with advances in time,

Discovery of a force originating from the materiality of a physical object is a kind of scientific mystique which, while rejecting the abstractness and uncertainty of the metaphysical approach, bases itself on a sound empirical foundation. Francis Bacon's dictum to look for knowledge in things themselves bore rich rewards that were denied to the Aristotelian and Scholastic investigators. But mysticism, of whatever kind it be, is anathema to science. To suggest that two bodies separated from each other should act upon each other is a contradiction in terms. How can an object act where it is not? True, the Law of Universal Gravitation brought the celestial and terrestrial systems together and bound them by a common mechanics, but it failed to unite thought and experiment. Newton was not quite sure about its consequence, viz. Action-at-a-Distance.

He had no qualms about it. When Newton wrote in 1693 to Bentley, the great contemporary classical scholar, he was very clear about it: "Tis inconceivable that inanimate brute matter should operate upon and affect other matter without mutual contact.... That gravity should.... act... at a distance... is to me so great an absurdity that I believe no man who has in philosophical matters any competent faculty of thinking can ever fall into it..." Yet he reconciled himself with the thought that it is not "the business of Experimental Philosophy to treat the Causes of things any further than they can be proved by Experiment. We are not to fill this Philosophy with Opinions which cannot be proved by Phenomena." He even went further and wrote later in the *Opticks* that "the main business of natural Philosophy is to argue without feigning hypotheses." His famous statement *hypotheses non fingo*—I feign no hypotheses—is the culmination of the stand he had taken in the matter.

This is an excellent defence. After all the formula works well and there is no need to seek conceptual support if the experiments are not forthcoming to demonstrate it. Seen purely from the point of view of empirical rationalism Newton's stand is impregnable. His tremendous contribution lies in getting a fruitful theory. Indeed, scientifically speaking, it is wrong, if not impertinent, to go beyond the limits of observation and philosophize about matters that cannot be brought for investigation to the laboratory. Thus by becoming less philosophical Newton was able to take a great step forward; he was now surely

in a position to solve the real problems concerning the motions of planets, satellites, or projectiles.

That such a theory should have led to the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte is a natural consequence. After rejecting the theological approach of seeking the fundamental causes of things, Comte tells us that "our real business is to analyse accurately the circumstances of phenomena, and to connect them by the natural relation of succession and resemblance. The best illustration of this is in the case of the doctrine of Gravitation." In the entire process the Law of Gravitation lent to philosophy "The Test of Utility" as it rode high on the wave of success. But when knowledge is measured by success then it smells of commercialism. Actually it is this aspect which disallows any possibility of true mysticism to enter into the scientific search regarding the nature of the physical world. Newton was quite near to a great discovery when he was about to see the origin of interaction between objects arising from the quantity of matter possessed by them. But as soon as he dubbed matter a "brute" thing he missed it completely. The problem of Action-at-a-Distance could have been seen in the materiality of the system itself. Obtaining correct numerical answers cannot be taken as a sufficiently good reason for any sound theoretical framework of knowledge. The paradox is, the positivist philosophy of existence arose out of a negativist situation: Newton's stand of not feigning hypotheses. Then the utility of the test itself remained undefined.

The circumstances under which Newton refused to feign hypotheses were rather peculiar. He did not believe in Action-at-a-Distance. He also could not accept the notion of any material substance, say, the Ether, pervading the Universe, for such a substance, howsoever subtle it be, would offer resistance to the motion of the planets and slow them down, a conclusion that lacked observational support. The concept of a material Ether proved to be infructuous as it created more problems than it solved. On either count Newton was in a predicament and therefore took a pragmatic position of not talking about things that fell beyond the scientific purview. However, in fairness to him, it must be mentioned that he became less of a positivist when later on he proposed "certain active principles" with "manifest qualities" which must be added to the set of primary qualities of orthodox mechanism. But while he was scientifically quick enough to assert that these did not belong to the category of "occult qualities", he was at a loss as to their original causes.

Newton's position in the discussion of Action-at-a-Distance is central in the sense that it marks a departure from the speculative to the rationalistic-empirical formulations of the investigative method. Naturally, the issue evoked a great deal of controversy even in his own time. He was aware of such a possibility and was therefore quite reluctant to publish Book III of the *Principia* concerning the System of the Worlds wherein he presented this topic. Leibnitz, Newton's contemporary and inventor of Calculus prior to him, thought it "ridiculous"

that there should be non-mechanical causes to transmit action from body A to body B, e.g. in the case of the sun and the earth. Basing himself on the principle of continuity of space—Nature makes no leaps—Leibnitz first ruled out the notion of an absolute void between material objects. It is through this space that the action is transmitted from one object to another. The question then was not of Action-at-a-Distance but of the medium lending itself for such an action. Leibnitz, however, could not tell anything about this medium except that the geometry of the system itself could be called space. Yet this action was not of a “push”-kind, A pushing its neighbouring region of space, the action being eventually carried to B in a contiguous manner. He saw the action between A and B as a “pre-established harmony” of their monads. Leibnitz’s monads were not only simple and immaterial but also active substances and hence carried processes. A relationship of mutuality between monads is the Leibnitzean analogue of Action-at-a-Distance. Therefore, if Action-at-a-Distance is such a harmony, it is inconceivable that it can come into existence or be destroyed with the objects themselves unless one assumes the same for the monads too, which is not the case with these entities of Leibnitz. Then, the question of monads with a hierarchy of perceptions falls outside the domain of material science. Similarly, the “fixed law of relationship” between the individual elements or monads, as was proposed by Bruno prior to Leibnitz, cannot account for Action-at-a-Distance. Even Kant’s monads as sources of motion in a Newtonian space amount to physical objects with extra-material causes.

In Cartesian physics the notion of action without contact was inapplicable. In this formulation matter, being extension, is indefinitely divisible and hence it is impossible to create an absolute vacuum. A vacuum indeed becomes nothing but the absence of the expected object. What is left after removing air from a vessel is a body more subtle than air. The 17th-century plenum theories required a material Ether to preserve continuity of matter and hence space itself was matter of some kind. This substantial Ether was the carrier of influence across from objects.

The Greek Atomists were repugnant to the Action-at-a-Distance idea. Democritus, the founder of the Atomic Theory of Western Thought, while he agreed with the eternal sameness of the “Pure Being” of Parmenides, postulated the principle of Non-Being to account for the material universe. As motion cannot take place in what is full, in Being, the absence of Being, that is, emptiness or Void or Space was essential for multiplicity and for movement. Atomicity implied separation which can be accomplished only by the intervening void between the objects. Democritus’s atoms were homogeneous, irreducible, indestructible and differed from one another only in shape, position, arrangement and magnitude; there was no difference in their quality. This meant that action between two objects was only an impact action. The void, by definition, cannot communicate influences across it. Such a dualistic theory of material

creation based on Being and Non-Being was a departure from Monism which required the unity of things in time, space and quality. However, freedom from change, indivisibility and undifferentiatedness were assured at the atomic level: it was an Atomic Monism. Empedocles, who wrote physics in hexameters, thought a little earlier than Democritus that everything came from four basic underivable roots or elements: fire, water, earth and air. For him the atmosphere was not a mere void but a fine corporeal substance. In the absence of the void, therefore, motion had to be accounted for only by interpenetration of particles; this was done by the action of two opposing forces, Harmony and Discord, or Love and Strife. In the Aristotelian system "atoms act and suffer action whenever they chance to be in contact... They generate it by being put together and becoming intertwined." For Aristotle form being inherent in matter, in contrast to Plato's ideal form, it is the potentiality of matter that is instantaneously brought out by the actuality of form; the thing itself becomes the movement. What we have therefore is a contact action between two objects as, for instance, between two marbles at the instant of their hitting each other. While these are the efficient causes of the system, the final cause of all motion is the "unmoved mover". As against this, for the Stoics impact action was inconceivable and they proposed a pneumatic medium to transmit action. However, such a medium, or Ether, led to any number of contradictions in the course of time and had to be finally abandoned. Robert Boyle's statement in the 17th century that "if the Ether is an unobservable and unverifiable entity then it has no place in experimental science" is typical of this reaction. The famous experiment of Michelson and Morley done in 1887 completely ruled out any possibility of the presence of such a medium. After all, the Greek atomism was a speculative philosophy rather than a scientific doctrine.

But Sri Aurobindo's view about the Ether is radically different. Tracing the cause of atomicity at the level of cosmic Mind he says in *The Life Divine*, p. 238 (C.E.): "Ether may and does exist as an intangible, almost a spiritual support of Matter, but as a phenomenon it does not seem, to our present knowledge at least, to be materially detectable." The atomists of ancient India, Kanada for example in the 6th century BC long before Empedocles in Greece, had proposed the creation of the material universe based on five elements, *bhutas*, starting with Ether and culminating through Air, Fire, and Water in the dense solid Earth. We shall take up some of these details later on.

The real scientific breakthrough in the concept of Action-at-a-Distance came in the middle of the last century with the work of Faraday and Maxwell who developed the field-theory of electromagnetism. Coulomb had discovered in 1785 that the force of attraction or repulsion between two charges varies inversely as the square of the distance between them in a manner similar to Newton's gravitational force. The validity of this law has been confirmed over several orders of magnitude ranging from the atomic dimensions to the macroscopic

scale. It was earlier believed that charge A exerts force on charge B, and *vice versa*, through distance without any intervening medium. Sure enough, such a view, as in the case of the gravitational force, was very disturbing and a plausible explanation had to be found. But then came Faraday, the son of a blacksmith, who worked his way up, and “smelt the truth”—in the words of Helmholtz—and everything changed when he suggested that the medium between the two charges is a seat of electric field transmitting influences across it. The magic word was found, the field, a quantity that is a function of space and time coordinates. The relationship between force and field was already worked out by the French mathematical physicists Lagrange and Laplace when they developed the “potential” theories. With this link between force and field, the action of a force at a distance was understood in terms of the modification of the field that propagated continuously. While complimenting Faraday for his method of approach and lucidity, Maxwell has the following to say: “Faraday, in his mind’s eye, saw lines of force traversing all space where the mathematicians saw centers of force attracting at a distance; Faraday saw a medium where they saw nothing but distance; Faraday sought the seat of phenomena in real actions going on in a medium, they were satisfied that they had found it in a power of action at a distance impressed upon the electric fluid.” In his monumental *Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism* published in 1873, ranking next to Newton’s *Principia*, Maxwell derived a set of field equations which show that an electromagnetic disturbance travels with the velocity of light. Indeed, he suggested that light is nothing but the propagation of an oscillating field, a conclusion that was soon confirmed by Hertz when he produced the radio-waves in 1887. J.C. Bose in India also produced these waves independently about the same time.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA BIRTH CENTENARY

Compiler's Note

In the old yogas of India this human body with its desires and demands was considered an obstacle in the path of Self-Realisation. The God-oriented souls tried to control the physical and the physical-vital hungers by harsh austerities or at best by indifference towards the body. It was considered a sheath to be thrown away on the dust-heap of time by the aspirants to Divinity and Immortality. This attitude seeped into the very fibres of Hindu Society and its natural corollary was a contempt for or an indifference to the things of this world, a neglect of Matter.

The Gita condemned this neglect of the body, but though the Gita's words vibrated through the psyche of the nation, this particular message of it could not wash away the imprint of the earlier convictions or undo the damage.

The Mother turned the wheel full circle, "Nothing is known that is not known by the body," she declared. Sri Aurobindo blew the conch of Physical Transformation. He promised humanity freedom from Death and Disease and by his unparalleled Tapasya brought down the Supramental Power to make earth the future abode of Immortals. For this purpose the Twin-Avatars had descended.

To achieve the above high endeavour a constant Sadhana of the body was needed. Nolini-da was one of those who had dared the razor-sharp edge spoken of by the Upanishads, now grown a hundred times sharper—and consciously tried to follow in the Mother's footsteps to attain physical transformation, to awaken the cells of the body.

In his last years once he told me, after an attack of illness, "Nothing is wrong with the body. So many things came from outside, from the universal nature in the subtle-physical."

Like a child using big words without understanding even mentally what it entailed I said, "Your subtle-physical must be universalised by now." Like a majestic god he replied, "Not quite."

As with Sri Ramakrishna, was it the universal suffering which he had to take on himself? What else can be the reason of the 'illness' and suffering of spiritual giants like Pavitra-da and Nolini-da? Nolini-da had made a deep study of the nature of the body and as a Yogi of course he knew thoroughly its subtle realities.

Here is a compilation from his writings on the subject.

SHYAM KUMARI

BODY-ENERGY

The Mother spoke once of the body being like a fortress, a strong shelter protecting you against enemy-attacks, the forces that are around roaming in the open spaces, the forces of physical and even moral disruption. The ancients used to refer to the body as a walled city the gates of which are to be carefully guarded. It is also compared to a temple, a firm structure wherein God is to dwell, which is to be kept always clean, trim and tidy. The body itself was worshipped as a holy thing almost as a Divinity by certain schools of spiritual discipline.

These are, so to say, various dimensions of the body; one more, somewhat of a different category, may be added. The body is a battery, an accumulation of energy: of energy and consciousness, of energy-consciousness. We are all familiar with the modern concept of the material particle being concentrated energy: it is tremendously concentrated and that is why it looks as though dead solidity. In reality its stilled high potency harbours almost an immeasurable force of creation and destruction.

The release of energy, material energy, in matter, is the business of Science and the scientist; the release of consciousness, the energy of consciousness in matter, is the business of yoga and the yogi. The tantrik discipline was in a large way occupied with this mystery. It found and developed its own method and process and its success in its own field is also well recognised.

The body-content thus is essentially consciousness consolidated, crystallised. The problem then is how to release it. The first thing is that you must be conscious, you, that is to say, your body must be conscious, must be aware always of what it is doing: living, moving, acting; the body must be doing all that consciously, almost voluntarily: there shall be no involuntary movements. Each physical gesture must know itself by feeling itself in the act. It is not that the mind should know, the mind can have only a memory, but that the limb itself has to pursue its function knowingly, in full awareness. At the beginning there is inevitably a mixture of mental knowing but that is to be cleaned out and overpassed.

One is conscious, can be conscious only through consciousness; consciousness is born through consciousness. It manifests, it grows through incubation, through self-centration. Energy energises itself, as the Upanishad says, *tapas taptvā*. Energy is consciousness in movement and in moving it expresses itself, embodies itself. A muscle, for example, when moving, awakes to its own activity, the awakening is not confined to itself, but it extends gradually, extends to all its constituent cells and even to contiguous cells. The process in this way permeates the whole body and the entire material content of the body is filled with consciousness and with its radiant energy.

There is however a basic preliminary necessity, a preparatory condition:

the first essential condition under which the body can be conscious of itself is its freedom, its absolute freedom. The body must be liberated wholly and entirely, it must feel its perfect freedom. As at present it is a slave: it never knows its own will, it is always under the orders of either the vital or the mind or both. Under the control of this dual master—a cruel diarchy—the body has lost all its independent movements. The activities, almost all, of the present body are not really its own, they are expressions of an imposed will. In order to have and to be aware of its own will the body must be freed from its alien imposition and as soon as it gains its freedom, it will know itself, learn itself, learn its own movements. It will gradually shred off all the wrong and distorted movements which form its present habits. We shall find that in itself the body is a sane entity and it is not in need of many things that have been suggested to it and instilled into it by forces that are outside it, almost foreign to it, the mental and the vital forces. The liberation will bring to it automatically the awareness of its own self, it will become, that is to say, conscious of itself and this consciousness will bring with it a pure and fresh energy which is that of its true self. As in the case of a subject nation the very fact of liberation brings to it the energy of self-consciousness and an exhilarating delight in the expression of the newfound selfhood, even as also in the case of the individual human being when he is freed from serfdom and slavery and bondages, he attains, realises the dignity of self-consciousness and self-power, even so the material body too becomes illumined with its freedom and rejoices in its power and energy to express its own truth. The first effect of freedom after a long subjugation is likely to be a spell of erraticism, but that is sure to die away if there is a corrective central will.

The body-movements in the animal are more authentic and truthful for they are not subsidised and suborned by the vital and mental injunctions, and they are more ordered and controlled, not subject to idiosyncrasies that sway the human character. They are more free and more natural: the same essential freedom and authenticity and purity shall belong to the body natural of the highest mode of being and consciousness.

However, in this age, at the present time the human body is inevitably moving towards such a consummation—towards freedom and buoyancy and radiancy, a new valency, a new self-law. The individual efforts are more than supplemented by a Grace that is at work in a supreme effective manner: for this is the hour of God—“when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny.”¹

Every part and element of the whole being, down to the material cells of the body itself must be filled with the soul's consciousness, a field suffused with the consciousness of the soul. Next there will come the question of changing the very substance of the constituents. That is the final and crucial discipline. For a pervading soul-consciousness may, by its pressure and influence, bring about

¹ *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol 4, pp 333-335

the prolongation of life, even indefinitely, but immortality is assured only when the very substance of the material body is changed into its immortal essence.¹

Nowadays we hear much of brain-washing. The other day, instead of brain-washing, I spoke of brain-ignition. That is to say, for a total reconstitution of the brain, for a new building of the physique of the new man, one has to transform the cells of grey matter into particles of fire, packets of burning energy. I said, the cranium being the control-room of physical existence and the brain being the controlling agent—the brain extending its range down the spinal column to its end at the last vertebra—this is the element that has to be treated and reorganised first and foremost if a physical reorganisation of human nature and behaviour is to be achieved. I explained—tried to explain—that this being the physical or material field, the first of the elements—*kṣiti* or earth or matter—the God presiding over it, Fire, has to be invoked and its especial working carried out here.²

The vital in its ordinary and normal functions means desires and attachments, hunger and thirst, ties and bondages, urges and demands—these have to be cleared and washed out if there is to be healthy strength in the system, washed by spraying the pure vital fluid. Physiologically the enzymes and endocrine secretions are the physical formations or outer formulations of the hidden vital fluid. This indeed is the function of the deity, Soma, Pawamana Soma, the flowing stream of Delight, who in effect is the true presiding godhead here. For it is this section of the body that is the stage for our whole world of enjoyment—for the play of all our physical delights as well as of all our ailments and diseases.³

...On the other side of the diaphragm, is the region of the thorax, the chest cavity. It contains the most important of all human organs, the heart and the lungs, which means the respiratory and the circulatory systems, extending into the solar plexus; and the power that controls it is that of the third element Tejas, the pulsating, radiant energy. It is the energising heat, the warmth of will and aspiration, concentration in the heart; it is also Tapas. It is indeed a form of fire, fire in its essential substance, a quiet white flame against the robust red and crimson and purple fires of earth. It is the mounting urge of consciousness in its rhythmic poise of harmonious strength. And that is the god Aryama of the Vedas, the godhead presiding over the upward surge of evolution. From here comes not merely the drive to go forward, the secret dynamo that moves the being to its goal but also the vision that shows the way and the conditions under which the end is achieved or fulfilled. From here too comes rhythm and the balance and the happy harmony of all movements in life. The calm heave of the lungs and the glad beat of the heart are the sign and symbol of a radiant animation.

¹ *Ibid.*, p 337

² *Ibid.*, p. 329

³ *Ibid.*, p 330

We now come to the fourth domain, the domain of Marut; in the physical body it is the mouth, the throat, the tongue, the facial front in general. It is the field of expression, of articulation—Vak, the word is the symbol. Here is the alert, the mobile field, also a stage for the play, the outward display of all the significances that life movements carry in them, physical or psychological. Speech or utterance is the epitomised or concretised expression of the sense of life movement.

This region of the Marut can be linked to that where the Vedic Maruts rule and govern. The Maruts are called thought-gods—thought-gods riding on the movements of life. They represent the aerial spirits or energies that lift the human spirit from its purely vital and material coils into the rarer regions of pure thinking and light and consciousness, who spread and move further upward in the still farther and rarer regions of consciousness and energy.

Beyond is the fifth element, Vyom, the sphere overhead, the Vast and the Infinite. That, of course, is the original source and status of the human being, where he gathers up all the elements in one indivisible perfect consciousness. That is the root of the Divine Tree of Existence which, as the Vedas say, dwells up there, spreading downward all its branches, namely the other elements of the being.¹

¹ *Ibid*, pp 330-331

MAN, MALADY AND MEDICINE

1

THE title of this treatise calls for clear, convincing and right answers to the following three questions:

First—What is *man*?

Next—What is his *malady* and from what does it originate?

And lastly—What is the right *medicine* that can radically cure him of his malady?

The questions demand that the answers should be intelligible and not ambiguous; logical and not mystifying; just and not arbitrary.

The answers may need analytical explanations and we must see to it. Now let us seek for the answers.

Some say that man is a *mental being*. Others observe that man is an animal living in society or, in other words, man is a social animal. An existentialist believes that man is a thinking animal living alone on the earth abandoned and unhelped.

From the above views it is not difficult to understand that they try to describe the present apparent man. But the present man has his past as also his future.

None of the views is indicative of either the one or the other.

Here is another definition: Man is a *transitional being*, he is not *final*.

This definition we get from *The Hour of God* by Sri Aurobindo. Let us examine how far this definition would fulfil our need.

The word 'transitional' accepts the fact that man has been moving from a stage which he left,—maybe long ago—to another stage which he has not yet reached. He is somewhere in between. But he has not stopped his journey; he is moving. The word also indicates that because he has not yet reached the last point of his journey he is not final.

We know that the identity of a living being like man, who is moving and thereby experiencing changes in both his inlook and outlook at various stages of his movement, cannot be precisely enunciated at any given stage until he becomes final. Sri Aurobindo's definition recognises this fact and therefore it is to be taken as the right answer to the first question. Still a little bit of elaboration is necessary to establish its justification which may also be helpful in finding the clue to answering the second question.

In the same discourse in *The Hour of God* Sri Aurobindo states: "Man is a mental being but his mind is imprisoned in a living body and therefore his mentality works here involved, obscure and degraded in a physical brain." He also points out: "Man's mind is not the highest possible power of consciousness, for mind is not in possession of Truth but is only its ignorant seeker." Now we

understand why man, though he believes that his mind is the one great power capable of solving all human problems, is forced to look for the beyond to achieve something wider, greater and higher than what he possesses, and that this something is *Truth*.

We have to determine then whether it is at all possible for man to achieve and possess what he has to look for. And so we have to carry on a deeper search into things—that is to say, we have to know not only the aim of man's journey but also more closely his progress from one stage to another, from one rung to the higher rung of the ladder. For this purpose we may also knock at the door of Sri Aurobindo, for his philosophy dwells upon the issue in detail and not in a mystifying way. Though the issue is no doubt spiritual his approach is rational and therefore intelligible.

2

In para 2 of the chapter titled "Man in the Universe" (Chapter VI, Book I) of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo indicates: "The ascent to the divine life is the human journey, the work of works, the acceptable sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a patch of surface mud and water..."

In this context his views expressed in a rhythmic tone and therefore bearing a deeper suggestion—in Book I Canto IV of *Savitri*—may also be recalled:

"Inheritor of the brief animal mind
Man still a child in Nature's mighty hands...
He knows not what he shall achieve or when,
He knows not whether at last he shall survive
Or end like the mastodon and the sloth
And perish from the earth where he was King.
He is ignorant of the meaning of his life,
He is ignorant of his high and splendid fate."

Now we understand that at the end of his journey there is the divine life and that to reach that end is his real business. Until then he remains transitional and not final. And therefore we must study the whole human journey with a view to examining whether he is progressing towards that "splendid fate."

We see that at the very outset of his journey man lives in his physical mind—working through the operation of his brain and nerves according to the information he receives through the channel of his senses—to serve the demands of the body. He is a physical man.

In the next stage of his journey we see that he is governed by a life-mind which is an instrument of desire. This life-mind of man continues to remain dis-

contented with whatever he achieves during the course of his journey through this stage. It hunts after unrealised possibilities to possess and enjoy them. It cannot remain satisfied only with the physical and objective, but seeks too a subjective and imaginative, a purely emotive satisfaction and pleasure. It may be noted here that if this life-mind or vital-mind—as it is otherwise termed—were not there in man then he would live like an animal accepting his physical life as his whole possibility. With the opening of this vital-mind man is able to ascend the second rung of the ladder and become distinctly different from the animal—though he still has animality in him. This vital mind always enlarges desires and cravings, creates dissatisfaction and unrest, a quest for new worlds to conquer, to move towards uncertainties. And with this restlessness man ascends the next higher rung when he develops a thinking mind which inquires into everything, questions everything, builds up affirmations and unbuilds them, erects systems of certitude but finally accepts none of them as certain. Thus we come to understand that the mind of humanity is ever seeking, ever active but never arriving at a firmly settled reality because he is transitional and not final.

Here Sri Aurobindo presumes that advocates of physical Science who do not believe that man is not final, can raise objections: “Is it at all possible for a transitional being to ever become final? Will man ever be able to complete his journey? To reach his goal he has to surpass himself. Does he really intend to become something other than man?”

The advocates of physical science may also argue: “If a creation superior to man is intended, the element necessary for a new creation must be there latent in the human mould, just as the peculiar animal-being that developed into humanity had the essential elements of human nature already potential or present in it. But such a race or kind or type of humanity can be found nowhere on the planet earth. At most there are only a few spiritualised human beings, here and there, who are seeking to escape this *Jagat* (world) to attain *Nirvana*. To them this *Jagat* is a falsehood, a *Maya* (illusion).”

To answer all the points we have to discuss them briefly in the perspective of the theory of Involution and Evolution as explained by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*.

(To be continued)

SAMAR BASU

THE ETERNAL CHILD AND THE ETERNAL MARVEL

(Continued from the issue of March 1988)

1+2+3+4 = ∞ (Pythagoras)
O 1 2 3 4 = the squaring of the circle (perfect objectivisation of the
subjective)

GOLDEN AGE

KING Midas loved gold above all things.

The land of Phrygia, over which he ruled in splendour, occupied that last strip of land where the immense plains of Asia reach out towards the Western sea with its islands—on which the first Aegean merchant-ships were already venturing. To his kingdom the ancestors of Plato and Aristotle, dazzled by a magnificence whose meaning totally outstripped the stumbling syllogisms of their primitive logic, came to glean among the Eastern barbarians those few fragments of true wisdom upon which later philosophers would erect the so very well-ordered—and so very limited—structures which form the basis of European culture. Thither too their heroes would come, questing after something faintly remembered, like a mysterious oracle, a message whispered in the fragmentary images of a sybilline tongue, scattered hints of a long-vanished myth:

the lost secret of Life.

The fabulous goal of this heroic quest was none other than the gold which alchemist Midas coveted with such intensity: the luminous and incorruptible element into which all the obscure and deceptive realities of material existence should be transmuted by his magician touch.

How had Midas reached the threshold of this prodigious discovery? It is told that it was a boon gifted by Dionysus—the Lord of Divine Delight. And the method, as revealed in the hymns of the 9th mandala of the Rig Veda,¹ was dazzlingly simple:

“Since the creative power is Delight,
Delight is the support of all perception,
for Delight bears the energy of consciousness
by which we are aware of all that is—

¹ Hymns to Soma, God of ecstasy and spiritual intoxication, symbolised materially by a vine with euphoric properties

the delight that springs forth from every being
 at the touch of their own Being;
 and what is it to exist but to feel that Delight?
Delight is the only Truth;
the gold of life is simply that Delight."

We have only to rediscover the golden thread, that current of Being, in all our sensations—pure delight at the contact of Self with Self—and all life will become

the gold of truth.

Thus:

Midas, having attained the immutable delight
 transmuted into gold each instant of his life—
 as in a distant age that knew no fall or winter
 a happy race had dwelt in gardens long-forgotten...
 while no shadow of Thought veiled the Sun from their sight,
 no wall divided self from the Self that we are.

Under skies ever-smiling of freedom absolute,
 their bodies harmonised with Nature's every mood,
 an everlasting youth sustained their joyful lives:
 a perfect equilibrium that forever would last...
 while innocent they lived, unstained by a will to be,
 their harmony unspoilt by any care for change,
 leisure's unmindful bloom cradling unflinching
 the golden ease in which they lived and moved....

What longing for the unknown disturbed that ancient peace?

Even Midas began to feel that this gold was weighing him down. For, although Truth is the gold of life, if there is nothing but gold—where is life then? Delight, pure and unchanging, perfection, ever-unstained Light—if this is the goal of existence, what of existence itself?

Midas... influenced already perhaps by the greedy mind of the Achaians... noticed that he was starving. He had annihilated Becoming into Being, Parmenides might have concluded; or the Upanishad might have compared him to that ethereal bird perched on the last branch of Life's tree, distantly watching his younger companions savouring the sweet fruits. But, leaving aside philosophy: all the soul-food of every moment, all the diverse experiences of every instant of life, all the nuances, the manifold fine variations—as soon as he approached them, they turned to gold! Always the same gold, of the same dazzling truth! Could one *taste* that?

And even worse, his child, so dear to him even before she had been born, the daughter in whom seemed fulfilled all the prayers he had offered in his youth to Astarte, to the Marvel he loved without knowing Her, to the Mystery where shadow was shot through with strange gleams and pain led to ecstasies unknown to pleasure... must she too become a golden statue? Must he live without her inexplicable and sublime caprices, her unjustifiable outbursts of tenderness, her unpredictable moods, her candour far exceeding tame innocence?

Perfection grew pale beside that miracle.

So he let himself bathe in that limpid flow of existence, the ever-changing current of Becoming, the river of which Heraclitus would say, "It is impossible to step twice into the same waters": Life.

And life washed away his obsession with gold.

But behold, strange alchemy! When Midas once more could touch the multiplicity of things and creatures, contact the ephemeral beauty of existence, play with the kaleidoscope of freedom, the waters of this great stream absorbed his magic powers and, while retaining their transparency, took on a golden sparkle of Truth-Delight.

The sun-rays of Being filled the waters of Becoming, the light danced on the waves and gave all things a hue of splendour, all creatures an aura of bliss, linked all happenings in the rhythms of a blissful revelation, led through all sensations towards an ever-fresh thrill of discovery; unveiled at every instant of his life

the harmonies of an eternal dawn

Midas listened to the music of the Light, the shimmering chords of Apollo's lyre; a sunlit song went with him everywhere, the solar echo to his every step in life.

But one day, after gold had turned to music and the same passion now sharpened his hearing to catch the faintest tone—for everything now vibrated with harmony—he seemed to recognise behind those high notes, as if an appeal from the depths of his being, a flute calling from within the secret shadow of life. He closed his eyes to that excessive brightness... and was dazzled by these other violet silences, modulated like the poignant notes of a love-song.

The unknown melodies flowed on and on, streams from the mystic source of life; calls from a far distance that yet haunts us with a sense of the most intimate closeness; silence of a sea beyond the skies whose waves and pearls yet visit the little beach of our lost childhood....

Farewell gold, farewell bright sunlight! Midas, all ears (what an ass!),

plunged into the depths of a mystery beyond the reach of light, drawn by the thread of an unknown voice which seemed to fall silent in order better to convey the impossible. He abandoned the glades of tranquil delight and dared to venture into a huge wild forest searching for a single flower no hand could pluck, whose magic perfume would speak to his soul the secret that lies beyond all wisdom, which only the mad ecstasy of Love can surprise:

the deep oneness of Life.

(To be continued)

B. PETRIS

(Translated by Shraddhavan from the original French)

FOR YOUR EARS ONLY

14. THE UNFORGETTABLE PENCIL

OF all my boyhood experiences—bad, worse and worst—at school, the most unforgettable was the one with a pencil.

In those good old days students up to the fifth standard were not allowed to write with pens. Perhaps the teachers were of the opinion that the handwriting of a student improved very well by writing with a pencil and that the pencil took better care of the curves of any letter in the alphabet than the unruly pen. Those were times when ball-pens were not even heard of. Hence the student's box contained a six-inch wooden scale, an eraser and a sharp pencil.

My father sharpened the pencil for me. It was a delight to watch him do so. I stood by his side and looked at the movement of his hand with wide-opened wonder. He never used a pencil sharpener (nor bought me one) but an old razor-blade. Since he was the chief-*dubash* to Englishmen who managed the Cotton Mill here, and since his higher authorities liked him very much, my father shaved himself every morning with a '7-o'clock' blade manufactured in England. I don't remember to have used any pencil other than England-made till the Englishmen left the Cotton Mill. Those pencils were sturdy and the black lead never broke. It was a pleasure to use such a pencil for it moved very smoothly even on the pages of the rough notebook made of newsprint, nicknamed by the teachers and the taught 'cowdung paper.' It left its print as "dark as Erebus" and when erased the letters disappeared like first-rate criminals leaving no trace.

My pencil always remained the envy of my classmates. My class teacher too in the absence of a cane preferred mine to others for tapping on the heads of boys who committed mistakes. Sometimes he forgot himself by looking at the exquisitely sharpened part of the pencil.

My father held the pencil vertically in his left hand and the blade horizontally in his right. Since the tail of the pencil carried a small cylindrical eraser, he ran the sharp edge of the blade round the neck of the pencil just half-an-inch below its head. The blade made a deep cut. Then he scrutinized the cut by rotating the pencil. Satisfied he held it horizontally and with the blade slightly tilted from its horizontal position dug into the cut and forcibly but gently pushed its way out on the side thereby allowing a chip to fall down from the pencil. He repeated the operation several times with his deft hand. And when the lead was long enough, he pressed it against the tip of his finger and scraped it with the blade till the tip of the lead turned very sharp like an awl.

He tested its sharpness on me. When I let out a howl, he said giving it to me: "Keep your mind as sharp as this pencil."

It looked like a well-forged mini javelin.

In the morning when I got ready for school, my father asked me: "Do you have your pencil? Did you check it? Is it sharp enough?"

He asked me again when I got down from his cycle at the entrance of the school. Sometimes he asked me to show him the pencil. Only when he was satisfied with its sharpness he left for the mill. That was a daily happening.

Since I was the first to enter the school every morning, I sat under the big portia tree, a yard or so from the main gate, with my eyes glued to the entrance. Yes, I awaited the arrival of my classmates. Half an hour later, one after another trickled in.

One day it so happened that three of my classmates who came from distant places reached school just about the time I entered. Now that there were four altogether, we planned to spend the time by playing the game of 'Thief and Police'.

Everybody clamoured to play the thief.

"Then who will be the Police Inspector?" I asked.

"You will," said they in unison.

"Why? I too like to play the thief."

"But you have a sharp weapon with you," said one. "All Police Inspectors have such weapons clinging to their broad brown belts. You are the only one fit here to play the police."

"Come on," said another. "Take out your pencil and hold it like a knife. It is the one with which you should frighten the thieves."

"Only to frighten the thieves? Or am I allowed to stab anyone?" It was my innocent question.

"Yes, of course. What then is the weapon for? You can do so only when a thief protests and refuses to surrender. But when you stab, use the other end of your pencil with the eraser," advised the third.

The game began.

As a Police Inspector, I hid myself behind a tree. The thieves ran to different places, while I started counting numbers up to 100, though I was not good at it. When I had finished counting I went in search of the thieves. My 'duty' was to corner the 'thieves' one after another, arrest them with imaginary hand-cuffs and take them to the tree supposed to be the police station.

I managed to arrest two of them within five minutes, for they were puny fellows. To overpower them was not difficult. I dragged them to the tree and put them 'behind bars'. They were not expected to escape.

But I had a real tough time with the third one. Maybe because I ran short of energy after chasing the first two. The third guy—Shiva—played hide and seek with me and when I was about to catch him by his hair, he ducked and made me fall on the ground.

Minutes later I managed to catch him. But he banged my head with his and sent me reeling.

What a shame for the Inspector!

I slumped down to the floor and held my pounding head with both my hands.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” laughed Shiva, like a villain in celluloid. “That is what happens to the Inspector when he tries to catch a hardened criminal! Ha... Ha... Ha!”

I gritted my teeth out of pain. Born of the Kshatriya race, the full-blooded warrior in me rose. With the ‘javelin’ in hand, I pounced on him like a hungry lion.

Shiva fell down, unable to bear the animal strength in me. Without any war cry I stabbed him.

Blood—real blood—gushed forth from the deep wound my javelin made on his forehead. He swooned.

The sight and smell of blood brought me back to my senses. That was the first time I had seen hot blood.

The other two thieves came running towards me. “Hei! What did you do? ...If he is dead, the real police will catch you.”

I stood stunned.

Meanwhile two peons of the school hurried with a tumbler of water and sprinkled it on Shiva’s face. When Shiva showed signs of life in him, one of the two peons rushed him to the hospital. The other looked daggers at me and dragged me to the headmaster’s room.

A crowd consisting of students, teachers and peons gathered and looked down upon me. Their looks gave me the impression that I was in for a horrible experience.

Clink... clank... came the sound of keys at a distance. The hue and cry of the crowd gave way to sepulchral silence. A chill ran down my spine. I began to shiver like a fully drenched dog in winter.

The crowd gave way in solemn respect. The headmaster in all his glory reached the door of his room, inserted the key into the hole and turned it. He turned his head like a keyed doll and looked at me. He then pushed the door open and entered. Out came he with a raised cane.

I began to weep.

“Kneel down,” the headmaster yelled.

I obeyed.

“What is your name?”

“Raja,” I said with a stutter.

“From which class?”

“III Std B.”

There was no further question. The cane was in full swing. I wriggled like a worm on hot sand. He stopped when his hand ached. I continued to kneel down.

The bell rang. It was time for the school assembly. The students and the teachers assembled in the open quadrangle of the school sheltered by huge trees. At the headmaster's bidding, I went with him to attend the assembly. I was asked to kneel down by his side.

The prayer began with the stroke of a second bell. I was the one who really prayed. After the prayer, I was introduced, the incident briefed and finally my act condemned.

I was spanked again in public, with the nobler intention of teaching others a lesson. But comparatively there were less number of blows.

The assembled dispersed to their respective classes. But I was asked to remain kneeling.

What a shame to the one who had played the Police Inspector!

Half an hour or so later, I was surprised to see my father there. Perhaps the headmaster had sent him word.

After briefing him with what had happened, the headmaster said: "Your son is really lucky. His victim sustained only a very minor injury. Had something else happened to him, your son by this time would have been in custody."

My father listened to him in silence. Then he said: "I'll take him home today and send him back to school tomorrow."

"As you wish," the headmaster said. "But don't beat him. He has had enough."

"Yes. I can very well see," my father said with compassion.

When we reached home, my father dragged me to the backyard of the house and made me kneel down on sand.

"You should never get up till I come back home for lunch," he said and left for the mill.

"A pencil should only write. But never stab," remarked my mother amidst tears.

Left alone in the backyard, I ruminated over the fate of Police Inspectors who run after hardened criminals.

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

A History of Pondicherry by *A. Ramasamy*, N.D., Sterling, 1987, Rs. 150

PROFESSOR A. Ramasamy has made a scholarly attempt to present a comprehensive overview of the history of the area now known as the Union Territory of Pondicherry, from prehistoric times right up to 1980. He has divided his presentation into three distinct periods.

The first, Tamil Puducherry, sketches the period from prehistoric times to the advent of the French, on the basis of archaeological, inscriptional and literary evidence. It covers the Sangam Age, the Pallava, Chola, Pandya and Nayak periods.

The second, and largest, part—French Pondicherry—recounts the major events, conditions and trends during the French occupation, culminating in the efforts of the populace for merger with the rest of the country after Independence. This is divided into two main sections: first, a historical survey covering the rise and fall of French power in Pondicherry, from the first incursions of the French East India Company, through the periods of influence of early key figures: François Martin, Dupleix and Lally Tollendal, the changing fortunes of the area during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, largely as an outcome of European politics, its close association with France for more than a hundred years, and the influence it felt from the rise of nationalism in the rest of India to the active pressure for merger with free India after 1947. One of the most striking and impressive figures to emerge from these pages is Ananda Ranga Pillai, whose vivid and fascinating Tamil *Diary* is a major source of detailed information about both political developments and everyday life in Pondicherry from 1736 to 1760. (Mr. P. Raja has given an interesting account of Ananda Ranga Pillai in the February 1983 issue of *Mother India*.) The second section consists of chapters on administration, economy, education, religion, society and art and letters in the territory during the period of French domination.

The third part—Indian Pondicherry—deals with political, economic and social developments in the State of Pondicherry within the Union of India, from 1954 to 1980.

To fulfil this considerable task, Professor Ramasamy has drawn on all available sources in English, French and Tamil, from private interviews and unpublished material, through specialist studies in scholarly journals, to a wide variety of published works more or less well-known. As a scholar should, he has weighed opposing views on knotty questions and striven to present with detachment a complete and unbiased picture. There are useful appendices listing the French Governors in India (from the first *chef de Loge* of the French East India Company, Bellange de Lespinay appointed on February 4th 1673, to the last Governor Monsieur Ménard, whose office ended with the *de facto* transfer of

authority on August 16 1954); the subsequent Lieutenant-Governors of the Union Territory of Pondicherry; the Councils of Ministers in the Six Legislative Assemblies which have held office since July 1963; and a chronology of important events, which gives significant dates in the history of the Pondicherry area in an easy-to-find form. There is also a complete bibliography to all Professor Ramasamy's sources, which would be of even more undoubted assistance to scholars wishing to delve deeper into the ground he has covered, if publishing details and availability of the various items had been given.

The index, regrettably, appears somewhat incomplete. For example, the major account of Ananda Ranga Pillai appears on pages 91-94, as a significant subsection to the chapter on Lally Tollendal; he is also mentioned in many other places. But a reader consulting the index will find himself referred only to pages 188, 207 and 215, where his name appears briefly in connection with matters reported in the diary. It is to be hoped that future editions of this valuable pioneer survey will (1) have a considerably enlarged index, (2) make use of a typeface which can give the correct accents so essential to the recognisability and pronunciation of French names, and (3) furnish some historical maps—for lack of these the reader remains completely bewildered at several points, especially in Part One.

SHRADDHAVAN

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IS SRI AUROBINDO'S YOGA TO BE TURNED INTO A RELIGION ?

Speech by Vishwajyoti Pandey

As we all know, this world has no dearth of religions. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc. are only a few main ones. They have their branches and sub-branches that run into hundreds of cults, creeds, sects and institutions.

But the important question is: "What have they given to mankind?" A backward glance at the historical record of religions makes it abundantly clear that however luminous they may have been in their origin, in their application to social life many crimes, violences and injustices have been carried out in their name. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls "false socialisation of religion".¹ Islam has waged holy wars; mediaeval Christianity, with the church as its centre of power, has hampered the progress of science and philosophy by persecuting the scientists and philosophic thinkers of its time. Even Hinduism which has been so tolerant and broad in its outlook has not been altogether free from occasional and brief periods of mutual hatred and persecution. Today's communal riots that lead to wanton massacre and bloodshed have often their roots in religion. The acute problem of Punjab faced by our country today is nothing else but deep-rooted, irrational, blind, religious fanaticism.

Yet, mankind has not learnt its lesson from this misuse of religion. At the present moment when humanity is turning away from modern materialism to some deeper truth, large sections of it still see religion as the uplifter of mankind. Even today, if men find any opportunity to form a new religion, they will not hesitate to do so. And if this is so, it is not unlikely that attempts are made to turn Sri Aurobindo's Yoga also into a new religion, because in his works, men will find concrete material to create a new religion. History shows us that in the past, whenever there was a spiritual awakening, it has always resulted in the formation of a new religion. It has happened before, it may happen again.

If such a movement is attempted, what will be its result? In the Mother's

¹ *The Human Cycle* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 15), p 211.

own words, "A new religion would not only be useless but harmful."¹

This categorical statement of the Mother is bound to raise many eyebrows. Men are sure to ask, "Why, what is wrong with a new religion? Religion elevates man from the mundane existence to a higher existence. It shows him the way to God. If it has failed in the past, it is not because it itself was wrong, but because it was not rightly practised. A new religion practised in the right spirit will succeed in doing what the past religions could not do."

There is some truth in this argument, for it cannot be denied that in their origin and essence each religion contained a revelation of some truth. But the revelation being partial and exclusive could not lead to the complete and integral truth of the Divine. But what is more objectionable is that all these religions soon lost their inner core of spiritual truth and got encrusted with mere soulless rites, ceremonies, practices and set dogmas and fixed beliefs without issue. In Sri Aurobindo's own words, "The religious life is a movement of the... ignorant human consciousness, turning or trying to turn away from the earth towards the Divine, but as yet without knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed which claims to have found the way out of the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beatific Beyond."²

All religions at their origin are the revelation of some spiritual truth to a great being who takes birth on this earth to receive it and incarnate it. This great being is a living embodiment of that truth and he tries to communicate this truth to his fellowmen. But men still live in ignorance, they cannot grasp this truth in its purity and distort and pervert it. They transform the truth into a dogmatic religion, impose rigid rules and regulations, rites and ceremonies on it and practically turn it into an authoritarian organisation whose rules cannot be violated. And very soon the truth is forgotten and fixed rites and set ceremonies become more important.

Sri Aurobindo does not reject the true essence of any religion, does not look upon any religion with contempt. He believes that each religion has brought some revelation to mankind, but even at its best it is only a partial and limited glimpse of the Spirit.

So any attempt to turn Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and supramental teaching, intentionally or unintentionally, into a new religion will not only be "useless but harmful", as says the Mother because Sri Aurobindo's Yoga being integral admits and embraces the truths of all religions, but it also exceeds all of them and is too vast, too profound, to be held in by partial beliefs, rites, ceremonies and dogmas, which inevitably arise in every religion. It is for this reason that the Mother has said, "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme."³

¹ *Bulletin of Physical Education*, August 1957.

² *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed., Vol. 22), p. 137.

³ *Collected Works of The Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol. 13, p. 3

Sri Aurobindo wants humanity to accept the essential truths of all religions, for they have each something to contribute to man's quest for a higher life. But he also insists that all these limited truths must be harmonised and synthesised by our transcending them all and rising above them into the integral truth of the Spirit to which he has given the name "Supermind". He does not want us to lead a mere religious life. He wants us to lead a spiritual life aiming at the integral realisation of the Truth which should be appropriately called Yoga. These two, religion and Yoga, are vastly different. In Sri Aurobindo's own words, "The religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual but very often it is only a turning about in a round of rites, ceremonies, practices or set ideas and forms without any issue. The spiritual life, on the contrary, proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine."¹

This question of religion has become of paramount importance at the present moment when humanity has arrived at a crucial turning-point of its evolutionary history which will lead it to a higher consciousness and create a New Age, the age of the supramental Truth. The question that now arises is, "Will this supramental Truth formulate itself into a new religion?" It is in answer to this question that the Mother has said, "In the supramental creation there will be no more religions."² I have already explained to you why the Mother is so much against the formation of religions. She and Sri Aurobindo maintain that any such attempt will only falsify the supramental Truth and inevitably generate the same evils as are found in all the historical religions.

Now the time has come to rise beyond the rays of the Sun into the very body of the Sun, to cease taking refuge in partial religious truths and seek out the integral supramental Truth.

I end my speech with these words of Sri Aurobindo in which he categorically states, "I may say that it is far from my purpose to propagate any religion, new or old, for humanity in the future. A way to be opened that is still blocked, not a religion to be founded, is my conception of the matter."³

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 22), p. 137.

² *Bulletin of Physical Education*, Nov. 1957.

³ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 22), p. 139.