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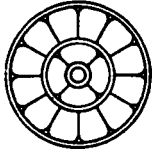
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled



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All correspondence to be addressed to

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

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Editor K D SETHNA

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>	
ON THE MOTHER'S WORKING	. 71
ON HIS YOGA AND ON THE MOTHER	... 71
<i>The Mother</i>	
A MESSAGE FOR ALL TIME	. 71
ON TWO ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE	... 71
THE MOTHER ON DEALING WITH PEOPLE	
INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN AT HER ORDER	.. 72
A TALK TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON	
17 FEBRUARY 1951	... 73
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>	
LIFE—POETRY—YOGA	
TWO PERSONAL LETTERS	.. 76
<i>Dinkar Palande</i>	
SAMADHI (Poem)	. 85
<i>Nirodbaran</i>	
'THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE	
A DREAM-DIALOGUE	
(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)	. 86
SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN "EXTRAORDINARY GIRL"	
A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION	... 90
<i>Jesse Roarke</i>	
INVOCATION (Poem)	.. 92
<i>Dr Chamanlal L. Gupta</i>	
SRI AUROBINDO AS TEACHER	
SRI AUROBINDO MEMORIAL LECTURE DELIVERED AT	
BARODA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION	... 93

CONTENTS

<i>B. Varalakshmi</i>	
ASWAPATHY AND THE MARUTS	
SOME INSIGHTS ON THE FATHER OF SAVITRI	. 97
<i>R. Y. Deshpande</i>	
“SATYAVAN MUST DIE”	
A DISCOURSE APROPOS OF A PHRASE IN SRI AUROBINDO’S <i>SAVITRI</i>	. 102
<i>Nilima Das</i>	
SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA	. 107
<i>Acharya Vidyananda Saraswati (Dr R. N. Pani)</i>	
EDUCATION AND CULTURE	. . 109
<i>P. Raja</i>	
A PAUPER AND A POOR COUNTRY	
A SHORT STORY	... 116
<i>Wilfried</i>	
NEW AGE NEWS	
TALKING TO PLANTS	. 120
<i>Review by Shraddhavan</i>	
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE	
SRI AUROBINDO FOR ALL AGES BY NIRODBARAN	. 121
<i>Pradip Bhattacharya</i>	
DESIRE AND ITS FRUITS IN THE MAHABHARATA	123

STUDENTS’ SECTION

<i>Speech by Dibakar Goswami</i>	
THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION	
TWENTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE 12 AUGUST 1990	
“OCCULTISM—ITS ROLE IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA”	. 131

A MESSAGE BY THE MOTHER FOR ALL TIME

WE have only one thing to do: the perfect surrender of which Sri Aurobindo speaks, the total self-giving to the Divine Will, whatever happens, even in the midst of the night.

There is the night and there is the sun, the night and the sun, again the night, many nights, but one must cling to this will to surrender, cling to it as through a tempest, and give up everything into the hands of the Supreme Lord, until the day when the sun comes for ever, the total victory.

THE MOTHER ON TWO ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE

THE Divine is everywhere and in all, He is all. Yes, in His essence and His supreme reality. But in the world of progressive material manifestation, one must identify not with the Divine as He is, but with the Divine as He will be.

30 June 1952

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE MOTHER'S WORKING

Q: X seems to think that the Mother is harder than you.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because the Mother's pressure for change is always strong—even when she does not put it as force, it is there by the very nature of the Divine Energy in her.

11.3.1937

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIS YOGA AND ON THE MOTHER

THERE is no method in this Yoga except to concentrate, preferably in the heart, and call the presence and power of the Mother to take up the being and by the working of her force to transform the consciousness.

*

By remaining psychically open to the Mother, all that is necessary for work or sadhana develops progressively, that is one of the chief secrets, the central secret of the sadhana.

THE MOTHER ON DEALING WITH PEOPLE

INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN AT HER ORDER

(This Message on behaviour, originally with an important particular bearing, has on the whole a general reference of equal importance, as some parts of the guidance given make it quite clear.)

THE Mother wants that the people responsible for receiving the visitors should always be very polite and gentle in their behaviour towards them. High and low, young and old, whether they are well-dressed or ill-clad, all should always be received properly with benevolence and good behaviour. It is not necessary that the better dressed people may be more fit for being received well in this Ashram. It should not be that we give more care to the people with a motor car than to an ordinary man looking like a beggar. We must never forget that they are as much human as we are and we have no right to think that we are at the top of the scale.

And our politeness should not be merely an outer form, stiff politeness, so to say. It must be something coming from within. Whatever may be the difficulties and whatever may be the circumstances—Mother fully knows even to the minute detail the circumstances when we lose our temper and get irritated in our work and knowing that fully well she says—whatever may be the circumstances, rudeness or curt behaviour is never permissible.

There are difficulties in our way, but Mother says that as a rule our difficulties and our troubles are always such that we do have the capacity of overcoming them. If we could remain at our best we shall always be able to tackle the situation without losing control. Remember, each time we lose control of ourselves, each time we get angry or we have to use the outer means of keeping discipline it means that at that moment we have fallen low and we could not rise up to the situation. In everything, in every way, it boils down to one rule—always endeavour to make progress, try to be your true self. Even if you have not been able to do it today you must be able to do it tomorrow. But the full effort must be there. Never forget in your action that you are representing the Ashram. People will judge the Ashram from your behaviour. Even if you have to say no, even if you have to reject somebody's request you can do it with all politeness and courtesy. Try to help each one. Even if others are rude to you it is not a reason for you to do likewise. If you behave in the same way as the outsiders do, then what is the fun of your being here?

9 5.1957

A good advice to all the Ashramites in their dealings with visitors and foreigners (and even among themselves):

“When you have nothing pleasant to say about something or somebody in the Ashram, *keep silent*.

You must know that this silence is faithfulness to the Divine's work”.

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 17 FEBRUARY 1951

“What is required of you is not a passive surrender, in which you become like a block, but to put your will at the disposal of the divine Will.”

Questions and Answers 1929 (21 April)

How can one make an offering of one’s will?... Some people, when they offer their will, stop willing! This is more convenient, but evidently this is not the right way.

How to offer one’s will to the Divine when one does not know what the divine Will is? This is a very interesting problem.

Some men think that all that comes to them from outside is the divine Will, and they accept it as such.

Yes, unfortunately. But all that they do is to accept the collective will or that of the strongest.

Should not one offer all one’s willed actions to the Divine? That is, first do the willed actions and then offer them?

Perhaps you could first silence your will and wait for the inner voice before acting! That would be wiser.

*

You can at every minute make the gift of your will in an aspiration—and an aspiration which formulates itself very simply, not just “Lord, Thy will be done”, but “Grant that I may do as well as I can the best thing to do.”

You may not know at every moment what is the best thing to do nor how to do it, but you can place your will at the disposal of the Divine to do the best possible, the best thing possible. You will see it will have marvellous results. Do this with consciousness, sincerity and perseverance, and you will find yourself getting along with gigantic strides. It is like that, isn’t it? One must do things with all the ardour of one’s soul, with all the strength of one’s will; do at every moment the best possible. What others do is not your concern—this is something I shall never be able to repeat to you often enough.

Never say, “So-and-so does not do this”, “So-and-so does something else”, “That one does what he should not do”—all this is not your concern. You have been put upon earth, in a physical body, with a definite aim, which is to make

this body as conscious as possible, make it the most perfect and most conscious instrument of the Divine. He has given you a certain amount of substance and of matter in all the domains—mental, vital and physical—in proportion to what He expects from you, and all the circumstances around you are also in proportion to what He expects of you, and those who tell you, “My life is terrible, I lead the most miserable life in the world”, are donkeys! Everyone has a life appropriate to his total development, everyone has experiences which help him in his total development, and everyone has difficulties which help him in his total realisation.

If you look at yourself carefully, you will see that one always carries in oneself the opposite of the virtue one has to realise (I use “virtue” in its widest and highest sense). You have a special aim, a special mission, a special realisation which is your very own, each one individually, and you carry in yourself all the obstacles necessary to make your realisation perfect. Always you will see that within you the shadow and the light are equal: you have an ability, you have also the negation of this ability. But if you discover a very black hole, a thick shadow, be sure there is somewhere in you a great light. It is up to you to know how to use the one to realise the other.

This is a fact very little spoken about, but one of capital importance, and if you observe carefully you will see that it is always thus with everyone. This leads us to statements which are paradoxical but absolutely true; for instance, that the greatest thief can be the most honest man (this is not to encourage you to steal, of course!) and the greatest liar can be the most truthful person. So, do not despair if you find in yourself the greatest weakness, for perhaps it is the sign of the greatest divine strength. Do not say, “I am like that, I can’t be otherwise.” It is not true. You are “like that” because, precisely, you ought to be the opposite. And all your difficulties are there just that you may learn to transform them into the truth they are hiding.

Once you have understood this, many worries come to an end and you are very happy, very happy. If one finds one has very black holes, one says, “This shows I can rise very high”, if the abyss is very deep, “I can climb very high.” It is the same from the universal point of view; to use the Hindu terminology so familiar to you, it is the greatest Asuras who are the greatest beings of Light. And the day these Asuras are converted, they will be the supreme beings of the creation. This is not to encourage you to be asuric, you know, but it is like that—this will widen your minds a little and help you to free yourself from those ideas of opposing good and evil, for if you abide in that category, there is no hope.

If the world was not essentially the opposite of what it has become, there would be no hope. For the hole is so black and so deep, and the inconscience so complete, that if this were not the sign of the total consciousness, well, there would be nothing more to do but pack up one’s kit and go away. Men like

Shankara, who did not see much further than the end of their nose, said that the world was not worth the trouble of living in, for it was impossible, that it was better to treat it as an illusion and go away, there was nothing to be done with it. I tell you, on the contrary, that it is because the world is very bad, very dark, very ugly, very unconscious, full of misery and suffering, that it can become the supreme Beauty, the supreme Light, the supreme Consciousness and the supreme Felicity.

“If you are vigilant, if your attention is alert, you will certainly receive... an inspiration of what is to be done and that you must forthwith proceed to do.”

Questions and Answers 1929 (21 April)

When I told you just a while ago that you must aspire with a great ardour to do the best possible, at every moment the best thing possible, you could have asked me, “That is all very well. But how to know?” Well, it is not necessary to know! If you take this attitude with sincerity, you will know at each moment what you have to do, and it is this which is so wonderful! According to your sincerity, the inspiration is more and more precise, more and more exact.

“Only you must remember that to surrender is to accept whatever is the result of your action, though the result may be quite different from what you expect. On the other hand, if your surrender is passive, you will do nothing and try nothing; you will simply go to sleep and wait for a miracle.

“Now to know whether your will or desire is in agreement with the divine Will or not, you must look and see whether you have an answer or have no answer, whether you feel supported or contradicted, not by the mind or the vital or the body, but by that something which is always there deep in the inner being, in your heart.”

Questions and Answers 1929 (21 April)

It is always the same thing, this is our screen before which we must pass everything to know whether one may accept it or whether one is told not to.

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, pp 114, 117-120)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

TWO PERSONAL LETTERS

I WAS most happy to get your letter and the “Triple-Life” tablets. From this afternoon I’ll start being triply alive. In the meantime, with whatever warmth of a single life I have, let me thank you for both the wisdom and the wit of your letter. Yes, wit has come in, whether you meant it or not. Of course, “always and all ways” is a conscious expression, but I don’t think you intended a paradoxical pun in writing: “A world gone illiterate by increasing degrees”—that is to say, the more the academic qualifications obtained, the more incapable the world grows of a true reading of life’s riddle! Then there is the phrase: “... as fast as glych and glamour are being embraced.” Doesn’t “embraced” get a double sense—a literal no less than a metaphorical with “glamour girls” getting evoked?

Now for the wisdom: “To be a poet is to be the freest being in the universe; one sings the Song of Songs (to God) every second of one’s life.” Even here, I believe, the wit has stolen in. Look at the word “universe”. You could have chosen “world”. The “verse” in your choice chimes very suggestively with the poet’s existence and activity. It is as if the world had as its origin an all-unifying master-maker of verse. The idea of the poet’s freedom is a basic one and its relationship to singing God’s praise is inherent. For, the poet’s imagination soars above the earth’s so-called realities to a super-sphere where dwell the idealities of all things, waiting to be embodied here. There is no hold on him of things as they are: he is in tune with that secret presence which “the poet’s eye” in Shakespeare, behind the sight fixed on the interplay of outer motives and surface actions, conjures up—

the prophetic soul

Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

And this mysterious universal presence is a representative of what in its plenitude is above on the one hand and deep below on the other—the Supermind, as Sri Aurobindo calls it, that has to manifest from its free domain and to emerge from its involved splendour in the cryptic base of our evolutionary earth. It is to this plenary Being that the poet addresses his rhythmic rapture. The Biblical term “Song of Songs” is most apt, for here is not only the quintessence of all poetry but also the profound accent of love, the spontaneous movement of the inmost heart. Hasn’t Meredith spoken of poetry as the outflow of

Our inmost in the sweetest way?

The Biblical term brings even more than the warmth of love: it brings inevitably

the glow of wisdom. For the Song of Songs is attributed to that legendary fountain of sagacity: Solomon. The poet whose mysterious stirring you feel within you is your “psychic being”, the soul to whom Sri Aurobindo attributes an intrinsic “sweetness and light”. Light here stands for an outbreak of God’s truth—an infallible guidance from within, accompanying the sweetness that is an unflinching joy in everything and an unreserved affection streaming out to all. If indeed, as you generously say, I woke the sleeping poet in you, you must be right in holding, as you do, that the Mother sent you to me from far America. I could not have done you better service nor served the Mother in a finer mode. For to be a poet is to be like Sri Aurobindo in an important lifelong aspect. Hasn’t he said that he was born a poet (as well as a politician): all else he developed. Perhaps it would be a fuller view of him to say that the future Yogi whom he developed lay in seed-form in the poet: from the rhythmic word grew the sense of the divine harmonies that lie at the base of the cosmic movement. Similarly, the born politician held implicit the dynamic visionary of a perfectly organised, faultlessly governed “One World”, of which a free and renaissance India was meant to be the pioneer.

I like very much your emphasis on what I once told you on the tape. It has been not only your mainstay but also mine. For I am an embodiment of the falling and rising act. My poor legs symbolise the downward propensity but my arms always stretch upward, ever beyond ordinary human reach and invoke the Grace without which I can get nowhere. I once showed the Mother a pocket photo I had of her and our Master: behind it I had written “Help of the helpless.” She contemplated the phrase for quite a time with a tender smile on her face, accepting the role in which I had cast her. Mention of this incident sends my mind back to an evening in the early ’thirties when a few of us used to sit in a semi-circle in front of the Mother in the old “Prosperity” Room before the Soup Distribution downstairs. The question came up: “Who sends appeals to the Mother the most in day-to-day life?” She picked out two sadhaks. One was Doraiswamy, the devoted advocate from Madras who visited the Ashram every week-end and was part of the group in the “Prosperity” Room. The other was Amal. This selection did not denote that either Doraiswamy or Amal was more deeply devoted to the Mother than the rest of those present: Nolini, Amrita, Pavitra, Dyuman, Champaklal, Lalita, Tajdar, Chinmayi, Dara, etc. It simply denoted that Doraiswamy and I turned inwardly to the Mother most frequently for help because we found ourselves more often than the rest in need of it, being unable to manage our affairs by our own strength. It must be our acuter sense of dependence on her Grace, that made us appeal continually to her to keep us moving on the Great Path. We felt repeatedly that without her assistance we would be nothing. We lived again and again by the sheer power of her impulsion and her protection.

Surely it was she who picked me up safely times without number from the

dangerous physical tumbles I was prone to experience because of a defect in my left leg—and from the still more perilous tosses due to my many-mooded, variously-drawn, complexity-shot nature prone to change on a sudden not only from sinner to saint but also from the right-moving Yogi to the easy-going stroller on the Left Bank of the Seine! The cry from the “Latin Quarter” and the call to the Indian Wholeness of spiritual being have been equally strong. Nothing except the vigilant and compassionate eyes of the Divine Mother could have led me to where I am at present. I recollect asking her whether the Supermind could transform an aspirant in spite of himself. On receiving a “Yes,” I exclaimed: “Then there is hope for me!” I believe the drift of that affirmative answer was: “If the central part of one wanted the transformation, the Supermind directly acting would nullify the resistance and the denial by the peripheral parts. Otherwise these are able to have their say in whatever degree despite the central one’s opposite pull.” Even short of the Supermind, the guardian power of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has alone saved me from utter failure. All that I have done on my side is never to give up aspiring from my frequently supine situation in the dust. This has carried me a fair distance and, though I am pretty far from being much transformed, there seems now to be no escape from the purlieu of some inner heaven. Perhaps if I live long enough beyond my current octogenarian phase I may come within sight of the threshold of that future which Sri Aurobindo has visioned:

A little more and the new life’s doors
 Shall be carved in siver light
 With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
 In a great world bare and bright.

I appreciate your concern for my health. There is nothing radically wrong with it. The only trouble is deteriorating legs. I don’t move about unless it is absolutely necessary. Luckily my life-style does not call for much movement. I can easily make the transition from the chair in which I do most of my reading to the chair where I sit to type. Inwardly the attempt is at transition from the human type to the divine archetype—and to do that I do not have to move even from one chair to another. (26.2 1990)

*

An exploration of my drawer has brought to light three letters of yours—still unanswered. Shouldn’t I rather say “brought the light” of them? For indeed they are shining with your soul and, coming from its depths, reach into mine like a sweet and soothing smile conveyed through you by our Divine Mother. Yes, it is She, the eternal radiance, who passes between us in the form of words. And that

is why our friendship is so full—even without words—and a vibrant communicative silence holds us together in the gap between letter and letter. This silence makes strange my other expression: “still unanswered.” Although words have not gone forth from me for quite a time, each time I read your letter there is a leap of my heart towards you in quintessential response.

I think your latest dream is symbolic of this wordless interchange of friendship. All the circumstances are significant of it. You dream that you wake up from sleep. Rapt away from the outer consciousness by sleep, you have become aware of your inner being and are acting in it. And what do you find? Right at your door appears “a just born child” which you recognise with your own soul’s instinct as representing the “Psychic”. Whose inmost being could have been thus figured—spontaneously drawn to your “veranda”? Who in the land of the living is closest to you and has the sense of you always intense and intimate in his heart and mind? And to be seen as “just born” is to carry the aspect in which you usually feel your dearest friend—the aspect so well pictured in a famous passage of Wordsworth:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star.
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home

Wordsworth’s poem develops the idea that as we grow older the “Heaven” which lay “about us in our infancy” starts to dim and “shades of the prison-house begin to close” upon us but still something of “the vision splendid” lingers through boyhood and youth until

At length the Man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.

By the by, I may remark that these lines as well as those linking the ending with the quoted passage remind me of the dawn-process in the opening canto of *Savitri*—how the Goddess of Dawn appeared with a promise of some unearthly lustre, still unrealised in our world, but gradually

The message ceased and waned the messenger.
Too mystic-real for space-tenancy
Her body of glory was expunged from heaven:

The rarity and wonder lived no more.
There was the common light of earthly day.

To return to my subject: the movement which Wordsworth envisages of the slow fading of the "vision splendid" in ordinary life is reversed in the life of Yoga in the Ashram. What Wordsworth took to be faded starts to come back. Under the touch of Sri Aurobindo and at the Mother's beckoning finger the forgotten Soul re-emerges, scintilla by scintilla, and through the years of our sadhana it gathers strength and at last arrives at the point of near-plenitude, which Wordsworth speaks of, when from its home in God it comes "trailing clouds of glory". Step by step, from manhood's obscurity a progression takes place to the youth and the boy's semi-lit state and finally to the babe's halo of heavenly memories. When this phase is reached we are full-blown disciples of Sri Aurobindo, true children of the Mother. So I am happy to have been found by you as "a just born child". I hope the reverse movement I have traced of the Wordsworthian story really holds good for me and the babe you saw was not a pretty little pretender but one whose tiny untutored look contained a "secret splendour" and deserved Wordsworth's insightful apostrophe:

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity;...
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day....
A Presence which is not to be put by....

Now let me consider the earlier dream recounted in the letter you wrote on the 40th anniversary of the day on which you "started from Calcutta for Pondicherry for the first time". Now, unlike that anonymous baby visiting you, you are visiting me in your own identifiable shape. I am delighted to learn that you, standing at my door, hear me singing a famous song of Tagore's, whose gist is: "Whatever comes to me, O Lord, even if it be unpleasant, is a boon from Thee." This gist echoes in general what I have put in that credo of mine, the poem "Triumph is All". Let me quote two stanzas from it:

O mine the smiling power to feel
A secret sun with blinded eyes,
And through a dreaming worship bear
As benediction wintry skies.

For ever in my heart I hear
A time-beat of eternal bliss.
White Omnipresence! where is fear?
The mouth of hell can be Thy kiss.

Yes, my poem answers to Tagore's memorable faith, but there is a further shade in it beyond the religious approach which reads God's Will even in unpleasant events. This further shade is a direct recognition of the Divine's open or hidden hand everywhere by the soul's awakened intimacy with its Supreme Source. There is not only faith and a sweet resignation, convinced that an Ultimate Goodness is at the core of things and that all shall be well at the end. The basic difference lies in hearing within one's heart

A time-beat of eternal bliss.

Beyond religious trust, beyond even a meditative contact with the Unknown, the very immanence of the Divine is here a living fact. The Blissful Boundless Beloved, the "Beauty of ancient days who is yet ever new"—this is a reality in the deep heart where the soul exists only by the existence of the supernal One who is the All. In the act of being itself, the soul is perpetually aware of being a portion of the Master of the worlds, a child put forth from Herself by the Infinite Mother. By such an experience, every adversity is not merely felt in a vague way as a blessing in disguise, a boon in its essence: it is known as a working by the Divine under the conditions of an evolving imperfect world to bring by however strange a path the soul nearer to its Master, its Mother. A direct development is seen to happen by a paradox of pain leading to a higher spiritual peak, a greater closeness to God.

I am intrigued by your finding me an adept in Tagorean Bengali. I suppose that in the subliminal realm we are acquainted with things which are outside our ken in normal life. By some sort of poetic empathy I must have entered Tagore's "plane" of consciousness, the Gandharva world of magical rhythms, and felt at home in his creative activity. In waking life my contact with *Bangla bani* is very limited. From hearing Nirod and some others intersperse their English with *manè*, my logical mind deduced that this word meant "I mean". By a leap of imagination I once thought I had discovered that the Bengali for the English "key-hole" was, most surprisingly, "kī-holo". Later, I was disappointed to learn that it only conveyed "What's happening?" The Bengali for a sneeze seemed to be—onomatopoeically—"hochchay"—though some people sought to disillusion me by equating it to the bare "Yes". I also learned some peculiarities when in the middle 'thirties I was teaching English to the famous Sarat whom I had dubbed "a domesticated fanatic" and who, in answer to my morning inquiry as to how he was, would say: "Somehow I am feeling quite all right." I gathered from my experience with him that no one-hundred-per-cent Bengali can pronounce the word "above" properly. Sarat made it either "abub" or "avuv". Similarly I heard of a strange phenomenon on the Ponds sea-shore: "big babes leaping!" Then there was the equally strange experience when the Mother had made me the first furniture manager. I had to remove a cot belonging to

Barinda. I arranged with Jyotin to get everything ready for me. He told me to go to the house concerned and added the startling news: "Now the cot is on Barinda." I remonstrated: "You mean that Barinda is on the cot?" He firmly replied: "No, no. The cot is on Barinda." Puzzled I went to the house and what did I find? The cot was on the veranda!

Whatever be the tricks the Bengali language plays on me, I am deeply grateful to it for the majesty it has given to our Guru's name by transforming the rather colourless Sanskrit "Aravinda". How impressive and full-rhythmed is the Bengali version: "Aurobindo"!

After this linguistic digression I come back to your dream. Our holding each other's hands and looking at each other are a natural consequence of our warm friendship, especially as fellow-sadhaks. But what you did next is most unexpected although at the same time most touching in more than one sense. You say: "I felt an urge to touch with my forehead our clasped hands—and I did it." Surely I do not deserve so much reverence blended with affection. And I have taken care to let the touch of your forehead go not to my head but to my heart.

On the 2nd of this month you gave me the thrilling news that you were on the last lap of *The Life Divine* and you end the news by quoting the final phrase of this multi-visionsed cosmos-sweeping book. The closing sentences are worth citing in full:

"Our evolution in the Ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery and world-discovery, its half fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the Knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature."

These two sentences are a couple of insights spanning all time and linking convincingly the phases of a double movement which is at bottom one single activity in two gigantic steps: the evolution in the Ignorance and the evolution in the Knowledge, the one with an embodied vital-mental complex half-lit by the hidden soul in it, the other with the soul come forward in this vital-mental embodiment and with the power of the Spirit above the mind at open play. Mark that Sri Aurobindo presents the first state of "half fulfilments" as leading "inevitably" to the second. There is an implicit logic at the back of the succession because the Divine is already in things and what we call Nature is an immense whole in which our current sense of Nature reveals only a part. What is "still a Supernature" to us is not anything extraneous to the world-scheme: it is Nature in its "true power"—a power which is really everywhere but manifest and dynamic in entirety only in the inmost and topmost ranges of consciousness. This "true power" is implied in those lines in Sri Aurobindo's poem "Descent", where it is said to express itself in Mantric inspiration and revelation:

Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway
 Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,
 Ecstasy's chariots.

It may interest you to know that when I took down from my shelf the American edition of *The Life Divine*, which I keep handy for quick reference, I found on the last page the date on which I had finished reading it over months of continued light and delight: 21.9.1951. Your date of reaching the *grand finale* is 2.9.1990. The month is the same and my day includes as its initial figure your 2.

Your idea of following up with a re-reading of *Savitri* is in tune with a common chord of composition-pattern in this work and in *The Life Divine*. Both the books have been planned on a cyclopean scale. *Savitri* has a mould equally massive and multiform as *The Life Divine*. The latter deals with every aspect of spiritual philosophy in prolific detail and is comprehensively illustrative of what Shelley has termed "a mind grown bright, gazing at many truths". In *Savitri* as in *The Life Divine*, "length," as Sri Aurobindo wrote to me, "is an indispensable condition for carrying out its purpose and everywhere there is this length...in every part, in every passage, in almost every canto or section of a canto.... It aims not at a minimum but at an exhaustive exposition of its world-vision or world-interpretation." As in *The Life Divine*, its method is "architectural"—"to give a large and even a vast, a complete interpretation, omitting nothing that is necessary, fundamental to the completeness." There is only one difference in the midst of the common extensive treatment. *The Life Divine* abounds in lengthy sentences, winding majestically on, unfolding idea after luminous idea in a closely concatenated form. *Savitri* is built of short sentences as a rule. It mainly dispenses with enjambment, the flow-over from line to line as mostly in Milton's blank verse. Each line here stands strongly by itself, though yet fitting harmoniously with other apparently independent lines, each seeming complete in its span of five feet. This is a technique difficult to sustain effectively unless the imagination is highly charged and carries in every brief part a subtle sense of its predecessor and successor even while standing revelatorily on its own.

I may add that both *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* need to be read audibly. All great literature is at the same time sculpture and music. And in these books there is not only artistic rhythm: there is also the wing-beat of the Mantra, the significant sound that lives in a modulated phrase as if it entered it—whether ideatively or imaginally—from a vast of wisdom above the human mind and a depth of exaltation beyond the human heart. Without the ear sensitively responding along with the attentively answering eye, the life-thrill of the superhuman planes from which the words come will not be sufficiently caught in our being. The Mantra, in order to make its impact in full, requires to be realised in its vibration no less than in its message. Perhaps you will wonder whether philosophy can be Mantric. All depends upon the source of it. In the Overmind,

whence the Mantra hails, Truth and Beauty are one and it is Gods and Goddesses that covertly move in the steps of sentences like the one with which *The Life Divine* opens its procession of logical vision:

“The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thought and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation,—for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality.”

Now for a bit of closing personal touch out of our own present preoccupation. I am referring to a recent feeling of mine in the midst of our faltering attempts at “the Life Divine”. In a letter written two days back to a friend in Bombay I had occasion to allude to the same spiritual perception. It is a sort of variation on the life-theme couched in that song of Tagore’s and at greater application in my own poem “Triumph is All”.

Of late I have been feeling as if the Mother’s presence were not only above me and in front of me and within me but also behind me enfolding my body and carrying me onward according to her will. Of course now and again my own impulses and ideas seem to come in the way of this wide warm wind of love and power supporting and urging me. I try my best to get my choices and my actions float on its quiet impetus. When I succeed, it is such a relief for hours and hours, if not days and days, to have no worry over good fortune or bad fortune, no care about right or wrong. Whatever this love and power at the back of me is able to do with me and through me brings the automatic assurance that all, no matter what the appearance, is invariably for the best. And there is a sense of happy rest in everything that happens, as well as a calm confidence that the Mother whose presence is behind is ever taking her child nearer and nearer to the Mother who is above and in front and within.

It is a little past midnight now. Let me hope to figure again in your sweet dreams.
(10.9.1990)

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

CORRECTION

On p. 6 of the January issue, please read the last line of the poem “Sky-rims”:

To yet another alchemy of dawn.

SAMADHI

THE Ashram gates, Her open arms gather all my selves,
We pass down corridors and passages and tunnels
Amidst fragrance jets and cleansing rays,
We unload, strip, and cleanse in showers of light and love
Until bare and nude, fresh and free we glide guided
Through a symbol womb of creation, heart of infinite love,
And emerge born anew in front of Power concentrated,
A formless wonder of Truth, Beauty and Love in a wondrous form.
“Only You, exclusively Yours” is the spontaneous cry in the Presence
Of Eternity measuring steps of the Timeless.

The heart's core is a vastness, a vibrant silence filled
With bird-songs, moans and groans and laughter and prayer.
I kneel, hands resting on cool marble, head in Her soft lap,
The inner priest starts worship, adoration, offering,
Starting with my surface self together with all I carry
Within, those I felt, met, love and cherish,
Surface after surface is peeled off and offered at Her feet,
Till I feel empty, freer than ever before, full of Her love.

I get up and turn to leave, but there is no exit,
I am full again from selves hidden in deeper depths—
Beings arising from behind and below clamoring
To be offered. The offering continues as it always has,
Like rivers flowing for ever into the sea,—

The endless offering has to continue
Until the glorious dawn of recognition
Of Itself by Itself,
Itself the offering unto Itself the flame.

DINKAR PALANDE

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of January 1991)

“LAST time I spoke to you about the Swadeshi Revolution, but it was indeed very little,” said Sri Aurobindo. “Of course, it is almost impossible to discuss it at length, since this sort of activity is always carried on in secret and so no one group or even individual quite knows what the others are doing. Only the leaders and their close helpers are in touch with all the members. In fact the success of a revolution depends on secrecy, that is to say, on the ability to keep its decisions secret. Therefore those who take part in it are selected on their capacity to keep silent in all circumstances and not to divulge any information ‘even in the cannon’s mouth’. Nothing could shake them, neither temptation nor torture. However, I have also told you that as the party grew larger and stronger, so did factionalism and rivalry increase among the leaders. I prepared a band of workers and returned to Baroda, but immediately the group broke up. I realised then that what we needed, first and foremost, were men; that without true and sincere human beings nothing great can ever be achieved. But even when the group split up, the work continued unhindered since the leaders finding themselves free were fired with greater zeal. On all sides were established new branches and groups of the Revolutionary Movement, the youth of the nation was shaken wide awake. Barin was unequalled in his ability to recruit men. He had the art of speech, discourse and argumentation that could set aflame his listeners, instilling in them great self-confidence. His words could turn meek lambs into lion cubs overnight, though of course, now and then, there were a few who turned out to be sheep in lion’s clothing!” *(Laughter)*

“Wasn’t it you who gave him his initiation?”

“Yes, it was I. That was the time when the British Government decided upon the perverse plan of partitioning Bengal. I then told the leaders of the Movement that this was our golden opportunity. The wicked partition must be resolutely resisted. The more the people would grow dissatisfied with the government, the greater the advantage for the Revolutionaries. And that is just what happened. The youth of the land continued to be inducted secretly into the Movement, the revolutionary spirit was inculcated into them, culminating in their training in armed combat. On the other hand, the journal *Yugantar* openly published articles that aroused in the masses the demand for total freedom, by whatever means possible, even by violence if necessary. Freedom would never be ours if we relied on the British to give it to us. You see, our plan of armed revolution could only be successful if it was carried on the wave of the people’s patriotism and the devotion to the motherland. No political movement can ever

be effective unless it has the support and sympathy of the people in general, particularly if it is a subject people. Therefore the partitioning of Bengal at that exact juncture helped us enormously.

“The opposition to it lit a flame that soon spread to the rest of India. Bengal in an instant seemed to have found her true self and Bankim’s mantra of ‘Bandematarām’ was echoed out of the pages of his book by thousands of voices. Who was it who first uttered the mantra? One does not know but from that moment it first rang out, it brought all Indians to the feet of their Motherland. In street after street, in meetings and processions the Mother’s worshippers cried out ‘*Bande Mataram*’ as though reverberating out of the *Anandamath* of Bankim. The furious government tightened its laws; in East Bengal, the cry of *Bande Mataram* was forbidden, and taking part in revolutionary meetings or movements was proclaimed illegal. This was the time of the famous Barisal Session of the Congress which was attended by all the great national leaders. Since it was held during my holidays, I too went there. Many well-known people had arrived from Calcutta, though the law had already been promulgated in the town, forbidding the cry of ‘Bandematarām’. But the young men had no intention of obeying the law, and so the police came charging into the meeting, breaking it up with their sticks and staves. There was a boy, I remember, a youngster not much older than you, who would not stop chanting *Bande Mataram* even though blows rained down on him. It was inhuman, they broke his head with their sticks, still he chanted on. Some of us leaders were there in the very front ranks, facing the police onslaught. The Barisal Session will remain unforgettable in the history of the Revolutionary Movement of India. It is hard for you today to imagine the kind of governmental repression as well as the determined resistance to fight it that had become widespread then. The British had even coined a phrase—‘The insolent Barisal look’!

“And how successful it was! What had taken long years of effort to achieve was now hastened by those very repressive measures of the British Government. All the revolutionaries, radicals as well as moderates, now realised what to expect of this government, which some of them had held in such high esteem. The Swadeshi Movement brought about many changes in our country and its society, particularly in the field of education. Centres of National Education were established in Bengal and I was made the Principal of the first College of this kind—the National College. I had been waiting for just such an opportunity for a long time. Immediately I resigned from the Service of the Maharaja of Baroda and moved to Calcutta to take up the charge of this College. By now my responsibilities had grown really heavy, for I continued the revolutionary activities along with my work in education as well as in politics. Gradually, of course, it was politics that began to occupy more and more of my time and attention while the revolutionary work was passed on to Barin and some other leaders. My first contribution to the political change was to write articles in the

Bande Mataram paper. Bepin Pal, who had just founded the journal, was very happy to accept my collaboration. In the meantime, the Government accused the paper *Yugantar* of publishing seditious articles, but it could not discover the name of the editor against whom to file its charges. Vivekananda's brother appeared before the court on behalf of the paper. At my instigation he announced that since this court was subject to a foreign government, he would not obey its laws and not accept its judgment in any form or degree whatsoever. Of course, he was punished for saying so, but the influence and prestige of the paper was considerably enhanced. This was the first instance where punishment was meted out for having slighted the Law and treated the court with contempt. The revolutionaries had now found another mode of fighting the British which they later used with much success. The youth began now to spread the message of Nationalism along with those of Revolution and Freedom of which the first condition was to abjure the use of all foreign goods. This idea had not struck anyone till then, except one or two persons for whom it was more of a whim than anything else. But now there appeared a book called *Deshar Katha* written by Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who, though he was a Maratha, wrote Bengali very well. It was he who, for the first time, used the word 'Swaraj'. He explained too, with the help of many well-substantiated proofs, how the British had exploited Bengal, had taken so much of its wealth by shattering its trade and commerce. Thus had they grown powerful, he concluded, by maiming us.

"This book had a profound impact on the feelings of the people and gave a strong impetus to the Swadeshi Movement. I had always believed that commercial and industrial growth was essential for a successful revolution because without economic independence we would never be able to free ourselves from our reliance on the British.

"As long as I was living in Baroda, it was impossible for me to take part, openly, in politics. And at that time I had not yet completely made up my mind to give up my job. Secondly, it was my nature, always, to work discreetly, from behind the veil."

"And it still is!" dared a little voice.

"Quite so!" laughed Sri Aurobindo. "I always worked secretly, even led the Movement without letting my name be known. But it was the British Government that spoilt my game for me. It was they who dragged my name into the open. I'll tell you about this later.

"You see, I would often ask the Maharaja for an extended leave and go to Bengal. There, my time would be mostly spent in revolutionary activities. During one such stay, I attended the Barisal meeting after which I toured East Bengal with Bepin Pal. I had my own reasons for wanting to draw closer to the liberals in the Congress Party. In those days, the Congress Party was very large. Many well-known Indians were its leaders, but most of them were Moderates. It was my intention to draw the Congress Party away from the influence of these

Moderates, making it an organ of the Swadeshi thought and to use this vast and complex organisation as the means to bring about a political revolution among the masses.

“I have already spoken to you about the paper *Bande Mataram* which Bepin Pal had started with only a little money. He asked me to collaborate with him and I agreed immediately. This was the opportunity I had been looking for, as this could be the means to spread the ideas of revolution and nationalism. I was, of course, still working at Baroda. But when, a little while later, I was offered the principalship of the newly-established Bengal National College, I resigned from Baroda and came straightaway to Calcutta. This too was an unexpected gift made to me by my friend Raja Subodh Mullick. He helped to found the college with his gift of one lakh of rupees which he gave on one condition—that I should be its first Principal. He was an active member of our Swadeshi Party and I always stayed with him whenever I went to Calcutta. All of you know Charu Dutt, don't you? Well, he was closely related to Subodh Mullick.

“This new job made it possible for me to be in constant touch with all the political developments. I also brought together all the liberal-minded Youth in the Congress to found a new Party, which then joined with its counterpart in Maharashtra. At my suggestion Tilak was elected the national leader and we prepared ourselves for a trial of strength against the Moderates. At that time, the Moderates' wing of the Party was enormously influential, consisting as it did of widely respected, clever and calculating gentlemen. Beside them we were small fry, but you will see how all these big fishes soon seemed to slither away. If I told you of all the political plots and intrigues that were woven to achieve this result, you would think you were listening to a highly colourful work of fiction!

“The second responsibility given to me was the work connected with the *Bande Mataram* paper—to turn it into the mouthpiece of the Party as well as to make it economically viable. When the Party sent Bepin Pal on a tour through the district towns, I alone had to bear the entire burden of bringing out the *Bande Mataram*. I used the paper to reiterate what I had proclaimed at the very outset—that Purna Swaraj, Complete Independence, was our aim. You could say that this was formulated for the first time in such clear terms, that until then the idea had seemed unthinkable to most people. In fact, the Moderates laughed at us and called us mad. But almost overnight, as though by magic, the country adopted this ideal. As for all the other changes that the *Bande Mataram* brought about, well, I will tell you of them later.”

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN “EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of January 1991)

“Long Exile from the Light”

AT last I was compelled to leave the Ashram, which throughout my childhood represented heaven, and return to the world which was nothing short of hell as I discovered by and by. Life in Calcutta could not but appear so even to a girl of my age—particularly to someone of my nature—compared to the life I had enjoyed in Pondicherry.

My mother went about like a conqueror among her kindred elements in society and in her own household-kingdom of ease and comfort. I withdrew into my shell, but soon found a close friend in one of my young aunts. She was very beautiful indeed and we became very fond of each other and passed our time delightfully in talk on endless topics. Being poor, her beauty remained like

A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye.

One day, however, the violet caught the eye of a suitor, a suitor who held a high position and was eligible in every respect, except that he was the ugliest of men. He simply lost his head over her. To the father of my friend ugliness was of little consequence so long as he could dispose of the heavy burden of a daughter without paying any dowry. He declared, “What shall I do with beauty? Is beauty something that can be washed and eaten every day for sustenance?”—as goes the Bengali saying. So the paragon of beauty was sacrificed for the sake of convenience at the altar of ugliness. But the sacrifice was avenged. She made her husband work like a slave and, though she bore him children, gave him not an iota of love. Whenever I protested, she retorted with her stock answer: “I never wanted to marry such an ugly man!” But the devoted husband did everything he could to satisfy a wife who refused to be pleased. In the end Fate exacted from her a terrible price: she died of cancer.

This unhappy story was one of the early experiences I had of life in the world outside the Ashram.

After the marriage of this aunt and friend, I was again lonely and withdrew into my shell. even though my mother continued to thrive on social activity in which I had to participate. Being well off, we ourselves often entertained our guests lavishly. In one such tea-party, distinguished persons had been invited.

While enjoying the delectable dishes, they regaled themselves with gossip of all kinds, among which came gossip about the Ashram. They could not find a better topic. They vented all their accumulated resentment: each one vied with the other and excelled in the art of calumny, though the Ashram had done nothing to the world or to them to deserve it. But I suppose the story about me and other baseless ones must have reached them. At that time the Ashram and the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were anathema to Calcutta's high society, perhaps because Sahana and my uncle, Dilip Kumar Roy, two renowned and much loved figures in Calcutta's elite music-world, had abandoned Calcutta for the Ashram. As a young girl of thirteen or so in such a prestigious assembly, I was quietly listening to their scurrilous conversation.

(A report of all this and what happened next was received by us in the Ashram. What follows is an account of it, by me, Nirodbaran)

I read out this report to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, while other attendants were also present:

"The topic of the Ashram came up. Comments and criticisms started flying. Even the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were not spared. The child was listening quietly, but when somebody seemed to overstep the limit of decency, she could stand it no longer. In a firm tone she said: 'Look here. If you speak one word more against my Gurus, I'll give you such a slap that you will roll on the floor.'

A bolt from the blue. Everybody was stunned. Her mother left the room in shame and anger. An uncle started looking at the ceiling."

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo looked pleased at this report. Then the Mother left.

Sri Aurobindo commented, "What she has done is remarkable for her age. She is an extraordinary girl. Along with strength of character she has developed an extraordinary intelligence. When she used to write to us, she would make reflections about people and the world in general which were beyond even a woman of fifty."

I added, "There are some stories which show her power of judgment as well as of detachment. She had a dancing-master. Her parents wanted to dismiss him because he was found to have a bad character. She stood against it saying that character had nothing to do with teaching. But for all her opposition, he was sent away. And when he left, she was not at all touched, although she had fought so much on his behalf. There is also the incident of the death of her pet dog, whom she had loved intensely. The death made no difference to her. She remained perfectly calm as if nothing serious had happened. This set her mother thinking that she had not really loved the dog and, who knows, she might not love her too. One day she might leave her for the Ashram." Sri Aurobindo added, "Her parents had found out that it would be difficult to bend her to their will."

I repeated what people were saying, "She is quite happy where she is at present." Sri Aurobindo replied, "How do they make it out? She wrote to us she was very unhappy."

Then I asked him why she had to go away. He answered that there was a part in her vital being which wanted to have experience of the world. I understood then that there was an occult reason for her going away.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

INVOCATION

(This is the poet's Invocation to the Muse before launching his unpublished epic poem in hexameters, "Eurydice.")

WORLD, with its endless envelopment growing to light's revelation,
 Sing, O Muse; the oversight kindling speed for the cosmos
 Wider, wider, decreed to its boundless all-comprehension
 Of substance and being divine. The involvement speaks the breath potent;
 Long as may be and beyond all time as sketched in the human,
 Delicate goddess too strong for the false enthusiast's flurry,
 Hold, and pierce, sustaining such effort large in its burden
 As rhythmically calm to all need of expansion's rich deepening art shall
 Fill and order some gift of apocalypse on the endless
 Road. The unfolding shall be, in the ageless seed is the flower,
 Of numberless ravishing petals exhaustless to bloom and be fecund,
 Round the encompassment of perfection teeming in truth's ways.

JESSE ROARKE

SRI AUROBINDO AS TEACHER

SRI AUROBINDO MEMORIAL LECTURE DELIVERED AT
BARODA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

On October 1st, 1990

By Dr. Chamanlal L. Gupta
Professor of Applied Sciences, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

(Continued from the issue of January 1991)

Essays on Education

COMING to Sri Aurobindo's Essays on Education, which span his entire working life from the Baroda period till 1950—in fact, two of them are from his last prose writings—it is rather strange that all of them were parts of a series which never got finished. In chronological sequence they are:

1. Education—Intellectual (From Baroda Papers—date uncertain)
2. A System of National Education (From the *Karmayogin*—1910; book version in 1924)
3. A Preface on National Education (Last two articles of *Arya*—1920-1921)
4. Perfection of the Body (From the last prose writings in the *Bulletin of Physical Education*—April, 1949).

Even though they are full of seminal ideas much ahead of their times and still relevant, Sri Aurobindo probably never considered them as completed documents. Later, the Mother has penned her own essays in the *Bulletin* and further elucidated both the series of essays in her talks with the teachers of our Centre of Education, which have now been published. We have documents on 'Free Progress System'—the applied aspects of these essays, as experimented with in our Educational Centre by teachers and students. Again, we do not intend to go into details of these basic postulates but just have a panoramic view of their substance, for whatever contribution they may be allowed to make to the present educational system, which is in chaos.

In a very early essay, Sri Aurobindo mentions that education is necessary to give not only knowledge but more the powers of knowledge, *i.e.*, power of reasoning, power of comparison and differentiation, power of expression and power of storing, *i.e.*, memory. These powers are present in all but need cultivation in order to be effective. The first three active faculties should occupy ninety per cent of teaching effort. For a liberal education, there should be not only knowledge of things but also knowledge of men, *i.e.*, sciences, mathematics and humanities should be there. He remarks: "While we insist on passing our students through a rigid and cast-iron course of knowledge in everything, we give

them real knowledge in nothing.” He records that even in a precise subject like mathematics, our brilliant students find that all they have learnt is only relevant till the first year at Cambridge.

Even though Sri Aurobindo wanted to base his entire system on an Indian view of life and mind, it did not mean the revival of some ancient system any more than the blind following of the Western system. Just as the latter is rooted in the temperament, mind and social genius of the Teutonic, the Latin, the Celtic and Slav races, he wanted the national system to be rooted in the cultural premises of the Indian race. In the closing issues of the *Arya*, he categorically states: “The scientific, rationalistic, industrial, pseudo-democratic civilisation of the West is now in process of dissolution and it would be a lunatic absurdity for us at this moment to build blindly on this sinking foundation.” He wanted the national education to take into account:

1. The universal mind and soul of humanity
2. The mind and soul of the individual with its infinite variation, its commonness and its uniqueness
3. The mind of the nation and the soul of its people so that the educational process becomes a living evocation of the powers of the mind and spirit of the human being.

He wanted Indian national education to be so designed that it is not just useful for the best advantage of the personal and national ego but helps evoke the consciousness of Divinity at the centre, which manifests and grows through the cultivation of the mental, intellectual, ethical, dynamic and practical, aesthetic and hedonistic, vital and physical parts of the being.

In terms of educational practice, this view meant that it is necessary to consult the mind in its own growth so that the being can follow its Dharma and to start the learning effort from the child’s own environment so that a free and natural growth can take place. He limited the role of teachers to helpers and guides rather than ego models or taskmasters, thereby not giving knowledge but showing where it is and how to acquire it by oneself. On the basis of yogic insights and ancient knowledge, he delineated the various layers of mind and the roots of moral nature and suggested methods for their cultivation and training. As against world-denying views of life, he suggested methods for training the senses for sensitiveness and accuracy and the required purification of the background nervous system.

In his message to the *Bulletin of Physical Education* and the article ‘Perfection of the Body’, Sri Aurobindo brings out the decisive role of physical education in its higher aspect towards “development of discipline and morale and sound and strong character. Help of sports in forming and necessitating qualities of courage, hardihood, energetic action and initiative or call for skill, steadiness of will or rapid decision and action, the perception of what is to be done in an emergency and dexterity in doing it.” He also points to the awakening

of the essential and instinctive Body Consciousness, which can see and do what is necessary—without any indication from the mental thought—which is equivalent *in the body* to swift *insight in the mind and spontaneous and rapid decision in the will*. As we can see, these are objectives far wider and deeper than normally given to physical education: namely health, strength and fitness of the body, which are, of course, necessary and important.

We have briefly covered the writings of Sri Aurobindo on Education right from his Baroda days till the end of his physical sojourn. This has been done to bring to you a feeling of the range of his vision of education not only as a formal teacher but also as a Yogi. However, this is accompanied by the uneasy feeling of having truncated the meaning considerably in this process of summarising. I do hope I will be pardoned for having to do the unavoidable for this lecture.

A few Anecdotes

It is my surmise that Sri Aurobindo, a teacher *par excellence* and at many levels, had a specially soft corner for students and matters concerning education. A few anecdotes will illustrate this.

We have seen his handwritten form for old boys' record of King's College, Cambridge, filled as late as 1930 wherein he describes his address as 41, Rue François Martin (and not Sri Aurobindo Ashram) and his vocation as Mysticism and Poetry. Luckily, there are no columns for salary and religion/caste. The wonder is that he cared to fill it.

When the French Foreign Minister Mr. Maurice Schumann came with a proposal to open a French Academy in Pondicherry, as late as September 1947, Sri Aurobindo consented to be its Chief Rector to the amazement of all except, possibly, the Mother.

Even when he was hardly receiving anybody from public life, Sri Aurobindo received Shri K. M. Munshi as late as 1949 and spent full 20 minutes with his old student surveying India's and the world's political scene in 'quiet measured tones', as Kulapati later recorded.

In Conclusion

May I conclude this offering with a few lines from *Savitri* which so aptly describe Sri Aurobindo's stay at Baroda, during most of which time he was teaching as a professor at Baroda College?

“A morn that seemed a New Creation's front,
Bringing a greater sunlight, happier skies,
Came, burdened with a beauty moved and strange
Out of the changeless origin of things.
An ancient longing struck again new roots.”

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am grateful to you for according me this opportunity, which I have genuinely enjoyed and humbly accepted. I do pray and hope you all have shared in this joy as well. Thank you all once again for your understanding and your attention.

ASWAPATHY AND THE MARUTS

SOME INSIGHTS ON THE FATHER OF SAVITRI

IN *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo says that the Vedic Rishis wished to convey the seminal idea of the truth which they first won by their tapasya, in esoteric symbols or 'seer-words'. They conveyed the idea of the transition of the human soul from a state of death to a state of immortality by the exchange of falsehood for the Truth, of the divided and limited being for the integral and infinite being. Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* also is a record of a 'seeing', 'of an experience which is not of the common kind ..' It enacts the drama of man's and earth's transcendence into the splendours of the Life Divine. Sri Aurobindo used the rich esoteric symbols of the Vedic Rishis. However, the architectural and exhaustive exposition which he gives lends scope for a detailed interpretation of every essential aspect at every level. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and essays on Yoga serve as a guide and support.

Each of the main characters in *Savitri* is doubly significant—as the ascending individual seeking some supramental force and as the responding descending force. The aspirant and the answering consciousness, the seeker and the sought are the same. For example, Savitri is on one side the descending supramental being and on the other the first human to ascend to the status of supermind. Satyavan is at once the individual being seeking truth and the truth itself. In the same way, Aswapathy's character also has a twofold meaning.

King Aswapathy is the representative human, the first of his kind, who extends the domains of consciousness and makes the supramental descent possible through Savitri. His Yoga is a record of the various stages of ascent in the consciousness of any being who is on the path of integral Yoga. But Aswapathy is not merely the ascending being: he is the descending life-force as well. When Savitri is born Aswapathy's role becomes secondary. But as the only individual who prepares the field, he is important. If Savitri is Surya, Aswapathy, 'the traveller of the worlds', is the radiant ray of Surya. He is the dawn who appears on the pure mental Heavens. He is the messenger of the 'Super-conscious Fire' in the world of falsehood, the first ray which imposes 'the diamond script of the Imperishable' on the dark atoms and the dumb mass. With the descent of Savitri, the dawn of eternal day gets fulfilled, and Satyavan, who lived in the light of these rays till then and aspired for the whole truth, wakes into the eternal day. If Savitri is seen as the Supreme Consciousness-force of the Lord, Aditi, Svarvati, who awaits the 'seeking spirit' and bestows divine illumination by her descent, Aswapathy is the combination of the purified life-force and thought-force, who prepares the ground. A study of Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the Maruts helps in appreciating Aswapathy as the personification of this dual force at one level.

The Vedic Rishis, in the course of their soul-pilgrimage from mortality to immortality, invoked the Maruts—the powers of movement, of irresistible strength that smashes all obstructions, forces that set aflow currents of waters from the ocean below as well as from the ocean above and have a definite part to play in the building up of the inner life. Sri Aurobindo describes them as luminous and violent Gods uniting in themselves the force of Agni, the power of Vayu and the seer-will. They are the seers who do the work by their knowledge as well as by their battling forces, and who by the power of the heavenly Breath overthrow the artificial obstructions, *Kritrimanirodhamsi* in which the sons of darkness have entrenched themselves. The Maruts aid Indra to overcome Vritra and the Dasyus. Sri Aurobindo writes:

“They seem to be in the esoteric Veda the life-powers that support by their nervous or vital energies the action of the thought in the attempt of the mortal consciousness to grow or expand itself into the Immortality of the Truth and Bliss.”¹

Sri Aurobindo further explains that in their psychological aspect the Maruts are the aspiring forces in man, powers that are born of life and attain to the light of the purer mind. Ordinarily, the life-energies in man are turned towards the satisfaction of the demands of the body, dominated by the desire-self. Even when the purposes to which they are directed become less physical and pertain to the domain of the vital and mental purushas, these energies are used in the service of the surface-being only. But once one turns to the higher life, aspires and endeavours to turn all of oneself towards that Ideal, the life-energies begin to reorient themselves. As they draw back from the surface, from the gross physical preoccupations, they begin to assume more and more of their natural character. They become subtilised and move more freely on the deeper levels of the being. They turn upward and inward and share in the general aspiration and the response it evokes from the higher and inner Powers.

The nature and behaviour of Aswapathy offer a clue here. His interests, his ambitions—all seem to prove that he is not like all the other humans. Sri Aurobindo says, ‘Humanity framed his movements less and less.’ The grosser preoccupations are foreign to him. Even his first steps are said to be in a vaster freer air beyond the ‘small earth-bounds’. Aswapathy pursues aims too sublime for ‘Nature’s daily will’. His fearless will for knowledge is said to erase the lines of safety which reason draws around the Mind’s soaring or ‘the Soul’s dive into the infinite’. This shows that in Aswapathy the essential reorientation of life-forces has been achieved.

In his book *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda*, Shri M. P. Pandit offers a

¹ Quoted in ‘The Maruts’ in *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda* by M. P. Pandit, p. 57

detailed study of the Maruts and their nature. He explains that when the life-energies uplift themselves and acquire the freedom and right to move up to the level of the mind, they attain the light of thought and as they increase on that plane they impart their own power, their impulsions and nervous strengths to the thought-movements which are already aspiring to reach out to the still higher regions of the illumined mind but fail for want of sufficient driving forces. The impetus given by the life-powers now identified with and sustaining them gives them the necessary dynamism to force their way against all obstructions and grow into illumined thought-powers. This is called the birth of the Maruts in man, their second birth, the first being their original manifestation in the cosmos. With this birth of the Maruts in the worshipper, the eventual success in attaining the goal of Immortality is assured. The whole multitude of the thought-Forces energised by the uplifted powers of life enter into the light of the Divine Mind and take birth on the mental summits of the worshipper, thereby registering a crucial victory.

Aswapathy possesses the gifts of the spirit—pure perception, intimate vision, etc.

The gifts of the spirit crowding came to him;
They were his life's pattern and his privilege.
A pure perception lent its lucent joy:
Its intimate vision waited not to think;
It enveloped all Nature in a single glance...¹

Aswapathy has the ability to move freely on the subtler levels of his being. His whole upward and inward journey, wherein he knows all the planes of existence, can be seen as a part of the purified activity of the life-forces. He meets naked Hell with his bare spirit and in the world of Falsehood he shatters the stereotypes of Ignorance and the author says, 'Then life beat pure in the corporeal frame.' He is described with the words:

Earth-Nature stood reborn, comrade of heaven,
A fit companion of the timeless kings.²

Aswapathy crosses the planes of the Greater Mind, the Heavens of the Ideal and stands successfully on the last step to the supernal birth. In the kingdoms of Greater Knowledge, by living unobliviously in the mighty chargings of 'world-Force', Aswapathy becomes the 'timeless child', the new-born infant, and grows limitless with unfathomable knowledge as the primal Energy takes him in its arms. He links creation to the Eternal's sphere and his finite parts approach their absolutes.

¹ *Savitri*, Book 1, Canto 3, p 31 Sri Aurobindo International University Centre Collection

² *Savitri*, Book 2, Canto 9, p 268

In the Veda the powers of thought are described as birds. In this context Sri Aurobindo explains:

These birds here symbolise energies... liberated and upsoaring, winging upward towards the heights of our being, winging widely with a free light, no longer involved in the ordinary limited movement.¹

The actions and thoughts of Aswapathy are described in *Savitri* in similar words:

The bounded mind became a boundless light,
The finite self mated with Infinity.
His march now soared into an eagle's flight.²

In the upward movement of the human soul there are several obstructions and impediments to be overcome, certain upliftings of the lower energies to be effected, some positive stages to be established which are all well beyond the human capacity to achieve unaided. To fulfil these imperative demands of the striving spirit and lead man further up the ladder of progress, the Maruts are brought into manifestation:

They are the gods that preside over the subtle life-energies and thought-powers. It is for this indispensable purpose of man that Prishni bore them in her womb and fostered after birth... this manifestation, their birth in man, the seeker engaged in the inner Yajna, is an event of capital importance.³

The mother of the Maruts is the mystic Prishni, the dappled cow which symbolises Aditi in the mid-region, the sky, *i.e.*, the region between Earth and Heaven. This cow also symbolises the Shakti who is the field for the manifestation of the life-power and contains in her womb the rays of the thought-power endowed with capacities for bringing out diverse manifestations. The plane of life, the antariksha, is the Maruts' place of birth. King Aswapathy's origin and birth reveal his identity with the Maruts. The Mother of the worlds, 'in her topless supernature', fills his frame and 'shapes the figure of her unborn might'. Aswapathy is called a 'spirit that stooped from larger spheres' with the power from 'the unknowable'. He is the 'skyward being' sustaining itself on 'occult spiritual founts'.

Rudra is the Maruts' father. He is the violent and the bounteous healer who leads the upward evolution of the conscious being. Sri Aurobindo says that the

¹ Quoted in 'The Maruts' in *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda*, by M P Pandit, p 73

² *Savitri*, Book 1, Canto 3, p 30

³ *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda*, pp 65-66

Maruts and Agni are the leaders of the fierce struggle upward from the obscure creation to the heavens of thought. Sri Aurobindo shows that, as the children of Prishni, they are the shapings of the streams of consciousness and he says that as the offspring of Rudra they are the manifestations of force. Because of their birth from the mid-air, the Maruts are classified among the gods of the mid-region, the plane of life. They derive their strength and impetuosity from the life-force which governs that region.

Aswapathy shows all these characteristics. He is the 'son of Force' in whom 'the high transition laid its base'. He has the integral Godhead's seal of 'a static oneness and dynamic power'. From nature's border-line he shows the transition into 'supernature's arc of living light'.

(To be continued)

B. VARALAKSHMI

“SATYAVAN MUST DIE”

A DISCOURSE APROPOS OF A PHRASE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of January 1991)

9. The First Anniversary

TWELVE swift-winged months are given to Savitri for her love's union with Satyavan, at the end of which his life will be claimed by Death; in the thick and dark forest of the Shalwa country he will die on the day foretold by Narad. Their love will have experienced the joy of a complete cycle of one year, gone through all the seasons witnessing the full play of Time in rhythms of sun and moon and stars, of wind and dew and rain and storm. The lovers will have filled their hearts with sweet human rejoicings and enriched their souls in the wondrous multi-mooded plenitudes of some primal longing's creation. The completion of the cycle marks the completion of all the possibilities Nature offers to the earth. Therefore Satyavan and Savitri will have lived together and loved in the play of the seasons at the end of which the child of the year will have ushered in the birth of a new life. But then love running through the seasons will have proved to be seasonal. What is now sought is not the transmitted perpetuity but the immortality of love, love untouched by death, full of colours and fragrances and bird-songs and the murmuring joys of streams, the delights of the green pasture-lands and the blue-soaring happinesses of the hills and the whistling and rushing raptures of the winds. To abrogate the recurring cycles of the past and to cut open a new path which shall be season-transcendent, even in season, is what is destined to happen at the end of the year.

Identification with the steps of Time is a necessity to bring to Time the possibilities of Eternity. Love between Satyavan and Savitri goes through the human phase and identifies itself with the wheeling of the seasons to bring to them the death-superior supra-human vari-coloured blithesomenesses. In the figure twelve there is the fullness, a twelve-faceted jewel-luminous completeness that can, and must one day, make earth its natural home. Therefore “This day returning Satyavan must die.” Thus alone can the cycle of the old Time get terminated, yielding itself for the new one to begin. In that decisive hour “Twelve passionate months led in a day of fate.” What was begun long ago has come of age and has matured up to be delivered on that day of days. The “great golden dawn” has at last arrived.

Savitri is now ready to face, in the woods of her love, Time and Fate. She had the foreknowledge through the prophecy made by Narad; she had prepared herself for the eventuality by severe Yogic tapasya initiated under the command of her own higher self; she had gathered in her soul the Force to meet the sombre

Shadow. True, in her hour “All the fierce question of man’s hours relived”; but she was least concerned about it. For her the only issue was to bring Satyavan back from the jaws of Death. Whether everything was poised on the precipitous edge, whether it would be a new creation arising out of the dead past or a total dissolution in the absolute Nothingness, all that did not figure in her immediate reckoning. In the full blazing intensity of her love she would let herself go, if necessary even encounter Death; she has no qualms if she is to flaunt all the established laws of the cosmic workings. Love alone is true for her, the one cause for living to the end of things. When, later on, she meets Death she is insistent and tells him with the force of a heavenly conviction that she claims from him nothing but Satyavan alone. But divine Savitri’s aspect of love is not only individual; it is also cosmic and transcendental. By focussing the agony of the entire world in her self she fulfils the other two. Human Satyavan’s death draws that fulfilment closer.

On the fated day Savitri gets up much before sunrise, “before the Gods awake”. Completing her daily chores and after getting ready, she offers her prayers to the great Goddess that was “simply carved by Satyavan upon a forest stone”. In the Vyasa-tale of *Savitri* Satyavan is presented as a Painter of Horses, but in Sri Aurobindo’s epic he is a sculptor as well. The Goddess whom Savitri worshipped, the image of Durga, the protectress of mankind, was sculpted and installed at the hermitage by him. What prayer she had made to the Goddess only Savitri’s soul knew, but certainly it must have been “a master act, a king idea” that can link man’s strength to the transcendent Force. The Goddess too must have spoken to her, giving full assurance and protection to the divine soul in its dire hour of difficulty in the world of death.

Worship done, Savitri approaches her mother-in-law for permission to go along with Satyavan to the forest. He has to go there to bring fruit and fire-wood for the daily sacrificial rites. She would not allow, on this particular day, Satyavan to remain alone, unaccompanied by her even for a moment. Savitri, without letting her inner agony be known to anybody, expresses her little wish to the queen-mother that a strong desire has now seized her heart to go with Satyavan and be one with Mother Nature’s joys surrounding him. Very gladly and immediately Savitri’s request is granted and she is told:

I hold thee for a strong goddess who has come
Pitying our barren days; so dost thou serve
Even as a slave might, yet art thou beyond
All that thou doest, all our minds conceive,
Like the strong sun that serves earth from above.¹

A secret divinity has become recognisable to all in her outward acts; but now the test lay in confrontation with Death. Savitri is ready to face him.

Permission granted, the young couple set out, hand in hand, happily for the thick distant forests. Satyavan shows to Savitri the sacred streams and points out trees laden with summer flowers. In the lovely and delightful forests, with flocks of peacocks dancing there, they hear all around them a lyrical note of joy. Satyavan speaks to her in honey-sweet words of love and Savitri, enchanted with the beauty of the surroundings, and in the company of her lover, responds to him with equal sweetness. But she is constantly watching her husband in all his movements and does not allow him to go out of her sight even for a moment. Remembering Narad's words and reckoning the day, the time, even the precise hour and the instant, she knows that his life will be over soon and that he will die with the arrival of the Time-Person, *kāla-puruṣa*. Within, she is in great agony all the while. Yet accomplished as she is in the intense Yogic sadhana and with the tremendous self-poise of an exceptional woman, she remains calm to face the Dread of the Worlds. It looks as though the swift-approaching fatal moment cannot touch her; in the green emerald woods, in love's joy, all has disappeared.

Satyavan, bright and youthful in his luminous strength, collects with the help of Savitri a basketful of fruits. Then he attends to the work of cutting fire-wood. He means to complete the day's task quickly so that he may spend the rest of the time with his beloved. But, due to over-work, he suddenly feels exhausted and begins perspiring profusely. There is a severe headache as though shafts of agony are piercing through his skull. The limbs are in pain and in the heart there is a burning sensation. Savitri immediately goes closer to him and sits on the ground under a huge kingly tree, avoiding the one he had been cleaving, and takes his head in her lap. She knows that the foretold moment has arrived and that the *kāla-puruṣa* will now soon appear.

Presently, Savitri becomes aware that they are not alone in the forest and that a silent dire Shade is standing there and is ready to snatch the soul of the suffering Satyavan. According to Vyasa:

मुहूर्तदिव चापश्यत् पुरुषं रक्तवाससम् ।
 बद्धमौलिं वपुष्मन्तमादित्यसमतेजसम् ॥
 श्यामावदातं रक्ताक्षं पाशहस्तं भयावहम् ।
 स्थितं सत्यवतः पार्श्वे निरीक्षन्तं तमेव च ॥

Within a short while she saw present there a bright person in red attire, with a tiara on his head; handsome and brilliant he looked, as though the Sun-God himself had appeared there. His body, dark in hue, was lustrous, and his eyes were blood-red, and he had a noose in his hand which inspired great fright; standing close to Satyavan he was steadfastly gazing at him.

Even more than that. The intense noon of the summer seemed to get chilled by the presence of that awesome figure of darkness who was hiding behind him all "annihilation's mystery".

The fatal stroke has done its work; but Savitri in her heart is calm and all grief and fear are dead and the impulse to oppose pain, the one mortal feeling that is still there, also passes away from her. Death has taken place in the noon-hour:

She knew that visible Death was standing there
And Satyavan had passed from her embrace.²

In that moment of death a luminous Satyavan, no bigger than the thumb, emerges from the dead Past and starts moving towards the Abode of the Departed. Behind him is Death who is followed and pursued by the Force that shall claim him back for Love's fulfilment on the earth. Death has given to this world the appearance of a shadow-play, put on it a frightening stamp of unreality; under his long and dark fearsome shadow "the luminous Satyavan" remains hidden from mortal sight. But now Death has come and the cover is removed. Indeed, in this death what is revealed is "annihilation's mystery" itself, annihilation of all that conceals this luminous being's occult presence in the deep heart of the creation.

The bell for the "divine Event" to occur has rung. The cosmic drama has reached the stage of dénouement. In the enormous silences, dubious and fate-stricken, all consciousness has disappeared; it has taken a shape of the "mind of Night" and laid itself as an insurmountable rock, huge and foreboding, the physical receiving the darkness of the Void. On the road where the pilgrim-light must stumble and fall, must suffer the ignominy of utter extinction, a "fathomless zero" has opened its wide mouth to swallow the divine Event itself. To adapt Dante, those who enter here must abandon all hope. But, if the divine Event is to be saved, Savitri must step into this hollow gulf. "In the last turn where heaven raced with hell", Savitri's will must awake and "cancel her body's destiny".

Her soul's debate with embodied Nothingness
Must be wrestled out on a dangerous dim background:
Her being must confront its formless Cause.³

The two mighty powers, immortal Death and the nude spirit of Savitri measuring the Infinite's night, are pitted against each other; they oppose each other on a dangerous verge where each is staking its claim for Love's soul. In that battle, fought for Love, shall be decided the destiny of the universe itself.

The toll—"It is decreed that Satyavan must die"—beats with a relentless regularity through the entire body of *Savitri*. Narad is precise even to the extent that "The hour is fixed, chosen the fatal stroke". Yes, the hour has come and "the great Woodsman" has inflicted the fatal stroke. Out of it a luminous

Satyavan arose and has become a part of the divine Event. But even to Narad the whole meaning of this death is unknown; the details are “illegible and mute”. Satyavan is lying dead in the lap of Savitri. She leans over him in the calm of Infinity’s world-guarding poise. It is as though some tremendous moment has arrived and a “crescent of miraculous birth is tossed” in the night-sky. Savitri is free of her mortality and a power coming from the eternal Truth fills the whole cosmic space. A Force descends in her in endless light and takes its station in the thousand-petalled lotus, the occult centre of consciousness just above her head. Savitri is now no more the human Savitri. The first anniversary of the marriage of the Lord and Spouse here on the earth reveals the twofold mystery, of the luminous Satyavan and of Savitri as the incarnate Force, in the creative act of the divine Event.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

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SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of January 1991)

Sri Aurobindo was born when sheer inconscience seemed to have prevailed in India and overtaken most fields of activity. It was the result of centuries of misrule, asuric fightings and overwhelming *tamas*. So his birth may be said to mark “an hour of God” in order to lead India as well as the whole world into light. As a leader of evolving humanity he visualised and prepared a Life Divine on earth. To deal with the external biography of Sri Aurobindo is no easy task as he was a revolutionary with a combination of many facets: a master of English prose and poetry, author of luminous works such as the philosophical *The Life Divine* and the epic *Savitri*, brilliant political thinker who has been hailed as “the prophet of Indian Nationalism”. Besides, Sri Aurobindo discovered another world not found in any map which he called Supermind which would bring a decisive change in the evolution of the earth-consciousness and have power to transform our material world.

Sri Aurobindo was born at about 5 a.m. on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta. He was the third son of his parents. Dr. K. D. Ghose and Swarnalata had six children—five sons and a daughter: Binoy Bhushan, Manmohan, Aurobindo, a son who died in childhood, Sarojini and Barindra. Kalidas Nag has observed that Sri Aurobindo’s birth in 1872 marked the birth-centenary of Raja Rammohan Roy who was the initiator of modern India.

Dr. Ghose was an ardent admirer of the West, and an atheist. He was one of the first Indians to go to England from Bengal, defying the ban of the orthodox society. When he returned from England his manners and outlook were completely anglicised. He had a great admiration for the English way of life. There was a convention during those days that those who crossed the sea had to do *prāyaścitta*, “the Repentance Ceremony”. Dr. Ghose, when he came back from London, refused to undergo this rite. Later on, Sri Aurobindo remarked: “Everyone makes the fore-fathers of a great man very religious-minded, pious etc. It is not true in my case at any rate. My father was a tremendous atheist.”¹ As a tribute to Dr. Ghose, the periodical *Karmayogin* records: “Keen of intellect, tender of heart, impulsive and generous almost to recklessness, regardless of his own wants but sensitive to the sufferings of others—this was the inventory of the character of Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose.”²

There is a small anecdote connected with the ceremony of giving Sri Aurobindo his name. A. B. Purani writes: “The question of why Sri Aurobindo was called Aravinda Ackroyd Ghose baffled me for some time, till an indication in Monod Herzen’s book gave the clue. It is now established that Miss Annette Ackroyd arrived in Calcutta in December 1872, the year in which Aurobindo was born in [barrister] Monmohan Ghose’s house in Calcutta. Miss Ackroyd was probably present at the ceremony of naming the child. Dr. Ghose, who was very fond of the English way of life, must have wanted the child to be given an English

name and so Miss Ackroyd's family name was given to Sri Aurobindo as his middle name."³ The main name Aurobindo means "Lotus". It was an uncommon name in those days. Later on Sri Aurobindo remarked: "Look at the irony of human decisions and human hopes. My father who wanted all his sons to be great men,—and succeeded in a small way with three of them—in a sudden inspiration gave me the name Aurobindo, till then not borne by anyone in India or the wide world, that I might stand among the great by the unique glory of my name. And now when I went to the National College in the Swadeshi days which was my first public step towards the ignominies of fame there was already an Aurobindo Prakash waiting for me there with the sardonic comment of the gods printed on his learned forehead. Aurobindo Prakash indeed!"⁴

As Dr. K. D. Ghose was antagonistic to everything Indian, he decided to give his children a thorough English education. He tried his best to make them grow up completely in a European atmosphere. That is why he engaged an English nurse Miss Pagett to facilitate his children's picking up English education. They were completely ignorant of their own mother-tongue Bengali. They learnt broken Hindi from their Hindustani servants. Dr. K. D. Ghose did not want his children to know anything of the traditions and languages of India.

At the age of five Sri Aurobindo was sent to Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling along with his two brothers Benoy Bhushan and Manmohan. In that school the teachers were Irish nuns. It was meant for British administrators' sons. Sri Aurobindo with his brothers spent their vacation sometimes with their parents and sometimes at the residence of the grandfather Rajnarayan Bose at Deoghar. There is an interesting story relating to Sri Aurobindo. Once his eldest maternal uncle Jogendra held up a mirror in front of Sri Aurobindo, just to criticise his European-style dress and manner, and said "See, there is a monkey". The boy held the mirror back to Jogendra and said, "Great Uncle, great monkey" (*bodo mama bodo bandar*).

A very important dream in early life, which Sri Aurobindo once recounted, runs: "I was lying down one day when I saw suddenly a great darkness rushing into me and enveloping me and the whole universe. After that I had a great *tamas*-darkness—always hanging on to me all through my stay in England. I believe that darkness had something to do with the *tamas* that came upon me. It left me only when I was coming back to India."⁵

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE

A paper presented to teachers of colleges affiliated to the Utkal University in the Orientation Course held in the Academic Staff College, Utkal University on 23 Nov. 1990.

1. Introduction

EDUCATION and Culture are the twin determinants of civilization. They are the two aspects which point to what extent an individual or a society or a nation is civilized. In a way they may be considered to be inseparable, though not identical. A glance at the contents of any book on education would reveal that a consideration of culture forms an intrinsic part of the study. And in any case a study on culture belongs to the Sociology of Education. Thus education and culture go hand in hand for any in-depth study on the subject.

2. Concept of Education

The first concept involved in this discussion is Education. What is education after all? Though everybody, even an uneducated man, thinks that he knows what the term means, it is perhaps one of the most misunderstood, complex and complicated concepts about which very few people have any clear idea. To some education means going to school, to some others it means acquiring knowledge, yet to some others it means preparing to earn a livelihood. Education means all these things and much more.

Etymologically the word "Education" is derived from the root "Educare" which implies to lead out or to draw out. This means that there are some latent potentialities in every human being which have to be brought to the surface, nourished and developed. This in fact is the oldest, the best and even the latest concept of education.

However, the concept of education differs from country to country according to their cultural heritages and it has changed from age to age in accordance with the changes that the heritages have passed through. Some of these differing and changing concepts can be indicated below.

- i) Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- ii) Education implies the preparation for life.
- iii) Education is the process of growth and development.
- iv) Education brings about change in behaviour.
- v) Education enables adjustments to the environment.

According to Rabindranath Tagore education implies harmony—harmony of human nature with universal Nature and Super-Nature. To Gandhiji education meant to bring out the best in the child and man—in his body, mind and

spirit. However, the most complete concept of education comes from Swami Vivekananda when he says, "Education is the manifestation of a perfection which is already in man." And according to the elucidation of the concept given by the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, perfection consists of four aspects, namely, love, knowledge, power and beauty. Education helps a man (child or adult) to manifest the different sides of perfection in the four aspects of his personality—his body manifesting the divine beauty, his life manifesting the divine power, his mind manifesting the divine knowledge and his psychic being manifesting the divine love.

The concept of education does not end here. There are others who consider education as an activity of the whole community. It is in fact nothing other than the whole life of a community viewed from the particular standpoint of learning to live that life. Yet for others education is a life-long activity known as life-long education.

3. Concept of Culture

Culture is a single word to connote the whole life of a community. Matthew Arnold in his *Culture and Anarchy* defines culture as a "study of perfection". For Talcolt Pansons and Robert Morton culture stands for a system of values, *i.e.*, preferred ways or alternatives adopted by the members of a given community. It includes all activities of life, ways of eating food and dressing, using language, making love, getting married, treating different people of different statuses, reading literature, listening to music, appreciation of art, the interests, attitudes and goals to be pursued in life. In short, culture is concerned with preference in beliefs, ideas, practices and ideals. Values occupy a dominant place in it. Thus cultural traditions consist in the values and preferences of a given society as selected, practised and evolved through its period of existence.

Just as we speak of a person being educated to the extent he is able to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes and apply them in his day-to-day life as an adjustment to his social environment, similarly a person is said to be cultured to the extent he is able to make his value judgements and realise his preferences.

Explaining the concept of culture Sri Aurobindo says:

A true happiness in this world is the terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements. And a civilisation must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilisation in the pursuit of this aim may be

predominantly material like modern European culture, predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Graeco-Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India.

Viewed in this perspective we can see that Education and Culture always go hand in hand and each contributes to the fulfilment of the other inasmuch as both aim at attainment of harmony and perfection. While culture stands for the finer side of life, education leads it to its fulfilment.

4. Cultural Traditions

Cultural traditions are the established modes of thinking, believing and behaving of people in a given society or community which are held to be valuable or preferential and handed on from generation to generation. For example, seeking after Truth, Good and Beauty (*Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram*) is considered to be one of the most important cultural traditions not only in India but all over the world. Similarly respect for the human being is another such tradition, though this tradition has begun losing its importance in modern times.

There are some who distinguish between social and cultural traditions. Social traditions relate to institutions like religion, caste, marriage, family, education, economy, law and order, art and amusement. But these are matters of details which do not come under the purview of the present discussion.

5. Some Cultural Traditions of India

The cultural traditions of India are epitomised in a statement of Dr. Radhakrishnan when he says: "The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the brave knight of medieval Europe, but the free man of spirit who has attained insight into the universal source by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India's pride that she clung fast to this ideal."

Sri Aurobindo also stresses the same thing when he says: "Spirituality is indeed the master key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it." He further explains:

India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here encased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, dharma.... India's social system is built upon this conception; her philosophy formulates it, her religion is an aspiration to the spiritual consciousness and its fruits; her art and literature have the same upward look, her whole Dharma or law of being is founded upon it.

Thus the essential features of Indian cultural traditions include universality, humanism, individuality, tolerance, assimilation, adjustability, harmony, hospitality, etc. Some traditional values of Indian culture are enshrined in the prayers or statements of the ancient scriptures such as:

- “Vasudhaiva kutumbakam”*,¹
“Sā vidyā yā vimuktaye”,²
“Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam”,³
“Sarvam khalvidam brahma”,⁴
“Satyameva jayate”,⁵
“Sarve bhavantu sukhinah”,⁶
“Vidyā dadāti vinayam”,⁷
*“Vidyayāmṛtamśnute”*⁸.

6. Educational and Cultural Traditions

One of the important functions of education is transmission of culture, otherwise known as enculturation. This implies that the young ones should be helped to know about their social and cultural traditions, to believe in them, to feel committed to them and practise them. In other words it means that the learners are to be educated to make proper social adjustments in their life. This is essential inasmuch as social and cultural traditions play a very important role in the socialisation of youngsters and in bringing about their cultural refinement. This is also known as the conservative function of education. No society or community can continue to exist unless its cultural traditions are preserved.

Again, no meaningful communication among the members of a society is possible unless they know the meanings of the innumerable words and terms, symbols, themes and idioms in use in the society as formed by their culture. It is the task of education to promote and facilitate effective communications in society. In short, social and cultural traditions provide the purpose, meaning or rationale of life to the people. This in a way is also the conservative function of education.

But a question arises whether all cultural traditions are worth preservation and transmission. There may be three distinct answers to this question. Modernists are of the opinion that all old traditions have become obsolete and

¹ “The whole earth is [my] family”,

² “Only that knowledge which liberates”,

³ “Yoga is skill in works”,

⁴ “All this that is is the Brahman”,

⁵ “Only the truth conquers”,

⁶ “May all be happy”,

⁷ “Knowledge imparts modesty”,

⁸ “By the knowledge [one] enjoys immortality”

hence need not be preserved at all. The sooner they are rejected and changed, the greater the chance for the society to progress. There are others, the *Santanis*, who are in favour of preserving all the old values intact without effecting any change at all. For them, 'Old is gold.'

There is yet a third group of people which is in favour of conserving such elements of the cultural traditions as have helped the society to preserve itself, and changing those elements which are no longer of any use and are positively harmful for its successful existence.

According to Sir Ford Clarke a society needs a stable set of values and a unified purpose. It should also have the capacity to criticise itself and initiate change. Such a situation is possible only in a democratic society.

A note of caution needs to be given in this regard. Just as dead values tend to putrefy a society, too rapid changes tend to break it up, especially when there is not a sufficiently stable core of attitudes and values to be transmitted to the coming generation and widespread uncertainty develops over the aims of the society.

There is yet another function of education wherein it is connected with cultural change, on the one hand serving as an instrument of change and on the other as the product of change. But the two functions are simultaneous and inevitable in the relationship of education and culture.

7. Cultural Crisis

The conflict between the old cultural traditions and the modern values has led to a cultural crisis all over the world, and India is no exception to it. The two world wars have laid a great stress on material progress to an utter neglect of the spiritual. A new concept of happiness consisting in physical and vital pleasures has emerged and begun to reign over humanity. Man has begun losing faith in the age-old eternal values like truthfulness, honesty, sincerity and universal good. Falsehood, corruption, hypocrisy and selfishness have taken their place and are being accepted as a way of life. Examples for emulation are badly in want. Man and his society are in total confusion. A total cultural revolution on the basis of a renaissance of the eternal social and cultural values is the only solution.

8. Cultural Revolution

The cultural revolution or renaissance in India began with the British coming to this country. One can discover three distinct stages of this revolution. According to Sri Aurobindo:

The first step was the reception of the European contact, a radical re-

consideration of many of the prominent elements and some revolutionary denials of the very principles of the old culture. The second was a reaction of the Indian spirit upon the European influence, sometimes with a total denial of what it offered and a stressing both of the essential and the strict letter of the national past which yet marked a movement of assimilation. The third only now beginning or recently begun, is rather a process of new creation in which the spiritual power of the Indian mind remains supreme, recovers its truth, accepts whatever it finds sound and true, useful or inevitable of the modern idea and form, but so transmutes and Indianises it, so absorbs and so transforms it entirely into itself that its foreign character disappears and it becomes another harmonious element in the characteristic working of the ancient goddess, the Shakti of India mastering and taking possession of the modern influence, no longer possessed or overcome by it.

The renaissance thus determining itself, but not yet finally determined, if it is to be what the name implies, a rebirth of the soul of India into a new body of energy, a new form of its innate and ancient spirit, *prajna purani*, must insist much more finally and integrally than it has yet done in its spiritual turn, on the greater and greater action of the spiritual motive in every sphere of our living. In other words, it would mean that all our cultural activities relating to religion, art, literature, polity, etc. are to be moulded and refounded on the basis of spirituality. And what kind of spirituality? Not that which negates life and all the power and prosperity life brings to us, but a spirituality which accepts both *Purusartha* and *Paramartha* and includes all the four *chaturvargas*—*artha*, *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha* or the four human interests which include material prosperity, desires, religion and liberation.

An integral education which aims at self-perfection can bring about such a cultural change in the individual and revolution in the society and the community.

9. National Integration

National Integration is as much an objective of National Education as an important aspect of cultural revolution, particularly at the present moment of the cultural crisis through which India is passing, India has never been confronted with such a crisis after it was partitioned in 1947. Politicians are trying to divide the country into small fragments in the name of communalism, casteism, quotas and other factors for their own political advantages. The country is bowed down under the burdens of illiteracy, economic depravity, international loans, price rise, dowry system, etc. Even long extinct customs like "*Satidaha*" ("widow-burning") are trying to raise their heads. National Integration has become the call of the hour. This has to be established at any cost, not on the basis of any

external factors which will not last long, but on the basis of the discovery of the self in the individual, in the nation and in humanity. Thus national integration has to be established on the broader foundation of international understanding.

Let us hope that India shall rise to the occasion and achieve its goal.

*Sarve'tra sukhinah santu
sarve santu nirāmayāḥ,
sarve bhadraṇi paśyantū
mā kaścidduḥkhamāpnuāt.
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.*

May all be happy
May all be free from disease,
May all visualise the propitious
May none be afflicted with suffering

ACHARYA VIDYANANDA SARASWATI
(DR. R. N. PANI)

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A PAUPER AND A POOR COUNTRY

A SHORT STORY

Translated from the Tamil of Prapanjan by P. Raja

..AND so I am constrained to write this letter. Let me assert my view once again. I am not in any way against Antoine getting a handsome salary, nor do I envy him. But my only grievance is that I am unable to make both ends meet with the meagre amount paid to me in the name of salary.

Last week, Sir, my sister came to spend her week-end with us. My wife and I planned to add fish-sauce to her menu. I hope there is nothing wrong with that.

Fishes were available in plenty at the Grand Bazaar Fish market. A fisherwoman who sold only pomfrets told me that three were available for fifteen rupees.

“Preposterous! They are all tiny and you demand so much!” I told her.

“If you can’t afford to buy, better shut your mouth and get lost,” she retorted. A few in the crowd whisked around and looked at me. I felt humiliated.

Sir, it will not be out of place here to compare myself with my friend Antoine. For I stayed in Veerar Veli street and he in Bahadur Sahib street. If I stood at the threshold of my house and shout the name of my friend at the top of my voice, he would respond. We were so near. We hail from poor families. I am taller and stronger than he. I have read the two-thousand-year old Tamil literature, including the latest works by the most modern writers. I have a good knowledge of English too. Antoine can’t even pronounce his full name properly which happens to be Antoine Asirvaadham. Yet his salary in the early ’seventies was Rs. 3000. In the eyes of society he is a successful man. My father used to tease me by comparing his achievements with mine. He found great satisfaction in doing so: “Look at that fellow. He studied a bit and managed to get a job. Now he earns in thousands and maintains a family. What is there to boast about you? You are a useless fellow... A wasteland...the severed tail of a lizard.”

Twice, Sir, twice I have been given the opportunity of going to France to do some work or other, get retirement and come back to my motherland and lead a very happy and contented life with the fat pension. But both times the opportunity slipped from my hands. In the one instance my father had a hand in it and in the other I played a role. On second thoughts, I do not in any way regret letting the opportunity go.

I was admitted in the French school here. When I was studying in the fifth standard, my father did something ‘great’. He was a freedom-fighter and he fought against the French supremacy. How could he allow his son to study the language of his enemies? Was it not below his dignity? And so he stopped me from the French school and admitted me into the English school. You may ask

me if the English are not supremacists? True, but they are not his direct enemies like the French.

The English school was managed by Christian missionaries. I was asked to attend the first standard class, though I was a student of the fifth standard in the French school. In the classroom a grown-up boy sat by my side. He was Antoine.

Well! After having studied the fifth standard in the French school, I found it very embarrassing to sit along with the five-year olds in the first standard and learn 'A for Ant'. But nothing can be done about it. By the time I reached the eighth or ninth standard there was a growth of hair on my upper lip. It was only during that period I happened to read Na. Parthasarathy's famous Tamil novel *Kurinjī Malar*. Aravindan, the hero of the story, was so appealing to me that I became one with the character. As a result I started wearing a dhoti in the ninth-standard class. Many of my teachers had their own second thoughts in approaching me and in most cases they simply ignored me. As I was the one fully grown-up boy in the whole school, the teachers perhaps had their own difficulty in treating me.

I had an uncle—my mother's side—named Michael Mohanarangam. He liked me very much. And so in one of his visits during the vacation he asked me with all affection: "Are you willing to come to France? I'll make all the necessary arrangements for you. You can very quickly come up in life."

What was really surprising was that my father too seconded the plan of my uncle. In those days one had the liberty to cancel one's Indian citizenship and opt for French citizenship.

"In France every citizen is guaranteed a job ..he has every right to it...he is entitled to receive a stipend till he is provided with a job," he said and spoke of the glory of France.

To me, my uncle looked half-French. He spoke French with a lovely French accent. He called Indians cut-throats. He cursed the scorching Indian sun. He spoke very highly of De Gaulle. He then scoffed at the beggars in India and remarked that India was rich in them. "India is destined to go to the dogs. Here, even if you study up to M.A. or anything above that you will never get a job. Every day I see lakhs and lakhs of graduates wander the streets..."

After a sigh of disgust, he continued amidst munching the slices of bread soaked in coconut-milk: "It is only the Indians who betray their brethren. Suppose the government spends a hundred rupees on a very useful scheme, not even one tenth of the amount reaches the common man. Corrupt are the higher officials. The policemen are the real bandits. And all the intellectuals who are born here have no backbone at all."

My father agreed with him. He was a freedom-fighter of French India. He expected a great change to take place after the freedom was won. But he was disappointed. He was vexed to find that the Blacks were more cruel than their White counterparts.

I found nothing but truth in what my uncle said. I too agreed with him.

“And so, my dear boy, don’t you think that it is wise on your part to leave India for France at this juncture?” asked my uncle.

“No,” I replied bluntly. “At this juncture it would be wise of me not to leave India. The affected ones who suffer at the hands of the corrupt are none but my brethren. Only if I remain with them and work for them can I call myself a Man.”

“Ah! If that’s the case, put on a dhoti and a jibba like Aravindan and have groundnut and cow’s milk for supper. But you can’t dream of having a girl like the heroine Poorani.”

“So what?”

When my uncle started for France, I too went to the railway station to see him off. At the station he hugged his mother, father, wife, children, friends and then me and kissed every one of us before he got into the train. As the train was about to clank forward, he thrust his head out of the window and yelled: “It’s not too late. Take your own time. If you decide to opt for French citizenship and thereby make your life a prosperous one, don’t hesitate to write to me. I’ll do the needful from there. Your father too who once fought against the French Supremacy seconds my view. Yet I don’t understand why you are so reluctant!” He spoke as if there was no room for second thoughts.

“O.K. I’ll think about it,” I told him and bade goodbye.

Sir, when Antoine came back from France to spend his first vacation here, he narrated to me all his experiences. At first he was grouped with two more Indians. His immediate superior had asked the group to pick up the cigarette butts from the parade ground. Antoine felt insulted.

“How can you take that as an insult? Is it not part and parcel of army discipline?” I asked.

He told me that it took several days for him to realize it.

Well! Antoine was all gleaming teeth when he rehearsed to me how he had cheated his officers. While the other two picked up the butts and deposited them in the tin-containers that they held in one hand, Antoine simply crushed the butts under his heels and made them one with the sand. All this he managed without even stooping. It seems his chief had asked him why no butt was seen in his tin-container. “What can I do, Sir, when I can’t find any on the ground?” replied Antoine. How the French Army Officers famed for their discipline would have groomed him to do his work properly is anybody’s guess.

So please bear with me if I say that Indians are a cursed lot. We are the ones who struggle with biting cold and fight against poisonous insects to produce tea leaves. Yet what we get for our pains is only the third-quality tea. The same is applicable to prawns too. Twenty years ago big-sized prawns were available in plenty in the fish market. But now it is very rare to see them. How did this happen? Why do these prawns that are caught by us in our own sea become a delicacy to the unknown men in alien lands while our tongues can only water at the thought of it?

When my grandfather got married he received just ten rupees as salary for serving as accountant. He had six daughters and three sons. Yet he ate to his stomach's fill, married off all his daughters, educated all his sons, bought a house, remodelled it according to his taste and led a happy and contented life.

Now, Sir, my only doubt is, when a ten-rupee wage-earner in those days was able to lead a contented life, how does one with a salary of a thousand rupees go about borrowing? I can't quite understand. Say for example I am paid only one rupee as my salary for the work done by me, its real value is just ten paise. That means I am cheated of my ninety paise, am I not? It is meaningless to distribute packs and packs of paper currency without taking any step to keep the prices of commodities under control.

A measure of paddy is bought from the agriculturist at the rate of one rupee by one who is not in any way connected with the production of paddy, and he sells the same at three rupees. Who gives the licence to such squeezers who call themselves merchants?

Will the time ever come back to make me lead the contented life that was once led by my grandfather and then by my parents? Will I ever be able to make both ends meet?

Sir, all that I like to know is only this. Antoine and I are born on the same earth. We are equals. We breathe the same air. Yet why should our living conditions be different? I am a clerk. He too is one. When his salary amount reaches India from France, it is Rs 4000/- whereas my salary here is only one thousand. And that is why Antoine is able to spend even fifty rupees on three little pomfrets. And I have to stomach insults from fisherwomen.

I can't tolerate this. This is nothing but injustice that you do to your own citizens.

And so, Sir, I have explained to you the problem that I face today. I eagerly await your verdict. Yours Sincerely, A Pauper of a Poor country.

Postscript: India is not a poor country. Only its people are poor. The wealth of this subcontinent is mismanaged. As the wealth of this nation continues to go into the coffers of the privileged few, the people are made paupers.

*

This letter reached the clerk, the headclerk, Junior Officer, Senior Officer, the Minister's Assistant, the Minister and finally the Chief Minister. Then it came down in the same order and a reply was sent to Mr. Subramanian, the writer of this letter, two years and nine months later. The letter was redirected with a note that the addressee had opted for a French citizenship and had moved to France. It took two years and three months more to reach the Minister again. The old Minister had gone and his place was occupied by a new one. Unable to make out the content of the letter, he tore it into shreds and dumped them into his bin. And then he started writing a letter to his son who had his education in India, but had gone abroad to make a living

NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

Talking to Plants

TURNIP cabbage, also called kohlrabi in English (as in German), normally reaches the size of a man's fist. But in the garden of Ernst Roth, a Swiss police employee, vegetables grow in different dimensions. The largest kohlrabi is larger than a football, having a circumference of 90 cm and weighing 15 kilograms. The 56-year old hobby gardener has already achieved four entries into the Guinness Book of Records, particularly with cabbage and beans. What is his secret?

Roth does not use any chemicals or artificial fertilizers, only cow dung and compost. "I won't allow any chemistry into my garden," he told a reporter, and this was confirmed when private individuals as well as representatives of chemical factories came to take samples. His real secret is talking to the plants with feeling. Coming home at night from service, he asks the plants individually, "How are you today," etc. and they feel that he cares. The result is tremendous, as visitors walking through his garden can easily note. All kinds of cabbage as well as leek and salad grow in giant size. And they are not just artificially blown-up. Expert cooks have stated that his vegetables have excellent taste, too. When in 1989 he was invited to appear in a nationally televised show, he became nervous with the thought that his vegetables should grow especially large that time. But they did not do so. The hectic element in his consciousness reacted on them. Nevertheless, he was still able to present very remarkable specimens.

Nowadays, Roth writes a weekly column for a newspaper, sharing his wisdom with the readers. He may tell them, for instance, to drive away parasites with fetid nettle manure or shavegrass boiling. Or he recommends using clean water and doing frequent hacking to keep the earth loose and airy. Occasionally, Roth has given seeds from his plants to neighbours who tried to apply the same methods. Without much success. It appears that Roth alone just knows the right language.

Source: *Esotera*, November 1990

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Sri Aurobindo for All Ages: a Biography, by Nirodbaran. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1990, Rs. 50.

ANYONE who has been following Nirodbaran's serial "The Ashram Children and Sri Aurobindo's Life, a Dream-Dialogue" in recent issues of *Mother India*, or who has read *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, or heard any of his talks on the Master addressed to various gatherings, will be able to testify that he is the biographer *par excellence* of Sri Aurobindo, with whom he was privileged to enjoy a unique relationship.

This latest book, as title and foreword indicate, has been written with "the younger generation" in mind. So the author has taken up a straightforward, approachable style which makes the book a pleasure to read. Simply but handsomely produced, it is very reasonably priced for these days of soaring paper and printing costs.

Almost from the beginning of his association with the Master, Nirodbaran was gathering information about Sri Aurobindo's life, first through his fascinating correspondence with him and what he could gather from fellow-sadhaks, later supplemented with the intimate glimpses occasionally granted by the Lord during his conversations with his attendants, recorded in the *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. To this, and his own first-hand experiences, Nirod here adds the results of much research carried out over the years by the Sri Aurobindo Archives and various interested individuals. All this information has been organised and presented with an intimate grasp of the significance of each detail in the overall context of the Master's life and work that could only come from one who has himself been so closely associated with and deeply imbued in that life and work.

When the manuscript of his earlier book, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* was read out to the Mother, she wrote the comment: "Grâce à Nirod nous avons la révélation de tout un côté inconnu de ce qu'était Sri Aurobindo"—"Thanks to Nirod, we have a revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was." The information conveyed in that book about the Master's later years was, in fact, quite new to most people when it appeared.

The material treated in this new one is, by comparison, more generally available...but, I believe, nowhere else so accessibly presented. For example, I found that no other account had given me such a clear, focussed picture of Sri Aurobindo's participation in the Nationalist movement, and the precise nature of his contribution to it. The treatment of the early "pre-Ashram" Pondicherry period was similarly illuminating, bringing together information which must have appeared elsewhere, but not in such a coherent presentation.

Similarly, many other aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life and work are com-

pactly yet clearly treated. The chapter entitled “Coming of the Mother—‘Arya’ Review—World War I” covering the period 1914-1920, ranges through a vast variety of subject-matter, including a brief biography of the Mother, in a wonderfully clear and concise manner.

The foreword pays generous tribute to the editorial contribution of the author’s close friend Ashit Gupta, who “unfortunately...passed away before he could give the finishing touches to the last two chapters.” With this in mind, I had a specially close look at these last two, to see if there were any discernible difference in style between them and the rest of the book; but I could find none: the voice is the same throughout, a very simple and direct one. And the overall grasp, clarity and accuracy of the presentation far outweigh the couple of slips in the earlier part of the book which have been pointed out to me by a discerning friend who agrees with my general admiration.

Nirodbaran has indeed given us an account of Sri Aurobindo “for all ages”, in a profounder sense perhaps than he intended: one that is not only of interest and value for people of all ages, but one that spotlights the Master’s significance for all ages of humanity.

Thanks to his special understanding and accessible account of the facts known about the Lord’s life, the second part of the Mother’s message on his earlier book applies equally to this one:

“It is extremely interesting and very instructive.”

SHRADDHAVAN

DESIRE AND ITS FRUITS IN THE MAHABHARATA

WHY is it that, despite being a remorseless exposé of the frailties of human nature and a pitiless record of blood, sweat, toil and tears of the Kaurava dynasty, the *Mahābhārata* still mesmerises the reader? Leaving aside the sheer art of Vyasa's story-telling and the beauty of the poetry, it is the discovery, on repeated reading of certain patterns and parallelisms in the weaving of the tale which draw one back to the epic time and again. One of these patterns is the study of human desire and its fruits. In analysing this, I shall steer clear of the *Gītā* and confine myself to the core of the epic in so far as it tells the story of the end of an era.

The epic of Vyasa exists within the over-all framework of the Hindu system of belief. Multifaceted as that system is, let us choose, for the present, a particular aspect of that *sanātana dharma* which has received possibly its most lucid exposition in the form of a parable: the parable of the *kalpataru*, the wish-fulfilling tree.

Many children are playing inside a room when their uncle enters and points out to them that instead of quarrelling amongst themselves over who will play with what, they ought to go outside and stand under the branches of the wish-fulfilling tree, whose roots are in the heavens, and ask for whatever they desire. The children rush outside and start asking. The tree gives them the toys and sweets they crave, but along with these it also gives them the opposite: boredom and stomach-ache. The children grow up. They now "know" more, and they ask for wealth, power and pleasure. The tree unquestioningly grants them their desires, but with the bonus of miserliness, anxiety and frustration. The askers grow old and gather in three groups under the tree. One group, out of frustration, asks for death. The tree grants their desire, but with it gives the opposite: re-birth. Another group is "wiser" and waits to make the correct wishes next time. They have learnt nothing. The third group exclaims that all this is an illusion. They too have learnt nothing. During all this time one child has been unable to get out of the room, for being lame he was pushed aside by the others in their frenetic hurry to rush to the *kalpataru*. Through the window, that lame child has been watching his friends make their wishes, get them along with the opposites, yet continue to make more wishes. Transfixed by this fascinating play of desires and their fruit, and the misery of his one-time companions, a profound compassion wells up in his heart for them, and he forgets to wish for anything. He, alone, is the *mukta-purusa*, the liberated one.

It is this parable of the *kalpataru*, whose roots are upwards and whose branches pervade the cosmos, which is the over-arching symbol encompassing that aspect of the *Mahābhārata* which we are studying: that of desire and its fruits.

Shantanu is the first of those who are driven by desire, though his name

means “the child of controlled passions” (he was born to Pratīpa in his old age). Smitten by the sight of Ganga—who had wantonly solicited Pratīpa and been politely turned down as not being of the same caste—he accepts all her conditions and marries her. Childless, he watches Ganga consign seven sons to the river in pitiless succession. Thus, he obtains his desire for sexual gratification with Ganga, but with it its opposite: anger at the object of his infatuation, and loss of the fruits of the lustful union. Ganga leaves him and years later Shantanu comes upon his eighth son Devabrata, and makes him crown-prince.

In his old age Shantanu is smitten by another maiden-by-the-river: Satyavati. Unlike the sage Parashara who desired her, enjoyed her, but did not crave to possess her for ever, and passed on, the king needs must have her for himself at any price. The chief of the fishing community too has his desire. That his daughter should become queen and that her sons should succeed Shantanu. Devabrata’s desire to please his father complements this. It is beside the point that none of them—the fisher-chief, Shantanu, Devabrata, Satyavati—give a thought to the people who constitute the kingdom and whose welfare is supposed to be the reason for the appellation *rājā* given to the monarch.

They all get their desires: Shantanu gets the nubile Satyavati but engenders sons who are weaklings and die prematurely. The fisher-chief sees his daughter as queen, but his grandchildren do not live to rule Hastinapura (in a sense, however, through Vyasa, the fisher-king’s grandchild Dhritarashtra does sit on the throne). Satyavati, who looks forward to being the queen mother, loses her first-born in a skirmish with a Gandharva. Anxious to ensure the perpetuation of her dynasty, she urges Devabrata to obtain brides for Vichitravīrya, who is yet an adolescent. She does obtain for him Ambika and Ambalika.

Both were tall.
 Black, wavy hair.
 Fingernails and toe nails
 Painted red, pointed.
 Hips round and full.
 Swelling and large breasts.

But the result is that, driven by passion, a victim of over-indulgence, Vichitravīrya dies without progeny. Thus, Satyavati, having brought about Devabrata’s Bhishma-hood, so that the succession of her children to the throne is ensured, now finds it the greatest obstacle to ensuring her queen-motherhood, for Bhishma refuses to break his vow of celibacy and practise the custom of *niyoga* on his step-brother’s widows. Satyavati has not learnt anything, and driven by her hunger for grandsons, she summons her illegitimate son Vyasa to beget sons on her daughters-in-law. Vyasa advises a year-long vow to be observed by them to purify themselves of lust. But Satyavati cannot wait and wants grandsons

immediately Vyasa warns her that only if the princesses can stand his body-odour (acquired from his fish-odorous mother) and fearful looks, will they bear excellent sons. Satyavati leads Ambika and Ambalika to believe that Bhishma will be servicing them (she tells them that their husband's elder brother will be coming, very much of the type of veiled truth as Yudhishtira's *aśvatthamā hataḥ*. .). The fruit of Satyavati's desire is a blind son, and another who is impotent. Even now she has not learnt anything. Again she commands Ambika to lie with Vyasa. Ambika sends her maid instead, and the issue is the only healthy and virtuous descendant of Satyavati. Vidura. But he, too, dies childless.

During her lifetime Satyavati hears of the death of Pandu and Vyasa advises her to retire to the forest, for

the green years of the earth
are gone...
Do not be a witness
to the suicide
of your own race.

And thus, Satyavati, accompanied by her daughters-in-law, passes out of the epic. Had they learnt anything from their experience of desire and its fruits? If only Satyavati had been content with becoming queen; if only she, and her foster-father, had not wanted her children alone to rule over Hastinapura! Well, the world would not have had Kurukshetra!

If we go back a little to the first sight we have of Satyavati, we find her called Matsyagandha, smelling powerfully of fish, possibly having been found inside one. Her one desire is to get rid of this obnoxious smell. This is granted, with the loss of her virginity, the birth of a son, and the bestowing upon her of a lotus-scent which draws the old Shantanu to her presence and leads to a life which has been described above.

Between Satyavati and her grand-daughter-in-law Kunti there exists a curious parallelism. Satyavati is actually the daughter of King Uparihara of Chedi, who sends her off to be brought up by a *dāsa*-chief. Pritha is the daughter of King Shurasena of the Yadavas who gifts her to his cousin Kuntibhoja, whence she is renamed Kunti. Both Satyavati and Kunti give birth to pre-marital sons, and in both cases the sons are discarded by their mothers, and re-appear as adults: one as the sage Krishnadvaipayana (island-born, dark) Vyasa (the arranger) and the other as Vasusena (born with the riches of skin-armour and ear-rings) also known as Karna. Both women are given the boon by the fathers of their sons that their virginity shall remain unimpaired. This virginity is not just a physical attribute but very much of a psychological one, which both women share with Draupadi (who regains her virginity before living in turn with each husband). The exact opposite of this can be seen in the Madri type of woman

who is dependent on what others think, and always acts as a female counterpart to a male and is not "one-in-herself". Dr. M. Esther Harding points out in *Woman's Mysteries* (pp. 125-6), "The woman who is psychologically virgin is not dependent in this way. She is what she is because that is what she is.. as virgin, she is not influenced by the considerations that make the non-virgin woman trim her sails... (she) does what she does not because of any desire to please... or to be approved, even by herself.. but because what she does is true. Her actions may, indeed be unconventional." Kunti is not the usual wife. In her we see more clearly what a "virgin" can be, of which Satyawati was only a hint and Draupadi will be an extension.

Another interesting parallel is that just as Bhishma, the eldest son of Shantanu, cannot claim the throne, similarly Karna, the eldest son of Kunti, is unable to claim his birthright. He is, after all, as legitimate as the five Pandavas, none of whom were fathered by Pandu. What if Kunti had kept track of the child she floated down the river and been able to tell Pandu when he was begging her to beget children by others?

What did Kunti desire? Pandu is the only one in the dynasty to go to a *svayamvarā*, and he is chosen among all the assembled princes by Kunti. Yet, she almost immediately thereafter loses him to Madri, who is brought, after payment of heavy bride-price, by Bhishma in accordance with the family tradition of Hastinapura of obtaining brides instead of winning them in *svayamvarā* contests. As an adolescent, Kunti desired to test the power of Durvasa's mantra, and this wish was granted, but with it the anguish of having to discard her first-born, just as she had been discarded by her father Shurasena, and in the same manner in which great grandmother-in-law Ganga had sent seven sons down the river, and her other great grandmother-in-law Satyawati had discarded her first-born, on an island. Her second desire was to obtain Pandu. She got him, but could never hold him. As she tells Madri beside the corpse of Pandu,

Princess of Vahlka!

You are fortunate indeed—
I never had the chance to see
his face radiant in intercourse.

Even in death Madri does not let Kunti accompany her chosen partner in life.

Kunti now desires to establish her sons as rulers of a kingdom. She succeeds, but with it she is granted the double agony first of the enslavement of her children and the attempted stripping of her daughter-in-law in the Kaurava court, and then their exile for thirteen years. She desires that the unity of the five sons should not be sundered by Draupadi belonging only to Arjuna, who won her. That desire too is fulfilled, with the result that Draupadi though five-husbanded is actually *anāthabat*, without a husband to protect her from

Duhshasana, Jayadratha, Kirmira, Kichaka. She has five sons none of whom survives the war. She has five husbands, none of whom turns back to help, let alone wait at her side, when she falls down on the slopes of the Himalayas during their last journey. Like Kunti, Draupadi had wanted a kingdom, and gets a field of ashes to rule over. Perhaps the most telling commentary on desire and its fruits lies in the scene where Vyasa describes Kunti accompanying Dhitarashtra and Gandhari into the forest leaving behind her victorious sons. She saw them victorious, as she had desired, but paid the price of her first-born being slain by her son when defenceless, at the urging of her nephew, Krishna. And how effectively she ensured this victory, by revealing the secret of his birth to Karna and not to the Pandavas, so that Karna all along knew he was fighting his brothers, but they were fighting to kill the hated charioteer's-son!

Look at Kunti's predicament: she is told each time which god she must take to bed. She has no choice in the matter. But, when Pandu makes her pass on the mantra to Madri, he does not set any such mandate, and Madri is free to choose! Each of Kunti's three major choices bear agonising fruit: calling Śurya; choosing Pandu; insisting that Draupadi be shared by her five sons. Perhaps she alone learns; for it is she who, at the end, tells Gandhari and Dhitarashtra that instead of trying to flee the forest-fire, they should walk towards it, welcoming the providential release from having been bound as on a wheel of fire wherein their own tears scald as molten lead.

What of Draupadi's desire for Arjuna? That desire which Yudhishtira coldly cites, without a backward glance at her dying form, as the cause of her inability to go to heaven in the physical body. By the time Arjuna's turn would have come to live with her, he was away on an exile in the course of which he had no scruples to oblige the amorous Ulupi, woo Chitrangada and abduct Subhadra. This last he does only after obtaining the consent of Yudhishtira. Vyasa does not tell us that the eldest Pandava bothered to pass on the information to Draupadi. He was, perhaps, pleased that Arjuna should have fallen in love elsewhere! So, when her beloved Arjuna does return to Indraprastha, it is with Subhadra. The greatest archer wins her, but is not hers. Even during the 13 years' exile she is bereft of his company for he is sent off by Yudhishtira to obtain celestial weapons. And then, he becomes a eunuch, who merely enquires of her how she managed to escape the Upa-kichakas who had dragged her off to be burnt with Kichaka's corpse; never does Brihannala raise a voice to defend her either in the Kaurava court or in the court of Virata.

What of Gandhari? We surmise that yoked to a blind husband, she would have looked forward to giving birth to the first Kuru scion. Indeed, she conceived first, but had to carry the embryo for two years, by which time Kunti had given birth to Yudhishtira and was pregnant with Bhīma. In blind rage, Gandhari aborts the conception and is about to discard the foetus when Vyasa appears and arranges for the birth of a hundred sons and a daughter. So, her

desire to be a mother is fulfilled, but with it comes the opposite: her sons are unprincipled, arrogant, wicked, disobedient. Duryodhana defies her commands to accept Krishna's peace proposals in open court. If Draupadi though five-husbanded is un-husbanded, then Gandhari with one hundred sons is son-less. In that she is curiously like Satyawati, who, too, having two sons, ended up having none. Like Satyawati, she has to leave for the forest, having witnessed "the suicide of her race". In both their cases their ambition to become Queen mothers appears initially to be fulfilled, only for them to find the sweet fruition of success turning into bitter ashes in their mouths.

If we are to talk of desire, perhaps the most striking image of desire and attachment in its most intense form is exemplified in Gangadatta-Devabrata-Bhishma. Krishna and Bhishma are two colossi bestriding the Mahabharatan universe, one as the herald of a new epoch and the other the mightiest bulwark of an age which does not wish to pass away. Devavrata's one desire is to see his father happy—a father whom he has not known from his birth and to whom his mother hands him over in teenage and disappears. For this desire he sacrifices not only his paternal heritage but also his personal marital right. But beyond this he also sacrifices the paramount, super-ordinate goal, the welfare of the kingdom and its people. His desire is granted. His father is beside himself with joy. And what does Bhishma get besides the granting of his desire? The immediate consequence of it is a boon that he will die only when he wishes to. But is it a boon at all to be not only a witness, like Gandhari, to the suicide of his race, but also an active participant in it, fighting on the side which he knows is in the wrong and against those whom he loves and knows to be in the right? And to be responsible for killing millions over a continuous period of ten days? Is it the pangs of conscience multiplied over decades of remaining a silent witness to the poisoning of Bhima, the gutting of the lacquer house, the humiliation of Draupadi, the cheating in the dice-game exiling the Pandavas—are all these the scorpion-stings which are the bed-of-arrows on which he lies torturing himself till the holocaust has ended?

Bhishma also acted indiscriminately as the instrument for fulfilling his step-mother's intense craving for grandchildren. Instead of getting one wife for Vichitravirya, a teenager, he abducts three daughters of the King of Kashi. Thereby he sows the seed of his own death in the fury of Amba. So strong is his attachment to his vow, that it steels him against all other human obligations. In that process he destroys the life of the three princesses of Kashi. His desire to please his father seems to undergo a metamorphosis into an adamant will to please himself, and he turns into the Egotistical Sublime of the epic. And the fruits of his desire? They grow on the field of Kurukshetra, in the quagmire of gore. His desire was granted, his vow remained unbroken but was it worth the cost of eighteen Akshauhinis and a world bereft of heroes, peopled by widows and infants, filled with the sound of wailing and lit up with the smokey flames of innumerable funeral pyres?

A strange parallelism exists between Bhishma and Krishna. Both are the eighth-born and the only surviving sons of their parents. Each is the unquestioned leader of the opposing parties in the fratricidal strife. Again, both are renowned not only as warriors *par-excellence*, but also as the most well-versed in dharma. There are two sublime moments in which these two similar yet opposing proponents of two dharmas, two ages, meet. One is in the *rājasūya yajña* of Yudhishtira, when Bhishma explains why the *arghya* ought to be offered to Krishna as pre-eminent among all present. The other is on the battlefield, when Krishna, furious with Arjuna for failing to control Bhishma's unremittent slaughter of the Pandava host, breaks his own vow and rushes to slay him. In words of exquisite beauty, Bhishma welcomes death at Krishna's hands. But the real point is that Krishna has no hesitation in breaking his vow to be a non-combatant in order to save lives. This is where he differs from Bhishma's enslavement to his vow and his sense of loyalty to Dhritarashtra. Unlike Bhishma, Krishna never hesitates to root out wickedness, even if it be in the form of his own kin (Kamsha, Shishupala, Shatadhanva). He appears to have had two major desires: the bringing together of various clans such as the Vrishnis, Andhakas, Bhojas, Yadavas, Kukutas, etc. to form a single community at Dwaraka, safe from the depredations of imperialistic ambitions of Magadha and Hastinapura. This was granted him. And ultimately he watched his kith and kin destroy one another in a drunken orgy of senseless violence. The second wish was the establishment of an empire based upon righteousness, doing away with the petty kingdoms fighting against each other, and bringing them all under one sovereign of impeccable rectitude. This, too, was granted him. But what subjects did Yudhishtira, dharma-rajā, have to rule over? A field of ashes filled with thousands of mourning widows? The Stree Parva in the epic is a merciless commentary on the fruit of this desire of Krishna's, and has been voiced in words of unsurpassed poignancy by Gandhari as she stands in Kurukshetra.

“See, Krishna, where Duryodhana, general of eleven *akṣauhīnīs*, lies bloody-bodied, embracing his mace. His wife and Lakshmana's mother lies fallen on his chest. My daughters-in-law, bereft of husbands and sons, are running about with hair unbound on this battle-ground. Look there, the young bride of my son Vikarna is desperately trying to drive away the flesh-greedy vultures, but failing. Jackals have eaten away half of my son Durmukha's face. Keshava, that Abhimanyu, whom people used to describe as more valorous than even you or Arjuna, even he is slain and mad with grief his bride, the adolescent Uttara, is saying ‘O hero, you were killed just six months after our union.’ Alas, Karna's wife has fallen unconscious on the ground, for the jackals have left very little of his body. Vultures and jackals are tearing at the body of Jayadratha, king of Sauveera, and my daughter Duhshala is trying to kill herself while abusing the Pandavas. Oh, Oh, look, Duhshala, not finding her husband's severed

head, is running about madly seeking it. Krishna, see, Shakuni is surrounded by vultures and even that wicked soul will attain heaven because he died in battle.”

What is the end of Krishna? The death of a hero, brought down in a duel of epic dimensions by an opponent of mighty prowess? Hardly. Leaving a Dwaraka filled with wailing widows and children, having seen his elder brother Balarama die, he lies down under a tree in a forest and dies of the injury caused by an arrow shot into his foot by a mere Nishada, not even a warrior, out on a hunt.

This, then, is one of the lessons of the *Mahābhārata*: that desire, if powerful, does get fulfilled, but brings in its wake a price to be paid which, more often than not, outweighs the gratification experienced through fulfilment of the desire. To this vision of Vyāsa we may apply the words of another great epic poet, John Milton:

They, fondly thinking to allay
Their appetite with gust, instead of fruit
Chewed bitter ashes.

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

Students' Section

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Speech by Dibakar Goswami

OCCULTISM—ITS ROLE IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

OCCULTISM is often falsely associated with sorcery, magic and miracle-mongering, with raising spirits from the dead at one end and conjuring tricks for the credulous at the other. It is because of this that some people denounce occult powers or siddhis, as they are called in India, as “Tantric, dangerous, immoral, delusive.”¹ Even by some great Yogins of our time, notably Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, occultism was considered to be a practice that had to be very carefully avoided by the spiritual seekers lest it should distract them from their true goal and act as a stumbling-block in the soul’s path towards liberation. In the West too, in modern times occultism has been peremptorily brushed aside as blind superstition or condemned as black magic.

My endeavour in this speech is to clear some of the misconceptions about occultism and state its proper role in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga.

Occultism, according to Sri Aurobindo, is man’s effort to know the secret truths and utilise the hidden forces of Nature, which will help him to overcome his present physical limitations and become the master of Nature’s Forces. Along with this it also attempts to establish communication with worlds and beings belonging to supraphysical planes. A common mistake is committed when the term “occultism” is used to mean the discovery of forces of “supernature”; for actually it is only the discovery of the supraphysical forces, surpassing our material limits and therefore invisible to our still stunted sense-perceptions. This mistake occurs because of the wrong modern scientific tendency to identify Nature only with physical Nature, but according to the Yogic view, physical Nature is only a part of universal Nature which has other deeper and higher subtle-physical, vital, mental and spiritual ranges and it is these that occultism tries to explore and master. It does not go beyond all Nature.

Hypnotism is an example of such a mastery of occult power but it is still limited and its full potentialities remain untapped. If it is fully developed it can enlarge the control of our mind over our life and body or even enable us to act on the minds, lives and bodies of others or on the movements of the cosmic forces.

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Archives and Research*, April 1985, p 9

Without our knowing it, we are constantly undergoing a barrage of thought-suggestions, will-suggestions, emotional and sensational suggestions on different levels, coming to us from other persons or from the environmental and universal forces. With the help of occultism we can know these movements and their laws, master them, and use their powers or protect ourselves from them.

In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga our approach to the Divine is integral. God or Spirit is not only Supreme Truth and Supreme Love, but also Supreme Power. Therefore for an integral perfection the aspect of Power, achieved partly through the practice of occultism, cannot be ignored or brushed aside. Of what effective use is our knowledge and love if we are left helpless, impotent?

I will now try to outline the important role that occultism has to play in man's evolution towards spiritual perfection. To put it in Sri Aurobindo's own words: "It is evident that if we can live...deeper within and put out steadily the inner forces into the outer instrumentation or raise ourselves to dwell on higher and wider levels and bring their powers to bear on physical existence, not merely receive influences descending from them, which is all we can now do, there could begin a heightening of our force of conscious being so as to create a new principle of consciousness, a new range of activities, new values for all things, a widening of our consciousness and life, a taking up and transformation of the lower grades of our existence,—in brief, the whole evolutionary process by which the Spirit in Nature creates a higher type of being. Each step could mean a pace, however distant from the goal, or a close approach leading to a larger and more divine being, a larger and more divine force and consciousness, knowledge and will, sense of existence and delight in existence; there could be an initial unfolding towards the divine life."¹

In India, the knowledge and practice of occultism were thoroughly systematised and the extent of its maturity can be seen still intact in the remarkable system of the Tantras. Occult powers, in ancient times, were not shunned by our great Rishis; instead they recognised them as a part of Yogic siddhi, "used them with an abundant and unhesitating vigour. They are recognised in our sacred books, formally included in Yoga by so devotional a Purana as the Bhagawat, noted and some of their processes were carefully tabled by Patanjali."²

In the West, occultism never reached its majority because, as Sri Aurobindo says, "it never acquired ripeness and a philosophic or sound systematic foundation. It indulged too freely in the romance of the supernatural...and deviated into magic white and black or into a romantic or thaumaturgic paraphernalia of occult mysticism and an exaggeration of what was after all a limited and scanty knowledge. These tendencies and this insecurity of mental foundation made it difficult to defend and easy to discredit, a target facile and vulnerable."³ But today things have changed very much as the West has realised that Matter is not

¹ *The Life Divine* (Cent Ed., Vol 19), pp 722-23

² Sri Aurobindo, *Archives and Research*, April 1985, p 9

³ *The Life Divine* (Cent Ed., Vol 19), p 870

the sole truth of existence and we are seeing several new developments indicating a swing towards the revival of the old occultism. There are many in the West who are now seeking for the truth of occultism through various parapsychological phenomena like hypnotism, clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy, etc. But though their seeking is mostly a blind groping, their sincerity in the search is genuine. Scientific investigation is today penetrating into the still hidden secrets and powers of mind, life and matter. A close study of abnormal or supernormal psychological phenomena is throwing new light on this subject. But if any modern effort undertaken to revive this ancient system is to fulfil itself it must always keep in mind the true aim and direction towards which it should move, and the necessary precautions that have to be taken on the way. Its most important aim must be to discover the secret truths and forces of Nature and to use them for the greater effectivity of our mental, vital and spiritual being leading towards our higher perfection.

A word of caution in the use of these forces is necessary because, like all forces of physical Nature which modern Science has mastered, these deeper supraphysical occult forces of mind-nature and life-nature can also be misused for egoistic purposes and produce catastrophic consequences. But as Sri Aurobindo pointedly remarks: "The misuse of great powers is no argument against their right use."¹ In fact in man's higher evolutionary development, many powers or faculties, which now appear to us supernormal, will automatically develop and become normal. This is especially so in a dynamic Yoga like Sri Aurobindo's, which seeks for integral perfection. Sri Aurobindo therefore does not subscribe to the view that, because of the great dangers involved in their misuse, the spiritual seekers should avoid the use of occult powers altogether. I quote here a passage in which he states this point very explicitly:

"The idea that yogins do not or ought not to use these [occult] powers I regard as an ascetic superstition. I believe that all yogins who have these powers do use them whenever they find that they are called on from within to do so. They may refrain if they think the use in a particular case is contrary to the Divine Will or see that preventing one evil may be opening the door to a worse or for any other valid reason, but not from any general prohibitory rule. What is forbidden to anyone with a strong spiritual sense is to be a miracle-monger, performing extraordinary things for show, for gain, for fame, out of vanity or pride. It is forbidden to use powers for mere vital motives, to make an Asuric ostentation of them or to turn them into a support for arrogance, conceit, ambition or any other of the amiable weaknesses to which human nature is prone. It is because half-baked yogins so often fall into these traps of the hostile forces that the use of yogic powers is sometimes discouraged as harmful to the user."²

¹ *The Human Cycle* (Cent Ed., Vol 15), p 36

² *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed., Vol 22), p 481

Since Sri Aurobindo was of the view that occult powers can be rightly used, he himself not only made ample use of them for his own yogic development but also for his active intervention in Indian and world-movements. When, after retiring from outer active participation in Indian politics, he came to Pondicherry, people generally thought that he had completely withdrawn into the silence of the free and pure Spirit, dissociating himself totally from Indian and world-affairs. But that this was altogether wrong is clearly proved by a statement of his own which I read here. It is written in the third person but it is by himself.

“But this [retirement from Indian political activity] did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action.”¹

The Mother, too, has made extensive use of occult powers in her own Yoga as well as in her work in the Ashram and the outside world. In fact, occultism has been a subject that has interested her since she was only twelve years old. In 1907, when she went to Algeria to live with Monsieur and Madame Théon, two great occultists, she undertook a systematic training in the use of the occult forces from them. She has never avoided the use of occult forces whenever they were necessary to be used for the Divine's work. In fact, the effectivity of her action for the spiritual progress of the Ashram sadhaks and the organisation of the Ashram work, as well as for her action on India and the world, depends largely on her use of occult and spiritual powers.

¹ *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), p 38