

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SEPTEMBER 1993

PRICE: Rs. 8.00

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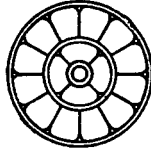
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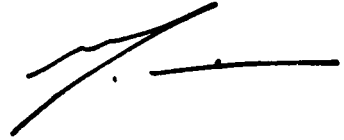
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India  
Editor's Phone 24782  
Publishers Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Editor K D SETHNA  
Published by HARIKANT C PATEL  
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST  
PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002  
Printed by AMIYO RANJAN GANGULY  
at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press Pondicherry 605 002  
PRINTED IN INDIA  
Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No R N 8667/63

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## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLVI

No. 9

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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• **LIGHTS FROM THE MOTHER \***

*(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1993)*

*Has the lack of consecration of the Aurovilians and the wastage taking place there something to do with the fact that money is not coming for Auroville?*

CERTAINLY the attitude of most of them is not favourable to the wealth of Auroville and does not create an atmosphere that is attractive to money.

5 March 1969

*Everyone criticises the Creator of the universe—He seems to be the most criticised of all beings. I hope that he takes it all with a smile.*

The smile is constant. And it is a marvellous smile which has the power to change the worst catastrophes into bliss.

9 March 1969

*It is becoming evident that the Divine is more concerned with the progress of the sadhak than the sadhak himself can be.*

This is certain. Even a very ardent aspiration is but a reflection of the triumphal march of the Divine—and this in Perfect Peace!

11 March 1969

*Often I find that if I criticise some action of others, I do the same thing later, and that with justification.*

Yes, and this is how one learns not to criticise. For most often the criticism is a lack of understanding or some narrowness, and if we want to be truly useful, it is *He alone* who can teach us what we must be and what we must do to grow closer to the Supreme Lord and ultimately to consciously unite with Him.

15 March 1969

*Is it the psychic being that knows, or can know, what the Supreme Lord expects of me?*

Yes, the psychic being not only has the capacity to know but also to realise. The psychic being, far better than the mind and vital, understands the body and knows how to make it obey.

21 March 1969

\* With acknowledgments to the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* from the issues of November 1991 to February 1993

*There is a joy in knowing the future, there is also a joy in walking the virgin path, carefree, in the Mother's arms!*

These two joys are not in the same domain. It is the mind that enjoys knowing the future, it is the psychic that is at ease with the attitude of trusting surrender.

23 March 1969

*Mother has said, "The remedy lies at the centre of the evil." Is this because the Divine is at the centre of everything?*

Yes. And if we know how to go always to the deep centre of every difficulty, we find there the supreme remedy.

31 March 1969

*As soon as some demand or expectation enters into love, love disappears, doesn't it?*

Divine love in its purity is sufficient unto itself and it is eternal. But as soon as it manifests upon earth, it is mixed with all the egoistic movements of the mind, vital and body. Thus it is veiled and distorted beyond all recognition. What men call love is a sad caricature of the essential love, Divine Love.

2 April 1969

*In the case of profound things, true understanding often comes when I am not trying to understand.*

It is always the mind that tries to understand—outer, superficial things it can understand and even explain, but profound things it does not understand; they belong to another domain, to a higher and purer light. It is only when the mind is silent that this consciousness awakens in us and understands.

10 April 1969

*Is it preferable for me to continue to have fixed hours of meditation?*

Fixed hours are usually recommended with the idea that the outer nature gets accustomed to them and thus offers less resistance.

But my experience has been different. It has been my experience that true concentration imposes itself at the right moment and that when one obeys this inner inspiration the contemplation, the concentration and even the meditation, which is exclusively a mental phenomenon, are of a very high quality and much less mechanical.

12 April 1969

*From today I am giving up fixed hours of meditation. I aspire to live more and more in the true consciousness at Your feet.*

It is good.

Yesterday I asked this Consciousness what condition was needed to be able to receive it without deformation. It replied, "One must be able to stand in the Supreme Consciousness without casting a shadow." This means the absence of ego.

14 April 1969

*Now I can see the play of my ego in reactions where before I saw the ego of others.*

This is a great progress and makes it much easier to have the inner equality that is indispensable for the yoga.

16 April 1969

*For me, prayer is now more a means of opening myself than of making myself heard.*

It is certain that the Supreme Lord knows better than we do what we think, what we want and what we need. One tells it to Him not so that He knows it, but to offer oneself to Him as totally as one can.

26 April 1969

*What should be the sadhak's attitude towards his wasted past, to which are being added, no doubt, most of the present moments?*

We cannot get rid of the ties binding us to the world of ignorance entirely and all at once.

But the Grace is there to comfort us, and we should have complete confidence in its action. And if we turn constantly towards the Supreme Consciousness, being receptive to It alone, we are doing all that it is in our power to do.

30 April 1969

*Instead of asking Your blessings for what seems good to me, I would like to be able to know Your will and obey it.*

Yes, this is very good.

When one asks for something, it is the Grace that responds and grants it, and one progresses if one is grateful. But if one aspires without asking, it is the

Supreme Consciousness that hears and at once responds with the most favourable conditions for the fastest integral progress.

4 May 1969

*Are conditions more favourable now for the Yoga of the body?*

Since this new consciousness<sup>1</sup> has been at work upon earth, it is definitely helping the Yoga of the body in a powerful way. But even now it is not an easy thing and it demands that the body be neither over-delicate nor fearful, and of course that it be free of desires.

15 May 1969

*There is a very vague perception of a fantastic possibility: it is that one day the body would be able to feel itself to be physically one with all existence.*

This is just the experience that this physical body (which is reading and writing here) is having more and more. And I find it interesting that you came to know something of it without my ever having told you anything about it.

23 May 1969

*How happy I would be if the Mother would give me a new birth every morning!*

If you mean by “new birth” an opening of the consciousness to the innumerable inner fields that are as yet unexplored, it is possible on condition that your thirst for progress is ardent and sustained. For that you must come to me in the morning in a state of aspiration, but passive and receptive and, if possible, without thought.

27 May 1969

*I want to learn to bear insults with a smile.*

It is very easy when one is convinced that the Divine alone knows the Truth and that human opinions have no true value.

19 June 1969

*I would like to do sadhana as a child of the Mother.*

For me sadhana consists in loving the Divine more and more integrally, more and more absolutely, with a love so total that it leads to identification.

9 July 1969

<sup>1</sup> The superman consciousness



*What is the secret of Your constant and invariable smile?*

Constant contact with the Supreme Lord.

13 July 1969

*If I could let the past drop off like an old robe, I could be a new-born child.*

Try to concentrate your consciousness on the Divine Presence, which is a concrete fact, and the past will fade away by itself quite naturally.

15 July 1969

*Can we hope that the new consciousness which descended on the first of January will do in the field of Yoga what the astronauts are doing in the scientific field?*

What the astronauts have just done on the moon is certainly a marvellous achievement of calculation, endurance and courage; but these are the realisations of a child compared to what the new Consciousness is in the process of achieving on earth, which will lead to the creation of the superman.

23 July 1969

*The prayer "What You want" seems to solve problems better than specific prayers.*

According to my experience, this is the prayer that provides the best attitude in every circumstance.

29 July 1969

*Does Durga's lion represent the Power of the Divine over adverse forces?*

It can be understood in that way.

But in the vital there is a lion, very much alive, who is very often near me and whom several people have often seen. This is not an animal, of course, though its form has an animal appearance symbolic of its royal strength.

4 August 1969

*The pleasure of possessing now seems like dust in comparison with self-giving.*

The pleasure of possessing is something purely vital and physical; as the inner being develops and the consciousness widens, it is replaced by a sense of judicious use and becomes a clear vision of the true use of everything.

6 August 1969

*I understand that the true use of things depends on the loss of the sense of ownership and on the growth of consciousness.*

The sense of ownership belongs to the ego, and when the ego disappears the sense of ownership is replaced by the correct vision of the true use of each thing (money or object) and one has only to act according to what one sees.

8 August 1969

*When Mother is late for her lunch I say to myself, "The Divine likes to be late in all things!"*

Would it not be, rather, that for the Divine time does not exist, or at any rate does not have the same value that man gives to it?

12 August 1969

*Without the disappearance of the ego, my true life with You does not begin.*

The best way to make it disappear is to widen it to the size of the universe. You can do this without violence, but with quiet persistence. I am with you in your effort.

22 August 1969

*Can the manifestation come to its dissolution, its Pralaya?*

A very old tradition, more ancient than the Vedas, says that the present manifestation is the seventh, that the six preceding ones were followed by six pralayas, but that this one will be transformed perpetually, without returning to the Creator.

3 September 1969

*Perhaps the old tradition had foreseen the supramentalisation in the seventh manifestation, with its eternal transformation.*

It had foreseen not only the supramentalisation of Matter, but also the appearance of the new species that must succeed man and be immortal.

5 September 1969

*(To be continued)*

# IDEAS AND IDEALS

## PASSAGES FROM SRI AUROBINDO

### *Compiler's Note*

*(‘Ideals,’ declares Sri Aurobindo, are ‘truths that have not yet effected themselves for man’. In the following politico-economic ideas advanced by Sri Aurobindo are involved some ideals which wait for their manifestation in our present field of operation. But the success of the execution of the ideal depends, according to Sri Aurobindo, upon the ‘glory of the vision and the ardour of the effort’.—G.P. GUPTA)*

### **Control of the Public Purse**

... (THIS) administrative side of the national organisation has three principal parts, financial, executive proper and judicial. The financial power carries with it the control of the public purse and the expenditure of the wealth contributed by the society for national purposes, and it is evident that this must pass into the hands of whatever authority has taken up the business of organising and making efficient the united action of the community. But that authority in its impulse towards an undivided and uncontrolled gestation, a complete unification of powers must naturally desire not only to determine the expenditure according to its own free will, but to determine also the contributions of the society to the public purse both in its amount and in its repartition over the individuals and classes who constitute the nation. Monarchy in its impulse towards a despotic centrality has always sought to engross and struggled to retain this power; for the control over the purse of the nation is the most important sign and the most effective element of real sovereignty, more essential perhaps than the control over life and limb. In the most despotic regimes, this control is absolute and extends to the power of confiscation and despoliation otherwise than by judicial procedure. On the other hand, a ruler who has to bargain with his subjects over the amount of their contribution and the methods of taxation, is at once hedged in in his sovereignty and is not in fact the sole and entire sovereign. A vital power is in the hands of an inferior estate of the realm and can be turned against him fatally in any struggle for the shifting of the sovereignty from him to that estate. That is the reason why the supreme political instinct of the English people fixed, in the struggle for the monarchy, upon this question of taxation as the first vital point in a conflict for the power of the purse. Once that was settled in the Parliament by the defeat of the Stuarts, the transformation of the monarchical sovereignty into the sovereignty of the people or, more accurately, the shifting of the organic control from the throne to the aristocracy, thence to the bourgeoisie,

and again to the whole people,—the latter two steps, one still incomplete, comprising the rapid evolution of the last eighty years,—was only a question of time. In France, the successful practical absorption of this control was the strength of the monarchy; it was its inability to manage with justice and economy the public purse, its unwillingness to tax the enormous riches of the aristocracy and clergy as against the crushing taxation on the people and the consequent necessity of deferring again to the nation which provided the opportunity for the Revolution. In advanced modern countries we have a controlling authority which claims at least to represent more or less perfectly the whole nation; individuals and classes have to submit because there is no appeal from the will of the whole society. But even so, it is questions, not of taxation, but of the proper organisation and administration of the economic life of the society which are preparing the revolutions of the future.

Sri Aurobindo: *Social and Political Thought* (Birth Cent. Ed.), Vol. 15, pp. 427-8.

\*

### Labour-Capital Concert

... The hope of a concert between Labour and Capital idyllically settling all their acute causes of conflict in amoebaeen stanzas of melodious compromise for the sake of the higher national interests is likely to be as treacherous and delusive. Even the socialisation of governments and the increasing nationalisation of industry will not remove the root cause of conflict. For there will still remain the crucial question of the form and conditions of the new State socialism, whether it shall be regulated in the interests of Labour or of the capitalistic State and whether its direction shall be democratic by the workers themselves or oligarchic or bureaucratic by the present directing classes. This question may well lead to struggles which may easily grow into an international or at least an inter-European conflict; it might even rend each nation in two instead of uniting it as in the war crisis. And the results of such a struggle may have an incalculable effect, either in changing the ideas and life of men dynamically in new directions or in breaking down the barriers of existing nations and empires.

Sri Aurobindo: *Social and Political Thought* (Birth Cent. Ed.), Vol. 15, p. 380.

\*

### Politician and Statesman

... The politician and the statesman—and the world is now full of politicians but very empty of statesmen—act in accordance with this average general mind of the mass; the one is governed by it, the other has always to take it into chief account and cannot lead it where he will, unless he is one of those great geniuses

and powerful personalities who unite a large mind and dynamic force of conception with an enormous power or influence over men. Moreover, the political mind has limitations of its own beyond those of the general average mind of the mass; it is even more respectful of the *status quo*, more disinclined to great adventures in which the safe footing of the past has to be abandoned, more incapable of launching out into the uncertain and the new. To do that it must either be forced by general opinion or a powerful interest or else itself fall under the spell of a great new enthusiasm diffused in the mental atmosphere of the times.

If the politician mind is left entirely to itself, we could expect no better tangible result of the greatest international convulsion on record than a rearrangement of frontiers, a redistribution of power and possessions and a few desirable or undesirable developments of international, commercial and other relations. That is one disastrous possibility leading to more disastrous convulsions—so long as the problem is not solved—against which the future of the world is by no means secure.

... It is immaterial whether these belong to a governing class or emerge as in modern States from the mass partly by force of character, but much more by force of circumstances; nor does it make any essential difference that their aims and ideals are imposed nowadays more by the hypnotism of verbal persuasion than by overt and actual force. In either case there is no guarantee that this ruling class or ruling body represents the best mind of the nation or its noblest aims or its highest instincts.

Nothing of the kind can be asserted of the modern politician in any part of the world; he does not represent the soul of a people or its aspirations. What he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. Great issues often come to him for decision but he does not deal with them greatly; high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they become rapidly the claptrap of a party. The disease and falsehood of modern political life is patent in every country of the world and only the hypnotised acquiescence of all, even of the intellectual classes, in the great organised sham, cloaks and prolongs the malady, the acquiescence that men yield to everything that is habitual and makes the present atmosphere of their lives. Yet it is by such minds that the good of all has to be decided, to such hands that it has to be entrusted, to such an agency calling itself the State that the individual is being more and more called upon to give up the government of his activities. As a matter of fact, it is in no way the largest good of all that is thus secured, but a great deal of organised blundering and evil with a certain amount of good which makes for real progress, because Nature moves forward always in the midst of all stumblings and secures her aims in the end more often in spite of man's imperfect mentality than by its means.

Sri Aurobindo: *Social and Political Thought* (Birth Cent. Ed.), Vol. 15, pp. 363; 278-279.

# LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

## SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

I AM always very pleased to read of your meditative experience: “At will I am able to step back and offer myself to the Mother and consequently I feel a kind of presence around my head.” You also write apropos of your Physics examination: “This time while taking the test I feel as if all this is happening outside me.” In tune with these words are the later ones: “I seem to be always a bit lost. All the activities appear to be happening outside me. I don’t feel interested in anything; everywhere around I find things so obstinate, rigid. The sole solace I get is to watch the gentle sway of tall trees in the breeze, to watch the movements of small leaves as if giggling with joy, to sit in my room alone with the lights off and listen to the Mother’s music, and dream...”

The presence around your head is the two hands of Sri Aurobindo on either side of it, blessing you in response to your stepping back at will and offering yourself to the Mother. Sri Aurobindo has blessed me like that. It was a way of his when he saw that one had moved close to the Mother in one’s heart.

You have also passed beyond your outer self: hence the feeling that everything is happening outside yourself. There is a detachment from the mundane routine, and there is a lack of interest in common affairs and a pull only towards Nature’s beauty and the beauty of the new world the Mother is striving to manifest—a new world whose rhythm of being is caught in the mystic depth and magic movement of her music. A little more inward development and you will cross from the stance of non-interestedness to the attitude of disinterestedness. In that stance you have separated yourself from the flow of time, feeling that flow to be insignificant and even misdirected. The attitude towards which you will move is one in which the importance of your very self will be lost and you will turn to the flow of time in order to help it in its difficult passages without any thought of how things will affect you. You will act with an impersonality, but this impersonality will not be cold: it will be warm with the soul’s love of the divinity that dwells in all things. Indeed, the Divine beyond one’s own small self will act for the Divine who lives in others, though unknown to them. Disinterestedness does not always have this spiritual awareness, but it tends towards it and ultimately discovers its source in that secret splendour. (10.5.1993)

\*

The sight of your epistolary diarrhoea (at least one letter every day) makes my present constipation in the same line a little ashamed. So I am letting myself go just a little.

You ask me: “Should I do something specific to ensure and hasten my

walking on the sunlit path? For that matter, is it at all in my hands even in a small measure?"

All Yoga is a transaction between God in quest of man and man in search of God or, if you like a somewhat paradoxical turn, God from beyond man pulling him and God from behind and within man pushing him. Perhaps the most Chesteronian way of putting the matter would be: the archetypal Man who is God is at hide-and-seek with the evolving God who is Man. The long and short of the Yogic situation in your context is that you have to make a movement towards the Divine at the same time that you appeal to the Supreme Grace to move in your direction faster than you find it doing.

What should be your movement? The cultivation of an even temper in relation not only to the various personalities you meet but also to the various personalities in yourself. The central you who has to be poised in peace has to face undisturbed the peripheral entities whom you also accept as parts of your being. The central you is the one who wants to do Yoga as well as to raise to its finest pitch the career you have chosen. Perhaps the vague urge to be a polymath, mastering many fields of knowledge, is also organic to the centre but belongs to what I may dub the periphery internal to the centre itself. Try to bring the several you's of the real periphery, who hover round the Yogic you, into harmonious affinity with the latter. Let them not tug you this way and that but turn to wherever they are drawn in a condition of tranquil strength. The Yogic you should have a hold on them, not complete at the moment yet proceeding towards completeness. And when there is an increasing tendency not to run away from the centre, the aspiration that is in you to give yourself to the Mother will light little candles, as it were, in all your peripheral parts and in the midst of that ring of soft illumination the Yogic you will break into a finer, an intenser flame. This will be the signal of your entering the sunlit path.

You complain and regret that "Remember and Offer" is not as frequent an act as it should be. Perhaps you are making it too mental an affair. Of course to stop at times and talk to the Mother, "Here I am offering to you what I am doing so that you may turn it into a further step closer to you," is a good practice. Especially good it is when something hurtful impinges on you and, instead of directly reacting to it in a personal manner, you divert it in the Mother's direction so that it gets lost in her all-transmuting vastness and becomes for you a blessing in disguise at a near or distant point in the future. But one is not at all times in a state of leisure, as it were, to receive such unpleasant guests: one is often at work. Then the question is: how, after initially offering the affair in hand to the Mother, is one to keep up the offering-gesture while the mind is occupied? Of course one can stop the work now and again and repeat the offering. But I am thinking of a long-term solution. And this solution can come only by practising the presence of God—an interiorisation of the consciousness until the deep heart opens and one grows aware of oneself as a being that has been put forth by the

Divine—and this Divinity is a constant Presence by the side of that being and the very essence of oneself is love and worship of the Greatness and the Grace ever before one in the deep heart's temple. The best way I know of in order to enter this temple is to visualise Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as they used to sit together on the Darshan days or else to visualise one or the other of them and imagine one's head bowed to him or her for the touch of their benediction. As a result of this practice of their presence, all one's moments will be a flow of one's depths towards them without any effort no matter what one may be doing. Then there is no call for deliberate dedication or consecration. No room is left for praying or praising. Just to breathe is to remember the Mother: just for the heart to beat is to offer everything to her.

Broadly appropriate here is the feeling in a passage from Wordsworth which has been one of my favourites though it is not as well known as some others of a like tenor from the Tintern-Abbey poem or from *The Excursion* or *The Prelude*. I am referring to the lines that close the description of "the growing Youth" watching from the naked top of a bold headland the sun rise and bathe the world in light:

... Far and wide the clouds were touched,  
 And in their silent faces could be read  
 Unutterable love. Sound needed none,  
 Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank  
 The spectacle: sensation, soul and form,  
 All melted into him; they swallowed up  
 His animal being; in them did he live,  
 And by them did he live; they were his life.  
 In such access of mind, in such high hour.  
 Of visitation from the living God,  
 Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.  
 No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;  
 Rapt into still communion that transcends  
 The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
 His mind was a thanksgiving to the powers  
 That made him; it was blessedness and love!

One of your questions is: "What must be our attitude towards devotional songs outside the purview of Aurobindonian music, songs and other devotional music?" Behind all such expression, there are the Godward heart and mind of humanity, the religio-spiritual aspiration for a supreme Purity and Power and Perfection which has taken various names and forms in the life of mankind. If we pierce through the diversity and particularity to the basic Eternal and Infinite and Divine shining through them, we need have no sense of differing or side-



tracking from the Aurobindonian Presence. It is when we get the oppressive atmosphere of attitudes like “No salvation outside the Church” or “There is no god except Allah” that we have to be on guard. A single-tracked intolerance, deeming all creeds other than the one espoused to be false and pernicious, a fanatical religiosity whose motto is “Convert or kill or at least strike dumb”—a strain of this is what we have to fight clear of. All religio-spiritual movements have their own particular emphasis. The Aurobindonian movement keeps in view a Divine Consciousness which holds the original models of mind, life-force and body, an ideal or archetypal mentality, vitality and physicality—a Supramental Consciousness which is not only a manifested Perfection beyond the mind-level but also a hidden Perfection in the very depths of Matter, gradually releasing by an evolutionary process life-force and mind and heading towards Supermind partly by its own push and partly by the pressure and pull of the veil-less glories beyond, with the result that the climax of world-existence will be in that existence itself, a fully transfigured terrestrial life in the end. Here is a radical divergence from the usual spiritual formula which takes the earth-scene to be merely an interim stage with possibilities of nothing else than attractive variations on the same theme of longing reveries at play around deplorably unchanging realities “Not here but elsewhere”—these words from a poem of Tagore sum up all past religion and spirituality’s vision of soul-fulfilment. If there is a strong vein of this vision in the music you speak of, you have to guard against falling under its spell. But I must confess that any kind of music which reaches an acme of inspiration—however otherworldly its ostensible thrust—can serve us as a tremendous drive into the inner being, and to be drawn inward with such an extreme of felicitous force is a great gain to the soul practising any Yoga. Even if the motive of the music is not directly religious or spiritual, there could be a self-transcending ecstasy of human love in which the heart of insatiable desire loses its identity in a super-sleep, as it were, of a nameless night. I am thinking of both the prelude and the *grand finale* of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isoldë*, exquisite with now poignant now defunctive music. To avoid yielding to such grandeurs and sonorities of artistic creation simply on the doctrinaire grounds that Sri Aurobindo is not for such romantic escapism would mean missing a mighty though indirect upliftment to the Yoga of Bhakti, of Devotion, seeking to merge the human spirit in the unknown Beloved.

I’ll deal with one more question of yours today: “How does one manage to give one’s composite self to the Mother? Gather all the movements in one large peaceful upward offering, or offer separately one’s awareness of each of the movements and parts and traits—negative and positive—at the feet of the Mother? How does one prevent the consciousness from slipping off to one’s old weak humdrum self?”

In self-offering, there seem to me to be two attitudes. In one we are a composite bundle, a whole of consciousness holding numerous movements and

offering them as all being ourselves. In the other we take separately our defects and put each at the Mother's feet while dissociating it from our identity as the giver. The second way strikes me as being more systematic and also as involving in its very act a helpful detachment from the troublesome part or trait—for at least the time during which the offering takes place. We become the witness, free from the offending movement though still aware that this movement is our own. If the witness-poise is sustained for long and repeated often, the sense of ownership will weaken and even when the trait falls back into our nature it will seem to be not a member of the family but an unwelcome guest somehow lodging in our house. No doubt, there will be occasions when the undesirable part is too vehemently active to be pushed outward as an offering: on such occasions we should try to offer it along with ourselves as one whole. When the part is not so assertive and is just an unpleasant presence with no more than a threat to become assertive, we should make it a frequent practice to pull it out and hold it at arm's length as an object for the Mother to manage. I presume she would take away the particular stain of the movement while returning to us the energy as such which is behind it.

I remember consulting the Mother as to how to throw the undesirable qualities in me into the soul's purifying fire. Should I try to feel this fire to be within me or see it as an upward-rising glow in front of me? My aversion to seeing it inside was due to my feeling that the very defects I wanted to be free from were still being thrown back within me in the very process of my wanting to be rid of them! If I visualise Agni, the Fire-god, in his role of all-refiner as a splendour in front of me, I thrust my dross out of my body and feel liberated from it. As a Parsi, dubbed "fire-worshipper" in religious classification, I had been accustomed to face in temple or at home the urn bearing the golden bouquet of flames flying up, sustained by logs of fragrant sandalwood. This fire, addressed as "Son of God" in the Avesta, the Zoroastrian scripture, symbolised the Divine Presence in the midst of the world, in the midst of each living creature, an "objective correlative" of the ineffable secrecy in the human heart. The sandalwood signified the concentrated prayer-perfumed dedication of the soul in us. This dedication would cover every kind of matter we may set before God and give it a sanctified air in spite of some materials being our baser characteristics. It would be natural to the Parsi in me to project the process of purification instead of introjecting it. The Mother said to me that it was all the same whether I acted one way or the other. I took her answer to be on a par to what she would have said if I had asked her: "Should I think of the Divine as within my heart or as standing before me?" The Divine as an omnipresence could be situated anywhere. Indeed, the very fact of our two Gurus living as Divinity incarnate outside us and satisfying our urge to worship what is greater than we are, an Other reminding us of our need to outgrow our own smallness and yet figuring what is hidden deep within us as our own true reality—verily,

the existence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as Avatars amongst us to whom we daily related our little selves, laying both our virtues and vices at their feet, would justify my disposition to see the soul-fire without rather than within as the all-purifying Power.

As regards the danger of the consciousness slipping down, it is often there as long as the Yoga is done principally by the mind. If the deep heart is awakened, a spontaneity comes into play and one is not called upon to make an effort. The mind too can get into a habit of keeping itself uplifted, but some slight strain will be experienced now and again, whereas the heart's turning of the consciousness towards the Divine can go on as effortlessly as its own beating. I know that the Yogic heart too can get veiled by what are termed "lower vital movements", but these can stand also in the way of the Yogic mind. The difference is that as soon as they cease the Yogic heart's spontaneity breaks forth easily whereas the Yogic mind takes time to set its course again. This advantage of the former should not lead us to take those upsurges of the lower vital lightly. A habitual recurrence of them can seriously block our psychic depths.

Among these upsurges I include, as Sri Aurobindo himself has done, not only the drive towards the sex-act but also the itch to masturbate. In contrast to the grim warnings by the old school of doctors, the modern medical view is pretty lenient about that itch. And I dare say that for somebody striving to do Yoga outside the Ashram masturbation may not assume a particularly grave aspect any more than would the normal sex-act, since the Yoga is not necessarily whole-hearted. But, from the strict viewpoint of Ashram life as well as of a whole-hearted Yoga outside, it cannot be looked upon with the levity of the modern-minded medico. Let me quote a correspondence I had with Sri Aurobindo.<sup>1</sup> It was in connection with a visiting aspirant who was an extreme and chronic masturbator. He was a good man but with a terrible twist in his vital nature. A number of times he had come to my room for a chat and each time I had got a severe headache by his very presence. Though his visits to the Ashram were well-meant they could not be sustained for long. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo: "For my work I had to go to X's room after one of his flights from here and I found several scraps of writing by him scattered all over. Out of curiosity I read some of them. They were desperate cries of one caught in the masturbation-complex. I felt very uncomfortable later as if the imp or imps responsible for his aberrancy had clung on to me or come close on my heels." Sri Aurobindo replied: "Evidently it must have been like that, for with the masturbation there is always some clinging influence of this kind which can become a sort of possession as in X's case who is hagridden by this thing and helpless to shake it off. The only thing is to give it no hold at all by an immediate refusal and turning away of the mind from the suggestions which usually come with the impulse."

<sup>1</sup> *Life-Literature-Yoga* Some Letters of Sri Aurobindo Revised and Enlarged Edition (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1967), pp 27-28

This was written on 27.4.1937. It was soon followed by another note from Sri Aurobindo: "Never yield to that. It would mean allowing a possession of certain centres or movements by a very low kind of elementals and a serious *détraquement* in your sadhana hereafter."

Almost everybody at one time or another has slid into the practice of what used to be called "self-abuse". And I have learned that the impulse to it is naturally accompanied by a vague erotic imagination. If one stops this imagination from becoming particularised, if one fends off its tendency to acquire concrete name and form, one can shove the impulse aside. Up to a certain point the impulse is not irresistible. One must have the wish and the will not to overstep that point. And, along with them, one must seek some kind of diversion. Of course, for those who are on the spiritual path the best way is to superimpose on the incipient erotic imagination the remembrance of the compassionate face of our Lord Sri Aurobindo and the affectionate countenance of our Divine Mother. (18.5.1993)

AMAL KIRAN  
(K.D. SETHNA)

## NIRODBARAN'S TALK ON CHAMPAKLAL

*(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1993)*

### THE END

WE divided Champaklal's life in the Ashram into three parts: 1) from his youth to Sri Aurobindo's passing; 2) from Sri Aurobindo's passing to the Mother's departure; and 3) from then on to his own exit, all the parts making up about 73 years, which is the longest period of stay in the Ashram after Nolinida's, I believe.

I have described the first two parts from my own personal contact with him and from other sadhaks.

Now comes the last part, a very dolorous dénouement to the life-long dedication of a sadhak in the devoted service of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I shall content myself with giving only the salient points of this part so that the readers and admirers of "Maharaj" may have a fairly rounded picture of his life—a part which is not very widely known but which adds a significant aspect that completes the personality of the man.

Well, after this preamble, I must confess straightaway that the readers may find the following very sad reading and may ask themselves many questions about it without finding satisfactory answers.

I have said that Maharaj had finally returned home after his long globe-trotting during which he spread the Mother's message to the world through his unique way of Silence. I don't know if he intended to resume his journeys later, but his long peregrinations in the late seventies and eighties with a frail body had taken their toll. Whenever he returned, he had always a few admirers who would attend on him and give him bath, massage, etc. One morning we found to our shocking surprise that he was lying on the floor of his room in a kind of trance. There were no movements of his body, his eyes were closed. I suspected a mild stroke. I told the attendants that we should let him remain lying down and request Dr. Datta to come immediately. I had to go somewhere for a while. On my return I learned that Dr. Datta had found that Maharaj had had a mild stroke affecting the right side of his body. He could not move his right arm and leg. He had to be confined to bed. Now a systematic regime was started consisting of massage and walking with the help and support of volunteers in rotation throughout the day. Fortunately there was no dearth of volunteers to serve him and they were mostly young men from Gujarat and Orissa. Neither was there any lack of money. To nurse a paralytic patient is not an easy job, because of his loss of ability to make voluntary movements. Muscles had to be reeducated by regular artificial exercises. For a man who had been used to leading an active life, it was indeed a severe physical and psychological tapasya which Maharaj

endured in the best of spirits. He would not express to anybody his inner condition even in writing, but we noticed that he always kept a cheerful expression, and a sweet smile greeted close friends who came to see how he was. There were plenty of visitors from Gujarat, Orissa and other places coming regularly to see their Dadaji in the morning, afternoon and even at night. They would sit by his bedside, sometimes for hours. Many suggestions were followed by way of treatment but none seemed to produce any substantial effect. On the contrary, the limbs gradually began to lose their power of movement. My role was very small—to keep a regular watch over his daily movements and enquire about his health. As I was busy during the day, I would spend some time in the evening with him. Maharaj had kept a chair reserved for me and, when I came, he would greet me with a smile and ask about *my* health by means of gestures.

Kamala attended to his diet. Here she had to face a big difficulty, for his food intake began gradually to diminish. In spite of her ingenuity in cooking various dishes he liked he would eat very little. I would see every day how much she had to coax him to eat some more with hardly any effect.

One very invaluable service that was rendered by his admirers and devotees at this time was to draft a number of books during this illness. I don't know exactly what method was employed to bring out his experiences in book-form. Did Maharaj scribble them with his left hand on a slate or on pieces of paper, which the scribes transcribed to make books. At any rate, I would see some sadhikas attending on him regularly and reading to him from some texts, and we must be grateful to them for having done an excellent job. Otherwise so much of his inner life would have remained unknown to us. But, typically, he never mentioned anything about his physical troubles.

Of his various ailments, one was noticeable to all: he would groan with pain from time to time and press his head with his usable hand as if it was the seat of the pain. At night too he would cry out with the pain. When I would ask him about it, he would not give any reply. I would wonder if the Force was acting upon his body, which he could not bear. Much later the agony subsided.

Another curious sign of his ailments was that at times he would cough up thick sticky phlegm. The doctor found congestion in the lungs, due probably to his flat position. The drugs were not of much help. At times during his meals, bouts of cough would suddenly seize him and he would bring out thick phlegm.

This symptom continued without any improvement, in spite of various treatments. The patient was finally confined to bed most of the time. But throughout his illness a stream of people used to come and seek his blessings which Maharaj gave unstintingly. A striking feature was that quite a number of people saw a golden light coming down on him from above, or they found his body suffused with it. This made me hope against hope that eventually, by some miracle, the Force would cure him. But one day I heard our Guru's voice saying, "I'm waiting for him. He will come straight to me." Maharaj also had realised

that he would not recover and he indicated from time to time that his end was nearing.

Then, for some mysterious reason, he made up his mind to once again leave the Ashram even though, in my view, things had gone beyond hope.

The way it happened was like this. Some Naturopath from Gujarat known to Maharaj had come to see him and had suggested that since no improvement was visible his treatment could be given a chance, but he did not promise a cure. Maharaj consented to go out and undergo the treatment. When I heard of it from one of his attendants, it shocked me and I doubted if he would be able to come back. When I asked him if it was true that he was leaving, he nodded his head in assent. I knew that nobody could stop him. His decisions were always abrupt and he would not listen to anyone. So, I simply told him, "My heart is going with you."

He must have thought: "Since no other system of medicine was having any effect, why not give a chance to this new treatment?" He was almost resigned to his fate, and dying outside had not much importance to him because, for him, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were not confined to the Ashram alone. He had felt their Presence everywhere. I, for one, would presume that inwardly he had the Mother's sanction for it. We bade him farewell. His servitors had gathered who had received tokens of his love in kind.

The rest of the story has come out in *Mother India*. I need not repeat it. I will only add this much that when some improvement was noticed after the treatment had succeeded in bringing out a copious amount of phlegm, Maharaj seemed to have expressed his wish to return, but friends persuaded him to stay and improve further. Sadly, it did not work out as they had wished.

Thus after a long span of ideal service a great soul quietly passed away in his native province, but Destiny brought his mortal remains to the Ashram. My friend Amal Kiran tells me that when the ashes arrived in the courtyard around the Samadhi he felt a sudden uplifting of the whole atmosphere for some time, a very remarkable experience testifying to the Mahatma that our Champaklal was. The ashes were given a sacred burial by the side of other lofty sadhaks in the bosom of the Cazanove garden

### Epilogue

Maharaj by all means was an extraordinary man. Few could have refrained from shedding silent tears when they heard the sad news. His only aim in life had been service to the Divine, and who will question the one-pointed aim and fulfilment of his soul? He was not a dreamer of big schemes for the Ashram like Dyumanbhai nor did he have a zeal like Madhav to spread the Great Message all over the earth, but to be like Hanuman, an absolute servitor, was the *raison d'être* of his existence. And when that had been fulfilled, life lost its meaning and

he was biding his time to hear the call to depart. He himself has said that he was happy he had achieved what he had come for in this world.

A man, I should say, of a psychic type, he was *bālavat* in his nature. Pure and candid, loving, simple, generous, free from all attachment and always living in the inmost consciousness—this is how he has appeared to me since I came to know him in the growing years. He had indeed a hot temper of which he repented but it was like the outburst of a child that was forgotten the next minute.

Two sadhaks of recent time stand apart from all others, whose image will always remain untarnished in our memory. One is Nolini-da and the other Maharaj Champaklal, two true yogis—one predominantly a “homo intellectualis”, the other essentially a “homo psychicus”. Both of them attained rare heights of consciousness, each following his own path indicated by his swadharma.

*(Concluded)*



# SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

## A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1993)

### Woman of Property

#### Episode 1: Candour and Courage

My mother was ill, and as I could not look after my property, I thought of handing its management over to *Fowler and Co.*, a well-known Calcutta firm which does this kind of business. I wanted in fact to sell our big house and buy a smaller one to suit our need. I gave the charge to *Fowler and Co.* and signed the document without scrutinizing the terms and conditions. They made an estimate of all my property and charged Rs. 50,000/- for the contract. When I showed it to my advocate, he fell from the sky. “You have signed the document without reading it even once!”

“Well, I thought they must be honest people!”

He was dumbfounded at my naiveté.

In such eventualities, my only refuge is the Guru. I heard him saying that if I went on worrying, then whatever had to happen in the natural course of things would happen. If I wanted otherwise I should leave it to him. That made me free from worry. I could sleep well as I felt he had taken up all the responsibility.

Then I went to the manager of *Fowler and Co.* and made a clean breast of everything and said, “I haven’t a pie at home. My mother is bed-ridden—”

“But why didn’t you read the document?” he asked. “Who will pay for our expenses?” I looked at him helplessly. He went inside. After a while he came out with our contract papers and, looking straight at me, said, “I believe you. We won’t charge a thing ” So saying he tore up the document in front of me and said: “In future be careful. Don’t repose so much trust in people’s honesty. You’re very simple-hearted. You have a large property and you should consult your elders before taking any important decisions.” So saying he bade me goodbye.

A few years later he died. When I came to know about it I paid a visit to his wife to offer my condolences and thank her for her husband’s large-hearted gesture towards me. As she looked askance at me, I explained the critical predicament from which he had saved me. She listened to the story quietly. After a while her eyes moistened and she told me how he had a heart-attack and had quietly passed away. As I was leaving the house I felt a guardian presence in it.

## Episode 2

We have a house in Calcutta with four floors which we give out on rent. The ground floor tenant had not paid his rent for many years. We filed a suit against him and won the legal battle, but lost the actual fight. This is not an unusual case in Calcutta. One cannot drive away the tenant. The law does not permit it. I and my son presented ourselves before him and told him firmly that he would have to leave as he had lost the case in court. The man, sitting upright on his cot, replied with calm insolence: "If you have the power, drive me out. Here am I sitting as firm as a rock." I felt almost like asking my son to drive him out by force and face the consequence but good sense prevailed. Beaten, we returned home.

The next day, however, the tenant of the third floor came running to me and said that our immovable tenant had decamped at night in a hurry. The flat was empty and we should go at once and take possession of it. But, he requested, we should give him the flat later on. We could hardly believe our luck or, should I say, our God-sent opportunity. But we kept wondering why the man who was so adamant during the day should run away at night. However, I along with my son appeared on the scene. My son, indeed very happy, said, "Ma, we shall get a fair amount of money from the sale of the costly furniture he has left behind. He has cheated us for so many years, and now we shall realise at least some of the dues." I kept quiet for a moment, then I told my son, "No, *Khokan*, we won't touch a single article." "Why not?" he argued hotly. "Not yet. For the moment, we will put the things in order under lock and key." After that we came away. Then the tenant of the second floor came and wanted to have the flat. I refused, as I had already committed myself to the previous man. He offered to pay a substantial rent. "Even for that kind of rent, I can't break my word," I replied.

That night our telephone rang. My son picked it up. A man's voice said, "I want to speak to so and so," meaning me. His pitch was high and the tone excited. "I'm her son. Tell me."

"No. I want to speak to her only. It's a serious matter."

I came and asked, "What do you want?"

"Are you so and so, the owner of that flat?"

"Yes."

"Please listen. All the furniture of that flat should belong to us. Don't, for heaven's sake, touch a single article."

My son was furious and said, "Oh, he wants to show his muscle to us?"

The man continued, "We are *mastans*. We had lent that fellow a big sum of money, but he has cheated us. When we threatened to take recourse to our *dharma*, he ran away. We are now practically beggars. Many a night we have gone without any meal. We shall now be able to get some money out of the sale of his furniture. You are rich people and have let go the rent for years. If you spare a few thousand chips for poor people like us, it won't be a big sacrifice for

you. But," he paused significantly, "if you don't, well, let God be with you."

In spite of his veiled threat, which would normally have brought out the fighter in me, without the slightest hesitation I left the articles to them. You see, when my son and I had gone to the flat, I had heard a voice asking me not to touch the furniture.

Later on I came to know that our former tenant was involved in many forgeries and all kinds of shady dealings. And that night he had to run for his life from his revenge-seeking creditors. We benefited in the bargain. The Grace has many ways of showing itself.

The story, however, had a sequel to it. There was a *basti* in the neighbourhood of our own dwelling place. I was on good terms with a woman of the area and through her I met a man whom I abhorred at once. He had only one arm, which increased my animus against him. To my enquiry about his arm he replied evasively that the doctor had to amputate it. One day he said, "You haven't done the right thing occupying that house."

I was astonished and said, "How did you know about it? And why, for that matter, haven't I done well?"

"For this reason, that you go to many places all alone and return alone at night. I've marked it. Any day—"

"What! Are you trying to insinuate that I am too bold? Do you know where my courage comes from? None, nobody has the power to touch even a single hair of my head. Let me not hear such words again."

My great-uncle and my son disapproved of what they thought was my utterly show-off attitude. They argued, "The man is not to blame. He warned you for your own good. You needn't have been so piqued."

"Why not? Out of fear? You should know very well by now that I'm not an ordinary woman, particularly when I'm challenged. There is something evil in that man. I get into such moods only when needed."

A few days later, I ran into that man again. He gave me a broad smile and said facetiously, "The day will pass well with me. I have seen your face."

"Is that so? My days don't pass well even though I see my own face every day. So how can yours?" I retorted sharply. After that the man avoided me.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

# WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL LIFE?

BY EVELYN UNDERHILL

“THE Spiritual Life” is a dangerously ambiguous term; indeed, it would be interesting to know what meaning any one reader at the present moment is giving to these three words. Many, I am afraid, would really be found to mean “the life of my own inside”: and a further section, to mean something very holy, difficult and peculiar—a sort of honours course in personal religion—to which they did not intend to aspire.

Both these kinds of individualists—the people who think of the spiritual life as something which is for themselves and about themselves, and the people who regard it as something which is not for themselves—seem to need a larger horizon, within which these interesting personal facts can be placed; and seen in rather truer proportion. Any spiritual view which focuses attention on ourselves, and puts the human creature with its small ideas and adventures in the centre foreground, is dangerous till we recognise its absurdity. So at least we will try to get away from these petty notions, and make a determined effort to see our situation within that great spiritual landscape which is much too great for our limited minds to grasp, and yet is our true inheritance—a present reality here and now, within which our real lives are now being lived. We will look at it through the wide-angle lens of disinterested worship; and put aside those useful little pince-nez which bring into sharp focus our own qualities, desires, interests and difficulties, but blur everything else.

There it is, in its splendour and perfection, “shining to saints in a perpetual bright clearness”. Not only the subject matter of religion, but also the cause and goal of everything in human life that points beyond the world—great action, great music, great poetry, great art. Our attention to it, or our neglect of it, makes no difference to that world; but it makes every difference to us. For our lives are not real, not complete, until they are based on a certain conscious correspondence with it: until they become that which they are meant to be—tools and channels of the Will of God—and are included in the Kingdom of Spirits which live in, to and for Him alone.

Yet there are plenty of things in our normal experience which imply the existence of that world, that music, that life. If, for instance, we consider the fact of prayer, the almost universal impulse to seek and appeal to a power beyond ourselves, and notice the heights to which it can rise in those who give themselves to it with courage and love—the power it exerts, the heroic vocations and costly sacrifices which it supports, the transformations of character which it effects—it is a sufficiently mysterious characteristic of man. Again and again it is discredited by our popular rationalisms and naturalisms, and again and again it returns, and claims its rights within human life; even in its crudest, most naive

expressions retaining a certain life-changing power. No one who studies with sympathy, for instance, the history of religious revivals, can doubt that here, often in a grotesque and unlovely disguise, a force from beyond the world really breaks in upon the temporal order with disconcerting power.

So, too, all who are sensitive to beauty know the almost agonising sense of revelation its sudden impact brings—the abrupt disclosure of the mountain summit, the wild cherry-tree in blossom, the crowning moment of a great concerto, witnessing to another beauty beyond sense. And again, any mature person looking back on their own past life, will be forced to recognise factors in that life, which cannot be attributed to heredity, environment, opportunity, personal initiative or mere chance. The contact which proved decisive, the path unexpectedly opened, the other path closed, the thing we felt compelled to say, the letter we felt compelled to write. It is as if a hidden directive power, personal, living, free, were working through circumstances and often against our intention or desire; pressing us in a certain direction, and moulding us to a certain design.

All this, of course, is quite inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint. If it is true, it implies that beneath the surface of life, which generally contents us, there are unsuspected deeps and great spiritual forces which condition and control our small lives. Some people are, or become, sensitive to the pressure of these forces. The rest of us easily ignore the evidence for this whole realm of experience, just because it is all so hidden and interior; and we are so busy responding to obvious and outward things. But no psychology which fails to take account of it can claim to be complete. When we take it seriously, it surely suggests that we are essentially spiritual as well as natural creatures; and that therefore life in its fulness, the life which shall develop and use all our capacities and fulfil all our possibilities, must involve correspondence not only with our visible and ever-changing, but also with our invisible and unchanging environment: the Spirit of all spirits, God, in whom we live and move and have our being. The significance, the greatness of humanity, consists in our ability to do this. The meaning of our life is bound up with the meaning of the universe. Even though so far the consciousness of this ability and this meaning is latent in the mass of men, yet what an enhancement of life, what devotedness, heroism, and capacity for suffering and for love, what a sure hold upon reality it already produces in those who have felt its attraction, and who respond with courage and without reserve to its demands.

When we consider our situation like that, when we lift our eyes from the crowded by-pass to the eternal hills, then how much the personal and practical things we have to deal with are enriched. What meaning and coherence come into our scattered lives. We mostly spend those lives conjugating three verbs: to Want, to Have, and to Do. Craving, clutching, and fussing, on the material, political, social, emotional, intellectual—even on the religious—plane, we are

kept in perpetual unrest: forgetting that none of these verbs have any ultimate significance, except so far as they are transcended by and included in the fundamental verb, to Be: and that Being, not wanting, having and doing, is the essence of a spiritual life. But now, with this widening of the horizon, our personal ups and downs, desires, cravings, efforts, are seen in scale as small and transitory spiritual facts within a vast, abiding spiritual world, and lit by a steady spiritual light. And at once a new coherence comes into our existence, a new tranquillity and release.

The people of our time are helpless, distracted and rebellious, unable to interpret that which is happening, and full of apprehension about that which is to come, largely because they have lost this sure hold on the eternal which gives to each life meaning and direction, and with meaning and direction gives steadiness. I do not mean by this a mere escape from our problems and dangers, a slinking away from the actual to enjoy the eternal. I mean an acceptance and living out of the actual, in its homeliest details and its utmost demands, in the light of the eternal; and with that peculiar sense of ultimate security which only a hold on the eternal brings. When the vivid reality which is meant by these rather abstract words is truly possessed by us, when that which is unchanging in ourselves is given its chance, and emerges from the stream of succession to recognise its true home and goal, which is God—then, though much suffering may, indeed will, remain, apprehension, confusion, instability, despair, will cease.

This, of course, is what religion is about; this adherence to God, this confident dependence on that which is unchanging. This is the more abundant life, which in its own particular language and own particular way it calls us to live. Because it is our part in the one life of the whole universe of spirits, our share in the great drive towards Reality, the tendency of all life to seek God, who made it for Himself and now incites and guides it, we are already adapted to it, just as a fish is adapted to live in the sea. This view of our situation fills us with a certain awed and humble gladness. It delivers us from all niggling fuss about ourselves, prevents us from feeling self-important about our own little spiritual adventures; and yet makes them worthwhile as part of one great spiritual adventure.

It means, when we come down again to our particular case, that my spiritual life is not something specialised and intense, a fenced-off devotional patch rather difficult to cultivate, and needing to be sheltered from the cold winds of the outer world. Nor is it an alternative to my outward, practical life. On the contrary, it is the very source of that quality and purpose which makes my practical life worthwhile. The practical life of a vast number of people is not, as a matter of fact, worthwhile at all. It is like an impressive fur coat with no one inside it. One sees many of these coats occupying positions of great responsibility.

Spiritual life, which is profoundly organic, means the give and take, the

willed correspondence of the little human spirit with the Infinite Spirit, here where it is; its feeding upon Him, its growth towards perfect union with Him, its response to His attraction and subtle pressure. That growth and that response may seem to us like a movement, a journey, in which by various unexpected and often unattractive paths we are drawn almost in spite of ourselves—not as a result of our own over-anxious struggles—to the real end of our being, the place where we are ordained to be: a journey which is more like the inevitable movement of the iron filing to the great magnet that attracts it, than like the long and weary pilgrimage in the teeth of many obstacles from “this world to that which is to come.”

There are countless ways in which this may happen: sometimes under conditions which seem to the world like the very frustrations of life, of progress, of growth. Thus, boundless initiative is chained to a sick bed and transmuted into sacrifice; the lover of beauty is sent to serve in the slum, the lover of stillness is kept on the run all day, the sudden demand to leave all comes to the one who least expects it, and through and in these apparent frustrations the life of the spirit emerges and grows.

Indeed, if God is All and his Word to us All, that must mean that He is the reality and controlling factor of every situation, religious or secular; and that it is only for His glory and creative purpose that it exists. Therefore our favourite distinction between the spiritual life and the practical life is false. We cannot divide them. One affects the other all the time: for we are creatures of sense and of spirit, and must live an amphibious life. It is through all the circumstances of existence, inward and outward, not only those which we like to label spiritual, that we are pressed to our right position and given our supernatural food. For a spiritual life is simply a life in which all that we do comes from the centre, where we are anchored in God: a life soaked through and through by a sense of His reality and claim, and self-given to the great movement of His will.

Most of our conflicts and difficulties come from trying to deal with the spiritual and practical aspects of our life separately instead of realising them as parts of one whole. If our practical life is centred on our own interests, cluttered up by possessions, distracted by ambitions, passions, wants and worries, beset by a sense of our own rights and importance, or anxieties for our own future, or longings for our own success, we need not expect that our spiritual life will be a contrast to all this. The soul's house is not built on such a convenient plan: there are few sound-proof partitions in it. Only when the conviction—not merely the idea—that the demand of the Spirit, however inconvenient, comes first and IS first, rules the whole of it, will those objectionable noises die down which have a way of penetrating into the nicely furnished little oratory, and drowning all the quieter voices by their din.

Yet there is no real occasion for tumult, strain, conflict, anxiety, once we have reached the living conviction that God is ALL. All takes place within Him,

He alone matters, He alone is. Our spiritual life is His affair because, whatever we may think to the contrary, it is really produced by His steady attraction, and our humble and self-forgetful response to it. It consists in being drawn, at His pace and in His way, to the place where He wants us to be; not the place we fancied for ourselves.

Some people may seem to us to go to God by a moving staircase, where they can assist matters a bit by their own efforts, but much gets done for them and progress does not cease. Some appear to be whisked past us in a lift; whilst we find ourselves on a steep flight of stairs with a bend at the top, so that we cannot see how much farther we have to go. But none of this really matters; what matters is the conviction that all are moving towards God, and, in that journey, accompanied, supported, checked and fed by God. Since our dependence on Him is absolute, and our aspiration is that His Will shall be done, this great aspiration can gradually swallow up, neutralise all our small self-centred desires. When that happens life, inner and outer, becomes one single, various act of adoration and self-giving; one undivided response of the creature to the demand and pressure of Creative Love.

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### A LITTLE MORE

So I may love Thee a little more, a little better,  
 Lift the golden cloud of my vain imaginings  
 From Thy sun-face, O Quintessence of the Infinite.  
 Part just a little the vague veil that cruelly separates us.  
 For a moment let us hold hands across the prism of the  
Manifold,  
 I from behind the bars of Time and Space,  
     Thou from Thy high Beyond.  
 Flood my prisoning self with Thy all-revealing rays,  
 I offer my darkness at the rose altar of Thy smile.

SHYAM KUMARI



## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of July 1993)

THE National Movement during the period (1906-1907) under the hegemony of Sri Aurobindo gave rise to a new trend of political thought which was big with future consequences. The projects of the Nationalist leaders of the Indian Society were well-equipped in their literary media like the *Bande mataram* and *Jugantar* to promote National Education, Boycott and Swadeshi. Swaraj was the goal of the National Movement.

Sri Aurobindo's contributions to the growth of Indian nationalism were such that any nation can be proud of even his earliest thought. This thought can be traced as far back as 1893-94 when he contributed articles to the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay under the caption "New Lamps for Old". In that series he exposed the hollowness and futility of the prevailing Congress policy of prayers and petitions for the redress of national grievances.

The New Party (i.e. the Extremists) had already come into being in Bengal. Patriotic men like Bipin Chandra Pal and Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya had been editing the *New India* (founded in 1904). With his appearance on the scene, Sri Aurobindo was at once recognised as a God-ordained leader of the New Party.

Pal, one of the chief architects of the Swadeshi Movement of 1905, characterised the national upsurge as a 'Spiritual Movement'. In his article, 'The Bed-Rock of Indian Nationalism', he wrote thus in 1908: "The strength of the New Movement in India lies in its supreme idealism. It is not a mere economic movement, though it openly strives for the economic resurrection of the country. It is not a mere political movement, though it has boldly declared itself for absolute Political Independence. It is an intensely spiritual movement having for its object not simply the development of economic life or the attainment of political freedom, but really the emancipation, in every sense of the term, of the Indian manhood and womanhood."<sup>1</sup>

In the middle of 1906 Sri Aurobindo gathered kindred spirits into the New Party or the Nationalist Party, then called it the Extremists as distinguished from the Moderates. Criticising the narrow ideal of Colonial Self-Government or Dominion Status in the British Empire to which the old Congress was irrevocably committed, he popularised along with Bipin Chandra Pal the contrary conception of *Purna Swaraj* for the country. This conception was so revolutionary at that time that the Moderates who then controlled the Congress could not accept it and so it became a serious bone of contention between the two wings of the Congress. Sri Aurobindo like Bipin Chandra Pal built up a comprehensive scheme of political action.

With the Moderates re-forming their forces and many Nationalists disheartened by the wave of repression and many shifted away to prison and many

more losing all hope in the normal method of political agitation, at that crucial moment Sri Aurobindo acted the role of Krishna who buoyed up the drooping spirits of the Pandavas on the field of Kurukshetra. None of his associates knew but after the *Bande Mataram* prosecution, it was general knowledge among the Moderates as well as the Loyalists that he was a Power to be reckoned with and every one of his moves worth watching.

The prominent Moderate leaders such as Motilal Pandit, Gokhale and Pherojshah Mehta tried to discuss matters with the Extremists leaders, like Tilak and Lajpat Rai who were formidable figures in their party. Yet indeed they were not always quite a match, iron was met by steel, sword by sharper sword and argument by counter argument.

What was the vision of Sri Aurobindo in advocating *Swaraj* as India's inalienable birth-right? Every nation on earth has its own destiny, with a particular trait of mind as its own individuality. A subject nation under an alien rule cannot fulfil its own national ideals. And however benevolent the Government, it can never willingly foster the centres of strength in the life of the subject nation in relation to whom it always stands not only as a "parasite" but even as an "octopus".

The complex state of affairs at that time may be put thus. The Loyalist party of India argue "... that India cannot, should not and will not be a free, great and united nation. The Moderates believe the nation to be too weak and disunited to aim at freedom; they would welcome independence if it came, but they are not convinced that we have or shall have in the measurable future the means or strength to win it or keep it if won. They therefore put forward Colonial Self-Government as their aim and are unwilling to attempt any methods which presuppose strength and cohesion in the nation.... The Nationalists hold that Indians are as capable of freedom as any subject nation can be and their defects are the result of servitude and can only be removed by the struggle for freedom; that they have the strength, and, if they get the will, can create the means to win independence.... They believe that the fated hour for Indian unification and freedom has arrived. In brief, they are convinced that India should strive to be free, that she can be free and that she will, by the impulse of her past and present, be inevitably driven to the attempt and the attainment of national self-realisation. The Nationalist creed is a gospel of faith and hope."<sup>22</sup>

The Loyalist party of India at that time pointed out:

"For certain nations in certain periods of their development liberty would be disastrous and subjection to foreign rule is the most healthy condition. India, argue the Loyalists, is an example of such a nation in such a period."<sup>23</sup>

Sri Aurobindo raised the question whether the gospel of the Loyalists had any firm root. He answered, "The nation or group is not like the individual who can specialise his development and throw all his energies into one line. The nation must develop military and political greatness and activity, intellectual and

aesthetic greatness and activity, commercial greatness and activity, moral sanity and vigour; it cannot sacrifice any of these functions of the organism without making itself unfit for the struggle for life and finally succumbing and perishing under the pressure of more highly organised nations. The purely commercial State like Carthage is broken in the shock with a nation which has developed the military and political as well as the commercial energies. A purely military state like Sparta cannot stand against rivals which to equal military efficiency unite a greater science, intellectual energy and political ability. A purely aesthetic and intellectual state like the Greek colonies in Italy or a purely moral and spiritual community like the empire of Peru are blotted out of existence in the clash with ruder but more vigorous and many-sided organisms. No Government, therefore, can really be good for a nation or serve the purposes of national life and development which does not give full scope for the development of all the national activities, capacities and energies. Foreign rule is unnatural and fatal to a nation precisely because by its very nature it throws itself upon these activities and capacities and crushes them down in the interests of its own continued existence. Even when it does not crush them down violently, it obstructs their growth passively by its very presence. The subject nation becomes dependent, disorganised and loses its powers by atrophy. For this reason national independence is absolutely necessary to national growth. There can be no national development without national liberty.”<sup>4</sup>

Professor Haridas and Uma Mukherjee say:

“The spirit of the new Party or the Extremists was triumphant in the Congress of 1906, held in Calcutta with Dadabhai Naoroji in the (Presidential) chair from December 26th to December 29th. Altogether there were 1663 delegates and the audience numbered 20,000 souls. Dr. Rashbehari Ghosh as the Chairman of the Reception Committee in welcoming the delegates referred to Bengal’s great and burning grievance and the Russian methods of Government to repress national aspirations. ‘The singing of national songs and even the cry of *Bande Mataram*,’ said he, ‘were forgotten under severe penalties. This Ordinance was fittingly succeeded by the prosecution of schoolboys, the quartering of military and punitive police, the prohibition and forcible dispersion of public meetings and these high-handed proceedings attained their crown and completion in the tragedy at Barisal, when the Provincial Conference was dispersed by the Police, who wantonly broke the peace in order, I imagine, to keep the peace’. Referring to the spirit of Swadeshi, he called it ‘The cradle of a new India’.... Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man, in his Presidential speech laid special stress on ‘the question of the policy and principles of the system of Government under which India is to be governed in future’, and emphatically observed: ‘The whole matter can be comprised in one word, Self-Government or Swaraj, like that of the United Kingdom or the Colonies’. For the first time in British India the question of Swaraj was raised on the Congress platform and

defined as India's political goal. And in defining it so, Dadabhai Naoroji gave an emphatic utterance to the spirit of the New Party which had the resolution passed in favour of *Boycott, Swadeshi, National Education and Swaraj*.”<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo became the leader of the New Party. But the Swaraj which he sought to realise for the country was not to be attained by a mere aspiration for political freedom. He did not appreciate the ideas of Dadabhai Naoroji about a Swaraj based on the conception of local Self-Government. Sri Aurobindo vehemently criticised it and said: “Swaraj as a sort of European ideal, political liberty for the sake of political self-assertion, will not awaken India. Swaraj as the fulfilment of the ancient life of India under modern conditions, the return of the *Satyayuga* of national greatness, the resumption by her of her great *role* of teacher and guide, self-liberation of the people for the final fulfilment of the Vedantic ideal in politics, this is the true Swaraj for India.”<sup>6</sup>

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

#### REFERENCES

- 1 *India's Fight for Freedom*, by Professors Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, pp 298, 299.
- 2 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (S A B C L)*, Vol 1, pp 298-299
- 3 *Ibid* , p 304
- 4 *Ibid* , pp 306, 307
- 5 *India's Fight for Freedom*, by Professors Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, pp 175, 176
- 6 *S A B C L* , Vol 1, p 902

## WILL AND SURRENDER

*Yet is all here his action and his will. [154]*<sup>1</sup>

### THE PROGRESSIVE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WILL IN SAVITRI

WHEN the Little Prince descends from his lovely little planet to the big green earth, he visits on the way several other small planets. The saddest of all is the lonely planet of the drunkard. The man has an evident hangover and looks utterly miserable so the Little Prince asks him why he drinks so much if it makes him feel that bad. The drunkard answers: 'In order to forget.' 'To forget what?' asks the Little Prince. 'To forget my shame,' grumbles the drunkard. 'Shame? Shame for what?' asks the Little Prince again, and the drunkard answers wearily: 'For drinking so much.'

'People are strange,' thinks the Little Prince.

The way Saint Exupéry puts it, the drunkard is indeed difficult to understand and we may laugh, but if we look at ourselves a little closer, we must admit that we are as trapped in our mediocrity as the drunkard in his beer. The problem is a genuine one. If we want to improve our nature, the solutions we choose and the instruments we have at our disposal are likely to be part of that very old nature and suffer from exactly those defects we need to remedy. As with the drunkard, our attempts at a solution become immediately a part of our problem. We are all a little like the insomniac staying awake worrying about his insomnia. To put it in an old but very clear image: it is impossible to lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. In Yoga this translates itself into the idea that there is very little scope for our own effort, and that our only hope rests in surrender. And so we try to be wise, leave the will on the side and choose the path of surrender, but alas, our situation hardly improves: even surrender is not as simple as it looks.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written and talked often about the importance of surrender. In one of the letters Sri Aurobindo says in so many words 'our yoga is the Yoga of surrender' and one may easily get the impression that there is thus hardly any role for the will. But this conclusion may lead to the same trap in which St. Exupéry's drunkard had fallen. The surrender we evidently need at the heights is not quite the same surrender with which we struggle in the beginning. The surrender Sri Aurobindo and the Mother speak about may especially go quite well together with a strong will.

The contradiction between will and surrender can exist, evidently, only on the level of the ego which experiences itself as separate from the Divine. It is only as long as we identify ourselves with the separated individual that the paths

<sup>1</sup> Numbers in square brackets indicate the page number in the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library edition of *Savitri*

of will and surrender seem to run in different directions. On this level it is moreover hard to decide which is worse, our ignorant will or our ignorant surrender. Our ignorant will is the will of our ego, small in capacity, and confused in its aim; it doesn't see to what extent it is pushed around by all types of primitive forces. But on this level of the ego our surrender also may quite well be given by cowardice or laziness and we are as likely to surrender to our own lower nature as to the Divine Mother.

In *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo says:

'The only remedy [for our egoistic tendencies] is to lessen persistently the personal effort... and... to let the Shakti lay hold on us and use us for the divine purpose. This cannot be done perfectly at once,—*nor can it be done safely if it is only the lower form of the universal energy of which we are aware*,... but still it is the aim... which can be wholly carried out when we become insistently aware of the highest spiritual presence and form of the divine Shakti.<sup>2</sup>

The issue here is evidently not to give up effort or will as such, but to replace the *personal* will by the *divine* will. The difficulty is then twofold: First, to 'become insistently aware of the highest spiritual presence and form of the divine Shakti.' Second, to surrender ourselves to it. While the Mother was physically here, the first problem was to quite an extent solved: man, as he is, tends to look outside for the solution of his problems and right there She was! The emphasis could be laid on the second point, on the need for surrender. But at the present time the first step cannot be neglected. We have first to become *aware of the highest form of the divine Shakti*. Recursively this imperative applies of course to our present search for the true meaning of will and surrender. Somehow we have to get at least an initial understanding of the issue which is not vitiated too much by our old nature. One of the most beautiful ways open to us is to immerse ourselves into the world of *Savitri*. As Mona Sarkar remembers, the Mother says: '*Savitri* alone is sufficient to make you climb to the peaks. If truly one knows how to meditate on *Savitri*, one will receive all the help one needs. For him who wishes to follow this path, it is a concrete help as though the Lord himself were taking you by the hand and leading you to the destined goal.'<sup>3</sup>

One can enter into *Savitri* in many different ways, but it is certainly not meant for a purely external, mental analysis. Yet, even if we have a look at *Savitri* on the most external level, we are in for an amazing discovery. While the word 'will' (as noun) is used close to 300 times, the word 'surrender' occurs in all its 724 pages only in 10 different sentences. How does Sri Aurobindo use the words 'will' and 'surrender' in *Savitri*? ❧

<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p 739 Emphasis added

<sup>3</sup> Mona Sarkar, *Sweet Mother, Harmonies of Light*, 1978, p 22

The word 'will' is used approximately once in every 20 sentences, 30 times more often than the word 'surrender'. It is used most often to describe the adamant will of Savitri herself, but there are many other 'wills' besides. There is the transcendent Will and the Will of the personal Divine, the will of Nature, the unconscious will-to-be, the will to love and the secret will for progress; there is the will in things to remain as they are and once even 'a strange will down ever down'. There is will as ordering energy and will as desire; there is the impotent will of the small man and his Spirit's secret will; the 'free-will' of which man is so proud and the inscrutable will of Fate; there is the will of Death; the high spiritual will of Aswapathy and there is finally the Will of the divine Mother.

The word 'surrender' is used only sparingly but on the most significant occasions. It is used first of all to describe the relationship between the Supreme and the Divine Mother. As we shall see later, Sri Aurobindo also uses surrender to depict the natural state of our Psychic Being and surrender is at one place indicated as the only way out for us humans:

Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight,  
Breathe her divine illimitable air,  
Her simple vast supremacy confess,  
Dare to surrender to her absolute. [276]

The word 'surrender' occurs twice in the description of Aswapathy's life and also twice for Savitri. In this respect Aswapathy's and Savitri's sadhana run perfectly parallel. In both cases surrender comes only when they have reached the summit of their yogic ascent, when Aswapathy is standing directly in front of the Mother, and when Savitri is confronted with her secret soul. In both descriptions the word 'surrender' is first used to indicate that there is nothing left in them of their old ego and then, somewhat later, their surrender is described as the source of their new strength. Their surrender has nothing whatsoever to do with weakness, it does not come instead of the will. Their surrender is their freewill's act which leads to a progressive replacement of the personal will by the divine Will.

All these different varieties of will and surrender don't appear of course in a pell-mell or haphazard order. If one goes through these 300 passages a clear pattern emerges out of the wealth of images. The will takes its many different forms in *Savitri* according to the stage of evolution which is being described. The connecting thread is the evolution of consciousness. *Savitri* unveils itself as the story of the progressive development of the divine Will in which surrender occurs on a few rare but extremely crucial moments. A marvellous sequence unrolls of the progressive conversion of the will during the long evolution of consciousness out of matter. If we try to compress it all into one paragraph, the story of the will runs something like this:

In the very beginning there is only the will of the sole transcendent One. But once he starts the great play the scene is set for a multitude of seemingly opposing wills, which are yet, secretly, all expressions of Him alone. There is first the dumb, unconscious will for progress in nature. Then the ignorant will of the small man, who is forced by adverse fate to progress. As man's evolution progresses, one man is born with a truly high aspiration, Aswapathy, Lord of Tapasya. As his aspiration increases, nature becomes almost his opponent, as it is she who is slower and resists change. He realises then that man is pushed around by all kinds of dark forces and calls for the Divine to intervene. While he grows in consciousness and becomes more and more intimate with the Divine, slowly his own small will becomes more and more attuned to Hers. Finally there is a climax, a complete surrender to the divine Mother and a reversal of direction. As an answer to Aswapathy's aspiration, Savitri, 'the Divine Word, the goddess of the supreme Truth', is born. Satyavan, for whom she is meant, is 'the soul carrying the divine truth of being within himself, but descended into the grip of death and ignorance'. In the first instance Savitri accepts the inevitability of Satyavan's death, but when made aware of the meaning of her birth in Time, she obeys the inner command and sets forth on an all-out fight with Death and Ignorance. She realises that to conquer Death, she has to find her deepest, secret soul, she has to rise to her very summit, transcend all intermediate layers, surpass herself, surrender directly and completely to the Divine Mother. Not only all the negativity but also all the false and limited beauty rises up then from the gulfs to resist and to keep the human soul in their grip. While she confronts and transcends each of them, she realises more and more that her will is one with the Divine Will, till she has the absolute strength needed to defeat Death. This not only brings Satyavan's soul back to life, but frees him also forever from the grip of ignorance and thus heralds new Time.

It does not require much imagination to realise that in his descriptions of Aswapathy Sri Aurobindo has given an account of his own labour, and the comparison between Savitri and the Mother also hardly needs elaboration. But it is good to realise that as described in the stories of Aswapathy and Savitri, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have opened for us a new path to a completely new reality. Through their work and their indescribable sacrifice Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have in a very concrete sense created a new world. The world in which we now live or, should I say, can live, is not any more what it has been during all the wild and often terrible years of the human history we know. Especially the role and the process of yoga have changed. The time for ascent culminating in an escape out of the world is over. The time for static compassion and acceptance of the world as it is is over. The road to a dynamic identification with the divine Will has been opened. It is now possible to progressively align ourselves consciously with the divine Will while right here in the physical reality, because this physical reality itself is undergoing a sea-change. The Mother says:



*'The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality', and 'A new world is born. The things that were promised are fulfilled'*. Or, to adjust a line of *Savitri*: *'Fate has been changed by an unchanging will.'* The transformation has begun, and it is to the extent that we can become one with the descending Truth-Force of the Mother, that we can participate in the process, that we can participate in what in *Savitri* has been described as the defeat of Death and the transformation of life. It is for this process of transformation that a right understanding of the relationship between surrender and will is so crucial: in *Savitri* surrender is not the giving up of the will, but its complete conversion. If we can paraphrase the story of Aswapathy and *Savitri* in terms of our own sadhana, we have in the first stages of our inner growth to choose at every moment for that will in us that aspires for the very highest and to reject all that opposes. As we grow, we realise that we can only progress to the extent that we align our will to the will of the Supreme, to the extent that we allow the Divine to replace our personal will by his Will. At the same time our love for the Divine Mother increases so that in the end we cannot do anything else than give ourselves progressively up to Her. At the end of our personal sadhana, the last thing we can still 'do' is to surrender the last little bit of 'ourselves' to the Divine. But even after that, and this is the great miracle, if we want to partake in the great work of the Mother, the will still plays a crucial role, because there is yet one more choice: the choice between eternal peace and work for the will of the Truth that descends, for *'His will must be worked out in human breasts'* [444]. There is no moment at which we can exist, let alone progress, without will. The one thing needed is the transformation of our will by aspiration and a progressive surrender to the Divine Mother. Aspiration establishes the link from below with summits beyond anything we fully understand or know. Surrender offers the entire lower nature up to the highest and invites the highest to bring its splendour down. *Savitri* shows how all the way it requires utter vigilance and a constant rejection of the lower wills in and around ourselves if in the end we want to learn how to reject the very will of Death. For however long it may take, that is our destiny.

It is not possible in a short article to render the wealth of beauty and wisdom contained in all the passages of *Savitri* related to Will and Surrender. Instead we have selected some of the most significant lines and woven them together around the central theme of the will's progressive transformation. We hope that these few lines will encourage the reader to go back to the original and experience directly how meditating on *Savitri* *'is a concrete help as though the Lord himself were taking you by the hand and leading you to the destined goal.'*

In the beginning the Eternal Will creates Nature:

Because there dwelt the Eternal's vast Idea

<sup>4</sup> *The Mother's Collected Works* Volume 15, pages 198 & 204 (24-4 & 29-3, 1956)

And his dynamic will in men and things,  
 So only could the enormous scene begin. [692]<sup>5</sup>

This enormous scene is the play of 'the Two who are one' in which the 'sole transcendent One' whose 'soul, silent, supports the world and her,... yields to her as the mover of his will':

This grand surrender is his free-will's gift,  
 His pure transcendent force submits to hers. [64]

In the great drama which ensues, His will participates in all roles at once. In the background, there is His—unconscious—will for order, beauty and progress:

His is the dumb will of atom and of clod;  
 A Will that without sense or motive acts,  
 An Intelligence needing not to think or plan,...  
 For its body is the body of the Lord... [680]

For us men, the most important fact is that His will is also there directly behind the human individual. The very existence and the difficult ascent of man are the expression of the Divine Mother's will:

This ever she meant since the first dawn of life,  
 This constant will she covered with her sport,  
 To evoke a Person in the impersonal Void,  
 With the Truth-Light strike earth's massive roots of trance,  
 Wake a dumb self in the inconscient depths  
 And raise a lost Power from its python sleep  
 That the eyes of the Timeless might look out from Time  
 And the world manifest the unveiled Divine. [72]

There is a long road between the 'first dawn of life' and the moment when the 'Timeless might look out from Time'. But it is the Divine Mother as Nature who looks after the whole journey:

The dumb great Mother in her cosmic trance...  
 Accepts indomitably to execute  
 The will to know in an inconscient world,

<sup>5</sup> *Savitri* has not been written in one simple straightforward sequence. There are many short references to what is described much later in full detail and *vice versa*. The quotations follow the sequence of events of the story which is not necessarily the sequence of their description in the book.

The will to live under a reign of death,... [75]

And so it starts, slowly, ever so slowly:

A dream of living woke in Matter's heart,  
A will to live moved in the Inconscient's dust,  
A freak of living startled vacant Time, [156]

It is the Divine who appears then as the human player but he surrenders so completely to the play that he forgets his own divinity, accepts to be powerless and unconscious.

He takes birth in her world, waits on her will,  
Divines her enigmatic gesture's sense,  
The fluctuating chance turns of her mood,  
Works out her meanings she seems not to know  
And serves her secret purpose in long Time. [62]

The core of this, now small, creature is his Psychic Being, which lives still in a natural state of surrender to the Divine:

.. behind our life, the deathless Rose.  
A body of the cosmic beauty and joy  
Unseen, unguessed by the blind suffering world,  
Climbing from Nature's deep surrendered heart  
It blooms for ever at the feet of God, [278]

But man is hardly aware of this inner beauty. He lives on the surface and claims, quite foolishly, to be the master of Nature:

A tool and slave of his own slave and tool,  
He praises his free will and his master mind  
And is pushed by her upon her chosen paths;  
Possessor he is possessed and, ruler, ruled,  
Her conscious automaton, her desire's dupe. [511]

Man is only very partially conscious of his own motives, and has hardly any long term plan:

Only a little of us foresees its steps,  
Only a little has will and purposed pace. [483]

Even where man does achieve some appearance of freedom, his perspective is too small:

A thought was there that planned, a will that strove,  
But for small aims within a narrow scope,  
Wasting unmeasured toil on transient things. [149]

The Lord hides himself even as the secret will behind Death and Ignorance:

The secret Will that robes itself with Night  
And offers to spirit the ordeal of the flesh,  
Imposed a mystic mask of death and pain. [130]

[The One...] watches his will done by the forms of Gods  
And the desire that goads half-conscious man  
And the reluctant and unseeing Night. [656]

More specifically His is the secret Spirit's will which creates a destiny, harsh enough to hone the individual's aberrant nature back to perfection, for

... what is Fate if not the spirit's will  
After long time fulfilled by cosmic Force? [456]

Aeons of human aspiration and desire for progress produce finally one man, Aswapathy, Lord of Tapasya, who has the strength to climb back to his Divine origin:

A fearless will for knowledge dared to erase  
The lines of safety Reason draws that bar  
Mind's soar, soul's dive into the Infinite. [26]

As he climbs, Aswapathy's will transmutes itself into the highest aspiration:

His soul lived as eternity's delegate,  
His mind was like a fire assailing heaven,  
His will a hunter in the trails of light. [23]

Aswapathy passes right through Hell and transcends the highest planes of consciousness. He becomes more and more a channel for the Divine Force and more and more one-pointed in his search for the Divine Mother:

His spirit was made a vessel of her force;

Mute in the fathomless passion of his will  
He outstretched to her his folded hands of prayer. [295]

And here, right at the summit of what can humanly be achieved, Aswapathy surrenders all of himself to the Divine Mother:

An atom of her illimitable self...  
He cast from the rent stillness of his soul  
A cry of adoration and desire  
And the surrender of his boundless mind  
And the self-giving of his silent heart.  
He fell down at her feet unconscious, prone. [296]

This is the turning point, the beginning of new Time. Till here the secret player is the unconscious will for progress in nature, which slowly sublimates itself into the ardent aspiration of Aswapathy. It is the yoga of the ascent. But when Aswapathy reaches the very highest plane the human being can reach, 'creation's peaks' where 'A vast surrender was his only strength' [315],

His finite parts approached their absolutes,  
His actions framed the movements of the Gods,  
His will took up the reins of cosmic Force. [302]

It is then that Aswapathy asks the Divine Mother to

Pack with the eternal might one human hour  
And with one gesture change all future time. [345]

And as answer to the ardent aspiration of Aswapathy, there 'arose a wide consenting Voice'

"... One shall descend and break the iron Law;...  
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will." [346]

The yoga of descent begins, and with that there appears a completely different type of will, the adamant will of Savitri, which is clearly a descending deputy will of the Supreme.

Savitri, the Word, the Divine Truth, is born and grows up almost unnoticed in a small circle where there is none commensurate to her greatness. Then one good day, in Aswapathy

... the mighty yearning raised its flame,

That asks a perfect life for earth and men [369]

And as answer Aswapathy hears

A word that leaped down from some far sky of thought,...  
 "O Force compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race,...  
 And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,  
 How long will you tread the circling tracts of mind  
 Around your little self and petty things?  
 But not for a changeless littleness were you meant,...  
 Out of the Immortal's substance were you built;  
 Your actions can be swift revealing steps,  
 Your life a changeful mould for growing gods....  
 A greater destiny waits you in your front:  
 This transient earthly being if he wills  
 Can fit his acts to a transcendent scheme...." [370]

Aswapathy then recognises 'the great spirit born his child' and sends Savitri ('the Divine Word, the goddess of the supreme Truth') forth into the world to find her mate in order to search out together 'the high gods and a greater God, their self beyond Time'.

When Savitri hears that her chosen other half, Satyavan ('the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself, but fallen into the grip of death and ignorance') is destined to die within a year, she is confronted with the harsh reality of life in the ignorance, but she proves to know from the beginning her strength and answers with the famous words:

"... Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will." [432]

Still, when the moment comes near, she almost succumbs to acceptance of her fate. But, as with Aswapathy, a voice comes to her and asks:

"... what shall thy soul say when it wakes and knows  
 The work was left undone for which it came?" [475]

And Savitri answers the inner voice, in one of the most touching passages of the book:

"... Command, for I am here to do thy will." [476]

Savitri starts then her search for the soul, her share of conscious yoga. Just like Aswapathy, her complete surrender comes only right at the end, when she

has reached the summit of 'her spirit's upward route', just before she finally meets her secret soul:

All was abolished save her naked self  
 And the prostrate yearning of her surrendered heart:  
 There was no strength in her, no pride of force;  
 The lofty burning of desire had sunk  
 Ashamed, a vanity of separate self,  
 The hope of spiritual greatness fled,  
 Salvation she asked not nor a heavenly crown:  
 Humility seemed now too proud a state.  
 Her self was nothing, God alone was all. [522]

This complete annihilation makes Savitri ready to meet her secret soul and call 'the mighty Mother of the worlds/To make this earthly tenement her house'. Her nature is prepared for her encounter with the All-Negating Absolute and Death:

A firm ground was made for Heaven's descending might.  
 Behind all reigned her sovereign deathless soul:  
 It built the harmony of its human state;  
 Surrendered into the great World-Mother's hands  
 Only she obeyed her sole supreme behest  
 In the enigma of the Inconscient's world. [530]

And from this moment onwards the conversion of her will is complete and the battle is fought fully in the opposite direction. Her will now becomes the will of the conqueror from above which becomes more and more clear, so that her will is one with the divine Will. And it is this will which comes *down* from the Supreme that finally conquers Death and Ignorance.

Transcended now was the poor human rule;  
 A sovereign power was there, a godlike will. [574]

So that Savitri can say convincingly to Death:

My will is greater than thy law, O Death;  
 My love is stronger than the bonds of Fate:  
 Our love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme....  
 I am the living body of his light,  
 I am the thinking instrument of his power,  
 I incarnate Wisdom in an earthly breast,  
 I am his conquering and unslayable will. [633/634]

This human will tuned to the divine Will is clearly promised as our destiny:

In Matter shall be lit the spirit's glow,  
 In body and body kindled the sacred birth;  
 Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,  
 The days become a happy pilgrim march,  
 Our will a force of the Eternal's power,  
 And thought the rays of a spiritual sun. [55]

Then shall the embodied being live as one  
 Who is a thought, a will of the Divine,  
 A mask or robe of his divinity,  
 An instrument and partner of his Force,  
 A point or line drawn in the infinite,  
 A manifest of the Imperishable. [705]

The frontiers of the Ignorance shall recede,  
 More and more souls shall enter into light,  
 Minds lit, inspired, the occult summoner hear  
 And lives blaze with a sudden inner flame  
 And hearts grow enamoured of divine delight  
 And human wills tune to the divine will,  
 These separate selves the Spirit's oneness feel,  
 These senses of heavenly sense grow capable,  
 The flesh and nerves of a strange ethereal joy  
 And mortal bodies of immortality. [709]

MATTHIJS CORNELISSEN



## THE VIRTUE OF ALONENESS

“OURS is essentially a tragic age.” There is of course a peculiarity to our own tragedy. Unlike the older tragedies, the destruction of Pompeii, the disappearance of Atlantis or the outbreak of the medieval Plague, our tragedy is less of Job, the biblical character, and more of Prometheus, the Greek hero. It is less of the Job pattern of inexplicable suffering and more of the Promethean pattern of tragic choice.

There is a lesson here that has probably not dawned on us. The Post-Renaissance Cartesian Enlightenment principle armed man with the confidence to make rational choice. The choice was dramatically manifest in the great social, political and ideological experiments. Democracy, Capitalism, Socialism, Communism. However, while freedom and rationality have been emancipatory, they have paradoxically turned out to be a curse as well. Indeed, we may wonder whether the remedy has outpaced the disease.

Nowhere is this tragedy, this curse more visible than in our fanatical faith in organized thinking and action. Religions, old and new, have relied on such faith and continue their trail of bigotry and destruction. Never mind the power of revelation and the promise of the kingdom of God upon earth. Similarly, Bolshevik Communism rose against the gross tyranny of the Tsarist regime and spawned with equal tragedy the horror of the Stalinist era. One form of evil replacing the other. The midnight knock and the Gulag. Another replay of the older drama: the children of the Revolution devouring their own parents.

And notice where such blind faith in rationality and science, in organized ideology and action have led us. Yesterday it was *laissez-faire* Capitalism. Then came the death of the Individual and affirmation of the truth of the Collectivity, swiftly followed by the return of the Individual. An endless ritual of defecation and desecration. The cyclic repetition would be comical if only we could be spared the “essential tragedy” of our times that D.H. Lawrence spoke about.

Of course, the newer version of the older drama has its own repertoire and denouement. To miss these essential differences would be to be blind to the great outgrowth of the media and their diabolical uses by the organized groups, most of all by the political elite and the organized state. Print capitalism and the culture industry have become an explosive mix with urbanization and industrialization. Consequently, the vast destabilization, both physical and psychic, has proved to be a fertile ground for organized ideologies. With consequences that everyone can see.

And all the while, the irony is lost upon us: the more zealously we plunge into action with a new slogan, a new rallying cry, a new formula, a new shibboleth, the more we advocate one kind of authoritarianism to defeat another kind of fascism, arm the power-mad State and its equally intoxicated gendarmierie, in order to save us from the radical subversive fringe of the Left and the Right, the more we slide inevitably into the abyss. And all the while, we are held under the hypnotic spell of modern ideology. It comes in a packaged form. You

have the option to choose between one package and another. In effect, making no real choice. For selectivity is out. Like a packaged T.V. programme beamed at passive viewers, today's ideological messiahs of a mandir or a mosque, "cultural nationalism" or "social justice" want *our total loyalty or nothing*. To such a mind, labelling comes easy. All labelling is a substitute for genuine introspection, essentially a mask for our inadequacy. And so we see a proliferation of slogans in the ideological arsenal: progressive-reactionary, secular-communal, feminist-sexist.... Not that these terms do not have their uses. Only today's discourse makes them less descriptive and more judgemental and condemnatory.

The more we condemn and the more we abuse, the more polarized we become. We have that much of space less for a dialogue and persuasive action, for our ability to lead the warring members of our own being, let alone the question of the whole community.

The answer suggested is not cynical despair or quietistic escape, but a faith in action and a commitment that emerge from a state of reflection. At least for those in the vanguard who claim to lead. So long as egalitarianism and solidarity elude us, so long will, ideology and organized action play a role. Only the choice is left to us: be a beacon of light or add to the gloom.

The first lesson we learn is never to give our unquestioned blind allegiance to any vocal, exclusive creed, whether religious or secular. For all battle for changing the world, essentially and ultimately, begins with the self, the monster that lies deep within each one of us. Tackle this monster first, then we can look around for lesser goblins and horrors. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, his plea for self-reliance in deed and thought has not lost its timeless relevance. There is enough in it even for lesser mortals like us.

Next, we must look at each issue sympathetically and honestly: Does it serve a partisan end or the collective good? Despite polemical confusion, the answer is easy to find. At least in most instances.

The belief that the more shouting we do and the more self-righteously condemnatory we become, the closer we are to the goal is a fallacy of the highest order. The more headlong we hurl ourselves unthinkingly, the more reckless we become and the more tragedies we create.

The temptation to join a cherished ideological group or a bandwagon is of course great. That way lies security and well-being—both physical and psychic. But ultimately it leaves us vanquished: for no society has solved yet the basic economic dilemma: too few resources and too many wants.

Only by deep reflection can newer tragedies be averted. Ideology was a tool, today it has become a Frankenstein's monster. We must learn to control it fast lest we should be swept away by the tragedies of our making. Aloneness thus becomes not only a virtue but our saving grace too.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

## WHY I WRITE POEMS

I AM a poet  
more published than publicised.

I've more than three hundred  
mostly in colourful journals.  
Editors—mostly women—have developed  
a liking for me, I mean, for my poems.  
It's good that  
they have not seen me in person  
for I don't look like a poet.

Poems don't bring in money.  
Sometimes they fail even to fetch  
a complimentary copy.  
And to get a xerox copy for my file  
I've to spend half-a-dozen letterheads.

Editors don't have rejection slips for me,  
as they don't have pay-cheques.  
Perhaps that's why my wife  
—the inspirer of my works—  
advises me not to write poems,  
but concentrate on remunerative prose-pieces.

“But poems bring in fans,” I console her.  
“Ah, Hell! Fans don't fan a breeze,”  
I hear her murmur.

But I continue to write poems  
for she can never feel  
the flutterings within me  
as if I were capturing the horizon.

P. RAJA

## ODE TO RAIN

TORRENTS of intense  
summer,  
scorched,  
chafed,  
turning our streets to dust,  
and they cry out  
tearless;  
the glare of the city  
brings some to their knees,  
others offer prayer.  
All is white sun  
assaulting even paler skies,  
as baked,  
blackened  
asphalt cracks open,  
bare feet treading  
upon hot coals.

We want to drench  
endlessly  
in your swells of joy

blown in  
from offshore currents,  
cool,  
wet,  
nourishing our senses,  
drowning our fears.

I can feel you  
coming.  
the imprint of you  
I know  
before you arrive.  
Mist gathering momentum  
to become droplets,  
you dampen my skin,  
you make me sop  
as you effortlessly toss the clouds,  
smashing open the sky.  
You are pure  
ecstasy,  
magnificent rain.

SUZANNE COSGROVE

## HUMAN RIGHTS\*

HUMAN rights are not new—we have not invented them.

We cannot give them to man because they are his already—they are his inheritance from birth.

We can only re-declare them and re-echo the fact that they belong to him and that we, from time to time, have robbed him of his rightful heritage.

Although they are the birthright of every man equally, we have ignorantly thought that we are better equipped than nature and have found fit to change things around to suit our current beliefs.

We decided that the rights of a child born out of wedlock differ from those of the one born in wedlock.

We gave the male child privileges denied to the female child.

We gave special rights to the first born and placed those who followed under different conditions.

We felt compassion towards the widowed but withheld it from the deserted and ill-treated.

We extended respect to the married but ignored the unwed and the orphans.

We differentiated between the rights of the male and the female.

Those we did not favour we persecuted—only to reverse our stand at a later time.

We imposed special conditions on any kind we fancied—the tall, the short, the pink or the brown.

We elected for our antagonism those of certain geographic positions and did the same with beliefs and sciences.

Indeed we have created within our society an underdog—ourselves.

Surely we must see that the need is urgent to examine and alter our thinking. What can we do about it now? We can attempt to put things back in their natural order and re-declare that which was ours right from the beginning.

It is man's duty to himself to fight for them—as it is ours not to deprive him once he has attained them.

GEORGETTE COTY

\* Introduction to the book *The Rights of Man—The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* Publ F W Cheshire—Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, 1968

## CREATION AND MY INNER FEELING

TRUE knowledge in man's awakened thought starts from the moment man begins wondering about what he sees around him in the big outer world. It is then that his true quest begins and with this quest about the world around him is inseparably connected the quest about the self, the question, 'Who am I? Where do I come from?'

Our wonder about the world starts from the feeling of its vastness, which almost teases us out of thought. Then we begin to ponder over how this world came into existence and our wonder deepens. We get engulfed in a dilemma. We feel bewildered to think that the universe exists, but there is no beginning of its existence. But more bewildering it is to think that it has a beginning. For then the question will arise as to what was there before the beginning. The answer that there was nothing is meaningless to us, for we do not understand how, out of nothing, something can come. We are convinced that out of nothing nothing comes (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). If we accept the Big Bang theory of modern science, which says that the universe started with a big gigantic explosion, the question will arise as to explosion of what. In what state was the thing that exploded before the explosion and for how long was it there in that state? It may be quite true that this very world of our sensory perception and scientific knowledge had a beginning, but we feel that pure existence can have neither a beginning, nor an end. Science is no doubt concerned with the 'present' world and its changes through time. The aspect of change is of fundamental import both in science and in philosophy and we shall necessarily have to reflect on it. But we shall naturally start with existence itself.

The first idea that comes to our mind about the existence around us is that it is a creation. Whose creation? Well, such a way of thinking and questioning is fraught with danger. For, if existence is imagined to be a creation and thus to have a creator, the question will arise as to who is the creator of that creator. In this way we shall fall into an infinite regress (*anabasthā doṣam*). In fact, if the notion of creation and the creator is simplistic, then it resembles that of a pot and the potter (*Kumbha* and *Kumbhakāra*) which two are categorically different. But such a naive analogy is not tenable when we are dealing with ultimate realities. The danger occurs if and only if we consider creation and the creator to be different, but not otherwise. There is no gainsaying the fact that this rhythmic and law-abiding world is suggestive of a plan and does appear to us to be a creation.

Our first query is about the essence of this existence, this great existence, itself. We are overwhelmed on one side by the vaster-than-vastness (*mahato mahiyān*) of it and on the other side by its atomic and subatomic minuteness (*aṇoraniyān*). But gradually we are seized by the general rhythm and law-

abiding coherence: technically speaking, the uniformity of Nature. From this uniformity we come to the notion of the all-pervading one. For, the fact that, many things exist but they are all under a uniform law, can be accepted only when we are ready to accept that law as an existence of a higher kind. Thus our analysis finally leads us to the conclusion that the ultimate reality is one. This theory is known as Monism (*advaitavāda*).

We have made mention of the law-abiding character of the universe. People may raise their brows about it by referring to the 'indeterminacy principle' of modern science. In this connection, we need only observe that the indeterminacy talked of in the 'indeterminacy principle' lies in the sphere of our reckoning the exact state of Nature and, as such, such indeterminacies are epistemological problems and therefore lie in the realm of phenomenology which involves study of things as they appear to us or our senses. If the indeterminacy is irremovable, even then it will mean that the scope of our knowledge about the universe has unavoidable limitations. But that will never mean that the law that governs the universe fails or is shaken at places and at times.

Now, what is the true self of this ultimate One? Since within this 'One' we get the whole world together with its development through time giving rise to life and mind, the ultimate One must encompass all these things. On the other hand, we cannot accept the world of our sensory perception as the world-cause itself. This is simply because, of any object of sensory perception or of any meaningful law, the question will arise in our mind as to why it is so. So the ultimate One must transcend the world and all worldly principles. We say that the ultimate One is both transcendent (*viśvātīta*) and immanent (*viśvagata*). Recall the Upanishadic saying—Just as the fire entering the world takes different shapes in different things, so also the One, the inner self of all beings, takes different shapes in different things and is yet beyond them all. (*Agniryathaiko bhuvanāṁ praviṣṭo rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bavūva/Ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bahiṣca*).<sup>1</sup> We get confirmations of our line of thinking also in the absolute idealism of Hegel and in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in spite of certain differences in their outlooks. Our ancient seers and sages named the ultimate One as *param* (the Absolute), *paramātmā* (the Supreme Self), *pūrṇam* (the Whole), *puruṣottama* (the Supreme Personal), *brahman* (the All-pervading Great) *et cetera*. Again, as connected with humanity, the ultimate One has been described as *bhagavāna* (the Being of Infinite Splendour), *vidhātā* (the Great Dispenser) or *īśvara* (the Being of Supreme Benevolence).

No doubt, the ultimate being is one and without a second (*Ekamevādvi-  
tīyam*). But then what exactly is the nature of its relation with the world? Granted that he has created the world, the question arises as to wherefrom did the potter of the world-pot get the clay. In the context of the Absolute we need to understand, as hinted earlier, that all analogies are partial, for an analogy is a

comparison and that can only be between parts. If the ultimate is to be One without any second, then we must realise that he is both the efficient cause (*karāṇa-kāraṇa*) and the material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of this universe, in the sense that he created the universe and created it out of himself. Thus we are led to the notion of Pantheism (*sarveśvaravāda*) which means that God is one and everything is (in essence) God. Pantheism is the highest and the best form of Monism.

[Many would perhaps like to describe our viewpoint as 'panentheism' which is the name for Hegel's doctrine. The word literally means that everything is in or held by God (theos). Since however, as is our opinion, the everything that is in or held by God is (essentially) God himself, we think that 'pantheism' is a better description for our viewpoint. It is true that Spinoza's doctrine which holds that God is totally in the world and everything is (essentially) God, and is very different from our view, goes by the name 'pantheism'. We are of the opinion that Spinoza's doctrine may be considered as a particular form of 'pantheism'.]

The creation may be looked upon as the process of the transcendent becoming the immanent. It is a self-imposed change in the stuff of the Absolute which consists of the initial stage of creating what appears to us as the 'nescient' out of the Absolute's own self and then evolving consciousness gradually and variously in that 'nescient' ground. The second phase of the change is within our sensory and scientific purview and has been described as 'evolution' by scientists and philosophers. In contradistinction to this, the first phase of change, namely that of God's self-deployment into the world, which is beyond our sensory knowledge, has been described by many modern Indian philosophers as 'involution' (*antarābartana*).

So far in our discussion we have been concerned with the nature and form of the creation. Many scientists have also thought in the same line with us. But our next question is: Why did the Absolute create the world? If he is the Absolute, then he should have no feeling of want. Why then should he engage himself at all in the act of creation? This is our third question about the cause of creation—what is its purposive cause (*uddeśya-kāraṇa*). Scientists generally remain silent about any purposive cause, for they regard it as beyond their jurisdiction. But man's life is intimately connected with the view he takes about the purpose of creation. In Vedantic philosophy the purposive cause is simply God's will to play (*līlā*). When we play, we may play just for the joy of playing and not for fulfilling any want. God has created this world out of joy. Out of joy all things are born (*ānandāddeha khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante*<sup>2</sup>). In the language of the Upanishad again, we may say that out of a joyful desire, He (the 'One') resolved to be many (*tadaikṣata bahusyām*<sup>3</sup>). But why? The reason, in the language of Tagore, is, 'without me, Oh Lord of the worlds, Thy love would have been unfulfilled' (*āmāy naile, tribhubaneśvar, tomār prem hoto je miche*<sup>4</sup>); or, in the



language of Sri Aurobindo, 'The Spirit shall take up the human play.'<sup>5</sup> Following Sri Aurobindo's philosophy we may say that it is a self-imposed vast experiment of the Absolute and this experiment is his play. The Absolute creates in himself the opposite of himself (the inert and 'nescient' many from the conscious One) to see whether from the womb of this opposite he can manifest himself. If we look into creation in this way then it comes very near to Hegel's dialectical Absolute Idealism. On the other hand, without acquiescing in any materialistic tenet, we may say that many deep truths of dialectical materialism can be given a deeper interpretation, by recognising matter as dialectical in nature.

Thus matter, which we call inert, is only apparently inert. Otherwise, it is the basis of infinite energy and unforeseen possibilities. This is, in fact, a scientific truth to-day. Just as two combating wrestlers of equal might may attack each other and remain as a whole motionless and still, so also two equal amounts of energy may oppose each other and become, as a whole, what we call an inert mass. But in that inert mass energy lies hidden in the subatomic levels. Advancing one step forward we may say that consciousness is there in a hidden form even in apparently nescient matter, and so it will perhaps be nearer to truth to hold that the gradual evolution of consciousness from matter is not an evolution from zero consciousness. Let us deal with the point in some detail. We think that there are really minutest particles of matter which are indivisible and are themselves matter. Leibnitz thought that since any material object has extension, it must be divisible. This argument is really out of place here. We can surely, in our imagination, divide an extended object geometrically an infinite number of times. But the question is whether the smaller and smaller quanta thus obtained will always remain matter. We think that this is not possible. What we know to be a fundamental particle today may prove to be not so one day. But this cannot go on *ad infinitum*. The limit of infinite divisions can only be zero and zeros cannot add up to anything real. Since material creation has taken place, there must be fundamental particles of whatever kind or kinds and however small yet greater than zero in size. These fundamental particles, we feel, also possess rudimentary consciousness. They are, however, quite different from Leibnitzian monads which are the minutest carriers of consciousness but are devoid of spatial existence. Apart from this, the pluralistic idealism of Leibnitz, built on these monads, does not at all agree with our viewpoint. We think that the infinitude of spatially existent and conscious fundamental particles are the creation of the one Absolute and thus our viewpoint remains monistic.

Because matter is not really inert or nescient, change is possible in it. There are various levels and directions in the change, but any change means becoming something that one was not and that is dialectics. If our viewpoint is accepted, then dialectical materialism gets a fundamentally new dimension and the notion that matter is dialectical becomes equivalent to the notion that the material

universe is created through the stuff of the supreme consciousness and manifestation of consciousness in the material basis is the purpose of the creation.

(To be continued)

ASHOK KUMAR RAY

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- 3 *Chhândogya Upanishad*, 6/2/3
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## ZEAL FOR THE LORD

BE it darkness of night  
 Or brightness of day  
 A constant soothing vastness  
 May fill the void mind.  
 When the ego  
 Doesn't bring turmoil  
 A healing grace may be felt.  
 When our zeal for the Lord  
 Eats us up  
 A candid flame within  
 Burns straight unhindered towards heaven.  
 What was awaited  
 On the morbid bed of Earth  
 Is now a distinct reality,  
 Be it amidst common work  
 Or in the static posture of a yogi.

SITANGSHU CHAKRABORTTY

# WILLIAM BLAKE: "THE LITTLE BLACK BOY"

## AN INTERPRETATION

"The Little Black Boy" is one of Blake's most dramatic lyrics:

My mother bore me in the Southern wild,  
And I am black, but o! my soul is white,  
White as an angel is the English child:  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree  
And sitting down before the heat of day,  
She took me on her lap and kissed me,<sup>1</sup>  
And pointing to the east began to say.

Look on the rising sun: there God does live  
And gives his light, and gives his heat away.  
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive  
Comfort in morning, joy in the noon day.

And we are put on earth a little space,  
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,  
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face  
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear  
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear his voice.  
Saying: come out from the grove my love & care,  
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.

Thus did my mother say and kissed me,  
And thus I say to little English boy.  
When I from black and he from white cloud free,  
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy:

I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear,  
To lean in joy upon our father's knee.  
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,  
And be like him and he will then love me.

(1789)

<sup>1</sup> The word "kissed" is to be pronounced "kissèd" According to the old system of poetic pronunciation, where there is no apostrophe-sign in place of the "e", the vowel is to be sounded.

It is dramatic not only in the presentation of four characters,—the little black boy who is the speaker, his mother who bore him and taught him in the southern wild, the English boy who does not love him but will be made to do so, and the father in heaven—each acting upon the other. It is dramatic also in the vivid presentation of the “scenes” of action. The poem opens with the past tense, —“bore me”, “taught me” and ends with the future,

he will then love me.

At the moment of speaking the little boy tells us what he says to the English boy. Since it is the *little* black boy that speaks, there cannot be a long interval between the past and the present, but the gap of time, howsoever brief, is there if the poet’s use of tenses makes any sense.

The poem takes us back not only to a past however near but to another place, fairly far—

the Southern wild,

obviously Africa. Presumably the little boy is now with his mother in England; perhaps both of them are slaves. That may account for the English boy not loving the black boy.

As A.C. Swinburne, who, though farthest from Blake as a poet, is close enough in sympathy with *The Songs of Innocence* to be able to assess them rightly notes, this poem

is especially exquisite for noble forbearance from vulgar pathos and achievement of the highest and most poignant sweetness of speech and sense in which the poet’s mysticism is baptized in pure water and taught to speak as from faultless lips of children...

(Swinburne quotes the fourth stanza of the poem discussed below: the speaker of those words is actually the boy’s mother but she is a child in her “innocence” which is what Blake calls “a state of the soul”.)

The forbearance from vulgar pathos is seen in the very opening stanza where a touch of regret is suggested only to be almost overcome immediately.

The first line not only accounts for the fact,—

I am black—

but introduces to us the character of the mother who teaches him the wisdom pondering over which helps him lose any trace of regret he feels at the start. But, as we have seen, he has to overcome the regret at the very beginning with the words,

but o! my soul is white

After he remembers his mother's words and broods over them he sees a greater truth, that *white* like *black* is only a hue of the skin, which, like a cloud, disappears in the presence of the father in heaven. Though the boy does not say it in so many words we see that his soul, like any other soul, is not white but *bright*, resplendent in God's own light. It is because the little boy is yet to realise more fully the truth that he comments at the commencement,

White as an angel is the English child:  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

A slight sense of regret seems to return here. But that is not the point we are concerned with now. The English child, as we have noted, does not love the little black boy: how can he be an angel? He is an angel only in outward appearance, bearing the colour white, which an angel is commonly credited with: as in the case of the soul, an angel should transcend human hues: it should be appalled in celestial light: else the later coupling of black and white as clouds hiding the soul would make no sense. But the black boy is not aware of the implied irony. Perhaps the "New" Critics (now not only not 'new' but 'dated'!) would say that that is the irony the poet intends!

Nor is he bereaved of light. The boy may not be fully conscious of it but when he says

as if bereav'd of light

the meaning is, he is not really so.

The boy recalls his mother's words in stanzas three to five. The second stanza flashes us back to the scene in the southern wild.

Some editors needlessly relate the tree underneath which the mother taught the boy to the Tree of Mystery in Blake's poem, "The Human Abstract" or to the tree Igdrasil of Norse Mythology on which Odin hanged himself to attain knowledge.

The trees in the poem are part and parcel of the southern *wild*. Trees are mentioned along with flowers, beasts and men in the stanza that follows and the sunburnt face of the negro is compared to a shady grove in the stanza after this. The question of shade, of course, does not rise in connection with the tree spoken of in the present context. It was still before the heat of day when the mother sat down and took her child on her lap. The woman in sitting beneath the tree was acting like a typical 'primitive' living a life in tune with Nature. It is equally natural and appropriate that she should have taught the child about LOVE fondling him with love. The detail of her kissing the child is repeated,

after her “teaching” is completed, to underline the atmosphere of love in which the child is reared by the mother. *Love* is the theme of the poem, love human and divine. As has been observed already, the little boy hopes to win the love of the English boy in heaven in the ambience of God’s own love. The title of the poem, as we shall see, has another function than pointing to its central theme. It is not at all meant to indicate what a black suffers at the hands of the whites.

The poignant sweetness of speech and sense which Swinburne writes of becomes possible only because the poem is raised far above the “vulgar pathos” focussing our attention on such a suffering. Swinburne also rightly underlines the poet’s mysticism which is “baptized in speech and sense” “in pure water”. Quite a few critics have recognized the importance of Blake as a mystic poet. Sri Aurobindo calls him “Europe’s greatest mystic poet”.

Swinburne has stanzas three to five in mind when he speaks of the poet’s mysticism. In the last line of stanza two we see how the little black boy’s mother pointed to the East before beginning to speak. The boy recalls her words in stanzas 3-5.

These stanzas bring before us a vision of God and his love which is truly mystical. Beginning with what we do not normally associate with the Christian concept of God and ending with what seems to correspond to the Christian belief the words reveal a truth which goes beyond creeds and denominations. Far in the southern wild, the mother drew the attention of the child to the rising sun and told him that God lived there. Normally Christians do not think of God as living in the sun. A poet like Donne may pun upon Sun and Son as in “Good Friday—Riding Westward.” But he does not identify them. And Blake here is speaking of the heavenly father. Christians place Him above the manifested world in some high heaven. Speaking to the boy the mother even identified the sun’s beams with God’s beams of love. In Africa (as to a great degree in India) the sun’s beams are unbearable.

The subtle distinction made by the mother is remarkable when she told the boy that the sun

gives his light, and gives his heat away.

He illumines the world with his light and extravagantly throws out his heat without a limit. He gives comfort in the morning and joy in the noonday to

flowers and trees and beasts and men.

(For a ‘primitive’ there is a sense of the unity of all creatures, hence her clubbing them all together.) The mild heat in the morning gives comfort physically. In the noonday it gives joy to the deeper selves of creatures—not *comfort* to the physical frames.

In the next stanza the woman reveals her deeper awareness of the hot beams of the sun as beams of God's love. Unlike the educated the simple woman is fully aware of the brevity of human existence. (The educated conveniently forget the fact and pursue pleasures without end as if there is no end!) To the primitive woman the brief span of life is meant for a spiritual training: Swinburne who quotes the stanza italicises the line,

That we may learn to bear the beams of love.

He sees that line as the key to the meaning of the whole poem. We shall return to the line soon. The woman continued,

And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face  
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

The mother as she spoke the words must have pointed to the bodies of both herself and the boy ("these bodies") and to her own face which the child could see as "this sun-burnt face". The sun-burnt face or collectively the body of each and the sun-burnt face are like a cloud or shady grove, at the same time covering the truth within and protecting from the excessive heat symbolising the warmth of God's love.

The mother's explanation was meant to make the child understand the particular situation created by the equatorial sun—the black bodies and faces and the unbearable heat. Her identification of the sun's beams with beams of God's love which are too intense to bear has a mystical truth borne out in the vision of God we see elsewhere (in another image and context) as a tremendous lover from whom the human soul recoils and seeks to flee.

The little black boy recalling her words says,

Thus did my mother say and kissed me,  
And thus I say to little English boy.

The black boy wants to share the wisdom he has learnt with the English boy whom he loves and tell him of the time when they will both drop the muddy vesture of decay, black as well as white, which is no more than a cloud hiding their bright souls and when they will joy like lambs round the tent of God.

The repetition of the detail of children of the heavenly father playing round the tent of God like lambs is deliberate. The full significance is brought out in "The Lamb", the poem which appears before "The Little Black Boy" in *The Songs of Innocence*:

Little Lamb, who made thee...

Little Lamb I'll tell thee!  
 He is called by thy name,  
 For he calls himself a Lamb:  
 He is meek and he is mild  
 He became a little child:  
 I a child and thou a lamb,  
 We are called by his name.

In the last stanza of the poem under discussion the little black boy says how he has to shade the English boy from the heat in heaven

till he can bear  
 To lean in joy upon our father's knee.

The English boy has not been trained to bear the heat of the beams of love like himself—his “white” cloud was not meant to be a shady grove: *his* mother did not bear him in

the Southern wild

but in what we may Blakeanly term

the northern (region) mild.

It will take some time for him to acclimatize himself to the excessive heavenly warmth. Once it is done he will lean upon the father's knee—

And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,  
 And be like him, and then he will love me.

The little black boy will be no more black and the white boy no more white—they will be alike radiant flames equal in the eyes of the father. In a sense he who is now the little black boy will be the white boy's superior: he will not only shade the other boy from the excessive warmth but stand and stroke the *silver* hair of the boy in the *golden* tent of the father. Our notions of white and black will have no longer any place in that transcendent realm. “The little black boy” of the title of the poem will no longer be black or even a boy in the human sense of the term but will be a child of the heavenly father.

K.B. SITARAMAYYA



## SHAKESPEARE IN THE LIGHT OF SANSKRIT POETICS

(Continued from the issue of June 1993)

THE opening scene of the next Act of *Othello* shows us much fighting,—yet it is not *vira* (the heroic) that is engendered, but *raudra* (the furious), and, to some extent *bibhatsa* (disgust) at the whole sordid affair. Bianca, lamenting over wounded Cassio, evokes *śrngāra* through the obvious sincerity of her love. We experience *śrngāra* as well as *karuṇa*

And so we come to the speech “It is the cause”. Analysed from the *rasa* point of view this superb example of Shakespeare’s powers not only gains in poetic beauty, but also enhances the poetic value. Where a western critic would find dramatic irony, effective images, etc. in it, we will find that it ascends to the high level where the experience it gives is called *brahma-svāda-sahodara*. Othello, torn by the conflict of anger, love and pity, becomes the *āśraya* of all these powerful *sthāyī* emotions. The attendant *vyabhucārī* emotions of *nirveda* (despair), *glāni* (weariness), *amarṣa* (vengefulness) are there as well as the *vibhāva* of admiration of Desdemona’s beauty:

that whiter skin of hers than snow  
And smooth as monumental alabaster,...  
Thou cunning’st pattern of excelling nature ..  
Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword!<sup>28</sup>

Othello’s pity, accompanied by the *anubhāva* of tears, is recognised by him to be heavenly:

I must weep  
But they are cruel tears. this sorrow’s heavenly.<sup>29</sup>

In this one speech of twenty-two lines Shakespeare takes the very essence of jealousy, love, anger, terror and pity and distils a unique mixture of *śrngāra* and *karuṇa* with undertones of *raudra* and *bhayānaka* (the terrible) Othello is the universal, archetypal figure of the betrayed lover and the reader or spectator experiences all the different *rasas* mentioned. The *rasa* that predominates in the ensuing dialogue is *karuṇa*, though it is mixed with *bhayānaka* with her as the *āśraya* and Othello as the *ālambana*. Finally in the denouement we have *bibhatsa* (disgust) for Iago mixed with *karuṇa*. Othello’s last speech once more brings *śrngāra* into prominence though, since Desdemona is dead, his grief should properly be classified as engendering *karuṇa* *rasa*. Set against this rich and complex *rasa*-experience the theory of purgation through pity and terror seems

naive and simplistic. The power of Shakespeare's creation gains manifold enhancement when seen in the light of *rasavāda*

A brief comment on the characters of the protagonists will not be out of place. It has been said that Othello has many characteristics of the *dhīrodātta* hero. Dhananjaya tells us that such a hero is a steady man, grave in demeanor and forgiving by nature. He never indulges in self-praise but he has quiet pride and great resolution in him.<sup>30</sup> This comes very near to Aristotle's great-souled man. Othello fails to fulfil only two of these requirements. He is not a *mahāsattva* or a man whose steady nature remains unruffled by joys and sorrows. Lodovico describes him as being a "nature whom passion could not shake", a man,

whose solid virtue  
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance  
Could neither graze nor pierce.<sup>31</sup>

But we know that Othello's nature is not unimpressionable. He himself tells us that he is

One not easily jealous, but being wrought  
Perplex'd in the extreme<sup>32</sup>

We also know that he is not forgiving by nature since he penalises Cassio by dismissing him and later cannot bring himself to forgive either him or Desdemona. So in these two particulars he falls short of the ideal *dhīrodātta* hero.

Desdemona fulfills the requirements of a *mugdha* heroine in almost every particular. Dhananjaya mentions the physical attributes of such a *nāyikā*, but does not have much to say of her character. Desdemona's sense of propriety or decorum (*śīla*) is the first characteristic that draws our attention, when she speaks of her duty as a daughter and as a wife (I, iii 181-89). Later we notice her utter devotion to Othello, a subjection that comes through deep and enduring love:

my love doth so approve him  
That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns—  
(Prithee, unpun me)—have grace and favour in them.<sup>33</sup>

Her purity is such that she cannot believe that there are women who can be false to their husbands. Her love is so deep and forgiving that with her last breath she tries to save Othello:

Emilia: O, who hath done this dead?

Desdemona: Nobody; I myself, farewell:  
Commend me to my kind lord: O farewell!<sup>34</sup>

One cannot feel that one has done justice to *Othello* in this attempt at analysing its multi-levelled excellence. It has not been possible to cast even a cursory glance at the other characters, or at the dramaturgy, or the beauty of its poetry. When all is said and done, the foregoing discussion has been but a poor attempt at trying to promote one's understanding and enjoyment of a well-cut jewel, every facet of which takes on fire and light as we look at it.

(Concluded)

RATRI RAY

#### REFERENCES

- 28 *Othello*, V, ii 4-17
- 29 *Ibid* , V, ii 20-1
- 30 *Dasarupa*, p 41
- 31 *Othello*, IV, i 276-9
- 32 *Ibid* , IV, i 285-7
- 33 *Ibid* , IV, iii 19-21
- 34 *Ibid* , V, ii 121-2

# THE VISION AND WORK OF SRI AUROBINDO

## A REVIEW-ARTICLE

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1993)

Now apropos of the Mind of Light. There is a long article, accompanied with a poem, spanning 32 pages of the present book in which Sethna (Amal) discusses the various issues involved, bringing insights from several angles. The article was first published in the December 1953 issue of *Mother India* and bears witness to the fact that it is one of the earliest and most authentic and authoritative discussions on the subject. What we also owe to Amal—and we should be sincerely grateful to him for that—is some of the seminal statements made by the Mother to him throwing occult light on the Mind of Light. Thus we have her capital pronouncement: “As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he has called the Mind of Light got realised in me”, which reveals to us an extremely significant event that had taken place in the spiritual history of the earth. Her definition of the Mind of Light is revelatory too in the context of the process of physical transformation: “The question was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light.” Sri Aurobindo himself did not expatiate on it so explicitly in his writings wherein the stress is on spiritual-ontological considerations and its role in the scheme of new things, particularly the Mind of Light as the leader of the intermediate race from which “would be recruited the race of supramental beings” Analogous to the Upanishadic description of the Pranamaya and Manomaya Purushas being the leaders, Netas, of the respective races in the evolutionary stages of Life and Mind, we may visualise the Mind not in Ignorance but in Light as the next leader or Neta of the new humanity or the intermediate race. From Sri Aurobindo’s phrase “the pressure of supermind creating from above out of itself the mind of Light would compel this certainty of the eventual outcome”, we may say that the Mind of Light is the first entry of supermind in the earth-consciousness and that we may equate this with the Mother’s phrase “the physical mind receiving the supramental light” as her definition of the Mind of Light. It is in conformity with both the statements that we may read the first two lines of Amal’s poem *Mind of Light*:

The core of a deathless sun is now the brain  
And each grey cell bursts to omniscient gold.

Based on her crucial experience the Mother told Amal, after reading the poem, that these lines were “sheer revelation and caught exactly what had taken place” when the Mind of Light had been realised in her at the moment of Sri Aurobindo’s passing away—his parting gift to her.

Associated with the Mind of Light there are several questions of what we may call spiritual philosophy or Yogic knowledge expressed in terms cognisable to our alert mental and intuitional faculties. Is the Mind of Light a new creation, a new Star in the Aurobindoman sky? Is it a stage in the evolutionary process or is it a plane in the ladder of Consciousness connecting the Cosmic and the Transcendent? If it is a plane, where exactly is it located? If, in terms of *chakras* or centres of activity in the individual functioning, the Overmind is located above the head in our subtle body, where should we locate the Mind of Light working at the level of the physical mind? Can the Mind of Light be created in the body? Will the race governed by the Mind of Light remain there permanently or is it only a stop-gap arrangement to take “recruits” to the supramental race dispensing with it once the latter has firmed itself up in the evolutionary process? Thus the Mind of Light poses innumerable queries to the questing mind as if it has created more problems than it originally came to solve. Amal in his long detailed discourse tackles them with a tremendous zest and force of intuition. He draws, naturally enough, substantially from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s writings to substantiate his understanding of them. The account is masterly and, though one may not agree with some of the shades he provides at times in his too confident approach, the gain always remains ours. Let us briefly see a couple of them not in the spirit of cavil but because the matters are absolutely fundamental.

We may pick up first the Mother’s disclosure made to him about the realisation of the Mind of Light in her: “As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he has called the Mind of Light got realised in me.” That is how the statement is given in the Mother’s Collected Works with a symbol indicating that it was an oral communication which was “noted from memory” and “later approved by the Mother for publication”. But the same statement has a slightly different version in the first edition of *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*; in it we have “got realised here” instead of the approved “got realised in me”. In her article on the subject in the December 1987 issue of *Mother India*, Nilima Das also quotes the phrase as “got realised here”; added to it is the Editor’s footnote clarifying the point thus: “The word ‘here’ was used because the Mother never liked personal references. Its proper meaning is ‘in me’ .” We believe that it is not just the question of “proper meaning” but “in me” is occultly the most correct phrase, particularly if we accept that the Mind of Light was the gift made to the Mother by Sri Aurobindo at the time of his withdrawal. Amal recognises the difference and has spoken of the event in the sense of “in me” at a few other places in the present edition.

Let us look at the issue from another angle. If we are to see that the Mind of Light was “realised here” after the passing away of Sri Aurobindo, it would leave a doubt whether Sri Aurobindo himself had realised it in his physical consciousness at all. Certainly in that case the question of his giving the gift to the Mother would not arise and what had happened would simply be the natural outcome of the strategic sacrifice. That would imply something of a more serious concern: it would mean that the achievement of the sacrifice was in fixing the Mind of Light and not Supermind proper when Sri Aurobindo gathered the dark Inconscience in a “holocaust to kindle heaven upon earth”. Does the Mind of Light possess the power, the needed fire, to kindle heaven upon earth? If it does, then, strictly speaking, there is no necessity of the intermediate race appearing in evolution, the race whose Neta it is. But it is this race from which recruits will be made to the supramental race upon earth which will be the true heaven aimed at by the Avatar of the Supermind. The race under the governance of the Mind of Light is a new Humanity and not the race of the gnostic beings governed by Supermind. Sri Aurobindo’s strategic sacrifice would fall considerably short of his purported Yogic endeavour and we will have to say that his was only a partial achievement. Do we subscribe to this? In a personal interview with Sri Aurobindo, which was later on corrected by himself, with Dilip Kumar Roy in 1943, we have a very categorical statement from him, one among many. When asked “Is your real work this invocation of the Supramental?” his answer was “Yes, I have come for that.” He even emphatically asserted “Leave the Supramental to me as my business.” Did he then compromise on his business as a part of pragmatism to achieve what is in the context of things and circumstances feasible? Although the Mind of Light is the first entry of Supermind here it would be at one remove from the full splendour of the task he had set for himself. But certainly we do not get such an impression from the events that have happened since December 5, 1950.

What was realised when Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body? Amal has posed this question and answers it as follows: “Yes, the Mind of Light at its supreme and in its absolute orb, is what was realised in descent into earth’s being in December 1950.” If so the phrase “what was realised in descent into earth’s being” would go well with the Mother’s declaration having in it “realised here”. But we must stick to the approved phrasing as given in her Collected Works and examine the first query once more. However, before we proceed we should recognise that “the Mind of Light at its supreme and in its absolute orb” cannot be equated in any way with the Supermind proper, as the one governs the intermediate race and the other the gnostic or supramental race. We can fairly confidently say that Sri Aurobindo had realised the Mind of Light in himself and what he was really attempting was something beyond. Amal writes: “The Mother remarked in 1954 that even as far back as 1938 she used to see the Supermind appearing in Sri Aurobindo’s body but what could not be done at that time was to fix it in the most outer physical being. The first fixing took place in

circumstances mind-bafflingly dramatic... Sri Aurobindo... gathered as it were the whole force of mortal fate into his semi-divinised body and in the act of giving up this body exhausted that force in essence and principle and drew down to earth and fixed there the supramental Light.” This description is in full accord with Amal’s own in *The Passing of Sri Aurobindo* which give its inner significance and which was considered by the Mother, while approving it fully, to be “admirable” and later to be “excellent” and “the best thing Amal has written”. Describing the essence of the sacrifice he writes: “Sri Aurobindo... battled for the Supermind’s descent till his last breath—calling the immortal Sun of the Spirit down, passionately packing his earthly envelope with the supramental light....” It is to this “earthly envelope” that the Mother offered her prayer and expressed her gratitude on December 9, 1950; in it she saw the supreme “Thee” who “willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us”. Yes, to the first query “What was realised when Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body?” the answer is not the Mind of Light, which was already there, but the supramental Light. Indeed, we should remember that when Sri Aurobindo wrote those articles on the Mind of Light for the *Bulletin of Physical Education* he was already in possession of it; the stamp of authenticity is clear in them; otherwise they would have looked theoretical in nature, speculative, with no sure certainty of the realisation the Mother got at the time of his passing away.

In this connection we should also scrutinize the concept of the “phases of the Mind of Light” introduced by Amal; it is a very bold concept and may also be a good way of visualising matters too abstruse-occult for us. I shall, however, reproduce here what I wrote long ago in my copy of *The Supramental Manifestation* (1952 edition) in the blank space at the end of the last chapter. “It looks as though the Mind of Light is Sri Aurobindo’s creation. He spoke of the vast tracks between Overmind and Supermind in the ’30s but they had remained until then unexplored. Never did he earlier mention at any time the Mind of Light, neither in letters nor in conversations. If it were a pre-established plane in the evolutionary ladder he would have certainly spoken about it. He saw the great difficulty in bringing down the Supermind directly in the earth-nature and therefore the focus of his sadhana in the ’40s was essentially fixed in solving this problem. As a part of that *modus operandi* he brought down a power of Supermind close to the earth making it a station for the higher operation. The Mind of Light becomes the physical receiving the supramental. This is a new station, a stage, created by him for the higher transition or evolution. A possibility of a new humanity has been worked out. This power of the Mind of Light he made directly operative in himself. He established it in his own body-consciousness. At the time of his passing away he gave it as a parting gift to the Mother.<sup>1</sup> His supreme sacrifice is to fix the unfixed supramental Light perma-

<sup>1</sup> K D S ’s comment

If Sri Aurobindo already had the Mind of Light, it was nothing new that he achieved by passing it on to the Mother. The Mind of Light getting achieved in the Mother was precisely the result of Sri Aurobindo’s sacrifice

nently on the earth Having fixed it he shifted his own station from the earthly physical to the subtle physical invoking the further descent. The Mother speaks of the enormous power he himself gained after the withdrawal from here. The supramental Descent of 1956 was a direct consequence of this action. .” Some time back Amal happened to borrow my copy of this book and quite understandably went through my notings. He himself made the following remark in the margin against the two sentences “As a part of that *modus operandi*. . the physical receiving the supramental”: “This is in line with my article but hardly in line with Sri Aurobindo’s articles”, which means that the Mind of Light will always remain elusive to our minds.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore let us move on to a few other topics in *The Vision and Work*. Amal’s exposition of Sri Aurobindo as the Poet of Integralism is, as are all his writings on poetry, exquisitely insightful with an epic span jubilantly measuring earth and heaven in one sweep Considering integral style and integral word-power as the two chief components of integralism, with matching experience and vision, he brings out most lucidly the uniqueness that is *Savitri*’s in world literature. Such a luminous integralism is possible only if one has unhindered access to the sources of “overhead” inspiration whose triumphant glory is in utterance of the overmind which we hear in compositions of the Vedic Rishis. But it finds its expression in very rare instances elsewhere also; elaborating this point Amal says: “Perhaps it is the pressure of this voice that from far behind gives, in Homer, through his nearness to something elemental, a ring of greatness and an air of divinity to everything said by him and endows his power of straightforward yet splendid speech with a rush of oceanic sound.” But what we have always in Sri Aurobindo is a “lift towards the *mantra*, culminating now

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He sacrificed his body in order to achieve the Mind of Light in a body continuing on the earth

Besides, it is extremely unlikely that he should possess the Mind of Light during his lifetime and the Mother remain without it until the moment he gave up his body. One would expect that whatever he possessed would automatically pass into her to put into action for conducting the Ashram’s Yoga

<sup>2</sup> K D S ’s comment

The view Sri Aurobindo presents in the article “Supermind and Mind of Light” (pp 131-34 of *The Supramental Manifestation*, 1952 Ed ) may be summed up as follows

Ontologically the overhead planes short of the Supermind are the “lower hemisphere”, but practically they are the “higher hemisphere”, because they carry in general the light of Truth and may be termed a subordinate power of the supramental Gnosis. In this range, from Overmind downward the Mind of Light stands where a step further down carries us into the beginning of the Ignorance. Thus the Mind of Light is below the Higher Mind and has a position on the threshold of ignorant mentality. Like all the other overhead planes inferior to the Supermind, it comes from the Supermind but is itself not a part of it.

Obviously, the Mind of Light discussed by Sri Aurobindo is not identical with the power which the Mother has defined and which she declared to have been revelatorily characterised by the two opening lines of my poem on it though a few passages in Sri Aurobindo’s discussion seemed assimilable into my thesis based on the Mother

In my article I tried to assimilate Sri Aurobindo’s articles into my thesis on the strength of certain passages. But now I see that those articles are along a line different from all the declarations of the Mother to me, which form the basis of my exposition



and again in that sovereign speech itself". Amal quotes a few illustrative lines and passages from *Savitri* pointing at the source of their inspiration; he also makes us aware of the echoes of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Vyasa, Tennyson, Shelley which we can hear in our deep chambers of silence; in the spiritual epic that is also a world-epic, in the encyclopaedic range of its subject-matter, everything is lifted to the sheer soul-vision giving it back to us with soul's truth and soul's beauty and soul's delight. But what is it that strikes us prominently as features of Sri Aurobindo's style in *Savitri*? "Felicity and novelty"—tells Amal. And yet that cannot be the true integralism of Sri Aurobindo. "Behind the poet in him is the master of integral yoga" who brings to us poetry "embodying the vision-thrill of an overhead consciousness".

Let us now briefly see one or two essays from the remaining lot where we have not the iambic exaltation climbing to the ethereality of the sky but a dactylic quantitiveness holding in its sound-body the power of thought. And the queer thing is, the massiveness of the Advaitic philosophy turns wholly towards essentiality of the One disregarding the notion that quintessentiality can become phenomenally tangible and concrete. Sethna discusses the problem of essentialism vs phenomenalism from the ontological and axiological view and compares the two answers, of Shankara and of Sri Aurobindo, in their many-one dimension. For Shankara the distancing by the one from the many is ontologically inevitable; also, axiologically, the one can be our essence only if the many is excluded from it. While the fundamental Reality of the absolute Brahman as the basis of all existence is a common factor in the spiritual philosophy of both Shankara and Sri Aurobindo, Shankara's one without the many, which for him is only an appearance, immediately becomes a stumbling block for Sri Aurobindo's conception of transformation and divine life in evolutionary manifestation, or what Sethna would like to call many-festation. No one will accept Sri Aurobindo if a satisfactory answer is not given by him pointing out, in addition to the reality of the one, the reality of the many. Sethna develops his arguments quite cogently and forcefully, with the tightness of philosophical phrasing, to show that ontologically Sri Aurobindo's Brahman is at once Essential and Self-creative, in other words, the reality of static and dynamic Brahman is posited, each inclusive of the other, and both based on a wider spiritual experience. Axiologically in Sri Aurobindo's view "we who pass from phenomenal terms to the essence can never be said to find our absolute perfection and fulfilment unless we reach what gives us the final divine truth of all these terms as well as release from them, a supreme transfiguration rather than an entire annihilation of them in the midst of their transcendence". The essay is indeed very well written and must be studied carefully, particularly by the Advaitins adhering to Shankara.

In the *Harmony of Virtue* Sri Aurobindo, while discussing fate and free-will, asks the question: "Are we free in ourselves?" Restated, "we seem to be free, to

do that which we choose and not that which is chosen for us". In *Savitri* we have the line "Man can accept his fate, he can refuse." Sethna in his article "*Freewill*" in *Sri Aurobindo's Vision* takes up this crucial issue from the point of spiritual metaphysics and discusses tersely the several implications flowing from it. The entire crux of the matter lies in the strange paradox—true or great paradoxes are always strange—that to "realise that all is Brahman we have to reject something as not Brahman!" Occult-spiritually what is, in a way of speaking, inevitably present in the scheme of things and in us is "some profound urge" to surpass all that ensues from this non-Brahman "In man, the mental being, the conscious self-evolver, the urge is an unavoidable open ingredient of his constitution and cannot help being insistent and deeply desirable. We may tend to justify the non-following of it by arguing from one half of God's truth: the vision of Pantheos. But when both halves are taken together and we do not overlook God from above calling to God from below to rise and evolve in the *milieu* of God that is all, then the urge to choose good and to reject evil is found to be a decree the soul in us has passed from the supramental identity-in-difference it enjoys within the multiple yet single Divine." This urge also means man's collaboration in the work of transformation and in that respect his free-will has to be recognised. Indeed, choice has to be made at every point and in it lies the growth of the will itself till that will becomes free with the Divine's freedom from all bonds.

Sethna narrates elsewhere his obsession with the problem of free-will ever since he was a student. Once when he was desperate with it he asked for an interview with the Mother. The interview runs as follows:

When I went, she asked: "Now what is the trouble?" I said: "Have I got free-will or have I not?" She began to speak. I at once interrupted: "Please don't argue with me, Mother: I have argued enough with myself. Don't say anything because I am sure to say something to contradict you. Just tell me whether or not my will is free, to however small an extent. Don't say anything more than 'Yes' or 'No'." She said: "Yes." I said: "That's enough." And I went away.

Now, in 1947, a much maturer Sethna gives us something superb. When the article was read out to Sri Aurobindo the Master said: "It is excellent. In fact, it could not be bettered." What a compliment! And yet Sri Aurobindo himself has bettered it! The heavenly sage who came from Paradise to Aswapathy's palace in *Savitri* lays bare the whole occult mystery of why our souls came here and suffer the yoke of Ignorance, why Satyavan must die, and how the hour is fixed and the fatal stroke. When our heart's will becomes one with the spirit's will, as it happened in the case of Savitri, then it becomes invincible and death-conquering; the "Spirit's interminable bliss" that the soul sensed even in a "negative infinity" is won again as if as a reward "for the adventure of Ignorance".

To conclude, let us skip the usual formalities of a review in pointing out the routine lapses and instead try to do something more violent than that: cut up Amal into four parts which, we are sure, he would endorse, of course out of his “freewill”. If we do so, we will find him with a Grecian mind, a Western heart, an Indian body, and an Aurobindonian soul. These are precisely the aspects reflected in the organic integralism of his *Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*.

(Concluded)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

# A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

*(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1993)*

## 8. A FRIEND WORTH DYING FOR

KOPERUN Chozhan, an eminent king of the Chozha empire, decided to die. It was not because of any incurable disease, for he was blessed with a fine physique, powerful and attractive. It was not because of want of good friends, for he had Potthiar and Pısranthaiar among many other poets who sang of his glory, and thereby encouraged him to do more good to the commons. It was not because of his enemies, for no king dared to attack him. But it was all because of his unruly sons.

The king had no faith in the princes and so refused to give them the crown. This led to a quarrel between the father and the sons. At an unexpected moment, the princes collected an army and waged a war against their father.

Broken-hearted stood King Koperun Chozhan. There was no option for him but to fight his sons. He too got ready. But his true friends gave good counsel and averted the battle for the throne.

The king stepped down giving way to his sons. But he was unable to sleep for several nights because he wasn't sure of what great disasters awaited his people in the hands of the new rulers.

Hence he decided to die, so that he wouldn't be a witness to the impending chaos and confusion in the empire. Moreover, if his decision would change the mind of his sons, it would be of immense help to the commons. His decision was final.

Renouncing his royal attire, he donned the garb of an ascetic. He then moved to the bank of the river and chose a spot to sit facing North. His idea was to practise austerities, attain the first of the eight siddhis, i.e., *anuma* (the power to become the size of an atom) and then disappear from the earth.

Preparations began for laying a stone slab, rectangular in shape, for the king to sit on.

"Another one to my right," said the king, to the dismay of everyone gathered there.

Since no one was bold enough to ask the king, they began to whisper: "What is that for?... "Who is expected to sit there?" "Does he want someone to die with him?"

While many of them stood there quaking with fear, one beamed with joy. He was Potthiar, the poet and a bosom friend of the king.

On the appointed day, the king-turned-ascetic reached the spot. He was followed by a very huge crowd.

Sitting cross-legged on one stone slab, he looked at the other and nodded his

head smiling all the time. Saluting the crowd ceremoniously by bringing his palms together, he bade farewell

But no one in the crowd trickled away. Everyone of them was eager to know who would be occupying the second slab.

Potthiar stood with great expectations. He wanted the king to make the first move. And when the king didn't do so, he officiously moved towards the slab, showing all gestures of occupying it.

"No .. don't. It's not meant for you," said the king.

Potthiar stood back and looked at the king inquiringly.

"For whom else, if it is not for Potthiar?" Everyone was heard to murmur.

"It is meant for my friend Pisiranthaiar." The king let the cat out of the bag.

"Pisiranthaiar!... You mean the poet from the Pandya Kingdom?" asked Potthiar.

The king nodded.

Everyone including Potthiar laughed up their sleeves.

"I don't understand why you people laugh! Be frank. What is your doubt?" asked the king

"Our only doubt is, how could you ever expect a man whom you have never met so far, to come all the way from the Pandya Kingdom, to die with you?" asked the poet.

"When you happily offer to die for me, why do you doubt that Pisiranthaiar, another intimate of mine like you, would not do the same?"

"But, your majesty! Our friendship is as old as our teeth. Can you think of a single day on which we were not together? But you and Pisiranthaiar have not met each other even once."

"So what? None can deny that Pisiranthaiar and I are good friends. He started singing of my glories and conquests ever since I ascended the throne. And I've always read and enjoyed his poems. I agree that our eyes have not met each other. But who can disagree when I say our hearts never got separated? We never forgot each other even for a single wakeful moment."

Potthiar was unaware of the fact that the depth of friendship does not depend upon the length of personal acquaintance. And so he asked: "But don't I deserve to die with you?"

"Why not?. But not now. You can join me when your wife gives birth to a son," replied the king

The crowd slowly melted away. Each one thought that the king had gone senile. Potthiar too didn't differ much from them.

On their way back Potthiar and a few others saw someone coming very fast from the opposite direction. He was tired-looking. "Where can I meet the king Koperun Chozhan?" asked the stranger.

"But he has nothing to give you. He has renounced his kingship," said Potthiar.

“I haven’t come here to get any help from him. I am his bosom friend. Something in me said that he was fasting to death. And I’ve come to give him company.”

“Who are you?”

“I am Pısiranthaiar, the poet. I am from the Pandya Kingdom.”

“Preposterous! Pısiranthaiar is known to us as an aged man. But you don’t have a single grey hair on your head.”

Pısiranthaiar sang a song as a reply to the question:

“How is it, in spite of old age,  
my hair has not turned grey? Ask you.  
Learned and virtuous are my wife and kids.  
My servants too act the moment I think.  
The king under whose protection I live  
cares for his subjects well.  
Above all, unrivalled scholars—meek and humble—  
masters of the five senses—live at my place.”

“How lovely!” exclaimed one in the crowd. “That’s why no streak of sorrow has penned wrinkles on your face.”

“Yes,” approved Pısiranthaiar, “as I lead a happy and contented life, my hair refuses to turn grey.”

Potthiar and others then lauded him on his promptness to go to a friend in adversity rather than in prosperity. They ushered him to the spot where the king awaited the poet.

The eyes of the king and those of the poet met for the first time. A festival galore went on in both their hearts

As Pısiranthaiar occupied the empty stone slab, the king beaming with joy told the crowd: “Life has no blessing like a true friend.”

Days passed. The king and the poet together left their emaciated bodies.

Two hero-stones were planted to honour the memory of the dead.

Years later Potthiar had a son. He was eagerly waiting for such a moment. He had not forgotten the words of the king. Hence he rushed to the river bank where stood the hero-stones. He looked at the royal stone on which the name of the king was chiselled, and said amidst tears: “I have come to die for you and for our poet friend. But where is the place for me?”

As he prayed in silence, a blaring noise like that of rumbling thunder was heard. He opened his eyes to see the hero-stones part a little thereby giving enough space for Potthiar to stand and breathe his last.

*(More legends on the way)*

## *Students' Section*

### THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Special Seventy-third Seminar

14 February 1993

#### HOW TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MOTHER ON THE PATH TO THE DIVINE LIFE?

Speech by Mita Chakravarti

THE question put to us for deliberation in this Seminar is of greatest importance for all the sadhaks of Integral Yoga

Footsteps of the Mother, or the way She did Her sadhana, the way She served the Lord, Sri Aurobindo, shine like gold all through the span of time in front of all aspirants. Just as a sunflower remains turned towards the sun, She with Her one-pointed surrender to Her sole Master, the Divine, is the perfect embodiment of the total self-giving demanded by the path. All through Her physical existence She has propounded this great truth of surrender to the Divine, the way to will what the Divine wills.

Sri Aurobindo said, "To practise Yoga implies the will to overcome all attachments and turn to the Divine alone."<sup>1</sup> "Self-giving or surrender is demanded of those who practise this Yoga, because without such a progressive surrender of the being it is quite impossible to get anywhere near the goal."<sup>2</sup>

When Sri Aurobindo was asked by His younger brother Barindra regarding His feelings about the Mother after their first meeting, He had paused for a moment and then said, "That was the first time I knew that perfect surrender down to the last physical cell was humanly possible: it was when the Mother came and bowed down that I saw that perfect surrender in action."<sup>3</sup>

The Mother knew that the best way of leading the world to the Master was to be Herself the example to be followed by others. So She made Her whole life a one-pointed, continuous act of surrender to Sri Aurobindo, to the Lord, to the Supreme. Even at the age of five Her inner being was already turned towards the Lord, and She had started Her quest. As She grew up and followed the ordinary norms of life, Her seeking always continued as the fundamental controlling centre of Her physical existence. It was such a concrete aspiration that even without any outer contact, She had visions of Sri Aurobindo and was working under His inner guidance.

<sup>1</sup> *The Mother* (Cent Ed, Vol 25), p 122

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p 131.

<sup>3</sup> Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, First Edition, p 151

Later She left Her life in France and came to India, to stay near Her Master and to serve Him. The change must have been rather drastic. Her life-style in Europe and that of the group of young men around Sri Aurobindo were completely unlike each other. Her friends, Her relatives, even Her little son, all were left behind to make Her surrender total and absolute. A complete, one-pointed submission to love and to serve the Divine Will became Her sole preoccupation. Her whole self was offered to the Divine to be used as He chose.

She continued to face all the difficulties and troubles unfalteringly, with incomparable steadfastness, with Her sole aim of serving the Lord, Sri Aurobindo. Till Her last breath, She concentrated to accomplish the task given to Her by Her Master and to fulfill it. No amount of physical illness could deviate Her from the path. She even bore the attacks of the Asuric forces, because everything was part of Sri Aurobindo's work in His infinite self. The Mother embodied unreserved surrender.

All Her *śraddhā*, tapasya, sadhana was directed towards the Lord. All Her life She has told us repeatedly to leave everything to the Lord. With what devotion and humility She has prayed to the Divine in Her *Prayers and Meditations!* There was never a prayer for any personal gain. It was always for His victory, for His manifestation, for His reign on earth. Again and again She bowed down to Him, so that His will might be expressed and His work in this world be accomplished.

Physically She worked tirelessly to manifest the Lord's will on earth. She was always so busy with the administration of the Ashram. Her ceaseless love protected all of us, inside and outside the Ashram, everywhere and at all times. In spite of all our ignorant egoistic meanderings She guided us, led us towards the ultimate goal. In the midst of Her manifold duties of physical existence, with infinite patience, She repeatedly turned us towards the Divine, through Her talks, Her messages, Her guidance. And through every act of Her life She made Her teaching always living by Her own shining example of self-giving.

She once gave the following directive to one of the devotees for practising perfect surrender:

“Three steps towards the Supreme Identification.  
 Give all you have, this is the beginning.  
 Give all you do, this is the way  
 Give all you are, this is the fulfilment.”<sup>1</sup>

The Mother, with Her whole, Her total existence has shown us the path of self-giving. To follow in Her footsteps, our duty is to follow this directive utterly, unfalteringly and unquestioningly

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 15, p. 109