

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

DECEMBER 2019

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00; Two years Rs. 400.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail (USA & Canada):

Annual: \$35

For 10 years: \$350

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70

For 10 years: \$700

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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriaurobindoashram.org.in

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXII

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

BUGLES OF LIGHT (Poem)	...	7
THE ORIGINS OF ARYAN SPEECH	...	8

The Mother

‘I ADDRESS BUT ONE PRAYER TO THEE’	...	25
HELPING HUMANITY	...	26
A CONVERSATION OF 20 MAY 1953	...	30
THE SUPRAMENTAL DESCENT	...	41

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

SRI AUROBINDO — MASTER SPIRIT OF MODERN AGE	...	42
---	-----	----

Georges van Vrekhem

THE CLOSING OF THE WESTERN MIND	...	46
---------------------------------	-----	----

Chitra Sen

NEEDLEWORK IN THE MOTHER’S EMBROIDERY DEPARTMENT	...	66
--	-----	----

Gautam Malaker

SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN — “LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA” (Part 4)	...	72
--	-----	----

Ratri Ray

SRI AUROBINDO’S EARLY POETRY ACCORDING TO RASAVĀDA — IX	...	86
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BUGLES OF LIGHT

Bugles of Light, bugles of Light, blare through the mist and the darkness!
Children of Immortality, we march through the Abyss and the Shadow,
Over us hustle the feet of the Fates and the wings of Erinnys,
In front is the screech of the Death horn, behind the red-eyed monster hunts and
howls the tornado.
Our steps search for the road and find the morass and the pitfall.
Follow the Gleam, follow the Gleam to the city of God and the pavements
of Dream!
Bugles of Light, bugles of Light, shatter the heart of the Darkness!

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 673)



THE ORIGINS OF ARYAN SPEECH

(A Draft Version)

In that pregnant period of European knowledge when physical Science, turned suddenly towards its full strength, was preparing to open for itself the new views, new paths and new instruments of discovery which have led to the astonishing results of the nineteenth century, an opportunity was offered to the European mind for a similar mastery of sciences other than physical. The Sanscrit language was discovered. It was at first imagined & expected that this discovery would lead to results as important as those which flowed from the discovery of Greek literature by Western Europe after the fall of Constantinople. But these expectations have remained unfulfilled. European knowledge has followed other paths and the seed of the nineteenth century has been Newton's apple and not Sir William Jones' Shakuntala or the first edition of the Vedas. The discovery of Sanscrit has, it is true, had a considerable effect on the so-called Sciences of Comparative Philology, Comparative Mythology, Science of Religion, ethnology and sociology; but these branches of knowledge are not sciences, they are systematised speculations. Their particular conclusions often change from generation to generation and none of them, not even the most certain, have the same cast of certainty as a scientific generalisation in the domain of physical inquiry. The law of gravitation is a permanent truth of science; the law that all myths start from the sun, the law of Solarisation, if I may so call it, is an ingenious error which survives at all only because it pleases the poetic imagination.

So great has been the failure that the possibility, even, of a Science of speech has been too readily scouted. But this is an excessive deduction, the reaction of disappointed expectation has exaggerated the meaning of the failure. To say that there can be no Science of speech is to say that the movements of the mind are not governed by intelligible processes, but rather by an incalculable caprice — a supposition that cannot be admitted. Intelligible processes there are for all natural action, and therefore also for mind & its instrument speech; the difficulty is to discover their precise lines of action. We need sufficient material and the right material; we need also the right way of approaching the material. Once that is discovered, the processes also will be discovered & the Science of speech founded.

In this volume I give the result of certain attempts I have made to approach the problem from a new standpoint. Sanscrit, I hold, is the key to the problem. In most other languages, we have a secondary or tertiary speech formation; we have to go beyond the actual form before us & reconstruct its parent tongue, to find again perhaps that the parent tongue has to be subjected to a similar reconstructive process. We have not sufficient materials for such a task; no instruments we possess can go deep enough. But Sanscrit, by a peculiar fidelity to its origins, presents us with a true

primary form of speech, in which the vocabulary indeed is late, — a new structure of word flesh & tissue, — but the base of the structure is primitive, reveals the roots of its being and betrays the principles of its formation. The failure of the comparative philologists to make use of their opportunity has been signal; it has even obscured the issue by creating a false system; but it is no more fatal or final than the failure of Aristotle to discover the law of gravitation, although he must have seen many fruits falling from many boughs. Sanscrit still stands there offering to us its secret.

The fundamental mistake of the philologists is contained in their famous original formula, *pitā, patēr, pater, Vater, father*, and the hasty conclusions they have drawn from it which have prevented a deeper scrutiny of the roots of language. An identity of words between various languages can never in itself lead to any fundamental discovery. It does not even prove that the languages thus agreeing are of a single stock. In many of the most common domestic terms Tamil and Sanscrit agree, but they are still held to be of different families. All therefore that is proved is not the identity of these tongues but their contact — so close a contact of one with the rest that a number of the commonest ideas & relations came in all to be expressed by terms borrowed from one. Nothing more is proved; we have not advanced a single step towards a science of languages. Even the classification of tongues as Aryan, Dravidian, Semitic cannot be called scientific; it is empirical and depends upon identities which may not be fundamental. We must go deeper. European philology has started from word-identities and identities of final word meaning. I propose to start from root-identities and identities of original & derivative root-meaning and even from sound identities and identities of fundamental and applicatory sound meaning. It is, I believe, possible in this way to establish the unity of the Aryan tongues and some at least of the laws governing the birth & development of Aryan speech. My inquiry does not carry me farther. I do not pretend as yet to inquire into the laws of speech itself, but only to establish from data, some facts of Aryan speech which may eventually help in solving the wider problem.

In another respect, also, the philologists seem to me to have misunderstood the conditions of their inquiry. They have been not rigid enough and yet too rigid. They have been too rigid in not allowing for the flexibility of mind movements. They have sought for the same invariable sequence which we observe in the physical world and admitted a law only where such sequence seemed to occur. The laws of physical formation follow a fixed line and their variations even are after a fixed fashion. But with the growth of life in matter there comes a growing element of freedom, of a more elusive principle & a more elastic variation; for this reason Science has found life more difficult to fathom & analyse than matter and her triumphs here have been far less notable than in the pure physical domain. Mind brings with [it] a still freer play, a still more elusive principle and flexible application. A general law always obtains, but the application, the particular processes vary more subtly and are more numerous. Science, not taking into account this law of increasing freedom, has in the domain of

mind accomplished little or nothing. When we deal with the laws of speech, we must remember this flexibility of all mind-processes. We must ourselves keep a flexible mind to follow it and an open eye for all variations. It is for regularity in irregularity that we must always be on the watch, not for a fixed, a cast-iron regularity. On the other hand the few laws which Philology has admitted, have been, by a sort of false compensation for their original narrowness, used with too free and even lax a play of fancy. Often indeed instead of working as a law, the philological principle presents itself as an ingenious means for inventing word-identities.

I have disregarded as another error of imperfect inquiry the rigid philological divorce of the Dravidian & Aryan languages. Whether there be a separate Dravidian stock or no, it is to me a certainty that Tamil owes not only many of its most common terms, but whole families of words to the original Aryan speech. Its evidences cannot be neglected in such an inquiry as I have undertaken, for they are of the greatest importance. Indeed the theory worked out by me, took its rise originally not from any analysis of the Sanscrit word-system, but from an observation of the relations of Tamil in its non-concretised element to the Greek, Latin & Northern Indian languages. At the same time it is on an analysis of the Sanscrit word-system that I have chiefly relied. I have omitted from that system most of its Vedic elements. The meanings of Vedic words are often extremely disputable & it would be unsafe to rely whether on the significances fixed by the European scholars or on those fixed centuries ago by Sayana or even by Yaska. It is better, & quite sufficient for the immediate purpose, to rely upon the classical tongue with its undoubted & well-ascertained meanings.

These are the lines upon which I have conducted my enquiry. The full proof of the results arrived at depends upon a larger labour of minute classification both of root families and word families in all the greater Aryan tongues, — a labour which is already in process, but not yet complete. What I have written in this book, will, I hope, be judged sufficient for a secure foundation. If it does no more, it may possibly lead to a deeper & freer approach to the problem of the origin of speech, which, once undertaken in the right spirit and with an eye for the more subtle clues, cannot fail to lead to a discovery of the first importance to human thought & knowledge.

SRI AUROBINDO

Chapter II

In an ordinary language which has not preserved the evidence of its origins, we are compelled to start with the full-formed word as our first & earliest document. We then find words existing in very small, unconnected families, little individualistic groups which seem to have started life on their own account without any observable growth from a common stock with other words that have, physically, a race-resemblance to them. We can all see that *doceo*, *doctrina*, *doctor*, *docilis*, *documen*, *doctus*, *docte*

are one family. They acknowledge their kinship openly. From this acknowledged kinship we can draw certain important conclusions; especially the law of development from a common root & certain fixed forms by the accretion of which to the root this development was effected. It is a beginning, but it does not carry us beyond the surface-strata of our subject of enquiry.

For when we look farther, we are confronted with a serious difficulty. We find a certain number of words which, in their formation, would seem to be connected like the family we have glanced at above though not so strictly connected: — *doleo*, I grieve, *dolenter*, painfully, *dolor*, grief are obviously so interconnected; *dolus*, fraud, *dolosus*, deceitful, *dolose*, deceitfully, are so interconnected; *dolo*, I hew, cut or break, *dolabra*, an axe, are so interconnected. But between these three families we have in Latin itself no proof of any connection. In languages which have so far worn away their original phonetic moulds that entirely unconnected words wear the same or a similar dress, this want of connection would not lead to any farther conclusion beyond our mere inability to establish a connection. But Latin is a language which has preserved its phonetic moulds to a considerable extent. If then these three little families are entirely unconnected, then any hope of establishing an effective Science of Speech-Origins or even a Science of Aryan Speech-Origins must be abandoned. For by the supposition to which we would then be inevitably led, there must have been three original roots, *dol*, to grieve, *dol*, to cut or split, and *dol*, to deceive, unconnected with each other in origin. How then did their significances come to be attached to them? By chance? by caprice? by arbitrary choice? by some obscure psychological law we cannot trace? We can no longer hope to decide.

The hypothesis I shall start from, — and every attempt to connect the superficially unconnected without which there can be no science, must start with hypotheses, — is that there can be no such want of connection, that *dol*, to grieve, *dol*, to split and *dol*, to deceive must have been & are one root and not three and the three different significances now attached to them, have been developed not by caprice, chance or arbitrary selection, but have a natural connection and were developed in intellect by an intelligible psychological movement behind intellect from an original common meaning or mind-impression created in the Aryan mind by the sound *dol*. For I hold it to be obvious that speech must have started from what we in India would call the *guna* of sound, some natural property of particular sounds to create under given conditions a particular kind of impression on the mind which, constantly associated with that sound, became the basis of a number of special intellectual significances, called by us the meaning of words, much more variable, much less fixed than the basic mind-significance. Afterwards the intellect playing consciously with the sound, by association, by analogy, by figure, by metaphor & simile, by transference, by a number of means, may carry the intellectual significance far outside the bounds of the original mental impression. Still, if we have some evidence, clues may be found & then the vagrant word may be traced back to its parent mind-impression. For this

reason we have to catch a primitive language when it is young or else find one which even in its maturity is more faithful than others to its primitive mould and preserves on its face much of its ancient history. Such a language is Sanscrit; it is, in fact, almost the only language which at all answers to our need.

But a sound like *dol* is not & cannot be a pure, primary & isolated sound. It has congeners, at least in form, brothers, cousins, more distant relatives. Does this kinship in form involve an original kinship in mind-impression and therefore in history of significance? If the theory of guna is correct, there must be some such kinship. Turning from Latin to the more fruitful field, the more copious evidence of Sanscrit, we find this root *dol* in the form *dal* (*a* sounded like the English *u* in *dull* and represented both in Greek & Latin by either *a*, *u* or *o*) meaning also to split, burst, & then to bloom, open. We find *dala*, a fragment; a blade, petal or leaf; we find *dalapa*, a weapon, that which splits, just as we have *dolabra*, an axe, from *dolo*; *dalmi*, Indra's thunderbolt, also the god Shiva; *dalika*, a piece of wood, that which is split. We find also *dalbha*, meaning fraud, dishonesty, sin, and we have this established that in Sanscrit also, the root *dal* meant to deceive as well as to split. We find also the reason why *dal* came to mean to deceive; for the word *dala* means not only the blade of a weapon, but the sheath of a weapon. In other words, *dal* must have borne the significance, to cover or to contain. We find from other Sanscrit instances that the idea of covering or hiding led naturally in the Aryan mind to the idea of fraud or deceit, as in *chad*, to cover, *chadma*, a disguise, pretext, fraud, dishonesty, trick. But how are the two significances, cover & split, connected? That they are connected, is established as a strong probability at least by the word, *cha*, cutting, dividing, a fragment or part, which in its feminine form *chā* means covering, concealing and the neuter *cham*, a house, that which covers. If they are connected, the idea of cutting must have led to that of cutting off, separating, screening and thence to the significance we find in *chadman*, covering, disguise, fraud. There is no distinct significance of pain attached to the root *dal* either in Sanscrit or Greek; but we do find that the word *dalita* in Sanscrit meant crushed, oppressed, trampled, and, more curiously & significantly, we find *dālanam* in the sense of toothache. It is easy to see how the idea of cutting, tearing, rending must have led easily to the sense first of a special kind of pain and then by detrition of force to that of pain generally. But we find more. We find not only *dal*, we find other roots kindred in sound, having something of the same history. For instance, *dambh* means to kill, destroy, strike down; but *dambha*, the noun proper to this verb, means deceit, fraud, trickery, sin, ostentation, pride (we see how starting from the idea of fraudulent intention or hypocrisy we come to the very different idea of ostentation without fraud or pride, — again by detrition of special force); we find *dambha* & *dambholi* meaning like *dalmi* Indra's thunderbolt, and *dambha* means also, like *dalmi*, the god Shiva. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that to the Aryan mind *dambha* & *dalmi* were words so closely akin that they carried easily the same impressions to the mind and the same significance to the intellect. But what is then

common to these two roots? It is the sound *da*, which must, therefore, by my theory have had a guna or mind-impression which naturally adhered in common to the two roots *dal* and *dambh*.

It is the second step of my theory, therefore, that not only must the three *dal* families be one family, not only must one root-sound have had originally one root-meaning, but that all kindred root-sounds must also be of one family and have proceeded from the simple sound, consisting of consonant & vowel, which is common to all of them, and the guna or natural mind impression belonging to that simple sound must have been the basis not only of the intellectual significances common to its progeny, but of those even which vary most from each other. *Da* is the simple root-sound, — the primary root; *dal*, *dambh*, *dabh*, *daś*, *dah*, *dakṣ*, *daṁś*, *das*, *daṁs*, *dagh*, *daṅgh*, *daṅḍ*, *dad*, *dadh*, *dan*, *dam*, *day*, roots which we find or can trace in Sanscrit, are its derivative, secondary or tertiary root-sounds. The simple sound contains in itself the seed significance which it imparts to its descendants, whether sons, grandsons or remote progeny. We have thus immensely widened our basis and approached much nearer to a scientific consideration of language.

Let us see whether the hypothesis finds any farther support in the facts of the Sanscrit language. We take the senses to split, burst open, cut, tear, crush, destroy, cheat, belonging to *dal*; we find the same senses or kindred senses such as hurting, as in *dolor* and *doleo*, not only in *dambh*, but in *dabh*, to injure, hurt, deceive, cheat and its Vedic derivatives *dabdhi*, hurt, & *dabha*, fraud, — if these be the right senses; & in *dabhra*, little, small, from the sense evidently of cutting, a slice, or small part. We find them in *dam*, to crush, afflict, & so to subdue, overpower, tame, conquer, restrain and its derivatives, *dama*, *damaka*, *damathu*, *damana*, *damin*, *damyā*, *dānta*; the last containing a lengthening of the vowel, to which we shall have occasion to return. We also find in *dama*, *damathu*, *damana*, *damyā* the kindred sense of punishment, & we find in the Vedic sense of *dama*, the significance house, as in Latin *domus*, Greek δόμος, δῶμα (again we notice the lengthening of the vowel), from which at once we return to the idea of covering we had to infer in *dal*. All these are evidently kindred roots belonging to the labial variety of the *da* family, formed that is to say by accretion of the sounds *p*, *ph*, *b*, *bh*, *m* (labio-nasal) or any combination of which they are the base to the simple sound.

We turn to other subfamilies. We find in the guttural subfamily *dakṣ*, to hurt or kill, *dakṣāyā*, a vulture (tearer of carrion); *dagh*, to kill, hurt; *dāgha*, burning; *daṅgh*, to abandon or leave, which I trace to the sense of cutting off, separating, casting away; an association of ideas we shall find again in Sanscrit. We find in the cerebral subfamily, *daṅḍ*, to punish, fine or chastise; *daṅḍa*, a cudgel, staff or sceptre, — afterwards any trunk, stalk or thing standing; fine, chastisement as in *dama*, *damathu*, *damana*; assault; subjection, control, restraint, as in *dama*; pride, as in *dambha*; a corner or angle, apparently from the sense of cutting off, separating & so containing, which mates it in its roots to *dama*, a house & *dal*, to feign or deceive.

A number of derivatives from *daṇḍ*, & *daṇḍa* repeat the same senses. We find also *dāḍaka*, a tooth or tusk and *dāḍhā*, a large tooth or tusk. We find in the dental subfamily *danta*, a tooth; also bower, arbour (to cover, screen, shelter); *dān*, to cut or divide, & its derivatives *dānava*, a Titan, *dānu*, a demon, also supposed to mean conquering or destroying, like *damana*; *dadhi*, a garment (to cover). We find in the liquid subfamily, along with *dal*, *day*, to hurt & *dāya*, loss, destruction, a part, share or gift. We find in the sibilant subfamily *das*, to destroy, bite, overpower (*dam*); to decay, waste, perish; to cast away (cf *daṅgh*, to abandon) & its derivatives, notably *dasyu*, an enemy; *daśana*, tooth & *daṣṭa*, bitten; *damś*, to bite, sting; *damśa*, bite, sting, cutting, tearing, tooth, pungency; a limb or joint; *dandaśa*, a tooth; *damśṭrā* & other derivatives varying these senses; *daśā*, a division or period of time, afterwards a state or condition, age etc; but we find also *damśana*, *damśa* and *daśana* in the sense of armour; *damśita*, mailed or protected; *dantura*, covered, overspread, — which bring us back to the idea of covering. The idea of protection once ascertained & traced, we turn back and find it recur in *dagh*, *daṅgh*, in *dānam*, protection (as well as gift), *day*, to protect, have pity, with its derivatives. The sense of giving which we find in *dāya* & can trace to the idea of cutting up, distribution or casting away, abandoning, handing over — but it can be shown to result really from the former — we get in *dā*, to give, *dānam*, a gift & many other derivatives; *dakṣiṇā*, a gift; in *dad* & *dadh*, to give, *dasma*, a sacrificer and in *day*, to grant, divide, allot. We have, in addition, *dah*, to torment, grieve, burn & its derivatives in the same sense; *dahara*, small, fine, young (cf *dabhra*), — a mouse or rat (the gnawer); *dahra*, small, fine, thin, a fire. Lastly we have, proving the previous existence of an obsolete root *da*, the adjective *da* in the sense of giving, destroying, cutting off; the noun *da*, a gift or donation and the feminine *dā* in the sense of heat (*dah*) and of repentance (*dolor*). The evidence is almost of an oppressive conclusiveness. It is a family of words, which bear the same or kindred meanings and seem all to go back to the root meaning to divide, usually with some idea of completeness, force, or even violence.

There are, we must note, a certain number of significances which do not at once trace themselves to or apparently connect themselves with the original sense. Some of these can on a moment's reflection be so traced & evidence of the particular association of meaning on which we have to proceed, can be found in other root families. Thus we have *daśā* in the sense of mind or understanding; *dakṣ*, to be competent or able; *dakṣa* & *dakṣiṇā*, expert, able, fit which connect themselves with the Latin *doceo*, to teach, the Greek *δοκέω*, I think, seem & *δόξα*, opinion, idea, judgment; but the sense here is evidently that of discrimination or analysis as in the Sanscrit roots *ci* & *cit*, *cetas*, mind, *citta* etc; and this brings us back to the idea of division and distribution. We may compare *dambh*, to arrange & so collect, and *ci* bearing the same senses as well as to heap up, increase which we find again in *dakṣ*, to grow, increase (cf *dānam*, addition). There are other common senses, mostly connected with the idea of moving or of shining, *damś*, to shine (also, to speak?); *dakam*, water (to flow); *dakṣ*, to go or

move; *dagh*, to go, leap, flow, attain; *dānu*, a fluid or drop; *dabh*, to go, push, impel; *dabhram*, the ocean (to flow); *das*, to shine, *dasma*, beautiful (bright, shining). These dissociated meanings are very few in number & rare in occurrence. Such as they are, they occur in different parts of the family, guttural, labial, dental and sibilant, and their presence & distribution proves yet more powerfully the now apparent & established truth that all Sanscrit words having for their basis the sound *da* are of one family, go back to the simple sound *da* as their simple root of being and derive from it all their varying senses. We have to add this fact, important for the particular family & as we shall see for the whole theory but not affecting our general conclusion, that we must seek in the original mind impression of the sound *da* some force of guna which gives rise directly to the idea of dividing with force or completeness and also can enter into ideas of motion & shining.

But we have not yet finished with this sound *da*. For just as the derived sound *dal* had its congeners, sounds kindred to it in form, so has the simple sound *da* other simple sounds by its side which are kindred to it in form and ought therefore to be congeners. These sounds are *dā*, *di*, *dī*, *du*, *dū*, *dṛ* & *dṝ*. The vowel sounds *e* and *o*, *ai* and *au* are in Sanscrit merely modifications of *i* and *u*, so that these seven roots with the lost root *da* form the whole original family of simple sounds depending on and having for their common base & element, the consonant sound *d*. If these roots are found to be one original family, we have gained another step and come yet nearer to the foundations of speech. My third step in the hypothesis is to accept this supposition and to lay down the rule that all simple roots formed in sound by the accretion of a vowel to the consonant sound *d* are one family having the guna of that sound as their seed of meaning, just as they themselves are separately the seed of meaning to their own descendants. We get therefore a seed-sound in addition to the primitive root-sound and their descendants the secondary & tertiary root-sounds.

Let us see how this hypothesis fares when confronted with the facts of the Sanscrit language. We have seen in passing that *da* & *dā* are the same root, one the short form, the other the long form. *Dā* has the same sense as *da*, *dās*, like *das*, means to hurt, kill, it means also, to give. There are no senses of the *dā* roots which are not shared by or traceable to the *da* roots. We must therefore proceed to the other vowels as forming three & not six classes of roots; we may treat in the absence of any opposing facts *dī* as a lengthening of *di*, *dū* of *du*, *dṛ* of *dṝ*. From the *da* family I have omitted the words which have for their basis the syllables *dar* & *dav*; yet these words are of great interest. For we find *dara*, in the sense of tearing, rending and also, like *dabhra* and *dahara*, of little, small. This sense of tearing, breaking, hurting we get again in *daraṇam*, *daraṇi*, *darita*, *dardara*, *darma*, *darva* (injury, mischievous person, goblin, as in *dānu*), in *dāra*, a rent, hole, ploughed field extending itself to *dārāḥ*, a wife, *dāraka* (also a child, infant, young animal, sense belonging also to *dahara*), *dāraṇam*, *dārikā*, *dāri*, *dārī*, *dārīta*, *dārin*, *darbha*, the sharp Kusha grass, *dardura*, a district, province, *dāru* (tearing, rending, also a piece of wood, wood or

pine-tree), & *dāruṇa*, terrible, rough, cruel, frightful, sharp, severe, violent or agonising (of grief & pain), a word of great interest as it shows us how moral senses developed from the physical idea. We find too *dara*, a cave, *daratha* and *darī* (also a valley) in the same sense, from the idea of cleft or hole which we have already had in *dāra* & *dārikā*. Again we have the same word *dara* in the sense of a stream, *darāṇi*, an eddy, current or surf, *daratha*, fleeing, flight, scouring for forage, *dārdura*, water. Connected perhaps with the sense of flight but really expressing the oppressive troubling feeling of fear, we have *dara*, *darad* and *darada*, fear, *daratha* & *darita*, timid or frightened. We have *daridrā*, to be poor or needy, with its derivatives, connecting this family with the sense of suffering, oppression, distress, wretchedness, burning (cf *dagdha*, distressed, famished, dry, insipid, wretched, vile, accursed) we find in the *da* family. We have again *dāru* in the sense of liberal, a donor, kind (cf *dakṣiṇa*, also meaning kind). There are more curious identities. *Darad* means, among other senses, heart; now *dahara* and *dahra* also mean “the cavity of the heart or the heart itself”. *Darad* means also a mound, mountain or precipice; *dardara*, *dardura*, likewise means a mountain; but in the *da* family we have also *da*, a mountain, *daśana*, the peak of a mountain, *danta*, the peak, side or ridge of a mountain. The identification in sense of this *dar* basis in its stock with the *da* family is complete. Their only senses, not traceable to the common original meanings, which find no parallel in that family are those which spring from the idea of sound, *dardura*, *dardarika*, a musical instrument; but we have in the Aryan vernaculars the word *ḍamaru*, a kind of drum, which may represent an original Aryan word not preserved in the literary language.

Now the question arises. Do all these words belong to the roots *ḍr* & *ḍṛ* or are they from an original root *dar*? There can be no doubt as to the answer. Nearly all, if not all, are avowedly children of the *ḍr* stock. It follows then that the roots of the *ḍr* family are one race with the roots of the *da* family, cousins perhaps, but members of a joint family who hold the same property in common & use it with a more than socialistic indiscriminateness. *ḍr* itself means to hurt or kill, *ḍṛ* means to tear, rend, split, separate, disperse, and to fear; *ḍṛti*, a skin, hide, or bag; *ḍṛka*, a hole or opening; *ḍṛnphū*, a snake, thunderbolt (*dambha*, *dambholi*, *dalmi*), wheel (*dalbha* also means a wheel), the shining or burning sun. *ḍṛp* is to inflame, kindle or to pain, torture; *ḍṛmp* also means to torture, afflict, distress, *ḍṛbh*, to fear, & *ḍṛbham*, fear, finally *ḍṛś*, to see with all its derivatives. That this sense of seeing which we find also in *ḍṛp* (*darpaṇa*, a mirror, *darpaṇam*, the eye) comes not from the idea of light in reflection but from the original physical idea of discerning, separating with the eye, is evident from the fact that *das* also means to see. There are two sets of associations in this word which are of considerable help to us in fixing the exact history of certain developments in this family. The word *ḍṛp* expresses any violent troubling emotion; it means to be greatly delighted, wild, extravagant, mad or foolish, proud or arrogant (without anything of that idea of ostentation attached to *dambha*); *darpa* means pride, insolence, rashness, heat, musk (from the strong, oppressive scent); *ḍṛpta* means proud. *ḍṛ* again means to

care for, mind, desire, & so to worship or respect — its root sense is evidently care, anxiety or excitement of love or other favourable feelings. We see more clearly now why words of this root bear the sense of grief, fear, pain. The mind-impression of the seed sound carries with it this possibility of expressing any emotion or sensation which is oppressive, troubling, disintegrating to the peace of the mind. To the pervasive root idea of strong division, we have to add the idea of oppression tending to division which is thus revealed to our observation.

But *ḍṛpta* also means strong and this sense is found again in *ḍṛñh*, to strengthen, fortify, fasten, be firm, grow or increase; *ḍṛḍha* is firm, fixed, solid, dense, strong, hard; *ḍṛḍham* means iron, a fortress or abundance; *ḍṛbh*, to tie, fasten, arrange, string together; *ḍṛṣad*, a stone or rock; *ḍṛh*, to be fixed or fasten, to grow, increase or prosper. We have met some of these meanings in the *da* family. We have found words there which mean a mountain, and these may now be attributed to this root meaning of firmness, solidity, size and density. We may notice also a group of words which we have hitherto omitted; *dāman*, a string, thread or rope, a bandage, a girdle, which also means a line or streak (from the idea of cutting); *dāmanī*, a foot-rope, *dāmā*, a string or cord and *dāminī*, lightning, from the idea of shining. We may also note, as it now appears, that the kind of light indicated by this family, is only an oppressive or a sharp piercing light as in *dāminī*, *ḍṛñphū*, *das*, to shine, and the words which mean fire or to burn. I have to suggest that this idea of firmness, solidity, compactness comes similarly from a sense of close, heavy contact, pressing things together into firm cohesion.

What, then, is the result of this detailed examination of the *ḍṛ* family of roots? Always the same; first, that, whatever their varieties of meaning, there is no sense the words of this household bear which cannot be paralleled from the roots of the *da* & *dā* household & does not either explain or get explained by them and, secondly, that these varieties resolve themselves to & derive from a common *guna* or mind impression variously applied.

Again, there are a certain number of compound roots with a base combined of *d* and *r* which it would be as well to examine here as possibly kindred to the *ḍṛ* roots. We find *drakṣa*, a kettle drum; *drāñkṣ*, to croak; *druta*, a scorpion (to sting); *dru*, wood, tree or branch (*dāru*); *druma*, a tree; *druha*, a deep lake; *drāgh*, to vex, torment, exert oneself, be weary, stretch, also to be able (cf *dakṣ*); *drākh*, to be able, to become dry (*dagdha*; *dal*, to wither), to adorn, grace (to shine); *drāḍ*, to split, divide or be pulled to pieces; *drāpa*, mud, mire (which recalls a meaning of *dama*, mud, mire), a small shell (*dara* also means a conch-shell); *drāva*, heat; *druḍ*, to sink or perish; *druṇ*, to hurt, injure, twist, bend; *druṇa*, a scorpion or rogue; *druṇam*, a sword or bow; *druḥ*, to hurt, bear malice; *dru*, to hurt or injure; *drū*, gold, from the idea of brilliance; *drek*, to sound (originally, a discordant sound as in *drāñkṣ*), to grow or increase, to be exhilarated (*ḍṛp*); *drona*, a scorpion, a tree, a bucket. We have the idea of desire, wish or longing in *draviṇam*, wish, desire. We have the idea of solidity or density in *dravya*,

substance, material, wealth, strength, *draḍhiman*, tightness, firmness, heaviness, & in *drākh*, to obstruct. All these form a goodly array of evidences, showing the family identity of these roots with the *da* and *dr* groups.

There are a few isolated meanings whose connection is not so immediately clear, such as *drā* or *drai*, to sleep, *drāṇam*, sleep (cf *nidrā*); but this is probably connected in sense with *drāgh*, to be weary or heavy from exertion, & will then contain the common idea of heaviness or oppression; *drāh*, to wake; *drāpa*, heaven, either from shining or from the idea of covering; and one or two others of the kind. But these may all be traced with a little difficulty to the common significations and are extraordinarily few in number. One would expect in so ancient & long-lived a tongue as Sanscrit a far greater number of meanings which have wandered too far outside or too near to the farthest permissible verges of the country occupied by their race to be easily identifiable or exactly paralleled among their kindred.

Then we have a number of significations resulting from the root sense of motion which are of some importance to us. They start mainly from the two ideas of running and flowing. *Dru*, the most characteristic, means to run, flow, rush, attack, melt, ooze or simply by detrition of special force, to go or move. This root also means to hurt and to repent. We have also *druṇ*, to go, move; *drū* in the same sense; *dram*, to go or run about (Gr. δρόμος); *drapsa*, a drop; *drava*, speed, etc, the noun proper to *dru*, but meaning also play, amusement (cf *div*, later); *drāva*, liquefaction, melting, running, flowing, flight, speed; *drāvaṇam*, distilling; *dravantī*, a river; *drā*, to run, make haste, fly (the same word which means to sleep); *drāk*, quickly, instantly etc; *drāgh*, to wander about. We shall find that the idea of motion is common to all Sanscrit root families but that in each case there are certain special significances kept in the words, where their special force has not suffered detrition, which tend to show that they originally indicated a particular kind of motion. It is possible & probable that swift, overcoming, forceful motion, “darting, dashing”, kindred to the idea of pressure & division, is the proper sense of motion in the roots of this family. It is even possible that the words *drāva* & *drāvaṇam* from *dru* — distilling, liquefaction by heat, etc — *dakṣ*, to do, go or act quickly, keep the original force, & that the other shades of sense under this head show the gradual force of the influence of detrition, a phenomenon whose study is of as great an importance in the history of language as the study of detritions of sound rightly so much insisted on in Comparative Philology.

After such consistent & conclusive results a very cursory examination of the *di* & *du* families might be held sufficient. Nevertheless, in order that the full force of the evidence may be appreciated, I shall devote an equal care to these two households, fortunately not very numerous in their population, as well as to the compound bases, *dy* & *dv* & the modified forms *de* (*dai*) and *do* (*dau*). We start as in the *dra* roots with *diṇḍi*, a kind of musical instrument, & then come to *dita*, cut, torn, divided; *diti*, cutting, dividing, liberality; *ditya*, a demon (also *daitya*, cf *dānu*, *dānava*); *dinv*, to gladden, please (*drp*); *dimp*, *dimbh*, to accumulate (*dambh*), also to order, direct;

div, to shine, play, sport (cf *drava*); squander (from the sense of waste, scatter); to throw, cast; be glad; be sleepy (*drā*, *drai*); be mad or drunk (*dṛp*); to wish; to vex, torment, lament, suffer pain; & two new meanings, to sell & to praise, — the one associated with the idea of giving, delivering, distributing; the other with the idea of love, respect, homage (*dṛ*). Proceeding we find *div*, *diva* & *divan*, heaven, sky (which helps, perhaps, to solve our former difficulty *drāpa*, though I believe that to be connected with Vedic *drāpi*, a cloth or robe), day (also *dinam*), light, brilliance (the original meaning); *divya*, divine etc; *deva*, divine, a god, quicksilver, a sense we have also in [], a lover; sport, play; *dev*, to sport, gamble, lament, shine, throw or cast; *devanam* in connected senses, but also meaning praise, motion, beauty, and an affair or business which connects it with *dakṣ* & perhaps with the Gr δρᾶω, I do & δρᾶμα; *diṣṇu*, a giver, donor; *dih*, to increase, augment, and to smear, from the idea of rubbing, pressing; *de*, to protect, cherish; *deha*, anointing; body (to contain); *dehī*, rampart, wall (to cover or to strengthen); *dai*, to protect, brighten, cleanse, purify; *dī*, to perish, waste; *dī*, decay, ruin; *dīti*, *dīditi*, splendour, lustre; *dīna*, poor (*daridra*), distressed, wretched, sad (*dagdha*), frightened, timid (*dara*, *darita*); *dīp*, to shine & its derivatives; *dīrgha*, long (cf *drāgh*), *dīrghikā*, a lake, big pond or well. Finally we have *diś*, to give, grant, pay, assign, allot, show, point out, teach, direct or order (cf *dimp* above); *diṣṭa*, *deśa*, *diśā*, a direction, quarter. The last root, identically with Gr δείκνυμι, at once throws a light on *daśā*, understanding, *dakṣa*, Grk δόξα, δοκέω, Latin *doceo*, I teach. It is the same idea of discernment, discretion or separation, allotting things to their place, showing, teaching — the family of special significances which have since had so important & brilliant a history.

Once again what is the upshot of this substantially exhaustive statement of the significances in Sanscrit of the *di* family? Once again the result never varies. It is precisely the same. It is as if this particular family in Sanscrit, at any rate, were insistent on proving the theory with which we started, on declaring themselves all one family, with the same spirit, the same temperament, the same intellectual equipment, the same physical features. Absolutely, we have arrived at hardly a single new significance & none which can be isolated from the rest of the family.

We turn to the *du* roots. We start with *du*, to burn, torment, afflict, give pain, be pained; also to go or move! Then there is *dūna*, pained, burned, agitated (the essential idea in all emotional senses in this family, good or bad); *duḥkh*, to pain, afflict, distress & *duḥkha*, pain, grief, trouble, difficulty, unpleasant, difficult, uneasy, with its derivatives; *duḍi*, a small tortoise (*duli* also means tortoise); *duṇḍuka*, dishonest, fraudulent, bad-hearted; *duṇḍama* (but probably from Rt *ḍam*, cf *ḍamaru*), *duṇḍubhi*, *duṇḍu*, *duṇḍubha*, a drum; *duṇḍumā*, the sound of a drum; *dudh*, to kill, hurt, injure, propel, with its derivatives; *dur*, a particle prefix with the sense of hard, bad; *durv*, to hurt or kill; *duvas*, active (cf *dakṣ*, *devanam*, δρᾶω); *dul*, to toss up, swing; *duṣ*, to corrupt, spoil, destroy; to censure, annul; to be bad, impure, sinful, & its derivatives (cf *daṃśa*, a fault or defect); *dūṣikā*, a paint brush (cf *dih*, to smear), rheum of the

eyes; *dūṣya* meaning corruptible, pus, or poison, but also cotton, a garment, a tent, — the common root sense to cover suddenly turning up in this unexpected quarter as if to point out the entire identity of these families; *duh*, to milk or squeeze out (here we have the original sense of violent pressure), to yield or grant, to enjoy, to hurt, pain, distress, & its derivatives (cf also *dogdhr* & *doṣaka*, both meaning a calf); *dū*, to afflict, be in pain; *dūrvā*, kusha grass (cf *darbha*); *dūra*, far, distant (cut off, separated); *dūśyam*, a tent; and finally *dūta*, a messenger, which must derive from the sense of impelling, sending we have already found in this family. We have also *do*, to cut, divide, mow, reap; *dora*, a rope; *doṣas*, *doṣā*, night, darkness (to cover, hide); *dos*, *doṣā*, *doṣan*, the arm, forearm, the side of a figure (probably, to cover, contain, embrace); *doha*... Once more, we receive nothing but confirmation of our theory.

There are, finally, two connected families, connected, as we might say, by marriage with the seed sounds *y* and *v*. In the first we have *dyu*, to encounter, attack; *dyu*, day, sky, brightness, heaven, sharpness, fire, with a number of kindred words, *dyauh*, *dyumat*, *dyumna* etc; *dyut*, to shine, elucidate, express, with its derivatives; *dyūta*, gambling, play, battle; *dyūna*, sportive, sorry; *dyai*, to disfigure, despise (cf *div*, to make sport of, squander, make light of). In the second we have *dvi*, two (to separate) & its derivatives; *dvandva*, a couple, strife, duel, fortress (to strengthen), secret (to hide); *dvār*, *dvāra*, door, gate, aperture; *dviṣ*, to hate, dislike (cf *druh* etc) with its derivatives; *dvīpa*, shelter, protection, refuge, an island (to divide, cut off, separate), a division of the world, continent; *dvīpin*, a tiger, leopard (to tear, rend); *dvr*, to cover, hinder (obstruct), disregard, misappropriate (cf *dasyu*, a robber). Again, an absolute confirmation.

We have completed our survey of this great *D* clan of Aryan words, so far as the Sanscrit language holds them & introduces them to us in its classical form. No one, I think, can regard this evidence without being driven inevitably to the conclusion that here we have no chance aggregation of words, no language formed by chance or arbitrarily, but a physico-mental growth as organic, as clearly related in its members, species, families, subfamilies as any particular species of physical fauna & flora. The words claim each other for kinsmen at every step. Not a single family, not one small group fails to bring forwards its claim, its documents, its oral evidence. All stand together, shoulder to shoulder, as closely as any Highland clan or savage tribe. The most opposite meanings meet in a single word, but always there is the evidence borne by the rest of the family to their common origin not only in body but in spirit, not only in physical sound form, but in mental sense origin & development. The proof is complete.

We have then a single great family with a common store of sense-property which each uses according to his needs. We have a number of meanings all going back to a few radical significances. What are those significances? First, forceful, effective or violent division or separation; second, swift oppressive overbearing motion; third, heavy pressure or oppression; fourth, violent, oppressive, strongly agitated or

simply emphatic emotion; fifth, strong, heavy sound; sixth, strong, overpowering scent; seventh, strong or swift action; eighth, strong, brilliant or oppressive heat or light; ninth, close, solid & heavy contact or cohesion. I have stated them at random, but I think a little reflection will show us that these nine fundamental ideas resolve themselves into the single idea of a heavy, decisive pressure, sometimes the idea of weight, sometimes the idea of decision predominating, applied to the fundamental experiences which would recommend themselves to the newly awakened and virgin observation of mankind; viz sound, contact or touch, (form), light, (taste), smell, motion & action, sensation objective & subjective. From the *da* family form & taste seem to be absent; either they have lost it or never applied themselves to these provinces of human observation. But we cannot yet say this precisely; for we have the word *deha*, body, the Greek δέμας, shape, body; δέμω, to build. It is obvious also that words expressive of taste must necessarily be fewer & more limited than the words expressing sound or touch. It is possible that words of form & taste were drawn by a figure from other primary senses & were not in themselves a primary application of the original mind-impression to the terms of intellectual appreciation. We shall have to examine languages more widely before this question can be decided. Another idea that hardly appears in this clan is that of human speech itself as distinguished from sound in general.

I, therefore, add an additional hypothesis to those I have already formulated, viz that the original guna or mind-impression created naturally & automatically by the seed sound (in this case the consonantal sound *d*) was applied primarily to the simple categories of sense observation, contact, sound, light, motion & action, including speech, sensation, and perhaps taste & form. It is no more than a hypothesis at present; for other sound families will have to be examined before this hypothesis can be either established or dismissed as untenable. I put it forward here for the sake of completeness.

It is not necessary to suppose that this perception of mental or sensational sound values, of the particular impression on mind-sensation of a particular inarticulate sound defining & separating itself on the human tongue or even its systematic application to the categories of sense observation was willed, conscious or intellectually reasoned out in the men who first framed their utterance into the vocables of Aryan speech. Nature, whatsoever Nature may be, guides the unconscious tree & flower, the unreasoning insect & animal to self-expression, to self-organisation, to self-evolution, & the result exceeds the best efforts of the deliberate human intellect. Why should she not have done the same for human speech? Instead of saying that men applied the guna of the particular sound to the sensations they wished to express, let us say that as in plant & tree & animal the sound itself, by the force of Nature, by the law of its own activity, *svadhām anu, ṛtūn anu*, “according to its own self-arrangement, in the straight line of the truth of things inherent in it,” and helped by the half conscious responsive awakening mind, applied itself in the service of mind to the various classes of sense

observation which his awakening mentality demanded. I do not say this is the final & complete truth of the matter. But it is the only part or aspect of the truth of it at all consonant with our present way of approaching Nature as a blind force working in matter out of unconscious through half conscious into fully conscious action. It is the only theory which, provided it can establish itself, deserves, as it seems to me, to be called in the modern sense, rational & scientific; for it takes its stand on the two natural movements which constitute speech, the physical movements of articulation & the mental movement, partly sensational, partly discriminatory which attends the physical movements. And it seeks to establish itself by reducing the relation between these two motions to classified order & ascertained rule.

Chapter III

We have not, however, approached even yet the last step of our theory. For as there are families of words, families [of] root sounds, families of simple sounds, so also are there families of seed-sounds. These families are known to all grammarians & in Sanscrit they have been distinguished with a faithful & peculiar care & related to those parts of the organ of speech which play the decisive part in their articulation; but their relations to meaning seem never to have been studied. The seed sound *D* belongs to the group called dentals, which consists in Sanscrit of the hard *t*, the soft *d*, the aspirates *th* & *dh* & the dento-nasal *n* — for every consonant group except the liquids, the sibilants and the isolated aspirate *h* is composed of these five members, the hard consonant leading, the soft following, each attended by its corresponding aspirate and a nasal bringing up the rear. Sanscrit has three sibilants & even these it attributes to the complete groups; *s* to the dental, *ś* to the palatal and *ṣ* to the cerebral family. The question then arises, are these groups only related in sound? or are they related also in guna and therefore in signification tendency? If there is any soundness in the theory I have been advancing, then as we have found the word-families united in a single root family with a single paternal root (as, *dal*, *dah*, *dabh* etc), these root families united through the paternal roots in a single primitive root family, phratria or brotherhood (as, the *da* family) with one paternal simple root, & these primitive brotherhoods united through their paternal root (*da*, *di*, *du*, *dr*) in a single clan with one paternal seed sound (*d*), so also we ought to find kindred clans united through their ruling sound into a single tribe based on the kinship of the paternal seed sounds. The sound *d* being closely related to the sound *dh*, must hold a similar guna and therefore carry with it similar intellectual significances, and, though they may coincide in a less degree, *t*, *th* and even perhaps *n*, though this is more doubtful, ought to be not far in guna & sense from the *d* & *dh* word-clans. We must now proceed to examine the facts & perceive how the theory fares in this last & final test.

We will take first the aspirated soft dental *dh*. In the last chapter I have taken the reader very much at random through the word-jungle, pointing out as we went, how

the different trees fell into groups, all belonging to families of one species. In this chapter, the theory having once been found, springing up of itself as we progressed, we can afford to proceed with more order & method; we can collect our specimens and present them ready assorted for examination & even speak with greater confidence about the precise nature of their connections.

The commonest sense of the *d* roots, a significance which we found so pervasive that we were first inclined to take it as *the* root significance, — was the idea of violent dividing or rending pressure, especially in the senses “to hurt, kill, injure, destroy; to afflict, distress, give pain; to burst open, cleave, split; to deceive, cheat, etc.” Do we find the same senses or the same tendency in the *dh* family? We find *dhrād*, to divide, split or pluck (flowers); we find *dhvāñkṣa*, a carpenter; but we do not find any other words with the precise idea of splitting or breaking open or cutting — a deficiency of some importance for the proper appreciation of the guna of the seed sound *dh*. On the other hand the sense of hurting, injuring, killing, giving pain, is sufficiently common. We have *dhakk*, to destroy, annihilate; *dhanus* (*dhanu*), a bow or an archer (Nb *dharma* also occurs in this sense, but this does not prove that the idea of bow is “the thing held”, for *dhr* has other senses, “to drink, to flow”, & its secondary roots mean to hurt, kill, injure); *dhr̥ṣ* & its derivatives, to hurt, injure, offend, outrage, attack, violate; *dhātī*, attacking, assaulting; *dhū*, to treat roughly, injure; *dhur*, distress or affliction; *dhurv* & *dhūrv*, to hurt, injure, kill; *dhūr*, to hurt, kill; *dhūrta*, *dhattūra*, *dhustura*, the white thorn-apple (with its intoxicating & stupefying drug); *dhūlaka*, poison; *dhorita*, injuring, hurting, striking; *dhrū* & *dhr̥*, to kill; *dhvañs* & its derivatives, to perish, fall, sink; also to scatter or sprinkle. We find *dhikṣ*, to be harassed, weary; *dhyāma*, soiled or unclean (spoiled, withered); *dhrākh*, to be dry or arid; *dhūka* & *dhava*, a rogue or cheat; *dhipsu*, deceptive; and *dhī*, *dhīti*, to disregard, disrespect. We find the simple sense of heavy or strong pressure in *dhāv* and its derivatives, to rub, brighten, polish; & in *dhr̥*, to bend, which we have already had with the sense of killing. This harvest is not so plentiful, and that has its significance, but neither is it entirely scanty. We may notice also the sense of giving in *dhartram*, a sacrifice, *dhāyu*, liberal, and *dhenu*, a gift, present, but we must also notice that the impression here seems rather to be that of placing than of distributing.

But then we observe that the sense of pressure so scanty otherwise gives more liberal results in two special senses, two particular kinds of strong & insistent pressure, — to shake or agitate and to blow. We have *dhū* & *dhu* with many derivatives meaning to shake, agitate, shake off, blow away, to kindle or excite &, directly from the sense of pushing, to resist or oppose; we have *dhūnana*, *dhūka* & *dhavāñaka* in the sense of wind; *dhūli*, the driven dust or ground powder & derivative senses of smoke, fog, incense etc in *dhūpa*, *dhūma* & their derivatives, — *dhūma* meaning also eructation and *dhūp*, to obscure or eclipse; *dhmā*, to blow, with its derivatives &, connecting these roots with the sense of hurting or giving pain, we have *dhamana*, cruel. A certain idea of action, labour or effort appears vaguely as in the *d* family, in *dhmā*, to manufacture &

dhūma, a place prepared for building (cf Greek ἰδύω, I build), but as in the *da* family, the sense does not prominently emerge. We seem to have also the sense of covering, cutting off in *dhārā*, night (also meaning edge) & perhaps *dhvāntam*, darkness. But *dhvāntam* may also come from the idea of thickness, crassness more proper to this family. Here again we find a difference between *dh* & *d*.

Another class of meanings which we noticed in the *da* family were those which expressed some kind of motion & we perceived that a swift, overpowering pressure of motion was the original idea in that family. In the *dha* clan also there are a number of words conveying directly or indirectly the idea of motion. As we have *dru*, to run, there, so here we have *dhāv*, to run, glide, charge, to flow, to give milk, to wash. We have *dhunayati*, flows; *dhuni* & *dhenā*, meaning river; *dhena* and *dhīra*, the ocean; *dhārā*, meaning a stream, current, shower, the pace of a horse, a wheel (cf *dalbha* etc); *dhūma*, a meteor; *dhor*, to run or trot (of a horse) with its derivatives; *dhorāṇi*, series, tradition; *dhārā*, tradition, fame or rumour, line, series (but here the idea of continuing may be the source); *dharuṇa*, water; *dhras*, to toss up; *dhūr*, *dhvaj*, *dhrā*, *dhrj*, all in the sense of going or moving; *dhrāj*, to go or move; *dhrāji*, a gliding, persistent motion; *dhrāji*, impulse, storm or wind. It is evident that here there is a great stress not on the force of the motion, though this sometimes emerges, but on its persistence.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Vedic and Philological Studies*, CWSA, Vol. 14, pp. 523-46)



‘I ADDRESS BUT ONE PRAYER TO THEE’

June 27, 1914

My being is happy with what Thou givest it; what Thou wantest from it, it will do, without weakness, without vain modesty and without futile ambition. What does it matter which place one occupies, what mission Thou entrustest? . . . Does not all lie in the fact of being entirely Thine, as perfectly as one can be, without the least care of any kind?

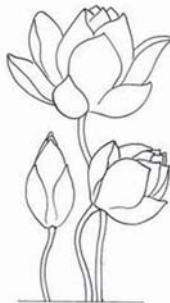
In this deep and steadfast confidence that Thy work will be done and that Thou hast created and appointed those who have to accomplish it, why strain one’s energy uselessly and want what is already realised? Thou hast given me, O Lord, the sovereign peace of this confidence; Thou hast granted me the incomparable boon of living in Thy love, by Thy love, of being Thy love ever more and more; and in this love is complete and unchanging beatitude.

I address but one prayer to Thee, which I know to be granted in advance: Always increase the number of elements, atoms or universes, capable of living integrally in and by Thy love.

Peace, peace upon all the earth. . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 187)



HELPING HUMANITY

For those who practise the integral Yoga, the welfare of humanity can be only a consequence and a result, it cannot be the aim. And if all the efforts to improve human conditions have miserably failed in the end in spite of all the ardour and enthusiasm and self-consecration they have inspired at first, it is precisely because the transformation of the conditions of human life can only be achieved by another preliminary transformation, the transformation of the human consciousness or at least of a few exceptional individuals capable of laying the foundations for a more widespread transformation.

But we shall return to this subject later on; it will form our conclusion. First of all, I want to tell you about two striking examples chosen from among the adepts of true philanthropy.

Two outstanding beings at the two extremes of thought and action, two of the finest human souls expressing themselves in sensitive and compassionate hearts, received the same psychic shock when they came into contact with the misery of men. Both devoted their whole lives to finding the remedy for the suffering of their fellow-men, and both believed they had found it. But because their solutions, which may be described as contraries, were each in its own domain incomplete and partial, both of them failed to relieve the suffering of humanity.

One in the East, Prince Siddhartha, later known as the Buddha, and the other in the West, Monsieur Vincent, who came to be called Saint Vincent de Paul after his death, stood, so to say, at the two poles of human consciousness, and their methods of assistance were diametrically opposite. Yet both believed in salvation through the spirit, through the Absolute, unknowable to thought, which one called God and the other Nirvana.

Vincent de Paul had an ardent faith and preached to his flock that one must save one's soul. But on coming into contact with human misery, he soon discovered that in order to find one's soul one must have time to look for it. And when do those who labour from morning till night and often from night till morning to eke out a living really have time to think of their souls? So in the simplicity of his charitable heart he concluded that if the poor were at least assured of the barest necessities by those who possess more than they need, these unfortunate people would have enough leisure to lead a better life. He believed in the virtue and efficacy of social work, of active and material charity. He believed that misery could be cured by the multiplication of individual cures, by bringing relief to a greater number, to a very large number of individuals. But this is only a palliative, not a cure. The fullness of consecration, self-abnegation and courage with which he carried on his work has made of him one of the most beautiful and touching figures in human history. And yet his endeavour seems to have rather multiplied than diminished the number of the destitute and the helpless. Certainly the most positive result of his apostleship

was to create an appreciable sense of charity in the mentality of a certain section of the well-to-do. And because of this, the work was truly more useful to those who were giving charity than to those who were the object of this charity.

At the other extreme of consciousness stands the Buddha with his pure and sublime compassion. For him the suffering arising out of life could only be abolished by the abolition of life; for life and the world are the outcome of the desire to be, the fruit of ignorance. Abolish desire, eliminate ignorance, and the world will disappear and with it all suffering and misery. In a great effort of spiritual aspiration and silent concentration he elaborated his discipline, one of the most uplifting and the most effective disciplines ever given to those who are eager for liberation.

Millions have believed in his doctrine, although the number of individuals capable of putting it into practice has been very small. But the condition of the earth has remained practically the same and there has been no appreciable diminution in the mass of human suffering.

However, men have canonised the first and deified the second in their attempt to express their gratitude and admiration. But very few have sincerely tried to put into practice the lesson and example that were given to them, although that is truly the only effective way of showing one's gratitude. And yet, even if that had been done, the conditions of human life would not have been perceptibly improved. For to help is not the same as to cure, nor is escaping the same as conquering. Indeed, to alleviate physical hardships, the solution proposed by Vincent de Paul can in no way be enough to cure humanity of its misery and suffering, for not all human sufferings come from physical destitution and can be cured by material means — far from it. Bodily well-being does not inevitably bring peace and joy; and poverty is not necessarily a cause of misery, as is shown by the voluntary poverty of the ascetics of all countries and all ages, who found in their destitution the source and condition of a perfect peace and happiness. Whereas on the contrary, the enjoyment of worldly possessions, of all that material wealth can provide in the way of comfort and pleasure and external satisfaction is powerless to prevent one who possesses these things from suffering pain and sorrow.

Neither can the other solution, escape, the solution of the Buddha, present a practical remedy to the problem. For even if we suppose that a very large number of individuals are capable of practising the discipline and achieving the final liberation, this can in no way abolish suffering from earth and cure others of it, all the others who are still incapable of following the path that leads to Nirvana.

Indeed, true happiness is the happiness one can feel in any circumstances whatsoever, because it comes from regions which cannot be affected by any external circumstances. But this happiness is accessible only to a very few individuals, and most of the human race is still subject to terrestrial conditions. So we can say on one hand that a change in the human consciousness is absolutely indispensable and, on the other, that without an integral transformation of the terrestrial atmosphere, the

conditions of human life cannot be effectively changed. In either case, the remedy is the same: a new consciousness must manifest on earth and in man. Only the appearance of a new force and light and power accompanying the descent of the supramental consciousness into this world can raise man out of the anguish and pain and misery in which he is submerged. For only the supramental consciousness bringing down upon earth a higher poise and a purer and truer light can achieve the great miracle of transformation.

Nature is striving towards this new manifestation. But her ways are tortuous and her march is uncertain, full of halts and regressions, so much so that it is difficult to perceive her true plan. However, it is becoming more and more clear that she wants to bring forth a new species out of the human species, a supramental race that will be to man what man is to the animal. But the advent of this transformation, this creation of a new race which Nature would take centuries of groping attempts to bring about, can be effected by the intelligent will of man, not only in a much shorter time but also with much less waste and loss.

Here the integral Yoga has its rightful place and utility. For Yoga is meant to overcome, by the intensity of its concentration and effort, the delay that time imposes on all radical transformation, on all new creation.

The integral Yoga is not an escape from the physical world which leaves it irrevocably to its fate, nor is it an acceptance of material life as it is without any hope of decisive change, or of the world as the final expression of the Divine Will.

The integral Yoga aims at scaling all the degrees of consciousness from the ordinary mental consciousness to a supramental and divine consciousness, and when the ascent is completed, to return to the material world and infuse it with the supramental force and consciousness that have been won, so that this earth may be gradually transformed into a supramental and divine world.

The integral Yoga is especially intended for those who have realised in themselves all that man can realise and yet are not satisfied, for they demand from life what it cannot give. Those who yearn for the unknown and aspire for perfection, who ask themselves agonising questions and have not found any definitive answers to them, they are the ones who are ready for the integral Yoga.

For there is a series of fundamental questions which those who are concerned about the fate of mankind and are not satisfied with current formulas inevitably ask themselves. They can be formulated approximately as follows:

Why is one born if only to die?

Why does one live if only to suffer?

Why does one love if only to be separated?

Why does one think if only to err?

Why does one act if only to make mistakes?

The sole acceptable answer is that things are not what they ought to be and that these contradictions are not only not inevitable but they are rectifiable and will one

day disappear. For the world is not irremediably what it is. The earth is in a period of transition that certainly seems long to the brief human consciousness, but which is infinitesimal for the eternal consciousness. And this period will come to an end with the appearance of the supramental consciousness. The contradictions will then be replaced by harmonies and the oppositions by syntheses.

This new creation, the appearance of a superhuman race, has already been the object of much speculation and controversy. It pleases man's imagination to draw more or less flattering portraits of what the superman will be like. But only like can know like, and it is only by becoming conscious of the divine nature in its essence that one will be able to have a conception of what the divine nature will be in the manifestation. Yet those who have realised this consciousness in themselves are usually more anxious to become the superman than to give a description of him.

However, it may be useful to say what the superman will certainly not be, so as to clear away certain misunderstandings. For example, I have read somewhere that the superhuman race would be fundamentally cruel and insensitive; since it is above suffering, it will attach no importance to the suffering of others and will take it as a sign of their imperfection and inferiority. No doubt, those who think in this way are judging the relations between superman and man from the manner in which man behaves towards his lesser brethren, the animals. But such behaviour, far from being a proof of superiority, is a sure sign of unconsciousness and stupidity. This is shown by the fact that as soon as man rises to a little higher level, he begins to feel compassion towards animals and seeks to improve their lot. Yet there is an element of truth in the conception of the unfeeling superman: it is this, that the higher race will not feel the kind of egoistic, weak and sentimental pity which men call charity. This pity, which does more harm than good, will be replaced by a strong and enlightened compassion whose only purpose will be to provide a true remedy to suffering, not to perpetuate it.

On the other hand, this conception describes fairly well what the reign of a race of vital beings upon earth would be like. They are immortal in their nature and much more powerful than man in their capacities, but they are also incurably anti-divine in their will, and their mission in the universe seems to be to delay the divine realisation until the instruments of this realisation, that is to say, men, become pure and strong and perfect enough to overcome all obstacles. It might not perhaps be useless to put the poor afflicted earth on guard against the possibility of such an evil domination.

Until the superman can come in person to show man what his true nature is, it might be wise for every human being of goodwill to become conscious of what he can conceive as the most beautiful, the most noble, the truest and purest, the most luminous and best, and to aspire that this conception may be realised in himself for the greatest good of the world and men.

THE MOTHER

(*On Education*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, pp. 95-101)

A CONVERSATION OF 20 MAY 1953

You have said: "And as for those who have the will of running away, even they, when they go over to the other side, may find that the flight was not of much use after all."

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (28 April 1929)

What do you call "the other side"?

We speak of the other side of the veil, the other side of existence.

It is being no longer in the physical: being in the vital, for example, or in the conscious part of the vital. One becomes conscious of two sides and so knows what is happening. There are people who go out of their body methodically to have the experience of the separation between the two. But as for that, one must know how to do it, and one must not do it all alone. Someone should be there to look after and watch the body.

Are not offering and surrender to the Divine the same thing?

They are two aspects of the same thing, but not altogether the same. One is more active than the other. They do not belong to quite the same plane of existence.

For example, you have decided to offer your life to the Divine, you take that decision. But all of a sudden, something altogether unpleasant, unexpected happens to you and your first movement is to react and protest. Yet you have made the offering, you have said once for all: "My life belongs to the Divine", and then suddenly an extremely unpleasant incident happens (that can happen) and there is something in you that reacts, that does not want it. But here, if you want to be truly logical with your offering, you must bring forward this unpleasant incident, make an offering of it to the Divine, telling him very sincerely: "Let Your will be done; if You have decided it that way, it will be that way." And this must be a willing and spontaneous adhesion. So it is very difficult.

Even for the smallest thing, something that is not in keeping with what you expected, what you have worked for, instead of an opposite reaction coming in — spontaneously, irresistibly, you draw back: "No, not that" — if you have made a complete surrender, a total surrender, well, it does not happen like that: you are as quiet, as peaceful, as calm in one case as in the other. And perhaps you had the notion that it would be better if it happened in a certain way, but if it happens differently, you find that this also is all right. You might have, for example, worked very hard to do a certain thing, so that something might happen, you might have

given much time, much of your energy, much of your will, and all that not for your own sake, but, say, for the divine work (that is the offering); now suppose that after having taken all this trouble, done all this work, made all these efforts, it all goes just the other way round, it does not succeed. If you are truly surrendered, you say: "It is good, it is all good, it is all right; I did what I could, as well as I could, now it is not my decision, it is the decision of the Divine, I accept entirely what He decides." On the other hand, if you do not have this deep and spontaneous surrender, you tell yourself: "How is it? I took so much trouble to do a thing which is not for a selfish purpose, which is for the Divine Work, and this is the result, it is not successful!" Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it is like that.

True surrender is a very difficult thing.

For self-surrender, should one continue to do what one ought to do?

Continue to do what one *ought* to, what is clearly shown as the thing that ought to be done, what is to be done — whether one succeeds or does not succeed, whether the result is what one thinks or expects or isn't — that has no importance; one continues.

But when one tries, if one makes a mistake unconsciously, how can one know?

If you are quite sincere, you know. Not to know one's fault is always the sign of an insincerity somewhere. And generally, it is hidden in the vital. When the vital consents to collaborate (which is already a big step), when it decides that it too is going to work, to devote all its effort and all its energy to accomplish the work, even then there is underneath, well hidden somewhere, a sort of — how shall we call it? — an expectation that things will turn out well and the result will be favourable. And that veils the complete sincerity. For this expectation is an egoistic, personal thing, and this veils the full sincerity. Then you do not know.

But if one is altogether, absolutely sincere, as soon as what one is doing is not exactly what should be done, one feels it very clearly — not violently but very clearly, very precisely: "No, not this." And then if one has no attachment, immediately it stops, instantaneously it stops.

But one has attachment, even for a disinterested work. That's what you must understand. You have given your life for a cause that is not egoistic, but the ego is there all the same. And you have a way of doing the thing which is special, personal to you; and you have within you a hope (not to speak of a desire) that the result will be like this, that you will get this and it will be done. Even a work that is not done for yourself but which you have undertaken, you expect that it will succeed, that you will have success — not personally — for the thing you have undertaken, the work that you are doing. Well, that brings in just a little bit of something like that, down

below, quite hidden, quite a tiny thing which is a little . . . not very straight, a little bent, twisted. And then you do not know. But if that were not there, as soon as you failed to do exactly what should be done, you would know. You would know it absolutely precisely. It is as delicate a movement as the thousandth part of a millimetre would be. Yes, it is there, and that is sufficient, you know: "I was mistaken." But you must have that absolute sincerity which precisely does not want at any cost to blunder, which will do anything, give up everything, everything, rather than live in any kind of illusion. But it is very difficult; it takes time and much labour. When you are doing a thing, always those two, the mind and the vital are there, trying to draw some benefit or other out of what you are doing: the benefit of personal satisfaction, the benefit of happiness, the benefit of a good opinion that you have of yourself. It is difficult not to deceive oneself.

What is the exact way of feeling that we belong to the Divine and that the Divine is acting in us?

You must not feel with your head (because you may think so, but that's something vague); you must feel with your sense-feeling. Naturally one begins by wanting it with the mind, because that is the first thing that understands. And then one has an aspiration here (*pointing to the heart*), with a flame which pushes you to realise it. But if you want it to be truly *the* thing, well, you must feel it.

You are doing something, suppose, for example, you are doing exercises, weight-lifting. Now suddenly without your knowing how it happened, suddenly you have the feeling that there is a force infinitely greater than you, greater, more powerful, a force that does the lifting for you. Your body becomes something almost non-existent and there is this Something that lifts. And then you will see; when that happens to you, you will no longer ask how it should be done, you will know. That does happen.

It depends upon people, depends upon what dominates in their being. Those who think have suddenly the feeling that it is no longer they who think, that there is something which knows much better, sees much more clearly, which is infinitely more luminous, more conscious in them, which organises the thoughts and words; and then they write. But if the experience is complete, it is even no longer they who write, it is that same Thing that takes hold of their hand and makes it write. Well, one knows at that moment that the little physical person is just a tiny insignificant tool trying to remain as quiet as possible in order not to disturb the experience.

Yes, at no cost must the experience be disturbed. If suddenly you say: "Oh, look, how strange it is!" . . .

How can we reach that state?

Aspire for it, want it. Try to be less and less selfish, but not in the sense of becoming

nice to other people or forgetting yourself, not that: have less and less the feeling that you are a person, a separate entity, something existing in itself, isolated from the rest.

And then, above all, above all, it is that inner flame, that aspiration, that need for the light. It is a kind of — how to put it? — luminous enthusiasm that seizes you. It is an irresistible need to melt away, to give oneself, to exist only in the Divine.

At that moment you have the experience of your aspiration.

But that moment should be absolutely sincere and as integral as possible; and all this must occur not only in the head, not only here, but must take place everywhere, in all the cells of the body. The consciousness integrally must have this irresistible need. . . . The thing lasts for some time, then diminishes, gets extinguished. You cannot keep these things for very long. But then it so happens that a moment later or the next day or some time later, suddenly you have the opposite experience. Instead of feeling this ascent, and all that, this is no longer there and you have the feeling of the Descent, the Answer. And nothing but the Answer exists. Nothing but the divine thought, the divine will, the divine energy, the divine action exists any longer. And you too, you are no longer there.

That is to say, it is the answer to our aspiration. It may happen immediately afterwards — that is very rare but may happen. If you have both simultaneously, then the state is perfect; usually they alternate; they alternate more and more closely until the moment there is a total fusion. Then there is no more distinction. I heard a Sufi mystic, who was besides a great musician, an Indian, saying that for the Sufis there was a state higher than that of adoration and surrender to the Divine, than that of devotion, that this was not the last stage; the last stage of the progress is when there is no longer any distinction; you have no longer this kind of adoration or surrender or consecration; it is a very simple state in which one makes no distinction between the Divine and oneself. They know this. It is even written in their books. It is a commonly known condition in which everything becomes quite simple. There is no longer any difference. There is no longer that kind of ecstatic surrender to “Something” which is beyond you in every way, which you do not understand, which is merely the result of your aspiration, your devotion. There is no difference any longer. When the union is perfect, there is no longer any difference.

Is this the end of self-progress?

There is never any end to progress — never any end, you can never put a full stop there.

Can that happen before the transformation of the body?

Before the transformation of the body? . . . This is a phenomenon of consciousness.

For instance, the physical consciousness may have this experience even for years before the cells change. There is a great difference between the physical consciousness (the body consciousness) and the material body. This takes a long time, because it is a thing that has never been done. That state, as I have already told you, is a commonly known state which has been realised by some people, the most advanced, the highest among the mystics; but the transformation of the body has never been done by anyone.

And it takes a terribly long time. Sri Aurobindo said — one day I asked him: “How long will it take to transform the body?” He did not hesitate, he said: “Oh! something like three hundred years.”

Three hundred years from when?

Three hundred years from the time one has the consciousness I was just speaking about. (*Laughter*)

No, the conclusion, what you must succeed in doing, is to be able to prolong life at will: not to leave the body until one wants to.

So, if one has resolved to transform the body, well, one must wait with all the necessary patience — three hundred years, five hundred years, a thousand years, it does not matter — the time needed for the change. As for me, I see that three hundred years is a minimum. To tell you the truth, with the experience I have of things, I think it is truly a minimum.

Just imagine. You have never thought about what it means, have you? How is your body built? In a purely animal way, with all the organs and all the functions. You are absolutely dependent: if your heart stops for even the thousandth part of a second, you are gone and that's the end. The whole thing works and works automatically without your conscious will (happily for you, for if you had to supervise the functioning, it would have gone the wrong way long ago). All that is there. Everything is necessary, because it was organised in that manner. You cannot do without an organ, at least totally; there must be something in you representing it.

Transformation implies that all this purely material arrangement is replaced by an arrangement of concentrations of force having certain types of different vibrations substituting each organ by a centre of conscious energy moved by a conscious will and directed by a movement coming from above, from higher regions. No stomach, no heart any longer, no circulation, no lungs, no . . . All this disappears. But it is replaced by a whole set of vibrations representing what those organs are symbolically. For the organs are only the material symbols of centres of energy; they are not the essential reality; they simply give it a form or a support in certain given circumstances. The transformed body will then function through its *real* centres of energy and not any longer through their symbolic representatives such as were developed in the animal body. Therefore, first of all you must know what your heart represents in the

cosmic energy and what the circulation represents and what the stomach and the brain represent. To begin with, you must first be conscious of all that. And then, you must have at your disposal the original vibrations of that which is symbolised by these organs. And you must slowly gather together all these energies in your body and change each organ into a centre of conscious energy which will replace the symbolic movement by the real one. . . . You believe it will take only three hundred years to do that? I believe it will take much more time to have a form with qualities which will not be exactly those we know, but will be much superior; a form that one naturally dreams to see plastic: as the expression of your face changes with your feelings, so the body will change (not the form but within the same form) in accordance with what you want to express with your body. It can become very concentrated, very developed, very luminous, very quiet, with a perfect plasticity, with a perfect elasticity and then a lightness at will . . . Have you never dreamt of giving a kick to the ground and then soaring into the air, flying away? You move about. You push a little with your shoulder, you go this way; you push again, you go that way; and you go wherever you like, quite easily; and finally when you have finished you come back, enter your body. Well, you must be able to do that with your body, and also certain things related to respiration — but there will no longer be lungs; there's a true movement behind a symbolic movement which gives you this capacity of lightness; you do not belong any longer to the system of gravitation, you escape it.¹ And so for each organ.

There is no end to imagination: to be luminous whenever one wants it, to be transparent whenever one wants it. Naturally there is no longer any need of any bones also in the system; it is not a skeleton with skin and viscera, it is another thing. It is concentrated energy obeying the will. This does not mean that there will no longer be any definite and recognisable forms; the form will be built by qualities rather than by solid particles. It will be, if one may say so, a practical or pragmatic form; it will be supple, mobile, light at will, in contrast to the fixity of the gross material form.

So, to change this into what I have just described, I believe three hundred years are truly very little. It seems many more than that are needed. Perhaps with a very, very, very concentrated work . . .

Three hundred years with the same body?

1. According to Sri Aurobindo, this true movement behind respiration is the same as the one governing electrical and magnetic fields; it is what the ancient yogis used to call Vayu, the Life-Energy. The breathing exercises (*prāṇāyāma*) are simply one system (among others) for acquiring mastery over Vayu which eventually enables you to be free from gravitation and gives certain powers known to the ancients: the power to be extremely light or extremely heavy, very big or very tiny (*garimā, laghimā, mahimā, aṇimā*). As an appendix to this talk we publish an extract from a conversation of Sri Aurobindo with a French scientist-disciple, dealing with some of these "true movements" behind the external movements of Matter.

Well, there is change, it is no longer the same body.

But, you see, when our little humanity says three hundred years with the same body, you say: “Why! when I am fifty it already begins to decompose, so at three hundred it will be a horrible thing!” But it is not like that. If it is three hundred years with a body that goes on perfecting itself from year to year, perhaps when the three hundredth year is reached one will say: “Oh! I still need three or four hundred more to be what I want to be.” If each year that passes represents a progress, a transformation, one would like to have more and more years in order to be able to transform oneself more and more. When something is not exactly as you want it to be — take, for example, simply one of the things I have just described, say, plasticity or lightness or elasticity or luminosity, and none of them is exactly as you want it, then you will still need at least two hundred years more so that it may be accomplished, but you never think: “How is it? It is still going to last two hundred years more!” On the contrary, you say: “Two hundred years more are *absolutely* necessary so that it may be truly done.” And then, when all is done, when all is perfect, then there is no longer any question of years, for you are immortal.

But there are many objections that may be raised. It may be said that it would be impossible for the body to change unless something changes in the surroundings also. What would be your relation with other objects if you have changed so much? With other beings also? It seems necessary that a whole set of things changes, at least in relative proportions, so that one can exist, continue to exist. This then brings much complication, for it is no longer one individual consciousness that has to do the work, it becomes a collective consciousness. And so it is much more difficult still.

(Silence)

If we are not conscious of all that the Divine is doing for us, do we not progress?

You progress, but you are not conscious of your progress; and so it is not a willed progress. That is, it is a progress that the Divine brings about in you without your collaboration. That takes much more time. It does occur, but it takes much more time. When you are conscious and collaborate and indeed do consciously what you should do, it is done much more quickly.

There are many people who are not even conscious, the immense majority of people are not even conscious of the action of the divine Force in them. If you speak to them about it, they look at you in round-eyed wonder, they think you are half mad, they don't know what you are talking about. That is the vast majority of human beings. And yet the Consciousness is at work, working all the time. It moulds them from within whether they want it or not. But then, when they become conscious of this, there are people who are shocked by it, who are so stupid as to revolt and

say: “Ah! no, I want it to be *myself* !” Myself, that is, an imbecile who knows nothing. And then, that stage too passes. At last there comes a moment when one collaborates and says: “Oh! What joy!” And you give yourself, you want to be as passive and receptive as possible so as not to stand in the way of this divine Will, this divine Consciousness that is acting. You become more and more attentive, and exactly to the extent you become more attentive and more sincere, you feel in what direction, in what movement this divine Consciousness is working, and you give yourself to it wholly. The thing ripens more quickly. And in this way you are truly able to do in a few minutes the work that would otherwise take years. And that is the goal of yoga: one can do the work in a few hours, in a concentrated, shortened time; one can do in another way what Nature is doing — Nature will do it, Nature will succeed in transforming all this, but when one sees the time she has taken to do what she has done till now, if one wants to do all that in another way. . . . Evidently, for the divine Consciousness time means very little, but for the consciousness here, it is very long. There is a point of view from which you say: “Bah! That will be done, it is sure to come about, so it is all right, one has only to let things go on.” But then it is not the external human consciousness, it does not take part, for this tiny consciousness which has been formed by the body (this body that’s at present made in this way), well, it will have gone away long before the thing is done. Because after all the progress of Nature is not accomplished from one century to another. If we look back, we do not see that there has been really much progress in comparison with what man was some three thousand years ago — just a little, something; something that happens particularly in the head which understands a little better; and then a kind of control over what Nature does, an understanding of her processes; one begins to understand her tricks. Then as one begins to learn her tricks, one begins to intervene. But as one does not have the true knowledge, when one intervenes one may very easily make a lot of blunders. . . . Indeed, I do not know what will happen when men will know all the secrets of the formation of matter, for example. They have already invented a very fine way of destroying themselves. We shall see what is going to happen. But this is just a very small step; it happens particularly here (*pointing to the head*), with very relative material results.

How should one practise this consciousness?

You must establish this will to be conscious constantly and then change the mental will into an aspiration. You must have this movement. And then never to forget. You must look, look at yourself, and look at your life with the sincerity not to make a mistake, never to deceive yourself. Oh! how difficult it is!

Did you ever have spontaneously — spontaneously without effort — the perception that you had made a mistake? I am not speaking of an external reaction that gives you a knock, wakes you up suddenly and you say: “Oh my God, what

have I done?" I am not speaking of that. When you do a thing, feel a thing, when you say a thing — take simply the petty quarrels like those I hear about at least a dozen of them a day (at least), idiotic, (I wonder how, having one's reason, one can quarrel about such things), well, at the time you utter those words that should not be uttered, that are simply silly, do you see that you are truly stupid — not to say anything worse — spontaneously? . . . You always give an excuse. You have always the feeling that the other person is wrong, and that you are right and that, indeed, he must be told that he is wrong, yes? Otherwise he would never know it! Isn't that so? I am putting the thing rather glaringly, as though under a small microscope, so that it may look a little bigger. But it is like that. And so long as it is like that, you are a million miles away from the true consciousness. When you are unable immediately, instantaneously to step back, put yourself in the place of the other person, understand why he has this feeling, have a glimpse of your own weakness, compare the two and come to the conclusion: "Well, it is that, that's the true thing", it means that you are still very far behind. When you are able to do it spontaneously, instantaneously, when it does not take time, when it is a natural movement, then you may feel satisfied that you have made a little progress. . . . How many times do you have the experience during the day? Even if you do not come to an open quarrel, how many times is the reaction there in the head, there, something that leaps up in the head, instead of this wisdom of equanimity which, at the very moment things are happening and it is observing them, understands how they are happening and why all this occurs — and that impersonally enough to be able to smile always and never have a violent reaction, never.

And even if you perceive the Truth, which is far beyond and far above, and the Truth that is not realised and you want to realise, if you have its clear vision and can see constantly the difference between what is true and what should be and what is false and deformed and must give place to the other, see it so clearly, there is no reaction any longer, and even things that seem to you most stupid, most idiotic, most obscure, most ignorant, most vulgar, most crude can make you smile, for you are able to see the whole length of the way you have to cover so that That which is up there may come down here. And if you had had violent reactions, long ago there would have been no world any more. Because, in truth, if the world could exist only on condition of its being true, then long ago it would have ceased to exist! For it has never been true even to this very day.

But if you remain in that consciousness and look from there, then you begin to understand something of the truth. And this consciousness has to be so total, that even if things come directly against you, even the physical movement of someone coming to beat you (you must not allow him to kill you, no; you have perhaps to do what is necessary not to get killed), but if you are yourself in this perfect consciousness and have no personal reaction, well, I give you the guarantee the other cannot kill you. He will not be able to, even if he tries. He will not be able to

beat you, even if he tries. Only, you must not have a single violent or wrong vibration, you understand? Even if there is just a little false vibration, that opens the door and the thing enters and all goes wrong. You must be fully conscious, have the full knowledge, the perfect mastery over everything, the clear vision of the Truth — and perfect peace.

You must make an effort all the time.

Voilà.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1953, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 52-65)

APPENDIX

(Extract from a talk of Sri Aurobindo with a French scientist-disciple)

8 May 1926

In the West the highest minds are turned not towards spiritual truth but towards material science. The scope of science is very narrow, it touches only the most exterior part of the physical plane.

And even there, what does science know really? It studies the functioning of the laws, builds theories ever renewed and each time held up as the last word of truth! We had recently the atomic theory, now comes the electronic.

There are, for instance, two statements of modern science that would stir up deeper ranges for an occultist:

1. Atoms are whirling systems like the solar system.

2. The atoms of all the elements are made out of the same constituents. Different arrangement is the only cause of different properties.

If these statements were considered under their true aspect, they could lead science to new discoveries of which there is no idea at present and in comparison with which the present knowledge is poor.

According to the experience of ancient Yogis, sensible matter was made out of five elements, Bhutani: Prithivi, Apas, Agni (Tejas), Vayu, Akasha.

Agni is threefold:

1. Ordinary fire, Jada Agni,

2. Electric fire, Vaidyuta Agni,

3. Solar fire, Saura Agni.

Science has only entered upon the first and the second of these fires. The fact

that the atom is like the solar system could lead it to the knowledge of the third.²

Beyond Agni is Vayu of which science knows nothing. It is the support of all contact and exchange, the cause of gravitation and of the fields (magnetic and electric). By it, the action of Agni, the formal element, the builder of forms, is made possible.

And beyond Vayu is the ether: Akasha.

But these five constitute only the grossest part of the physical plane. Immediately behind is the physical-vital, the element of life buried in matter. J. C. Bose is contacting this element in his experiments. Beyond is the mind in matter. This mind has a far different form than the human mind, still it is a manifestation of the same principle of organisation. And deep below there are two more hidden layers. . . .

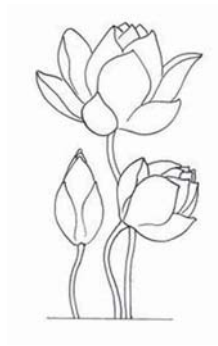
That is the occult knowledge concerning the physical plane only. Science is far behind this knowledge.

The Hindu Yogis who had realised these truths did not elaborate them and turn them into scientific knowledge. Other fields of action and knowledge having been open before them, they neglected what for them was the most exterior aspect of the manifestation.

There is a difference between the scientific mind and the cast of mind of an occultist. There is little doubt that one who could unite these two groups of faculties would lead science towards great progress.

(Questions and Answers 1953, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 66-67)

2. It is remarkable to observe that since then (1926) we have indeed discovered a third “fire”, that which accompanies nuclear reactions — and that this fire is in fact that of the sun, the enormous radiation of which is liberated in course of the fusion of hydrogen nuclei into helium (Bethe cycle). The first fire is that of chemical reactions wherein molecules get destroyed and reconstituted without the constituent atoms being changed. The second fire comes from the modifications of the peripheral levels of the electrons in the atom, modifications which are at the origin of all electro-magnetic phenomena.

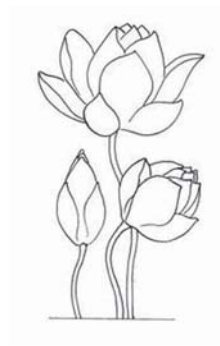


THE SUPRAMENTAL DESCENT

Do you know what the flower which we have called “Successful Future” signifies when given to you? It signifies the hope — nay, even the promise — that you will participate in the descent of the supramental world. For that descent will be the successful consummation of our work, a descent of which the full glory has not yet been or else the whole face of life would have been different. By slow degrees the Supramental is exerting its influence; now one part of the being and now another feels the embrace or the touch of its divinity; but when it comes down in all its self-existent power, a supreme radical change will seize the whole nature. We are moving nearer and nearer the hour of its complete triumph. Once the world-conditions are ready the full descent will take place carrying everything before it. Its presence will be unmistakable, its force will brook no resistance, doubts and difficulties will not torture you any longer. For the Divine will stand manifest — unveiled in its total perfection. I do not, however, mean to say that the whole world will at once feel its presence or be transformed; but I do mean that a part of humanity will know and participate in its descent — say, this little world of ours here. From there the transfiguring grace will most effectively radiate. And, fortunately for the aspirants, that successful future will materialise for them in spite of all the obstacles set in its way by unregenerate human nature!

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers, 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, p. 180)



SRI AUROBINDO — MASTER SPIRIT OF MODERN AGE

(Reprinted from *The Sunday Standard*, 2 December 1951, page 11)

The first anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's passing will be observed this Wednesday. This tribute is written by K. D. Sethna, author and poet, who spent many years at the feet of the Master at the Pondicherry Ashram.

On December 5 a whole year will have passed since India lost one of her most extraordinary sons: Sri Aurobindo.

The extent to which we remember him and realise the value of his life and message may be considered the measure of our own greatness as a nation.

It was indeed in the name of the Indian nation that Sri Aurobindo first sprang into prominence. Among a small academic circle he had already been recognised. Educated from his seventh to his twenty-first year in England, Sri Aurobindo came to India with a striking mastery of the English tongue and a fine poetic gift.

He was also a brilliant classical scholar who had made his mark not only at Cambridge but also in the open competition for the I.C.S. by his record scoring in Greek and Latin. Fluent knowledge of French, Italian and German was another of his accomplishments.

Later he acquired a profound grasp over Sanskrit and a ready acquaintance with several modern Indian languages. He was at home in the culture and history of both the West and the East.

Political Life

After deliberately evading the Indian Civil Service, by absenting himself from the riding test, he came to Baroda on the invitation of the Gaekwad. Here he spent a few years, first in State service, then as Professor of English in the Baroda College.

At Baroda, he was admired and respected. But his name dwelt upon the lips of three hundred million Indians when in 1905, in his thirty-third year, he launched into politics at a critical moment — the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon.

His political career — during which he was thrice accused of sedition, yet never convicted — covered only eight years, but it was crowded and momentous. Together with Tilak, he was the first to impress on the Indian mind the ideal of complete independence and the method of revolutionary activity. The lines he laid down through various channels of intensive work persisted in essence throughout India's nationalist struggle.

It may be mentioned here that he was not an addict to ahimsa in politics. He

did not exclude the technique of passive resistance when circumstances demanded it, but he was never opposed in principle to armed insurrection, or the right of a people to attain freedom by violence.

Higher Power

He held that the worker for freedom should kindle in himself the thought of a higher power other than his own limited ego's longings. This power does not consist merely of a patriotic fervour on behalf of a geographical unit or a human collectivity.

It is the deep feeling of the national soul, the super-personal being who is a nation's presiding genius in its historic development. And when, as in India, the central urge in the historic development has been to realise the divine self and spirit of the universe, the soul of the nation must be more than national: it must be visioned and experienced as a face and front of the Supreme Godhead, a representative of the Divine Mother, creatrix of the worlds.

It is this fusion of the national with the spiritual that is in the cry of Vande Mataram — "I bow to you, O Mother!" — the cry which Sri Aurobindo helped spread all over the country, and which has been the mantra of our country's movement towards independence.

Sri Aurobindo started practising Yoga in order to possess the full inner and higher guidance in his political life. In 1908 he had the experience of a complete cessation of thought, a thorough stillness of the mind, a vast and overwhelming Peace — a Nirvana of all human consciousness.

Supermind

From then onwards all his activity — thinking, feeling, willing — came not from the 'brain-mind' but from above it, and flowed into a receptive and transmitting quietude within — the dynamism of what he has called the 'overhead' planes of spiritual light.

Together with this, he realised during his eleven-month detention in Alipore Jail, the cosmic presence of the Divine. The most dramatic form taken by that realisation was at the subsequent trial when Sri Aurobindo saw behind the judge, the jury, the witnesses and the counsels on both sides the guiding presence of Sri Krishna.

Some time after his acquittal he felt an inner call to leave British India and withdraw from politics proper — not for a life-shunning solitude, but for a more concentrated pursuit of the spiritual. He saw that his mission was one of worldwide import. Its centre would indeed be India, the age-long lover of the Infinite and the Eternal, but its circumference would be universal, for it was nothing short of creation of a new humanity. It was a further step in evolution by which man, the being of

Mind, would become a being of what Sri Aurobindo later termed Supermind. To appraise Sri Aurobindo's message and work we must understand this term. A synonym used for it by him is 'Truth-Consciousness'. Sri Aurobindo says that, although the Nirvanic experience brings a feeling of the illusory nature of the universe against the background of a transcendent reality, another experience arising out of a supplementing of this by that of the cosmic Divine culminates in the experience of a spiritual Ultimate which unites Peace and Power.

This Ultimate manifests itself in a gradation of organised existence, with Supermind at the top and, at the bottom, the world of matter which has evolved from a seeming abyss of unconsciousness or 'Inconscience'. In the Inconscience all the powers of the spirit are latent, and they evolve progressively, with a contributory pressure or invasion from their own free and unsubmerged forms beyond the material world.

Thus Life emerges in Matter, Mind in Life, and there is in Mind the urge towards some ideal, some perfection that can give man no rest in a mere mental-vital-physical existence.

This urge points to a manifestation on earth of powers above the mind, of which Supermind is the supreme form, an infinite creative consciousness in which the truths of the Absolute are put forward to constitute the archetype of all principles of activity evolving on earth.

In the Supermind are the substance and force of a divine vitality, a divine physicality. They are waiting to be reached by man, the spiritual seeker, and to be brought down by him to effect a comprehensive, an integral transformation of all that he is and all that he does, both individually and collectively.

Synthesis

There has been so far, on the one hand, the ascetic's refusal to attach essential importance to the physical world and, on the other, the materialist's denial of the supra-physical and the divine. There exists, in between, a sort of compromise or patchwork of the Here and the Beyond.

Things have come to this pass, because the complete possession of the Supermind and its decisive all-transformative dynamism has never been accomplished. And indeed the time for its accomplishment has never been ripe until now — the age of the atom bomb.

Sri Aurobindo comes as the prophet of a total synthesis of the Beyond and the Here, a full solution of the evolutionary crisis through which the modern world is passing. Art, science, philosophy, ethics, religion — these by themselves, or in combination, are insufficient and impotent to transform man and his life.

The sovereign harmonious creativity of the supramental Truth-Consciousness which excludes nothing and fulfils everything must be put into action. What Sri

Aurobindo laboured at for forty years, after compassing all the traditional spiritual realisations, was precisely to initiate this phenomenon.

His Ashram in Pondicherry, with his co-worker, the Mother, presiding over its growth, is meant to be the nucleus of it. His death is regarded in the Ashram as part of the momentous process, a self-sacrifice at a critical juncture, a kind of tactical withdrawal for a greater advance of the work under his spiritual associate.

Inspiration

The work has intensified — not only in the spiritual or inward way but also outwardly. One of the cherished ideas of Sri Aurobindo has been zealously taken up by the Mother, and is about to find concrete expression: the International University Centre.

Students of various nationalities from the East and the West will soon gather in this gigantically conceived institution. They will be housed and educated free. Each national will be taught in his own tongue. The teaching will cover every department of knowledge, and the spiritual outlook of Sri Aurobindo will pervade the education.

The inspiration will emanate not only from Sri Aurobindo's unseen presence behind the visible scene and from the Mother's influence and instruction but also from the great books written by the Master, dealing with every type of problem — books like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Fundamentals of Indian Culture*, *The Psychology of Social Development* (now entitled *The Human Cycle*), *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Future Poetry* and that magnificent epic of nearly twenty-five thousand lines — already in our midst — *Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol*.

Touched by the Aurobindonian inspiration, hundreds of people from various parts of India will visit on December 5 the spot in the Ashram where in a vault rests the rosewood-encased body that remained strangely aglow and completely free from the slightest trace of discolouration and decomposition for more than four days. It would be well for all of us to keep in our hearts a memory of that sacred spot. Here a master spirit is commemorated and here is no death but one phase of an immortal and unique mission of light and love. This mission is to change the face of the world, and make India the cradle of a super-humanity.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

THE CLOSING OF THE WESTERN MIND*

Interpreting history

Does the knowledge of the past have any value? Does history teach us anything? Does the past tell us something about the future? “Nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding . . . than its own communal and collective life”, wrote Sri Aurobindo. “History teaches us nothing; it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions. We do not seize the real sense of all this change and this continual streaming forward of human life in the channels of Time.”¹ One finds a similar opinion in a recent text by the French historian Roger Chartier: “I think pretending that the past can explain the present is a rhetorical trick of the historians to justify their position. To me this idea has no ground because I think that history consists of discontinuities. Events are not repeated, and going back is not possible: nothing in history can be used as an example for later on. In Antiquity historical examples served as guidance for the present. Such is, of course, not the case today.”²

All the same, Sri Aurobindo’s statement that ‘history teaches us nothing’ seems aimed at the academic, mental view which tries to interpret history as a bundle of linear, related and rationally understandable developments leading to a goal, this goal usually being the historian’s thesis. According to Sri Aurobindo humanity is essentially one; its evolution is not linear but progressively cyclic; and its aim is a growth of consciousness, leading to its own perfection and following the processes of its evolutionary constitution. “All mankind is one in its nature, physical, vital, emotional, mental and ever has been in spite of all differences of intellectual development ranging from the poverty of the Bushman and negroid to the rich cultures of Asia and Europe, and the whole race has, as the human totality, one destiny which it seeks and increasingly approaches in the cycles of progression and retrogression it describes through the countless millenniums of its history.”³

There have been many worlds in the world, each one actualising an aspect of humanity’s potential. Only since the Enlightenment has the inherent unity of humanity been realised and probingly brought into practice. The cultures and religions in the kaleidoscope of the past represent many images of the human being, yet there is

* An essay based on a talk in Auroville in 2011. The author passed away in 2012, and these essays were not polished-up. Some references have been added editorially. These are put within []. — Ed.

1. Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 279.
2. Robert Chartier, in *L’Histoire aujourd’hui*, p. 18.
3. Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, pp. 66-67.

one fundamental human constitution, discovered in the spiritual experience of the sages. Therefore history may be seen as the exploration of all aspects of human nature and their gradual conscious integration into one body for humanity. This body has to be built in its conscious totality before humanity can consider its evolutionary task accomplished — before it is ready to access the next higher step in the evolution which is its secret destiny.

History seen in this way obtains an evaluation in which everything becomes meaningful. After all, we were there in former lives, in places mentioned in the history books, but also in events narrated in what have become myths, or legends, or speculation, or in places swallowed by time as their soil was covered by crusts of earth or by the waters. When asked what he had been doing in his former lives, Sri Aurobindo answered laconically but so significantly: “Carrying on the evolution.” [CWSA Vol. 32, p. 88] The Mother wrote about herself: “Since the beginning of the earth, whenever and wherever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of consciousness, I was there.”⁴ Seen in this way, history is no longer a chaos of events unrelated among them; it is part of the present because it generated the present and is alive in us.

When did history begin? If one accepts that it began when some peoples started to record things in writing to support their memory, then its beginning must have been something like five thousand years ago in the Middle East. However, more and more civilisations are dug up which date from times well before Sumer, even from -10,000, like Göbekli Tepe in present-day Turkey. And then there are the fiercely discussed civilisations of which no known trace is left, but which have remained alive in humanity’s memory. Where did the cave artists, painting their masterpieces 35,000 or more years ago, come from? One reads time and again about primitive hunter-gatherers who settled down around -8,000 years, before which there was only wilderness sparsely populated with primitives. To this Sri Aurobindo objects that ten thousand years would have been insufficient for the human mind and its practical capacities to develop.

The Western way, originating in Greece, and the Eastern of which India was the spiritual cradle, are generally considered the two main ways leading up to the present. To keep things simple we will follow this interpretation, leaving for instance ancient Egypt out of our consideration because much is known about it, but not yet that which is essential to its occult and spiritual understanding.

Opening the Western Mind

“No Indian can be adjudged so totally Greek as Sri Aurobindo”, wrote K. D. Sethna.⁵

4. *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life*, p. 1.

5. K. D. Sethna: *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*, p. 2.

This is a rather surprising statement in the Aurobindonian literature, where Sri Aurobindo is mostly presented as a prominent former freedom fighter and an incarnation of the Indian soul. But Sethna was one of his closest disciples, a frequent correspondent over many years, and the editor of *Mother India*, considered by Sri Aurobindo to be his own mouthpiece, and therefore must have known what he was writing. Besides, in Sri Aurobindo's oeuvre there is abundant support for Sethna's statement. There is e.g. the unfinished epic *Iliion* about the fall of Troy, the illuminating series of articles on *Heraclitus*, and the first two articles of *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth* proposing the Greek ideal of the perfection of body and mind, "in countries like Greece, Greece where all sides of human activity were equally developed",⁶ set as an example to the students of the Ashram School. There are also the countless references, explicit or implicit, throughout his work. All testify to a presence of ancient Greece which had remained vividly alive in Sri Aurobindo — who as a classical scholar in Cambridge had been awarded several prizes for his mastery of the Greek language.

A point that has been generally overlooked in this context is the importance Sri Aurobindo ascribed to the presence of the mystics in Egypt and Greece, whom he held to be on an equal footing with those in India. It should be recalled that ancient Greece was much more than the Athens of Pericles. Its 'mysteries' point back to a knowledge and a life many centuries old and often related to ancient Egypt or even imported from there. Also, the Greek culture on the islands of the Aegean and on the coast of Anatolia (now Turkey) preceded in most cultural aspects the golden age of Athens.

"The Vedic Rishis were mystics of the ancient type", wrote Sri Aurobindo, "who everywhere, in India, Greece, Egypt and elsewhere, held the secret truths and methods of which they were in possession as very sacred and secret things not to be disclosed to the unfit who would misunderstand, misapply, misuse and degrade the knowledge."⁷ "in Greece the mystics and the mysteries were there at the prehistoric beginning and in the middle (Pythagoras was one of the greatest of the mystics) . . ." [CWSA Vol. 28, p. 324] "The ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato, and form the profoundest part of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West." [CWSA Vol. 20, p. 330] Initiation in the mysteries always forbade disclosure of their spiritual contents, even on punishment of death; as a consequence much about them remains unknown or the result of fanciful guesses. But there can be no doubt that behind the cult of Osiris and Orpheus, or of Dionysus and Apollo there lived the essence of true spirituality, including the awareness of an immortal soul and of reincarnation.

6. Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 517.

7. Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga – II*, pp. 418-19.

The entity called Greece was not political, at least not in the beginning, for Greece was divided in numerous and most often inimical city-states. Its essence was its culture, of which the importance rose to the surface in its 'mysteries' and during the four great Games (one of which was the Games at Olympia), when a sacred truce was respected by all. When Greece emerged from its dark ages around -700, the centre of its culture was not Athens, but the coast of Anatolia and some of the islands in the Aegean. All were connected by an intense trade, always the carrier of ideas and religion. Miletus, for instance, now little more than a name, was a big, very lively and rich harbour.

It was from Miletus and places near it that the first pre-Socratic philosophers originated, among them the very first one to be recognised as such and to be counted among the Seven Sages: Thales of Miletus (probably 624-546). Together with his name is usually mentioned that he was the first known person to predict a solar eclipse, the one that took place on 28 May -585. It may be safely assumed that Thales did not find the astronomical data and do the complicated calculations all by himself. Miletus was visited by sea and by land from all over the known world at that time, and Thales himself, like so many others eagerly seeking for knowledge, was an extensively travelled man. It is known that he visited Egypt, and he must also have been in places in Mesopotamia or have met savants from Ur or Babylon. Both the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians possessed an astonishing astronomical knowledge. In this cultural exchange, Thales stands as an example of the other philosophers who created 'the Greek Miracle'. The travels of Pythagoras, to Phoenicia, Egypt, Mesopotamia and up to the borders of India, are related in some detail by classical authors. Plato too will sail to Egypt, as had done the first historians, the law-giver Solon, and countless other Greek intellectuals before him.

At the time of Plato, the aristocratic, powerful Athens at the head of an empire of city-states on the mainland and in the sea had already for some time become the magnet of Greek culture. Athens was now where the traders came, where the drachmae filled the coffers, and where philosophers from the four corners of the world sought a platform to make their voices heard. At the zenith of ancient Greek culture, with the magnificent monuments on its acropolis and its democratic values forever after shaping the societies of humanity, Athens shone like a torch in the night for a few decades — before being swallowed up by history in the shape of the Macedonians. But in those few decades it would lay an important part of the foundations of Europe and the West.

The Socratic Bifurcation

They came to Athens from near and far in Greater Greece, the philosophers known as 'sophists', who would create what was nothing less than the first Western Enlightenment. They were the first in Western history to represent the mind, the

intellect, reason pure and simple, questioning the myths, superstitions and morals of their contemporaries. As always when rational thought clashes with established creed, they did this at the risk of banishment and even of their lives.

“The word ‘sophists’ means professionals of the intellect”, writes Jacqueline de Romilly. “They were not ‘sages’ or *sophoi*, a word not applicable to a profession but to a state of being. Neither were they ‘philosophers’, a word evoking a patient aspiration for truth rather than an optimistic confidence in one’s own mental capacities. They knew the mental processes and were able to transmit them. They were masters in the use of thought, in the use of the spoken word. Knowledge was their instrument as the piano is the instrument of a pianist. [Some possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge.] The idea behind the word ‘sophist’ was eminently formulated by one of them, Thrasymachus, who had the following words written on his tomb: ‘My place of origin was Chalcedonia and my profession was knowledge.’”⁸

In a society in which the spoken word used in the art of argumentation was the most important tool of the citizen, the sophists trained the youth who could pay for it in obtaining the upper hand in the social conventions which it was their civil duty to attend. But “they were not only masters of rhetoric, they were also philosophers in the true sense of the word — philosophers whose doctrines liberated the minds, stimulated them and opened paths formerly not trod. This new kind of philosophers — not to be compared with our academic philosophers — thus started a real intellectual and moral revolution. . . . They inaugurated a total relativism, which left nothing behind that was transcendent or assured.”⁹ Theirs, with their ‘fluid clarity of the reasoning mind’ (Sri Aurobindo) was the revolution of *logos* versus *mythos*, of the questioning mind against the established, dogmatic certainties of myth, the basis of religion.

Their importance and activity will become clear if one realises that the first and foremost sophist was none other than Socrates himself. He, the man who questioned anybody and anything, to find that in fact nobody knew anything for sure, was *the* essential sophist, showing the rational relativity of everything, and finally condemned to drinking hemlock for his alleged undermining of religion. The greatness of Socrates, the sincerity of his vocation, and his inner *daemon* leave no doubt that he was a *vibhuti* of the Mind. It was he whom the others took as an example, even when ridiculing him. The schools of Pyrrhonism, with its basic principle of rational relativity, stoicism, cynicism and epicurism, all principal schools of classical philosophy, had their direct origin in Socrates — not to mention Platonism, for in Plato’s writings he is the principal protagonist throughout. If Plato presented Socrates as an opponent of the sophists, it was because Socrates, guided by his *daemon* and initiated by the priestess Diotima of Mantinea, took a moral stance against the

8. Jacqueline de Romilly: *Les grands sophistes dans l’Athènes de Périclès*, p. 17.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 107.

amoralism of the dialectic reason, convinced as he was that the knowledge of the truth must inevitably lead to the practice of the Good.

The years when satyr-faced and barefoot Socrates moved among the Athenians, while his fellow knights-of-the-mind taught the Athenian youth how to excel in the city by their intellectual agility and their mastery of the spoken word, are a decisive moment in the history of the West. Rational interrogation questioned dogmatic imposition and ossified tradition. This increasing separation may without exaggeration be called ‘the Socratic bifurcation’, giving to the other sophists their due share in the event. Sri Aurobindo has highlighted the importance of this bifurcation on several occasions, for instance in the following evaluation. “Greece at large followed the turn given by Heraclitus, developed the cult of the reason and left the remnants of the old occult religion to become a solemn superstition and a conventional pomp. . . . Greece with its rational bent and its insufficient religious sense was unable to save its religion; it tended towards that sharp division between philosophy and science on one side and religion on the other which has been so peculiar a characteristic of the European mind.”¹⁰

The Greek mind dominated the Hellenistic world for centuries. When first the Macedonians and then the Romans conquered Greece, Greek culture in its turn conquered them. The philosophical schools mentioned above were the main patterns according to which the intellectuals interpreted the world and found strength to cope with it. Centres of those schools will be founded throughout the eastern Mediterranean, but Athens will remain the jewel in the crown. It is there that many prominent Romans went to study, as did several Catholic Church Fathers.

Plato did not have any use for science, but his disciple Aristotle had. Dry Aristotle may be seen as the initiator of the study of Nature by the sciences, fields in which the mind must work with the utmost bareness and accuracy. A brief enumeration of the names of classical Greek scientists and their best known accomplishments will suffice to illustrate their brilliance. Euclid and geometry. (“The astonishing fact is that, after two thousand years, nobody has ever found an actual mistake in Euclid’s *Elements*, that is to say a statement that did not follow logically from the given assumptions.”¹¹) Aristarchus: the Earth moves around the Sun; he also calculated the distances of the Sun and the Moon from the Earth. Heraclitus of Pontus: the Earth spins on its axis. Hipparchus: the precession of the equinoxes. Eratosthenes: calculated the circumference of the Earth within two hundred miles. Archimedes: laid the foundations of integral calculus, applied mathematics and hydrostatics.

But then the Western mind was closed. Examining, questioning, calculating, exploring were allegedly inspired by the Devil, for all answers were to be found in

10. Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 246-47.

11. Robert Osserman: *Poetry of the Universe*, p. 100.

the Bible, the Word of God. The Academy in Athens was forcefully closed in 529, and only a thousand years later, in the Renaissance, would the freedom to ask and to answer, rediscovered in the texts of the classical Greeks, revive.

Initiation for the Masses

Roman emperors, consuls and senators sought initiation in the Greek mysteries, which continued to exist on the margin of society. But all human beings have a soul, and those with a living soul will seek for spiritual enlightenment in whatever form available. Not only in Greece, but also in the other conquered territories of the Roman Empire there were mysteries, and some of them spread and became quite popular. There was for instance the cult of Isis, the Universal Mother, of Mithras, favourite of the military, of Cybele and Serapis.

The spreading of the mystery cults, however, remained restricted because their access required initiation and absolute secrecy. The initiated became as it were a superior category of humans in conscious possession of their souls and gradually climbing up to higher grades of initiation (resembling in this present-day freemasonry). On the one hand the religious universality of Greece, mirrored in the Roman pantheon, had lost much of its credibility because of the rationalism of the sophists; on the other hand the restrictions and the occult character of the cults left the majority of the people without an interpretation of their lives, without a Source of Strength to turn to in the midst of their very harsh lives.

“They were none of them religions of the masses, because all taught that salvation comes through knowledge [gnosis]. Knowledge may be imparted suddenly, by revelation, to whomever the teacher deems worthy, as was the wont of certain Gnostics; or it might be learned by long study as among the Platonists, not a few Gnostics and, it seems, the Hermetists. But however acquired, it was always the possession of an *élite*. Hence the tendency within these milieux towards the emergence of a two-tier structure, with a small group of teachers, the ‘elect’, taking responsibility for the instruction of a much larger group of what the Platonists and Manicheans appropriately called ‘listeners’.” (Garth Fowden in *The Egyptian Hermes*)

There was a need and abundant space for a new mass religion.

Christianity started as one mystery cult among others, in fact as a variety of small gnostic sects, each with its own preceptor and sacred text. The basic belief of Gnosticism is that the world is divided in two: a vast higher hierarchy of heavens of light and holiness, a limited lower world of darkness and perdition. Some souls, inhabitants of the higher worlds, happen to fall into the world of darkness; their fall causes them to forget their origin and real nature; they remain bound to the darkness through many incarnations — till a Redeemer descends from on high among them, gives them the effective knowledge (gnosis) of their real nature, and shows them

the way out of the darkness into the Light. The similarity with the basic tenets of Christianity is obvious, and more so if one recalls that the belief in reincarnation also existed among the early Christians.

Who Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, actually was, remains a mystery in spite of the innumerable volumes written about him. Making the riddle still more mysterious is the fact that even the basic texts of the New Testament differ on all important points, and that each of them is untrustworthy in the wording it has come to us. Sri Aurobindo names Christ several times, together with Krishna and Buddha, as an *Avatar*, and finds his main inspiration to have been Buddhism, which he calls the parent of Christianity. "This was the Eastern ideal carried by Buddhism and other ancient disciplines to the coasts of Asia and Egypt and from there poured by Christianity into Europe."¹²

It is one of the great gaps in our knowledge of history that all records and references to the first *thirty years* of Christ's life, except for the nativity, were torn out from the sources. There is, firstly, no doubt that Christ was an extraordinary personality, whose words and actions presuppose a profound spiritual training. Secondly, what may be seen as the core of his teaching can only be understood through oriental spiritual knowledge. But this is what in Christianity never happened. The mind of the Church Fathers was shaped by Greek philosophy, especially Platonism (although Aquinas returned to Aristotle); the Hebrew religion remained a permanent obligatory reference; and when the Christian doctrine and its superstitions were put to the test by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, their secular knowledge lacked any spirituality.

There are many faces of Christ, but which was the true one? There was the apocalyptic Christ, who is supposed to have said: "Truly, I tell you, this generation will not pass away before all these things [he had been predicting] take place." (Mark 13:30)¹³ There was the incarnated Son of a loving Father, so contrary to the jealous and vengeful Yahweh of the Old Testament. There was the teacher of a movement (which may have been the Essenes). There is no doubt that Christ, during his short public life, was supported by an organisation without which his mission would have been impossible to execute in such a short time. And there was, often usefully forgotten, the bringer of the sword. "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man's enemies will be the members of his own household'." (Matthew 10:14-16) Such words can only be spoken by a leader who demands a total and exclusive commitment from his followers, whose salvation depends on his word and his spiritual power.

12. Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 1088.

13. See Bart Ehrman: *Jesus — Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*.

As to his oft discussed miracles, this is the opinion of a *mahayogi* who knew what he was talking about, namely Sri Aurobindo: “Jesus Christ made the use of the *siddhis* a prominent feature of his pure, noble and spiritual life, nor did he hesitate to communicate them to his disciples — the laying of hands, the healing of the sick, the ashirvada [blessing], the abhishap [cursing], the speaking with many tongues were all given to them.”¹⁴

Gnosticism was eclectic, owing some of its elements to Alexandria, the Egyptian metropolis, to Mesopotamia and India in the East, to Hebrew mysticism, and to Platonism. The common factor in all this was the search for Truth, wherever it may be hidden, beyond the materialism and phenomenalism of the dominating philosophies. Gnosticism was mystic — and much of it wildly sectarian, for founded on the experience or imagination of some charismatic figure, like all the sects in the past and today. Theologians, e.g. Irenaeus in *Adversus Heraeses*, did their best to separate Christianity from the other gnostic sects, and to give it an own identity whose God was the one true God and whose scripture contained the one true truth.

The Nag Hammadi bombshell in 1945 proved definitively how intimately Christianity had been part of the gnostic movement. Nag Hammadi is a small place in Egypt where Christian monks had buried their gnostic texts at the time that they were forbidden, somewhere in the 4th century, by the Emperor and the Church authorities. Among this treasure trove was found, e.g. The Gospel of Thomas, with supposedly authentic sayings by Jesus which sound at least as original as the material of the four canonic gospels. (One wonders what else may suddenly be thrown up on the beaches of time to reinterpret history — documents about the first thirty years of Jesus’ life?) “The term ‘Christianity’, for example, is not the name for any single unit of the type for which the historian of specific ideas looks”, writes Arthur Lovejoy. In Christianity there were “all manner of distinct and conflicting beliefs under the one name . . . a very mixed collection of ideas, the result of historic processes of a highly complicated and curious sort . . . a series of facts which, taken as a whole, have almost nothing in common except the name.”¹⁵

Driven by History, it was the mission of Christianity to create a mass religion which would fill the empty soul-space left behind by the Socratic bifurcation. To this end it needed the mystic core which it provided by presenting Jesus of Nazareth as the gnostic Redeemer who would show the souls their way back to heaven, and by gradually building up the myth of his exclusive divinity. Secondly, it needed an organised body, a Church, with strict authority over the members. Thirdly, it needed uniform definitions of its faith, the same for all the Church and to be accepted on heavy punishment (in this case eternal damnation in hell). The many truths of Gnosticism were reduced to one single truth, but not without feisty discussions and disagreements.

14. Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, p. 15.

15. Arthur Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 6.

It is amazing how fast the Catholic Church built itself a structure, the pillars of which were the bishops. Initially each bishop was the highest authority in his community or bishopric, owing respect to none other. As Ignatius, himself a bishop, wrote: "You should regard the bishop as the Lord himself . . . The bishop presides as the counterpart of God . . . Do nothing without the bishop and his presbyters . . ." ¹⁶ But the problem rose ere long that each bishop seemed to have his personal interpretation of Christianity.

One reason was that most of the communities had their faith from different sources and interpreters. Some had heard an apostle tell his own story, others had been handed a text differently inspired, and still others made a mixture of this, that and the other rumour about Jesus Christ, soon turned into miraculous truth. In circulation were the Old Testament scriptures, quite influential as Christianity originally spread along the paths of the diaspora and its synagogues; there were the gospels, not only four but more than twenty; there were the books of revelation, written by prophets and seers; there were the letters of Paul who, according to many exegetes, had created his own (gnostic) version of Christianity; there were the Church Fathers, commenting on disputed points of the teaching and adding their own interpretations, which became authoritative in their turn; there was Platonism, very influential especially through some of the Church Fathers; there were the decisions and the creeds of the Church Councils, trying to bring order in the general and often violent confusion, but only adding to it . . .

‘What I wish, must be the canon’

In spite of the persecutions, Christianity spread rapidly and soon had a dominant place among the new sects in the Empire. The main reason for which the Christians were persecuted was that they refused to recognise the Emperor as a god and sacrifice to him. Not only was this sacrilege according to the Roman law, it was also feared that it would attract the wrath of the heavens on the Empire and its citizens. A simple act of veneration sufficed to free anyone of condemnation, most often to a public execution or to serve as prey for wild animals in circus.

It is one of the surprises of history that the severe persecution by Diocletian, in 310, was almost immediately followed by the breakthrough of Christianity. Constantine the Great proclaimed in 313, by the Edict of Milan, universal freedom of religious confession, with special privileges for the Christian faith. Soon the persecuted for Christ became administrators and judges in the Empire; ‘the poor’, as they called themselves, became rich, sometimes ostentatiously, thanks to the generosity of the Emperor; the hidden now erected luxurious buildings for their congregations: the first churches.

16. Henry Bettenson: *The Early Christian Fathers*, p. 42.

Constantine himself became venerated as the thirteenth apostle. Was he really a Christian? Formerly, most historians had well-founded doubts about this, considering him rather an adherent of Sol Invictus, like so many of the military from whose ranks he had risen; because of the gruesome murders he committed on persons close to him in order to stay in power; and because he let himself be baptised only on his deathbed. But, as so often, in Constantine's case too, the opinion of the historians proved to be inconstant, and one reads in a recent book by the French historian Paul Veyne: "Nowadays, the historians agree in seeing Constantine as a sincere Christian believer."¹⁷

One of the main reasons Constantine tried to build a basis on Christianity was that it was so widely spread and therefore might serve as the support of the unity of his huge and very diverse Empire. (Soon the Empire would be split and ruled by two Emperors, each one assisted by a Caesar.) In this he rather miscalculated. For, as we have seen, the authoritative sources of Christianity varied without end, a situation which resulted in continuous quarrels, serious public disturbances, street battles and killings. Countless were the efforts to reach an agreement on the many points of contention by calling the bishops to discuss them in a council. Councils there were many, generally or partially attended and each one with a set of agreements which was proclaimed as the official, canonical truth the Church as a whole had to accept on punishment of eternal damnation. One creed replaced another, soon to be put into question by a new fanatic personality or a dissident council of disagreeing bishops.

One of the principal points of discussion was the status of Jesus Christ. Some said he was entirely God, others that he was entirely human, and many that he was something in between. This is of course the problem of the 'avatarhood' of Christ, the Son of God who was also the Son of Man. What in practically every council was discussed without end was a problem that is common in Hinduism, but that the West had to work out for itself, Christ being accepted as the only avatar without a second. For the right view many were ready to die, or to make others die. From the status of God to that of a human being, there was a whole scale of beliefs, e.g. Sabellians, adoptionists, subordinationists, Arians, and the ones for whom Christ was human like any other human being, albeit in an exceptional way. In the 4th and the 5th centuries so many councils were held — and so many internal battles fought for the Christian faith — that reading about it makes the head spin. Ultimately the Creed defined in Nicea, in 325, has endured more than any other, and it is still the official creed of the Catholic Church.

Such endless turmoil was the opposite of the unity which Constantine had hoped for, and he intervened with all his power and money to eliminate the dissenters and support the orthodox. It seemed however impossible to decide who was orthodox

17. Paul Veyne: *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien*, p. 95.

or not, and all of them declared themselves inspired by the Holy Spirit, i.e. by God himself. Constantine could play the same game: he declared himself inspired by the Holy Spirit and exerted the utmost pressure for the bishops to come to a definitive, clearly formulated conclusion. He proclaimed solemnly: “We have received from Divine Providence the supreme favour of being relieved from all error . . . myself, to whom the Highest Divinity by his celestial will committed the government of all earthly beings.” Which means that the councils held in his presence formulated their conclusions according to his opinion and decision — a man who had to wait till the 20th century to be thought of as a Christian. Nonetheless, this emperor’s iron fist did not put an end to the chaos, which soon made Constantius II state: “What I wish, must be the canon”, and by the canon is meant the formulation of the holy Christian faith, which was for a great deal the result of the viewpoint of emperors.

Already in the first decennia of this unholy turmoil, the bishop Irenaeus of Lyon had written: “If anyone asks how the Son was ‘produced’ from the Father, we reply that no one understands that ‘production’ or ‘generation’ or ‘calling’ or ‘revelation’ or whatever term anyone applies to his begetting, which in truth is indescribable.”¹⁸ Yet the head of the theologians was programmed for defined understanding, and as this had to be the result of the workings of the mind, its always partial definitions continued to sow dissension, leaving no place for Irenaeus’ mystic confession of mental inability to define the Undefinable.

The Closing of the Western Mind

As it grew in numbers and power, the Christian Church became ever more authoritarian, also in its creed and teachings. A sort of composite construction had grown out of the combative diversity over the years. The big framework of this often bizarre ‘theological’ construct became more or less generally accepted, especially as it was supported and therefore imposed by the authorities and by the emperors, now real Christians, above all. In 395 Emperor Theodosius declared Catholicism the official obligatory religion; paganism was forbidden, as were the non-Catholic versions of Christianity, Arianism prominent among them. (This tightening of the mental straitjacket would continue till Justinian decreed in 534 the death penalty for those who still practised pagan cults.)

It did not take long before the escalating power trip of the Catholic Church took on even the emperors themselves. After all, the Church represented the Supreme Power on earth, namely that of God himself. It had the might to forgive the worst sins or to refuse to do so, as it could excommunicate anybody it wanted, even whole peoples or kingdoms, thereby sending their souls assuredly to hell for all eternity. A priest could transmute bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ,

18. Irenaeus: *Adversus Haereses*, quoted in Henry Bettenson in *The Early Christian Fathers*, p. 74.

and administer or refuse the sacrament for the dying, again determining the eternal destiny of a person's soul. Compared to this, all bearers of the worldly authority were merely humans depending on the interventions and decisions of the representatives of God. It did not take long before Ambrosius, a potentate of the Church, refused to administer the sacraments to Emperor Theodosius, thus forcing him to submit to papal supremacy.

When Augustine became bishop of Hippo (ca. 400), northern tribes had already crossed Europe and invaded North Africa. This former Manichaean would in the coming centuries be considered 'the cornerstone of the western Christian tradition'. It was he who taught that all human beings are born in original sin, because of Adam's decision to eat the forbidden fruit in Paradise; who sent all non-Catholics to eternal hell, even new-born unbaptised children; who condemned all humans to eternal fire and brimstone, except for the predestined who were to be saved and whose number was known to God alone; and who declared that the Catholic Church had the divine right and duty 'to force all outsiders to come in', thereby developing a rationale for persecution. This sombre religious thought will dominate the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages.

How contradictory all this was to the life and teachings of Christ. The kingdom within which he sought had been 'humanised' into an external kingdom of mental confusion, ruthless power and eternal damnation instead of Love. "The result of the usurpations of philosophy was that mankind flung itself with an infinite sincerity, with a passionate sense of relief into the religion of an obscure Jewish sect and consented for a length of time which amazes us to every theological absurdity, even the most monstrous, so that it might once more be permitted to believe in something greater than earth & to have relations with God."¹⁹ The obscure Jewish sect was composed of numerous smaller gnostic sects; to form a mass religion, philosophy had to bend all existing kinds of elements into one authoritative, monstrous structure, the framework of a gigantic institution that would present itself as the bridge, the interface between lowly humanity and the heavens of God.

"The old philosophical spirit was torn to pieces with Hypatia in the bloodstained streets of Alexandria. Theology usurped her place . . ."²⁰ As symbol of those times Sri Aurobindo chose Hypatia, a philosopher and mathematician in fascinating Alexandria, that metropolis of learning and knowledge in Egypt. This exemplary learned woman, still representing the open mind of 'heathen' Greece, was murdered in 415 by a band of black-robed monks in the name of Christ, the new God. (Such bands of Catholic fanatics acted everywhere as the hammer of the new, just and true religion to eradicate paganism by destroying its temples and monuments, and killing its representatives. They could do this unpunished, as they were allegedly implementing

19. Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, pp. 80-81.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

the edicts of the emperors and of most of the bishops.)

This was the time of the closing of the Western mind, when what the Church taught was the Truth and all the rest was falsehood or superfluous knowledge. All Truth was contained in the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers and the conclusions of the Church councils; the rest was unnecessary or dangerous. The glorious Roman Empire ended in 476 with the fall of Rome to barbarians. “The last recorded astronomical observation in the ancient Hellenistic world was one by the Athenian philosopher Proclus in 475, nearly eleven hundred years after the prediction of and eclipse by Thales in -585, which traditionally marks the beginning of Greek science. It would be over a thousand years — until the publication of Copernicus’ *De revolutionibus* in 1543 — before the studies began to move forward again.”²¹

The Teutonic Lapse

The northern border of the Roman Empire in what is now Europe was of enormous length, a constant headache for the emperors to defend and demanding huge military resources. Battles with Germanic tribes had to be fought on frequent occasions, and this was where army commanders earned their laurels and sometimes gained enough power to contest for the Empire as a whole. Still, gradual infiltrations of the lines by barbaric tribes had taken place for centuries, often turned into permanent settlements and collaboration with the Romans. Barbarians filled the ranks of the legions and some of them rose to the highest commands.

The great unrest, however, started in 370 with the invasions of the Huns, the wild horse-riders out for the joy of battle and booty, who smashed the Ostrogoths and drove what remained of them into Roman territory south of the Danube. Great Rome itself, mother of the empire, was sacked for the first time by Gothic tribes who were in fact Christians, not Catholics but Arians. Glorious Rome, filled with treasures of all kinds, kept attracting the restless tribes also of the Huns under Attila, in 452, and of the Vandals under Gaiseric, in 455. That the axis of the Empire was repeatedly shaken was a bad omen for the survival of the Empire as such.

What is here mentioned in a couple of paragraphs was in fact a process of years, in which many ‘barbarian’ chieftains were attracted by the Roman lifestyle, adopted it to any possible degree, and with it submitted to conversion by the Catholic Church. Their descendants live on to this day in France, Spain, Italy and North Africa, rarely conscious of their origin. The era of the great invasions, which would lead to the downfall of the Roman Empire in 476, is extensively mentioned in the history books, where one will find demographic and economic reasons for it, but nothing deeper. It is nevertheless the deeper reason, perceived by Sri Aurobindo’s

21. Charles Freeman: *The Closing of the Western Mind*, p. 328. The present author has borrowed the title of his talk from Freeman’s great essay.

insight, which will bear in later centuries not only on Europe, but on the development of the world.

The European character is still clearly divided into two: northern or Germanic, southern or Romanic. If there is a mixture of the two, and if it is this mixture that has played such an important role in world history once Europe awoke from the Dark Ages, it is because of the infusion of the vitality of the Germanic tribes. They were the reason that the Roman Empire came to an end and Western Europe, because of its closing of the rational mind, sank into darkness. Sri Aurobindo called this historic process ‘the Teutonic lapse’, Teutonic standing here for Germanic or barbarian. “. . . for the European, ever since the Teutonic mind and temperament took possession of western Europe, has been fundamentally the practical, dynamic and kinetic man, vitalistic in the very marrow of his thought and being.”²²

It is “This triumphant emergence and lead of the vital man”²³ which will provide the impulse for the re-opening of the thinking mind and push it towards its realisations in science, commerce and conquest. “The emphasis of the Western mind is on life, the outer life above all, the things that are grasped, visible, tangible. The inner life is taken only as an intelligent reflection of the outer world, with the reason for a firm putter of things into shape, an intelligent critic, builder, refiner of the external materials offered by Nature . . . Even from religion the West is apt to demand that it shall subordinate its aim or its effect to this utility of the immediate visible world . . . The genuine temperament of the West triumphed and in an increasing degree rationalised, secularised and almost annihilated the religious spirit.” [CWSA Vol. 20, pp. 139-40] For this emptiness of the religious spirit, Catholicism itself, with its almost exclusively dogmatic system, was responsible. It “sought to capture the soul and the ethical being, but cared little or not at all for the thinking mind [as all was prescribed and nothing free to be thought about] . . . When the barbarians captured the Western world, it was in the same way content to Christianise them, but made it no part of its function to intellectualise.”²⁴ — till reason will reaffirm its rights in the Renaissance.

What became of Christ’s Message . . .

So what became of the message of Love for which a smiling young sage in Judea had sacrificed his life? “The Messenger suffered on the cross, and what happened to the truth that was his message?” asks Sri Aurobindo. And he answers himself: “As Christ himself foresaw, it has never been understood even by its professors. For five hundred years [after the death of Christ] it was a glorious mirage for which thousands of men and women willingly underwent imprisonment, torture and death

22. Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 157.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

in order that Christ's kingdom might come on earth & felicity possess the nations. But the kingdom that came was not Christ's; it was Constantine's, [who made Christianity the handmaid not of Love but of controversy and war;] it was Hildebrand's, [Pope Gregorius VII, who in 1077 excommunicated the Holy Emperor Henry IV, divested him of his imperial power and dissolved his subjects of all oaths sworn to him;] it was Alexander Borgia's [one of the scandalous Renaissance popes]. For another thirteen centuries the message was — what? Has it not been the chief support of fanaticism, falsehood, cruelty and hypocrisy, the purveyor of selfish power, the keystone of a society that was everything Christ had denounced?"²⁵

As an illustration of his assessment, Sri Aurobindo writes: "Witness the whole external religious history of Europe, that strange sacrilegious tragi-comedy of discords, sanguinary disputations, 'religious' wars, persecutions, State churches and all else that is the very negation of the spiritual life."²⁶ And he points to "the bloodstained and fiery track which formal external Christianity has left furrowed across the mediaeval history of Europe almost from the days of Constantine, its first hour of secular triumph, down to very recent times". [CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 175] He points to the record of the Inquisition. And he says: "But we must observe the root of this evil, which is not in true religion itself, but in its infrarational parts, not in spiritual faith and aspiration, but in our ignorant human confusion of religion with a particular creed, sect, cult, religious society or Church."²⁷

Indeed, the fundamental reason of the human tragi-comedy is the limitations of its mind, with ignorance turned into fanaticism as its illegitimate offspring. Dark powers rise up in the infrarational parts of humanity and inspire it with apparently meaningful formulas, which they use as the rods to beat it into submission to the gods as whom they pose. Such is the foundation of small sects and of successful sects called religions, but also of political movements, warped idealistic utopias, and practically everything humans try to do together. The closing of the Western mind was a monstrosity which is still alive, as it has been recognised as such without its opponents finding a replacement which would keep the mind open and still worthwhile to be the guidance of life.

The balance of Christianity drawn in the previous paragraphs is quite negative. Yet in Christianity there remained a mystical core which it kept from its gnostic times. There was the dictatorial institutional Church, but there was also a mystic underground, mostly hidden because the Church which owned and operated all access to God would not stand that individuals found their own way to God in their heart and soul. Even in the first canonical writings there were the letters of Paul of Tarsus and the Gospel of John with their very own mystic flavour, borrowed from the gnostic origins of the Christian movement. There has also been, at all times, a

25. Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, p. 75.

26. Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 38.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

strong reaction against the dogmatic and tyrannical Church and its creeds and prescriptions, because after all the human reason can be bludgeoned into unconsciousness but not eradicated.

Any soul will be touched by King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, in search of the Grail, a symbol of the highest spiritual aspiration and perhaps transformation. There were the Knights Templar, whose secret seems to have been gnostic, probably revealed to them by mystics of the Muslim faith. It gave them the strength to create an empire of their own, and to remain faithful to themselves when persecuted, tortured and put to the stake. There were the Cathars, an anti-Church as old as the successful one, which organised a bloody crusade to smash them out of existence.

Within the Catholic Church itself, there were the Franciscan mendicant orders, with Francis of Assisi as their example and patron saint. Their ideal was to return to the supposed life in poverty of original Christianity, i.e. of Christ and his companions. Considering the ostentatious luxury of the official Catholic Church, the barefoot mendicants were not a pleasing sight to the eye of the men in power. And there were the medieval mystics of Flanders and the Rhine Valley: Meister Eckhart, Jan van Ruysbroeck, and beguines like Hadewych, and Marguerite Porete, who like so many mystics in this and other religions was burned for the sin of having found God in her heart and having realised Him.

All these individuals and movements stood up against the institutional Church. All of them returned to the origin of the faith — love, poverty, God within — and wanted the external Church to follow them back to the original and inner Christ. This urge of spiritual authenticity is now as alive as ever, and is being suppressed as vigorously as ever. What revolutionary theologians like Hans Küng wanted was a return to the Church of the Apostles in the Christian spirit of simplicity. This brings to mind the following anecdote about Thomas Aquinas, the *doctor angelicus*, who “on 6 December 1273, while attending mass fell into a prolonged and rapturous mystical state. Thereafter, he ceased to write. [He had written enormously, including the *Summa theologica*.] When urged by officials of the Catholic Church to continue his work on the *Summa*, which he had left unfinished, he replied: ‘I can do no more. Such secrets have been revealed to me that all I have written now appears to be of little value.’”²⁸ In this he joined Meister Eckhart and his realisation of the One; both exceptionally learned Dominican monks were called to justify themselves before the Holy Inquisition for their deviations from the orthodox truth.

One finds the closing of the Western mind summarised in the following words of Sri Aurobindo: “. . . because men in the passion and darkness of their vital nature had chosen to think that religion was bound up with certain fixed intellectual conceptions about God and the world which could not stand scrutiny, therefore

28. Quoted by David Berlinski in his book: *The Devil's Delusion*, p. 66.

scrutiny had to be put down by fire and sword; scientific and philosophical truth had to be denied in order that religious error might survive.”²⁹

The Re-opening of the Western Mind

The division of the Roman Empire at the time of Constantine had been practically inevitable not only because of its hugeness, but still more because of the different cultures it contained: in the East the brilliant Byzantine culture, still deeply rooted in ancient Greece and developing its own kind of Christianity, in the West a world with the exception of some highlights like Rome still living in a primeval nature and mentality. When the western wing of the empire ceased to exist in 476, the eastern part, still mentally and physically strong, continued to exist, although gradually shrinking in the course of the centuries. In the 16th century, however, under attack by the Turcomans, Constantinople (founded as the New Rome) fell and the Roman Empire as a whole ceased to exist.

This fact is of importance in our story because Constantinople, and many other places of learning in the Byzantine Empire, still possessed a rich stock of original Greek manuscripts. If these fell into the hands of the Turks, they would most probably be destroyed. Therefore most of the manuscripts were taken to Italy, where, as it happened, something later called ‘Renaissance’ was in full swing, and many rich and cultivated merchants were willing to pay big sums for their acquisition. This cultural exchange created one of the main sources of ‘the new learning’, that would regain the ancient inquisitive spirit and put everything, including the dogmas and superstitions of the Catholic Church, to the test of reason. It became possible again to be an individual and to think as one. (In this period of mental and artistic fermentation Giovanni Pico della Mirandola wrote his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.) Art, science and discovery flourished, although their practitioners still had to watch their step, for the Church in power would not let go of its prerogatives easily.

Pages without end could be written about this important moment in Western history, which would prove equally important for the world. Here we will suffice with the following evaluation of the Renaissance by Sri Aurobindo. “The Renaissance gave back to Europe on one hand the free curiosity of the Greek mind, its eager search for first principles and rational laws, its delighted intellectual scrutiny of the facts of life by the force of direct observation and individual reasoning, on the other the Roman’s large practicality and his sense for the ordering of life in harmony with a robust utility and the just principles of things. But both these tendencies were pursued with a passion, a seriousness, a moral and almost religious ardour which, lacking in the ancient Graeco-Roman mentality, Europe owed to her long centuries of Judaeo-Christian discipline.”³⁰

29. Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 176.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

It was inevitable that a serious scrutiny of the Catholic faith and of its canonical writings would soon lead to frictions and conflicts, for much of it simply does not stand to reason, and the time had come that some passionate thinkers would no longer hesitate to say or write so in public. Thus came the Reformation; thus followed the Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason. Although the world has widened considerably since then, many of the points at issue then are still under discussion now. Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment may well have been the prologue to an age of global change which will lead to the transformation of humanity.

The Way of the East

In this talk the attention has been chiefly focused on ancient Greece and the Socratic bifurcation, the coming about of the mass religion of Christianity, the Teutonic lapse, and the revival of the mind in the Renaissance and Enlightenment, all of them Western historical phenomena. They have created elements which will play an essential role in the further development of humanity as a whole, even up to the present day. The East, and in the first place India, has created its own values. Usually these are seen as to be of a spiritual or mystical kind, but such a view, though basically true, omits the rich development of India's philosophical systems and its manifold experimentation with moral systems. The East 'fell asleep' when Europe reached a level of activity that would impose its values on the globe, but the treasure the East was guarding is now becoming available to humanity as a whole and will at long last provide humanity with its highest and true reason of existence.

Sketching the roads discovered by the East would require an exposition at least as long as the present one on the West. We will therefore conclude with the following admirable summary by Sri Aurobindo. "When, somewhere between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C., men began both in the East and West to intellectualise knowledge, this Truth [of 'an Other beyond Thought'] survived in the East; in the West, where the intellect began to be accepted as the sole or highest instrument for the discovery of Truth, it began to fade [after the Socratic bifurcation]. . . . In the East, especially in India, the metaphysical thinkers have tried, as in the West, to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect. But, in the first place, they have not given mental thinking the supreme rank as an instrument in the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status. The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience; . . . Secondly, each philosophy has armed itself with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness, so that even when one begins with Thought, the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking. Each philosophical founder . . . has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a Yogi. . . . In the West it was just the opposite that came to pass. Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest means and even the highest end; in philosophy, Thought is the be-all

and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the truth is to be discovered; even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect . . .”³¹

Metaphysics, mysticism and spirituality in general have been banned from the scientific mind. For this there was good reason, as the religion in whose midst modern science grew up was irrational and superstitious in the highest degree. But, as seems inevitable to the human mind, science itself formulated its dogmas and thus turned itself into a religion, which is still exclusively practised in all of its temples. This has continuously withheld science and most of its practitioners of examining the root and truth of things. It has even driven some of them to openly wage a war against religion and ‘God’, not realising that they were fighting the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible, as they had not the idea of a Divine which is present at the core of all beings as it is all beings. Words like the following by the ethnologist and media-superstar Richard Dawkins have become famous: “I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented.”³²

After having considered what this talk has to say about the converging history of West and East, it may be a right conclusion to end with the words of Sam Harris, another publicist who battled in the ranks against religion and God, but who in a recent book seems to have seen the light. “When the great philosopher-mystics of the East are weighed against the patriarchs of the Western philosophical and theological traditions, the difference is unmistakable: Buddha, Shankara, Padma-sambhava, Nagarjuna, Longchenpa, and countless others down to the present have no equivalents in the West. In spiritual terms, we appear to have been standing on the shoulders of dwarfs. It is little wonder, therefore, that many Western scholars have found the view within rather unremarkable.”³³

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

*(The New Spirituality — Essays and articles by Georges van Vrekhem.
Published by Stichting Aurofonds)*

31. Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga — I*, pp. 353-54.

32. Richard Dawkins: *The God Delusion*, p. 36.

33. Sam Harris: *The End of Faith*, p. 125.

NEEDLEWORK IN THE MOTHER'S EMBROIDERY DEPARTMENT

(Continued from the issue of November 2019)

WASHING OF THEIR LINEN

Washing was part of taking care of the linen from the Mother's room as well as that of Sri Aurobindo's. This was done by a few ladies in Quadroze, a house situated on the western side of the main Ashram building, where there were water connections and cisterns specially prepared for that purpose. Linen from the Mother's room was washed in the morning hours and evening hours were for linen from Sri Aurobindo's room.

Washing of Garments from the Mother's Room

Washing of the Mother's garments was one more work done by the ladies who stitched her clothes.

Datta took care of all the personal clothes of the Mother. She collected them from the Mother's bathroom on the first floor of the main building of the Ashram; daily, some of her clothes would be cleaned and returned to her. Vasudha as a young girl was sent by the Mother to Datta to be trained for the Mother's work. Apart from stitching etc. she washed the Mother's clothes and learnt to iron them.

Here are a few lines from Lalita, who joined the Ashram in 1927. She was one of those who used to embroider Mother's clothes. Once a gray georgette saree was embroidered by Lalita and offered to the Mother on a Darshan day.

Following is the account of the washing of her special saree in the early years:

Now the question arose as to how to wash this saree without spoiling the embroidery. The Mother always had her sarees washed after wearing them only once. In Bombay we had big shops where such articles were 'dry-cleaned' but here we could not do as those shops did, and the Mother did not approve of such a process either. She asked me if I knew of a way to wash this sort of saree without allowing it to shrink or get spoiled in any way. I said that I had never done it, but I would like to try. As I have said before, I knew that when she gave a particular work to us, she also gave us at the same time the knowledge and capacity to do it. She provided us with a very large oval tub and a large long table, as well as plenty of old cotton sarees as asked by me. These were placed outside Datta's room on the first floor of the house. I set to work by

dissolving some Lux soap flakes in the tub. I had many helpers (Vasudha, Tara, Meenakshi, Tripura, Padmasini and Lila) and we were all learning with the Mother's inner help. We passed the whole saree through this soap-water without crumpling it. We changed the water several times and repeated the process. Then we spread it lengthwise on the table and mopped thoroughly before hanging it in a particular way. While it was still damp, we pulled it gently breadth-wise as well as length-wise to bring it as near as possible to its original size. After this we ironed it on the reverse side keeping up the gentle pulling. Many other sarees did not need this pulling because they were not made of georgette and so they did not shrink when washed.

(Mother India, 1979, p. 410)

In 1946 the Mother sent three young helpers: Minoo, Jaya and Bela to Vasudha. Already, Anusuya and Ichchha were working with Vasudha. They took care of the Mother's clothes, i.e. stitching and embroidering them. They washed and ironed them as well. Till 1946, Mother's clothes were washed in two places. In Swarna's house there were special built-in tanks where she washed Mother's gowns and inner garments as ensembles (body petticoat type dress). She also had an arrangement for ironing these. Sarees and blouses were washed by Vasudha in Quadroze.

Bela, one of the workers of that time narrates:

All washing of clothes was done on the ground floor of the house. There was a long cistern with the water tap on one side. Later this cistern was partitioned into three compartments and all were interconnected. The cisterns were constructed at different heights. This enabled the water to flow freely from the first highest one to the others at lower levels. This arrangement made the washing easier.

The Mother's clothes were washed here during the morning hours. At first, before commencing washing, a mop cloth was spread on the long table in the hall on the first floor. This mop cloth resembled a thin long soft mattress. It was made of old clothes arranged as padding on which a cover was stitched by the ladies of the department.

Smaller garments such as blouses, gowns, coats, ensembles, kameezes and salwars were washed in a certain way whereas the sarees had to be handled differently. Previously small garments which were stitched by Swarna-di's group were washed in her place.

For smaller garments there would be five to six rows of buckets of water. In the first one we mixed Lux soap powder. We would then take a dress, check each part of it at a time, dip it in the solution where needed and gently rub it to remove any kind of stain on it. This done, we would pick up the whole dress, soak it in the soap water for just a few minutes. The next stage was to remove

it and dip it in for a few minutes in each bucket of water one after another till the dress was absolutely washed and cleaned properly. We would then squeeze it very gently to take out some of the water. It would then be placed in a basin and taken upstairs. There they would be spread on the long table over the mop cloth and a towel was placed over the pieces so that these were made somewhat dry. Then each one would be put on a hanger and hung on the clothes-line.

The process was different for sarees. No soap was used. They were washed in plain water. The sarees were never folded. After unfolding the saree for cleaning, it would be gathered carefully, then dipped in the three chambers of the cistern one after the other. Washing over, five persons held the open saree by the border. They moved up the stairs as fast as possible and reached the hall upstairs. Some kept holding up the saree. Two of them would take position on either side at the end of the table where the mop cloth was already placed. Now one part of one end of the saree would be placed on that end of the table. These two persons placed a towel on the wet saree and kept on gently pressing it. As that particular portion dried up, this end would be rolled up carefully, and pulled upwards so that the next portion of the saree could be kept on the table. The others would continue holding the border of the saree till the whole process of drying was over. Now, the somewhat dry saree would be hung lengthways on the clothes-line. Small cloth pieces would be put along the border of the saree, for the clips. These clips never came in direct contact with the saree.

All the clothes, when dry, would be ironed there. They would then be folded, packed neatly, and the packet was ready to be taken to the Mother.

Washing of Linen from Sri Aurobindo's Room

Clothes used personally by Sri Aurobindo or in his service were taken care of by different persons. The ladies of the Embroidery Department also took care of the linen from Sri Aurobindo's room. They repaired the torn parts when needed. Once Datta gave Swarna one of Sri Aurobindo's dhotis which was damaged for about a yard length, but Sri Aurobindo did not want to reject it. Swarna first washed the torn dhoti carefully. Datta wanted Swarna to pull threads out of some old cloth and use that for darning. It would then be soft and not hurt Sri Aurobindo. That was done and when completed, one could not find where the damaged portion was. So fine were her stitches. Many of his bedsheets and pillowcovers were also darned. Nirmala did this job. These were darned skilfully and a little embroidery done over them so that they looked like beautiful embroidered pieces.

His clothes were washed by Champaklal, Moti-ben, Anjali, Bibha and later for a few days by Nalina.

In the early days till his stay in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo used to wear western

clothes. When in Bengal he put on a dhoti, a punjabi with a chaddar around his shoulders. In a few pictures taken in Pondicherry before 1950, he is either wearing a dhoti, one side of which is wrapped over his upper body, or he is wearing a dhoti with a chaddar.

Champaklal washing His Clothes

We find the earliest record of washing of Sri Aurobindo's clothes in the book *Champaklal Speaks* (p. 48). He says:

One day I said: "Mother, I would like to wash my father's dhoti." She smiled and said that she would ask Sri Aurobindo. Next day when I went to Sri Aurobindo he looked at me and said: "You want to wash my dhoti?"

Champaklal: "Yes."

Sri Aurobindo: "Are you ready?"

I looked at him in surprise and wondered why he asked that.

Sri Aurobindo: "You know, people will mock at you, laugh at you, joke about you. Are you ready for all that?" When he saw that I was eager to do this work in spite of such possibilities, he looked at me affectionately and smiled. He said so because the Ashram atmosphere was like that at that time. But very soon Mother changed all that entirely.

Champaklal settled in the Ashram in 1923. This incident took place during the early days of his stay.

Moti-ben takes over the Washing

Champaklal's aunt Moti-ben came here in 1926 and she took over the washing of Sri Aurobindo's clothes. She recounts:

I had the privilege of washing Sri Aurobindo's clothes twice a day and in this way I got his darshan also twice a day. I went to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's bathroom in the morning to collect the clothes and in the evening took back the cleaned clothes; went to Sri Aurobindo's room in the evening to keep his dhoti there. Initially I used to place it outside the room. Later on, the Mother permitted me to place it inside. Those days Sri Aurobindo kept walking up and down in his room. As soon as I opened the door he would switch on the light and I would place his dhoti inside. . . . After his accident (in November 1938) I had to wash heaps of clothes every day.

(*Mother India*, February 1995, pp. 120-21)

At Moti-ben's residence on the first floor of the present Ashram Post Office building, all arrangements were made for the washing of clothes. She used to wash and iron Sri Aurobindo's dhoti. After drying the dhoti, Moti-ben would finely crease it. This was done by a specially made small wooden implement. In Bengal, babus of that time, always had their dhotis similarly creased. This custom is followed even now by some people. Once she had used up all the monthly quota of soap allotted to her; she had then asked the Mother to sanction some more soap for her work. In answer to her request, she received a note from Sri Aurobindo. He wrote to her in Gujarati that clothes get spoilt very soon if too much soap is used!

Washing done by Anjali Bal and Bibha Biswas

Bibha came here in 1941 and the Mother allotted her work with Anjali who was already here some years earlier and was washing some of the linen from Sri Aurobindo's room. The linen was washed in Quadroze, but in the evening at 6 p.m.; whereas, as already noted, the Mother's clothes were washed in the same place but in the morning hours. Except the dhoti, other items as shawl, pillowcovers, towels, napkins etc. were washed by these two persons. Liquid soap was used for washing and there was a good supply of water too. As most of the clothes were being used for a long time they had to be washed carefully in a special way.

There were two very good quality silk chaddars with maroon borders. Though these were rather worn out, yet Sri Aurobindo preferred to use them. Many of his bedsheets and pillowcovers were damaged and were repaired by fine darning. Washing and cleaning of such items was difficult. So, when washing such old pieces, the item would first be spread out on a towel. Together with the towel it would be first dipped in water where an adequate amount of liquid soap would then be added. The towel and the piece would be taken out and dipped repeatedly in clean water till there was no trace of soap left. The whole process was done in such a way that the strain of the washing was borne by the towel. Thus, the actual piece was as far as possible saved from further wear and tear. Washing over, the clothes were taken to the first floor for drying. The towel with the item would be spread out and placed on the long table in the hall. A dry towel would be placed on the wet items and then by gentle pressure of the palm over the whole area, water would be absorbed till the item was dry, then taken to Nalina's residence in the Balicour House in Rue St Gilles, about two streets to the East of Quadroze. The clothes were ironed, a neat bundle made of them and Anjali handed over these to Champaklal in the main Ashram building.

We recount here a beautiful incident. One of the napkins, used for wiping a table in Sri Aurobindo's room, was so worn out that it was difficult even with all the precautions taken, to wash it any more. It could fall into pieces any day! Anjali reported about this napkin and received from Champaklal a new one. We have

heard that Sri Aurobindo had remarked to Champaklal to this effect: Champaklal, how could you reject so easily something which has served you for so many years! Isn't this comment so similar to those of the Mother's? For both of them, every object was a living entity and was treated in that way.

* * *

So many people have worked in this department, preparing items for the Mother, taking care of all the garments and linen used by both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. They have done it as their offering to Them. It is not possible to record all the work and the names of all of them. We however remember them — the known and the unknown — gratefully for their service rendered by them to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The Mother's Embroidery Department is situated on the eastern side across the street of the main Ashram building. Originally there was quite a big open space with flowering shrubs and creepers. A big gate opens into the area. A few steps lead to the narrow landing on whose left is a spacious hall. This is the main work area where the ladies sit and work. This was the residence of Vasudha who stayed in a room to the west of the work area. Toward the south were a few rooms where Meenakshiamma and her daughter Anusuya stayed. At present most of the open space has been incorporated in the adjacent structure — the 'Studio' where all the paintings of the Ashram artists and some of the paintings done by the Mother are kept.

Work is going on in full swing in the Embroidery Department. The quality of the work is maintained as per the tradition. Each work is done for the Mother. As the variety and production increased, in 1960 the finished products were being taken by the Mother's devotees, their friends, and the sympathizers of the Ashram, as a token of the Mother's Grace, and the offerings were made to the Mother. Apart from embroidery, beautiful fabric paintings on sarees, T-shirts, kameezes etc. are now also being produced. Exhibitions are now held twice a year. These are open to all interested in artistic products.

(Concluded)

CHITRA SEN

SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN — “LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA”

(Continued from the issue of November 2019)

1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION (Part 4)

Basanti and Sukumar Mitra’s mother, Lilabati Mitra (1864-1924), was Sri Aurobindo’s mother’s younger sister — she was Rajnarayan Bose’s fourth youngest daughter. Despite the adverse social conventions of the era she showed a lot of courage by helping get many widows — sent to her by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar — remarried. Lilabati was exceedingly fond of her nephew Auro. In fact, Sukumar mentions that Lilabati nursed her eldest sister Swarnalata’s third son when the latter’s fourth child died.¹ Her husband Krishna Kumar Mitra (1852-1936) was a well-known professor of history at City College and its superintendent. He was a patriot, journalist and editor of the nationalist weekly *Sanjibani*, in which he exposed the ruthless exploitation of the tea and indigo planters. He took part in the Swadeshi movement, 1905-1910, and was even deported and imprisoned at Agra from December 1908 to February 1910.

Sukumar Mitra writes: “My father loved Sri Aurobindo very much.”² Sri Aurobindo was very close to this family, and whenever he went to Deoghar he passed through Calcutta to stay with them at 6, College Square. It is only when Sri Aurobindo came to Calcutta for a long stay in 1906 that he arranged for his own lodgings. Even then from May 1909 till he departed for Chandernagore in February 1910 he stayed at their house. The Mitras were family friends of Rabindranath Tagore. Sri Aurobindo’s love for his aunt is illustrated by an incident narrated by Basanti Mitra:

I have seen Aurodada writing an article for *Dharma* or *Karmayogin* in deep concentration — people are waiting to take his article — when mother appears and tells him, “Auro, come with me, let’s go for my bath in the Ganges.” At once, without wasting a moment, leaving his writing unfinished, even stopping in the middle of a sentence, Aurodada puts his pen away to go along with mother. He was that obedient. Such obedience, I have seen nowhere else.³

1. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 71.

2. Sukumar Mitra, ‘Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose’ (in *Basumati*, translated from Bengali); papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives .

3. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srinwantu*, April/August 1984, p. 85 (this incident happened after Sri Aurobindo left Baroda).

Sukumar Mitra acted as a trusted messenger for Sri Aurobindo and was associated in his revolutionary work. He organised Sri Aurobindo's escape from Chandernagore to Pondicherry via Calcutta. After Sri Aurobindo went into exile in 1910, Basanti Mitra never met Sri Aurobindo, but his memory was permanently etched in her heart. She fondly reminisces:

That day he walked out — he did not return even at night — not even the next day — and many more days elapsed — until one day at last I received a letter. He had written to me — I have come away to Pondicherry. . . . At the end he had bestowed his blessings on me.

Since that day, for the last 40 years, we did not meet; but that warm affection of his which I had received I cannot forget. Such agony I feel now, that the letter in his own hand, that poem he wrote on my birthday, they are no longer with me.

On 5 December 1950, the same day on which my father had passed away in 1937, Auro-dada too left this world for the other world. . . . Memories of those bygone days now flood my mind. . . .

Full of reverence and with a weeping heart, I quote these lines for a Mahayogi like him:

Marvellous austerity thine,
Wonder of wonders: Thou art!
Begot a child of wonder-spell
Thy Motherland at last.⁴

Indeed Sri Aurobindo was truly adored by his entire family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings. One could say he was the jewel of the family.

Now that we have covered most of Sri Aurobindo's family members, we shall finally touch upon Sri Aurobindo's concern about his wife Mrinalini Devi. Sri Aurobindo had inserted an advertisement for a bride which was noticed by Principal Girish Chandra Bose of Bangabasi College, a life-long friend of Mrinalini's father, Bhupal Chandra Bose of Jessore, who had settled down at Ranchi. Sri Aurobindo had several offers but he unhesitatingly selected Mrinalini, whom he met at Girish Chandra Bose's house. Girish Chandra Bose negotiated the marriage. The marriage took place in Calcutta according to Hindu rites on 30 April 1901. When it was suggested that he should shave his head and undergo purificatory rites for having crossed the seas and lived in England, Sri Aurobindo flatly refused, and the matter

4. Basanti Mitra-Chakravarty, 'Basanti Remembers Auro-dada' '*Amader Auro-dada*' (translated from Bengali in *Galpa Bharati*, Pausa 1357, pp. 784-85) *Mother India*, January 1997, p. 21; Also Basanti Chakravarty (*née* Mitra), 'Our Aurodada', *Srinwantu*, April/August 1984, p. 86.

was conveniently smoothed over by the obliging brahmin priest for a monetary consideration. Sri Aurobindo was particular about marrying a Hindu girl and in the Hindu way, quite contrary to what his father had done. After his return from England, Sri Aurobindo studied the Hindu religion and culture and found profound truths in it. He has stated that “he had long tried to apprehend the true inwardness and glory of the Indian religious and spiritual tradition, Sanatana Dharma, and to accept it in its entirety.”⁵ The reformist Brahma Samaj was at that time much in fashion with educated people in Bengal and despite his beloved grandfather being a leading Brahma he did not have much sympathy for this movement. Among those who attended the marriage were Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose, Lord Sinha and Byomkesh Chakravarty. None of Sri Aurobindo’s relatives were there at the wedding.⁶

Following their marriage they went to Sri Aurobindo’s maternal uncle’s place at Deoghar after which they, along with Sarojini, left for Nainital, reaching there on 29 May. They remained for a month amidst the utterly beautiful and majestic Kumaon Himalayas. In a letter Sri Aurobindo has referred to Nainital as: “The place is a beautiful one . . .”⁷ By the beginning of July, Sri Aurobindo returned to Baroda with his wife and sister. The Maharaja of Baroda was vacationing at Nainital too, but had left for Baroda earlier. Mrinalini Devi lived the first full year with Sri Aurobindo. After a year Mrinalini had to go back to her father’s home and could not return soon to Baroda, however much she wanted. Now she was living largely with her parents at Shillong but also lived in Deoghar, at the home of Sri Aurobindo’s maternal uncle. Sri Aurobindo wished that she should live amicably with his relatives. He visited Calcutta for his secret political work but meeting with Mrinalini was not always possible, primarily because his hectic political schedule prevented him from visiting her at Shillong. Besides, he had no permanent home of his own at Calcutta. From Baroda he used to write her letters, a few of which have fortunately been preserved.⁸

Ever since 1902, Sri Aurobindo had a herculean burden to bear in securing India’s independence, and thus he could not devote much time to his wife. Yet his deep affection, in his own particular quiet and impersonal way, is unmistakable. In a letter dated 25th June 1902, he writes:

5. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 111.

6. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, pp. 65-66; see A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 50; see Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, p. 4; see Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 120.

7. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 153.

8. See Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, p. 5.

Dearest Mrinalini,

I am grieved to hear about your illness. I hope you will now look after your health a little. It is a cold place and you must be careful that you do not catch a chill. I am sending you ten rupees; get medicine and take it regularly; don't neglect. I have heard about a medicine which will cure your disease. You will not have to take it daily; two or three doses will cure you, but you cannot take it in Assam. You may take it when you go to Deoghur. I shall write to Sarojini as to what should be done.⁹

That Mrinalini Devi's well-being was very important to Sri Aurobindo gets revealed in a letter written exactly a week later:

Dearest Mrinalini,

. . . You said you have got a horoscope; send it to me. Jotin Banerjee is here and I wish to show it to him. I have faith in astrology — ten years experience confirmed. But also amongst a thousand, nine hundred know nothing about it. Few know but more make mistakes . . . If there be evil consequences then there are means of knowing them beforehand — as they can be cured often. If horoscope can't be found, exact time of birth will do, but even the very minute must be correct. . . .¹⁰

On 3rd October 1905 Sri Aurobindo expresses his concern by writing to Mrinalini: "I have been so busy . . . that I haven't had a chance to write to you. But I haven't had a letter from you for quite some time. I hope all of you are well."¹¹

The affection that Sri Aurobindo and Mrinalini shared for each other is seen in a letter of 22nd October 1905:

I am in receipt of your letter. I have not written to you since a long time. Do not take it amiss. Why are you so much anxious about my health. I never suffer you know, except for cough and cold. . . .

I will write again as soon as I have found it out. It is time for evening prayer. I stop here for the day. I am well, you should not give way to anxiety even if you do not hear from me. What ailment will overtake me (that you are afraid of)? I hope you are all quite well.¹²

When Mrinalini Devi faced a personal tragedy in the family, Sri Aurobindo, in a letter dated 30th August 1905, not only consoles her but calms her with a solution:

9. Letter of 25th June 1902 from Sri Aurobindo to Mrinalini Devi; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

10. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 57.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

I was pained to hear about the bereavement of your parents but you have not mentioned which brother died. Even if there is sorrow, so what? In this world he who seeks happiness finds sorrow in the bosom of that happiness itself. . . . [It] is the inevitable accompaniment of every worldly desire. To offer all happiness and sorrow with a tranquil mind at the feet of the Divine is the only solution for man.¹³

In the same letter Sri Aurobindo points out to Mrinalini that compassion and selflessness are natural to her and encourages her to strengthen it further. Unquestionably Sri Aurobindo has stressed both these qualities:

You have a natural turn towards doing good for others and towards self-sacrifice. The one thing you lack is strength of mind. You will get that through worship of God.¹⁴

Shailendranath Basu, a cousin of Mrinalini Devi, confirms Sri Aurobindo's assessment of her. He recounts how she was always ready to serve the sick, without the slightest concern for her own comfort.

Sudhir Kumar Sarkar fondly remembers:

In those memorable days of 1907, I have seen Mrinalini Devi take out suits used by Sri Aurobindo during his stay in England and put them on us with her own hands; in this way she would dress us up, when we had occasion to visit subscribers of *Bande Mataram* and *Yugantar* for funds.¹⁵

Sri Aurobindo's observation of Mrinalini having a "natural turn towards doing good for others and towards self-sacrifice" came true at a critical juncture in Sri Aurobindo's life when he had "a dangerous attack of fever" in November 1906 which nearly "carried" him off. It was she who nursed him with uncommon devotion — massaging his head and feet, fanning him and meticulously preparing his diet. After convalescing, when Sri Aurobindo would be lost in his reading or writing; Mrinalini would punctually attend on him for his tea, meals etc. Her father would procure the choicest vegetables to Sri Aurobindo's liking and her mother herself would cook the dishes for him. It pleased Bhupal babu immensely to see him enjoying each dish. During his meals, he used to be surrounded by Mrinalini's relatives from the oldest to the youngest, as was the custom in Bengal. While the old ladies would

13. 'Sri Aurobindo's letters to Mrinalini' (translated from the Bengali original 'Sri Aurobindo Patra' by Niranjan, *Mother India*, January 1959, p. 12.

14. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 84.

15. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 21st February 1989, p. 105.

pester him with pleas to take larger helpings, the young girls would good humoredly tease him since this was their traditional privilege. Sri Aurobindo enjoyed these sweet banterings but, alas, could not counter them as his spoken Bengali and understanding of its colloquial side was slightly deficient. Mrinalini and others would then come to his rescue. He used to regret his inability to master his mother-tongue.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo's father-in-law Bhupal Chandra Bose writes that he "cannot throw any light on the mutual relations between Mrinalini and her husband, except that they were characterised by a sincere though quiet affection on the side of the husband and never questioning obedience from the wife. . . . After Sri Aurobindo left Bengal, the two never met again, but all who know her could see how deeply she was attached to her husband and how she longed to join him in Pondicherry."¹⁷

Sri Aurobindo's affection for his near ones was deep but quiet; he did not openly demonstrate his affection as is apparent in a June 1906 letter to his father-in-law:

Of course that is no excuse for my culpability in not writing letters, — a fault I am afraid I shall always be quicker to admit than to reform. I can easily understand that to others it may seem to spring from a lack of the most ordinary affection. It was not so in the case of my father from whom I seem to inherit the defect. In all my fourteen years in England I hardly got a dozen letters from him, and yet I cannot doubt his affection for me, since it was the false report of my death which killed him. I fear you must take me as I am with all my imperfections on my head. . . .

Your affectionate
son-in-law
Aurobindo Ghose¹⁸

Charu Chandra Dutt comments of Sri Aurobindo's relation with Mrinalini: "His famous letters to his wife amply indicate this firmness, along with a loving and affectionate nature."¹⁹ In a letter dated 17th February 1907 Sri Aurobindo, in his own inimitable style, apologises to Mrinalini Devi:

Dear Mrinalini,

I have not written to you for a long time. This is my eternal failing: if you do not pardon me out of your own goodness, what shall I do? What is ingrained in one does not go out in a day. Perhaps it will take me the whole of this life to correct this fault.

16. See Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, pp. 9-10.

17. Report of Bhupal Chandra Bose dated 26 August 1931; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

18. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 147-48.

19. Charu Chandra Dutt, 'My Friend and my Master', *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, p. 123.

I was to come on the 8th January, but I could not. This did not happen of my own accord. I had to go where God took me. This time I did not go for my own work; it was for His work that I went. The state of my mind has undergone a change. But on this I shall not speak in this letter. Come here, and I shall tell you what is to be told. But there is only one thing which must be said now and that is that from now on I no longer am the master of my own will. Like a puppet I must do whatever He makes me do. It will be difficult for you to grasp the meaning of these words just now, but it is necessary to inform you, otherwise my movements may cause you regret and sorrow. You may think that in my work I am neglecting you, but do not do so. Already I have done you many wrongs and it is natural that this should have displeased you. But I am no longer free. From now on you will have to understand that all I do depends not on my will but is done at the command [adesh] of God. When you come here, you will understand the meaning of my words. . . .²⁰

Despite the pangs of separation that Mrinalini Devi faced, it is evident she admired and adored him and sought his counsel. In fact Mrinalini once told her cousin: “I had no other God except my husband. I have seen God’s manifestation in him alone.”²¹ Mrinalini was “destined to suffer for marrying a genius”, writes R. R. Diwakar; “she had rarely the privilege of living with her husband for long, though her relations were most cordial and full of affection from the beginning to the end”.²² As Leo Tolstoy had said, “It is not so easy to be married to an exceptional genius. It is like living by the bank of a great river, it can overflow the bank.”²³ Providentially the name Mrinalini and Aurobindo share the same meaning, the lotus.

Mrinalini Devi had some contact with Sri Sarada Ma, wife of Sri Ramakrishna, and the Ramakrishna Mission. Bhupal Chandra Bose writes:

Mrinalini often visited Sri Ma (widow of Paramhansa Dev) at the Udbodhan Office in Bagbazar who treated her with great affection, calling her bau-ma (the normal Bengali appellation for daughter-in-law) in consideration of the fact that the Holy Mother regarded Sri Aurobindo as her son.

Mrinalini desired at one time to receive *diksha* from one of the sanyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission. Her father wrote to Sri Aurobindo for the necessary permission but the latter in reply advised her not to receive initiation from anyone else and he assured her that he would send her all the spiritual help she needed. She was content therefore to remain without any outward initiation.²⁴

20. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 71.

21. Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, pp. 12-13.

22. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo — a biography and a history*, p. 65.

23. Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, p. 7.

24. *Report of Bhupal Chandra Bose dated 26 August 1931; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.*

Sri Aurobindo has commented:

I did not take my wife for initiation to Sri Saradamani Devi; I was given to understand that she was taken there by Sudhira Bose, Debabrata's sister. I heard of it a considerable time afterwards in Pondicherry. I was glad to know that she had found so great a spiritual refuge but I had no hand in bringing it about.²⁵

Another account states that when Sudhira Devi took Mrinalini Devi for initiation Saradamata is reported to have exclaimed: "My child! I know her well enough, they are Aniruddha and Usha of Dwapara Yuga; who is there to initiate them!"²⁶ Sudhira Bose, according to Barin, was an austere person but suddenly died quite young in an unfortunate railway accident at Benaras in 1920.²⁷

On Sri Aurobindo's arrest in the Alipore Bomb Case in May 1908, Sri Sarada Ma reportedly said: "Aurobindo is pure at heart; who is there who can do him any harm?"²⁸

We momentarily fast forward a bit, when finally in 1918, after many years of separation, Mrinalini Devi was to reunite with Sri Aurobindo. Unfortunately, *en route* to Pondicherry, at Calcutta, she succumbed to a severe attack of influenza (flu), — the 1918 pandemic that affected 500 million people (1/3rd of the world's population) and claimed 50 million lives worldwide.

Mrinalini's sister gives an account of her passing:

There was a mention in her horoscope that her 32nd year would be critical. Sri Aurobindo knew it and wanted us to remind him about it when she would be 32. But all of us forgot except my mother. She was at that time at Ranchi. Hearing about the illness she hastened to Calcutta but Mrinalini Devi passed away within half an hour of her arrival. When she learnt that we had not informed Sri Aurobindo, a telegram was sent to him. On reading it, Sri Aurobindo said, "Too late!"

The narration continues:

My cousin [Saurin Bose] who was there at the time wrote to my mother: "Today I saw tears in the eyes of your stone-hearted son-in-law. With the telegram in one hand, he sat still and tears were in his eyes." Sri Aurobindo told him too

25. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 89.

26. Papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

27. See Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Agni-yug* (translated from Bengali); papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives; see Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 123.

28. Birendra Sen, 'Old Memories of Sri Aurobindo and Mrinalini', *Srinwantu*, August 1965, p. 189.

that Mrinalini's soul had come to him soon after her death. Also a photo of Mrinalini Devi that was on the mantel-piece is said to have fallen.²⁹

That evening Sudhira took Mrinalini's mother to Sri Sarada Devi who was then in deep meditation. When she opened her eyes and saw them, she remarked: "I was seeing in my vision my daughter-in-law, Mrinalini. She was a goddess born as your daughter in consequence of a curse. Now that her karma is exhausted her soul has departed."³⁰

Later Sri Aurobindo wrote to Mrinalini Devi's father of his sorrow and his undying love for Mrinalini and his affection for him:

My dear father-in-law,

I have not written to you with regard to this fatal event in both our lives; words are useless in face of the feelings it has caused, if even they can ever express our deepest emotions. God has seen good to lay upon me the one sorrow that could still touch me to the centre. He knows better than ourselves what is best for each of us, and now that the first sense of the irreparable has passed, I can bow with submission to His divine purpose. The physical tie between us is, as you say, severed; but the tie of affection subsists for me. Where I have once loved, I do not cease from loving. Besides she who was the cause of it, still is near though not visible to our physical vision.

It is needless to say much about the matters of which you write in your letter. I approve of everything that you propose. Whatever Mrinalini would have desired, should be done, and I have no doubt this is what she would have approved of. I consent to the chudis being kept by her mother; but I should be glad if you would send me two or three of her books, especially if there are any in which her name is written. I have only of her her letters and a photograph.³¹

Even after Mrinalini Devi's death her father and sister kept up a correspondence with Sri Aurobindo.³² In September 1925 Bhupal Chandra Bose wrote to Sri Aurobindo relating a tuberculosis illness of another son-in-law of his. Sri Aurobindo told a disciple: "You can write to that I will do my best to help him . . ."³³

Later in 1930 or 1931 Bhupal Chandra Bose visited the Ashram for the darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Nirodbaran has written:

29. Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, p. 20.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

31. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 148.

32. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 128.

33. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 177.

Bhupalbabu visited the Ashram with his wife in the thirties and did pranam to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, his son-in-law, during the Darshan. The Mother seems to have told him that Mrinalini's soul was with her. Dyuman adds that Bhupalbabu had the vision of Mrinalini in the Mother when he went to the Darshan and bowed to her and he was very much consoled.³⁴

Besides his family members, Sri Aurobindo's generosity extended equally to those whom he employed. Dinendra Kumar Roy, of course, was one of the benefactors for Sri Aurobindo treated him like a friend. Around 1899 Dinendra Kumar Roy was stricken with a dangerously high fever. A military doctor treated him and "Aurobindo nursed me," said Roy. He notes:

When day after day I lay unconscious owing to the intensity of the fever, he spent sleepless nights nursing me. . . . All I understood was that without his nursing care I would not have survived. . . . When, after a long spell, the fever left me, he said to me one day, smiling, "Roy, this time you have scraped through by the skin of your teeth. This 'Baroda fever' is a terrible sickness; it is very difficult to escape from its grip. So I thought I might not be able to save you this time." But not the slightest hint of all that he had done to save my life, not even incidentally. Whether in word or in deed, I have never seen such control.³⁵

An immensely grateful Roy added: "He never gave me a remote hint, of all the sleepless nights he kept vigil over my sickbed."³⁶

Sri Aurobindo's egalitarian attitude towards his cook and servants is also fascinating. He was fond of Bengali cuisine and a cook was recruited from Bengal. The cook's culinary skills were less than mediocre, yet Sri Aurobindo quietly ate whatever he cooked. As Sri Aurobindo never complained, the cook's ways became erratic. Once, Sri Aurobindo invited a talented painter and some other friends for dinner. He enquired from the cook, through Dinendra Kumar Roy, if he could cook some Bengali dishes like pulao, meat curry, grilled fish curry and chutney. The cook proudly declared that if the ingredients were procured he could cook anything. The ingredients were bought in large quantities, and the cook in order to show off his culinary skills went overboard and fried everything in ghee — fish, lobster and all. The dinner commenced but the stink of the fish was so great that the guests had to abandon their meal midway. Roy then remarks that had the cook been employed by anyone else he would have got a couple of slaps. Most perhaps would have

34. Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, p. 28.

35. Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 144.

36. *Ibid.*

immediately sent him packing back to Bengal. Sri Aurobindo, however, saw the comical side of the episode. He burst out laughing at the cook's empty boast of his culinary skills!³⁷

At times Sri Aurobindo would be amused when the said cook, overcome with sorrow due to homesickness, would start singing out his woes of his longing for Bengal — “Fly, O cuckoo, to where my soul mate lies!” Sri Aurobindo's sensitive side, even to a clumsy cook, was noticed by Roy:

But Aurobindo's gentle heart was also filled with sympathy for him and he remarked, “Poor fellow, he's awfully sad here.” A few months later, when we returned to Bengal, we took the cook along.³⁸

Earlier too, Dinendra Kumar Roy had noticed that Sri Aurobindo was “sensitive to the suffering of others”.³⁹ A line of Savitri reads: “My God is love and sweetly suffers all.”⁴⁰

Another employee, who was a beneficiary of Sri Aurobindo's kindness, was a domestic servant called Keshtha. Dinendra Kumar Roy describes Keshtha thus:

One does not generally come across such a dark-skinned fellow. He wore silver bracelets on his forearms and rings in his ears; his teeth were so big that he could not close his lips. Rabi-babu [Rabindranath Tagore], in his play *Raja o Rani*, describing the qualities of the old Trivedi Thakur, wrote: “His simple-mindedness was just a mask for his crookedness.” This was more than apt for Keshtha.⁴¹

Keshtha used to buy provisions from the market for Sri Aurobindo. Once he bought two lemons for a paisa; but the lemons were so small that it was obvious that he had saved and pocketed half a paisa. A few days later, Roy noticed some large lemons at the market and purchased three of them for a paisa. Roy then reprimanded Keshtha in the presence of Sri Aurobindo:

I told Keshtha, “Hey, Keshtha! I got three big lemons for a paisa and what did you get the other day?” Without the slightest embarrassment, he said, “But how small my lemons were! How can you ever get more than two of those for a paisa?”⁴²

37. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 20-21.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

40. CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 591.

41. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 22.

42. *Ibid.*

Normally any human will get angry, if cheated, more so if it is by his own servant; but not so Sri Aurobindo. Instead of chiding Keshtha for his dishonesty, he heartily laughed at his comical logic.

On another occasion Keshtha bought some Gujarati mangoes, which usually are very sweet. But these turned out to be so sour that when Dinendra Kumar Roy took a bite he had to spit it out. Later when Roy bought some sweet mangoes he gave one to Keshtha saying, "See how sweet these mangoes are! You rogue! The other day you bought those horrible mangoes for three times the price!" After tasting the mango Keshtha shook his head and replied with a straight face, "This mango is much too sweet!" Roy got disgusted with Keshtha's false justification.⁴³ No wonder he says of Keshtha: "I doubt if he would have lasted for more than three days with anyone else but Aurobindo."⁴⁴

Reflecting on Sri Aurobindo's temperament, a disciple sent a short draft to Sri Aurobindo. It read: "He was sensitive to beauty in man and nature. . . . He watched with pain the thousand and one instances of man's cruelty to man." Sri Aurobindo replied, "The feeling was more abhorrence than pain; from early childhood there was a strong hatred and disgust for all kinds of cruelty and oppression, but the term pain would not accurately describe the reaction."⁴⁵ In a letter to a disciple Sri Aurobindo writes about the experience of universal love:

. . . the Divine within is felt through the psychic being and the nature of the psychic being is that of the divine light, harmony, love, but it is covered by the mental and separative vital ego from which strife, hate, cruelty naturally come. It is therefore natural to feel in the kindness the touch of the Divine, while the cruelty is felt as a disguise or perversion in Nature, although that would not prevent the man who has the realisation from feeling and meeting the Divine behind the disguise. I have known even instances in which the perception of the Divine in all accompanied by an intense experience of universal love or a wide experience of an inner harmony had an extraordinary effect in making all around kind and helpful, even the most coarse and hard and cruel.⁴⁶

Besides those he employed, Sri Aurobindo was always naturally kind to those who came in contact with him. Dinendra Kumar Roy has written that distractions of any kind "could not touch the nobility and human kindness of his heart."⁴⁷

Rajaram N. Patkar, brother-in-law of Sri Aurobindo's intimate Cambridge friend K. G. Deshpande, reminisces about Sri Aurobindo's kindness towards him:

43. See *Ibid.*, p. 23.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

45. See CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 26.

46. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 180-81.

47. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 7.

He used to speak in no other tongue than English, as he knew no other language except a smattering of Hindi which he used while speaking to the menials. As my knowledge of English was very limited, I was rather shy of approaching him. By and by familiarity and his gentle and sweet nature made me bold and I was doing the work of carrying messages to him entrusted to me by the elders in the family. He had taken a liking for me and my contact with him became closer and closer day by day. He used to have free talks with me and I used to express myself in my broken English which he understood. By way of encouragement he would say to me, "My boy, this is the way to learn a language. You have got to be bold like a child to make yourself understood."⁴⁸

Often, Patkar felt free to ask Sri Aurobindo questions. "I was quite satisfied by these replies. They appeared to me simple then, since I had not the capacity to judge their importance. But therein lay his greatness and his power of judgment,"⁴⁹ he wrote.

Govindrao M. Jadhav, son of Sri Aurobindo's other intimate friend Madhavrao Jadhav, writes:

Sri Aurobindo lived with my uncle Khaserao Jadhav and my father Madhavrao Jadhav at Baroda in Khaserao Jadhav's bungalow. I have very happy recollections of the days when Sri Aurobindo was with us in Baroda. He was always kind and good to the sons and daughters of Khaserao Jadhav and the sons of Madhavrao Jadhav. We children used to call Sri Aurobindo affectionately uncle Aravinda. I have always remembered the many talks at lunch time, dinner time or tea time. The conversations were full of interest for me. Various subjects were discussed: literature, science, religion, art, philosophy, agriculture, administration and other related topics. . . .⁵⁰

Govindrao Jadhav was sent to Manchester Grammar School in 1909 for schooling after Sri Aurobindo had persuaded his father Madhavrao and uncle Khaserao to do so.⁵¹ Both of Sri Aurobindo's elder brothers had studied at Manchester Grammar School.⁵²

Sri Aurobindo was also very cordial and courteous with his colleagues; he never indulged in any rivalry or discord with them. Dinendra Kumar Roy writes: "It seems there was some factionalism among the high-placed state employees of Baroda, but Aurobindo never took part in this or chose sides. And I certainly would have known about it if he did. I suppose that Aurobindo never had the time, nor much

48. Reminiscences of Rajaram N. Patkar dated 30 September 1956; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Reminiscences of Govindrao M. Jadhav dated 17 December 1980, sent to Rishabchand; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

51. *Ibid.*

52. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 26-27.

less the inclination, to meddle in all this factionalism.”⁵³

Sri Aurobindo’s disinclination to any sort of infighting and bickering reminds one of Mother’s quotations:

We must replace competition and strife by collaboration and fraternity.⁵⁴

The Mother has also said:

Nobility: the incapacity for any pettiness either of sentiments or of action.⁵⁵

Sri Aurobindo’s stance — even in his work at Baroda State and the frenetic pace of political activity — has always been based on a statement he made:

One should be generous in nature and free from all rancour.⁵⁶

An aphorism of Sri Aurobindo also reads:

Men talk of enemies, but where are they? I only see wrestlers of one party or the other in the great arena of the universe.⁵⁷

Besides factionalism, Sri Aurobindo was also not in favour of provincialism. Dr. Manilal narrated to Sri Aurobindo an incident where he had attended a speech of his at Baroda. He recollected that Dr. Mullick had come to Baroda for a meeting that was held in his honour. Dr. Mullick, a reputed physician, was a patriot who encouraged Bengalis to join the army and was a driving force in forming the Bengal Territorial Force. A Bengali professor named Saha proposed Sri Aurobindo to the chair stating, “Dr. Mullick is a Bengali and Mr. Ghose is a Bengali. So I propose him to the chair.” Sri Aurobindo corrected him by saying, “I consent to take the chair not because Dr. Mullick is a Bengali and I am a Bengali, but because I am an Indian and Dr. Mullick is an Indian.”⁵⁸

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

53. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 42-43.

54. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 186.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

56. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 276.

57. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 454.

58. See Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2009, p. 952; see Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 223.

SRI AUROBINDO'S EARLY POETRY ACCORDING TO RASAVĀDA

(Continued from the issue of November 2019)

IX

The poem to be studied now is an occasional poem, written on the birthday of a young girl, Basanti, Sri Aurobindo's cousin.

The name of the poem is 'The Spring Child' and the occasion has been given. The poet most appropriately calls the girl 'a spring child' as she was born in spring and named Basanti. Let us look at the first stanza:

Of spring is her name for whose bud and blooming
We praise today the Giver, —
Of Spring, and its sweetness clings about her
For her face is Spring and Spring's without her,
As loth to leave her.¹

This opening sextain is typical of the whole poem — Nature-worship and affection for the little girl. Thus we see the mingling of *prakṛti* and another *rasa* which we meet for the first time — *vatsala*. We shall not waste time over *prakṛti* for we have met it many times in the foregoing pages but let us have a look at *vatsala*. This *rasa* had been introduced into the canon by Viśvanātha Kavirāja and he has given a highly quotable description of it —

sphutaṅ camatkāritayā vatsalaṅ ca rasaṅ viduh²

vatsala is accepted as a *rasa* as its expression is a wonderful one. The *bhava* of *vatsalya* is its *sthayi*. He establishes it, but it is explained in detail by Rupa Goswami in his *Haribhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. He devotes no less than 121 slokas to this *rasa* in two chapters. So the reader can imagine that everything that can conceivably be said about it has been said by him. We shall not go into all the details.

What is surprising is the expression of *vatsala* in the poem at all. As the poet is himself a very young man (in his teens) one would expect that this *rasa* would not

1. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 29.

2. *Sahitya Darpana*, 3.251.

be well-expressed by him. The surprising thing is that it has been attempted at all. Throughout the poem *vatsala* is inextricably mixed with *prakṛti*:³

O dear child soul, our loved and cherished,
 For this thy days had birth,
 Like some tender flower on some grey stone portal
 To sweeten and flush with childhood immortal
 The ageing earth.

The mingling of *prakṛti* with *vatsala* has made the expression a wonderful one: *sphutaṅ camatkāritayā vatsalaṅ ca rasaṅ viduh*.

The poem 'Since I have seen your face' which comes next, is but lip-service paid to the convention of love-poems. Though many *sañcari bhavas* are there, *rasa* is not generated. 'Euphrosyne' is again such another poem. The reader, perhaps, has not recognised her. She is one of the three Graces. They are Aglaia, Thalia and Euphrosyne. Milton has addressed 'L'Allegro' to her. Here too *bhavas* are there in plenty, but no *rasas* are there. The same can be said of 'The Nightingale', 'Song', 'Epigram', and 'The Three Cries of Deiphobus', 'Epitaph' and 'A Doubt'.

The poem that comes next, 'Perigune Prologuises', is the last in this section and the last to be studied by us. Her story is a little-known Greek myth. She was the daughter of a notorious outlaw whom Theseus killed. Perigune was married to Theseus. After some time he left her and she remained where she had been living, in the forest. She can be called a lesser version of Ceres and Demeter, the goddess of fertility. As such, the poem is instinct with the love for nature that heralds *prakṛti rasa*. The first four lines, quoted below, are typical of the poem:

Cool may you find the youngling grass, my herd,
 Cool with delicious dew, while I here dream
 And listen to the sweet and garrulous bird
 That matches its cool note with Thea's stream.⁴

We find only this *rasa* in the poem, with Nature as the *ālambana* and Perigune as the *āśraya*. Though it is a long poem (two pages) this is the only *rasa* that has been generated.

With this the first section comes to an end. The next poem we have was written in Alipore jail in 1908-09. So our study of his early poems ends here. All these poems were written in his teens, yet, in a poet so young, we have found the evocation of many *rasas* including *vatsala*. Many are the poems in which *rasa* has not been

3. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 29.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

generated but that is the case with so many! In fact, it is rare that *rasa* is generated. But let us end with Viśvanātha Kavirāja's immortal words:

*Vedyāntara-sparśa-śūnyo Brahmasvāda-sāhodarah
Lokottara-camatkara-prāṇah keścit pramāṭṛbhiḥ⁵*

This, in spite of or perhaps because of the sting in the tail, is the last word in *rasa*-experience.

(Concluded)

RATRI RAY

5. *Sahitya Darpana*, Vimla tika, pp. 48-49. Translation has already been given earlier.

There are three elements in the production of poetry; there is the original source of inspiration, there is the vital force of creative beauty which contributes its own substance and impetus and often determines the form, except when that also comes ready made from the original sources; there is, finally, the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 5)



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