

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



DECEMBER 2021

Owner: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Printer: Swadhin Chatterjee

Publisher: Manoj Das Gupta

Published from: Publication Department, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 605 002

And Printed from: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press,
No. 38, Goubert Avenue, Pondicherry, 605001, India

Editor: S. Ravi

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India: RNI No. 8667/63

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PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00 (or 2 years – Rs. 400/-, 3 years Rs. 600/- etc.)

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail: (valid for USA and Canada only)

Annual: \$35

For 10 years: \$350

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70

For 10 years: \$700

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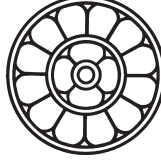
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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Vol. LXXIV

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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GOETHE

A perfect face amid barbarian faces,
A perfect voice of sweet and serious rhyme,
Traveller with calm, inimitable paces,
Critic with judgment absolute to all time,
A complete strength when men were maimed and weak,
German obscured the spirit of a Greek.

SRI AUROBINDO

[Circa 1890-98 – Editorial Note in CWSA]

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 16)



GOETHE IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

The world's supreme singers

You once spoke of Goethe as not being one of the world's absolutely supreme singers. Who are these, then? Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Valmiki, Kalidasa? And what about Aeschylus, Virgil and Milton?

I suppose all the names you mention except Goethe can be included; or if you like you can put them all including Goethe in three rows — e.g.:

1st row Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki
2nd row Dante, Kalidasa, Aeschylus, Virgil, Milton
3rd row Goethe

and there you are! To speak less flippantly, the first three have at once supreme imaginative originality, supreme poetic gift, widest scope and supreme creative genius. Each is a sort of poetic Demiurge who has created a world of his own. Dante's triple world beyond is more constructed by the poetic seeing mind than by this kind of elemental demiurgic power — otherwise he would rank by their side; the same with Kalidasa. Aeschylus is a seer and creator but on a much smaller scale. Virgil and Milton have a less spontaneous breath of creative genius; one or two typical figures excepted, they live rather by what they have said than by what they have made. (CWSA 27, p. 368)

*

Goethe and Shakespeare

Goethe certainly goes much deeper than Shakespeare; he had an incomparably greater intellect than the English poet and sounded problems of life and thought Shakespeare had no means of approaching even. But he was certainly not a greater poet; I do not find myself very ready to admit either that he was Shakespeare's equal. He wrote out of a high poetic intelligence, but his style and movement nowhere come near the poetic power, the magic, the sovereign expression and profound or subtle rhythms of Shakespeare. Shakespeare was a supreme poet and, one might almost say, nothing else; Goethe was by far the greater man and the greater brain, but he was a poet by choice, his mind's choice among its many high and effulgent possibilities, rather than by the very necessity of his being. He wrote his poetry, as

he did everything else, with a great skill and effective genius and an inspired subtlety of language, but it was only part of his genius and not the whole. There is too a touch mostly wanting in spite of his strength and excellence, — the touch of an absolute, an intensely inspired or revealing inevitability; few quite supreme poets have that in abundance, in others it comes only by occasional jets or flashes.

When I said there were no greater poets than Homer and Shakespeare, I was thinking of their essential poetic force and beauty — not of the scope of their work as a whole, for there are poets greater in their range. The Mahabharata is from that point of view a far greater creation than the Iliad, the Ramayana than the Odyssey, and either spreads its strength and its achievement over a larger field than the whole dramatic world of Shakespeare; both are built on an almost cosmic vastness of plan and take all human life (the Mahabharata all human thought as well) in their scope and touch too on things which the Greek and Elizabethan poets could not even glimpse. But as poets — as masters of rhythm and language and the expression of poetic beauty — Vyasa and Valmiki are *not inferior*, but also not greater than the English or the Greek poet. We can leave aside for the moment the question whether the Mahabharata was not the creation of the mind of a people rather than of a single poet, for that doubt has been raised also with regard to Homer. (CWSA, pp. 367-68)

*

Goethe and Shakespeare — the roots

“ . . . Nature does not go to work like a mere imitator of herself, as modern poets do, but transplants the secrets of her old poems and blends them with new secrets, so as to enrich the beauty of her new poem, and however she may seem to grow grapes from thistles, is really too wise and good, to do anything so discordant, and only by her involved and serpentine manner gives an air of caprice and anarchy to what is really apt and harmonious. She often leaves the ground fallow for a generation and the world is surprised when it sees spring from Sir Timothy Shelley, Baronet and orthodox, Percy Bysshe Shelley, poet and pioneer of free-thought, but learns in a little while that Percy Shelley had a grandfather, and marvels no longer. Could we trace the descent of Goethe and Shakespeare we should find the root of the Italian in the one and the Celt in the other — but the world did not then and does not now appreciate the value of genealogies to philosophy. We are vexed and are sceptical of harmony in nature, when we find Endymion a Londoner, but look back a step and learn that his parents were Devonshire Celts and recover our faith in the Cosmos. And why should we exclaim at the Julian emperors as strange products for stoical virtue-ridden Rome, when we know that Tiberius was a Clausus, one of the great Italian houses renowned for its licence, cruelty, pride and genius, and Caligula the son and Nero the grandson of Germanicus, who drew his blood from Mark Antony.

Science is right in its materialist data, though not always in the inferences it draws from them and when she tells us that nothing proceeds from nothingness and that for every effect there is a cause and for every growth a seed, we must remember that her truths apply as much to the spiritual as to the material world. Mommsen has said rightly that without passion there is no genius. We shall not gather beauty from ugliness, nor intellect from a slow temperament, nor fiery passion from disciplined apathy, but in all things shall reap as we sow, and must sow the wind before we can reap the whirlwind.” (CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 82-83)

*

Introverts and extroverts

The word introvert has come into existence only recently and sounds like a companion of pervert. Literally, it means one who is turned inwards. The Upanishad speaks of the doors of the senses that are turned outwards absorbing man in external things (for their own sake, I suppose) and of the rare man among a million who turns his vision inwards and sees the Self. Is that man an introvert? And is Russell’s ideal man, interested in externals for their own sake, Cheloo the day-labourer, for instance, or Joseph the chauffeur, *homo externalis Russellius*, an extrovert? Or is an introvert one who has an inner life stronger, more brilliant, more creative than his external life, — the poet, the musician, the artist? Was Beethoven in his deafness bringing out music from within him an introvert? Or does it mean one who measures external things by an inner standard and is interested in them not for their own sake but for their value to the soul’s self-development, its psychic, religious, ethical or other self-expression? Are Tolstoy and Gandhi examples of introverts? Or in another field Goethe? Or does it mean one who cares for external things only as they touch his own mind or else concern his own ego? But that I suppose would include 999,999 men out of every million. (CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 559)

*

Judging contemporaries

The errors of great poets in judging their contemporaries are personal freaks — they are failures in intuition due to the mind’s temporary movements getting in the way of the intuition. The errors of Goethe and Bankim were only an overestimation of a genius or a talent that was new and therefore attractive at the time.

(CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 666)

*

Two ends of a candle

Whenever a literary man gives proof of a high capacity in action people always talk about it as if a miracle had happened. The vulgar theory is that worldly abilities are inconsistent with the poetic genius. Like most vulgar theories it is a conclusion made at a jump from a few superficial appearances. The inference to be drawn from a sympathetic study of the lives of great thinkers and great writers is that except in certain rare cases versatility is one condition of genius. Indeed the literary ability may be said to contain all the others, and the more so when it takes the form of criticism or of any art, such as the novelist's, which proceeds principally from criticism. Goethe in Germany, Shakespeare, Fielding and Matthew Arnold in England are notable instances. Even where practical abilities seem wanting, a close study will often reveal their existence rusting in a lumber-room of the man's mind. The poet and the thinker are helpless in the affairs of the world, because they choose to be helpless: they sacrifice the practical impulse in their nature, that they may give full expression to the imaginative or speculative impulse; they choose to burn the candle at one end and [not] at the other, but for all that the candle has two ends and not one. (CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 103)

*

Goethe on Shacountala

Deftness & strength in dialogue, masterly workmanship in plot making & dramatic situation and vital force of dramatic poetry are enough in themselves to make a fine and effective poetical play for the stage, but for a really great drama a farther & rarer gift is needed, the gift of dramatic characterisation. This power bases itself in its different degrees sometimes on great experience of human life, sometimes on a keen power of observation and accurate imagination making much matter out of a small circle of experience but in its richest possessors on a boundless sympathy with all kinds of humanity accompanied by a power of imbibing and afterwards of selecting & bringing out from oneself at will impressions received from others. This supreme power, European scholars agree, is wanting in Hindu dramatic literature. A mere poet like Goethe may extend unstinted & even superlative praise to a Shacountala¹ but the wiser critical & scholarly mind passes a far less favourable

1. [Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed,
Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in once sole name combine?
I name thee, O *Sakuntala!* and all at once is said.

Translated by E. B. Eastwick

The footnote is an editorial insertion — MI]

verdict; there is much art in Hindu poetry, it is said, but no genius; there is plenty of fancy but no imagination; beautiful and even moving poetry is abundant, but the characters are nil; the colouring is rich but colour is all. Indian scholars trained in our schools to repeat what they have learnt do not hesitate to add their voice to the chorus. A Hindu scholar of acute diligence and wide Sanscrit learning has even argued that the Hindu mind is constitutionally incapable of original & living creation; he has alleged the gigantic, living and vigorous personalities of the Mahabharat as an argument to prove that these characters must have been real men and women, copied from the life; since no Hindu poet could have created character with such truth and power. On the other side the Bengali critics, men of no mean literary taste and perception though inferior in pure verbal scholarship, are agreed in regarding the characters of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti as beautiful and energetic creations, not less deserving of study than the personalities of Elizabethan drama.

(CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 188)

*

In art I shall not turn to the opinion of the average European who knows nothing of the spirit, meaning or technique of Indian architecture, painting and sculpture. For the first I shall consult some recognised authority like Fergusson; for the others if critics like Mr. Havell are to be dismissed as partisans, I can at least learn something from Okakura or Mr. Laurence Binyon. In literature I shall be at a loss, for I cannot remember that any Western writer of genius or high reputation as a critic has had any first-hand knowledge of Sanskrit literature or of the Prakritic tongues, and a judgment founded on translations can only deal with the substance, — and even that in most translations of Indian work is only the dead substance with the whole breath of life gone out of it. Still even here Goethe's well-known epigram on the Shakuntala will be enough by itself to show me that all Indian writing is not of a barbarous inferiority to European creation. And perhaps we may find a scholar here and there with some literary taste and judgment, not a too common combination, who will be of help to us. This sort of excursion will certainly not give us an entirely reliable scheme of values, but at any rate we shall be safer than in a resort to the great lowland clan of Goughs, Archers and Begbies. (CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 101)

*

Translations and blank verse

Must an adequate version of Homer, a real *translation*, be couched in the hexameter? At first sight it would seem so. But the issue is here complicated by the hard fact that the same arrangement of quantities or of accents has very seldom the same spiritual

& emotional value in two different languages. The hexameter in English, however skilfully managed, has not the same value as the Homeric, the English alexandrine does not render the French; terza rima in Latinised Saxon sounds entirely different from the noble movement of the Divina Commedia, the stiff German blank verse of Goethe & Schiller is not the golden Shakespearian harmony. It is not only that there are mechanical differences, a strongly accentuated language hopelessly varying from those which distribute accent evenly, or a language of ultimate accent like French from one of penultimate accent like Italian or initial accent like English, or one which courts elision from one which shuns it, a million grammatical & syllabic details besides, lead to fundamental differences of sound-notation. Beyond & beneath these outward differences is the essential soul of the language from which they arise, and which in its turn depends mainly upon the ethnological type always different in different countries because the mixture of different root races in two types even when they seem nearly related is never the same. (CWSA, Vol. 1 p. 244)

*

Great poets and high sanity

In the earlier stages the poet swears & tears his hair if a fly happens to be buzzing about the room; once he has found himself, he can rise from his poem, have a chat with his wife or look over & even pay his bills and then resume his inspiration as if nothing had happened. He needs no stimulant except healthy exercise and can no longer be classed with the genus irritabile vatum; nor does he square any better with the popular idea that melancholy, eccentricity and disease are necessary concomitants of genius. Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Goethe, the really great poets, were men of high sanity — except perhaps in the eyes of those to whom originality & strong character are in themselves madness. (CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 270)

*

Genius and femininity

When Coleridge spoke of the femininity of genius he had in mind certain features of temperament which whether justly or not are usually thought to count for more in the feminine mould than in the masculine, the love of ornament, emotionalism, mobile impressionability, the tyranny of imagination over the reason, excessive sensitiveness to form and outward beauty; a tendency to be dominated imaginatively by violence & the show of strength, to be prodigal of oneself, not to husband the powers, to be for showing them off, to fail in self-restraint is also feminine. All these are natural properties of the quick artistic temperament prone by throwing all itself

outward to lose balance and therefore seldom perfectly sane and strong in all its parts. So much did these elements form the basis of Coleridge's own temperament that he could not perhaps imagine a genius in which they were wanting. Yet Goethe, Dante & Sophocles show that the very highest genius can exist without them.

(CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 304)

*

Obviously superhuman

But the vibhuti, though he takes self-gratification and enjoyment on his way, never comes for self-gratification and enjoyment. He comes for work, to help man on his way, the world in its evolution. Napoleon was one of the mightiest of vibhutis, one of the most dominant. There are some of them who hold themselves back, suppress the force in their personality in order to put it wholly into their work. Of such were Shakespeare, Washington, Victor Emmanuel. There are others like Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Goethe, who are as obviously superhuman in their personality as in the work they accomplish. (CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 520)

*

Modern mechanistic civilisation

Was life always so trivial, always so vulgar, always so loveless, pale and awkward as the Europeans have made it? This well-appointed comfort oppresses me; this perfection of machinery will not allow the soul to remember that it is not itself a machine.

Is this then the end of the long march of human civilisation, this spiritual suicide, this quiet petrification of the soul into matter? Was the successful business-man that grand culmination of manhood toward which evolution was striving? After all, if the scientific view is correct, why not? An evolution that started with the protoplasm and flowered in the ourang-outang and the chimpanzee, may well rest satisfied with having created hat, coat and trousers, the British Aristocrat, the American capitalist and the Parisian Apache. For these, I believe, are the chief triumphs of the European enlightenment to which we bow our heads. For these Augustus created Europe, Charlemagne refounded civilisation, Louis XIV regulated society, Napoleon systematised the French Revolution. For these Goethe thought, Shakespeare imagined and created, St. Francis loved, Christ was crucified. What a bankruptcy! What a beggary of things that were rich and noble! (CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 545-46)

*

Shaping of the artistic production of Europe

The poetic mind of Greece and Rome has pervaded and largely shaped the whole artistic production of Europe; Italian poetry of the great age has thrown on some part of it at least a stamp only less profound; French prose and poetry — but the latter in a much less degree, — have helped more than any other literary influence to form the modern turn of the European mind and its mode of expression; the short-lived outbursts of creative power in the Spain of Calderón and the Germany of Goethe exercised an immediate, a strong, though not an enduring influence; the newly created Russian literature has been, though more subtly, among the most intense of recent cultural forces. (CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 48)

*

Goethe's genius

In Germany, so rich in music, in philosophy, in science, the great poetic word has burst out rarely: one brief and strong morning time illumined by the calm, large and steady blaze of Goethe's genius and the wandering fire of Heine, afterwards a long unlighted stillness. (CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 53)

*

Romanticism

The first widening breadth of this universal interest in man, not solely the man of today and our own country and type or of the past tradition of our own culture, but man in himself in all his ever-changing history and variety, came in the form of an eager poetic and romantic valuing of all that had been ignored and put aside as uncouth and barbarous by the older classical or otherwise limited type of mentality. It sought out rather all that was unfamiliar and attractive by its unlikeness to the present; its imagination was drawn towards the primitive, the savage, to mediaeval man and his vivid life and brilliant setting, to the Orient very artificially seen through a heavily coloured glamour, to the ruins of the past, to the life of the peasant or the solitary, the outlaw, to man near to Nature undisguised by conventions and uncorrupted by an artificial culture or man in revolt against conventions: there is a willed preference for these strange and interesting aspects of humanity, as in Nature for her wild and grand, savage and lonely scenes or her rich and tropical haunts or her retired spots of self-communion. On one side a sentimental or a philosophic naturalism, on the other a flamboyant or many-hued romanticism, superficial mediaevalism, romanticised Hellenism, an interest in the fantastic and the super-

natural, tendencies of an intellectual or an ideal transcendentalism, are the salient constituting characters. They make up that brilliant and confusedly complex, but often crude and unfinished literature, stretching from Rousseau and Chateaubriand to Hugo and taking on its way Goethe, Schiller and Heine, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats and Shelley, which forms a hasty transition from the Renaissance and its after-fruits to the modernism of today which is already becoming the modernism of yesterday. Much of it we can now see to have been ill-grasped, superficial and tentative; much, as in Chateaubriand and in Byron, was artificial, a pose and affectation; much, as in the French Romanticists, merely bizarre, overstrained and over-coloured; a later criticism condemned in it a tendency to inartistic excitement, looseness of form, an unintellectual shallowness or emptiness, an ill-balanced imagination. It laid itself open certainly in some of its more exaggerated turns to the reproach, — not justly to be alleged against the true romantic element in poetry, — that the stumbling-block of romanticism is falsity. Nevertheless behind this often defective frontage was the activity of a considerable force of new truth and power, much exceedingly great work was done, the view of the imagination was immensely widened and an extraordinary number of new motives brought in which the later nineteenth century developed with a greater care and finish and conscientious accuracy, but with crudities of its own and perhaps with a less fine gust of self-confident genius and large inspiration.

The recoil from these primary tendencies took at first the aspect of a stress upon artistic execution, on form, on balance and design, on meticulous beauty of language and a minute care and finished invention in rhythm. An unimpassioned or only artistically impassioned portraiture and sculpture of scene and object and idea and feeling, man and Nature was the idea that governed this artistic and intellectual effort. A wide, calm and impartial interest in all subjects for the sake of art and a poetically intellectual satisfaction, — this poise had already been anticipated by Goethe, — is the atmosphere which it attempts to create around it. There is here a certain imaginative reflection of the contemporary scientific, historic and critical interest in man, in his past and present, his creations and surroundings, a cognate effort to be unimpassioned, impersonal, scrupulous, sceptically interested and reflective. In poetry, however, it loses the cold accuracy of the critical intellect and assumes the artistic colour, emphasis, warmth of the constructive imagination: but even here there is the same tendency to a critical observation of man and things and world tendencies and a reflective judgment sometimes overweighting the natural tendency of poetry to the living and creative presentation which is its native power. There is amidst a wide atmosphere of sceptical or positive thinking an attempt to enter into the psychology of barbaric and civilised, antique, mediaeval, and modern, occidental and oriental humanity, to reproduce in artistic form the spirit of the inner truth and outer form of its religions, philosophic notions, societies, arts, monuments, constructions, to reflect its past inner and outer history and present frames and

mentalities. This movement too was brief in duration and soon passed away into other forms which arose out of it, though they seemed a revolt against its principles.
(CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 111-14)

*

Goethe's theory of literary creation

Out of the period of dominant objective realism what emerges with the strongest force is a movement to quite an opposite principle of creation, a literature of pronounced and conscious subjectivity. There is throughout the nineteenth century an apparent contradiction between its professed literary aim and theory and the fundamental unavoidable character of much of its inspiration. In aim throughout, — though there are notable exceptions, — it professes a strong objectivity. The temper of the age has been an earnest critical and scientific curiosity, a desire to see, know and understand the world as it is: that requires a strong and clear eye turned on the object and it would seem to require also as far as possible an elimination of one's own personality; a strongly personal view of things would appear to be the very contrary of an accurate observation, for the first constructs and colours the object from within, the second would allow it to impress its own colour and shape on the mind, — we have to suppose, of course, that, as the modern intellect has generally held, objects exist in themselves and not in our own consciousness of them. Goethe definitely framed this theory of literary creation when he laid it down that the ideal of art and poetry was to be beautifully objective. With the exception of some of the first initiators and until yesterday, modern creation has followed more or less this line: it has tried to give either a striking, moving and exciting or an aesthetically sound or a realistically powerful presentation, — all three methods often intermingling or coalescing, — rather than a subjective interpretation; thought, feeling, aesthetic treatment of the object are supposed to intervene upon and arise from a clear or strong objective observation.

But on the other hand an equally strong characteristic of the modern mind is its growing subjectivity, an intense consciousness of the I, the soul or the self, not in any mystic withdrawal within or inward meditation, or not in that preeminently, but in relation to the whole of life and Nature. This characteristic distinguishes modern subjectivism from the natural subjectivity of former times, which either tended towards an intense solitary inwardness or was superficial and confined to a few common though often strongly emphasised notes. Ancient or mediaeval individuality might return more self-assertive or violent responses to life, but the modern kind is more subtly and pervasively self-conscious and the stronger in thought and feeling to throw its own image on things, because it is more precluded from throwing itself

out freely in action and living. This turn was in fact an inevitable result of an increasing force of intellectualism; for great intensity of thought, when it does not isolate itself from emotion, reactive sensation and aesthetic response, as in science and in certain kinds of philosophy, must be attended by a quickening and intensity of these other parts of our mentality. In science and critical thought, where this isolation is possible, the objective turn prevailed, — though much that we call critical thought is after all a personal construction, a use of the reason and the observation of things for a view of what is around us which, far from being really disinterested and impersonal, is a creation of our own temperament and a satisfaction of our intellectualised individuality. But in artistic creation where the isolation is not possible, we find quite an opposite phenomenon, the subjective personality of the poet asserting itself to a far greater extent than in former ages of humanity.

Goethe himself, in spite of his theory, could not escape from this tendency; his work, as he himself recognised, is always an act of reflection of the subjective changes of his personality, a history of the development of his own soul in the guise of objective creation. (CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 116-17)

*

An enriching chord

Poetry following this movement takes on the lucid, restrained, intellectual and ideal classic form, in which high or strong ideas govern and develop the presentation of life and thought in an atmosphere of clear beauty and the vision of the satisfied intelligence; that is the greatness of the Greek and Latin poets. But afterwards the intelligence sets more comprehensively to work, opens itself to all manner of the possibilities of truth and to a crowding stream and mass of interests, a never satisfied minuteness of detail, an endless succession of pregnant generalisations. This is the type of modern intellectualism.

The poetry which arises from this mentality is full of a teeming many-sided poetic ideation which takes up the external and life motives not for their own sake, but to make them food for the poetic intelligence, blends the classical and romantic motives, adds to them the realistic, aesthetic, impressionist, idealistic ways of seeing and thinking, makes many experiments and combinations, passes through many phases. The true classic form is then no longer possible; if it is tried, it is not quite genuine, for what informs it is no longer the classic spirit; it is too crowded with subtle thought-matter, too brooding, sensitive, responsive to many things; no new Parthenon can be built whether in the white marble subdued to the hand or in the pure and lucid spacings of the idea and the word: the mind of man has become too full, complex, pregnant with subtle and not easily expressible things to be capable of that earlier type of perfection. The romantic strain is a part of this wider intelligence,

but the pure and genuine romanticism of the life-spirit which cares nothing for thought except as it enriches its own being, is also no longer possible. If it tries to get back to that, it falls into an affectation, an intellectual pose and, whatever genius may be expended upon it, this kind cannot remain long alive. That is the secret of the failure of modern romanticism in Germany and France. In Germany, Goethe and Heine alone got away from this falsity and were able to use this strain in its proper way as one enriching chord serving the complex harmonic purpose of the intelligence; the rest of German literary creation of the time is interesting and suggestive in its way, but very little of it is intimately alive and true, and afterwards Germany failed to keep up a sustained poetic impulse; she turned aside to music on the one side and on the other to philosophy and science for her field.

(CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 207-08)

*

Poetry and philosophy

Truth of poetry is not truth of philosophy or truth of science or truth of religion only, because it is another way of self-expression of infinite Truth so distinct that it appears to give quite another face of things and reveal quite another side of experience. A poet may have a religious creed or subscribe to a system of philosophy or take rank himself like Lucretius or certain Indian poets as a considerable philosophical thinker or succeed like Goethe as a scientist as well as a poetic creator, but the moment he begins to argue out his system intellectually in verse or puts a dressed up science straight into metre or else inflicts like Wordsworth or Dryden rhymed sermons or theological disputations on us, he is breaking the law. And even if he does not move so far astray, yet the farther he goes in that direction even within the bounds of his art, he is, though it has often been done with a tolerable, sometimes a considerable or total success, treading on unfirm or at any rate on lower ground. It is difficult for him there to maintain the authentic poetic spirit and pure inspiration. (CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 230)

*

Reading Goethe in the original

“It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo’s education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe. He was a brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin, | passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division, obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service |. He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied

for himself Italian and German sufficiently to read Dante and Goethe in the original tongue.”² (CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 12-13)

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Goethe’s phrase

But I think I have said enough to show that anyone wanting the truth about Sri Aurobindo would do well to avoid any reliance on Ramchandra’s narrative. It can be described in the phrase of Goethe “Poetic fictions and truths” for the element of truth is small and that of poetic fiction stupendous. It is like the mass of ale to the modicum of bread in Falstaff’s tavern bill. In fact it is almost the whole.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 97)

*

Swallowing all formulas

We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only if we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe. We must not begin by becoming partisans but know before we take our line. Our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything. That means to get rid of all unexamined opinions old or new, all mere habitual sanskaras in the mind, to have no preconceived judgments. Anityah sarvasanskarah, said the Buddha. I do not know that I quite agree. There are certain sanskaras that seem to me as eternal as things can be. What is the Atman itself but an eternal and fundamental way of looking at things, the essentiality of all being in itself unknowable, neti, neti. Therefore the later Buddhists declared that the Atman itself did not exist and arrived at ultimate nothingness, a barren and foolish conclusion, since Nothingness itself is only a sanskara. Nevertheless it is certain that the great mass of our habitual conceptions are not only temporary, but imperfect and misleading. We must escape from these imperfections and take our stand on that which is true and lasting. But in order to find out what in our conceptions is true and lasting, we must question all

2. The passage within inverted commas is Sri Aurobindo’s correction of a note that had been submitted to him by the correspondent. — Editorial Note in CWSA.

alike rigorously and impartially. The necessity of such a process not for India, but for all humanity has been recognised by leading European thinkers. It was what Carlyle meant when he spoke of swallowing all formulas. It was the process by which Goethe helped to reinvigorate European thinking. But in Europe the stream is running dry before it has reached its sea. (CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 41-42)

*

Genius and Nature's process

In order to establish genius in the human system, Nature is compelled to disturb & partially break the normality of that system, because she is introducing into it an element that is alien as it is superior to the type which it enriches. Genius is not the perfect evolution of that new & divine element; it is only a beginning or at the highest an approximation in certain directions. It works fitfully & uncertainly in the midst of an enormous mass of somewhat disordered human mentality, vital nervousity, physical animality. The thing itself is divine, it is only the undivine mould in which it works that is to a lesser or greater extent broken & ploughed up by the unassimilated force that works in it. Sometimes there is an element in the divine intruder which lays its hand on the mould & sustains it, so that it does not break at all, nor is flawed; or if there is a disturbance, it is slight and negligible. Such an element there was in Caesar, in Shakespeare, in Goethe. Sometimes also a force appears to which we can no longer apply the description of genius without being hopelessly inadequate in our terminology. Then those who have eyes to see, bow down and confess the Avatar. For it is often the work of the Avatar to typify already, partly or on the whole, what Nature has not yet effected in the mass or even in the individual, so that his passing may stamp it on the material ether in which we live.

(CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 119)

*

Great subjective force in Germany

We must not be misled by appearances into thinking that the strength of Germany was created by Bismarck or directed by the Kaiser Wilhelm II. Rather the appearance of Bismarck was in many respects a misfortune for the growing nation because his rude and powerful hand precipitated its subjectivity into form and action at too early a stage; a longer period of incubation might have produced results less disastrous to itself, if less violently stimulative to humanity. The real source of this great subjective force which has been so much disfigured in its objective action, was not in Germany's statesmen and soldiers — for the most part poor enough types of men

— but came from her great philosophers, Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche, from her great thinker and poet Goethe, from her great musicians, Beethoven and Wagner, and from all in the German soul and temperament which they represented. A nation whose master achievement has lain almost entirely in the two spheres of philosophy and music, is clearly predestined to lead in the turn to subjectivism and to produce a profound result for good or evil on the beginnings of a subjective age.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 40-41)

*

Olympian egoism of a Goethe

The spiritual life is the flower not of a featureless but a conscious and diversified oneness. Each man has to grow into the Divine Reality within himself through his own individual being, therefore is a certain growing measure of freedom a necessity of the being as it develops and perfect freedom the sign and the condition of the perfect life. But also, the Divine whom he thus sees in himself, he sees equally in all others and as the same Spirit in all. Therefore too is a growing inner unity with others a necessity of his being and perfect unity the sign and condition of the perfect life. Not only to see and find the Divine in oneself, but to see and find the Divine in all, not only to seek one's own individual liberation or perfection, but to seek the liberation and perfection of others is the complete law of the spiritual being. If the divinity sought were a separate godhead within oneself and not the one Divine, or if one sought God for oneself alone, then indeed the result might be a grandiose egoism, the Olympian egoism of a Goethe or the Titanic egoism imagined by Nietzsche, or it might be the isolated self-knowledge or asceticism of the ivory tower or the Stylites pillar. But he who sees God in all, will serve freely God in all with the service of love. He will, that is to say, seek not only his own freedom, but the freedom of all, not only his own perfection, but the perfection of all. He will not feel his individuality perfect except in the largest universality, nor his own life to be full life except as it is one with the universal life. He will not live either for himself or for the State and society, for the individual ego or the collective ego, but for something much greater, for God in himself and for the Divine in the universe.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 259-60)

*

Action of the great natural forces

Our business is to bring down heaven on earth for ourselves and mankind, to eliminate sorrow and weakness from the little corners of existence and time, where they are

allowed to exist. I do not give any assent to the gloomy doctrine which preaches a world of sorrow and inaction and withdrawal from it as the sole condition of bliss and freedom, which thinks, contrary to all reason and knowledge, that God in himself is blessed, but God in manifestation accursed. I will not admit that the Brahman is a fool or a drunkard dreaming bad dreams, self-hypnotised into miserable illusions. I do not find that teaching in the Veda; it does not agree with my realisations which are of the actuality of unalterable bliss and strength and knowledge in the midst of desireless phenomenal action. I am of the mind of Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata when he says, “Some preach action in this world and some preach inaction; but as for those who preach inaction, I am not of the opinion of those weaklings.” *Na me matam tasya durbalasya.*

But the action he holds up as an example, is the action of the great Gods, even as Goethe speaks of the action of the great natural forces, disinterested, unwearying, self-poised in bliss, not inert with the *tamas*, not fretful with the *rajas*, not limited even by the *sattwic* *ahankara* action made one in difference with the *Purushottama*, my being in His being, my *shakti* only a particular action of His infinite *shakti*, of *Kali*. I am not ignorant, I am not bound, I am not sorrowful: I only play at being ignorant, I only pretend to be bound; like an actor or like an audience I only take the *rasa* of sorrow. I can throw it off when I please. Who calls me degraded and sinful, a worm crawling upon the earth among other worms? I am Brahman, I am He; sin cannot touch me. Who calls me miserable? I am God, all blissful. Who calls me weak? I am one with the Omnipotent. He, being One, has chosen to be Many. He, being infinite, localises himself in many centres and in each centre He is still infinite. That is the mystery of existence, the *uttamam rahasyam*, God’s great, wonderful and blissful secret, a secret logic rejects, but knowledge grasps at, a knowledge not to be argued out but realised, but proved by experience, by the purified, liberated, all-enjoying, all-perfect soul. (CWSA, Vol. 11, pp. 1396-97)

*

More light

But still when I speak of the mind’s brightness, clearness, stillness, I have no idea of calling metaphor to my aid; it is meant to be a description quite precise and positive — as precise, as positive as if I were describing in the same way an expanse of air or a sheet of water. For the mystic’s experience of mind, especially when it falls still, is not that of an abstract condition or impalpable activity of the consciousness; it is rather an experience of a substance — an extended subtle substance in which there can be and are waves, currents, vibrations not physically material but still as definite, as perceptible, as tangible and controllable by an inner sense as any movement of material energy or substance by the physical senses. The stillness of the mind means,

first, the falling to rest of the habitual thought movements, thought formations, thought currents which agitate this mind-substance. That repose, vacancy of movement, is for many a sufficient mental silence. But, even in this repose of all thought movements and all movements of feeling, one sees, when one looks more closely at it, that the mind-substance is still in a constant state of very subtle formless but potentially formative vibration — not at first easily observable, but afterwards quite evident — and that state of constant vibration may be as harmful to the exact reflection or reception of the descending Truth as any formed thought movement or emotional movement; for these vibrations are the source of a mentalisation which can diminish or distort the authenticity of the higher Truth or break it up into mental refractions. When I speak of a still mind, I mean then one in which these subtler disturbances too are no longer there. As they fall quiet one can feel an increasing stillness which is not the lesser quietude of repose and also a resultant clearness as palpable as the stillness and clearness of a physical atmosphere.

This positiveness of experience is my justification for these epithets “still, clear”; but the other epithet, “bright”, links itself to a still more sensible phenomenon of the subtly concrete. For in the brightness I describe there is another additional element that is connected with the phenomenon of Light well known and common to mystic experience. That inner Light of which the mystics speak is not a metaphor, as when Goethe called for more light in his last moments; it presents itself as a very positive illumination actually seen and felt by the inner sense. The brightness of the still and clear mind is a reflection of this Light that comes even before the Light itself manifests — and, even without any actual manifestation of the Light, is sufficient for the mind’s openness to the greater consciousness beyond mind — just as we can see by the dawn-light before the sunrise; for it brings to the still mind, which might otherwise remain just still and at peace and nothing more, a capacity of penetrability to the Truth it has to receive and harbour. I have emphasised this point at a little length because it helps to bring out the difference between the abstract mental and the concrete mystic perception of supraphysical things which is the source of much misunderstanding between the spiritual seeker and the intellectual thinker. Even when they speak the same language it is a different order of perceptions to which the language refers. The same word in their mouths may denote the products of two different grades of consciousness. This ambiguity in the expression is a cause of much non-understanding and disagreement, while even a surface agreement may be a thin bridge or crust over a gulf of difference. (CWSA, Vol. 28, pp. 362-64)

SRI AUROBINDO

‘TWO THINGS REMAIN UNSHAKABLE . . .’

July 18, 1914

Two things remain unshakable despite all storm-winds, even the most violent: the will that all may be happy with the true happiness — Thine, and the ardent desire to unite perfectly and be identified with Thee. . . . All the rest is perhaps still the result of an effort and a pretension, this is spontaneous, unshakable; and just when it seems that the ground is giving way and everything breaking down, this appears luminous, pure and calm, piercing through the clouds, dispelling the shadows, emerging still greater and stronger from the ruins, carrying in itself Thy infinite Peace and Beatitude.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 205)



A CONVERSATION OF 9 JUNE 1929

What is exactly the nature of religion? Is it an obstacle in the way of the spiritual life?

Religion belongs to the higher mind of humanity. It is the effort of man's higher mind to approach, as far as lies in its power, something beyond it, something to which humanity gives the name God or Spirit or Truth or Faith or Knowledge or the Infinite, some kind of Absolute, which the human mind cannot reach and yet tries to reach. Religion may be divine in its ultimate origin; in its actual nature it is not divine but human. In truth we should speak rather of religions than of religion; for the religions made by man are many. These different religions, even when they had not the same origin, have most of them been made in the same way. We know how the Christian religion came into existence. It was certainly not Jesus who made what is known as Christianity, but some learned and very clever men put their heads together and built it up into the thing we see. There was nothing divine in the way in which it was formed, and there is nothing divine either in the way in which it functions. And yet the excuse or occasion for the formation was undoubtedly some revelation from what one could call a Divine Being, a Being who came from elsewhere bringing down with him from a higher plane a certain Knowledge and Truth for the earth. He came and suffered for his Truth; but very few understood what he said, few cared to find and hold to the Truth for which he suffered. Buddha retired from the world, sat down in meditation and discovered a way out of earthly suffering and misery, out of all this illness and death and desire and sin and hunger. He saw a Truth which he endeavoured to express and communicate to the disciples and followers who gathered around him. But even before he was dead, his teaching had already begun to be twisted and distorted. It was only after his disappearance that Buddhism as a full-fledged religion reared its head founded upon what the Buddha is supposed to have said and on the supposed significance of these reported sayings. But soon too, because the disciples and the disciples' disciples could not agree on what the Master had said or what he meant by his utterances, there grew up a host of sects and sub-sects in the body of the parent religion — a Southern Path, a Northern Path, a Far Eastern Path, each of them claiming to be the only, the original, the undefiled doctrine of the Buddha. The same fate overtook the teaching of the Christ; that too came to be made in the same way into a set and organised religion. It is often said that, if Jesus came back, he would not be able to recognise what he taught in the forms that have been imposed on it, and if Buddha were to come back and see what has been made of his teaching, he would immediately run back discouraged to Nirvana! All religions have each the same story to tell. The occasion for its birth is the coming of

a great Teacher of the world. He comes and reveals and is the incarnation of a Divine Truth. But men seize upon it, trade upon it, make an almost political organisation out of it. The religion is equipped by them with a government and policy and laws, with its creeds and dogmas, its rules and regulations, its rites and ceremonies, all binding upon its adherents, all absolute and inviolable. Like the State, it too administers rewards to the loyal and assigns punishments for those that revolt or go astray, for the heretic and the renegade.

The first and principal article of these established and formal religions runs always, "Mine is the supreme, the only truth, all others are in falsehood or inferior." For without this fundamental dogma, established credal religions could not have existed. If you do not believe and proclaim that you alone possess the one or the highest truth, you will not be able to impress people and make them flock to you.

This attitude is natural to the religious mind; but it is just that which makes religion stand in the way of the spiritual life. The articles and dogmas of a religion are mind-made things and, if you cling to them and shut yourself up in a code of life made out for you, you do not know and cannot know the truth of the Spirit that lies beyond all codes and dogmas, wide and large and free. When you stop at a religious creed and tie yourself in it, taking it for the only truth in the world, you stop the advance and widening of your inner soul. But if you look at religion from another angle, it need not always be an obstacle to all men. If you regard it as one of the higher activities of humanity and if you can see in it the aspirations of man without ignoring the imperfection of all man-made things, it may well be a kind of help for you to approach the spiritual life. Taking it up in a serious and earnest spirit, you can try to find out what truth is there, what aspiration lies hidden in it, what divine inspiration has undergone transformation and deformation here by the human mind and a human organisation, and with an appropriate mental stand you can get religion even as it is to throw some light on your way and to lend some support to your spiritual endeavour.

In all religions we find invariably a certain number of people who possess a great emotional capacity and are full of a real and ardent aspiration, but have a very simple mind and do not feel the need of approaching the Divine through knowledge. For such natures religion has a use and it is even necessary for them; for, through external forms, like the ceremonies of the Church, it offers a kind of support and help to their inner spiritual aspiration. In every religion there are some who have evolved a high spiritual life. But it is not the religion that gave them their spirituality; it is they who have put their spirituality into the religion. Put anywhere else, born into any other cult, they would have found there and lived there the same spiritual life. It is their own capacity, it is some power of their inner being and not the religion they profess that has made them what they are. This power in their nature is such that religion to them does not become a slavery or a bondage. Only as they have not a strong, clear and active mind, they need to believe in this or that creed as absolutely

true and to give themselves up to it without any disturbing question or doubt. I have met in all religions people of this kind and it would be a crime to disturb their faith. For them religion is not an obstacle. An obstacle for those who can go farther, it may be a help for those who cannot, but are yet able to travel a certain distance on the paths of the Spirit. Religion has been an impulse to the worst things and the best; if the fiercest wars have been waged and the most hideous persecutions carried on in its name, it has stimulated too supreme heroism and self-sacrifice in its cause. Along with philosophy it marks the limit the human mind has reached in its highest activities. It is an impediment and a chain if you are a slave to its outer body; if you know how to use its inner substance, it can be your jumping-board into the realm of the Spirit.

One who holds a particular faith or who has found out some truth, is disposed to think that he alone has found the Truth, whole and entire. This is human nature. A mixture of falsehood seems necessary for human beings to stand on their legs and move on their way. If the vision of the Truth were suddenly given to them they would be crushed under the weight.

Each time that something of the Divine Truth and the Divine Force comes down to manifest upon earth, some change is effected in the earth's atmosphere. In the descent, those who are receptive are awakened to some inspiration from it, some touch, some beginning of sight. If they were capable of holding and expressing rightly what they receive, they would say, "A great force has come down; I am in contact with it and what I understand of it, I will tell you." But most of them are not capable of that, because they have small minds. They get illumined, possessed, as it were, and cry, "I have the Divine Truth, I possess it whole and entire." There are now upon earth at least two dozen Christs, if not as many Buddhas; India alone can supply any number of Avatars, not to speak of minor manifestations. But in this way, the whole thing begins to look grotesque; but if you see what is behind, it is not so stupid as it seems at the first glance. The truth is that the human personality has come in contact with some Being, some Power, and under the influence of education and tradition calls it Buddha or Christ or by any other familiar name. It is difficult to affirm that it was Buddha himself or the very Christ with whom there was the contact, but none can assert either that the inspiration did not come from that which inspired the Christ or the Buddha. These human vessels may very well have received the inspiration from some such source. If they were modest and simple, they would be content to say that much and no more; they would say, "I have received this inspiration from such and such a Great One", but instead they proclaim, "I am that Great One." I knew one who affirmed that he was both Christ and Buddha! He had received something, had experienced a truth, had seen the Divine Presence in himself and in others. But the experience was too strong for him, the truth too great. He became half crazy and the next day went out into the streets, proclaiming that in him Christ and Buddha had become one.

One Divine Consciousness is here working through all these beings, preparing its way through all these manifestations. At this day it is here at work upon earth more powerfully than it has ever been before. There are some who receive its touch in some way, or to some degree; but what they receive they distort, they make their own thing out of it. Others feel the touch but cannot bear the force and go mad under the pressure. But some have the capacity to receive and the strength to bear, and it is they who will become the vessels of the full knowledge, the chosen instruments and agents.

If you want to appraise the real value of the religion in which you are born or brought up or to have a correct perspective of the country or society to which you belong by birth, if you want to find out how relative a thing the particular environment is into which you happened to be thrown and confined, you have only to go round the earth and see that what you think good is looked upon as bad elsewhere and what is considered as bad in one place is welcomed as good in another. All countries and all religions are built up out of a mass of traditions. In all of them you will meet saints and heroes and great and mighty personalities as well as small and wicked people. You will then perceive what a mockery it is to say, "Because I am brought up in this religion, therefore it is the only true religion; because I am born in this country, therefore it is the best of all countries." One might as well make the same claim for his family, "Because I come of this family that has lived in the same place for so many years or so many centuries, therefore I am bound by its traditions; they alone are the ideal."

Things have an inner value and become real to you only when you have acquired them by the exercise of your free choice, not when they have been imposed upon you. If you want to be sure of your religion, you must choose it; if you want to be sure of your country, you must choose it; if you want to be sure of your family, even that you must choose. If you accept without question what has been given you by Chance, you can never be sure whether it is good or bad for you, whether it is the true thing for your life. Step back from all that forms your natural environment or inheritance, made up and forced upon you by Nature's blind mechanical process; draw within and look quietly and dispassionately at things. Appraise them, choose freely. Then you can say with an inner truth, "This is my family, this my country, this my religion."

If we go a little way within ourselves, we shall discover that there is in each of us a consciousness that has been living throughout the ages and manifesting in a multitude of forms. Each of us has been born in many different countries, belonged to many different nations, followed many different religions. Why must we accept the last one as the best? The experiences gathered by us in all these many lives in different countries and varying religions, are stored up in that inner continuity of our consciousness which persists through all births. There are multiple personalities there created by these past experiences, and when we become aware of this multitude

within us, it becomes impossible to speak of one particular form of truth as the only truth, one country as our only country, one religion as the only true religion. There are people who have been born into one country, although the leading elements of their consciousness obviously belong to another. I have met some born in Europe who were evidently Indians; I have met others born in Indian bodies who were as evidently Europeans. In Japan I have met some who were Indian, others who were European. And if any of them goes to the country or enters into the civilisation to which he has affinity, he finds himself there perfectly at home.

If your aim is to be free, in the freedom of the Spirit, you must get rid of all the ties that are not the inner truth of your being, but come from subconscious habits. If you wish to consecrate yourself entirely, absolutely and exclusively to the Divine, you must do it in all completeness; you must not leave bits of yourself tied here and there. You may object that it is not easy to cut away altogether from one's moorings. But have you never looked back and observed the changes that have taken place in you in the course of a few years? When you do that, almost always you ask yourself how it was that you could have felt in the way you felt and acted as you did act in certain circumstances; at times, even, you can no longer recognise yourself in the person you were only ten years ago. How can you then bind yourself to what was or to what is or how can you fix beforehand what may or may not be in the future?

All your relations must be newly built upon an inner freedom of choice. The traditions in which you live or are brought up have been imposed on you by the pressure of the environment or by the general mind or by the choice of others. There is an element of compulsion in your acquiescence. Religion itself has been imposed on men; it is often supported by a suggestion of religious fear or by some spiritual or other menace. There can be no such imposition in your relation with the Divine; it must be free, your own mind's and heart's choice, taken up with enthusiasm and joy. What union can that be in which one trembles and says, "I am compelled, I cannot do otherwise"? Truth is self-evident and has not to be imposed upon the world. It does not feel the need of being accepted by men. For it is self-existent; it does not live by what people say of it or on their adherence. But one who is founding a religion needs to have many followers. The strength and greatness of a religion is adjudged by men according to the number of those that follow it, although the real greatness is not there. The greatness of spiritual truth is not in numbers. I knew the head of a new religion, the son of its founder, and heard him say once that such and such a religion took so many hundreds of years to be built up, and such another so many hundreds of years, but they within fifty years had already over four million followers. "And so you see," he added, "what a great religion is ours!" Religions may reckon their greatness by the number of their believers, but Truth would still be Truth if it had not even a single follower. The average man is drawn towards those who make great pretensions; he does not go where Truth is quietly manifesting. Those who make great pretensions need to proclaim loudly and to advertise; for

otherwise they would not attract great numbers of people. The work that is done with no care for what people think of it is not so well known, does not so easily draw multitudes. But Truth requires no advertisement; it does not hide itself but it does not proclaim itself either. It is content to manifest, regardless of results, not seeking approbation or shunning disapprobation, not attracted or troubled by the world's acceptance or denial.

When you come to the Yoga, you must be ready to have all your mental buildings and all your vital scaffoldings shattered to pieces. You must be prepared to be suspended in the air with nothing to support you except your faith. You will have to forget your past self and its clings altogether, to pluck it out of your consciousness and be born anew, free from every kind of bondage. Think not of what you were, but of what you aspire to be; be altogether in what you want to realise. Turn from your dead past and look straight towards the future. Your religion, country, family lie there; it is the DIVINE.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 76-84)



THE INSPIRATION AND ART OF JOHN A. CHADWICK

This essay was first published in the April 1956 issue of Mother India as 'Arjava (J. A. Chadwick) — His Poetic Inspiration and Art'. It was reprinted as Part 2 of 'Two Neglected English Poets' in the book Inspiration and Effort: Studies in Literary Attitude and Expression brought out in 1995 by the Integral Life Foundation with the title 'The Inspiration and Art of John A. Chadwick' (pp. 143-60).

The box-note of 'Two Neglected English Poets' reads:

Joyce Chadwick and John A. Chadwick, contemporary with each other and belonging to our own time, are hardly heard of in English critical circles. The former died in England in 1950, the latter in India as far back as 1939; but their works have made little headway. Identical in surname, they were yet no relatives; they did not even come in contact and wrote without knowledge of each other's poetry. But their common surname is highly symbolic; for both expressed themselves under a similar spiritual stress and combined with the typical English note a mystic motive either directly caught from or indirectly attuned to modern renescent India.

The most famous work of the prominent philosophical writer, C. D. Broad, *Mind and Its Place in Nature*, is inscribed to J. A. Chadwick. Although this inscription is enough to hint to us the esteem in which, even as a young man, that student of Philosophy and Mathematical Logic was held, we can never guess from it that he deserves an essay which might well be entitled 'Chadwick and His Place in the World'. For it is not as a philosopher or mathematical logician that he has become significant, nor was it at Cambridge that he did so. Only after leaving Trinity College to sail to India and after throwing up a professorship at an educational institution at Lucknow he suddenly flowered into a poet of exceptional quality. What brought about the flowering was his stay in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram of Yoga at Pondicherry. There, after a short spell, he made one of a group of poets writing in English whom, during the 1930s, Sri Aurobindo carried with a most acute and intimate care, both analytic and constructive, towards the Ideal of a perfect mystical and spiritual expression.

As we might expect of a mind trained to careful intellectuality, Chadwick — or Arjava, as he came to be known from the name Arjavananda (meaning "Joy of straightforwardness") given him by Sri Aurobindo — did not achieve closeness to the Ideal through a lavish spontaneity whose very breath is song. A deliberate self-

critical compact perfection belonged to him. Instead of taking the Kingdom of Heaven by a stormy frontal assault, he laid slow siege to it and won its treasures by patient compulsion — a victory no less complete though differing in plan and technique.

Here too is a superb energy of imagination expended not so much in a royal diffusion as in concentrated exquisiteness or magnificence. We feel, to quote the poet's own words from a sonnet, "a chaos-ending chisel-smite" in each work — a faultless statue emerges in which every line and curve has been traced by an inspired precision. Naturally the result is less prolific — a volume¹ of merely 327 short poems with 2 playlets in verse, published soon after their author's untimely death in 1939 — but a greater stress is brought to bear upon the understanding, a stress which produces a peculiar intensity of rapture packed with haloed mysteries, so to speak — unfamiliar twilights, symbolic enchantments, hieratic seclusions — and yet no narrowness in the ultimate revelation made: the sole difficulty lies in turning the key which throws the esoteric doors wide open into expanse on shining expanse of heights and depths.

It is an art which may be a little baffling at first, but for those who can absorb its strange atmosphere there awaits a reward often of a beauty which takes one's breath away by its magic spells or by its grave amplitudes of spirituality. The style is highly original with unexpected turns that are vividly forceful and a power of pregnant construction armed with a genius for rhythmical innovation is everywhere manifest — as in that finely as well as incisively imaged poem called *Communication*:

Ebbing and waning of joy, the day estranged:
Here, petalled evening droops;
Below sky-rim the petals have drifted — all is changed

To a dim listless stalk where Twilight stoops
Horizonward; and then
The black scorpion, Night, lifts claws of loneliness and loops

The zenith and all the sky
(Its venomèd blackness is in the life-blood of men).
. . . O then, love-armèd cry,

1. *Poems* by Arjava (J. A. Chadwick), with a Foreword by Sri Krishna Prem (Ronald Nixon), published by John M. Watkins, 21 Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, London, W. C. 2, printed at Government Central Press, Hyderabad, Deccan, India, 1941.

Bring with compulsive dream the moon's foreglow
 Over the difficult edge
 Of being, that eastward-straining hopes may know

Lit pearl of untarrying pledge, —
 Counsel, and laughter, and undissembling eyes.
 Time-tameless thought shall dredge

Wide welcome for the glimpsed sail of moonrise,
 The ship of understanding and conjoined wills,
 The keel of trust from far-off friendly skies.

Remarkable as this poem is, with its subtle variations of tempo and appositely manipulated expressive drive which promise a capacity for effective blank verse if ever the poet were to be inspired in that direction, Chadwick's most majestic work seems to be those flights where bursts upon the gaze an imaginative colour widening every moment into some "objective correlative" of high philosophy charged with the profoundest spiritual illumination. A striking instance is *Moksha*:

As one who saunters on the seabanks in a wilderness of day
 Is dazzled by the sunshot marge and rippling counterchange
 Of wavebeams and an eagerhood of quivering wings that range —
 Grey on the sky's rim, — white on the foam-pathway, —

Each man is wildered myriadly by oversight and surface tone
 Engirdling soul with clamour, by this fragmentary mood,
 This patter of Time's marring steps across the solitude
 Of Truth's abidingness, Self-Blissful and Alone.

But when eastward-streaming shadows bring the hush of eventide
 The wave-lapped sun can wield again his glory of hence-going
 And furnish by his lowlihead vast dreams of heaven-knowing —
 A golden wave-way to the One where Beauty's archetypes abide.

One can see how deftly the fourteener can be modulated by a hand conscious of the possibility it offers of many internal tones — swirl and stream and surge playing significant roles within the cumulative dignity of the whole movement. The two alexandrines in the above quotation are very suggestive also — the fourth line with its truncated first foot and its inverted accent in the fourth produces by the resultant emphasis on "grey" and "white" just the changeful bewildering effect which is sought to be conveyed by the sense of the stanza; while the eighth line, marking a

contrast to the three longer ones preceding it, is eloquent of the self-compactness and isolation attributed therein to Truth. In a similar way the comparative lengthening out of the finale seems to indicate the triumphant roll of the meaning like a lustrous billow towards some immutable mystery beyond the mind's horizon. All the three stanzas are consummately inspired art, and no greater praise is possible than that the middle — particularly in its second half — might well be one of the supreme moments of the Upanishads, a *Mantra*.

The large and lofty utterance met with in the major Upanishads, carrying with it an echo of some rhythm infinitely vibrating out of a stupendous Unknowable, is indeed a *rara avis* in the atmosphere of the English language. Hardly any recent poet of the British Isles writing with a marked mystical *penchant* shows even a glimmer of it. AE has filled his verse with a wonderful simplicity of soul-vision; Yeats of the earlier phase brings a poignancy dipped in secret wells of faery colour and, when the later masterful will is at play, there is the “gold mosaic” of “God's holy fire” and the cry to be gathered into “the artifice of eternity”; Kathleen Raine now and then gives her song a crystalline touch of inward meditation in which yet the pulse both of the elements and of the human heart finds a richer rhythm. Among the less known poets there are James Cousins and Joyce Chadwick, gravely or delicately articulate in their intimacy with Light. But the best work of all these, whatever its aesthetic perfection, falls short of the eagle-height of spiritual quality. Not the substance by itself confers that pure zenith; what is necessary is a profound intonation vitally one with substance and language, and John Chadwick at his finest reflects something of this triple intensity because his English mind has more consistently steeped itself in Yoga and caught a breath from what we may call the luminous spaces of Sri Aurobindo's inner life.

If we wish to find among English-writing poets a match to that pair of lines ending with the full yet far-away gong of the word “alone” we shall have to pick out from Wordsworth his noblest music. Curiously enough the verses that equal them are just the two that also end with the same word's long rounded *o* and bell-like consonance — the lines on Newton's face in the bust at Cambridge:

The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone.

And here it may be significant to mention that the terminal “alone” is not confined to Wordsworth's and Chadwick's Upanishadic pictures. It seems to have some innate affinity with the peak utterance of the Spirit, for it crowns too one of Sri Aurobindo's own poetic masterpieces, a passage visioning the very state hinted by Chadwick:

Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars

The superconscious realms of motionless Peace
 Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
 And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.²

To continue with Chadwick: he is not only a spiritual poet but an occult one. And in his occult sensibility too he strikes a new note. His Unicorn —

Unicorn uncreated,
 Time may grow tired, not you!
 For changes of rhythm are dated
 By the clang of your topaz shoe —

and his Phoenix —

Tranquil the phoenix-poise of golden crested,
 fleece-white and sorrowless
 head of the undefeated vision who had nested
 where on Time's moments looms the Everlivingness —

are neither of them merely traditional figures; they are a fresh contribution to symbolic sight. The white Unicorn with its single pointed projection on the head seems to be a symbol of purity and of faithfulness to a spiritual purpose, while the golden yellow of the topaz is emblematic of some spiritual principle behind manifested life in the recurrences as well as the variations of Time's movement. The Phoenix appears to stand for a power of some solar altitude of divine Truth, a power missioned to renew in the heart of Time the flame of aspiration towards the unquenchable and imperturbable luminosity above that has to be caught and intimately felt in Time's flux. But the achievement of Chadwick's symbolic poetry is the living body the spiritual-occult significances acquire in a verse where vision, word and rhythm are organically knit together. It is this that constitutes the revelatory originality of his symbolism.

Symbolic sight again, blending now the outer scene with an inner occult-spiritual lucidity of shape and significance, casts its spell on us in that short piece called *Unveering Light*:

Across unmoving lake
 A mirror theme
 Of swans with white wing-arches take
 Their endless dream.

2. *Savitri* (Sri Aurobindo International University Centre Collection, Vol. II, Pondicherry, 1954), Book I, Canto 3, p. 39. [*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 33-34.]

Poise-perfect is the set
 Of lunar-bright
 Pinions of trance where silence met
 Unveering light.

The swan is an old symbol of the human soul as a representative of the immaculate Eternal. But here it is given a specially revelatory attitude. The compound adjective “lunar-bright” immediately refers our imagination from the embodied soul to some Beyond of sheer Bliss. And the relationship indicated between the bird and the lake suggests a unison between the soul and environing nature. Here is a double reception of the transcendent beauty and purity — the soul realising its divine origin not only by an in-look towards the heavenly height but also by an out-look upon the natural elements amongst which it lives with the ideal of progressively manifesting the supreme light in the changeful character of earth’s limited existence. That existence is here glimpsed in a transformed moment of tranquillity and made one in substance as it were with the soul’s vision of its own enraptured being — and the whole double identity is caught by the poet’s eye in a tranced inner dimension where the perfection that is to be accomplished in Time waits full-formed in an immutable *Nunc Stans*, an ever-standing Now of Eternity.

In the pure occult also, as distinguished from the spiritual or the spiritual-occult — the pure occult of the mid-worlds behind us where a whole vast life of subjective-objective motifs, beautiful or bewildering, fantastic or formidable, proceeds on its way, pulling various strings of our own psychology — there too Chadwick captures a new note. Sri Aurobindo has contrasted Walter de la Mare’s *Listeners* with Chadwick’s *Totalitarian*, not as a disclosure of the spiritual with that of the occult but rather as the occult’s superficial glimpse with its profound sight. De la Mare’s is a poem of fanciful hauntedness, enveloping earthly objects with a faint ghostly atmosphere — Chadwick’s carries a direct focussing of realities clean beyond earth, a vivid vision powerfully evocative of the sheer occult. Not only do the actions described have entirely different gestures: the very sceneries differ though apparently similar. Take de la Mare’s

. . . the faint moonbeams on the dark stair
 That goes down to the empty hall

and

. . . the dark turf
 ’Neath the starred and leafy sky.

Delicately imitative, this, of an occult landscape, but how stark and realistic a projection of some “terrible elsewhere” are Chadwick’s

. . . the empty eerie courtyard
With no name

or

. . . a crescent moon swung wanly,
White as curd.

And, as the poems proceed, de la Mare goes on increasing his exquisite ghostliness with strange movements whose meaning is elusive, while Chadwick presses home to a weirdly dynamic symbol of a soul-attitude struck by the human in accord with some drama of hell's tyranny and murderous monotony. Here is de la Mare's ending:

Never the least stir made the listeners,
 Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
 From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
 And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward
 When the plunging hoofs were gone —

and this is the way Chadwick recounts how his "traveller", feeling frantic after having flashed his single sword-blade in a night where none resisted,

Hurled his weapon through the gloaming,
 Took no aim;
Saw his likenesses around him
 Do the same:
Viewed a thousand swordless figures
 Like his own —
Then first knew in that cold starlight
 Hell, alone.

De la Mare's poetry is undeniably fine in a daintily phantasmal vein, but it is ever so far from Chadwick's dreadful revelation of an occult depth reaching its climax with the gripping resonance once more of that predicative epithet about whose poetic suggestiveness we have already remarked.

Perhaps something of this kind of dreadful revelation dealing with the soul's own recesses is to be found in a few verses of that eccentric little genius Emily Dickinson, where she emphasises the individual's solitary confrontation of himself

in some spectral profundity of consciousness. She lacks Chadwick's direct occult sight and consummate symbolic art, but she has an occult feel by means of an inward-straining thought and a terse elliptic style adding to the psychological eeriness:

One need not be a chamber to be haunted,
 One need not be a house;
 The brain has corridors surpassing
 Material place.

Far safer of a midnight meeting
 External ghost,
 Than an interior confronting
 That whiter host.

Far safer through an Abbey gallop,
 The stones achase,
 Than, moonless, one's own self encounter
 In lonesome place . . .

Even when a scene of external earth-nature is clearly recognisable, Chadwick always throws a visionary hue upon it, calling up immediately a soul-reality: as in that atmospheric snatch, half Yeatsian half de la Maresque —

Drowsy pinions whitely winging
 Smoulder dimly past the strand —

or in those lines that end with a most sensitive vibration from the depths of the Godward-turned psyche —

. . . the eve
 Has limned a trance upon the air,
 A swirl of sunset on the stream,
 An ecstasy of quivering bells that seem
 Born from the heart of Prayer.

But Chadwick is not only depth-suggestive; he has many moments that burst upon us with amplitude and power. Instead of a sensitive psychic vibration, indirect in its description of the physical stars twinkling as though tinkling, he can look straight at the constellated firmament and give us an in-feeling of it in a line where the entirely monosyllabic pentameter with its various dispositions of similar or dissimilar vowels and consonants and with its meaningful massings of stress makes a most effective conjuration:

You stars who span with strength long leagues of space.

Or else, with less direct power but equally direct communication of a vast experience-value, we have the same starry phenomenon:

To gaze and gaze upon the fire-strewn sky
Until the hush of heaven loom within.

Here there is a breath of what Sri Aurobindo has called “overhead” rhythm. This rhythm, winging down as if from some boundlessness above the brain-clamped mind, tends in Chadwick to touch at times the very summit. And the Upanishadic magnificence of a poetic gesture like the following apostrophe to the transcendent divine Force which he visions as drawing the quintessence of a triple Absolute of Being, Consciousness, Delight, and reigning from on high over the mental plane like a Sun-kingdom of Knowledge, is, like those verses about Truth’s solitude that is perfectly withdrawn from the mind’s “fragmentary mood”, the most memorable of Chadwick’s poetic victories:

Un sullied wisdom of gold which was thrice refined,
Shine in the clear space of holy noon
On all the upland hollows of the mind:
May every shadow-harboured thought be strewn
With solar vastness and compelled
To feel all fear and all self-limits quelled.

Of course, the fact that a poet seizes or at least neighbours the *Mantra* does not mean that he is so filled with a supreme spirituality that he can never drop to a lower level of utterance. Neither must we expect all his speech on that level to be one tissue of originality. In Chadwick we may trace, except when he is at his best, certain general influences from poets preceding or contemporary. The Nature-poems, startlingly fresh though they are as a whole, share in details the vocabulary of Edmund Blunden’s inspired pastoralism enamoured of the English countryside. The magic vision within many verses casts our mind back to Yeats’s Celticism and here and there is a drift of dreamy fancifulness not very far removed from de la Mare. Even on some occasions the colouring shows a touch of the minutely marking as well as luxurious painter eye of the young Tennyson, and not infrequently the phrasing bears an aspect of traditional poeticism from Spenser down to William Watson, which especially the rebellious modernist ear may dub wearying. In a semi-modernist manner we get at a few moments an affinity to Gerard Manley Hopkins. But if we look deeper and hear more intently we realise that in the echo-semblances themselves a novel genius runs to create a general pattern of mind which is sheer Chadwick and

that an artistic flair lends by vigorous compactness or airy suggestiveness originality even of language to the *ensemble* and makes almost every stanza if not every line sparkle in at least one place with pure dew on whatever petals may have grown from the past or have reflected contemporary burgeonings. This should restrain the critic from pronouncing anything to be stale or even merely traditional.

Further, we must remember that Chadwick is not confined to old forms of verse. He is perfectly aware of recent tendencies and can exploit the possibilities of new forms without losing the true poetic quality. Thus he has several experiments in free verse, each an artistic success, and at times he not only works out the substance revelatorily in faultless language and rhythm but also brings superb depth and energy:

A green-grey twilit hush in the ageless forest,
 After the immense canopy of boughs
 Has strained all glare and vivid colours from the sunlight.
 Plinths of tree and stems of giant creeper rise up from the floor of dimness
 To the full height of these grey spaces
 In a cathedral calm.
 A plashy thud of some hard-rinded fruit
 Ripples momentarily the tapestries of hush.

The greyness and the quiet are over all, a many-fathomed covering of ocean mystery.
 That turbulence of harsh atomic being,
 Those hard and garish colours of the upper day
 Are no more;
 And only a faint dissolving line, a bubble's membrane holds
 Frontiers of existence and not-being.

We may apply to this the remarks made by Sri Aurobindo about another splendid performance in free verse:³ “. . . its rhythmic achievement solves entirely for the first time (it was partly done in some former poems) the problem of free verse. The object of free verse is to find a rhythm in which one can dispense with rhyme and the limitations of a fixed metre and yet have a poetic rhythm, not either a flat or an elevated prose rhythm cut up into lengths. I think this poem shows how it can be done. There is a true poetic rhythm, even a metrical beat, but without any fixity, pleasant and verging with the curve or sweep of the thought and carrying admirably its perfect poetic expression. . . .”⁴ We may also note here, in passing, the phrases: “a plashy thud” and “a bubble's membrane.” They do not sound quite poetic in the old style of verse-writing. But they are entirely in place not merely in free verse but

3. [*The High-flashing Fountains of Song*]

4. [*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 490.]

also in the type of work turned out by Chadwick in all forms, and they constantly mix a sort of modernism with his usual avoidance of the modernist degradation of poetry. They are intrinsic to his aim, as Sri Aurobindo pointed out at the very commencement of Chadwick's poetic career when an objection was raised by a reader to the use of the phrase: "bobbing globelets". Sri Aurobindo wrote: "I dispute the legitimacy of the comment. It is based on a conventional objection to undignified and therefore presumably unpoetic words and images — an objection which has value only when the effect is uncouth or trivial, but cannot be accepted otherwise as a valid rule. Obviously, it might be difficult to bring in 'bobbing' in an epic or other 'high' style, although I suppose Milton could have managed it and one remembers the famous controversy about Hugo's *mouchoir*. But in poetry of a mystic (occult or spiritual) kind this does not count. The aim is to bring up a vivid suggestion of the thing seen and some significance of the form, movement, etc. through which one can get at the life behind and its meaning; a familiar adjective here can serve its purpose very well as a touch in the picture and there are occasions when no other could be as true and living or give so well the precise movement needed."⁵

Modern-sounding or traditional-seeming, Chadwick's artistic technique is nearly always flawless, and it is original by more than a living sense of word-value and rhythm-value reinforcing thought and vision: there is the originality of the thought and the vision themselves. And this originality is of a rare order by being mysticism which is not merely intellectual or emotional but comes of a genuine intuitive hold on hidden domains. Even when the symbols chosen are old ones, verging on the well-worn, he can transmute everything into a masterpiece. Who has not heard of the shell that brings from its whorl the long boom of breakers? And has not Swinburne familiarised us to easy enthusiasms like "the sea, my mother", and "my mother the sea"? But take now Chadwick's:

Out of an infinite ocean
 Time arose;
 By his shore with a thunderous motion
 That Splendour flows.

Here is one shell of Its bringing,
 Cast on the beach;
 Hold it and hark to the singing, —
 Eternity speech.

Flotsam and jetsam of Oneness
 Unbaffled and free,

5. [*Ibid.*, p. 182.]

Spurring Time to remember his sonhood,
His mother — the Sea.

With masterful ease the whole depth of the poetic significance of sea-born land and stray sea-cast shell is plumbed and a power of mystical sight creates a little marvel of profound word and rhythm out of what may seem almost nursery-rhyme properties. In view of this power, whether exercised with striking novelty or within a known symbology, Chadwick's art in even its most traditional appearance must be distinguished as a new element at play in poetic literature, a pioneering triumph of one kind in what Sri Aurobindo has designated as "Future Poetry". And this triumph which springs from a heart of spiritual feeling attuned to an inmost Presence never so permanent and piercing in any English poet and approached in intensity by perhaps none else than Shelley and AE, is not a matter of a few isolated poems. In piece after piece that Presence makes Chadwick an expert discloser of mystical songscapes. We should hardly exaggerate in saying that it leads his poetry to overtop in sustained quality the production of all his English contemporaries and to hold a promise of greatness rendering his premature death a tragedy whose true significance can be adequately uttered only by a fineness of word comparable to his own, whether the fineness quickens, the imagination by a sober felicity as in

Boles of strength with that whisper of blessing

or by a rhapsodical beauty as in

Lustrously pale as the starlight when the air has been washed by the rain

or with a happy audacity as in

Gleam and bend cloud-centaurs from afar
Moon-bow that is aiming, silver-taut,
Arrows made of silence at a star

or with a vividly strange suggestiveness —

Only a moon-pale ledge of rock,
Lapped by that sullen waste
Of Limbo-drift where a shadowy flock
Of dream-birds spaced.

In the unquiet wideness of their loneliness
Are as that sky-line aimlessly empty of good —

or with an exceedingly exquisite “moon-prompted” aspiration —

Power and immaculate Glory,
 Whom outward eyes may greet —
 In this hour might the inward quicken,
 Cloudlessly meet
 Mother and Beauty Divine —

or with an august intuitiveness coupled with an inmost poignancy, setting Shiva before us —

Aimless, yet knowing each goal, —
 As unfrontiered Space
 Moves not at all,
 But centres in each place
 One instant effortless control;
 Or as the pity finds Thy face
 When on Thy shrine the tears and bel-leaves fall —

or with a profound ingenuity of “counterchanged” sense-perceptions spiritualised —

Timid clamour-pomps we see
 Whose mingled sound
 Leave naked yet the limbs of earthly faring:
 While all around
 The undraped silences go Selfward, wearing
 Form’s ecstasy —

or with a powerful insight symboling the seer-trance by a “rock-hewn cavern” open to unrealised spiritual possibilities —

So sleep the strong and keep their guarded peace,
 Whilst gracious dreams from aisles of future Time
 Lean past the bars of Being, whisper their secret word,
 Yearn to be made rock . . . Inlapidate Sublime —

or with a fusion of almost all the varieties exemplified above of poetic imaged speech in a grand attitude of keenly felt self-dedication to the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo:

Precarious boat that brought me to this strand
 Shall feed flame-pinnacles from stem to stern,

Till not one rib my backward glance can find —
Down to the very keelson they shall burn.

Now to the unreal sea-line I would no more yearn;
Fain to touch with feet an unimagined land. . . .
The gates of false glamour have closed behind;
There is no return.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

In the mind Agni creates a light of intuitive perception and discrimination which sees at once what is the true vision or idea and the wrong vision or idea, the true feeling and the wrong feeling, the true movement and the wrong movement. In the vital he is kindled as a fire of right emotion and a kind of intuitive feeling, a sort of tact which makes for the right impulse, the right action, the right sense of things and reaction to things. In the body he initiates a similar but still more automatic correct response to the things of physical life, sensation, bodily experience. Usually it is the psychic light in the mind that is first lit of the three, but not always — for sometimes it is the psycho-vital flame that takes precedence.

In ordinary life also there is no doubt an action of the psychic — without it man would be only a thinking and planning animal. But its action there is very much veiled, needing always the mental or vital to express it, usually mixed and not dominant, not unerring therefore; it does often the right thing in the wrong way, is moved by the right feeling but errs as to the application, person, place, circumstance. The psychic, except in a few extraordinary natures, does not get its full chance in the outer consciousness; it needs some kind of Yoga or sadhana to come by its own and it is as it emerges more and more “in front” that it gets clear of the mixture. That is to say, its presence becomes directly felt, not only behind and supporting, but filling the frontal consciousness and no longer dependent on or dominated by its instruments — mind, vital and body, but dominating them and moulding them into luminosity and teaching them their own true action.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 85-86)

BARUCH SPINOZA — A MAVERICK PHILOSOPHER AND A GOD-LOVING ATHEIST (?)

Introduction

In a previous article titled ‘God and World According to Spinoza and Vedanta’,¹ which is included in my book titled *Essays on Vedanta and Western Philosophies*, I discussed Baruch Spinoza’s philosophy of God and His relationship with the manifested world. I will not repeat here all the details of Spinoza’s thoughts on God and the world. However, I will review some of the salient concepts of his metaphysical view of God and the world. After that I will focus on a few other topics of philosophy, which he examined, and these include human beings and mind-body interaction, knowledge, emotions and bondage, and lastly his views on intellectual love of God and blessedness. The primary source of information for this article is Spinoza’s famous book, *The Ethics*. This book is a philosophical treatise written in Latin and was first published posthumously in 1677. The writing style of *The Ethics* is unique. It is called the Geometrical Method. Spinoza presented his thoughts in the form of Propositions and for each proposition he wrote its proof and other explanations. The book has five parts and their primary topics are as follows:

- I. Concerning God;
- II. Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind;
- III. Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Emotions;
- IV. Of Human Bondage, or the Nature of the Emotions;
- V. Of the Power of the Intellect, or of Human Freedom.

I will try to address all these five topics in this article.

Spinoza’s *The Ethics* is a major contribution to western philosophy. It is read and analysed by students and scholars of philosophy all over the world. The first few parts of his book focus on philosophical issues and concepts. However, toward the end and especially in Part V, Spinoza’s spiritual thoughts become evident. In the title of the article I have called him a God-loving atheist, which may seem paradoxical. I will explain the paradox and discuss his spirituality at the end of the article. Some of his thoughts are similar to Hindu philosophy and spiritual practices. I will point out some of these similarities in various sections. The discussions of Hindu philosophical concepts, which are similar to Spinoza’s views, are presented in ‘italics’.

1. See *Mother India*, September 2009.

All references are from *The Ethics*. An example of the numbering scheme for each reference is as follows: III – 5 will refer to Part III – Proposition 5. A Proposition sometimes is followed by a Scholium, and sometimes other explanations.

Spinoza’s Life in Brief

Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza (1632 to 1677) was a Jew of Portuguese origin, and he lived in Amsterdam, Netherlands. His Portuguese name was Bento. His religious and philosophical views were radically different from those of traditional Judaism although he was taught the teachings of Orthodox Judaism when he was growing up. His father was a businessman and also held a prominent position in a Synagogue in Amsterdam. After his father died, he stayed in Amsterdam for a short period of time. Jewish leaders of Amsterdam came to know of Spinoza’s unorthodox views, and they accused him of being an atheist and a materialist. He was excommunicated by the orthodox Jewish community of Amsterdam. After a few years he left Amsterdam and moved around for a few years. Finally, he settled in The Hague, a city in Netherlands. Spinoza did not marry and led a very simple life. During the latter years of his life Spinoza worked as an optical lens grinder, and made lenses for eyeglasses, microscopes, and telescopes. He studied philosophy and wrote books when he was not working. He suffered from a lung disease, which was caused probably by the inhalation of fine glass dust coming from his lens grinding work. He died in 1677 in The Hague when he was only 45 years old.

Spinoza’s Metaphysical View of God and the World

The traditional views of Judaism and Christianity consider God as a supreme being standing apart from His creation including the people who inhabit the created world. There are two views about the creation of the world and its inhabitants. According to one view God created the world out of pre-existing matter and the other view is that He created the world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). In either case, God does not have any physical or material attribute, and there is an absolute distinction between God and His creation.

The traditional religious view is dualistic as it believes that God is immaterial, and the world is material. Furthermore, the traditional view is that a man’s body and mind are made up of two different substances. Spinoza could not accept these theories of creation. In sharp contrast to the above described views of his time, Spinoza believed that the world is an emanation or manifestation of God. According to him there is nothing but God and that there is only one substance constituting everything. This view is known as ‘substance monism’. He called this substance God, and also Nature. According to him everything in the universe is in God. In Proposition I – 15 he wrote, “whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God”.

According to Spinoza God, or substance, has infinite attributes; however, only two of these attributes can be known by the human intellect. An attribute is that by which we perceive of God, or substance. Attributes represent the essences of substance. Spinoza defined an attribute thus: “By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.” (I – Definitions) There is some ambiguity related to what exactly an attribute is in Spinoza’s philosophy. The two knowable attributes of substance according to Spinoza are ‘extension’ and ‘thought’. The term ‘extension’ represents ‘matter’, which occupies space, and ‘thought’ represents a ‘thinking thing’. Spinoza’s view that extension and thought are attributes of God, or substance, leads to the conclusion that everything within the universe has both material and immaterial aspects. Furthermore, Spinoza’s view that God has an attribute of extension, which represents matter, was daringly different from prevailing views of his time, which believed God to be immaterial. Spinoza frequently used the expression ‘God, or Nature’. Because of his identifying God with Nature, he was considered by many to be an atheist. I should point out that although Spinoza believed that God has an attribute of matter (extension), he did not think that God is corporeal and has a body like a human being.

There is a common notion that Spinoza was a pantheist since he believed that everything in the phenomenal world is made of one substance, which is God. Other ways of expressing this would be to say that God is the inner essence of everything, or God is immanent in the world. A pantheist would also believe that there is nothing beyond the world that we experience. However, according to some scholars, Spinoza believed not only that God is immanent in the world, but also that He exceeds or transcends the world although He is not totally separate from it. This latter concept is known as panentheism. In this context two Latin expressions used by Spinoza are very relevant. In the Scholium of I – 19 he referred to God as *Natura Naturans*, which means ‘nature naturing’ or ‘nature actively expressing’. Spinoza wrote that *Natura Naturans* is “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself”. According to most scholars this represents God’s active/dynamic aspect. The other expression is *Natura Naturata*, or ‘nature natured’, and this expression represents all the manifested things (or modes) which make up the phenomenal world. Spinoza described *Natura Naturata* “as things which are in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God”. It seems reasonable to conclude that *Natura Naturans* is God in itself and is beyond, or more than, *Natura Naturata* although not completely separate. *Natura Naturata* is manifested by God using His own substance. According to this interpretation Spinoza was a panentheist. There can be other interpretations of *Natura Naturans*, and *Natura Naturata*. [This issue of immanence and transcendence is discussed in detail in the book. (Chatterjee, pp. 42, 43)]

Spinoza believed that God does not have a personality. This too is very different from traditional views of Judaism and Christianity, which believe that God has emotions and human beings can have a reciprocal relation with Him. God expects

human beings to love Him and follow His dictates, and in return He also loves them. He answers to prayers. In contrast to these views Spinoza believed that God is an impersonal entity with no emotions and also that God does not love or hate anyone.

There is another interesting aspect of Spinoza's philosophy of God: God does not have free will and that He acts by the necessity of His own nature. Furthermore, God is incapable of changing the course of His actions. Spinoza wrote in I – 29, "Nothing in nature is contingent, but all things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and to act in a definite way." Spinoza believed that there is no hidden purpose for the manifested world. Spinoza also denied that human beings could have free will. According to him all that happen in the world are components of a causal chain, and furthermore everything happens necessarily as it does and could not have happened any other way. These views of Spinoza are very different from those of Judaism and Christianity.

It is interesting to note that Spinoza's monism is compatible with the view of Vedanta, the prominent Hindu philosophy. There is a famous verse in Chandogya Upanishad (Verse 3. 14.3), which says, "Verily, this whole world is Brahman." The Ultimate Reality in Vedanta philosophy is Brahman, and with reference to the manifested world it takes the poise of Atman, or Self, which becomes the inner essence, or substance, of everything that exists. Spinoza's substance is similar to Vedanta's Atman. Vedanta's view of God and the world represents pantheism according to which the phenomenal world is a manifestation of Brahman, but Brahman is more than the world. As I discussed earlier, some scholars believe that Spinoza's view of God and the world also represents pantheism.

[It may be of interest to the readers to know what Albert Einstein thought about Spinoza. Einstein considered himself to be an agnostic. In 1929, Einstein wrote to a Rabbi: "I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and the doings of mankind." Isaacson, Walter (2008). *Einstein: His Life and Universe*. New York: Simon and Schuster, pp. 388-89.]

Individual Human Beings and Mind-Body Interaction

In addition to his broad metaphysical analysis of the world and God, Spinoza examined man as an individual being and analysed his psychology including the issues of mind and body interaction, and emotions. Mind-body interaction is a major topic of the subject area of Philosophy of Mind. Spinoza offered a concept about mind-body interaction, which is different from traditional views which believe that mind and body interact with each other and have cause and effect relationship. According to Spinoza body and mind do not interact causally.

Thus, according to Spinoza God, or substance, has infinite attributes; however,

only two of these attributes can be known by the human intellect — ‘extension’ and ‘thought’. The term ‘extension’ represents ‘matter’, which occupies space, and ‘thought’ represents a ‘thinking thing’. For Spinoza an individual human being is a combination of two modes (modifications) of the two knowable attributes of substance. His body is a mode of the attribute of ‘extension’, and his mind is a mode of the attribute of ‘thought’. Since these two attributes belong to the same substance, the body and mind are not distinctly different or separate entities. They are two aspects of the same substance; they are like two sides of the same coin. Spinoza wrote in II – 7, Scholium, “thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that.” According to Spinoza body and mind are independent of the other, but they are inseparable. There is a connection between them since the underlying substance for both is the same. But this connection is not a causal connection. When a mental event occurs, a corresponding physical effect occurs and vice versa, and their states are perfectly coordinated without any causal interaction between them. For example, if a person experiences grief he may start crying, but the physical event of crying will not be caused by the mental event of feeling the grief. Each event will occur on its own. Spinoza’s explanation of the relation of mind and body is known as ‘parallelism’. Spinoza’s view was very different from the theories of mind-body relation, which are postulated by many other philosophers who believe that mind and body are separable but that they interact causally. I want to make it clear that for Spinoza mind and body are not substances, but they are modes of the two attributes, thought and extension, of one substance, which is the essence of everything. Attributes are links between substance and modes.

According to Spinoza not only human beings, but all objects of the world are modes of the two attributes of extension (matter) and thought (mind). So, everything has a mind however rudimentary it may be. For Spinoza mind is the soul of an object including human beings. This view of Spinoza can be called ‘pan-psychism’. Spinoza also believed that “the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with the body, but something of it remains, which is eternal.” (V – 23) More on this later.

As mentioned earlier, according to Spinoza, God does not have free will and that He acts by the necessity of His own nature. The same law of causality is applicable also to an individual being. He wrote, “In the mind there is no absolute, or free, will. The mind is determined to will this or that by a cause that is likewise determined by another cause, and this again by another, and so *ad infinitum*.” (II – 48) The lack of free will makes it difficult to figure out how a human being can control his emotions, which is a major concern of Spinoza.

Knowledge

Knowledge plays an important role in Spinoza's philosophy. It is important not only for controlling emotions but also for gaining Intellectual Love of God and Blessedness. Spinoza identified three kinds of knowledge. The first kind of knowledge is that which is gained from sense-perception and/or hearsay. The knowledge generated by these sources is superficial and does not convey true knowledge of any thing. This knowledge lacks a rational order and is a source of error and falsity. Spinoza calls this knowledge 'opinion' and 'imagination'. This is also called 'inadequate ideas' in Spinoza's language. Most common people are guided by this kind of knowledge and it is not helpful to control emotions.

The second kind of knowledge is derived from reason. This knowledge is higher than the first kind of knowledge, and it has adequate perception of things. This type of knowledge tries to apprehend the essence of things. It examines the causal connections and tries to understand them. It helps develop 'adequate ideas' (i.e., knowledge) about things in a logical and analytical way, and it tries to explain how and why a thing is what it is. This knowledge is founded on reason, and it empowers the mind and renders it less susceptible to external influences. For example, we feel less saddened by the loss of a good thing when we understand that this loss was inevitable. Similarly, we will be angered less by another person's actions when we understand that he or she could not have done otherwise. The second kind of knowledge helps one gain some control over emotions and passions.

Ordinarily one may think that the second kind of knowledge is the highest kind, but Spinoza identified a higher kind of knowledge, which is his third kind of knowledge. He calls this third kind of knowledge 'intuitive knowledge'. This is acquired without going through any conscious deductive reasoning; hence, it is intuitive. [It is to be noted that Intuition is not the same as instinct.] In attaining the third kind of knowledge, the mind passes to the highest state of perfection that is available to it. As a result, it experiences active joy to the greatest possible degree. From this third kind of knowledge arises the intellectual love of God, which leads to Blessedness.

Thus, to attain freedom we need to free ourselves from reliance on senses and imagination, which constitute the first kind of knowledge. A life of senses and images is a life being affected and led by the objects around us. Instead of that we should rely as much as we can only on our rational faculties, which constitute the second kind of knowledge; and ideally, we should try to possess the third kind of knowledge, which is intuitive knowledge.

It is interesting to note that Spinoza's three types of knowledge are compatible with the views of Hindu philosophy, which include detailed analyses of human psychology. With regard to mental faculties for acquiring knowledge Yoga psychology uses several different terms of which three are pertinent to Spinoza's

thinking. These terms are ‘Manas’, ‘Buddhi’ and ‘Bodhimanas’. Manas is sense-mind and it relies on the physical senses to receive information and form knowledge. Most ordinary persons rely on Manas. However, due to the limitations of sensory organs the knowledge gained by Manas is superficial and likely to be erroneous. Spinoza’s first kind of knowledge corresponds to the knowledge gained through Manas.

Budhhi is a higher faculty than Manas. It represents intellect, which uses reason and discrimination to gain true knowledge. It is less prone to error than Manas. Buddhi corresponds with the second level of knowledge as described by Spinoza. Normally, for common people, Buddhi is considered as the highest level of faculty to gain knowledge, but there are even higher levels of mental faculty, and one of those is Intuition, which in Sanskrit is called Bodhimanas. Intuition does not rely on conscious reasoning or sense perception for understanding. It knows the truth spontaneously. Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge, which is intuitive knowledge, is recognised in Hindu philosophy widely, and most of the highly spiritual persons are known to have possessed intuitive mind, which helped them gain intuitive knowledge. [Sri Aurobindo has explained these terms — Manas, Buddhi, and Intuition in The Synthesis of Yoga.]

Human Emotions and Bondage

At the level of individual human beings Spinoza was very concerned about emotions controlling an individual being’s life, and he believed that most persons are slaves to their emotions or passions. He presented a way for gaining freedom from emotions because that is the way to happiness. To understand his views on this subject we first need to examine his detailed analysis of human emotions. Then we will examine his concepts of bondage to emotions and ways to become free. Spinoza discussed emotions and bondage in Parts III and IV of *The Ethics*. In Part V he focused on the method for gaining ‘freedom of mind, or blessedness’.

It needs to be pointed out that for Spinoza emotions are not only mental states, but they are also physical states corresponding to the mental states. As mentioned, according to Spinoza there is no causal interaction between mind and body. When a mental event occurs, a corresponding physical effect occurs and vice versa, and their states are perfectly coordinated. Spinoza’s explanation of the relation of mind and body is known as ‘parallelism’.

According to Spinoza there are two types of emotions — active and passive. Active emotions are those that are caused by forces within our nature and about which we have adequate ideas. Adequate ideas stand for right kinds of knowledge, which gives our mind the power to act on emotions. Passive emotions are generated by external causes about which our ideas (or knowledge) are inadequate. In the case of passive emotions, we do not understand the causes clearly; and we are acted

upon by emotions. Spinoza called passive emotions as passions. [It should be noted that in our ordinary language passion represents a strong emotion no matter whether it is due to an internal or external cause.]

Spinoza discussed and gave examples of specific emotions that human beings experience. He recognised three primary emotions, which are desire, pleasure, and pain. (III – 11, Scholium) [Some writers use the word ‘joy’ in place of pleasure, and some use the word ‘sadness’ instead of pain.] He also believed that all other emotions spring from these three. Other emotions include love, hatred, hope, humility, pride, and anger; and some of these can cause suffering.

Among the three primary emotions, which are desire, pleasure and pain, two can be either passive or active depending on the cause; and these are desire and pleasure. However, the emotion of pain according to Spinoza is always passive, which means that pain is caused by an external factor or agent only.

Conatus

One concept that plays an important role in Spinoza’s philosophy is that of conatus, which is defined as striving to persevere in being. In addition to recognising conatus as striving that underlies all actions, Spinoza gave it special importance and identified it as a thing’s essence. He wrote that “the conatus with which each thing endeavours to persist in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself”. (III – 7) So conatus is the essence of a human being, and the stronger is this power of self-maintenance the more is the individuality of that particular being. I should point out that animals also have conatus as they also strive for self-preservation.

Conatus is the basis, i.e., underlying support, of all emotions. Spinoza emphasised the close relation of desire with conatus, and he described desire as striving together with consciousness of striving. Desire is one of the primary emotions. I should point out that conatus, or striving for self-preservation, is not an act of free will. I discussed earlier that Spinoza denied that human beings have any will power. It also should be noted that several other philosophers prior to Spinoza and also a few who came after, recognised principles somewhat similar to conatus. However, there are differences between those and Spinoza’s conatus. A comparison of all these variations is beyond the scope of this article.

How to Attain Freedom from Bondage of Emotions

In Spinoza’s view human beings are bound by emotions and they need to find a way to get free. How does Spinoza define bondage? Bondage of human beings for Spinoza is psychological, and it is the condition when a person is subject to emotions that he cannot control. In his own words, “I assign the term ‘bondage’ to man’s lack of power to control and check emotions. For a man at the mercy of his emotions is

not his own master but is subject to fortune, in whose power he so lies that he is often compelled, although he sees the better course, to pursue the worse.” (IV, Preface) He also wrote, “we are in many respects at the mercy of external causes and are tossed about like the waves of the sea when driven by contrary winds, unsure of the outcome and of our fate”. (III – 59, Scholium)

Spinoza wanted to offer ways by which a person can liberate himself from the bondage of emotions. However, Spinoza’s belief that human beings do not have any will power makes it difficult to explain how a person can control passive emotions which are caused by external forces. Most philosophers of his time and also those who preceded him believed in man’s possessing will power. Spinoza referred to the philosophies of Stoics and René Descartes and criticised their views of using will to control emotions. Regarding Descartes he wrote, “Finally I omit all Descartes’ assertions about the will and its freedom, since I have already abundantly demonstrated that they are false. Therefore, since the power of the mind is defined solely by the understanding, . . . we shall determine solely by the knowledge of the mind the remedies for the emotions . . .”. (V, Preface) He also added in V – 3 and its Corollary: “A passive emotion ceases to be a passive emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it. So the more an emotion is known to us, the more it is within our control, and the mind is the less passive in respect of it.”

For Spinoza it is knowledge, and not will, that is the primary faculty of a person for controlling emotions. Spinoza acknowledged that emotions cannot be controlled completely. He believed that only God is completely free since He acts by the necessity of His own nature; but human beings are not capable of doing that. However, although a human being is not capable of acting entirely according to his own nature alone, he can come close to doing that. In other words, men can partially control emotions. In Part V Spinoza presented his thoughts on ways which help one to attain liberty from emotions. He also discussed how the freedom from emotions leads to blessedness.

To achieve release from the bondage of passive emotions a person must have the right kind of knowledge and understand the behaviour of others and himself. Spinoza also said that knowledge and understanding alone may not be sufficient for gaining freedom from passions. We must replace a bad passive emotion by a stronger contrary emotion. In IV – 7 he wrote, “An emotion cannot be checked or destroyed except by a contrary emotion which is stronger than the emotion which is to be checked”. Furthermore, Spinoza recognised that to gain control of passive emotions a person has to follow a disciplined way of life and thinking. In the Scholium of V – 10 he wrote, “. . . the best course we can adopt, as long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our emotions, is to conceive a right method of living, or fixed rules of life, and to commit them to memory and continually apply them to particular situations that are frequently encountered in life. . . .”

Characteristics of a Free and Wise Man

As mentioned before, one of the primary motivations for Spinoza's philosophical studies and analysis of human nature was to find a way for a person to become free from passions and lead a peaceful life. He identified several characteristics of human nature that a free and wise man should possess. Some of these characteristics may be classified in two groups. One will be individual characteristics, and the other will include those related to a person's interactions with others. There may be some overlap of these two.

Spinoza's focus is on knowledge and understanding as the way for attaining freedom from painful emotions. Naturally a wise man possesses knowledge of Nature and its processes, and he also knows that he is as a part of Nature. He understands the true causes of his emotions — his pleasures and pains. This knowledge uses the power of reasoning, and a wise man who is guided by reasoning can control emotions.

Spinoza did not suggest that one should shun pleasure completely. He was in favour of a cheerful disposition. In IV – 41 and IV – 42 he wrote, "Pleasure is not in itself bad. On the other hand, pain is in itself bad. Cheerfulness cannot be excessive; it is always good. On the other hand, melancholy is always bad."

Spinoza's views on a few other personality traits are as follows:

IV – 45. Hatred can never be good.

IV – 55. Extreme pride, or self-abasement, is extreme ignorance of oneself.

Spinoza was not in favour of asceticism. Although he himself led a very simple and austere life, he was not an ascetic. He did not accept some of the gloomy practices and views of Christianity such as self-denial, sin, remorse, and repentance. In IV – 54 he wrote, "Repentance is not a virtue, *i.e.* it does not arise from reason; he who repents for his action is doubly unhappy or weak." Spinoza's view about repentance is contrary to the belief of traditional Judaism and Christianity. In ordinary language, repentance means feeling remorse for wrongdoing. In Judaism repentance is a means for atoning for sins. In Christianity repentance is turning away from sinful life and looking to God for forgiveness, and it is a necessary step towards salvation.

With regard to living with others, Spinoza preached an attitude of understanding. He believed that human beings are a part of Nature and subject to laws of causality. This understanding helps a man see other human beings with whom he interacts in the proper light. Many of our emotions are caused by other persons around us; but a wise man does not let any external cause bother him and does not blame others for his painful emotions. He understands why other persons behave in particular ways. A free and wise man maintains equanimity under all circumstances. His emotions, if any, arise from within and he has full control over them.

Spinoza urged us to live in harmony with others. He wrote in IV – 37: “The good which every man who pursues virtue aims at for himself he will also desire for the rest of mankind, and all the more as he acquires a greater knowledge of God.” He also points out that we should not expect others to agree with us and should not impose our own views on them. In Scholium 1 of IV – 37 he wrote: “He who from emotion alone endeavours that others should love what he himself loves and live according to his way of thinking acts only by impulse, and therefore incurs dislike, especially from those who have different preferences and who therefore also strive and endeavour by that same impulse that others should live according to their way of thinking.”

Another example of Spinoza’s teaching about how to interact with others for maintaining harmony is expressed in IV – 46, which says, “He who lives by the guidance of reason endeavours as far as he can to repay with love and nobility another’s hatred, anger, contempt, etc. towards himself”. It may be noted that this and a few other propositions of Spinoza are compatible with the teachings of Judaism and Christianity.

Toward the end of the Scholium of IV – 73 Spinoza wrote that the true freedom of man is related to his strength of mind. Then he said that “the strong-minded man hates nobody, is angry with nobody, envies nobody, is indignant with nobody, despises nobody, and is no way prone to pride”.

Spinoza’s descriptions of a free and wise man are reminiscent of the descriptions of a man of steady wisdom and also a man who is dear to God that can be found in the Bhagavad Gita. A few verses from the Gita are presented below:

Verse 2 – 56. He whose mind is unperturbed in the midst of misfortune and free from longing in the midst of pleasures, from whom passion, fear and anger have departed, is called a sage of steady insight.

Verses 12 – 18. Alike toward enemy and friend, the same in honour and disgrace, alike in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, freed from attachment, . . . is a beloved man of mine.

Love of God and Immortality of Soul

Although Spinoza was considered by many to be an atheist during his lifetime, he was a very spiritual and God-loving person. His concept of God was different from those of traditional religions, but he believed in God and his feelings for God are evident clearly in Part V of *The Ethics*. For traditional religions that emphasise the personal aspects of God, God has emotions and human beings can have a reciprocal relation with Him. In contrast to these views Spinoza believed that God is an impersonal entity with no emotions and also that God does not love or hate anyone.

These views are presented in V – 17, which says, “God is without passive emotions, and he is not affected with any emotion of pleasure and pain”. The Corollary of this Proposition says, “Strictly speaking God does not love or hate anyone”.

It is interesting that despite his proclaiming that God is impersonal, Spinoza wrote about man’s ‘intellectual love of God’, which is a famous expression of his philosophy. He discussed at length various levels or grades of knowledge, and the highest level of knowledge or the third kind of knowledge, is intuitive, and it does not rely on either sense-perception or reason. Intuitive knowledge perceives the essence of particular things and develops a clear understanding about them. This knowledge helps a person understand that particular things are in God and conceived through God. The clear understanding of particular things leads to a full understanding of God and the idea of God as cause. Proposition V – 24 says, “The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God.” Again, Proposition V – 32 says, “We take pleasure in whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge and this is accompanied by the idea of God as cause”. Intuitive knowledge shows us why things happen in the way they do and that they cannot be otherwise. In Proposition V – 27 he wrote: “From this third kind of knowledge there arises the highest possible contentment of mind”. Then in the Corollary of Proposition V – 32 he wrote that “from the third kind of knowledge there necessarily arises the intellectual love of God”. This love is directed to God and it consists not of joy or passion, but blessedness itself. In the Scholium of Proposition V – 36, Spinoza wrote, “our salvation or blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in the constant and eternal love towards God . . .”. Blessedness leads to spiritual contentment, peace and tranquility. In the Proof of Proposition V – 20 Spinoza wrote, “This love towards God is the highest good that we can aim at according to the dictates of reason.” The same idea is conveyed by Proposition IV – 28, which says, “The mind’s highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind’s highest virtue is to know God.”

I would like to point out that some of the readers of Spinoza’s philosophy think that intellectual love of God is a mystical and esoteric concept, but actually it is not so. Spinoza wanted to distinguish the love of God attained through intuitive knowledge (third kind of knowledge) from the common type of sensual love that exists among human beings. It is interesting and ironic that a person who during his lifetime was called to be an atheist and was excommunicated by the Jewish community of his time, was called to be a “God-Intoxicated Man” by Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg (known as Novalis) (1772-1801).

Finally, I would like to examine one element of Spinoza’s philosophy related to the immortality of the soul, which is complicated because Spinoza’s treatment of this issue in *The Ethics* is somewhat obscure. Spinoza believed that “the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with the body, but something of it remains, which is eternal.” (V – 23) There are several questions related to this statement. What is this ‘something’ that remains after death? Spinoza said that certain faculties

of mind such as imagination and memory exist only when the body is alive. (V – 21) Based on this view it may be concluded that after death one will not remember the past life, and so the mind or soul will lose its individuality. Most scholars believe that the ‘something’ that remains is the thinking essence of mind and that it is not individual. However, Harry Austryn Wolfson, an eminent scholar of Spinoza’s philosophy, believed that the thought element of mind that survives death bears the particular characteristics of the individual during his lifetime. So, he believed that immortality according to Spinoza is personal and individual. (Wolfson, Vol II, p. 295) Another question, which may be raised, is why would not the essence of the body, the attribute of extension, also survive since body and mind are inseparable according to Spinoza? This is a complicated issue. I should point out that traditional Judaism believes in the immortality of soul; however, there are some variations in the belief related to what exactly happens to the soul of a righteous person and that of a wicked person. Neither traditional Judaism nor Christianity believe in the rebirth of a soul.

Closing Comments: Spinoza was a God-Loving Atheist

Spinoza was not only a maverick but also daring. He presented his philosophical concepts knowing that his views did not agree with the existing traditional views of Judaism and Christianity. I have pointed out some of his daring concepts of philosophy in this article. He suffered due to his daring acts as he was excommunicated from the Jewish community where he lived, but he did not try to compromise. His philosophy was much appreciated after he passed away, and today he is ranked among the top philosophers of all time.

Spinoza should be recognised and remembered not only as a philosopher but also for his concern about how common people live their life in the pursuit of sensual pleasures and do not find true peace and happiness. He thought that their efforts to get happiness and peace end up being futile. The underlying motivation for writing his book *The Ethics* was to show how one can live a life without being an ascetic and gain contentment and peace. Many of his thoughts are compatible with those of Hinduism of India. He believed in monism. According to him there is only one principle that underlies and constitutes everything. Vedanta Philosophy of Hinduism agrees with this view. Based on his belief in oneness Spinoza can be called a mystic. Spinoza’s descriptions of a free and wise man are similar to those found in Vedantic literature, namely, the *Bhagavad Gita*, about a man of steady wisdom.

Spinoza was genuinely concerned about how a man can attain contentment and peace. At the very end of his book *The Ethics* he shared his thoughts about a wise man and an ignorant man. I will conclude this essay by quoting a long paragraph from the Scholium of Proposition V – 42.

“I have now completed all that I intended to demonstrate concerning the power of the mind over the emotions and concerning the freedom of the mind. This makes clear how strong a wise man is and how much he surpasses the ignorant man whose motive force is only lust. The ignorant man, besides being driven hither and thither by external causes, never possessing true contentment of spirit, lives as if he were unconscious of himself, God and things, and as soon as he ceases to be passive, he at once ceases to be at all. On the other hand, the wise man, in so far as he is considered as such, suffers scarcely any disturbance of spirit, but being conscious, by virtue of a certain eternal necessity, of himself, of God and of things, never ceases to be, but always possesses true spiritual contentment.”

Spinoza further added, “If the road I have pointed out as leading to this goal seems very difficult, yet it can be found.”

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To have a developed intellect is always helpful if one can enlighten it from above and turn it to divine use.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – IV, CWSA, Vol. 31, p. 59)

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

(Part 21)

(Continued from the issue of November 2021)

Section 2: SIMPLICITY AND AUSTERITY

Sri Aurobindo writes that “pranayam brought me nothing of any kind of spiritual realisation.”¹ Subsequently, sometime in mid 1906, he stopped his pranayama. Alluding to the period after that Sri Aurobindo remarked: “I did not know how to proceed further and was searching for some guidance. Then I met Lele. . . .”² Regarding Lele Sri Aurobindo noted, “after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him.”³

Sri Aurobindo’s meeting with Lele was fortuitous. It all started when Barin felt that the revolutionaries in Maniktala Garden needed a spiritual discipline. Thus he and Upendranath Banerji went to Gujarat in search of a Guru. At Swami Brahmananda’s Ashram they met his disciple and successor, Swami Keshavananda, but were not impressed since he was mainly a Hathayogi. Disappointed, Barin sent Upen back to Calcutta but he himself persevered a little longer. One day, while he was practising *shirshasana* (headstand) a stranger suddenly entered the room and helped him keep the proper posture. When Barin sat up he saw a short, fair, blue-eyed man with a nice aura dressed simply but neatly, crowned with a majestic large white turban. The stranger went away and Barin proceeded to the Chandod railway station and took the train to Navasari where he was to stay in the house of a friend from his Baroda days. When he entered the house he found the same stranger sitting there in a chair. Both were astonished to see each other. Barin narrates:

Then the man asked me, “A man from Bengal, what are you doing in these parts?”

“I seek a Guru.”

“Why?”

“I have taken a vow to accomplish a difficult task, and I have an idea that without God’s help, the task will not be accomplished.”

1. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 237.

2. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 108.

3. CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 716.

“I know everything.”

He knew all about everything to do with our secret society; he had been a member of the Maharashtra branch of it, but had now left it. Then, out of the blue, he said, “Do you seek a guru? Come, take your sadhana from me.”

Taken aback, I asked, “Do you know the way to God?”

“A little, certainly. You take it; you will get from me what you want.”

“When do you want to give initiation?”

“Now.”

“Give, I shall take.”

He took me to an empty room and closed the door. We sat down face to face in the dark. He told me, “Close your eyes, don’t look, don’t think.” After fifteen minutes I opened my eyes at his bidding and saw us sitting as before.

“Did you feel something?”

“No. Felt sleepy.”

“Don’t worry, you will achieve!”⁴

This stranger was none other than Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Lele was a follower of Dattatreya Yoga, a traditional method of yoga in Maharashtra. When Barin asked for a mantra, Lele said that he had no right to give one for he was married and was not a sannyasin, but could give sadhana. Lele then gave Barin a few instructions.⁵ About Barin commencing his yoga with Lele, Sri Aurobindo said:

I heard that when he [Barin] had begun yoga he had an experience of *kāmānanda*. Lele was surprised to hear about it. For he said that experience comes usually at the end. It is a descent like any other experience but unless one’s sex centre is sufficiently controlled it may produce bad results such as emission and other disturbances.⁶

At the historic Surat Congress Conference Sri Aurobindo asked Barin if he knew anyone who could help him in his Yoga; “Barin knew of Lele who was in Gwalior. He wired him and asked him to meet us at Baroda,” said Sri Aurobindo.⁷ On receipt of the telegram Lele had an intuition that he would be giving initiation to a very great soul. On 31st December, 1907, Sri Aurobindo, Barin and Sakaria Baba left Surat by train for Baroda.

Sakaria Baba was once Barin’s guru. He had fought alongside the Rani of Jhansi in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. When the Rani died on the battlefield he was one of those who carried her body and put it on the funeral pyre. It was this great

4. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 435-36.

5. See *Ibid*.

6. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 567.

7. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 953.

sorrow that made him become a sannyasin.⁸ When an attempt was made to organise Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Bhawani Mandir’ scheme in 1905, K. G. Deshpande and Charu Chandra Dutt went to meet Sakaria Baba at his Ashram at Chharodi near the banks of the Narmada with the purpose of convincing him to stay with the revolutionaries. The Baba was unwilling as he had to look after his *Math* but when C. C. Dutt mentioned that Sri Aurobindo would be disappointed to hear about his unavailability the Baba changed his mind, “All right, tell him that I shall come and live with you three months every year.” Later in end December 1907 Barin brought the Baba for the Congress conference where he was deeply impressed by the nationalists.⁹ Sri Aurobindo has mentioned that Sakaria Swami had Yogic control and had once had held out his hand to a rabid dog and after being bitten stopped the poison going into the system by localising it. Twelve years thence, when the Surat Congress was over, he got excited, thus losing control, and the poison spread in his body. He got hydrophobia and couldn’t drink water. He said, “What is this nonsense? I, who was a trooper in the Mutiny and drank water from puddles, can’t drink water?” He drank the water and died.¹⁰

The news of Sri Aurobindo’s impending visit from Surat spread at Baroda. Principal of Baroda College, Mr. Clarke, issued orders to the students that they were not to meet Sri Aurobindo. Nevertheless, as soon as Sri Aurobindo passed the College the students enthusiastically rushed out, unharnessed the horses and pulled his carriage towards the house of Khaserao Jadhav where he and Barin were to stay as guests. Later Sri Aurobindo delivered three speeches and several of his students eagerly attended, in spite of Principal Clarke’s orders to the contrary — A. B. Purani attended these meetings and reminisced that the speeches “not only took the audience by storm but also changed the course of many lives.”¹¹ It was 8 a.m. when Sri Aurobindo reached Khaserao’s house and immediately after, he met Lele for half an hour — it was only after this that Sri Aurobindo went to the palace to meet the Maharaja.

When Lele departed, Barin asked Sri Aurobindo about his impressions; he succinctly replied, “Lele is a wonderful Yogi.”¹² Sri Aurobindo later stated that Lele was “a bhakta with a limited mind but some experience and evocative power,”¹³ and further elaborated, “It is not the human defects of the Guru that can stand in the way when there is the psychic opening, confidence and surrender. . . . In my own case I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or

8. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 159.

9. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, pp. 212-13.

10. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 362.

11. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 14.

12. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 438.

13. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 239.

supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance.”¹⁴

Sri Aurobindo told Lele that he wanted to do Yoga for his political work and not for leaving life. Lele replied: “It should be easy for you as you are a poet.”¹⁵ Since Sri Aurobindo was not willing to retire from politics, Lele asked him to suspend it for a few days. Thereafter for three days they were alone, meditating in the top-floor room of Sardar Majumdar’s house. Barin records:

At that time nothing was more difficult than this to arrange. Aurobindo had become the idol of the nation and a wonderful halo surrounded him producing a mysterious magnetic attraction for him in the hearts of our young men. Anybody who was in national work anywhere, and needed help sought his advice and guidance. Day in and day out, crowds surrounded our house and programmes of public meetings were arranged for him.

Lele suddenly spirited Aurobindo away from the midst of all this commotion to a lonely old place tucked away in the heart of the city. There, day in and day out, the two of them sat wrapped in deep meditation facing each other. Their simple needs were looked after by Vishnu Bhaskar’s wife, a matriculate girl of small stature and of very subdued nature.

. . . days passed almost in continuous and silent meditation while batches of young men traversed the town in search of their newly-found leader who had so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from among them upsetting all their crowded programmes and arrangements. When Aurobindo was at last permitted to come out and attend a meeting in the famous gymnasium there among his ardent admirers, a great and abiding peace had descended on him which from thence forward formed the basis of all his future Sadhana.¹⁶

At his meditation with Lele, Sri Aurobindo suddenly and unexpectedly got the Brahman experience. He writes, “Then in three days I got an experience which most Yogis get only at the end of a long Yoga,”¹⁷ which he called a “decisive experience of liberation and Nirvana.”¹⁸ Indeed, to a disciple Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Such a realisation of the personal Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not usually come at the beginning of a sadhana or in the first years or for many years. It comes so to a very few; mine came fifteen years

14. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

15. *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, p. 716.

16. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, pp. 361-62.

17. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 237.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

after my first pre-Yogic experience in London and in the fifth year after I started Yoga. That I consider extraordinarily quick, an express train speed almost — though there may no doubt have been several quicker achievements.¹⁹

Sri Aurobindo’s experiences were so radical that Lele himself was perplexed. Sri Aurobindo writes:

He himself was astonished and said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper. The result was a series of transmuting experiences of such a radical character that he was unable to follow and had to tell me to give myself up in future to the Guide within with the same completeness of surrender as I had shown to the human channel.²⁰

Sri Aurobindo had the realisation of Nirvana and called it “the pure experience of the Self.”²¹ He told his disciples that he “experienced the silent Brahmic consciousness, and all things and events of the world appeared only as names and forms — mere Maya.”²² Sri Aurobindo remarked, “One has to get rid of all attachments and all personalities before Nirvana can come,”²³ and that Nirvana “is a necessary experience in order to get rid of the nature-personality which is subject to ignorance. You cease to be the small individual ego . . . To get rid of the separative personality in nature Nirvana is a powerful experience.”²⁴ Besides the annihilation of the ego there is pervasion of an indescribable peace, profound silence and a vast freedom. He describes this ethereal treasured event:

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world . . . There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. . . what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. . . it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.²⁵

19. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

22. *Sri Aurobindo’s Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 57.

23. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 161.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

25. CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 249-50.

Sri Aurobindo reaffirms how the ego disappeared and Nirvana became the foundation of an eternal peace and freedom within:

There was an entire silence of thought and feeling and all the ordinary movements of consciousness except the perception and recognition of things around without any accompanying concept or other reaction. The sense of ego disappeared and the movements of the ordinary life as well as speech and action were carried on by some habitual activity of Prakriti alone which was not felt as belonging to oneself. But the perception which remained saw all things as utterly unreal; this sense of unreality was overwhelming and universal. Only some undefinable Reality was perceived as true which was beyond space and time . . . the inner peace and freedom which resulted from this realisation remained permanently behind all surface movements and the essence of the realisation itself was not lost.²⁶

Sri Aurobindo writes that Nirvana is one aspect of the Self or Brahman:

The first realisation of the Self or Brahman is often a realisation of something that separates itself from all form, name, action, movement, exists in itself only, regarding the cosmos as only a mass of cinematographic shapes unsubstantial and empty of reality. That was my own first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self. That does not mean a wall between Self and Brahman, but a scission between the essential self-existence and the manifested world.²⁷

Sri Aurobindo once explained to his disciples that there are many forms of the Brahman consciousness:

I entered the Brahman consciousness in three days, but for the Supramental it took a decade. There are many forms of the Brahman consciousness — the Shanti form, the Ananda form. All the movements of the world appear to be mere names and forms — there is no movement of the vital, the mind is abolished, and there is perfect peace and Ananda. One can remain there eternally without caring for anything else. I came out because I got the command from above.²⁸

On the process of silencing his mind Sri Aurobindo writes:

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

28. *Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed., 2020, pp. 218-19.

There are in fact several ways. My own way was by rejection of thought. “Sit down,” I was told, “look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back.” I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside.

In three days — really in one — my mind became full of an eternal silence — it is still there. But that I don’t know how many people can do. . . .

The usual way, the easiest if one can manage it at all, is to *call down* the silence from above you into the brain, mind and body.²⁹

So powerful was this realisation that even in his hectic political activity the inner silence remained. “In the condition of absolute inner silence I was making speeches and conducting a newspaper, but all that got itself done without any thought entering my mind or the silence being in the least disturbed or diminished,”³⁰ he writes. For he mentions, “Nirvana is nothing but the peace and freedom of the Spirit which can exist in itself, be there world or no world, world-order or world-disorder.”³¹ With this “condition of silence of the mind,” which “he kept for many months and indeed always thereafter,”³² Sri Aurobindo produced, in a very short time, myriad writings; a task perhaps impossible to match for any writer in terms of quantity and quality. On action that stems from a silent mind, Sri Aurobindo notes:

A calm or silence which can support or produce action — that I know and that is what I have had — the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for four months and wrote 6½ volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc. etc. I have written since.³³

Sri Aurobindo notes: “Since 1908 when I got the silence, I never think with my head or brain — it is always in the wideness generally above the head that the thoughts occur.”³⁴ In a conversation with his attendants Sri Aurobindo expanded on this:

Thoughts and suggestions come to me from every side and I don’t refuse them. I accept them and see what they are like. But if you mean thinking, I

29. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 247.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

31. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 456.

32. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 111.

33. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 346.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

never do that. Thinking ceased a long time ago — it has stopped ever since that experience of mine with Lele, the Silence and Nirvana at Baroda. Thoughts, as I said, come to me from all sides and from above and the receptive mind remains quiet or it enlarges itself to receive them. True thoughts always come in this way. You can't think out such thoughts. If you try to do so, you only make what the Mother calls mental constructions. . . .

It is a great relief to get out of the responsibility . . . of thinking about everything. Some thoughts are given, some are reflected from above. It is not that I don't look for knowledge. When I want knowledge, I call for it. The higher faculty sees thoughts as if they were written on a wall.³⁵

The significance of Sri Aurobindo's meeting with Lele was not only his realisation of the Brahman but also how it impacted his Yoga thenceforth. About Nirvana he writes that “in my case it was the first positive spiritual experience and it made possible all the rest of the sadhana”.³⁶ He expounds:

I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. . . . Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. . . . It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self!³⁷

Finally, Sri Aurobindo noted:

Lele finally told him to put himself entirely into the hands of the Divine within and move only as he was moved and then he would need no instructions either from Lele himself or anyone else. This henceforward became the whole foundation and principle of Sri Aurobindo's sadhana.³⁸

After attaining the Nirvanic silence Sri Aurobindo proceeded on a two-week political tour to deliver a number of speeches in several cities and towns in Maha-

35. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 12-13.

36. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 247.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

38. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 91.

rashtra. At Bombay Sri Aurobindo had a Vedantic experience, he “saw the whole busy movements of Bombay city as a picture in a cinema show — all unreal, shadowy,”³⁹ later articulated in the poem ‘Nirvana’. Sri Aurobindo was then to address a large gathering on the 19th January, 1908, at Bombay National Union. As he was in a silent thought-free consciousness he sought Lele’s guidance. “He asked me to pray. But I was absorbed in the silent Brahman and so I told him I was not in a mood to pray. Then he said he and some others would pray and I should simply go to the meeting and make Namaskar to the audience as Narayana, the all-pervading Divine, and then a voice would speak through me,” said Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁰ Sri Aurobindo also noted:

Lele told him to make namaskar to the audience and wait and speech would come to him from some other source than the mind. So in fact, the speech came, and ever since all speech, writing, thought and outward activity have so come to him from the same source above the brain-mind.⁴¹

Regarding the above experience Sri Aurobindo remarked: “That was my second experience from Lele. It also shows that he had the power to give yogic experience to others.”⁴² Lele was a Yogi of some substance for whilst alluding to his first experience also Sri Aurobindo said: “Evidently he had something in him and it was he who opened up and gave me the silence experience after my failure to advance further. Only, he wanted me to follow his path. He didn’t want me to have the Nirvanic experience.”⁴³

Before their parting Sri Aurobindo asked Lele for instructions on sadhana. He had told Lele that a Mantra had arisen in his heart and was told that the Mantra was from the Divine and to surrender to Him and He would do everything. Some months later Lele came to Calcutta and stayed with Sri Aurobindo. When he learnt that Sri Aurobindo was not following his advice of meditating twice a day, he blurted out, “Ah, the devil has got hold of you.” He then gave some instructions which Sri Aurobindo did not follow since by then he had received an inner command that a Guru was not necessary. A miffed Lele walked out without realising that Sri Aurobindo was practically meditating the whole day.⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo encapsulates:

39. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 316.

40. *Ibid.*

41. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 111.

42. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 316.

43. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 954.

44. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 316; See Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, pp. 953-54.

The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will, a principle or rather a seed-force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or system or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the Devil that had got hold of me.⁴⁵

At the time of his departure there were other disappointments too in store for Lele. Actually it was Barin who had invited Lele to Calcutta in the last week of February 1908 and put him up at Scott’s Lane with Sri Aurobindo, Mrinalini Devi, Sarojini and Abinash Bhattacharya. Barin hoped that Lele would initiate Yoga to the young revolutionaries at the Manicktolla Garden in order to garner inner strength to fulfil their political agenda. Lele, however, felt that some of the revolutionaries were excellent material for Yoga and tried to convince them to abandon their dangerous mission and take up the path of sadhana. At least two youths were interested. One of them was Upendranath Banerji. Referring to Lele as the Sadhu he writes:

Said the Sadhu: “Look, boys, I know what I am saying. The goal of your activities will be reached, but not through the method you have chosen. I have come to know this through twenty years of my Sadhana. Such will be the situation all around that the country will spontaneously come under your charge. All you have to do is to formulate a scheme for administration. Let some of you come with me. Should your Sadhana fail to yield any direct result, you could come back.”

After the Sadhu left us for the day, we had a serious exchange of arguments among us. Barin shrugged violently and said, “Impossible! I will never give up the work. Redeeming India without bloodshed! — that is a ridiculous dream of his! I accept his other propositions but not this one!”

But my mind had been sufficiently softened by the Sadhu. What’s wrong with giving his proposal a trial? . . . I took a decision to follow the Sadhu, accompanied by one or two boys. Once again the Sadhu came to persuade Barin, but Barin never had the good habit of listening to any advice. The desperate Sadhu told him at last, “Look here, terrible danger will befall you, before long, if you do not give up this path!”

45. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 240.

Said Barin, waving his arms, “They will hang us, is that all? But aren’t we ready to face that?”

“What will happen is worse than death!” said the Sadhu with a shrug.

The dialogue ended. The Sadhu decided upon the date of his return. But as the day neared, my feet, it seemed, refused to leave the Gardens. It had not been very difficult to desert my wife and son and my home, but how could I escape from these youths who had come leaving behind them the love of their parents, the prospects for their future and had given up all attachment to their life? . . . The appointed day came but I could not accompany the Sadhu.⁴⁶

Sri Aurobindo has also referred to this interaction between Barin and Lele. He told his attendants:

You know he was Lele’s disciple. Once he took Lele to Calcutta among the young people of the secret society. Lele did not know that they were revolutionaries. One day Barin took him into the garden where they were practising shooting. As soon as Lele saw it he understood the nature of the movement and asked Barin to give it up. If Barin did not listen to him, Lele said, he would fall into a ditch — and he did fall.⁴⁷

Like Barin, Abinash Bhattacharya was concerned that Lele was trying to convert the young boys from revolutionaries into sadhaks, especially his Chief was getting immersed in Yoga. He writes:

Lele Maharaj was settling in more and more securely. I sensed disaster — was terribly upset — imagined all our plans would come to grief. I went to the garden-house and secretly told Barin and Upen everything. How could we divert Aurobindo from this path? . . .

I was constantly thinking about how to get rid of Lele Maharaj. It would be unthinkable for me to slight someone who was Aurobindo-babu’s guide in the practice of yoga. . . .

Unable to contain myself, I blurted out to Lele Maharaj: “You won’t be satisfied until you have wrecked everything. When are you going to get out of here?” Smiling he said: Your resolution will be fulfilled. The freedom of India is imminent but it will not come by the path you are following. Believe me.”

“What do you mean by imminent?”

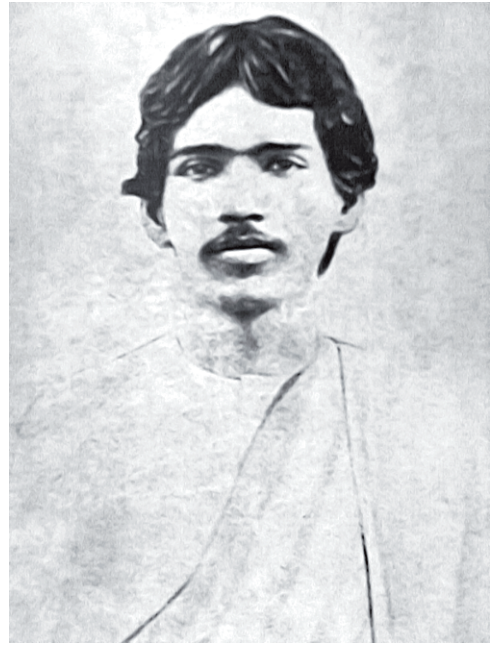
“Fifty years or so.”

46. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, pp. 388-89 (Upendranath Banerji, ‘*Nirbasiter Atmakatha*’; translated from Bengali).

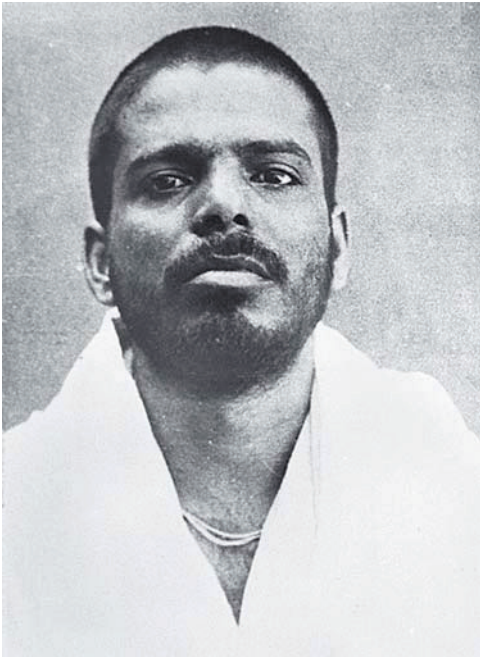
47. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 566.



Vishnu Bhaskar Lele



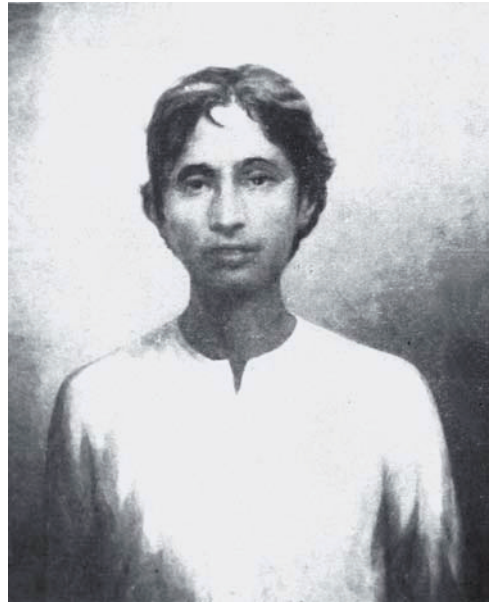
Barindra Kumar Ghose



Upendra Nath Banerjee



Prafulla Chaki



Khudiram Bose



Abinash Chandra Bhattacharji

“My God! Fifty years! No, no, that’s impossible. At the most ten years. We can’t wait any longer.” Patting my back, he told me: “One day, you too will take this path.”

“We are passionate people, we don’t want to hear about all that.”

“You will have to listen, you will have to follow this path.”⁴⁸

Lele’s other disappointment at the time of his departure from Scott’s Lane was that Prafulla Chaki, who had the capacity to go into deep trance and was willing to accompany Lele to learn Yoga, was persuaded by Upendranath to abandon Lele precisely at the very last minute. Prafulla was already part of two unsuccessful conspiracy plots, where he was to execute the assassination of Bampfylde Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal, notorious for arousing communal feelings amongst the people. Prafulla used to tell the Manicktolla revolutionaries, “I for one am not going to live on if they get hold of me. I shall neither be tortured by the police nor will I let their offers of confession tempt me. Look, this is the way I am going to finish myself.” He would then open wide his mouth, push in the revolver muzzle and press the trigger.⁴⁹ Later Barin, obsessed with the idea of killing the ruthless Magistrate, Douglas Kingsford, chose Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose to execute the plan. On the night of 30th April 1908 at Muzzafarpore their bomb, in a case of mistaken identity, killed two ladies instead of Kingsford. They went their own way to escape capture. The next day, at the time of being arrested, Prafulla, true to his word, heroically shot himself dead. The Mother was told about Prafulla: “When he saw escape was impossible, he told the police officer, who was an Indian, ‘Are you not ashamed to catch a patriot and become a traitor to the country? But I shall not allow your sinful hands to catch me.’ So saying, he took out his revolver and shot himself through the mouth.” The Mother remarked, “Well said, well said. Yes, what he said was perfectly true.”⁵⁰

Nirodbaran once mentioned Prafulla Chaki’s character to Sri Aurobindo:

Just to test him Charu [CharuChandra Dutt] said to Chaki, “Prafulla, what do you think about our leaders who are remaining safe behind the scene while putting you young people in danger?” Chaki suddenly clasped Charu’s feet and said, “Are you testing me? My duty is to do what I am commanded.” “Such was the material,” Charu said, “first-rate boys and, added to everything else, the yogic force made them remarkable.” It seems Barin was giving them spiritual training.

48. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, pp. 531-32.

49. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 7, 1st Ed., 1978, p. 344.

50. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, pp. 22-23.

Sri Aurobindo then replied:

It was Lele who gave them the initiation into Yoga. Barin called down Lele from Bombay for that purpose.”⁵¹

The other fearless patriot Khudiram was also arrested the next day and subsequently hanged. A day later, 2nd May, the police arrested several revolutionaries including Barin at Manicktolla Garden and Sri Aurobindo from his 48, Grey Street residence. Thus commenced the Alipore Bomb Case. Tilak in his newspaper *Kesari*, defended the two young men which led to his arrest on charges of sedition, followed by a six-year jail sentence in Burma. Incidentally, Khudiram was a political associate of Satyen Bose, a nephew of Sri Aurobindo’s grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose. Sri Aurobindo on a visit to Midnapore had met Khudiram, probably through Satyen Bose. Soon after, Khudiram fell so seriously ill that his friends almost lost hope of his survival but he kept his faith telling them that since he has been blessed by Sri Aurobindo, “no ordinary illness could bring about his death”.⁵²

To come back to Lele Sri Aurobindo acknowledged that he “never asked for help except from Lele.”⁵³ And on silencing his mind Sri Aurobindo noted: “It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this.”⁵⁴ Further, to the Editor of the *Sunday Times* he wrote that “the only help he received was from the Maharashtrian Yogi, Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, who instructed him how to reach complete silence of the mind and immobility of the whole consciousness.”⁵⁵ As regards his Yoga after parting ways with Lele, Sri Aurobindo writes:

I may add in explanation that from the time I left Lele at Bombay after the Surat Congress and my stay with him in Baroda, Poona and Bombay, I had accepted the rule of following the inner guidance implicitly and moving only as I was moved by the Divine. The spiritual development during the year in jail had turned this into an absolute law of the being. This accounts for my immediate action in obedience to the adesh received by me.⁵⁶

The adesh that Sri Aurobindo refers to, in his words, is: “I suddenly received a command from above in a Voice well known to me, in the three words; ‘Go to Chandernagore’ . . . Afterwards, under the same ‘sailing orders’, I left Chandernagore and reached Pondicherry on April 4th 1910.”⁵⁷

51. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. I, 2009, pp. 500-01.

52. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 396.

53. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 95.

54. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 244.

55. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 91.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

Incidentally, despite parting with Sri Aurobindo in a huff, Lele later wanted to come to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo as is apparent from a fragment of a draft of a letter written by Sri Aurobindo that was to be sent by his secretary:

He has removed from his immediate surroundings all who are out of harmony with the atmosphere necessary to the yogic quietude. He sees no one and receives no visits. His friends in Madras do not see him when they come. Even his old guru Vishnu Lele who proposed to come here at this time has been requested to postpone indefinitely his visit.⁵⁸

Sri Aurobindo has stated, “calm and peace in the whole being are the necessary foundation of all siddhi.”⁵⁹

He explains the necessity of quietening the mind:

. . . the control of one’s thoughts is as necessary as the control of one’s vital desires and passions or the control of the movements of one’s body — for the Yoga, and not for the Yoga only. One cannot be a fully developed mental being even, if one has not control of the thoughts, is not their observer, judge, master, — the mental Purusha, *manomaya purusa*, *sāksī*, *anumantā*, *īśvara*. It is no more proper for the mental being to be the tennis ball of unruly and uncontrollable thoughts than to be a rudderless ship in the storm of the desires and passions or a slave of either the inertia or the impulses of the body. I know it is more difficult because man being primarily a creature of mental Prakriti identifies himself with the movements of his mind and cannot at once dissociate himself and stand free from the swirl and eddies of the mind whirlpool. It is comparatively easy for him to put a control on his body, at least a certain part of its movements: it is less easy but still very possible after a struggle to put a mental control on his vital impulsions and desires; but to sit, like the Tantrik Yogi on the river, above the whirlpool of his thoughts is less facile. Nevertheless it can be done; all developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *svārājya*.

The Yogi goes still farther; he is not only a master there, but even while in mind in a way, he gets out of it, as it were, and stands above or quite back from it and free. For him the image of the factory of thoughts is no longer quite

58. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

59. *Ibid.*, Vol. 31, p. 139.

valid; for he sees that thoughts come from outside, from the universal Mind or universal Nature, sometimes formed and distinct, sometimes unformed and then they are given shape somewhere in us. The principal business of our mind is either a response of acceptance or refusal to these thought-waves (as also vital waves, subtle physical energy waves) or this giving a personal-mental form to thought-stuff (or vital movements) from the enviroing Nature-Force. It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. “Sit in meditation,” he said, “but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can enter throw them away from you till your mind is capable of entire silence.” I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think of either questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw a thought and then another thought coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought or a labourer in a thought-factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free too to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.⁶⁰

Sri Aurobindo reiterates that “The basis of your Sadhana must be silence and quiet,”⁶¹ and “The first thing a Yogi should have is a constant inner peace and quiet and no excitement, no clamour of desires which he cannot control.”⁶² He underlines the significance of quietness and silence: “When the mind is silent, there is peace and in peace all things that are divine can come.”⁶³ He adds: “When there is not the mind, there is the Self which is greater than the mind,”⁶⁴ Elsewhere he notes, “But the silence is necessary; in the silence and not in the thought we shall find the Self”.⁶⁵

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given us ample guidance on the methods to quieten the mind and we reproduce some of these in an appendix at the end of the article.

Sri Aurobindo’s yoga was not a form of asceticism or Puritanism. He remarked that “a solitary salvation leaving the world to its fate was felt as almost distasteful.”⁶⁶

60. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, pp. 243-44.

61. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 208.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 519.

63. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 162.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 355.

66. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 107.

He always stressed on the importance of Karmayoga. In the *Karmayogin* he writes:

. . . those who reverence and believe in the high things of Hinduism have the impression that one must remove oneself from a full human activity in order to live the spiritual life. Yet the spiritual life finds its most potent expression in the man who lives the ordinary life of men in the strength of the Yoga and under the law of the Vedanta. It is by such a union of the inner life and the outer that mankind will eventually be lifted up and become mighty and divine.⁶⁷

And to a disciple he wrote:

I have not written the history of my sadhana — if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation — well, there would have been no sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.⁶⁸

Even after Sri Aurobindo went into seclusion from November 1926 he ceaselessly worked for the upliftment of mankind. To a disciple he wrote:

I believe I have as many hours of hard external work to do as almost anyone in the Asram and I am not aware that I have any leisure or spend even the very short time I have for concentration in a blissful quietism communing with the silent Brahman. Even my concentration is of the nature of action and it is not an airy quietistic contemplation as your informants seem to imagine.⁶⁹

Sri Aurobindo felt that India, over a period of her history, lost her vitality because of the influence of Shankara’s philosophy with its emphasis on asceticism. This was one of the principal reasons that India was finally subjugated by the British. In a conversation he explains this loss of vitality:

The Hindus lost their vitality in the same way as the Greeks — they became too civilised: they forcibly suppressed the vital by the mental: at every turn, the movement of life was hampered by rules and orders. Then again, the teaching of asceticism and Mayavada did immense harm. The attempt to push Mayavada upon a whole people resulted in its losing all zest for life. The higher movements of life were choked and the vital being, thus suppressed, began to move in narrow channels — family, service, and so forth. People were not attracted by the higher play of life.

67. *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 9.

68. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 224.

69. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 261.

Mayavada is all right for a limited few who by their nature are capable of deriving some benefit from it, but it should not have been preached so vigorously to the masses. . . . People did not embrace Mayavada, but all the same they were sufficiently influenced by it to lose all zest for life and work.

Then there were the Pundits who through their Shastras tried to put all sorts of restrictions on life. Thus the Brahmin Pundits and the ascetic philosophers crushed vitality out of the Hindus. Our work is to recreate that life.⁷⁰

In *A Defence of Indian Culture* Sri Aurobindo observed that ancient India’s intrinsic culture of spirituality never negated life, for that too was a manifestation of Brahman. Later, however, for about two thousand years, the asceticism of Buddhism and Shankara’s Mayavada brought about a decline in India’s vitality. He then offers us hope that India presently is regaining her truer and deeper spiritual heritage:

There has been indeed from early times in the Indian mind a certain strain, a tendency towards a lofty and austere exaggeration in the direction taken by Buddhism and Mayavada. . . . But the European critic very ordinarily labours under the idea that this exaggeration in the direction of negating life was actually the whole of Indian thought and sentiment or the one undisputed governing idea of the culture. Nothing could be more false and inaccurate. The early Vedic religion did not deny, but laid a full emphasis on life. The Upanishads did not deny life, but held that the world is a manifestation of the Eternal, of Brahman, all here is Brahman, all is in the Spirit and the Spirit is in all, the self-existent Spirit has become all these things and creatures; life too is Brahman, the life-force is the very basis of our existence, the life-spirit Vayu is the manifest and evident Eternal, *pratyaksam brahma*. But it affirmed that the present way of existence of man is not the highest or the whole; his outward mind and life are not all his being; to be fulfilled and perfect he has to grow out of his physical and mental ignorance into spiritual self-knowledge.

Buddhism arrived at a later stage and seized on one side of these ancient teachings to make a sharp spiritual and intellectual opposition between the impermanence of life and the permanence of the Eternal which brought to a head and made a gospel of the ascetic exaggeration. But the synthetic Hindu mind struggled against this negation and finally threw out Buddhism, though not without contracting an increased bias in this direction. That bias came to its height in the philosophy of Shankara, his theory of Maya, which put its powerful imprint on the Indian mind and, coinciding with a progressive decline in the full vitality of the race, did tend for a time to fix a pessimistic and negative

70. *Sri Aurobindo’s Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed. 2020, pp. 40-41.

view of terrestrial life and distort the larger Indian ideal. But his theory is not at all a necessary deduction from the great Vedantic authorities, the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Gita, and was always combated by other Vedantic philosophies and religions which drew from them and from spiritual experience very different conclusions. At the present time, in spite of a temporary exaltation of Shankara’s philosophy, the most vital movements of Indian thought and religion are moving again towards the synthesis of spirituality and life which was an essential part of the ancient Indian ideal.⁷¹

In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo reiterates the effects of Buddhism on India’s life-force:

It is this revolt of Spirit against Matter that for two thousand years, since Buddhism disturbed the balance of the old Aryan world, has dominated increasingly the Indian mind. . . . But all have lived in the shadow of the great Refusal and the final end of life for all is the garb of the ascetic.⁷²

Also in *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo contrasts the materialism of the West and the asceticism of India. He explains the downside of these extreme positions:

In Europe and in India, respectively, the negation of the materialist and the refusal of the ascetic have sought to assert themselves as the sole truth and to dominate the conception of Life. In India, if the result has been a great heaping up of the treasures of the Spirit, — or of some of them, — it has also been a great bankruptcy of Life; in Europe, the fullness of riches and the triumphant mastery of this world’s powers and possessions have progressed towards an equal bankruptcy in the things of the Spirit.⁷³

On the subject of escaping into Nirvana or Moksha, the Mother commented:

Sri Aurobindo does not belong to history; he is outside and beyond history.

Till the birth of Sri Aurobindo, religions and spiritualities were always centred on past figures, and they were showing as “the goal” the negation of life upon earth. So, you had a choice between two alternatives: either

— a life *in* this world with its round of petty pleasures and pains, joys and sufferings, threatened by hell if you were not behaving properly, or

— an escape *into* another world, heaven, nirvana, moksha. . . .

71. CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 239-40.

72. *Ibid.*, Vol. 21, p. 26.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Between these two there is nothing much to choose, they are equally bad.

Sri Aurobindo has told us that this was a fundamental mistake which accounts for the weakness and degradation of India. Buddhism, Jainism, Illusionism were sufficient to sap all energy out of the country.

True, India is the only place in the world which is still aware that something else than Matter exists. The other countries have quite forgotten it: Europe, America and elsewhere. . . .

Sri Aurobindo has shown that the truth does not lie in running away from earthly life but in remaining *in it*, to *transform it*, *divinise it*, so that the Divine can manifest HERE, in this PHYSICAL WORLD.⁷⁴

Ever since returning to India Sri Aurobindo’s life, unlike some other yogis, was not divorced from the material world. He states:

My own life and my Yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side. All human interests are, I suppose, this-worldly and most of them have entered into my mental field and some, like politics, into my life, but at the same time, since I set foot on Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and intimate bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them. For me all is the Brahman and I find the Divine everywhere. Everyone has the right to throw away this-worldliness and choose other-worldliness only and if he finds peace by that choice he is greatly blessed. I, personally, have not found it necessary to do this in order to have peace. In my Yoga also I found myself moved to include both worlds in my purview, the spiritual and the material, and to try to establish the divine Consciousness and the divine Power in men’s hearts and in earthly life, not for personal salvation only but for a life divine here.⁷⁵

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

* * *

74. CWM, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., pp. 210-11.

75. CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 233-34.

Appendix:

How to quieten the mind

One must learn to concentrate one’s energies in the heart — then, when one succeeds in that, silence comes automatically.⁷⁶

*

Do you think that solely through an intense aspiration one can gain silence of the whole being and do sadhana by that silence?

Yes.⁷⁷

*

The more the psychic spreads in the outer being, the more all these things [*the mechanical activities of the subconscious mind*] fall quiet. That is the best way. Direct efforts to still the mind are a difficult method.⁷⁸

*

Peace is never easy to get in the life of the world and never constant, unless one lives deep within and bears the external activities as only a surface front of our being.⁷⁹

*

The Mother’s Peace is above you — by aspiration and quiet self-opening it descends. When it takes hold of the vital and the body, then equanimity becomes easy and in the end automatic.⁸⁰

*

76. *CWM*, Vol. 16, 2nd Ed., p. 309.

77. *Ibid.*, Vol. 17, 2nd Ed., p. 20.

78. *CWSA*, Vol. 29, p. 315.

79. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 194.

80. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, pp. 135-36.

When the consciousness is filled with the Mother’s force, then there is the condition you speak of as felt in the head — a solid block, compact, silent, free from all random thoughts and movements. But this can be felt not only in the head, but in all the body and also in all the consciousness above, around and below the body.⁸¹

*

I have said that the most decisive way for the Peace or the Silence to come is by a descent from above. . . . all that belongs to the higher consciousness comes from above, not only the spiritual peace and silence, but the Light, the Power, the Knowledge, the higher seeing and thought, the Ananda come from above. It is also possible that up to a certain point they may come from within, but this is because the psychic being is open to them directly and they come first there and then reveal themselves in the rest of the being from the psychic or by its coming into the front. . . . That is why in this Yoga we insist always on an “opening” — an opening inwards of the inner mind, vital, physical to the inmost part of us, the psychic, and an opening upwards to what is above the mind — as indispensable for the fruits of the sadhana.⁸²

*

The silence descends into the inner being first — as also other things from the higher consciousness. One can become aware of this inner being, calm, silent, strong, untouched by the movements of Nature, full of knowledge or light, and at the same time be aware of another lesser being, the small personality on the surface which is made up of the movements of Nature or else still subject to them or else, if not subject to them, still open to invasion by them. This is a condition that any number of sadhaks and Yogis have experienced. The inner being means the psychic, the inner mind, the inner vital, the inner physical. In this condition none of these can be even touched, so there has been an essential purification. All need not feel this division into two consciousnesses, but most do. When it is there, the will that decides the action is in the inner being, not in the outer — so the invasion of the outer by vital movements can in no way compel the action. It is on the contrary a very favourable stage in the transformation . . .⁸³

*

81. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

82. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, pp. 323-24.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

One must get back from all thought and be separate from it, a silent consciousness observing the thoughts if they come, but not oneself thinking or identified with the thoughts. Thoughts must be felt as outside things altogether. It is then easier to reject thoughts or let them pass without their disturbing the quietude of the mind.⁸⁴

*

If the difficulty in meditation is that thoughts of all kinds come in, that is not due to hostile forces but to the ordinary nature of the human mind. All sadhaks have this difficulty and with many it lasts for a very long time. There are several ways of getting rid of it. One of them is to look at the thoughts and observe what is the nature of the human mind as they show it but not to give any sanction and to let them run down till they come to a standstill — this is a way recommended by Vivekananda in his *Rajayoga*. Another is to look at the thoughts as not one’s own, to stand back as the witness Purusha and refuse the sanction — the thoughts are regarded as things coming from outside, from Prakriti, and they must be felt as if they were passers-by crossing the mind-space with whom one has no connection and in whom one takes no interest. In this way it usually happens that after a time the mind divides into two, a part which is the mental witness watching and perfectly undisturbed and quiet and a part which is the object of observation, the Prakriti part in which the thoughts cross or wander. Afterwards one can proceed to silence or quiet the Prakriti part also. There is a third, an active method by which one looks to see where the thoughts come from and finds they come not from oneself, but from outside the head as it were; if one can detect them coming, then, *before they enter*, they have to be thrown away altogether. This is perhaps the most difficult way and not all can do it, but if it can be done it is the shortest and most powerful road to silence.⁸⁵

*

There is the Advaita process of the way of knowledge — one rejects from oneself the identification with the mind, vital, body, saying continually “I am not the mind”, “I am not the vital”, “I am not the body”, seeing these things as separate from one’s real self — and after a time one feels all the mental, vital, physical processes and the very sense of mind, vital, body becoming externalised, an outer action, while within and detached from them there grows the

84. *Ibid.*, Vol. 31, p. 335.

85. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, pp. 301-02.

sense of a separate self-existent being which opens into the realisation of the cosmic and transcendent Spirit. There is also the method — a very powerful method — of the Sankhyas, the separation of the Purusha and the Prakriti. One enforces on the mind the position of the Witness — all action of mind, vital, physical becomes an outer play which is not myself or mine, but belongs to Nature and has been enforced on an outer me. I am the witness Purusha who am silent, detached, not bound by any of these things. There grows up in consequence a division in the being; the sadhak feels within him the growth of a calm silent separate consciousness which feels itself quite apart from the surface play of the mind and the vital and physical Nature. Usually when this takes place, it is possible very rapidly to bring down the peace of the higher consciousness and the action of the higher Force and the full march of the Yoga. But often the Force itself comes down first in response to the concentration and call and then, if these things are necessary, it does them and uses any other means or process that is helpful or indispensable.⁸⁶

* * *

86. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, pp. 328-29.

Patriotic sentiments are not incompatible with our yoga — far from it — to will for the strength and the integrity of one's Motherland is a quite legitimate sentiment, the will that she may make progress and that more and more she may manifest, in full freedom, the truth of her being, is a fine and noble will which cannot be harmful for our yoga.

But one must not get excited, one must not plunge prematurely into action. One can and should pray, aspire and will for the victory of the truth and, at the same time, continue to discharge one's daily duties and wait quietly for the unmistakable sign to come, indicating the action to be done.

The Mother

(*Words of the Mother – I*, CWM Vol. 13, p. 364)

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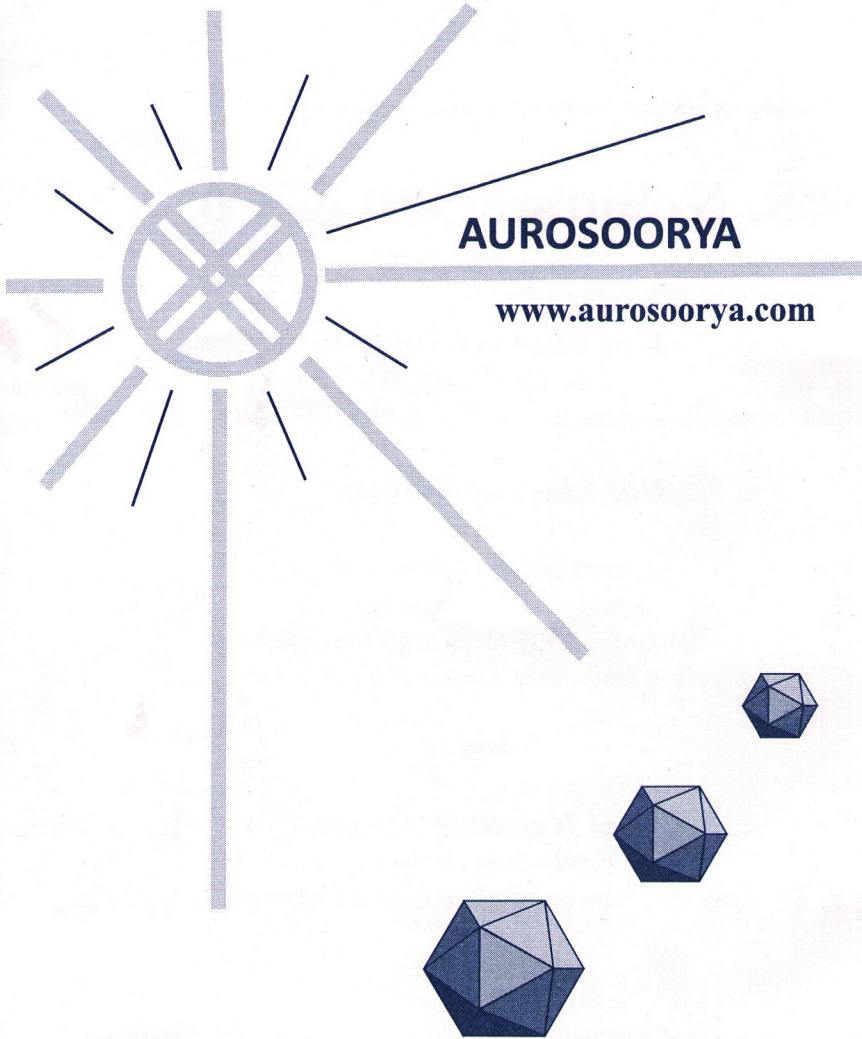
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