

Chittaranjan Das, in his defence of Sri Aurobindo during the Alipur Trial, described him as the poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity.

In this monograph, Manoj Das has given particular attention to these three aspects of Sri Aurobindo's multi-faceted personality and achievement. Sometime after his acquittal at Alipur, Sri Aurobindo retired to Pondicherry, and as a result of the gains of his Yoga, he projected his vision of the future in *The Life Divine* and in the great symbolistic epic, *Savitri*. Manoj Das has given due attention to this later and greater phase of Sri Aurobindo's career also. Altogether it is an informative and perceptive monograph on one of our indubitable makers of literature and builders of modern India.

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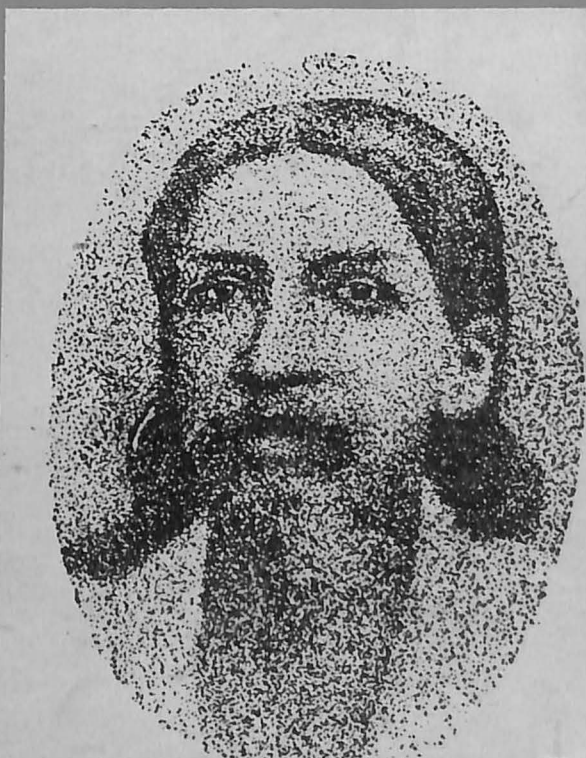
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SRI AUROBINDO

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

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SRI AUROBINDO

MANOJ DAS

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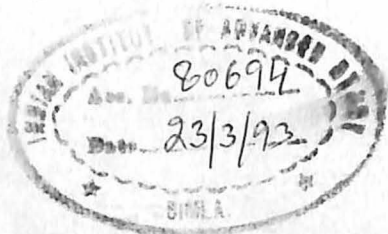
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CHAPTER ONE

Childhood

As yet thought only some high spirit's dream
Or a vexed illusion in man's toiling mind,
A new creation from the old shall rise,
A Knowledge inarticulate find speech,
Beauty suppressed burst into paradise bloom,
Pleasure and pain dive into absolute bliss.
A tongueless oracle shall speak at last,
The Superconscious grow on earth,
The Eternal's wonders join the dance of Time.

SRI AUROBINDO : *Savitri*

'No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see.'

This was Sri Aurobindo's warning to a disciple aspiring to write his biography. It is no doubt a paradox to begin writing on his life with a reference to this warning. But since write we must, to do so in full awareness of what he thought about it himself is perhaps the next best course we can follow. Reference to events and episodes of his life cannot be avoided even when our purpose is to present glimpses of his literary achievements.

There are, of course, events galore—political and literary—even on the surface, to make a magnificent volume of his life. An account of his role in India's struggle for freedom, indeed, should make a grand saga, but the real *Kurukshetra* of his life—where he fought his battle supreme—lay in the plane of consciousness and the story of that battle is beyond the scope of documentation.

Yet the greater part of his literature is deeply involved in that adventure of consciousness, often its projection, and so reference to that field—despite an author's reluctance to make it—becomes indispensable.

Sri Aurobindo was born on the 15th of August 1872—the third child of Dr. K.D. Ghose and Swarnalata Devi—at the residence of Mr. Man Mohan Ghose, Dr. Ghose's friend, at Theatre Road, Calcutta. His maternal grandfather, Raj Narayan Bose, popularly known as Rishi Raj Narayan, is often described by historians as 'the grandfather of Indian Nationalism.' A great friend of Rabindranath's father, the Rishi was an ardent nationalist, with Rabindranath's elder brother Jyotirindranath as his lieutenant. Rabindranath himself was among the budding souls the Rishi had recruited to a secret society founded by him to propagate the ideas of nationalism.

Rishi Raj Narayan's ideas and activities, however, had no impact on his son-in-law. The young Krishnadhan returned from the West with a post-graduate medical degree and a mind totally given to the Western values of life. Sri Aurobindo, from the very moment of his birth, literally, had to bear the brunt of his father's love nonpareil for English with his christening as Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose.¹

When Sri Aurobindo was five, he and his two elder brothers, Benoy Bhushan and Man Mohan, were admitted to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling, an institution meant for European children. About Sri Aurobindo's Darjeeling days his earliest biography by Mr. R. Palit published in 1911 says—and this must have been the impression that prevailed then—perhaps based on some information Mr. Palit or some other admirer of Sri Aurobindo had gathered :

The English master under whom Aurobindo read early discerned in that boy germs of greatness. He was the best beloved of his masters. He was always quick at mastering his lessons. We can almost see the boy with his deep, wistful eyes, earnest and thoughtful, looking as it were, into futurity, moving about in the midst of a band of alien boys, gazing at times upon the beautiful face of Nature; sweet and gentle of disposition, this pure-hearted boy was the glory of the school. . .

1. The name most probably commemorated the presence of one Miss Ackroyd, a visitor from England, at Sri Aurobindo's birth.

But two years later, in 1879, Dr. and Mrs. Ghose took their children to England. The parents returned, leaving their three sons at Manchester, with one Mr. W.H. Drewett and his mother. While the elder brothers studied at a Grammar School, Sri Aurobindo was privately tutored by Mr. Drewett, an accomplished scholar in Latin.

In 1885 the brothers shifted to London with the old Mrs. Drewett as their guardian. Dr. Ghose had instructed the Drewetts to see that the boys developed no contact with Indians living in England. So, the acquaintances the boys had were among the English friends of either Dr. Ghose or the Drewetts. Soon of course they cultivated friends themselves, not many though, among the English youths of their age. Man Mohan became known in his own circle as a poet and had among his friends Oscar Wilde and Laurence Binyon.

Although Dr. Ghose would love to see his boys thoroughly anglicised in their culture, conduct and education, so far as religion was concerned, he would prefer to let the boys grow up and make their own choice. Mrs. Drewett, however, was too zealous a Christian to wait. Sri Aurobindo recollects an amusing incident:

There was once a meeting of non-conformist ministers at Cumberland when we were in England. The old lady in whose house we dwelt, i.e., Mrs. Drewett, took me there. After the prayers were over all nearly dispersed but devout people remained a little longer and it was at that time that conversions were made. I was feeling completely bored. Then a minister approached me and asked me some questions. I did not give any reply. Then they all shouted, 'He is saved, he is saved,' and began to pray for me and offer thanks to God. I did not know what it was all about. Then the minister came to me and asked me to pray. I was not in the habit of praying. But somehow I did it in the manner in which children recite their prayers before going to sleep in order to keep up an appearance. . . . I was about ten at that time.

Sri Aurobindo was admitted to St. Paul's School, London, in 1884. His proficiency in Latin impressed his teacher much

who gave special attention to bring the pupil's knowledge in Greek to a par with Latin.

During his five years at St. Paul's, Sri Aurobindo shone as a brilliant student, securing the top prizes for literature and history. His promotion to higher classes was rapid.

Sri Aurobindo had begun writing poems at an extraordinary tender age - while at Manchester. They had been published in the *Family Magazine* of the city. He was then about ten.

His literary activity, both academic and creative, gathered momentum in London. Much of his writing of this time is lost. But the pieces recovered reveal a sharp sensibility and a spontaneous and intimate knowledge of prosody. It seems the statement attributed to Kalidasa, *Annachintāḥ Chamatkārā Kātare Kabitā Kutah*—'Amazing is the thought of bread, what poetry can be there in misery'—did not hold much good in case of Sri Aurobindo, for, while surges of inspiration rolled within him, around him was the sneering yawn of want. Generous and philanthropic though, Dr. Ghose was a man of imbalanced habits. Wherever he served as Civil Surgeon, at Khulna or Rangpur, he became the synonym of compassion. The poor flocked to him for succour; the affluent came to befriend him. The elite of both the Indian and English communities met in his bungalow and the bungalow came to be known as the 'Suez Canal'! But the extravagant Dr. Ghose was callous about his pecuniary obligations to his children right from leaving them at Manchester. And after the boys came to London he seems to have stopped bothering about sending any money to them at all! But the boys bravely carried on. Sri Aurobindo recollects: 'During a whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny saveloy formed the only food.'

Mrs. Drewett, shocked one day at some atheistic pronouncement of Man Mohan and deeply concerned about her own fate—for she believed that sooner or later the roof cannot but come down on the heads of the heretics—changed over to another house. In years to come, the brothers too were obliged to change their lodging thrice.

With a scholarship from St. Paul's Sri Aurobindo went to King's College, Cambridge, towards the end of 1889. Soon he impressed his teachers and the fellow-students by bagging all

the college prizes in Greek and Latin. He passed the classical Tripos in the first division at the end of his second year at King's.

He had earlier enrolled himself, due to his father's ardent desire, as a candidate for the Indian Civil Service. Usually such candidates engaged tutors to help them, but although Sri Aurobindo could not afford one, he secured high marks in all the papers of the written examination. Only when it came to riding test, he preferred to wander lonely as a cloud to appearing before an expert horseman. He was given the opportunity to take the test four times; but he proved elusive.

Long afterwards he gave out the reason himself for such conduct in regard to the riding. He felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from the bondage. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the service which his family would not have allowed him to do.

CHAPTER TWO

Early Inspirations

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the Southern Sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow.

SRI AUROBINDO : *Envoi*

(Written on the eve of returning to India)

‘He performed his part of the bargain as regards the college most honourably and took a high place in the first class of the classical Tripos, part one, at the end of the second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes, showing command of English and literary ability. That a man should have been able to do this (which alone is quite enough for most undergraduates) and at the same time to keep up his I.C.S. work, proves very unusual industry and capacity. Besides his classical scholarship he possessed a knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of undergraduates, and wrote much better English than most young Englishman.’ (20 November 1892).

This letter was written by G.W. Prothero, a tutor and senior fellow of King’s College, to James Cotton (brother of Sri Henry Cotton, a friend of Dr. Ghose) in a bid to do something together to forestall the rejection of Sri Aurobindo from the I.C.S. on account of as unimportant a reason as his not turning up for the riding test.

But Mr. Prothero’s or Mr. Cotton’s efforts were not likely to succeed. While at Cambridge Sri Aurobindo, first as member and then as secretary of the *Indian Majlis*, an organisation of the Indian students, made revolutionary speeches against British rule in India. This, it became known later, had duly been

brought to the notice of the authorities concerned who did not feel it wise to be in any way indulgent to Sri Aurobindo when he did not fulfil the conditions of entry into the Civil Service even though on a more or less technical point. (There were cases when the candidates had been permitted to practise riding and pass their test in India, even after joining the Service.)

And behind Sri Aurobindo's anti-British pronouncements was his disenchanted father. Dr. Ghose, of late, had grown somewhat bitter with the British attitude to Indians. He used to mail to his sons clippings from an Indian newspaper carrying the reports of the maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen and in his letters he denounced the British Government in India as heartless. When Sri Aurobindo was barely eleven he had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it.

How deeply the young Aurobindo had become convinced about the glory of fighting for freedom of one's own country will be evident from the poetic tribute he paid in 1891 to the memory of Charles Stewart Parnell, the Irish patriot:

O pale and guiding light, now star unsphered,
Deliverer lately hailed, since by our lords
Most feared, most hated, hated because feared,
Who smot'st them with an edge surpassing swords !
Thou too wert then a child of tragic earth,
Since vainly filled thy luminous doom of birth.

This and other poems collected in his anthology *Songs to Myrtilla* which was published in 1895 at Baroda 'for private circulation', were written during this period, between 18 and 20 years of the poet's age.

Vibrant with the feelings of life, the lines sung by Glaucus and Aethon in the *Songs to Myrtilla* make a bright review of the various aspects of this world:

Glaucus says:

Sweet is the night, sweet and cool
As to parched lips a running pool;
Sweet when the flowers have fallen asleep
And only moonlit rivulets creep

Like glow-worms in the dim and whispering wood,
To commune with the quiet heart and solitude.

And Aethon replies:

But day is sweeter; morning bright
Has put the stars out ere the light,
And from their dewy cushions rise
Sweet flowers half-opening their eyes.

And Glaucus sings:

How various are thy children, earth !
Behold the rose her lovely birth,
What fires from the bud proceed,
As if the vernal air did bleed.

Poems of this period are the sprouts of not only the creative emotions of joy and melancholy, but also of imagination stirred by inspiring episodes like the Irish fight for freedom. And some of them flash a perception and awareness of a deeper order too:

Perfect they motion ever within me,
Master of mind.
Grey of the brain, flash of the lightning,
Brilliant and blind,
These thou linkest, the world to mould,
Writing the thought in a scroll of gold
Violet-lined.

But emotion was not all. A keen and alert intellect expresses itself through a long dialogue written at the age of 18 which has come to light recently, entitled. *The Harmony of Life*:

KESHAV:

Life is too precious to be wasted in labour, and above all this especial moment of life, the hour after dinner, when we have just enough energy to be idle. Why, it is only for this I tolerate the wearisome activity of the previous twelve hours.

WILSON:

You are a living paradox. Is it not just like you to pervert indolence into the aim of life ?

KESHAV:

Why, what other aim can there be ?

WILSON:

Duty, I presume.

KESHAV:

I cannot consent to cherish an opinion until I realise the meaning of duty.

And the debate goes on, scanning in the light of reason what is duty, what is religion, and what is God—a brilliant attempt at an explanation of the cosmos on the foundation of the principle of Beauty and Harmony.

The last few months of Sri Aurobindo's fourteen years' stay in England were spent in London. During this period some Indian students in London formed a secret society and named it the 'Lotus and Dagger'. The members made vows to contribute, each in his own way, to the cause of India's freedom. Sri Aurobindo was one of them—and such a one whom Browning would describe as:

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward
Never doubted clouds would break
Never dreamed, though right were worsted wrong would
triumph

The Gaekwar of Baroda, Maharaja Sayaji Rao, was then on a visit to London. Sri Aurobindo's well-wisher, James Cotton, arranged a meeting between the former and the Gaekwar. Sri Aurobindo received appointment in the Baroda State Service.

Two significant voyages took place in the year 1893. One was from India—into the West. The other was from the West—into India. Swami Vivekananda was going out to make the Western world hearken to the message of India, the message of Spirit; Sri Aurobindo was returning from the West to India, to surprise her from her stupor.

CHAPTER THREE

Morning of Sadhana: Literary and Spiritual

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

SRI AUROBINDO: *Savitri*

Sri Aurobindo touched India at the Apollo Bunder, Bombay, in early 1893. It was a quiet home-coming with perhaps nobody to greet him on his arrival. But what welcome could be more splendid than the one that was extended to him in silence as though by the soul of Mother India? A great peace descended on him and as he wrote in a letter to a disciple long afterwards :

Since I set foot on the 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 infinite 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 world and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane.

A tragedy had preceded Sri Aurobindo's arrival. The ship by which he was to travel sank near Lisbon. The news reached Dr. K. D. Ghose who had no opportunity to learn that Sri Aurobindo, at the last hour, had decided to travel by another ship.

The shocked Dr. Ghose had an immediate heart-attack. He died after a few days repeating Sri Aurobindo's name. Sri

Aurobindo's mother, Swarnalata Devi had become mentally deranged for some years and was staying in her father's house at Deoghur. To meet her in that condition perhaps would have been painful. So from Bombay, Sri Aurobindo straight proceeded to Baroda.¹

He had to work in the Land Settlement, Revenue and certain other departments of the Baroda State administration before he was appointed as the Professor of English at the Maharaja's College. He took classes in French too.²

His intervention in Indian politics began almost as soon as he was back in India. It had not taken him long to have a complete grasp of the political situation. Politics was in the hands of—or rather in the words of—a few Moderate leaders. For a large nation like India the Congress was still too small an institution. Against a sophisticated colonial machinery the British had set up, it was too puny a voice. Unless it got a thorough shake, unless genuine aspiration was instilled into it, unless it was provided with inspiring causes to fight for—and last but not the least—unless its base was broadened to embrace the masses, it could deliver no goods.

To begin with Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of articles, anonymously, in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, entitled *New Lamps For Old*. His criticism of the Congress was slashing:

1. When Sri Aurobindo met his mother later, she said, 'But may Aurobindo was so small !' On being told that her son had in the meanwhile grown up, she insisted that her child had a certain mark on a finger. Only when the mark was shown to her she acknowledged him as her child !
2. A student of Sri Aurobindo, Mr. R.N. Patkar, Advocate, Baroda, recollects :
'I had the good fortune to be his student when I was in the intermediate class. His method of teaching was a novel one. . . But more than his college lectures it was a treat to hear him on the platform. He used to preside occasionally over the meetings of the College Debating Society. The large central hall of the college used to be full when he was to speak. He was not an orator but was a speaker of a very high order and he was listened to with rapt attention. Without any gesture or movement of the limbs he stood and language flowed like a stream from his lips with natural ease and melody that kept the audience spell-bound.'

I say of the Congress, then this,—that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts not the right sort of men to be leaders—in brief we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed.

The series must have raised a hue and cry in the arm-chair world of the then politics, for Mr. M.G. Ranade, the well-known Maharashtrian leader, asked the proprietors of the paper to stop publishing such 'Seditious' articles. The editor appealed to Sri Aurobindo to write something sober. Sri Aurobindo obliged him by beginning to write about the philosophy of politics, leaving aside the practical part. But he did not feel inspired to continue for long.

Sri Aurobindo's friends arranged a young Bengali literateur, Dinendra Kumar Roy, to come and stay with him at Baroda in order to help him master spoken Bengali. Roy's memoirs of his Baroda days make a most interesting and important document giving glimpses of the mode of Sri Aurobindo living. Callous towards food and sleep, Sri Aurobindo sat absorbed in his studies late into the night, oblivious of swarms of mosquitoes around him.

The Gaekwar not only depended on Sri Aurobindo for drafting all important documents and speeches, but it seems he at times desired his company for sake of itself and sent a vehicle to fetch him. Some times Sri Aurobindo obliged, some times he did not. Roy was amazed at the fact that while all important people would jump for joy at the slightest opportunity of bringing themselves to the notice of the Gaekwar, Sri Aurobindo had no attraction for that at all. Neither did he care to build-up any sort of social status. With all his charming gifts, how is it that he did not desire to feature in the Baroda Society?—Roy asked once. Sri Aurobindo's answer was simple: There was no joy in that !

Roy records: 'He was alone and he did not know what it was to run after pleasures. He did not spend even a pie in the wrong way, yet nothing was left with him at the end of the month.'

Roy sums up his impression thus: 'Sri Aurobindo was not a man of this earth, he was a god come down from heaven perhaps due to some curse.'

But what happened to all the money Sri Aurobindo received as salary? We will come to know that in the next chapter. Let us have a peep here into his spiritual and literary activities during this period.

Sri Aurobindo had, no doubt, a normal interest in matters occult, but he did not consciously begin to practise yoga until 1904. But even without aspiring for them, he had splendid spiritual experiences from time to time. For example, once while going into the city, his carriage suddenly faced the possibility of a serious accident. The moment he became aware of the situation and willed to avert it, there appeared a Being of Light, who, taking hold of the situation, instantly put the carriage on the safe track.

Sri Aurobindo recollected, during one of his evening conversations with some disciples, another experience:

With my European mind I had at that time no faith in the Gods, I had gone to Karnali (near Chandod) and there are several temples there. There is one Kali temple and when I looked at the image I saw the living Presence there. For the first time I believed in the 'Presence' of God. (Decades later in 1939, Sri Aurobindo wrote two sonnets describing these two experiences. They are reproduced in the Appendix.)

Then in 1903, while in Kashmir, on a visit to the Shankaracharya Hill, Sri Aurobindo experienced the vacant infinite in a very tangible way—an experience which could ordinarily be had only after prolonged *Sadhana*.

It was only from 1904 that he took up yoga seriously. He began with Pranayama and achieved in a remarkably short time all that such disciplines could obtain. He recollected:

At that time I used to write poetry. Usually I wrote five to eight or ten lines per day, about two hundred lines in a month. After the Pranayama I could write two hundred lines within half an hour. Formerly my memory was dull, but afterwards when the inspiration came, I could remember the

lines in their order and write them down conveniently at any time. Along with this enhanced mental activity I could see an electric energy all around the brain.

But he realised the limitations of such practices too. He said in a letter written in 1932:

After four years of Pranayama and other practices of my own, with no other result than increased health and outflow of energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest.

He had come in contact with some Yogis. But they had no role to play in his practice of yoga. It was a Maharashtrian Yogi, Lele, who gave him some concrete help in this regard. Sri Aurobindo's biographer, Mr. A.B. Purani, was told by Lele in 1916 that when he received the message telling him to go to Baroda, he had an intuition that he would have to give initiation to a very great soul. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges:

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 these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence.'

I had never heard before of thought coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think either of 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 one thought and then another 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 as a labourer in thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.

Lele's help was not necessary for long. By the dint of his own quest and inborn sincerity of purpose he shot into the firmament of consciousness and through layers of experiences like those of Nirvana¹ and silence in the Brahman he approached the uncharted areas of realisation which, later at Pondicherry, he was to thoroughly explore and master.

The literary creativity in this period of Sri Aurobindo's life is marked by a variety of inspiration. He made a concentrated study of the great literatures of India in Sanskrit and several Indian languages which he had easily picked up. This penetration into the heart of the Indian literature consequently imparted a new vivacity to his poetry. It is significant that the theme of his poetic *magnum opus*, the supreme revelation of his vision, the *Savitri*, which he wrote long afterwards at Pondicherry and finished only shortly before his passing away in 1950, had already had some sort of treatment at Baroda. But nothing remains of this early draft.

He translated into English many lyrical verses of the old Bengali poets like Chandidas and Jnanadas. They were not translations in the usual sense of the term, but grand transmutations. The spirit of the original, the sweetness of their *bhava*, have come wonderfully alive in these verses, which is rarely the case with translations.

Here Radha tells Krishna, who does not know how to reciprocate her love duly:

(I will) Die and be born to life again
As Nanda's son, the joy of Braja's girls,
And I will make thee Radha then,
A laughing child's face set with lovely curls.

Then I will love and then leave;
Under the Codome's boughs when thou goest by
Bound to the water morn or eve,
I can on that tree fluting melodiously.

¹In course of a letter to a disciple written in 1937, Sri Aurobindo said: '...in my case I walked into Nirvana without intending it or rather Nirvana walked casually into me not so far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave':

Songs of the same Radha-Krishna theme written in Maithili by the famous Vaishnav poet Vidyapati also glowed in their rich romantic grandeur in Sri Aurobindo's English rendering:

Playing she plays not, so newly shy,
 She may not brook the passing eye.
 Looking she looks not lest surmise
 Laugh from her own girl-comrade's eyes.
 Hearken, O hearken, Madhav, to me.
 Just is the case I bring to thee.
 Radha today these eyes beheld;
 A maid she is unparalleled.

From Sanskrit he made translations of three remarkable works. They were Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* and *Vikramorvasie* and Bhartrihari's *Niti Shataka*. The *Meghaduta*, unfortunately, is lost—along with several other translations and original poems of this period. But the *Vikramorvasie* or *The Hero and the Nymph* has survived the vicissitudes of the time. Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes: 'In attempting to render *Vikramorvasie* into English verse, Sri Aurobindo successfully braved a much more difficult task than when he translated Chandidas and Bhartrihari or even Chittaranjan. A play of Kalidasa's, romantic, tantalizing, and strangely and attractively remote from everyday experience, *Vikramorvasie* cannot easily be coaxed into changing her robes; but Sri Aurobindo has performed the feat, and we have in result *The Hero and the Nymph*. Like Laurence Binyon's *Sakuntala*, Sri Aurobindo's *The Hero and the Nymph* also fairly reproduces the fever and the flavour of the original and succeeds in making Kalidasa himself feel at home in an alien garb.'

Among the poems written during the Baroda period is *Urvasie* inspired by Kalidasa's recreation of the eternal nymph of the *Rig Veda*, the story of the 'goddess won to mortal arms'.

Urvasie, the flower self-bloomed without a stem—as Tagore would describe her—is the irresistible fascination of the Indian poet through the ages. This nymph of heaven, according to the age-old story, is enamoured by a mortal, a hero though, Pururavus. The hero and the nymph lived for many years together, but their love did not wane and *Urvasie* did not return to resume her duty in the celestial sphere. At last when the

discontented gods made her return, the agony of Pururavus knew no bound. For long he wandered in search of her and at the end found her out. But now their union was conditioned by many limitations. But the intensity of the hero's love, the strenuous penance he is ready to undergo—and of course Urvasie's response—at last arouse the compassion of the dispensers of destiny, the 'Unwilling Gods' and the lovers are granted the boon of a natural, permanent union.

The theme has received a superb treatment from Sri Aurobindo. Its epic majesty is manifest at every stage, be it a condition of tragic lull or a vibrant moment of passion.

This is how Urvasie, abandoned by her Kidnapper, the titan Cayshie, is discovered to the hero:

Perfect she lay amid her tresses,
Like a mishandled lily luminous.
As she had fallen, From the lucid robe
One shoulder gleamed and golden breast left bare,
Divinely lifting, one gold arm was flung.
A warm rich splendour exquisitely outlined
Against the dazzling whiteness, and her face
Was as a fallen moon among the snows.

And in contrast to this scene of lull, we see the moment of their union caught:

But, all a sea of mighty joy
Rushing and swallowing up the golden sand,
With a great cry and glad Pururavus
Seized her and caught her to his bosom thrilled,
Clinging and shuddering. All her wonderful hair
Loosened and the wind seized and bore it streaming
Over the shoulder of Pururavus
And on his cheek a softness. She, o'erborne,
Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay,
Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail.

The poem ends where Pururavus and Urvasie have finally been united. But the significance of the concluding lines transcends the deservedly won joy of the couple. True, Pururavus has been promoted to the orb of the immortals:

But far below through silent mighty space
The green and strenuous earth abandoned rolled.

It was a heroic victory of love, yet the earth and mortality had no share in it. It was in the second long poem Sri Aurobindo wrote at Baroda, *Love and Death*, where both the hero and the heroine are mortals of this earth, that love's victory becomes still more significant. (After all, the story of *Urvasie* and *Pururavus* belongs to the dim twilight of time when earth was in its infancy. But the story of *Love and Death* belongs to a much later time, when on one hand man has been more deeply rooted to the earth, and on the other hand his aspirations have matured; he is potentially capable of winning the virtues of heaven.)

In woodlands of the bright and early world
When love was to himself yet new and warm
And stainless, played like morning with a flower
Ruru with his young bride Priyumvada.

One morning, bitten by a snake, Priyumvada dies. With a great agony, balanced by a great determination in heart, Ruru wanders about until he meets the God of Love. Through the latter's help, after a fearful sojourn in the regions of the dead, he succeeds in bringing Priyumvada back to life. Although in order to do so Ruru has to give half of his life to Priyumvada, still it is a victory over the arbitrariness of death.

The *Love and Death* is also a song of the freedom of the early inhabitants of the earth—of souls unencumbered by religion, creed, politics or obligations and institutions of any sort:

Then earth was quick and pregnant tamelessly;
A free and unvalled race possessed her plains
Whose hearts uncramped by bonds, whose unspoiled thoughts
At once replied to light.

And till the end it remains a song of the earth. In contrast to the 'abandoned' earth with which the *Urvasie* ends, the *Love and Death* ends when the 'green green world' with its warm sunlight was breathing round Ruru and Priyumvada:

Glad of her children and the Koil's voice
 Persisted in the morning of the world.¹

Although now amid an abundance of themes Indian, Sri Aurobindo's creative zone was wide enough, as ever, for a sublime inspiration to choose for itself the frame that suited it best from the world's rich stock of legends and mythology. Such a frame he adopted for his *Perseus the Deliverer*, a play in five acts, with the ancient legend divested of its original character of a heroic myth and made 'the nucleus round which there could grow the scenes of a romantic story of human temperament and life-impulses on the Elizabethan model'.

But the play is also much more. In Perseus saving princess Andromeda chained to the rocks to be devoured by a sea-monster as an atonement for her mother's impiety against the sea-god, Poseidon, we see the triumph of truth. Perseus is a hero with divine attributes, but Andromeda too is an aspirant with a rebellious vivacity, rebellious against all that cramps the spirit, the false laws of superstitions and rituals. When her father tells her:

The mighty gods
 Dwell far above the laws that govern men
 And are not to be mapped by mortal judgments.

¹Remarkable is the poet's awareness of the change that time brings about in the attitude of the people to poetry. Discouraging a disciple's move to try for the publication of *Love and Death* in England, Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter in 1934:

'I am afraid you are under an illusion as to the success of *Love and Death* in England. *Love and Death* dated—it belongs to the time when Meredith and Phillips were still writing and Yeats and A.E. were only in bud if not in ova. Since then the wind has changed and even Yeats and A.E. are already a little high and dry on the sands of the past, while the form or other characteristics of *Love and Death* are just the things that are anathema to the post-war writers and literary critics. I fear it would be, if not altogether ignored which is most likely, regarded as a feeble and belated imitation of the literary model exploded and buried long ago. I don't regard it in that light myself, but it is not my opinion that counts for success but that of the modern highbrows. If it had been published when it was written it might have been a success, but now! Of course, I know there are many people still in England, if it got into their hands, who would read it with enthusiasm, but I don't think it would get into their hands at all.'

It is Poseidon's will these men should die
Upon his altar. 'Tis not to be questioned!

She replies:

It shall be questioned. Let your God go hungry.

The play ends on this note of warning and prophecy (by Perseus):

But the blind nether forces still have power
And the ascent is slow and long is Time.
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase:
The day shall come when men feel close and one.
Meanwhile one forward step is something gained,
Since little by little earth must open to heaven
Till her dim soul awakes into the Light.

The jolly bright dramatic romance of this period *The Viziers of Bassora*—recovered in 1951 after remaining buried for nearly half a century under the papers of the Alipore Conspiracy Case—a dramatisation of a tale from the *Arabian Nights*—ends on a note of caution too though against odds of a different sort:

Fair children worthy of each other's love
And beauty! till the Sunderer comes who parts
All wedded hands, take your delights on earth,
And afterwards in heaven. Meanwhile remember
That life is grave and earnest under its smiles,
And we too with a wary gait
Should walk its roads, praying that if we stumble,
The All-Merciful may bear our footing up
In his strong hand, showing the father's face
And not the stern and dreadful Judge.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Poet of Patriotism

Long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, the agitation, will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India, but across distant seas and lands.

C.R. DAS

It was C.R. Das, later the celebrated Deshbandhu Chittaranjan, who described Sri Aurobindo as the Poet of Patriotism in course of his concluding argument in defence of Sri Aurobindo, during the trial of the Alipore Conspiracy Case. Our appreciation of the truth of this inspired utterance can commence from a glimpse of the 'private' Sri Aurobindo, through extracts from an intimate communication to his wife which became a public and historic document during and after the Alipore trial and circulated in its innumerable copies all over India.

Sri Aurobindo had married Mrinalini Devi, daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose, at Calcutta, in 1901. Serene and beautiful, Mrinalini Devi, according to those who had been familiar with her, was the very image of dignified endurance. Except for a short period at Baroda and a shorter period at Calcutta, she had no opportunity to live with her husband. If she could stand the shock of having to look on while early in the morning one day, Sri Aurobindo was taken away by the police in connection with the so-called Conspiracy Case, it was due to her unflinching faith in the greatness of his ideals and deeds. Eight years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry, when she received the green signal to proceed there, she had no time to do so. She died in December, 1918, of influenza.

The following extracts are from Sri Aurobindo's letter to her written on 30th August 1905, from Baroda.

. . . You have, perhaps, by now discovered that the one with whose fate yours is linked is a very strange kind of person. Mine is not the mental outlook, the aim of life, and the domain of action which the generality of people in this country have at present. It is quite different in all respects, it is uncommon. Perhaps, you know by what name the generality of people call extraordinary ideas, uncommon actions, extraordinary high aspirations. They level all these things as madness, but if the mad man succeeds in the field of action then instead of calling him a lunatic they call him a great man, a man of genius. But how many succeed in their efforts? Out of a thousand persons only ten are extraordinary, and out of these ten one succeeds. In my field of action success is out of the question; I have not been able to enter into it fully; so people will consider me a mad man; it is very unfortunate for a woman to be married to a mad man; for, all the hopes of women are confined to happiness and sorrow of the family. A mad man would not bring happiness to his wife—he would only inflict suffering. . . .

I have three madnnesses. Firstly, it is my firm faith that whatever virtue, talent, higher education and knowledge and wealth which God has given me belongs to Him. I have the right to spend only as much as is needed for the maintenance of the family and on what is absolutely necessary. Whatever remains should be returned to the Divine. If I spend all of it on myself, for personal comfort, for enjoyment, then I am a thief. According to Hindu Scriptures one who accepts money from the Divine and does not return it to Him is a thief. Up till now I have been giving only a small fraction of my money to God and have been spending nine-tenths of it for my personal happiness—thus have I settled the account and have remained immersed in worldly happiness. Half of the life has already been wasted; even an animal feels gratified in feeding itself and its family. . . .

I have no regrets for the money that I gave to Sarojini or

¹Translated from Bengali.

to Usha, because assisting others is Dharma, to protect those who depend on you is a great Dharma, but the account is not settled if one gives only to one's brothers and sisters. In these hard days, the whole country is like a dependent at our doors, I have thirty crores of brothers and sisters in this country—many of them die of starvation, most of them are weakened by suffering and troubles and are somehow dragging on their existence. They must be helped. What do you say, will you be my wife sharing this Dharma with me? We will eat and dress like ordinary people and buy what is really essential, and give the rest to the Divine. That is what I would do. If you agree to it, and accept the principle of sacrifice then my resolution can be fulfilled. You were complaining that you have made no progress. This is a path to progress that I point out to you. Would you like to take that path?

The second folly has recently taken hold of me. It is thus: by whatever means I must get the direct realization of the Lord. The religion of today consists in repeating the name of God every now and then in praying to him in the presence of everybody and in showing to people how religious one is; I do not want it. If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of realising His presence; however hard the path I have taken a firm resolution to follow it. Hindu Dharma asserts that the path is to be found in one's own self, in one's mind. The rule that enables one to follow the path is also given to me; I have begun to observe all the rules and within a month I have been able to ascertain that the words of the Hindu Dharma are not false. I have had the experience of all the signs that have been mentioned by it. I would like to take you also along that path; you would not be able to keep up with me as you have not yet had the knowledge, but there is nothing to prevent your following me. Anybody can reach perfection by following the path. But it depends upon one's choice to enter the path. Nobody can force you to enter it. If you are willing, I will write more about this subject.

The third folly is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and rivers, I look upon my country as

the mother, I worship her and adore her as the mother. What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; it is not physical strength, I am not going to fight with the sword or with the gun, but with the power of knowledge. The power of the warrior is not the only kind of force, there is also the power of the Brahman which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow, God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission. At the age of fourteen the seed of it had begun to sprout and at eighteen it had been firmly rooted and become unshakable.

This was the time when Curzon's move to partition Bengal had set the Ganges of the enlightened Indian sentiment on fire. Valentine Chirol, the correspondent of *The Times* of London, wrote, 'Never had India seen such popular demonstration.'

By then, under Sri Aurobindo's inspiration, secret societies had cropped up all over the land with tens of thousands of young men as their members. Posterity had very little scope of learning about these organisations and their functions as they were conducted under strict secrecy.

Sri Aurobindo did not believe that the activities of the secret societies alone could do much; they could be effective only if there was an intensive campaign for awakening the masses. Being in the Baroda Service still, he could not participate publicly in any open political movement. But the Partition of Bengal was too costly a blessing in disguise to let go. Sri Aurobindo drafted a scheme, practical as well as allegorical, entitled *Bhawani Mandir*. Copies of the appeal—it was not signed—to help materialise the scheme were distributed by his lieutenants, younger brother Barindrakumar, Jatin Banerji who had entered into the Baroda army with his recommendation, Barrister P. Mitra and others.

Its abrupt beginning had a mystic charm:

A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, the Mother, among the hills. To all the children of the Mother the call is sent forth to help in the sacred work.

But what the appeal hammered on was the need to muster strength:

In the unending revolutions of the world, as the wheel of the Eternal turns mightily in its courses, the Infinite Energy, which streams forth from the Eternal and sets the wheel to work, looms up in the vision of man in various aspects and infinite forms. Each aspect creates and marks an age. Sometimes She is Love, sometimes She is Pity. This Infinite Energy is Bhawani, She also is Durga, She is Kali, She is Radha the Beloved, She is Lakshmi. She is our Mother and the Creatress of us all.

Bhawani is Shakti

In the present age, the Mother is manifested as the Mother of Strength. She is pure Shakti.

The Whole World is Growing full of the Mother as Shakti

Let us raise our eyes and cast them upon the world around us. Wherever we turn our gaze, huge masses of strength rise before our vision, tremendous, swift and inexorable forces, gigantic figures of energy, terrible sweeping columns of force. All is growing large and strong. The Shakti of war, the Shakti of wealth, the Shakti of science are tenfold more mighty and colossal, a hundredfold more fierce, rapid and busy in their activity, a thousandfold more prolific in resources weapons and instruments than ever before in recorded history. Everywhere the Mother is at work; from Her mighty and shaping hands enormous forms of Rakshasas, Asuras, Devas are leaping forth into the arena of the world. We have seen the slow but mighty rise of great empires in the West, we have seen the swift, irresistible and impetuous bounding into life of Japan, some are Mleccha Shaktis clouded in their strength, black or blood-crimson with Tamas or

Rajas, others are Arya Shaktis, bathed in a pure flame of renunciation and Utter self-sacrifice: but all of them are the Mother in Her new phase, remoulding, creating. She is pouring Her spirit into the old; She is whirling into life the new.

We in India Fail in all Things for Want of Shakti

But in India the breath moves slowly, the afflatus is long in coming. India, the ancient Mother, is indeed striving to be reborn, striving with agony and tears, but she strives in vain. What ails her, she who is after all so vast and might be so strong? There is surely some enormous defect, something vital is wanting in us, nor is it difficult to lay our finger on the spot. We have all things else, but we are empty of strength, void of energy. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti. The mother is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms.

We had knowledge; but it was a dead thing for want of Shakti. We had Bhakti; but true Bhakti was only the leaping flame of Shakti, the fuel. If the fuel is scanty how long can the fire endure?

Many of us, utterly overcome by Tamas, the dark and heavy demon of inertia, are saying now-a-days that it is impossible, that India is decayed, bloodless and lifeless, too weak ever to recover; that our race is doomed to extinction. It is a foolish and idle saying. No man or nation need be weak unless he chooses, no man or nation need perish unless he deliberately chooses extinction.

But what is a nation? The Shakti of its millions. It is our own choice whether we recreate our nation or perish. The appeal then became an exhortation charged with emotion:

What is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti. . .

Come then, hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to

be worshipped,—inactive because the God in us is concealed by Tamas, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them. You who feel Her stirring within you, fling off the black veil of self, break down the imprisoning walls of indolence, help Her each as you feel impelled, with your bodies or with your intellect or with your speech or with your wealth or with your prayers and worship each man according to his capacity. Draw not back, for against those who were called and heard Her not She may well be worth in the day of Her coming; but to those who help Her advent even a little, how radiant with beauty and kindness will be the face of their mother's.

Thus he was driving home the concept of India as the Mother. In months to come the cry of *Bande Mataram* was to shake the very foundation of the British empire in India.

The *Bhawani Mandir* was intended to remind the people that the country was heaving and panting under the burden of her children's stupendous inertia. But that did not mean that luminous souls like those of yore were no more born in this sacred land. They were always there whether the country be in a position to benefit by them or not. Such a soul was Bankim Chandra. Sri Aurobindo had written on him while at Baroda, in the *Indu Prakash*. (He had written a poem on him too.) The tribute was again published in the *Bande Mataram* (1907):

There are many who, lamenting the by-gone glories of this great and ancient nation, speak as if the Rishis of old, the inspired creators of thought and civilisation, were a miracle of our heroic age, not to be repeated among degenerate men and in our distressful present. This is an error and thrice an error. Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose strength, greatness, holiness may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease. The hero, the Rishi, the saint, are the natural fruits of our Indian soil; and there has been no age in which they have not been born. Among the Rishis of the later age we have at last realised that we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving mantra which is creating a new India, the mantra *Bande Mataram*.

Soon after coming to Calcutta Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem on a great soul of another category, Baji Probhou, who, to cover Shivaji's retreat, held a mountain pass for two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand enemy soldiers. He made Baji Probhou say—as though the great hero was looking down from the clouds of time and was speaking to his enchanted countrymen:

...make iron of your souls
Yet if Bhavani wills, strength and sword
Can stay our Nation's future from o'erthrow.

The long poem in blank verse opens on a description of the land and the time that formed the background of the episode:

A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood deep in haze,
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up
Longing for water in the courses parched
Of streams long dead.

But was not the glorious sacrifice of Baji Probhou more than a lusty shower on this 'Waste-land' condition? The greater Indian landscape too was oppressed under a different sort of tyrant's glare. Should it not anticipate a sudden emergence of a tribe of Baji Probhous?

Sri Aurobindo made a Mahabharata story assume a new significance in his *Vidula*, first published under the title *The Mother to Her Son*.

Prince Sunjoy, dethroned by an enemy king, feels so much disheartened and dejected that he is ready to forget his *dharma*—which was to fight on till the recovery of the kingdom or at least till his death—and is in favour of living the life of an ordinary man reconciled to fate. But lucky was he in his mother—a flaming spirit.

'Son,' she cried, 'no son of mine to make thy mother's heart
rejoice !
Hark, thy foemen mock and triumph, yet to live is still thy
choice.
Nor thy hero father got thee, nor I bore thee in my womb,
Random changeling from some world of petty souls "and coward
gloom l. . . .

Out to battle, do thy man's work, falter not in high attempt;
 So a man is quit before his God and saved from self-contempt
 Sunjoy, Sunjoy, waste not thou thy flame in smoke !

Impetuous, dire
 Leap upon thy foes for havoc as a famished lion leaps,
 Storming through thy vanquished victors till thou fall on

slaughtered heaps. . . .
 Shrink not from a noble action, stoop not to unworthy deed !

Vile are they who stoop, they gain not Heaven's doors, nor
 here succeed. . . .

When thou winnest difficult victory from the clutch of fearful
 strife,

I shall know thou art my offspring and shall love my son
 indeed.'

Was it not also the call of Mother India to her Sunjoy-like children ?

But while in *Bhawani Mandir* Sri Aurobindo narrates the conditions which the people must fulfil so that the Mother can manifest in the country, and in *Vidula* he makes a mother—whose voice can be taken as the symbolic voice of the brave and ideal motherhood—speak out what she expects of her children, in *Durga Stotra*, Hymn to Durga, he gives the *mantra* by which the children can invoke the Mother's Grace. Vibrant with the spirit of aspiration, the hymn shows the sure path to the Mother's protection, for this is a song of total surrender too:

Mother Durga! Rider on the lion, trident in hand, thy body of beauty armour-clad, Mother, giver of victory, India awaits thee, eager to see the gracious form of thine. *Listen, O Mother, descend upon earth, make thyself manifest in this land of India.*

Mother Durga ! Giver of force and love and knowledge, terrible art thou in thy own self of might, Mother beautiful and fierce. In the battle of life, in India's battle, we are warriors commissioned by thee; Mother, give to our heart and mind a titan's strength, a titan's energy, to our soul and intelligence a god's character and knowledge.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Prophet of Nationalism

Aurobindo's genius shot up like a meteor. He was on the high skies only for a time. He flooded the land from Cape to Mount with the effulgence of his light.

DR. PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA

The History of the Indian National Congress

On the 9th of November, 1905, Calcutta witnessed a mammoth rally at Pantir Math. There Subodh Mallik, affluent and inspired patriot, announced that he had set apart a lakh of rupees for founding a national College, free from the control of the British-Indian Government.

The crowd, in one voice, hailed Mallik as 'Raja'. The appellation became a permanent prefix to Subodh Mallik's name—a solitary event of its nature.

And Subodh Mallik had made a very welcome condition: Sri Aurobindo, till then in Baroda Service, must be requested to come down to Calcutta to shape the proposed institution.

The request was duly made; Sri Aurobindo acceded to it, resigned as the Vice-Principal of Baroda College and came down to Calcutta—into the open arena of politics, in 1906.

The same year renowned patriot Bipin Chandra Pal invited him to help him in launching the *Bande Mataram*. Sri Aurobindo extended his help. The newspaper soon became the herald of Indian revolution—in the words of Mr. Ratcliffe, the then editor of the *Statesman*, 'Full of leading and special articles written in English with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian Press. . . the most effective voice of what we then called nationalist extremism.'

Sri Aurobindo took over as the Principal of Calcutta National

College in August 1906. But the demand on him of the *Bande Mataram* and the flourishing Nationalist Party became too heavy to allow him a longer stay in the field of education. He soon resigned.

In frequently organised huge public meetings and in the pages of the *Bande Mataram* Sri Aurobindo spelled out a concrete scheme to make the continuation of the British rule impossible. Promotion of Swadeshi industries and national education and a complete boycott of and non-co-operation with all Government institutions and formation of a militant volunteer force, roughly speaking, constituted this scheme. (The history of the four decades of the nation's struggle for freedom that followed shows that whatever be the form, these continued to be the cardinal ideas behind the struggle till the goal was achieved.) His stress on the country as the Mother and declaring with disarming frankness that complete independence was the goal of India's national awakening had a thrilling impact on the mind of young India.

Sri Aurobindo's journalism not only gave the call of freedom, in its treatment of topics and style it also breathed a new spirit of freedom—freedom from inhibitions, from the superstitions created by the propaganda of the alien Government about the virtues of their domination and freedom from the exaggerated feeling of weakness from which the country was made to suffer. Here is a passage to this effect from an article published in the July 14, 1907 issue of the *Bande Mataram* :

It would be difficult to imagine anything more ridiculous than the Pharisaical cant of Anglo-Indians about the impossibility of Indians becoming fit for political advancement on democratic lines prior to the complete renovation of their industries and social institutions. 'Feed and clothe your countrymen first,' says one wiseacre, 'before you think of imitating the healthy countries of Europe.' 'Democratise your society' says another, 'before attempting to establish political democracy.' All those countries that possess popular Government, possess wealth and social equality as well, and must not India also have these before she can aspire to democracy, so runs the infallible Anglo-Indian logic, provokingly amusing by its utter lack of the sense of sequence.

The only unfortunate part of it is that a considerable number of our own countrymen have been deluded into a belief in this fiction of the sequential order of a country's social, industrial and political development . . . India, paralysed by poverty, plague-stricken, in the clutches of a perennial famine: India, the battle-ground of jarring faiths and rival races, divided against herself by her minute castes and soul-killing superstitions, is it not heresy, they cry, to speak of her political improvement before you have lifted her out of the dead level of this unbearable existence?

The chaste and powerful prose of the *Bande Mataram* won wonder and admiration even from those who were hostile to it. Politics was not the lone theme it discussed, the various facets of India's culture and heritage found their illuminating interpretation through its columns and the problems of the society were discussed by Sri Aurobindo with an insight that revealed the issues down to the end of their roots.

Here is an observation on the evil that was the caste system (*Bande Mataram*, 29-9-1907):

The *Bengalee* reports Srijut Bal Gangadhar Tilak to have made a definite pronouncement on the caste system. The prevailing idea of social inequality is working immense evil, says the Nationalist leader of the Decean. This pronouncement is only natural from an earnest Hindu and a sincere nationalist like Srijut Tilak. The baser ideas underlying the degenerate perversions of the original caste system, the mental attitude which bases them on a false foundation of caste, pride and arrogance, of a divinely ordained superiority depending on the accident of birth, of a fixed and intolerant inequality, are inconsistent with the supreme teaching, basic spirit of Hinduism which sees the one invariable and indivisible divinity in every individual being. Nationalism is simply the passionate aspiration for the realisation of that Divine Unity in the nation, a unity in which all the component individuals, however various and apparently unequal their functions as political, social or economic factors, are yet really and fundamentally one and equal. In the idea of Nationalism which India will set before the world, there will

be an essential equality between man and man, between caste and caste, between class and class, all being, as Mr. Tilak has pointed out, different but equal and united parts of the Virat Purush as realised in the nation. The insistent preaching of our religion and the work of the Indian Nationalist is to bring home to everyone of his countrymen this ideal of their country's religion and philosophy. We are intolerant of autocracy because it is the denial in politics of this essential equality, we object to the modern distortion of the caste system because it is the denial in society of the same essential equality. While we insist on re-organising the nation into a democratic unity politically, we recognise that the same principle of re-organisation ought to and inevitably will assert itself socially; even if, as our opponents choose to imagine, we are desirous of confining its working to politics, our attempts will be fruitless, for the principle once realized in politics must inevitably assert itself in society. No monopoly, racial or hereditary, can form part of the Nationalist's scheme of the future, his dream of the day for the advent of which he is striving and struggling.

As will be seen, all issues were viewed in the broad context of nationalism. But so far as nationalism was concerned, its concept was kept above the reach of any attempt at compromising it with any expediency:

True national unity is the unity of self-dedication to the country when the liberty and greatness of our motherland is the paramount consideration to which all others must be subordinated. In India at the present hour there are three conflicting ideals; one party set the maintenance of British superiority above all other considerations; another would maintain that supremacy in a modified form; a third aspires to make India a free and autonomous nation, connected with England, if it may be, but not dependent on her. Until one of these conflicting ideals is accepted by the majority of the nation, it is idle to make a show of unity. That was possible formerly because the ideal of a modified British supremacy was the prevailing ideal, but now that new hopes and resolves are entering the national consciousness, these must either be

crushed or prevail, before true unity of a regenerated nation can replace the false unity of acquiescence in servitude.

In 1907 the Government prosecuted the *Bande Mataram* and Sri Aurobindo as its editor for propagating sedition. It was a country-wide sensation. Rabindranath Tagore then wrote his famous poem on Sri Aurobindo: 'Rabindranath. O Aurobindo, bows to thee!'

The Prosecution could not prove that Sri Aurobindo was the editor. He was acquitted. While the Government was exploring other ways to shut him up, there took place the Surat Congress where occurred the dramatic clash between the Moderates and the Nationalists when the former refused to pass resolutions declaring unqualified support to Swadeshi and Boycott. The Congress was adjourned and Nationalists met separately. Visiting British journalist Henry Nevinston records:

'Grave and silent, I think without saying a single word, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the chair and sat unmoved with far off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone and someone kindled a lantern at his side.'

The Surat Congress made it clear that the Indian politics was entering a new phase. The days of appeal and entreatment to a foreign rule were fast coming to a close. The popular support to Tilak and Sri Aurobindo—to the latter from the youth of India in particular—was becoming phenomenal. Soon afterwards, during the Alipore trial, Prosecution Counsel, Mr. Norton, complained with bitter agony: 'Aurobindo was treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone.'

Extremely bold was the emphasis now the *Bande Mataram* put on the ideal of Swaraj:

One thing only we are sure of, and one thing we wear as a life-belt which will buoy us up on the waves of the chaos that is coming on the land. This is the fixed and unalterable faith in an over-ruling purpose which is raising India once more from the dead, the fixed and unalterable intention to fight for the renovation of her ancient life and glory. Swaraj is the life-belt, Swaraj the pilot, Swaraj the star of guidance. If a great social revolution is necessary, it is because the

ideal of Swaraj cannot be accomplished by a nation bound to forms which are no longer expressive of the ancient and immutable Self of India. She must change the rags of the past so that her beauty may be readorned. She must alter her bodily appearance so that her soul may be newly expressed.¹

For some time the Police repression against the Nationalists was assuming diabolical proportions. Merely shouting the slogan 'Bande Mataram' was enough to invite brutal caning. Sri Aurobindo foresaw the consequence and told the rulers how childish it was to dream that a nationalist upsurge could be nipped like that. But the Government was determined to strike terror—and soon the inevitable retaliation came in the form of terrorism.

Sporadic attempts to eliminate officers noted for their anti-nationalism and to wreck the Governor's train culminated in a bomb being thrown at what was believed to be the carriage of Magistrate Kingsford notorious for awarding inhuman punishment to Swadeshi volunteers. In the course of the desperate investigation that followed, Police unearthed a centre of the revolutionaries at the Maniktolla gardens of Calcutta. Their report says that those who lived there were 'all educated young men belonging to respectable families'.

The youths, with their leader, Barin, were rounded up in a predawn swoop, and simultaneously Sri Aurobindo too was arrested at his residence.

The story of the trial that followed—and continued for a full year—is famous as the Alipore Conspiracy Case. The Judge was Mr. Beachcroft, Sri Aurobindo's colleague at Cambridge, a brilliant student next only to Sri Aurobindo!

Dramatic incidents took place while the trial was in progress. Two officers who were assisting the Prosecution were shot dead. The approver whose statement would have positively helped the Prosecution was killed in the broad daylight inside the prison premises by two young revolutionaries who knew for certain that they would be hanged.

¹All passages reproduced from the *Bande Mataram* are extracts from Sri Aurobindo's articles.

But while the trial was accompanied by such sound and fury Sri Aurobindo remained as detached as a remote star. 'Ashramvas', indeed, it was for him, as Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar would term it! Confined in a solitary cell he was having splendid spiritual experiences.

He related, after release, in his celebrated Uttarpara speech:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned, no, it was Basudeva, who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Basudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. . . . I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Basudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the prosecuting counsel and it was not the counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled.

So, Sri Krishna who was born inside a prison, now revealed himself to Sri Aurobindo inside a prison! Sri Aurobindo must have felt then what he wrote down in 1939:

At last I find a meaning of soul's birth
Into this universe terrible and sweet,
I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet.

I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,
And heard the passion of the Lover's flute.
And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise
And sorrow in my heart for ever mute.

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
Life shudders with a strange felicity.
All Nature is a wide enamoured pause
Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be.

For this one moment lived the ages past;
The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.

But while inside the prison, he wrote a magnificent anthem of freedom and adventure, which it is difficult again to check the temptation to quote in full:

Invitation

With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow?

Not in the petty circle of cities
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
Over me God is blue in the welkin,
Against me the wind and the storm rebel.

I sport with solitude here in my regions,
Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride,
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.

Another poem written during this period is *Who*. Rarely has there been a more successful marriage of depth of realisation with simplicity of expression. Any comment on such a poem would not only be superfluous, it might cramp its effect too. We can only quote a few lines and bask in their sunshine:

In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest,
Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?
When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether,
Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?

He is lost in the heart, in the cavern of Nature,
He is found in the brain where He builds up the thought;
In the pattern and bloom of the flowers He is woven,
In the luminous net of the stars He is caught.

In the strength of a man, in the beauty of woman,
In the laugh of a boy, in the blush of a girl;
The hand that sent Jupiter spinning through heaven,
Spends all its cunning to fashion a curl.

CHAPTER SIX

The Lover of Humanity

On the Congress platform he had stood up as a champion of left-wing thought and a fearless advocate of independence at a time when most of the leaders, with their tongues in their cheeks, would talk only of colonial self-government. He had undergone incarceration with perfect equanimity. . . . when I came to Calcutta in 1913, Aurobindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth.

SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE
An Indian Pilgrim

The Alipore trial went on for a year at the end of which Sri Aurobindo was acquitted. When he came out of the jail, repression had dulled the edge of revolutionary enthusiasm in Bengal. But on the broader Indian scene two things had already been achieved: Independence was no more a utopia for the people. The question was 'how' or 'when', no more 'what'. On the part of the British their first shock had given way to a better appraisal of the reality. The process to yield ground step by step had set in without their being quite conscious of it.

The *Bande Mataram* had ceased publication. Sri Aurobindo now brought out two weeklies, the *Karmayogin* in English and the *Dharma* in Bengali. The journals were not entirely political; they appealed to a deeper spirit in man from which politics could derive its true character, as Arjuna's participation in the battle of Kurukshetra derived its peculiar character from his realisation of the Karmayoga.

Even though India was relatively calm, a free Sri Aurobindo was too much of a risk for the Government to put up with

indefinitely. 'He is the most dangerous man in the whole of India,' wrote Lord Minto, the Viceroy, who would have been happy to deport him, to Lord Morely, the Secretary of State for India, who would not easily agree to the proposed deportation.

Sri Aurobindo, for quite some time now, was not formulating his actions through thoughts or calculations. He was depending for guidance from above. While at the Government level the debate on the advisability of deporting Sri Aurobindo was in full swing—and Sri Aurobindo knew about it but did not care—one evening early in 1910 he suddenly got an *adeshi* to proceed to Chandernagore, a little French pocket not far from Calcutta. He did not stop to reflect or to discuss; he acted at once and was at Chandernagore the next morning. A few weeks later the voice guided him to Pondicherry.

The *Karmayogin* was run by Sister Nivedita for some time, and the *Dharma* by his young lieutenant, Nolini Kanta Gupta.

In the certainty of his inner vision Sri Aurobindo had seen India's independence as a fact in the process of realisation. And significantly, the independence came on his 75th birthday, on the 15th of August 1947.¹

Surging forth in his horizon was the outlines of fresh woods and pastures new. He had now woken up to the supreme mission of his life: to plunge into the depth of spirituality and to discover and establish the principles of the Yoga Integral—for the transformation of man.

The hullabaloo in the Government circle was gradually reduced to squeak and creak and was then silenced. But it took a long time for the vast multitudes of Sri Aurobindo's admirers to reconcile to the fact of his departure from the political scene. Within a year of his leaving Calcutta his first biography was published by Mr. R. Palit to satisfy a country-wide crying need. Mr. Palit had the courage to tell those who thought that Sri Aurobindo had fled to the French territory only to avoid harassment by a desperate administration that his motive 'Must not be judged by outward circumstance only. We must try to get into the spirit of the action. Should we sacrifice our spiritual

¹Sri Aurobindo's Message of the 15th of August 1947 has been reproduced in the Appendix.

interests for the sake of being reckoned heroic in a mundane affair?"

But people looked forward with great eagerness to know more. Few were fortunate to receive any letter from him. Netaji Subhas Chandra remembers: 'Such letters would pass rapidly from hand to hand, especially in circles interested in spirituality-cum-politics. In our circle usually somebody would read the letter aloud and the rest of us would enthuse over it. In one such letter Aurobindo wrote, "We must be dynamos of the divine electricity so that when each one of us stands up thousands around may be full of the light—full of bliss and Ananda." We felt convinced that spiritual enlightenment was necessary for effective national service.'

Later, celebrities like C.R. Das and Tagore saw him at Pondicherry. Their statements went a long way to dispel confusion from the people's minds. Tagore wrote in 1928:

'At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realisation had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine, which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life. . . . I felt that the utterance of the ancient Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him, "You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world, 'Hearken to me'. . . ."

'Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him, "Aurobindo, accept the salutation of Rabindra". Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of a reticent richness of wisdom and again I sang to him in silence, "Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindra."' "

Tagore had hit the truth. Sri Aurobindo had not rejected life; far from that, it was in quest of—and with the certainty of—a greater life on earth for man that he had retired from politics. His vision of man's evolution into a new being and his Sadhana to bring down Supermind on earth were of course propositions too profound to be appreciated immediately. Yet those who had looked forward with genuine eagerness to the light

from Pondicherry, they had not to wait long. The light began to reach them from 1914, in form of the monthly *Arya*, first published on the 15th of August this year—a significant year indeed—when the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, met him at Pondicherry.

Through the pages of the *Arya* which serialised his major prose works—*The Life Divine*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Essays on the Gita*, *The Psychology of Social Development* (now called *The Human Cycle*), *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Future Poetry*, *A Defence of Indian Culture* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* apart from several other works, people learnt that his spirituality did not reject the so-called worldly life. Instead, it envisages its spiritualisation and transformation. To be a lover of humanity in the highest, the divine sense of the term, it was not enough to love man as he is and to leave him there. The world, in fact, abounds in displays in which ego or attachment masquerades as love.

Only when thou hast climbed above thy mind
And livest in the calm vastness of the One
Can love be eternal in the eternal bliss
And love divine replace the human tie.

—Savitri VI, I

But Sri Aurobindo's love of man was evident, not in his vision of man's lofty destiny alone, for the manifestation of which he endeavoured hard and endured all; but also in terms purely social and political he has laid down principles which could straighten many a knotty problem that intrigue and vex mankind today, in the pages of *The Ideal of Human Unity*. It is not a work of emotional appeal for unity, not a call by the conventional prudence, tired of strifes, for a lusty declaration of brotherhood, for, the very first chapter bears this significant title: 'The Turn towards Unity. Its Necessity and Dangers,' where he points out what should be the basic rationale for a conscious drive towards unity:

It must be remembered that a greater social or political unity is not necessarily a boon in itself; it is only worth pursuing in so far as it provides a means and a framework

for a better, richer, more happy and puissant individual and collective life. But hitherto the experience of mankind has not favoured the view that huge aggregations, closely united and strictly organised, are favourable to a rich and puissant human life. It would seem that collective life is more at ease with itself, more genial, varied, fruitful when it can concentrate itself in small space and simpler organisms.

If we consider the past of humanity so far as it is known to us, we find that the interesting periods of human life, the scenes in which it has been most richly lived and has left behind it the most precious fruits, were precisely those ages and countries in which humanity was able to organise in little independent centres acting intimately upon each other but not fused into a single unity.

But we are living in a different time when people have begun to dream of social, administrative and political unification of mankind.

A tremendous organisation would be needed under which both individual and regional life would be crushed, dwarfed, deprived of their necessary freedom like a plant without rain and wind and sunlight, and this would mean for humanity, after perhaps one first outburst of satisfied and joyous activity, a long period of mere conservation, increasing stagnancy and ultimately decay.

Yet the unity of mankind is evidently a part of Nature's eventual scheme and must come about. Only it must be under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly diverse in its oneness.

Sri Aurobindo examines all the imperfections of the past aggregates, diagnoses the weaknesses underlying the various moves at unity through the ages with a masterly objective grasp of the currents and counter-currents of forces in history—and he does so with a prognosis of the evolution of the social and world orders. He concludes:

The saving power needed is a new psychological factor which

will at once make a united life necessary to humanity and force it to respect the principle of freedom. The religion of humanity seems to be the one growing force which tends in that direction; for it makes for the sense of human oneness, it has the idea of the race, and yet at the same time it respects the human individual and the natural human grouping. But its present intellectual form seems hardly sufficient. The idea, powerful in itself and in its effects, is yet not powerful enough to mould the whole life of the race in its image. For it has to concede too much to the egoistic side of human nature, once all and still nine-tenths of our being, with which its larger idea is in conflict. On the other side, because it leans principally on the reason, it turns too readily to the mechanical solution. For the rational idea ends always as a captive of its machinery, becomes a slave of its own too binding process. A new idea with another turn of the logical machine revolts against it and breaks up the machinery, but only to substitute in the end another mechanical system, another credo, formula and practice.

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellowmen will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of co-operation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellowmen is his own

life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race. To go into all that this implies would be too large a subject to be entered upon here; it is enough to point out that in this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas. But if it is at all a truth of our being it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, and inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.

Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and true way from the inner truth to the outer forms. Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed. But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent,—perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing,—the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.

And we can conclude with a meditation on a few words from his *Thoughts and Glimpses*:

What is there new that we have yet to accomplish? Love, for as yet we have only accomplished hatred and self-pleasing; Knowledge, for as yet we have only accomplished error and perception and conceiving; Bliss, for as yet we

have only accomplished pleasure and pain and indifference; Power, for as yet we have only accomplished weakness and effort and a defeated victory; Life, for as yet we have only accomplished birth and growth and dying; Unity, for as yet we have only accomplished war and association.

In a word, godhead; to remake ourselves in the divine image.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Poet of Love and Dawn

Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.

SRI AUROBINDO : *Savitri*

. . . Love, the storm is past,
The peril o'er. Now we shall glide, my queen,
Through green-gold woods and between golden fields
To float for ever in a golden dream
O earth's gold Luxmie, till the shining gates
Eternal open to us thy heavenly home.

This is from *Vasavadutta* of Sri Aurobindo, written in 1915,—a popular tale from Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara* turned into a dramatic romance of exquisite sweetness ending on the hope of floating for ever in a golden dream for its hero. It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo had written his only tragedy, *Rodogune*, during this period too. Two exiled sons, Antiochus and Timocles, return to their mother Cleopatra after her husband's death. Soon both of them are enamoured by the beautiful Rodogune, a captive princess in the palace. Rodogune loves the brave Antiochus who unfortunately has been misunderstood by his powerful mother from the very beginning. The jealous Timocles has his brother killed. Rodogune dies of shock. A prophecy once uttered by an Eremite before Antiochus and Rodogune comes true:

I am the appointed voice
who come to tell thee thou shalt not be king,
But at thy end shall yield to destiny
For all thy greatness, genius, pride and force
Even as the tree that falls.

But after all the displays of naked passion what has Timocles the survivor to live by? Nothing but a death-like existence; life to him has become almost a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing:

Something has snapped in me
 Physicians cannot bind. Thou, Prince Nicanor,
 Art from the royal blood of Syria sprung
 And in thy line Seleucus may descend
 Untainted from his source. Brother, brother,
 We did not dream that all would end like this,
 When in the dawn or set we roamed at will
 Playing together in Egyptian gardens,
 Or in the orchards of great Ptolemy
 Walked with our arms around each other's necks
 Twin-hearted. But now unto eternity
 We are divided. I must live for ever
 Unfriended, solitary in the shades;
 But thou and she will lie at ease inarmed
 Deep in the quiet happy asphodel
 And hear the murmur of Elysian winds
 While I walk lonely.

In the complex formation of man's ignorant existence, ambition perhaps is the perversion of what should really guide his steps in the right direction, namely, aspiration. There is no escape from the vicious whirlpool of mean deeds and their inevitable reactions, *Karma* and the consequence, as long as man has not taken a bold jump out of it. How many heroes, how many civilizations, indeed, have not been crushed under the ruthless wheels of fate! We get a sad yet grand view of this condition in Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion*, an early and unfinished epic of the Trojan theme, when dawn breaks upon the city which is already under the grip of doom:

Closer now gliding glimmered the golden feet of the goddess.
 Over the hills and the headlands spreading her garment of
 splendour,
 Fateful she came with her eyes impartial looking on all things,
 Bringer to man of the day of his fortune and day of his down-
 fall.
 Full of her luminous errand, careless of eve and its weeping,
 Fateful she paused unconcerned above Ilion's mystiered
 greatness.

Domes like shimmering tongues of the crystal flames of the
 morning,
 Opalesque rhythm-line of tower-tops, notes of the syre of the
 sun-god.
 High over all that a nation had built and its love and its
 laughter,
 Lighting the last time highway and homestead, market and
 temple,
 Looking on men who must die and women destined to sorrow,
 Looking on beauty fire must lay low and the sickle of slaughter,
 Fateful she lifted the doom-scroll red with the script of the
 Immortals,
 Deep in the invisible air that folds in the race and its morrows
 Fixed it, and passed on smiling the smile of the griefless and
 deathless,—
 Dealers of death though death they know not, who in the
 morning
 Scatter the seed of the event for the reaping ready at nightfall.

Fate, however, assumes a different significance in *Eric*,¹
 another dramatic romance, written in 1912 or 1913. When at
 its end, in response to Eric the hero's joy over their union,
 Aslaug, the heroine, says:

That it was fated. Now for us,
 O beloved, the world begins again. . . .

Loves has performed a miracle, Aslaug who was once full
 of hatred for Eric and in fact had gone to meet him in order to
 find an opportunity to slay him, has run into sweet troubles
 from the start, for, Eric is

A mighty man!
 He has the face and figure of a God,—
 A marble emperor with brilliant eyes.

And she in due course has changed Eric, a man of 'height'
 and 'iron' into a man of mercy, greatness and enterprise.

In *Rodogune*, the hero, Antiochus, was too ambitious, despite
 his brave qualities, too egoistic to allow love to work such a

¹We have five complete and three incomplete plays from Sri Aurobindo. The complete ones are: *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta*, *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric*. The incomplete ones are: *The House of Brut*, *The Maid in the Mill* and *The Prince of Edur*.

happy sequel. Love is the secret of change towards good, of looking up at the sublime:

'Tis Love, 'tis Love fills up the gulfs of time.
By love we find our kinship with the stars.

—*Eric*

But how much true love is there in all that goes by that name?

To live, to love are signs of infinite things,
Love is a glory from eternity's spheres.
Abased, disfigured, mocked by baser might
That steal his name and shape and ecstasy,
He is still the Godhead by which all can change.

—*Savitri*

But if it has wrought wonders even through its pale blossoming in human life how wonderful will it not be when it would flourish under the bright sun of spiritual purity and enlightenment!

Only when thou hast climbed above thy mind
And livest in the calm vastness of the One
Can love be eternal in the eternal bliss
And love divine replace the human tie.

—*Savitri*

After all, man is the lover and God is the goal—is the last revelation of the Rishi.¹

When Ahana, the Dawn of God, descends on the world where amid the strife and trouble of mortality the Hunters of Joy, the Seekers after Knowledge, the climbers in the quest of Power are toiling up the slopes or waiting in the valleys. She too brings the message and interpretation of true Love:

¹The theme of *The Rishi*, a long poem of Sri Aurobindo, is this: 'King Manu in the former ages of the world, when the Arctic continent still subsisted, seeks knowledge from the Rishi of the Pole, who after long baffling him with conflicting side-lights of the knowledge, reveals to him what it chiefly concerns man to know.'

Voice of the sensuous mortal, heart of eternal longing,
Thou who hast lived as in walls, thy soul with thy senses
wronging !
But I descend at last. Fickle and terrible, sweet and deceiving,
Poison and nectar one has dispensed to thee, luring thee,
leaving.
We two together shall capture the flute and the player
relentless.
Son of man, thou hast crowned thy life with the flowers that
are scentless,
Chased the delights that wound. But I come and midnight
shall sunder.
Lo, I come, and behind me Knowledge descends and with
thunder
Filling the spaces Strength, the Angel, bears on his bosom
Joy to thy arms. Thou shalt look on her face like a child's
or a blossom,
Innocent, free as in Eden of old, not afraid of her playing,
When thy desires I have seized and devoured like a lioness
preying.
Thou shalt not suffer always nor cry to me lured and forsaken:
I have a snare for his footsteps, I have a chain for him taken.
Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and
for master.
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness
insulting.
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song
and the singer,
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill
to his finger,
Brindavan's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,
Take thy place in the Ras and thy share of the ecstasy after.

Thus the descent of the Dawn of God is, we can say, the
beginning of the Realisation of Love in its true glory.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Revelation of India's Past

She sees promise of her future in the revelation of her past.

SRI AUROBINDO

In the next great stage of human progress it is not a material but a spiritual, moral and psychical advance that has to be made and for this a free Asia and in her a free India must take the lead, and liberty is therefore, for the world's sake, worth striving for. India must have Swaraj in order to live; . . . in order to live well and happily: She must have Swaraj in order to live for the world, not as a slave for the material and political benefit of a nation, but as a free people for the spiritual and moral benefit of the human race.

This was a declaration made in the early days of India's struggle for freedom. But Sri Aurobindo's commitment was deep. So he devoted a great part of his writing in the *Arya* to the expositions of the pristine spiritual vision of India and the significance of her cultural and literary heritage. They are now compiled under the titles, *Essays on the Gita*, *On the Veda* and *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.

While reflections on Mr. James Cousin's book *New Ways in English Literature* provided a basis for *The Future Poetry*, the need to review an assessment of the Indian heritage by Mr. William Archer whose chief claim to write on the subject 'was a sublime and confident ignorance,' and Sir John Woodroffe's answer to it, created the occasion for writing *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.

Mr. Archer had lumped together all India's greatest achievements, philosophy, religion, poetry, painting, sculpture and

scriptures 'in one wholesale condemnation as a repulsive mass of unspeakable barbarism'. After exploding the grotesque lump cemented by Mr. Archer's genius in bungling, Sri Aurobindo pointed out the real issue in question:

Not then, whether India is civilised is the query that should be put, but whether the motive which has shaped her civilisation or the old-European intellectual or the new-European materialistic motive is to lead human culture. Is the harmony of the spirit, mind and body to found itself on the gross law of our physical nature rationalised only or touched at the most by an ineffective spiritual glimmer, or is the dominant power of spirit to take the lead and force the lesser powers of the intellect, mind and body to a more exalted effort after a highest harmony, a victorious ever-developing equipoise? India must defend herself by reshaping her cultural forms to express most powerfully, intimately and perfectly her ancient ideal. Her aggression must lead the waves of the light thus liberated in triumphant self-expanding rounds all over the world which it once possessed or at least enlightened in far off ages. An appearance of conflict must be admitted for a time, for as long as the attack of an opposite culture continues. But since it will be in effect an assistance to all the best that is emerging from the advanced thought of the Occident, it will culminate in the beginning of a concert on a higher plane and a preparation of oneness.

Sri Aurobindo examines the various aspects of Indian culture—their deep spiritual basis—the secret of their surviving the blows of history and the vicissitudes of time.

India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human people. And that which must seek now to awake is not an Anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycle of the occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning

to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma.

About the Veda, he says in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*:

The Veda thus understood stands out, apart from its interest as the world's first yet extant Scripture, its earliest interpretation of man and the Divine and the universe, as a remarkable, a sublime and powerful poetic creation. It is in its form and speech no barbaric production. The Vedic poets are masters of a consummate technique, their rhythms are carved like chariots of the gods and borne on divine and ample wings of sound, and are at once concentrated and wide-waved, great in movement and subtle in modulation, their speech lyric by intensity and epic by elevation and utterance of great power, pure and bold and grand in outline, a speech direct and brief in impact, full to overflowing in sense and suggestion so that each verse exists at once as a strong and sufficient thing in itself and takes its place as a large step between what came before and what comes after. A sacred and hieratic tradition faithfully followed gave them both their form and substance, but this substance consisted of the deepest psychic and spiritual experiences of which the human soul is capable and the forms seldom or never degenerate into a convention, because what they are intended to convey was lived in himself by each poet and made new to his own mind in expression by the subtleties or sublimities of his individual vision. The utterances of the greatest seers, Viswamitra, Vamadeva, Dirghatamas and many others, touch the most extraordinary heights and amplitudes of a sublime and mystic poetry and there are poems like the Hymn of Creation that move in a powerful clarity on the summits of thought on which the Upanishads lived constantly with a more sustained breathing. The mind of ancient India did not err when it traced back all its philosophy, religion and essential things of its culture to these seer-poets, for all the future spirituality of her people is contained there in seed or in first expression.

And *On the Veda*, beginning with the question 'Is there at all or is there still a secret of the Veda?' elaborates this theme and explains several hymns with commentaries.

Yet another great work on the Indian lore, and according to many the most important one, is *Essays on the Gita*:

The Gita is a book that has worn extraordinarily well and it is almost as fresh and still in its real substance quite as new, because always renewable in experience, as when it first appeared in or was written into the frame of the *Mahabharata*. It is still received in India as one of the great bodies of doctrine that most authoritatively govern religious thinking and its teaching acknowledged as the highest value if not wholly accepted by almost all shades of religious belief and opinion. Its influence is not merely philosophic or academic but immediate and living, an influence both for thought and action, and its ideas are actually at work as a powerful shaping factor in the revival and renewal of a nation and a culture.

What is our demand and need from the Gita? Who is the Divine Teacher and who is the human disciple? What is the core of the teaching of the Gita? What is the Supreme secret? These are among the several questions the *Essays on the Gita* answers.

CHAPTER NINE

Message of the Life Divine

Here comes Sri Aurobindo, the completest synthesis that has been realised of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe. . . . The last of the great Rishis holds in his hand, in firm unrelaxed grip, the bow of creative energy.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Has our life a deeper meaning, a goal to be attained? If yes, what is that goal? If death is the inevitable ultimate, where is the justification for our putting up all the exasperating fights against the problems and odds of life? If God is good and he is the creator of this world, why is his creation so very imperfect?

One does not get answers to these questions from one's learning at the university. Neither through wealth and power nor through poverty and sacrifice does one get at them. Yet the questions are irresistible.

How often has it not been said—in so many words—that the world is an illusion! Perhaps much of it—as the world stands today—is illusion, is far from truth. But if, in order to realise the truth one must abandon the world, then why did God create it at all? Why do great souls appear here from time to time and try to enlighten it? And can one ever truly abandon the world from which he has sprung—himself but a bit of itself?

Long ago Dharma had once put a question to Yudhisthira: What is the greatest of all wonders? Yudhisthira had replied: So many are departing to the abode of death, day after day. Yet the living ones think and act as though they were immortals! What is a greater wonder than this?

That the wonder still goes strong several thousand years after Yudhisthira—is no less wonder. Cannot it be so that hidden in

the core of man's consciousness lies a prescience of a deathless future which, distorted and mutilated, manifests through ignorance as a blind attachment to life?

Measureless is the world's misery. Yet has man stuck to it, rebuilding it after each devastation, each deluge. What is the secret of this triumphant strength? To live a life of pleasures and to die in peace—can this be the apex of his aspirations?

Does not something in us inform us—however faintly—that the world as it is cannot be the last word for itself, that even a promise of a happy life, free from social and political problems, from physical maladies, cannot be the last word in human aspirations?

In his great 'prose epic', *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo, through a patient examination of the nature of the evolution of consciousness, the nature of the Ultimate Reality and the way it is related to the universe of the triple existence of Matter, Life and Mind, shows how we must find the link between the Ultimate Reality and the Universe—the Supermind. In doing so, not vital question that besets man has he left unexplored.

Our world—our life in this world—must enter a future with a difference. A transformation awaits us in this earthly existence of ours:

There is no conclusive validity in the reasoning that because this is a world of Ignorance, such a transformation can only be achieved by a passage to a heaven beyond or cannot be achieved at all and the demand of the psychic entity is itself ignorant and must be replaced by merger of the soul in the Absolute. This conclusion could only be solely valid if Ignorance were the whole meaning, substance and power of the world-manifestation or if there were no element in World-Nature itself through which there could be an exceeding of the ignorant mentality that still burdens our present status of being. But the Ignorance is only a portion of this World-Nature; it is not the whole of it, not the original power or creator: it is in its higher origin a self-limiting Knowledge and even in its lower origin, its emergence out of the sheer material Inconscience, it is a suppressed Consciousness labouring to find, to recover itself, to manifest Knowledge, which is its true character, as the foundation of existence. In

universal Mind itself there are ranges above our mentality which are instruments of the cosmic truth-cognition, and into these the mental being can surely rise; for already it rises towards them in super-normal conditions or receives from them without yet knowing or possessing them intuitions, spiritual intimations, large influxes of illumination or spiritual capacity. All these ranges are conscious of what is beyond them, and the highest of them is directly open to the Supermind, aware of the Truth-consciousness which exceeds it. Moreover, in the evolving being itself, those greater powers of consciousness are here, supporting mind-truth, underlying its action which screens them; this Supermind and those Truth-powers uphold Nature by their secret presence: even, truth of mind is their result, a diminished operation, a representation in partial figures. It is, therefore, not only natural but seems inevitable that these higher powers of Existence should manifest here in Mind as Mind itself has manifested in Life and Matter.

Indisputable is man's urge, conscious or otherwise, to realise a higher life. And further:

If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the Spirit manifesting in Nature.

The process of transition is already in motion. Sri Aurobindo explains the nature of the acute and complex crisis man is

·experiencing in all spheres of existence:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organized collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it. This new fullness of the means of life might be, by its power for a release from the incessant unsatisfied stress of his economic and physical needs, an opportunity for the full pursuit of other and greater aims surpassing the material existence, for the discovery of a higher truth and good and beauty, for the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being; but it is being used instead for the multiplication of new wants and an aggressive expansion of the collective ego. At the same time Science has put at his disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements, no inner sense or power which would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness. All that is there is a chaos of clashing mental ideas, urges of individual and collective physical

want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hustling medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, to kill and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that this is his way out of something ideal. The evolution of human mind and life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality; but on a basis of ego and segmenting and dividing mind this opening to the universal can only create a vast pollution of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires, a chaotic mass of unassimilated and intermixed mental, vital and physical material of a larger existence which, because it is not taken up by a creative harmonizing light of spirit, must welter in a universalized confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life.

With a thorough probe into the manifold spiritual quest of man since times immemorial, Sri Aurobindo presents the vision of their inevitable culmination, the prospect of the ultimate self-revelation of the Divinity in things. The process of transformation described is an illumination at every step:

. . . the gulf between mind and supermind has to be bridged, the closed passages opened and roads of ascent and descent created where there is now a void and a silence. This can be done only by the triple transformation. . . there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconscious; last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation,—there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.

CHAPTER TEN

Poetry and Aesthetics of the Future

The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of or rather be included in the sight, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech.

SRI AUROBINDO : *The Future Poetry*

There is a singularity in Sri Aurobindo's vision of poetry and his ideas of aesthetics. The first of the qualities which go to make this singularity, to put it in a nutshell, lies in the fact that Sri Aurobindo views man as an evolving being with the possibility—or rather the assurance of—hitherto unrealised capacities opening up in him, for,

Man is a narrow bridge, a call that grows,
His soul the dim bud of Gods' flaming rose.

—*The Dumb Inconscient*

and for,
I know, O God, the day shall dawn at last
When man shall rise from playing with the mud
And taking in his hands the sun and the stars
Remould appearance, law and process old.

—*The Meditations of Mandavya*

And here is a glimpse of man's destiny:

A might no human will or force could gain,
A knowledge seated in eternity,
A joy beyond our struggle and our pain
Is this earth-hampered creature's destiny.

—*Evolution*

So, man, after all, is a transitional being. Crawling in his evolution he has come to be what he is today. But perhaps the time has come when, although caught up in the vortex of an evolutionary crisis at the moment, he will bounce out and will embrace a loftier destiny that awaits him. For, certainly, Sri Aurobindo says, an eternal perfection is moulding us into its own image. Through the ages our secret to translate into the reality of our being that image of perfection sometimes results in our inner progress and sometimes gets expression through our artistic activities, for, as Sri Aurobindo says, 'The highest Art is that which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit.' The aesthetic sense in us is an awareness of the reality and the justification of such activities; perhaps to an extent inborn and to an extent cultivated capacity to recognise the beautiful in us and around us. 'To find highest beauty is to find God.' And spiritually speaking, God is synonym of that eternal perfection—to realise which is our eternal drive—conscious or unconscious.

Now, although, generally speaking, aesthetics belong to the mental range and all that depends upon it and sometimes—as Sri Aurobindo warns—it may degenerate into aestheticism and may exaggerate and narrow itself into some version of the theory of 'Art for Art's sake', but it will be possible for man to take a stand at a higher level than his mind, say, to use Sri Aurobindo's own term, Overmind, where aesthesis is not limited by rules and canons, where, 'it sees a universal and an eternal beauty which it takes up and transforms all that is limited and particular'. Since each individual, through all the joys and agonies of life, is doing one thing—evolving—slowly or rapidly, his aesthetic perception too may become an area of dynamic experiences leading him through the physical, moral and intellectual beauty, to the realms of ever inexhaustible spiritual beauty. Explaining in a letter that his epic *Savitri* was written with an Overmind influence and while discussing about the attitude required to appreciate it, Sri Aurobindo wrote :

A fundamental and universal aesthesis is needed, something also more intense that listens, sees and feels from deep within and answers to what is behind the surface. A greater, wider and deeper aesthesis then which can answer even to the

transcendent and feel too whatever of the transcendent and spiritual enters into the things of life, mind and sense.

The second cardinal factor that distinguishes the scope of Sri Aurobindo's aesthesis from the term's usual meaning is his vision of the world,

This iron, brute, gigantic helpless toy
They call a world, this thing that turns and turns
And shrieks and bleeds and cannot stop, this victim
Broken and living yet on its iron wheel . . .

—*The Meditations of Mandavya*

But yet—

Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,
The forge where the Arch-mason shapes his works.

—*Savitri*

And so far as we, the human beings, are concerned:

A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion, we must grow divine.
Our life is a paradox with God for key.

This material world or life, then, is no antonym of God; everything, whatever be its immediate palpable function in this world, is also symbolic of something greater and sublimer.

In its march through time mankind has reached a most crucial juncture. Rarely is performed an act in the world scene today which does not bear the marks of bewilderment. Man's creative activity is no exception. In *The Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo refers to this condition with a note of warning:

At present the human mind is occupied in passing the borders of two kingdoms. It is emerging out of a period of active and mostly materialistic intellectualism towards a primary intuitive seeking to which the straining of the intellect after truth has been brought in the very drive of its

own impulse by a sort of slipping over unexpected borders. There is therefore an uncertain groping in many directions some of which are only valuable as a transitional effort and, if they could be the end and final movement, might lead only to a brilliant corruption and decadence.

Signs of brilliant corruption and decadence are very much there in contemporary poetry and, no doubt, in the poetry of brilliant minds, for brilliance is not enough. If the poetry of tomorrow should not be just a superfluous prolongation of the poetry of yesterday and today (indeed, it cannot be that—although it can fall back), and should rather be a worthy continuation with marked achievements, then it has to widen its scope. While the universe gets discovered to man in its intimate details, the feeling of being a stranger and afraid in a world we never made will not do. The expansion of man's physical vision must be adequately matched by an expansion of his consciousness. The groping in darkness can end only with the unsealing of the doors of spirit in man, with the opening up of a new vision: 'Vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminating thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist.'

The speech through which such vision will express itself will be *mantrik*. The *mantra* must not be confused with anything like a formula or a fixed system; neither is it a form for philosophical content. The *mantra* is 'the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the rhythm and speech of that truth'. It comes as expressions of—it can perhaps be said—great heights of inner freedom.

The pouring of a new and greater self-vision of Man and Nature and existence into the idea and the life is the condition of the completeness of the coming poetry. It is a large setting and movement of life opening a considerable expansion to the human soul and mind that has been in the great ages of literature the supreme creative stimulus. The discovery of a fresh intellectual or aesthetic motive of the kind that was common in the last century initiates only an ephemeral ripple on the surface and seldom creates work of the very first order. The real inspiration enters with a more

complete movement, an enlarged horizon of life, a widening of the fields of the idea, a heightening of the flight of the spirit. The change that is at present coming over the mind of the race began with a wider cosmic vision, a sense of the greatness and destiny and possibilities of the individual and the race, the idea of humanity and of the unity of man with man and a closer relation too and unity of his mind with the life of Nature. . . .

The intellectual idea was yet not enough, for it had to find its own greater truth in the spiritual idea and its finer cultural field in a more delicate and complex and subtle psychic sight and experience. It is this that has been prepared by recent and contemporary poets. The expression of this profounder idea and experience is again not enough until the spiritual idea has passed into a complete spiritual realisation and not only affected individual intellect and psychic mind and imagination, but entered into the general sense and feeling of the race and taken hold upon all thought and life to reinterpret and remould them in their image. It is this spiritual realisation that the future poetry has to help forward by giving to it its eye of sight, its shape of aesthetic beauty, its revealing tongue and it is this greatening of life that it has to make its substance.

It is in effect a larger cosmic vision, a realising of the godhead in the world and in man, of his divine possibilities as well of the greatness of the power that manifests in what he is, a spiritualised uplifting of his thought and feeling and sense and action, a more developed psychic mind and heart, a truer and a deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of diviner potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention and structure of his life that is the call upon humanity, the prospect offered to it by the slowly unfolding and now more clearly disclosed Self of the universe. The nations that most include and make real these things in their life and culture are the nations of the coming dawn and the poets of whatever tongue and race who most completely see with this vision and speak with the inspiration of its utterance are those who shall be the creators of the poetry of the future.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Epic of the Destiny of Man

Savitri. The supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's Vision.

THE MOTHER

With the passage of time will become more and more glaring a great paradox of our age: amid a contemporary creativity splattered with the blood of multiple agony has blossomed a complete vision of a golden tomorrow; somewhere aside the sombre labyrinths of the phantom castle of 'Today' echoing and re-echoing the wailings of despair and anger has been sung a wonderful *Bhairav* welcoming a new dawn.

The genuineness of the cries of agony—vibrating with vitality in the contemporary literature—cannot be challenged. They certainly convey a reality of the most obvious experience. But neither can the vision and assurance of *Savitri*, the epic of Sri Aurobindo, be challenged. They too are the records of an adventure in consciousness.

The poet of *Savitri* has not rejected the agonies of the world as illusions:

The great perplexed and discontented world,
This haunt of ignorance, this home of pain:
there are pitched desire's tents, grief's headquarters.

But there is a reality behind these realities:

Yet Light is there; it stands at Nature's doors:
It holds a torch to lead the traveller in.
It waits to be kindled in our secret cells.

No doubt, the experience of this light is a mystic experience: Sri Aurobindo is a mystic poet. But mystic experiences too are

the realities of a certain sphere. While most of the poetry worth the name are bound to contain some elements of mysticism, their poets are not generally inclined to believe in that mysticism having anything more to do than importing a secret magic lure into their poetry. But it was different with Sri Aurobindo. He believed that one day the splendours of those high mystic peaks would stream down into man's life, for, man as he stands today is only a transitional being.

He has risen to greatness and discontent,
He is awake to the invisible,
Insatiate seeker, he has all to learn:
He has exhausted now life's surface acts.
His being's hidden realms remain to explore.

—*Savitri* II, 4.

In his great prose work, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo says:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, —for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment, —is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.

That which retards man, at every step, from his realising the end of his perennial aspiration, is ignorance—inconscience. Death too, the 'Black lie of night to the cowed soul of man, unreal inescapable end of things' feeds and lives on this unfortunate element that dominates and tyrannizes over life.

Of this formidable tyrant, death, there is only one genuine opponent, love.

The eyes of love gaze starlike through death's night,
The feet of love tread naked hardest worlds.

This perpetual opposition of love to death and love's potential superiority over death has been cryptically contained in one of the immortal legends of the *Mahabharata*: Savitri, a princess who lived in a forest with the exiled family of her husband Satyavan whom she had chosen to marry, had the prescience of her husband's death. She accompanied him into the wood on the doomsday. At the predestined moment Satyavan fell down, dead. But Savitri was not simply a devoted wife with a heart full of the purest love for Satyavan, but also she was a woman with splendid spiritual achievements. She could see, in her occult vision, when Yama the God of Death appeared there and took hold of Satyavan's soul. Silently but with adamant steps Savitri followed Yama. Yama entreated her to return. But she would not. Amazed at the strength of her love—and at the same time ardently desiring to get rid of her—Yama granted a series of boons to her, in course of which, in a psychological moment, Savitri made him grant that she would have a hundred sons by Satyavan!

But how can that be if Satyavan is no more? Thus outwitted Yama was obliged to restore Satyavan to life.

In Sri Aurobindo's hand this legend has been transformed into a symbol of elaborate significance. Too weak, too puny indeed is man; too meagre and distorted is what he knows as love to challenge the oppression of death with. But projected into a remote past, but growing with humanity, timeless yet putting on the garb of time, is the eternal Savitri, whose *sadhana* on behalf of the children of the world will one day usher in the flow of Divine Love, the ultimate antidote to the hydra of ignorance.

'As we read the epic, Canto after Canto, with Aswapathy we become a traveller of the worlds of darkness below and the worlds of light above, with Savitri we adventure into the "inner countries" of the mind, heart and soul, and meet the triple soul forces of Might, Sorrow and Light, and when at last the issue is joined between Savitri and Death in the dream kingdom of the Spirit we follow the vicissitudes of the struggle all through the spaces of Eternal Night, the Double Twilight and Everlasting

Day. And when all is over, and Savitri and Satyavan retire for the night, there is the sure promise of another and "a greater dawn". (Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar.)

The personality of Savitri, to any devoted reader of the epic will be an untold delight of discovery. Her soul is with men as the Mother of Sorrows:

Accepting the universe as her body of woe,
The Mother of seven sorrows bore
The seven stabs that pierced her bleeding heart:
The beauty of sadness lingered on her face,
Her eyes were dim with the ancient stain of tears.
Her heart was riven with the world's agony.

—*Savitri* VII, 4.

But she is also there as the Mother of Light:

Heaven had unveiled its lustre in her eyes,
Her feet were moonbeams. her face was a bright sun,
Her smile could persuade a dead lacerated heart
To live again and feel the hands of calm.

—*Savitri* VII, 4.

An epic records the exceptional courage of a hero. In the whole range of world epics, *Savitri* is unique in this that its 'hero' is a woman:

Amid the work of darker Powers She is here
To heal the evils and mistakes of Space
And change the tragedy of the ignorant world
Into a Divine comedy of joy.
And the laughter and the rapture of God's bliss.

—*Savitri* III, 2.

And in place of an external fight as is inevitably fought in the great epics of the world (such fights, of course, always have an occult phase and parallel) the fight of Savitri is basically a fight in the realm of consciousness. In his *Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo says:

The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or gods, need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action:

the divinely appointed creation of Rome, the struggles of the principles of good and evil as presented in the great Indian poems, the pageant of the centuries or the journey of the seer through the three worlds beyond us are as fit themes as primitive wars and adventure for the imagination of the epic creator. The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. This indeed may be the song of the greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe.

The *Savitri*, with its 23,813 lines of blank verse the longest poem in English language, is national in the most subtle and significant sense of the term. Its story is traced back to the epic heritage of India. As in the two great epics of India's past, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, its spirituality remains entwined with the earth. The spirituality of the Indian epics is not asceticism. In the *Mahabharata*, when on the eve of the Kurukshetra war Arjuna is assailed by an overpowering emotion of renunciation, *vairagya*, Sri Krishna is inspiring him back to his duty, for it is not to shun the work, but work sans attachment, work for the fulfilment of a sublime scheme on earth—as an instrument—is the path of a truly enlightened man. There is such a scheme—a divine scheme—which is unfolding itself upon the earth—envisions Sri Aurobindo—and man, according to this scheme, must transcend himself so that

A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.
On Nature's luminous tops, on the Spirit's ground,
The Superman shall reign as a king of life.
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven.

—*Savitri* XI, 1.

In this Sri Aurobindo's epic transcends the national frame; it embraces the mystery that is the creation and the man. Not that such transcending elements are not involved in other epics but in the *Savitri* the vision of man's destiny is of the cardinal focus.

We conclude with an observation by K.D. Sethna who had the unique privilege of initiating an intimate correspondence with Sri Aurobindo on the significance of the *Savitri* even while the composition of the epic was in progress:

‘Thus the earth-born heart of man is shown in the poem not only in its finiteness aching for the infinite but also in an apocalyptic fulfilment. And this fulfilment, though dense with the mystical light, is again and again depicted in terms which go home to us and which set forth in a colossal clarity the Eternal in the movements of Time. For, Sri Aurobindo did not write his epic with the disposition of either a sworn Surrealist wedded to the obscurely entangled or a strict Symbolist cherishing a cult of the glimmeringly elusive. Behind the poet in him is the Master of Yoga whose work was to enlighten and not to puzzle and who, with all his roots in India’s hoary past of spirituality, was yet a modern among moderns and the seer of a new mystical progression, a collective advance in consciousness from mind to Supermind, a whole world evolving Godwards and breaking the fetters not only of political or social tyranny but also of mortal ignorance. A democracy of the Divine liberating the human was his goal, as in those words he puts into the mouth of his Savitri:

‘A lonely freedom cannot satisfy
A heart that has grown one with every heart:
I am a deputy of the aspiring world,
My spirit’s liberty I ask for all.’

APPENDIX

The Godhead

I sat behind the dance of Danger's hooves
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist's whim,
And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature's grooves,
In me, enveloping me the body of him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,
A face with the calm of immortality
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze;
The world was in His heart and He was I:
I housed in me the Everlasting's peace,
The strength of One whose substance cannot die.

The moment passed and all was as before
Only that deathless memory I bore.

The Stone Goddess

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me,—
A living Presence deathless and divine,
A Form that harboured all infinity.

The great World-Mother and her mighty will
Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,
Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,
Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.

Now veild with mind she dwells and speaks no word,
Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,
Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard
The secret of her strange embodiment.

One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,
A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.

The Hour of God

There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. It is true that the latter may prepare the former, may be the little smoke of sacrifice going up to heaven which calls down the rain of God's bounty.

Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call. But thrice woe to them who are strong and ready, yet waste the force or misuse the moment; for them is irreparable loss or a great destruction.

In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph. But being pure cast aside all fear; for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the wine-press of the wrath of God; but he who can stand up to it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand; even though he fall, he shall rise again; even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected.

Message for the Independence Day

August 15th, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But we can also make it by our life and acts as a free nation an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. In all these movements free India may well play a large part and take a leading position.

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possi-

ble, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization. Asia has risen; large parts are now quite free and are at this moment being liberated: its other still subject or partly subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of nations.

The third dream was a world union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life of all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect imitation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and it must inevitably increase and conquer. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of

all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. But an outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures. Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy and would no longer find these things incompatible with self-preservation and the integrality of its outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. This is still a personal hope and an idea, an ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and, the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far this hope will be justified depends upon the new and free India.

Milestones in the Life of Sri Aurobindo

- 1872: Born on 15th August, at Calcutta, of Dr. K.D. Ghose and Swarnalata Devi, daughter of Rishi Raj Narayan Bose, a great patriot and visionary.
- 1879: Taken to England and left at Manchester, with the Drewetts.
- 1879-1883: Learns Latin and French from Mr. Drewett—Contributes poems to the *Fox Family Magazine*.
- 1884-1889: Studies at St. Paul's School, London. Awarded all the important prizes.
- 1890: Goes to King's College, Cambridge, with a scholarship. Passes high in the 1st Part of the Tripos—passes the open competition for the I.C.S., but does not appear for the riding test. Secretary of the Indian Majlis.
- 1892: Member of 'Lotus and the Dagger'—a secret society formed in London to work for India's freedom.
- 1893: Introduced to the Gackwar of Baroda. Appointed in Baroda Service. Returns to India. An overwhelming peace embraces him the moment he sets his foot on the Indian soil at Apollo Bunder, the first concrete spiritual experience. Joins the Baroda Service—Contributes a series of articles containing radical political ideas to the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay. Intensive study of Indian Literature.
- 1901: Marriage with Mrinalini Devi, daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose at Calcutta.
- 1902-1905: Visits Bengal several times and organises secret revolutionary societies and mobilises the Nationalists.—Begins practice of Yoga.
- 1905: Partition of Bengal introduced. Anti-British spirit runs high.
- 1906: Takes up editing of the *Bande Mataram* while on leave, at Bipin Chandra Pal's invitation—Resigns his Baroda job and comes to Calcutta as the Principal of the National College.—Declares that complete independence is the goal of India's national awakening. Puts forth his five-fold scheme for struggle for independence.
- 1907: Historic Surat Congress. Split between Nationalists and Moderates. Nationalists hold separate convention under Sri Aurobindo's Presidentship.—Government brings the charge of sedition against the *Bande Mataram*.—Sedition charge fails.

- 1908: Arrested in connection with the Alipore Conspiracy Case.
—Waves of spiritual experiences come to him inside the jail.
- 1909: Acquitted. Edits the *Dharma* and the *Karmayogin*.
- 1910: Guided by his inner voice leaves for Pondicherry. —Government issues warrant against him for a so-called seditious article in the *Karmayogin*. Engrossed in Yoga at Pondicherry.
- 1914: Publication of the monthly *Arya* which serialised all his major works.
- 1918: Mrinalini Devi dies at Calcutta.
- 1920: The Mother, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, joins the Ashram. Ashram begins to grow.
- 1926: Sri Aurobindo achieved *siddhi* over what is termed in his spiritual vocabulary, Overmind, paving the way for the descent of a new Force, Supermind, capable of promoting man into a higher phase in evolution.
- 1942-1945: Sri Aurobindo applies his spiritual Power for the victory of the Allied Forces, for he saw in his seer-vision that Hitler's triumph would mean a great set-back in the scheme of human evolution.
- 1947: India becomes independent on his 75th birthday.
- 1950: Sri Aurobindo left his body on 5th December. The body remained luminous, without the slightest sign of decomposition, for five days. The body was laid to rest in Mahasamadhi on the 9th.

Works of Sri Aurobindo

A Brief Bibliography

The complete works of Sri Aurobindo are now published in 30 volumes under the imprint THE SRI AUROBINDO BIRTH CENTENARY LIBRARY, by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

Here we list his major spiritual and important literary and sociological works, according to their first appearance in book form.

- 1895: *Songs to Myrtilla and Other Poems*, Laxmi Vilas Printing Press, Baroda.
- 1896: (circa) *Urvasie*, Laxmi Vilas Printing Press, Baroda.
- 1911: *Vikramorvasie*, Kuntalini Press, Calcutta.
- 1915: *Ahana and Other Poems*, The Modern Press, Pondicherry.
- 1918: (circa) *The Ideal of Karmayogin*, First edition not traceable.
- 1919: *The Uttara Para Speech*, Pravartak Publishing House, Chandernagore.
- The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sons of India Ltd., Madras.
- 1920: *War and Self-Determination*, S.R. Murthy and Co., Madras.
- 1921: *The Yoga and Its Objects*, Pravartak Publishing House, Chandernagore.
- Love and Death*, Vasant Press, Madras.
- 1922: *Man, Slave or Free?* Pravartak Publishing House, Chandernagore.
- Baji Probhau*, Arya Office, Pondicherry.
- 1922: *Essays on the Gita*, First Series, V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons, Madras; Second Series, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta.
- 1924: *The Mother*, Arya Sahitya Bhavan, Calcutta.
- 1933: *The Riddle of this World*, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta.
- 1935: *Lights on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Library, Howrah.
- 1936: *Bases of Yoga*, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta.
- 1939: *The Life Divine*, Vol. 1, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta.
- 1940: *The Life Divine*, Vol. 2, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta.
- 1942: *Collected Poems and Plays*—2 Volumes, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- 1946: *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- 1949: *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- 1950: *Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*, Part 1.
- 1951: *Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*, Part 2, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

- 1953: *Eight Upanishads*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
The Foundations of Indian Culture, Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry.
Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother, Sri Aurobindo
International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.
- 1955: *Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Educa-
tion, Pondicherry.
On the Veda, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education,
Pondicherry.
- 1956: *Songs of Vidyapati*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- 1957: *Ilion*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- 1958: *Rodogune*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- 1959: *The Vaziers of Bassora*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.



