CONTENTS

Editorial
The Challenge Continues  Manju Bonke  2
Grace  The Mother  3
Give all you are, all you have  The Mother  3
1979  Shyam Sunder  4
Happy New Year India!  Maria Netto  5
Soul Moments  Lopa Mukherjee  6
When Young India Awakes - 21  Beloo Mehra  8
Hints on physical education  David Annoussamy  11
The Significant role of the Guru in our life  Ananda Reddy  12
2021  Sunaina Mandeen  15
A note from the Editors  Editors  16
The Challenge Continues

The world is a great game of hide and seek in which the real hides behind the apparent, spirit behind matter. The apparent masquerades as real, the real is seen dimly as if it were an unsubstantial shadow. The grandeur of the visible universe and its laws enslaves men’s imaginations. (CWSA, Vol. 13, pg. 64)

The shadows begin to lengthen on the afternoon of 31st December. The air is surcharged with anticipation.

Midnight on New Year’s Eve is a unique magic when, just for a moment, the past and the future exist as one in the present.

No chapter of life on this day closes but the blank pages of the book continue to be filled with new verses. Dreams colour the empty canvases. It is not the stars that direct our destiny; it is the way we ourselves pave our onward path. The journey of the soul moves forward.

It is neither an end nor a beginning but a going on.

The transition from the year 2020 to 2021 is strange, a feeling of pending, a premonition from last year, not magic but a spell. We can fill up not only pages this year but volumes and volumes of books on what has been happening.

The midnight eve sky was no ordinary sky. The stars and the Milky Way were brighter than ever. It felt as if there were a conspiracy brewing above, a conference constituted of stars, moon, sky, wind, the sea below and the invisible hand. There were rumblings and lightning. Perhaps a new decree was being passed—an entire new way of living, a transformative shift in thinking and action, perhaps awakening humanity to the truth that the universe is not moved by its own force but by the Maker.

At the dawning of the New Year, I noticed the usual shy yellow oriental garden lizard, now bright gold with the reflection of the sun, daringly approach me and, if I am not mistaken, it sarcastically winked at me. It seemed to be making me aware that in this swift and still accelerating crisis, we humans, who have claimed to be the masters, are all at once facing the shock of the fragility and vulnerability of the human situation. This seemed to reinforce the stark fact that nothing much had changed in all the past year. The virus still remains a riddle. It has made the world bow down to it.

We still shrink away at the thought of hugging a friend and shudder at touching an Amazon packet or a bag of vegetables, imagining things and people imbued with this scary invisible virus. A radical change in life is the only solution.

The folded hands gesture that means Namaste is being adopted as a mode of greeting. This minor change in lifestyle might be symbolic of greater ones.

The challenge continues. The world will never be the same; it will look significantly different, even after the pandemic gradually fades away and temporarily vanishes to reappear in another form. We have to so fortify ourselves that no virus can further endanger us or shake our foundation.

The events that sway the world are often the results of trivial circumstances. When immense changes and irresistible movements are in progress, it is astonishing how a single event, often a chance event, will lead to a train of circumstances that alter the face of a country or the world. At such times a slight turn this way or that produces results out of all proportion to the cause. It is on such occasions that we feel most vividly the reality of a Power which disposes of events and defeats the calculations of men. The end of many things is brought about by the sudden act of a single individual. A world vanishes, another is created almost at a touch. Certainty disappears and we begin to realise what the pralaya of the Hindus, the passage from one age to another, really means and how true is the idea that it is by rapid transitions long-prepared changes are induced. Such a change now impends all over the world, and in almost all countries events are happening, the final results of which the actors do not foresee. (SABCL, Vol. 2, Karmayogin, pg. 406)

The world for decades has stood stagnant, imperfect, still and dreamless. It is:

\[
\text{Wasting itself that it may last awhile,}
\text{A river that can never find its sea, ...}
\]
(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg. 56)

Let the stagnant rivers of our life start flowing towards the Oceans.

Let us convert this present crisis into a unique opportunity to open sesame into an entirely different world. Let us reconjure our future. Let us soar into another dimension.
Let us restart the evolution of our involved spirit within.

A direct knowledge and experience is the need of the time and, a century ago, Sri Aurobindo revealed to us the future path and planted the seeds of a new way of life to embody and manifest upon earth the Divine consciousness.

Let us walk forward on the sunlit path, leaving the past behind; let us make a new beginning. Let us remember with gratitude:

*He is the Maker and the world he made,*
*He is the vision and he is the Seer;*
*He is himself the actor and the act,*
*He is himself the knower and the known,*
*He is himself the dreamer and the dream.*  
(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg. 61)

BONNE ANNÉE to All

MANJU BONKE

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**Grace**

I have said somewhere, or maybe written, that no matter how great your faith and trust in the divine Grace, no matter how great your capacity to see it at work in all circumstances, at every moment, at every point in life, you will never succeed in understanding the marvellous immensity of Its Action, and the precision, the exactitude with which this Action is accomplished; you will never be able to grasp to what extent the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises everything, conducts everything, so that the march forward to the divine realisation may be as swift, as complete, as total and harmonious as possible, considering the circumstances of the world.

As soon as you are in contact with It, there is not a second in time, not a point in space, which does not show you *dazzlingly* this perpetual work of the Grace, this constant intervention of the Grace.

And once you have seen this, you feel you are never equal to it, for you should never forget it, never have any fears, any anguish, any regrets, any recoils... or even suffering. If one were in union with this Grace, if one saw It everywhere, one would begin living a life of exultation, of all-power, of infinite happiness. And that would be the best possible collaboration in the divine Work.

THE MOTHER
(CWM, Vol. 08, pg. 250)

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**Give all you are, all you have**

Someone wrote to me saying that he was very unhappy, for he longed to have wonderful capacities to put at the disposal of the Divine, for the Realisation, for the Work; and that he also longed to have immense riches to be able to give them, to put them at the feet of the Divine for the Work. So I replied to him that he need not be unhappy, that each one is asked to give what he has, that is, all his possessions whatever they may be, and what he is, that is, all his potentialities—which corresponds to the consecration of one’s life and the giving of all one’s possessions—and that nothing more than this is asked. What you are, give that; what you have, give that, and your gift will be perfect; from the spiritual point of view it will be perfect. This does not depend upon the amount of wealth you have or the number of capacities in your nature; it depends upon the perfection of your gift, that is to say, on the totality of your gift. I remember having read, in a book of Indian legends, a story like this. There was a very poor, very old woman who had nothing, who was quite destitute, who lived in a miserable little hut, and who had been given a fruit. It was a mango. She had eaten half of it and kept the other half for the next day, because it was something so marvellous that she did not often happen to get it—a mango. And then, when night fell, someone knocked at the rickety door and asked for hospitality. And this someone came in and told her he wanted shelter and was hungry. So she said to him, “Well, I have no fire to warm you, I have no blanket to cover you, and I have half a mango left, that is all I have, if you want it; I have eaten half of it.” And it turned out that this someone was Shiva, and that she was filled with an inner glory, for she had made a perfect gift of herself and all she had.

I read that, I found it magnificent. Well, yes, this describes it vividly. It’s exactly that.

The rich man, or even people who are quite well-off and
have all sorts of things in life and give to the Divine what they have in surplus—for usually this is the gesture: one has a little more money than one needs, one has a few more things than one needs, and so, generously, one gives that to the Divine. It is better than giving nothing. But even if this “little more” than what they need represents lakhs of rupees, the gift is less perfect than the one of half the mango. For it is not by the quantity or the quality that it is measured: it is by the sincerity of the giving and the absoluteness of the giving.

The Mother
(CWM, Vol. 08. pp. 14-16)

1979

The Mother’s New Year messages were eagerly awaited by us with the passing out of the old years. Her messages were a blend of prevision of the year, a general guidance, and a call towards a certain direction. Many a time during the year, when there were difficulties or pleasant moments, we consulted the New Year message. The arrival of 1979, a new year, wistfully recalls to our mind the sweet and precious recollections of Mother’s messages, music and blessings with which we used to usher in the first of each January.

1973 was the last of such years. The preceding year was 1972, the year of Sri Aurobindo’s Centenary. It was expected by many to be a year of nice miracles. It did not turn out to be so, we know. The Mother had not given any such indication about the year, but the expectations were there as a result of the general human mentality, and the Bangladesh affair had given a flush of hopes. In fact the message on 1.1.1972 was apparently a very simple message, “Let us all try to be worthy of Sri Aurobindo’s Centenary”. Apparently very simple, almost conventional, but spiritually meaningful. 1972 was not an easy year, not at all. There was the comfortable feeling that we ourselves were worthy of Sri Aurobindo’s Centenary, and the message was for those who were not worthy or were outside the Ashram or had not accepted Sri Aurobindo. It escaped our notice that the upsurge of the mud that had taken a fresh start upon the descent of the Supramental force in 1956 was continuing in 1972 with added impetus, and thus making its permeation possible by the alchemist force of spiritual transformation. That year when an Ashramite’s letter complaining of pain in a particular part of the body was read out to Mother, She gave a blessings packet that was asked for, but She made a remark to the secretary to the effect that She was noticing that in the Centenary year that type of pain was occurring in those who were telling lies. Particularly for the residents of Auroville the Mother gave frequent messages that year to stop lying. Towards the end of 1972, the Mother warned,

“Before dying, falsehood rises in full swing.
Still people understand only the lesson of catastrophe. Will it have to come before they open their eyes to the Truth?”

The next year the Mother left Her body.

After this event, instead of going inward and upward towards the Truth a strange process of going outward and downward towards the Falsehood began, and went on increasing its speed and extent. This march of Falsehood has been visible everywhere. The work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother has been under fierce fire from the hostile forces, both at the special spots of their concentrated tapasya and effort as well as on the earth in general. The year 1978, the Mother’s Centenary year, has been a year of wastage of tremendous possibilities offered to those who claim to be servitors of the Truth. It was almost like the trench warfare of the First World War. There was a special protection of the Divine Grace, otherwise the situation would have been ghastly.

Now comes the next year, 1979. There is darkness, dense darkness, chaos and turmoil all around. There is an utter confusion of values. The Lord of Falsehood has succeeded in getting himself worshipped as the Lord of Truth by those who were once known to be in the camp of Truth. Defections have taken place, without announcement, consciously as well as unconsciously, out of fear, ignorance or ambition. The soldiers of the anti-divine army are full of glee over the ravages wrought by them, but the fight is not yet over. The Mother would like to change the darkest hour into one of the finest hours. She calls us for a sincere turn to the Truth, nothing more, nothing less.

Do we consent to be spiritualised? Do we go back to Sri Aurobindo and Mother whose arms are open to receive back the lost herds? Do we take the resolve to cling to Truth?

These are the questions 1979 is putting to us.

Shyam Sunder
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)
Happy New Year India!

“He who kisses the joy as it flies, 
Lives in Eternity’s Sunrise.”

Modern man takes his life far too seriously. He is ever waiting for ‘real’ things to happen, for goals to be reached and eternally chasing dreams. He forgets that life can almost read like a poem— it has its own rhythmic beat, the slow rising of the morning sun, the ambience of a cool glade, a scorching noon sun, a tranquil dusk that heralds the presence of the mystic moon. These are the seasons of the day, just as there are seasons of the year. These are what bring cycles of growth and decay—a cycle that for us, begins with innocent childhood, followed by awkward youth with its passions and ambitions; and then reaches manhood, a time of testing and acquiring and reaching the sunset of life. After this, life flickers and we reach the land of eternal sleep. As we realise this grand rhythm, we surrender more to change — and cherish that transition from childhood to adulthood — more like the grand tempo of the Ganges flowing majestically to the sea eventually.

When thinking of the changes in my life, most of the memories are closely connected to and related with the times our family — my mother, father and two sisters, went “touring”. Dad was with the Railways, so we had this annual “free” dom to see India. For us, as a family, touring meant just “being”. More so for me. Me of the Sleepless Eye. In the dead of the night, as a train rolls on, what can one see? Yet I’d cup my face against the glass window pane and gaze. Oh, why was this heart created with so much sensitivity! My tours of India became a chance to evolve this sensitivity. I had never at any time returned home without being shaken up to admire more, the grandeur of our Land. The contours of India with its staggering physical variety — from the world’s highest mountains, to jungles, plains, swift rivers, arid deserts, exquisite flora and fauna, spectacular coastlines and verdant valleys — its colours, textures, sudden shifts from grandeur to squalor, co-existence of tradition and modernity, the confrontation with unpredictable extremes of nature’s power, the unbridled enthusiasm of a people whose faiths, lives and languages are not strictly associated with any formal formation, yet has resulted in a way of life unlike any other nation. Realising all this at an early age, is what made my touring more a personal experience, one that I lived close to my heart and re-visited a thousand times in my head. This was My India. Where else on earth could one find this amazing amalgamation. Truly, only in Incredible India!

The ultimate voyager’s dream, India can excite, enthrall and astound and generously handover the experience of a lifetime. To internalise the seasons of our life and make it whole, we need to re-live our childhood and youth, when “we had joy, we had fun, we had seasons in the sun” and go once more to where we first experienced joy and saw God. And yes, to traverse again those paths, right from the Himalayas the abode of Sages and Snow and right down, to God’s Own Country; from the warm beauty of the Coromandel Coast to the hot yellow and orange spectacle of Rajasthan; from astounding Simla, to the Blue Mountains with their almost antiseptic walks and serenity.

India — the multi-faceted daughter of Brahma — promises a life in Eternity’s Sunrise, for her sons and daughters are, perhaps, the only on this planet who are able to survive hardships with a large smile, conjure up plenty out of nothing and most important, “kiss the joy even as it flies”. Namaste India. A Happy New Year!

Maria Netto
Soul Moments

Has a beautiful butterfly ever made you stop on your tracks? Have the stars in a dark night sky reminded you of fireflies? In a village where life was simple, and conversation flowed from the heart? Take a superfast train back in time, to a pristine moment. When you simply were. Not when you were happy, or successful, or young, or cared for. Just when you were, reveling in a primordial sense of being at the right time, in the right place. Where you belonged without any doubt, at peace, joyfully. You saw the expanse of the sky, and your small arms stretched out to embrace it. You measured yourself with the universe and did not find yourself wanting. The balance was perfect. You were meant to be small. How else could you admire, with curiosity, with wonder? And feel grateful that you can see, that you can be. Breathe deeply, and feel the breeze on your face. Coming from another place, from another time. Yet so close, you can touch it with your hand placed over your heart. That moment was a soul moment. It touched you then. It touches you now. It has never left your side. It may have been a vanishing moment, a few seconds long. But you carried it within forever. “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.”

A romantic poet’s heart leapt up when he saw the rainbow in the sky. Maybe your heart leaps up when you see your dear ones return home. Home is not a place. It is where you feel at home. It could be in the train, passing by a silent field, when the night is dark, and the hurricane lamps mimic the stars. Looking out of your iron window you catch a fleeting glimpse of a single lamp by a wooden window, and a hint of a face. There is a person in that hut, awake, while the world sleeps. She is dreaming with eyes open. Perhaps you are living her dream. She is wishing she could switch places with you, just for an instant. And you are wishing you could be in a world peopled by stars and fireflies. The soul moments pass us by like scenes from a moving train. Your journey doesn’t leave you time to linger. You snap a picture of the moment. You save it in an album. In a sanctum within, in the deepest recess of your being, called the soul.

A bird couple building a nest with twigs suddenly halts your customary thoughts. Collaborating. Celebrating together. Building a home. Loving. Preparing for the future. The mother cat licking her kittens, while they squeeze her belly with miniscule paws. How simple nature is, how crafty in her designs. The corkscrew seed fastening itself to the earth. The perfect geometric shape of the honey comb, the sweetness of honey. The mountain holding up so many trees, the tree holding up so many squirrels. The storm herding the clouds from one pasture in the sky to another. Soul moments are moments we live so consciously they don’t feel like memories when recalled, but experiences we are reliving. And every time the Grace tells us, It exists and It is watching over us. We listen to a patriotic song and our eyes fill with tears. We don’t ask them why. We let the tears roll. We hear the story of Panna’s sacrifice and we salute her courage. A mantra’s vibrations, a prayer’s sincerity, are melodies divine. They are mysteries we cannot fathom. And must not try to fathom. Being able to explain something means explaining it away. Removing it from the consciousness, solving the mystery. It is not interesting anymore. A soul moment can vanish like a gorgeous sunset, but its phosphorescence remains to light our way through the dark passages of our life.

A dewdrop on a flower petal. An angelic smile on a baby. We can’t capture them in camera or words. They are captured in our consciousness. The faithful album will treasure them for us. An ephemeral sight is immortalised. When we see a ten second run for which the athletes practiced for years, we feel that spark of joy of belonging to a species that strives for transcendence. Soul moments are those where we transcended something. Like solving a tough problem. Overcoming a weakness. Helping another. Falling in love. Like the fighter plane pilot who climbs so high he loses the sense of fear. He touches the face of god; and then it matters little that he is shot down. He ascended the world stair and walked over the rainbow. The enemy sees a corpse in a charred plane, but it isn’t him.

The realisation that in this world of brokenness there is something that cannot be broken, and that we possess it, is a soul moment. This we want to remind ourselves always when we feel low. This subtle thing inside of us is the reason we exist. All the grand moments of life amount to nothing if not supported by a nod from this. That’s why the delicate flowers and butterflies with short lives make us wise. They inspire us to overcome personal difficulties. The delicate remind us to become strong. They bring out our soul qualities of protecting, caring, encouraging, appreciating all — small and big, weak and strong.

Those capitalised words — Truth, Beauty, Goodness — are the divine counterparts of the earthly truth, beauty, goodness. The romantic poets sensed them. They saw a halo behind things, the spiritual essence, of which the objects are the shadows. The numen is the soul truth, the phenomenon its expression in time. We catch a glimpse of the numen and create a soul memory. The satori, the epiphany, the peak
experience, drive us towards the indescribable Absolute. The Mahabhutas were conceived in a supreme mind. They landed in the creation as the bhutas (elements) we can touch, see, smell, hear, taste. We say one is an abstract concept and the other its concrete manifestation. If we could visit God’s workshop we would see the original models, and perhaps be able to touch, see, smell, hear, taste them.

The dervish whirls in a mystical trance. The Zen Buddhist grapples with a koan. The yogi chants mantras. We try escape journeys, open the doors of perceptions, reach altered states of consciousness. Oh, for a second of transcendence we can do anything. For just one numinous vision. To see the storm and die staring at it. We live intensely in these moments. We glimpse divine possibilities.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour. (William Blake)

Let the pearls lie at the bottom of the ocean. Dive in sometimes and look at them. Soul places are not destinations you can mark off as visited. Peace, Unity, Love are not places to reach, but entire continents. You can visit them, leave, and at the same time live there forever.

You form soul relationships with people you connect with deeply. When you see something marvelous you want to share it with them. When you feel deeply, you can convey it to them without the need of words or gestures. Loving is a natural act, simple and spontaneous. You form soul relationships with the tools you use, with the plants you tend, with your animal friends, with stories you enjoy, with biographies that inspire, with places you like to visit.

Soul qualities blossom like flowers on your path. Gratitude, humility, love, perseverance, nobility, compassion. Universal messages come to you in cloud formations, in the dancing of leaves, in the choreography of sunbeams on a lake’s surface. Synchronicities give you free rides. Coincidences you cannot explain wink at you. You have tickets to the mystic shows that are always happening all around. Words jump out of books that have the answer to exactly what you were asking.

This indrajal, the diamond net of a mighty god, has fished you out of the waters of ignorance. You wonder at the clever sutradhar who has staged a play just for you. Is he doing it for all? His intelligence then is mind-boggling. Don’t even attempt to understand it. Be comfortable not knowing, so you can begin to truly know. Each soul moment adds fuel to a psychic fire. The gods, each a soul quality, seated in the chamber within shine forth. They chant while the homa blazes.

वायुरनिलम्मुतमथेदंभस्मांत्यश्रीरम्
ॐ क्रतोस्मर क्रतोस्मर क्रतोस्मर क्रतोस्मर ||१७ ||
Vayuranilamritamathedam, bhasmaantamshariram
Om, kratosmara, kritamsmara, kratosmara, kritamsmara ||
17 ||Isha Upanishad

“The wind and sky are immortal, but our bodies end in ashes. Therefore, O Will, remember, that which was done, remember. O Will, remember, that which was done, remember.”

LOPA MUKHERJEE
Yuvaan was now keenly looking forward to witnessing and experiencing the glory of the world-famous Ajanta and Ellora caves. The road trip with Ishaan and Namrata in their comfortable car had been going smoothly, and in addition to the fun and enriching conversations the three of them were also enjoying frequent breaks at roadside tea-stalls and local food joints. Yuvaan was impressed by the passion the young couple had for experiencing the richness of India’s cultural heritage and natural beauty, to whatever extent was possible within their schedules and travel budget. Namrata told him that it was during their second date itself that the couple had decided that if they end up getting married, they would not be like their other friends who always jump at the opportunity of ‘foreign travel.’ They agreed that for them travel would always mean exploring some new place in their vast motherland — from the famous tourist spots to the remotest village or town — because each such journey would give them some new way to experience the rich diversity of India, some new insight through which to know and feel the living culture of India.

Yuvaan shared with them some of what he had been reading about India, and particularly about the spiritual nature of Indian culture, in some of Sri Aurobindo’s works. Namrata was particularly fascinated about whatever little Yuvaan shared from his limited reading of Sri Aurobindo’s writings on Indian art. He sent her the links to some of the essays and the two of them decided to read from those during the three days they had planned to spend visiting the caves at Ajanta and Ellora. Yuvaan was certain that this would make their ‘experience’ of the caves much more delightful and educative.

They were still a few hours away from their destination — the small hotel they had found on the internet while they were still in Ahmedabad, — when the conversation somehow steered toward the almost-total-neglect in Indian mainstream education of any preparation for the youth to face life’s challenges from a stronger and healthier emotional and psychological space. Ishaan candidly shared how psychologically ill-prepared he and Namrata had felt when an unfortunate accident within the first week of their marriage had left Ishaan bed-ridden and totally dependent on a nurse; his condition had lasted for several months and only after a long therapy he was slowly able to get back to his daily routine. The situation was hard on the newly married couple, not only financially but more so because of the emotional frustrations they experienced during that time. Namrata added that the experience was in a way a real lesson for them: they not only learned about the real meaning of mutual caring, love, friendship and marriage, but also about the value of controlling one’s natural desires and physical intimacy.

Yuvaan was speechless; but he found a new admiration for the young couple who had matured and grown through an adversity and had found a deeper way to be together. He recalled the conversation with his nani ma from a few days earlier when she was telling him about the four purushārthas, one of them being kāma which also included sexual desire — a normal part of human experience.

Perhaps it was because of re-living that difficult time which Ishaan and Namrata had been through, or perhaps because they all were a bit tired; a kind of hush came over all three of them making each one go into the quiet inner space. Babulal, Ishaan’s dependable driver, continued to drive with his eyes glued to the road ahead. Yuvaan remembered that he had already conveyed to his college professor that his next article would be on the kāma purushārtha. He now wondered if he would be able to do justice to such a complex topic, especially given its significance for the youth. Something in him sent out a hushed suggestion that he should pray to Sri Aurobindo before sitting down to write. While he wasn’t sure from where such advice came to his awareness, he decided to remember it and also practise it the following week when he was planning to take up his second writing assignment. But for now, it was all about Ajanta and Ellora! He shut his eyelids in the hope of catching a quick nap.

It was about an hour later, or maybe more, when Yuvaan woke up and realised that the car had stopped at a chai-stall. He splashed some water on his face and walked to the rickety bench where Ishaan, Namrata and Babulal were sitting, savouring sweet chai and vada-pav. He happily joined the group in snacking and chatting.

In less than two hours after that chai break, the group reached their hotel. A quick shower and Yuvaan was feeling refreshed enough to spend some time with Sri Aurobindo’s essays on Indian art.

“For the Indian mind form does not exist except as a creation of the spirit and draws all its meaning and value from the spirit. Every line, arrangement of mass, colour, shape,
posture, every physical suggestion, however many, crowded, opulent they may be, is first and last a suggestion, a hint, very often a symbol which is in its main function a support for a spiritual emotion, idea, image that again goes beyond itself to the less definable, but more powerfully sensible reality of the spirit which has excited these movements in the aesthetic mind and passed through them into significant shapes. 

This sentence seemed to express the subtlest essence of Indian art — the meeting of the visible with the invisible, or rather the visible expressing or symbolising that which is invisible and yet being able to express it in only a very limited way because the invisible is, in essence, infinite, and hence never completely expressible.

Yuvaan felt a sense of joy that with concentrated reading he was now slowly able to grasp the meaning of Sri Aurobindo’s words. He was beginning to understand the importance of having a quiet and distraction-free mind when reading Sri Aurobindo; he had been practising the art of quietening his mind by sitting silently for a few minutes every morning. He was also working on his habit of silencing his phone and keeping it away from him whenever he would read any of Sri Aurobindo’s writing. He had discovered that it was not necessary to read a lot at any given time; what made the learning experience more delightful and effective was if he read only a few paragraphs but with as complete concentration as he could muster.

Then in the very next paragraph, Yuvaan found what he was really hoping to discover — a specific guidance or an approach to appreciating Indian art in an Indian way. This, he felt, would be his true guide the next morning when he visited the magnificent Ajanta caves.

“...to start from the physical details and their synthesis appears to me quite the wrong way to look at an Indian work of art. The orthodox style of Western criticism seems to be to dwell scrutinisingly on the technique, on form, on the obvious story of the form, and then pass to some appreciation of beautiful or impressive emotion and idea. It is only in some deeper and more sensitive minds that we get beyond that...
To understand the Vedic-Upanishadic spirit is very important for any art historian of India, because this spirit had been behind all great art of India, he remembered reading in that essay by Havell. And that is why perhaps now when he was reading Sri Aurobindo, he could understand why the Mahayogi of Pondicherry was revealing this important clue to appreciating Indian art:

“A great oriental work of art does not easily reveal its secret to one who comes to it solely in a mood of aesthetic curiosity or with a considering critical objective mind, still less as the cultivated and interested tourist passing among strange and foreign things: but it has to be seen in loneliness, in the solitude of one’s self, in moments when one is capable of long and deep meditation and as little weighted as possible with the conventions of material life.”

Yuvaan was aware that the Ajanta caves are primarily Buddhist caves. But as his mother had reminded him, these cave cathedrals were built in a period when the society in general had equal reverence for Hindu gods and goddesses and for Buddha who was generally accepted as another great master in the long line of self-realised and enlightened souls who had walked this holy land of Bharatvarsha and who had shown a new path of seeking the Truth.

The 30 caves comprise ancient monasteries and worship-halls of different Buddhist traditions. In addition to their rock-cut sculptures, Ajanta caves are also famous for the remarkable paintings depicting the past lives and rebirths of the Buddha, and various Jataka tales. These caves also served as a retreat for wandering monks during monsoons, as well as rest-houses for merchants and pilgrims.

Yuvaan remembered reading at college some excerpts from an old book on Indian art by E.B. Havell, the well known British art historian. A couple of ideas from those passages had stayed with him though he had never fully understood them. Until now. But even now, he was only starting to grasp at their outer boundaries. Havell said in that passage that a golden thread of Vedic thought bound together all the varied strands of Indian art—Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Sikh, and even Indo-Saracenic—in spite of their outer ritualistic and dogmatic differences. He also added that as art is primarily subjective, it is not in existing monuments and masterpieces or in the fragmentary collections of painting and sculpture in museums that we should seek for the origin of the great art schools of the world, but rather in the thoughts which created these monuments and masterpieces.

To understand the Vedic-Upanishadic spirit is very important for any art historian of India, because this spirit had been behind all great art of India, he remembered reading in that essay by Havell. And that is why perhaps now when he was reading Sri Aurobindo, he could understand why the Mahayogi of Pondicherry was revealing this important clue to appreciating Indian art:

“A great oriental work of art does not easily reveal its secret to one who comes to it solely in a mood of aesthetic curiosity or with a considering critical objective mind, still less as the cultivated and interested tourist passing among strange and foreign things: but it has to be seen in loneliness, in the solitude of one’s self, in moments when one is capable of long and deep meditation and as little weighted as possible with the conventions of material life.”

Long and deep meditation, solitude of one’s self...that is what is required to fully appreciate, fully experience the masterpieces of Indian art. What a marvelous lesson he was getting in art appreciation, Yuvaan felt deeply grateful. An inner, spiritual dimension to art creation and art appreciation is what makes Indian art one in essence with the deepest truth of Indian culture; Sri Aurobindo was helping him understand that. And next morning he must try to put this learning into practice.

It was almost midnight now. And for the past hour or so Yuvaan had been browsing through some of the virtual galleries of various sculptures and paintings from various caves. But the one recurring thought that kept running in his mind was this: the spiritual and intuitive basis of Indian art has to be kept to the fore when appreciating the greatest creations of Indian sacred architecture, sculpture and painting. As his eyelids started to feel heavy with sleep, Yuvaan felt elated at the opportunity he would have the next morning — to stand in front of some of the finest art created by the genius of Indian aesthetic mind, which because of being shaped by the essential Indian cultural spirit had its characteristic temperamental turning toward the spiritual basis of all reality and existence.

Beloo Mehra

3Ibid. pg. 271

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3Ibid. pg. 271
Hints on physical education

Sri Aurobindo rejects straight off the current opinion which is that the body is an obstacle to spiritual life and consequently disregards it instead of associating it with spiritual perfection. On the contrary, he finds that it is necessary to associate the body, considering the ultimate aim of human evolution.

Even in respect of purely mental activities the good state of the body is an essential condition. Therefore a complete and lofty education of the mind is not possible without a corresponding education of the body. One should aim at the perfection of the body, a perfection as great as we can achieve with the means at our disposal. In this connection he says:

“It is therefore, the first business of the educationist to develop in the child the right use of the six senses, to see that they are not stunted or injured by disuse, but trained by the child himself under the teacher’s direction to that perfect accuracy and keen subtle sensitiveness of which they are capable.” (CWSA, Vol. 01, pp. 386-387)

On the other side, each child should acquire some qualities like discipline, obedience of the leader, team spirit and a combination of actions towards a common goal. These qualities are essential if we are to act efficaciously with others towards reaching that goal.

At the same time the child should develop the sportive mind and learn to consider defeat and victory in the same way.

What is important is what can be described as a trained and developed automatism, a perfected skillfulness and the ability of eyes, ears, hands and all the members to be ready to respond to any appeal made to them.

A good physical education should develop rapidity of decision and action, the perception of what should be done in a critical circumstance and the dexterity to accomplish it.

One should aim to provide the ability to respond to any demand that the mind and vital energy might require.

One should develop the awakening of the essential and instinctive consciousness of the body, able to perceive and do what is necessary without any indication of mental thought. That is the equivalent in the body to the quick penetration of mind and the quick and spontaneous decision of the will power.

On the other side, health and strength are the primary conditions for the natural perfection of the body; not only the muscular strength, the solid strength of the limbs and physical vigour but a strength more refined, alert, plastic and adaptable, which our subtle nervous and physical parts may bring onto play in the activities of the body.

Even in purely mental activities, the ability, the promptness or the perfect training of the bodily instrument constitutes a condition *sine qua non* of success. Such promptness and response also form part of the full perfection of the body. This idea is stressed by the following words:

“A total perfection is the ultimate aim which we set before us, for our ideal is the Divine Life which we wish to create here, the life of Spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe. That cannot be unless the body too undergoes a transformation, unless its action and functioning attain to a supreme capacity and the perfection which is possible to it or which can be made possible.” (CWSA, Vol. 13, pg. 521)

One cannot be more explicit on the importance of the body in the life of man and the need to care for it in the perspective of the evolution of the mankind.

David Anoussamy
The Significant role of the Guru in our life
(Part Three)

Now, how do we choose the right Guru or who is the best Guru? Here we can speak of three levels from which a Guru can impart knowledge. We have Gurus at different levels. A Guru who is on the level of teaching, a Guru who is on the level of himself being an example and a Guru on the level of influence; there could be a Guru who is on all the three levels simultaneously. Therefore, depending on the status of the Guru you can see which level he belongs to.

The first level is of knowledge: among these three instruments teaching comes foremost, in the sense that it is easier, be it a teacher in school or parents imparting knowledge. But then what kind of knowledge or teaching?

A true spiritual Guru “will not seek to impose himself or his opinions on the passive acceptance of the receptive mind;” (CWSA, Vol. 23, pg. 66)

That is fundamentally so very important. A true spiritual master, that is a Guru, will not seek to impose himself. Those who seek to impose themselves on the receptive minds of the shisyas, thinking that the shisyas have surrendered themselves and hence anything can be imposed on them are wrong. Sometimes this imposition gets onto a level of desire. A Guru starts imposing his wishes, his desires and his impulses on his shisyas. Such a Guru is not at all proper. Instead he should throw a productive seed into his shisya and see that nurture to its fruition. So that’s the role of a Guru. He puts in seeds of thought, emotion, and consciousness, to grow themselves by the aspirations, by the Tapsya, by the personal effort of the seeker. This is what is important. The Guru doesn’t give everything on a platter. He cannot and he should not, because he doesn’t know the requirement. So he gives a seed idea, a seed thought a seed advice, leaving the seeker to make it grow through the water of his own aspiration. That’s the Knowledge part, which is very important.

Secondly, “He will give a method as an aid, as a utilisable device, not as an imperative formula or a fixed routine”. (Ibid. pg. 67). This is again so very beautifully put, a method as an aid. Again there is nothing rigid about it. You see any Guru who forms a rigid methodology, rigid formula or a routine, takes away the initiative of spirituality. Basically spirituality is itself against any fixed routine, any mechanical routine, because any routine takes away the enthusiasm. You may see, there are six hundred disciples under you; they are all at different levels of aspiration, and knowledge and experience, so they should not be bound in a particular routine. The Guru has to give the disciples a method, an aid as a utilisable device. The Guru has to be extremely discriminative; he has to use his Viveka. That means to each he gives what he needs. It is not that all the hundred shisyas receive the same advice, because the hundred shisyas may require a hundred different levels of advice. So, the Guru has got to be extremely careful, not to make a monotony or uniformity of his teachings. That is the spiritual Guru. Otherwise it becomes so easy to establish a general rule and ask everybody to follow that. It is not so, a spiritual master must reach the levels of the disciples under him. And of course you have many Gurus doing that like Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Ramana, Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. Each individual disciple has his own story to tell, ‘How the master helped him’. Because the master has been helping each one according to his inner need, aspiration and capacity. So that is the beauty of spirituality which is flexible, there is no mechanical rigidity, and each shisya is looked after individually. And of course the Guru doesn’t seek any recognition.

There are times when the Guru says, ‘my role with you is over, you need to reach a higher consciousness, you need a higher progress, you need to go on, so I release you, you must go on, what I could give you I have given you.’ You have to remember one thing that the Guru helps you on the path; he doesn’t walk the path for you. You have to walk it. He is there sometimes as an umbrella, sometimes as a walking stick, sometimes as a doctor and sometimes as a helper. He is there to see that you stick to the path. But, the path, you have to walk on it. In this walking sometimes the Guru may find you have achieved what a Guru could give you, and then if he is sincere and not a possessive one, seeking greater numbers of disciples, he may say you may find another path and another Guru. So that is the first level of teaching. This is where we have an innumerable number of Gurus who have taught in this manner. They have given a method, put in a seed, sometimes giving an instruction for awakening etc. Sometimes Gurus make a uniformity, a rigidity which is incorrect. This is the first level of teaching.

Then a greater Guru is one for whom example is more powerful than instruction. Not the example of outward acts or that of the personal character. So when the Guru sets an example, it is not as to how he acts or how he eats. In such cases there are chances of falsity setting in. Here, we have a story of Sri Shankaracharya, who taught a lesson to his
his living remain the same. Here is the issue of the spiritual master has to be very careful, that his teaching and are the opposite of what they have taught. That is where the example. In public, in the mass media, but in their personal life they something and lives in a different way. That is not the example.

This is an example of a particular level of consciousness, a particular way, because each guru has his own level of consciousness, his own path and his own discipline being what he is teaching, is the example. So, the Guru is the best example, by living exactly according to his own teaching. It is not that he teaches something and lives in a different way. That is not the example. That’s where most of the Gurus fail. They teach something in public, in the mass media, but in their personal life they are the opposite of what they have taught. That is where the spiritual master has to be very careful, that his teaching and his living remain the same. Here is the issue of the sadhak or the disciple following his guru in his dynamic sadhana. If we see the Guru having a certain level of realisation, I must aspire to that level of consciousness. To get that level of consciousness we needn’t imitate the Guru. Once, somebody asked Sri Aurobindo, if he could become Sri Aurobindo. He was trying to have the consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo told him, ‘you needn’t be Sri Aurobindo for that, you can reach the consciousness of overmind or Supermind by yourself by following your own path.’ not in words but through meaning and essence. What it means is that we don’t have to follow the external character of the Guru, but try to imbibe the inner dynamic consciousness of the Guru. That is the example.

Beyond the example is the third level, the influence that is more important than the example. You see each time there is a greater subtlety. First one is the teacher, then there is the moral intellectual level where there is an example, then there is the spiritual level and that’s the highest one, where Sri Aurobindo says,

_Influence is not the outward authority of the Teacher over his disciple, but the power of his contact, of his presence, ..._ (Ibid. pg. 67)

This is the most important one. It is not a question of outward authority, as if you are running an ashram and you are the head. Then you have the authority to tell someone to do something. But the true spiritual master doesn’t use his authority, it is rather through the power of his contact, of his presence that things move. If the Sadhak or disciple feels the presence of his master, that’s the highest thing. Because no physical Guru lives that long, it is only the disciples and those who are younger who live long. So, sometime or the other your Guru leaves his physical body, but how is it that the great spiritual work continues to go on? Because the disciples feel his presence. This is the case with most of the greatest Gurus, be it Guru Nanak, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, or Swami Vivekananda. Physically they have left the world, but you see their work is being continued by their disciples. You go to any disciple he will say that ‘I feel the presence of my master. He comes to me many a times in my dreams and shows me the way and gives me instructions.’ That is the highest point of contact of a disciple with the Guru. What we see here is that the physical presence is not required. What is required is the inner presence of the consciousness. If a Guru can establish that he has done his job, his work will continue beyond his physical presence. That is what is happening in India. This is happening only with the spiritual masters. Those who are fake Gurus, their work ceases as soon as they leave the earth. But true spiritual consciousness continues the work of the true Guru. Once you have understood how to choose a Guru, look at his teachings, his experience, his presence. If you can feel his presence that is the best thing that can happen. Feel him in meditation, prayer, Bhakti and in every other way. These are the three levels of a true spiritual master. And if you find these three characteristics in a guru, you will know if he is a true Guru or a fake master. Those Gurus who go for the outward kingdom can never be spiritual masters. They may perhaps help humanity on a certain level. Definitely each Guru helps the community to a certain extent, but those seekers who want to have spiritual growth they need the qualities in the master that we have just described.

But all said and done, no human Sadhak should arrogate to himself Guru-hood in Integral Yoga. This is very important because in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga, nobody is to arrogate to himself any Guruhood. He is not supposed to take the place of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. Becoming a Guru in Integral Yoga is forbidden. It is very simple and straightforward. Yes a person himself can be a channel, helping his brothers, a child leading children, a light kindling other lights, but not to arrogate that I am the Guru after so and so. In other systems, that exits and there are chains of Gurus. But in Integral Yoga Guruhood is not expected from any disciple however great he may be, he is only a helper on the way, himself a channel, a vessel, a representative of higher consciousness; we don’t have any system of Guruhood here.

To conclude: We have seen the issue of Utsaha, Shastra and Guru. But there is one more instrument, one more element which helps the Sadhak in his growth and that is the factor of time, the Kala. This is very important because many sadhaks get disillusioned, saying ‘I have doing Tapasya for so many
years but nothing has happened to me, I have not reached my goal’ etc. So, there comes in a point of disappointment, boredom, distrust, and they may leave the path. That’s where, Sri Aurobindo tells us that it depends on *Kala*, time. There are different ways of looking at time. One who is at the stage of personal effort on level one, for him time becomes a tyrant because he is putting in all his effort with little result. So he is impatient. For the person on the first level time is a tyrant. But then those who are on the second level, who feel that the divine is doing the work for them, helping them, there is a kind of recognition of a higher force. Hence, for seekers at this level time becomes a friend. He says, time is friendly a medium and a condition. That means he understands that when the Divine is helping him on this path why should he care for time; it may be five years or ten years. So the first level, time as a tyrant becomes a friendly time, not only friendly but also giving the feeling that I am in the hands of the Divine, he knows, when to give me what. But at the third level, when we see that we are neither the doer, nor the instrument, but that it is the Lord who is the doer, instrument and the work, all in himself, then we get this Vedantic realisation, that he is doing everything, he is the object and the subject, knower and the knowledge, which is a very high level of realisation, where time becomes completely your servant and instrument. That’s why Sri Krishna and Sri Rama are not in a hurry, because they know that things will happen in their own time. There is something called, evolutionary time. The Avatar cannot hasten any change in the human beings. There has got to be some time given, there should not be anything imposed, then time becomes a servant and an instrument.

So we see here the four factors but about time what is needed at the common human level is that we have endless patience as if we had all eternity for fulfilment. But it doesn’t mean that you say God will do it in his own time and you become lazy and don’t make any personal effort to read the *Shastras* or seek the Guru. This is a beautiful thing that on one side you think that you have all the eternity in front of you and at the same time you develop the energy that shall realise now. That is the beauty. On one side your attitude is that you have endless time because the Divine is doing everything but that doesn’t give you the right to become lazy. You have got to do it as if you are going to realise it now. That is the beauty of spirituality that you have to make your effort every day and every hour for you to grow and yet leave to the Divine the result of your effort.

This is what we see about these four levels of spirituality, where Guru is fundamental, but he is one among the four; The *Utsaha, Shastra*, Guru and the *Kala*. When there is a combination of all these four then you will see that what we had started with, “*He who chooses the infinite has been chosen by the infinite*” fits aptly. The divine has chosen, the divine is working for you, and the Divine himself becomes your own Guru. And then we see what the *Bhagvad Gita* tells us in the last verse that wherever there is Krishna, the master of Yoga, wherever there is Partha, the archer, assured are their glory, victory and prosperity. When the disciple knows that it is the divine who has chosen me, the divine has become the spark in me, the divine who becomes the *Sadhaka* in me then of course the Nara and Narayana come together, Krishna and Arjuna come together, then there is all victory, all prosperity, everything in the outer life as well as the inner life. That is the plenitude of Divine Life that Sri Aurobindo has envisaged in his own Yoga.

Ananda Reddy
(Concluded)

(This was an online talk on 5th of July 2020, Guru Poornima Day)
A year ago, when we greeted the New Year, no one had any idea that the virus that was found in a Chinese city at the end of 2019 would end up becoming a pandemic and holding the whole world hostage. Lockdowns, social distancing, masking and frequent hand washing would become a part of our daily lives as would virtual communication. We were never alone, even when locked down or quarantined in our homes, or even in a hospital, as phone calls and messages were our constant companions. Working online from home became common. Webinars by the oodles, on every conceivable topic, virtual meetings, and even online classes, not just for school or college students but on various topics, were the norm. Musicians and dancers were posting videos and creativity was flourishing, finding new mediums of expression. But all this was only accessible to those who had smart phones, laptops, computers and the lifeline of it all, an internet connection. Those without access to any of these were isolated, or just braved everything and went to work, risking their lives, and relying on their immunity and God.

Retail commerce, tourism, the hospitality industry, the pillars of the new economy, crumbled immediately and were the last to get back on their feet. While online sales boomed through the purchasing power of those with access, for others, as well as for those who preferred to see, touch and feel before buying anything it was a long wait.

Everyone spoke about how the pandemic had given a new lease of life to nature and its other creatures not affected by it. In fact it was thriving. There was cleaner air, more birds and animals around, all because we were no longer in the way. The place and power of nature was made clear to us in no uncertain terms.

Places of worship were closed and people forced to go within to worship the god of their choice instead of crowding the temples and churches and mosques. At a time when there was so much fear, so much pain everywhere, loved ones dying and uncertainty about how we would manage to survive physically and economically, it was but natural that people wanted to reach out to their gods and pray and ask for help and mercy. And that was the time when we were finally forced to find this solace: this peace and this joy of making contact with our ishita devata all on our own, within ourselves. What an amazing opportunity! Can we hope that this will have brought a lasting change withing human beings on all these different levels? Or were we all just making do while clamouring all the while for the same old same? I hope not, I pray not, and sincerely hope that some change, if not a major one, has come over each and every individual’s life to position all human beings to move closer towards a truer and more sincere life in preparation for the next step in the evolution of humankind.

One of the less recognised facts about Sri Aurobindo, in the larger world, outside of the circle of people worldwide who are familiar with him, is the complete originality of his thought and work.

Everyone else has essentially re-packaged the original and ancient Truth of the Vedas and the Upanishads. But no one else took it from that point, and significantly so much further, as Sri Aurobindo and then the Mother did.

The Action journal is the journal of India’s Resurgence and what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have done during their lifetime is an incredible and immense contribution to this resurgence.

In preparation for the 150th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo’s birth in 2022, starting from August 2021, we would like to bringing out special issues for a whole year up to August 2022. Each issue will carry articles reflecting on the new ideas which the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have put forth on topics such as: Poetry and Literature; Art — painting, sculpture, music; Architecture; Science (all branches) and mathematics; Education: physical vital mental and psychic (from the teaching of children to the concept of unending education); Psychology, Human Unity; Economy and the material world; Religion and spirituality; Synthesis of yoga and Integral yoga; Evolution of the species followed by the mind and the Overmind and finally the new consciousness and the Supramental.

Our regular contributors are already working on this and we also invite and welcome others to do the same. Let us know in advance the topic of your interest on which you would like to contribute.

We hope that through this we not only bring these new ideas and perspectives closer to our readers but at the same time inspire and encourage all to carry these forth in their own lives towards the Resurgence of India.

Wishing all of you a very Happy New Year.

Sunaina Mandeen
A note from the Editors

We extract below the “Object of Sri Aurobindo’s Action Journal”, the Journal of India’s Resurgence, from its introductory issue of 15 August 1970:

The journal is designed to serve as an instrument in Sri Aurobindo's Action’s effort to carry Sri Aurobindo’s message to the people.

The objects, in detail, of this journal will be:

— To study and comment on the present problems in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

— To expound Sri Aurobindo’s vision of India; her role and her future.

— To share with the youth their dreams and aspirations and to aid them in their quest for new values.

— To trace the true destiny of man which transcends religion, political or ideological goals.

— To emphasise the hidden, creative splendour in man that can alter his present state of predicament.

— To stress that spirituality can embrace the whole of life— every sphere of man’s activities.

— To participate humbly in the process of Transformation that Sri Aurobindo’s Force is working out.

— To report organisations and activities in keeping with these objects.

It has been our endeavour to follow these guidelines in every issue that we bring you.

In 2021, through the pages of our Journal, you will continue to travel with Yuvaan as he wonders at the many marvels of India and explores inner realms that awaken within him as he carries on this journey of self-discovery.

This year too, we hope to conduct Resurgent India workshops so that Sri Aurobindo’s vision of India, her role and her future is understood and acted upon by a growing number of people.

We hope you will continue to renew on time and subscribe to the journal and thus participate in some way in India’s Resurgence and Sr Aurobindo’s Action. We hope you will recommend friends and family to do the same.

Details of subscription are available on our website www.sriaurobindosaction.org where this issue will be posted and available for download through the year.

Wishing all of you a very Happy New Year.

EDITORS