

The World-Redeemer's Task

V. Ananda Reddy



Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research
Puducherry

The World-Redeemer's Task

The poem, 'A God's Labour' is in essence the vision, mission, and experience of Sri Aurobindo. It is an embodied experience of the Avatar's Tapasya captured in poetic rhythms, announcing the Truth of tomorrow. This autobiographical poem is extremely dense, highly symbolic, and suggestive – every word and image depicts a mystic experience behind it: each phrase captures an adventure of consciousness. All through there is work – a strong rhythmic movement, an intense poetic sensibility, and an intuitive turn of phrase bordering on Pashyanti vak. It is the "seeing word" because it reveals the seer-poet's creative powers. 'A God's Labour' is the world redeemer's effort and experience etched in a few strokes of light. Although strewn with metaphysical ideas such as:

Coercing my godhead I have come down
Here on the sordid earth,
Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and birth. (CWSA 2: 534)

This poem is not merely a compressed thought substance. For the critic, Sri Aurobindo's "spiritual seeing" may seem to be more of philosophical abstraction which do not help the inquisitive reader.

Lines such as —

I have pierced the Void where Thought was born,
I have walked in the bottomless pit... (Ibid: 537)
I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
At the very root of things Where the grey
Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
On the Dragon's outspread wings. (Ibid: 536)

These may seem like lines from a meta-philosophical treatise but for Sri Aurobindo, these and many such lines in this poem,

burdened with mystic experiences and insights, are concrete and embodied psycho-spiritual realities. Sometimes, these spiritual intuitions could be misinterpreted as poetic fancy or considered to be aesthetic expressions by those who do not have a true understanding of Sri Aurobindo's inner work. Sri Aurobindo emphasises "To the mystic, there is no such thing as an abstraction," (CWSA 27: 93). In connection with his magnificent and profound epic, *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo had written: "...what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced...". (Ibid: 343)

The same statement could be very aptly applied to this poem, 'A God's Labour' too, for, every line and word in it has the impact of the power and authenticity of a deeper and conclusive experience. Nevertheless, it would be easier for the reader to understand the undercurrents and nuances of the imagery in this poem if he/she were to know the basic philosophy and vision of Sri Aurobindo. However, the journey of discovering the inner work of the Redeemer itself requires preparation from the reader in terms of looking inward.

Often times poetry is written as a recollection of a state of consciousness, or as the British poet noted, poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings ... recollected in tranquility". But this poem does not seem to be in any manner a 'recollection' for, a 'recollection' is an act of memory and loses the original force of the inner experience when translated into poetic rhythm and imagery. This poem seems to be a direct transcript of his actual level of consciousness and sadhana during 1935 — the year this poem was penned. The inner state of consciousness that the poet was constantly living in during this year is captured and given the poetic turn and stamp reflecting every battle and issue in his iconic work which is, in the poet's own words, "a revolt against the whole universal Nature". (A.B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo First*

Series, p.42) He was, however, fully aware, as he wrote in a letter to a disciple on 23rd August 1935, that "anyone who wants to change earth-nature must first accept it to change it." (CWSA 35: 284) The same truth is admitted in these lines:

He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.
(CWSA 2: 534)

What is experienced and felt in his spiritual self as well as in his inner physical and mental being is the struggle of the world-redeemer who would have to bear "the burden of earthly nature" and "tread the dolorous way". It is obvious from another letter that he had "accepted" the earth-nature and was solely working to "change" it by the Supramental consciousness and force which he was seeking to bring down not for his own salvation or his spiritual emancipation, but for "the earth and souls born on the earth". (CWSA 35: 282-83)

Perhaps, we may never understand the invisible battles that Sri Aurobindo had waged to change the "earthly nature", the results and secrets which he had obtained. It seems that Sri Aurobindo left his body without revealing his secrets. But, of one thing we are absolutely sure, for he himself has revealed it: "I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits." (CWSA 29: 482)

In support of Sri Aurobindo's stand, the Mother said,

There is always the possibility of escaping and going elsewhere. Many people have done that. They have gone elsewhere, into another, more or less subtle world. There are millions of ways of escaping, you see; there is only one way of staying: to have courage and endurance, to accept all the

appearance of disability, powerlessness, incomprehension — the appearance of, yes, a negation of the Truth. But if one does not accept, it will never be changed. Those who want to remain great, luminous, strong, powerful, and so on and so forth — well, let them, they can be of no help to the earth. (Mother's Agenda, 6: 261)

Yes, Sri Aurobindo accepted the "negation of the Truth" and focused his consciousness on the earth consciousness, making his own body the center of the work of transformation: "One man's perfection still can save the world." (CWSA 34: 531) He knew that if the new power, the Supermind, could be made active within the terrestrial body, that is, if it actually touches one body at least, then it would settle itself in the earth consciousness and devise its own means of expression — its own new form, that would express it in all its radiance and luminosity — as was done by the Mind principle when it was infused into Life millions of years ago. This is what Sri Aurobindo achieved, even at the holocaust of his own body, to pull down the new Consciousness and Force on earth and hook it permanently, as it were. "I am at present engaged in bringing the Supermind into the physical consciousness," (K.R.S, Sri Aurobindo a Biography and History, p. 542) Sri Aurobindo told a disciple, "down even to the sub-material." (A.B. Purani, Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo Second Series, p. 298) The physical is by nature inert and does not want to be rendered conscient. It offers much greater resistance as it is unwilling to change. One feels as if one is 'digging the earth', as the Veda puts it. The "digging" seems to be the work of all those who have tried the transformation of the physical — a process that started in the Vedic times and is now being continued by Sri Aurobindo:

I have been digging deep and long
Mid a horror of filth and mire (CWSA 2: 534)

Sri Aurobindo had taken the plunge through "the body's

alleys” to bring the Supramental consciousness into its very cells. His central effort was to fix it in the physical for he was convinced that “if something is definitely gained on the physical plane, there is a more lasting and complete fulfillment than when it is on the mental or vital alone.” (CWSA 35: 337) Until and unless the consciousness is realised on the level of the physical nothing is permanent or stable. “Only the body can understand,” said the Mother, and it is the body alone that can perceive the next species, for, the new Consciousness is working itself out in the body and not only on the mental or vital levels. The new Consciousness is a formidable power; our mind and vital together cannot truly support it. What is required is the solid terra firma of the body, of conscious Matter, which alone has the capacity to develop itself, to bear the force and pressure of the new Consciousness. For the body to understand is to have the capacity of execution, obtained through the contagion of example. For, “to understand” for the body means “to be able to do”, explains the Mother.

Indeed, without transforming the mind and the vital, one cannot attempt any transformation of the physical. “You know,” explained the Mother to a student, “these very petty limits of thought are things that ought to disappear before you can even attempt to transform your body. If you still have these very petty ideas ... there is not much hope that you could begin the least process for the transformation of your body.” (CWM 9: 132) The transformation of the body is in fact the last thing to be taken up: the hunting down of the “falsehood of the body”, illness, unconsciousness, old age, comes only in the last level when the formation of the higher stages, the mental and the vital, is already over and when the rest of the being lives in the Truth, is established in the Truth. It would be an error to imagine that one can undertake Supramental yoga before having climbed all the other rungs of consciousness.

This "digging" must have lasted very long for, even in March 1937, Sri Aurobindo refers to it and writes: "I am not soaring and soaring — I am digging and digging." (CWSA 35: 364) This digging is, as seen earlier, into the very subconscious — the subconscious of the body, the vital, and the mind! The subconscious is universal and at the same time a very disorganised level of consciousness that accumulates all the "habits" and sanskaras of earth's past. Clearing it, refining it is perhaps as impossible a task as the one Hercules was given to cleanse in one night the Augean stables! And the first reactions of this digging into the dark alleys of the Inconscient and the Subconscious are predictably those of a huge revolt that Sri Aurobindo refers to in his letter: "The subconscious's difficulty is the difficulty now – because the whole struggle in the general sadhana is now there. It is in the subconscious, no longer in the vital or conscious physical that the resistance is all massed together." (CWSA 35: 341)

It may be because of the pulling down of the Supramental consciousness and force that the Subconscious region and the vital forces rose up en masse trying to obstruct the descent.

In the poem (CWSA 35: 342) this revolt, this "upsurging of subconscious mind" is described as—

How they mock and sneer, both devils and men!

"Thy hope is Chimera's head

Painting the sky with its fiery stain;

Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead...

Come, let us slay him and end his course!

Then shall our hearts have release

From the burden and call of his glory and force

And the curb of his wide white peace. (CWSA 2: 536)

These “devils and men” who revolt are indeed the beastly forces of the Inconscient. They cannot tolerate the “sacred Light” of the Superconscient. They want to put an end to the Redeemer, the bringer of the Light and Consciousness. They have done it before:

Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:
It fears the pure divine intolerance
Of that assault of ether and of fire; ...
Inflicting on the heights the abysm's law,
It sullies with its mire heaven's messengers: ...
It turns against the saviour hands of Grace;
It meets the sons of God with death and pain. (CWSA 33: 7)

This time too they want to “slay” the Saviour so that they can have their sway over the world of men and rule the earth indefinitely.

“One can't advance a single step without throwing their shells and stink-bombs” (CWSA 35: 336) reiterated Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo refers to this “mock and sneer” in one of his letters, written on 10 February 1935:

Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption, — I go on till I conquer or perish.
This is the spirit in which I seek the supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others. (CWSA 35: 282)

In the midst of this gruesome battle and fury, the protagonist hears a voice:

A voice cried, “Go where none have gone!
Dig deeper, deeper yet
Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
And knock at the keyless gate.” (CWSA 2: 536)

The advice of the “voice” to “dig deeper” gives a clue that it is only on reaching the hidden dormant bottom-most level of the Inconscient that one can connect to the Superconscient: the

Above and the Below are bridged! Sri Aurobindo's relentless battle was on, obviously for years together. Even after ten years of writing this poem, he reveals in a letter of April 1944 that his sadhana had come down to the level of the Inconscient. Hence, the real struggle was to break the primordial "changeless habits" of the body which get riveted in the triple layer of the human being. Moreover, unless and until the sempiternal habits are transformed, revamped, "re-grooved" on the physical level nothing permanent can take place. "Salvation is physical", the Mother used to say, when she was in the thick of the "monumental battle" trying to "re-tread" the fixed habits of the "mechanical repetitions of Nature". She reiterated that "when you come down to the body, when you attempt to make it take one step forward - oh, not even a real step, just a little step! - everything starts grating; it's like stepping on an anthill ..." (Agenda 1: 300) What Sri Aurobindo had expressed in 1944, that his work was going on at the level of the "grim foundation stone", the Inconscient, was experienced by the Mother too in 1953:

Death is not something inevitable, it's an accident that has always occurred till now (which anyway seems to have always occurred till now), and we have taken it into our heads to conquer this accident and overcome it. But it is such a terrible and tremendous battle against all the laws of Nature, all the collective suggestions, all the terrestrial habits, that unless you are a first-class warrior frightened by nothing, it's better not to begin the battle. (Satprem, The Mind of the Cells: 70)

The labor of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo has been to transform this "habit" of the physical to succumb to death and falsehood. And this transformation, the unveiling of Death, is possible only with the Supramental light penetrating the Inconscient which is the storehouse of universal habits of the physical, vital and mental consciousness. Therefore, it is

imperative to enter the "bottomless pit" with the Supramental "beam" and come to know "the inner reason of hell"! Sri Aurobindo was assured of his faith:

I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth-evolution. If greater men than myself have not had this vision and this ideal before them, that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth-sense and Truth-vision. (CWSA 35: 281)

It is with this certitude of his Truth-sense and Truth-vision that Sri Aurobindo took up the task of opening the way to "a development of divine consciousness here" for he knew that that is "to be the final sense of the earth-evolution". When one travels in a difficult, uncharted terrain one likely encounters dangers and threats. But Sri Aurobindo was on a mission:

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
Marrying the soil to the sky
And sow in this dancing planet midge
The moods of infinity. (CWSA 2: 534)

And nothing could stop him, not even if all "Hell" burst on him. We marvel at the dauntless spirit of Sri Aurobindo who takes up this journey to conquer the undiscovered realms of consciousness and is ready to face all the consequences if his endeavors fail. His effort of "marrying the soil to the sky" is difficult and dangerous. Yet he knows that if his labour of love and compassion for mankind can succeed it would create the possibility of a new creation and for that he is ready to make all sacrifices. The Redeemer has "the iron will" to break the resistance of the Subconscient and to conquer the "Titan kings":

All that was found must again be sought,
Each enemy slain revives,
Each battle for ever is fought and refought

Through vistas of fruitless lives.

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
And the Titan kings assail,
But I dare not rest till my task is done
And wrought the eternal will. (CWSA 2: 535)

The descent "into clay" and the "world's dark" is essentially the Avataric labour, though none of the avatars known and accepted till now. It is, in particular, the avataric work and mission of Sri Aurobindo who has been commissioned by the Divine Fiat to ...build a rainbow bridge .

Marrying the soil to the sky or, as he wrote to someone in 1936,

No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy, I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things — in the Abyss that I have to plunge tbuild a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it. (CWSA 35: 360)

Sri Aurobindo goes through the monumental battle even at the cost of a thousand "gaping wounds": "My gaping wounds are a thousand and one And the Titan kings assail",

Around my way the Titan forces press;
This earth is theirs, they hold the days in fee,
I am full of wounds and the fight merciless:
Is it not yet Thy hour of victory? (CWSA 2: 614)

Relentless and indomitable, the protagonist battles these beastly forces with the strength of

But the god is there in my mortal breast
Who wrestles with error and fate
And tramples a road through mire and waste
For the nameless Immaculate. (Ibid: 536)

Even though in battle in the mire and waste the protagonist has not lost his deeper contact, the power of "the Unknowable":

Although consenting to mortal ignorance,
His knowledge shared the Light ineffable.
A strength of the original Permanence
Entangled in the moment and its flow,
He kept the vision of the Vasts behind:
Power was in him from the Unknowable. (CWSA 33: 22)

With this strength of Permanence in him, "the hour of victory" was bound to be near:

All veils are breaking now.
I have heard His voice and borne His will
On my vast untroubled brow. (CWSA 2: 537)

Sri Aurobindo had set out "To bring the fire to man" and to build "A home for the deathless fire" and for that, he did "pass to the other shore of falsehood's sea", (CWSA 34: 450) and entered "the world's dark to bring there light", (Ibid.) and succeeded in "bringing the fires":

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
And the undying suns here burn;
Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth
The incarnate spirits yearn
Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss...
(CWSA 2: 537-538)

This concrete experience clearly indicates that "Heaven's fire" has been lit in the darkest chamber of the earth and what was assumed to be impossible has been made possible. What was a prayer has become a reality:

Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless the
children of Time...
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life
Beatitude's kiss. (Ibid: 564)

Not only does Sri Aurobindo establish Bliss in the Abyss but he can foresee the dawn of a new spiritual age, a Life divine upon the earth. Once he has travelled through "Hell the world to save", he has prophetic visions of the New Race, that of the Superman, that is waiting on the luminous borders of the occult earth:

Down a gold-red stairway wend
The radiant children of Paradise
Clarioning darkness' end. (Ibid: 538)

The same vision of the descent of the New Race is elaborated in Savitri:

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
Forerunners of a divine multitude,
Out of the paths of the morning star they came
Into the little room of mortal life.
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world
And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
The messengers of the Incommunicable,
The architects of immortality. (CWSA 33: 343-344)

"A gold-red stairway " and "the amber stairs" are descriptive of the golden path of the Supermind for the "radiant children of Paradise" and "the sun-eyed children" to descend on earth in their destined hour. "Paradise" surely is not the one that is alluded to in religious scriptures and literature but it is the new paradise of a transformed earth. These "children" and "the massive barrier-breakers" announce the end of "darkness" and the beginning of a new Earth when —

This mortal life shall house Eternity's bliss,
The body's self taste immortality.

Then shall the world-redeemer's task be done. (CWSA 34: 451)

Until now God's labour was done only on the subtle physical level. Sri Aurobindo has rediscovered the secret of the Vedic Rishis — the "great passage", mahas pathah, the world of "the unbroken light" and the swar at the bottom of the Inconscient, "the well of honey covered by the rock". Like the Angiras who shattered the mountain rock with their cry and "made in us a path to the Great Heaven" .Discovering the Sun dwelling in the Darkness, Sri Aurobindo has discovered the Supermind above in the great Heaven, the upper hemisphere, and the Supermind below, under "the grim foundation stone", in "the bottomless pit".

As a consequence of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's god-like "labour"

thenew world is born. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a new world which is born. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled – where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in... (CWM 9: 149)

The unbeliever and the sceptic might comment that all these hopes of transformation of the body and the vision of the New Race are tall talk, that it is phantasmagoria. To him Sri Aurobindo replies: "My faith and will are for the now... (CWSA 35: 334) "I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world ... which did not eventually happen even after the delay, defeat or even disaster". (CWSA 35: 208)

The Mother too replies in the same vein –

... it is possible because it has never been. It is the new

world and it is the new consciousness and it is a new Power, it is possible, and this is and will be more and more manifested because it is the new world because it has never been. It will be because it has never been... It is beautiful: it will be because it has never been – because it has never been. (CWM 11: 317)

Similar is Sri Aurobindo's promise, as expressed in Savitri:
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. (CWSA 33: 330)

The protagonist, who had started his labour with "My jewelled dreams of you", of the earth between "the gold and the blue" – between the Supramental and the mental – has fulfilled his dream by bringing down the "truth-conscious world" (CWSA 34: 451) wherein "mortal life" houses "Eternity's bliss". He hopes — and in his hope there is a promise — that on this new Earth shall walk the "living truth of you" — the body of beauty and bliss of the Mother. That is to say, it is the first prototype of the Superman worked out by the Mother in her own physical body and left behind in the subtle realms and which, when the moment arrives, will be visible even to the non-believer. But when will that moment come when "the little more" and "the new life's" doors are "carved in silver light ... in a world bare and bright"? That will be when a sufficient number of conscious people feel without a doubt that there is no other choice. "All that has been, and all that still is must appear like an absurdity which cannot last — at that moment it can take place, but not before". (Satprem, *The Mind of Cells*, p.228)

Anyone can belong to that "sufficient number of conscious people" on condition that he/she takes the decisive step in one's consciousness. This decisive step is as simple as having a faith in the bright future of humanity. It is only to open one's eyes to this possibility. If a sufficient number of conscious people

believe it is possible, then it will be probable and everything will be feasible! The only impossibility is to think that it is not achievable: it blocks the path completely and we sink into the old fossilised perception. If we do not believe in this possibility it would be like the reptile which would have stubbornly remained a reptile dried up in its swamp and never made the transition to the land-roaming creatures. But for those of us who do want to make the transition, we have only to open the Doors of a new Perception, a new Possibility, and the Doors of a new World would open ajar, the one that the Mother has described so very graphically. This is the secret: we approach the Future with a faith in our heart and a resolution in our soul. And, "If earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now." (CWSA 12: 160) This is the promise held out by Sri Aurobindo to all adventurers of this new consciousness.

