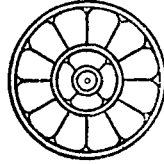


# MOTHER INDIA

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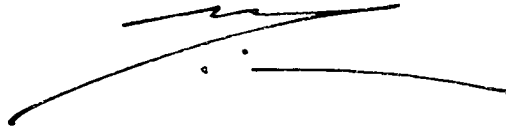


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute.

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XI

No. 9

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"*

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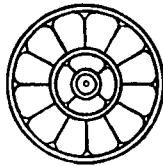
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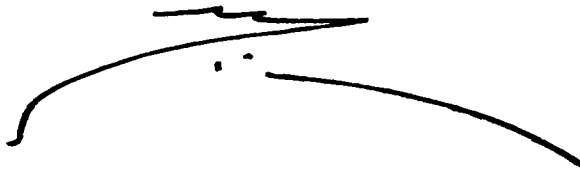


## WORDS OF THE MOTHER

In spite of what the ignorant men believe, it is the inner vibrations that are responsible for the exterior events.

Most of the people who live in the Ashram forget too easily that they are not here to live a quiet and pleasant life, but to do sadhana. And for doing sadhana a certain control upon one's inner movements is indispensable.

1.10.59.



## BEAUTY IN THE REAL

SRI AUROBINDO

*(This lively and charming piece of writing, published for the first time, dates back to the early life of Sri Aurobindo, the period in Baroda. One is not certain that it is complete.)*

I HAD ridden down by Shelsford thro' the glittering lustre of an afternoon in March and as I was returning somewhat cold and tired, saw at a distance the pink bust and heavy black curls of Keshav Ganesh and with him Broome Wilson and Prince Paradox. As I trotted up Prince Paradox hailed me. "Come round and have tea with me," he said, "we are speculating at large on the primitive roots and origin of the universe, and I know your love for light subjects." "I shall be a delighted listener," I said, and was genuine in the assurance, for I had many a while listened with subtle delight to the beautiful and imaginative talk of Keshav Ganesh. I rode to the stables and returned to the College and quickly changing my apparel repaired to Chetwind Court, but found them already drinking tea with the liberality of artists. "A cup of nectar," I cried, "ere the bowl be empty!" "It seems that Pegasus is blind," said Wilson, "or he would not see the drink of Gods in the brown tincture of the tea-leaves and the chased bowls of Hephaestus in a common set of China." "If not the drink of Gods," I replied, "it is the nectar of poets and women." "And that is a more splendid title," put in Prince Paradox. "You are right," said Keshav, "poets and women are the efflorescence of being and the crowning rapture of creation, and if poets are roses in their delicate tincture and have the crimson luxury and the heavy fragrance and the petalled sublimity of a blowing rose, women are moulded of as fine material but are flowers perpetually in the bud and are only seen in a glint of peeping splendour and not in the consummated outburst of glory, which is only fostered by the living waters of culture and the nurturing warmth of independence." Broome interposed. "No more of that," he said, "if you escape into a byway, Keshav, you will never be wooed back into the high-road." "But what is the high-road?" I inquired. Broome Wilson, who was gifted with a retentive memory undertook to inform me. "I understand," I said when he had finished, "and am pleased to see my own ideas garbed in the beautiful dialect of poetical analogy, but have you not

## BEAUTY IN THE REAL

finished or is there more wine to be pressed from the cluster ?” “There is more to be pressed,” he answered. Then began an amusing scene, for Broome baited his hook for the argument and kept throwing the line repeatedly, but Keshav was the wariest fish that ever cheated an angler and if he ever appeared to bite, was seen, as the line went flying up, to dart away into some fine thought or voluptuous image. At last when we least expected it, he plunged into the argument.

And so on the gnarled brow of Pisgah we stand and look down on a land flowing with milk and honey. Now whether is it wiser to descend and take the kingdom of heaven by violence or to linger here and feel on our temples the breath of the winds wafting us hints of the beauty we relinquish ? Below there are truculent peoples to conquer and strong cities to storm and giants, the sons of Anak, to slaughter, but above the stainless heavens and the sweet, fresh morning and one lingering star.

“Let us go down,” I said, “and enjoy the full meaning of the beauty below us.”

“Yes,” added Broome eagerly, “leave hints to the spiritually indolent.” Treneth threw in a paradox.

“I love the pleasure of anticipation better than the pain of enjoyment.”

“We are very far from the enjoyment,” said Keshav, “for we have yet to make the descent of Pisgah”.

“But what is Pisgah ?” I asked.

“In thought, the knowledge of virtue, and, in action, the purpose of evolving the inborn qualities and powers native to our personality.”

“Shall I let you off, Keshav”, said Broome, “or are you ready to answer my inquiries ?”

“Pray do not,” he said, “for like Gorgias I profess to answer any question and not be at a loss however strange the inquiry.”

“I am glad to hear it, and I hope you will answer and tell me why you have ignored the qualities that are native neither to our human nature nor to our personality but to a more subtle part of us.”

“I see,” he replied with a smile, “you shy at the spectre of heredity. Well, we will lay the spectre.”

“And a spectre it is, or rather a scarecrow,” put in Prince Paradox, “for it seems to me neither beautiful as an idea nor sound as a theory but merely the last resource of bad psychologists.”

“I see the lovers of the past as iconoclastic from regret as the lovers of the future from aspiration. We are then agreed that our first step will be to reject or accept heredity ?”

We all assented.



## MOTHER INDIA

“And now, Prince Paradox,” he cried, “will you tell me that you do not believe in race ?”

“God forbid.”

“And you agree with me that an Aryan is various from a non-Aryan and a Teuton from a Celt and a Celt from a Hindu, and a Rajput from a Mahratta and that this is fine as an idea and sound as a theory and consonant with Nature, which is fond of sphering harmony within harmony.”

“Yes, I agree with all that.”

“And by origin the Saxon varies from the Celt, and is meant for the drudgery of life and not for its beauty and splendour, just as by origin the thistle varies from the rose and is not glorious nor wonderful but simply decent and useful and good diet for donkeys ?”

“That is true.”

“Then if race divergences result from origin, and origin is heredity, is it not? is not heredity real and not a sciolism ?”

“Yes, in broad masses, but not in the individual. What is sauce for the goose abstract is not sauce for the positive gander.”

“It would take a positive goose to deny that. But synthesis is the secret of Philosophy and not analysis, and we err widely when we work from without rather than from within. Let us rectify our methods or we shall arrive at incomplete results. I trust some of you are proficient in text-book Psychology?”

We all disclaimed the text-book.

“That is fortunate, for I can now make ridiculous mistakes without fear of ridicule. This is the theory of race as I conceive it. Temperament is the basis or substratum of character and the character built on anything other than temperament is an edifice rooted in the sea-waves which in a moment will foam away into nothing or tumble grovelling under the feet of fresh conquerors. Indeed it would be more apt to call temperament the root of character, and the character itself the growing or perfect tree with its hundred branches and myriads of leaves. And temperament is largely due to race, or, in another phrasing, varies with the blood, and if the blood is quick and fiery the temperament is subtle and sensitive and responds as promptly to social influences and personal culture as a flower to sunlight and rain, and shoots up into multitudinous leaves and branches, but if the blood is slow and lukewarm, the temperament is dull and phlegmatic and will not answer to the most earnest wooing, but grows up stunted and withered in aspect and bald of foliage and miserly of branches and altogether unbeautiful. On the blood depends the sensitiveness of the nerves to impressions and the quick action of the brains and the heat of the passions, and all that goes to the composition of a character, which if they are absent, leaves only the heavy sediment and dregs of human

individuality. Hence the wide gulf between the Celt and the Saxon."

"You are the dupe of your own metaphors, Keshav," said Broome, "the quick nature is the mushroom, but the slow is the gradual and majestic oak."

"If the Athenians were mushrooms and the lowland Scotch are oaks, the mushroom is preferable. To be slow and solid is the pride of the Saxon and the ox, but to be quick and songful and gracile is the pride of the Celt and the bird. There is no virtue in inertia, but only absence of virtue, for without growth there is no development and the essence of growth and the imperative need of the spirit is movement, which if you lose, you lose all that separates the human from the brute."

Broome avowed that in our theory of virtue the remark was convincing.

"And do we all recognize," said he, "blood as the seed of temperament and temperament as the root of character?"

We all signified assent.

"Then, Prince Paradox, does it not follow that if our ancestors had quick blood, we shall have quick blood and a quick temperament, and if they had slow blood, we shall have slow blood and a slow temperament, and if we have come of both characters, we shall have the elements of either temperament, and either they will amalgamate, one predominant and the other subordinate or driven under, or they will pervert our souls into a perpetual field of battle?"

"Obviously," he assented.

"Then here we have heredity in the individual as in the broad masses."

"But only a racial heredity and to that I do not object, but what I loathe is to be told that my virtues are mere bequests and that I am not an original work but a kind of anthology of ancestral qualities."

"But if I called you a poem, in which peculiar words and cadences have been introduced and assimilated and blended in a new and beautiful manner, would you loathe to be told that?"

"Dear me, no; it quite reconciles me to the idea."

"And it is the more accurate comparison. Nature does not go to work like a mere imitator of herself, as modern poets do, but transplants the secrets of her old poems and blends them with new secrets, so as to enrich the beauty of her new poem, and however she may seem to grow grapes from thistles, is really too wise and good to do anything so discordant, and only by her involved and serpentine manner gives an air of caprice and anarchy to what is really apt and harmonious. She often leaves the ground fallow for a generation and the world is surprised when it sees spring from Sir Timothy Shelley, Baronet and orthodox, Percy Bysshe Shelley, poet and pioneer of free-thought, but learns in a little while that Percy Shelley had a grandfather and marvels no longer. Could we trace the descent of Goethe and Shakespeare we should

find the root of the Italian in the one and the Celt in the other, but the world did not then and does not now appreciate the value of genealogies to philosophy. We are vexed and are sceptical of harmony in nature, when we find Endymion a Londoner, but look back a step and learn that his parents were Devonshire Celts and recover our faith in the Cosmos. And why should we exclaim at the Julian emperors as strange products for stoical virtue-ridden Rome, when we know that Tiberius was a Clausius, one of the great Italian house renowned for its license, cruelty, pride and genius, and Caligula the son and Nero the grandson of Germanicus, who drew his blood from Mark Antony? Science is right in its materialist data, though not always in the inferences it draws from them and when she tells us that nothing proceeds from nothingness and that for every effect there is a cause and for every growth a seed, we must remember that her truths apply as much to the spiritual as to the material world. Mommsen has said rightly that without passion there is no genius. We shall not gather beauty from ugliness, nor intellect from a slow temperament, nor fiery passion from disciplined apathy, but in all things shall reap as we sow, and must sow the wind before we can reap the whirlwind."

## OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Translated by Nirranjan from the Bengali letters in "Patravali")*

THE vital does not like the state of vastness where there is no movement of thought. It wants movement, any movement whether of knowledge or of ignorance. A serene condition without any restlessness seems dry to it.

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Nobody can ever progress in sadhana through pain, despair, and lack of enthusiasm. It is better not to have them.

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Not only the experience of the higher but also the transformation of the lower nature is necessary. Pleasure, sadness, despair and sorrow are the ordinary play of the vital, impediments to progress—one has to go beyond them and bring down the vast unity and equality from above into the vital and in all the being.

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As long as desire, and subjection to the mercy of any whim, demand and imagination are strong, the vital will dominate. All this is nourishment to the vital, and when you give nourishment why should it not become huge and powerful ?

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If you entertain a desire, become impatient for the fruits of sadhana, then how will you remain peaceful and silent ? A great work like the transformation of human nature, can it be done in a moment ? Remain quiet, let the force of the Mother work in you, then in time everything will be accomplished.

If you remain peaceful within, in a state of surrender, then obstacles and difficulties will not be able to disturb you. Unhappiness and anxiety and 'Why

## MOTHER INDIA

is this not happening ? When will it happen ?', if you allow these feelings to enter into you, then obstacles and difficulties will find strength. Why do you pay so much attention to them ? Concentrate on the Mother. Remain peaceful and surrendered within. The petty defects of the lower nature cannot be got rid of so easily. It is useless to be agitated over them. When the Mother's Force fully occupies the entire being down to the subconscious, they will go. The length of time necessary for that does not matter. The complete transformation requires time.

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We have neither moved away from you nor abandoned you. When your mind and vital become disturbed, then these false ideas enter into your mind. Even if the ego rises and the difficulties come you must not lose faith in the Mother. Keep on calling her quietly and remain calm, the difficulties and the ego will leave you.

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The truth is that you must not be subject to the ego or the external nature in your work. If you are, the work cannot form a part of the sadhana; instead, it becomes equivalent to trivial and ordinary work. Even the work must be done from within in a spirit of surrender.

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The external consciousness is full of ignorance, and seems to make a false transcription, a wrong imitation or translation of what comes from above, to remould that in its own way; as if trying to turn that to some imaginary enjoyment, or some outward selfish interest or the pleasure of the ego. This is the weakness of human nature. One should want the Divine, for the sake of the Divine and not for one's own satisfaction. When the psychic being inside becomes strong, then the defects of the external nature begin to lessen till finally one becomes pure.

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Any average man reacts like this—to be pleased when praised and offended when blamed. There is nothing strange about that. But it is absolutely essential for a sadhak to get over this weakness; he must remain unshaken by praise or criticism, honour or insult. But it cannot be easily done, it will take time.

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## OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

This is the state and outlook of the true consciousness. If you can have this attitude when you go deep inside or come out in the external consciousness, then everything will rightly move towards the divine purpose.

Falsehood is a great barrier in the path of this yoga. Falsehood of any kind must not be given a place in thought, speech or action.

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There is no connection between the tamasic surrender and the tamasic ego. The tamasic ego seems to think : "I am a sinner, I am weak, there will be no progress for me, the sadhana is impossible for me, I am unfortunate, the Divine does not accept me, death is my only salvation, the Mother does not love me but she loves all others," etc., etc. The vital nature likes to hurt itself by demonstrating its own meanness. It wants to satisfy its ego-sense in a negative way, by showing itself as the worst person, the most unhappy, wicked and tortured of all. The rajasic ego is exactly the opposite. By saying, "I am great," etc., it likes to exaggerate about itself.

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Ignorance, ego and desire are hindrances. If the mind, life and body become instruments of the Higher Consciousness, this divine light can descend into the body.

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The human mind itself is full of sceptical imaginations, wrong ideas, distrust, ignorance and unhappiness. This ignorance is the cause of distrust, the source of anguish. The human intelligence is an instrument of ignorance. Very often wrong thoughts and false ideas come to it, yet it believes that its ideas alone are true. The mind is not even inclined to consider whether there is any mistake in its thought or, if so, where lies the mistake. When the mistake is pointed out, it does not like to own it and becomes angry and unhappy, yet it derives great pleasure from finding fault with others. When it hears any criticism of others, it immediately accepts that as true without even considering how far it might be true. It is difficult for faith and trust to grow in this type of mind. That is why you must not listen to ordinary human beings or accept their influence within you. If you want to hear the truth, you have to go within you and awaken the psychic being and from there true intelligence will grow in the mind, true emotion and feeling will come to the heart, true inspiration will

## MOTHER INDIA

rise in the vital; the psychic light will bring a new vision of man, objects, circumstances and the world; ignorance of the mind, wrong seeing, incorrect thinking, disbelief and mistrust will cease for ever.

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There is probably some resistance to meditation in the body, that is why it does not want to sit down. But it also happens with many that their sadhana goes on automatically. There is no need to force oneself to sit for meditation. Whether one is sitting, walking or lying down or even sleeping, the sadhana goes on.

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All this has happened probably because of some external contact. These vital disturbances are now occurring repeatedly in some people. Like a disease they go from one person to another; especially the feeling, "I want to die, I do not wish to keep this body, it is not possible to do yoga and sadhana in this body," is strong. However, the idea, "By leaving the body I shall attain the realisation in yoga without any difficulty in another body," is extremely erroneous. If you give up the body in this way, there will be still greater difficulties in the next birth and you will not have any relation with the Mother. All this is an attack of the hostile forces. Their aim is to break the sadhana of the sadhak, break the health of the Mother, break the Ashram and our work. You must be on your guard. Do not allow them to enter into you.

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"An outsider scolds me. I am very much hurt. I wish to die"—these are words of the vital ego, not of a sadhak. I am giving you a fair warning—"Do not give any place to the ego." If anybody says anything to you, remain undisturbed, in a peaceful state of mind, free from any egoism and united with the Mother.

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Merely dying does not solve anything. How do you think the difficulties you have not overcome in this life will leave you in your next birth? You have to clear them up in this very life.

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## OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

If you allow these futile lamentations of the vital to rise, how will the true experience come ? Even if it comes how can it endure or bear fruit ? This weeping of the vital can only be a bar.

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These words of moaning and bewailing are obstacles to progress on the path of yoga and nothing else but that—only a kind of tamasic play of the vital. If you can give them all up and quietly pursue your sadhana, there will be a rapid progress.

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What you have seen is true—but what you call an evil force is only the ordinary nature. This nature makes man do almost anything—in the sadhana; one has to overcome its influence, but it cannot be easily done. By quiet and determined effort, in the end it is entirely overcome.

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When the sadhak begins to live in the true consciousness, the other parts still continue to exist; only in proportion as the power of the true consciousness increases, does it gradually weaken the others.

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What else but an evil force can pull you down so low, make you so weak and agitated ? Many forces of this nature are moving about in the atmosphere because the sadhaks give them shelter. If they come to you, call the Mother and send them away. They will not be able to do anything; they will not be able to endure. Obstacles cannot be fully got rid of so easily. By a constant opening and a heightening of consciousness, the physical consciousness is transformed, the difficulties will then completely disappear. Before that, they will decrease, go out and remain outside you. Instead of getting upset by these difficulties, detach yourself from them. Do not accept the difficulties as your own, because if you do your power will diminish.



## GLIMPSES OF SRI AUROBINDO

*(A few extracts from "Aurobindo Prasanga", a Bengali book of reminiscences by Dinendra Kumar Roy, are here translated for the benefit of the general reader. Sri Aurobindo had invited the author to live with him in Baroda for some time to help him in his Bengali studies. The book was published in 1923 and is based on the recollections of Baroda. The text has been rearranged in places to suit our present purpose. Our grateful acknowledgments are due to the author's successors.)*

ANYONE who has spent even ten days in the company of Aurobindo will never be able to forget him in his life.

It was my great good fortune that I had an opportunity of staying with him<sup>1</sup> for more than two years....Today<sup>2</sup> millions of people are anxious to hear about Aurobindo's life....May I hope that the sacred story of this dedicated *tapaswi* and servant of Mother India will not be wasted on the youth of Bengal ?...

Before I met Aurobindo I had formed an image of him somewhat like this : a stalwart figure, dressed from head to foot in immaculate European style, a stern gaze in his spectacled eyes, a distorted accent and a temper exceedingly rough, one who would not tolerate the slightest breach of form. It is needless to add that I was rather disappointed in my estimate when I saw him for the first time. Who could have thought that this darkish young man with soft dreamy eyes and long thin wavy hair parted in the middle and reaching to the neck, clad in coarse Ahmedabad *dhoti* and close-fitting Indian jacket, his feet shod in old-fashioned Indian slippers with upturned toes, a face sparsely dotted with pock-marks—who could have thought that this man could be no other than Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, the living fountain of French, Latin and Greek ? I could not have received a bigger shock if someone had pointed to the hillocks about Deoghar and said, "Look, there stand the Himalayas."

<sup>1</sup> From 1898

<sup>2</sup> This was in 1923.

Nevertheless, after I had known him for barely a couple of days, I realised that there was here a heart which knew nothing of the pettiness and dross of earth. His laughter was simple as a child's, as limpid and soft. An indomitable will showed on the curve of his lips, but there was not a trace of the common human selfishnesses in that heart or any worldly ambition ; there was only a godlike desire to spend himself for the relief of human suffering....We lived together for months on end, and the more I came to know of him, the more I realised that Aurobindo was not of this earth, he was truly a god come down from heaven....

I was enchanted by his devotion to his mother. He loved to call himself "the madcap child of a madcap mother". He was extremely affectionate to his sister and his cousin. He wrote them letters, helped them with his money.

This reminds me of a little episode. One day Aurobindo was filling up a Money Order form for sending some money, I forget whether it was to his mother or his sister. For some time past, I too had been thinking of remitting some money to my people at home, but I was hesitating to ask Aurobindo in case he should not have enough to spare. As he was filling up the form, I thought I should take this opportunity to ask him for some money. I asked him. With a smile, he got the purse from his chest, shook out the few pieces it contained, and said, "That is all I have got ; you take it and send it to your people." I replied, "But how can I ? You were writing the form since you wanted to remit the money. You remit it. I shall send later." Aurobindo shook his head and said, "No, that cannot be. You need the money more than I do. It would not matter if I postponed the remittance." His Money Order form was left unfilled, he put it aside and took up his poem on the story of Savitri.

He was not much used to writing letters and seldom finished them at one sitting. He would write some ten or twenty lines on a small granite-grey sheet and leave it there ; it would be some days before he could find the time or was in a mood to finish the letter and send it off. In some cases, his letters did not even reach the post office : they got a decent burial in the pad. Aurobindo used to say that the less one spoke about oneself the better. Perhaps that explains why he talked so little.

Aurobindo was never a "popular" figure in Baroda society. But he had two or three intimate friends and the depth of his friendships was something unique. He had formed a deep attachment to the Jadhav family. Mr. Khaserao Jadhav, a friend of the Maharaja, had finished his education in England and

was now the Subah or Magistrate of Baroda. He regarded Aurobindo as his own brother; his younger brother, Lt. Madhavrao Jadhav, was Aurobindo's intimate friend. They spoke among themselves mostly in English but sometimes they used Marathi as well. Aurobindo understood Marathi well enough but could not speak it fluently, although he spoke it better than Bengali. He used to laugh a lot while in their company.

Everyone in Baroda had heard about Mr. Ghose and he was held in high esteem by those who knew him. The cultured *élite* of Baroda had great regard for his unusual gifts. The students adored him like a god. They respected and trusted their Bengali professor far more than the British principal of the College. They were charmed with his teaching. I know of no other professor, with the possible exception of Derozio,<sup>1</sup> who has ever earned such respect, devotion, love and trust from the students. A number of interested persons also showed him much deference, but I wonder if that had anything to do with his genius. They used to come to him for all sorts of favours, as they knew that the Maharaja had a great regard for him. Occasionally a Gujerati business man or a Marathi Sardar would call on him for advice on the education of their sons abroad.

Now and again a hussar from the Luxmivilasa Palace would arrive in the morning or in the afternoon with a letter for Aurobindo from the Maharaja's Private Secretary. The letter usually contained something to this effect: "The Maharaja would be very happy if you would come and dine with him tonight", or "Could you find it convenient to see the Maharaja at such and such an hour?" I have seen him refuse the Maharaja's invitation at times because he was busy. There were so many eminent people who waited for months in the hope of getting an interview with the Maharaja, and here was a mere professor who regarded his time and work more valuable than the Maharaja's favour!<sup>2</sup>

I have never met anyone with such strange appetite for books. Every evening Aurobindo would sit at his table and read in the light of a "Jewel" lamp till one in the morning, wholly unmindful of the sharp mosquito bites. I saw him seated thus for hours on end in the same posture, his eyes glued to

<sup>1</sup> A popular professor of the old Presidency College in Calcutta during the twenties of the last century, who paved the way for the reception of Western ideas among the educated youth of Bengal.

<sup>2</sup> "Whenever he thought fit, the Maharaja would send for him for writing letters, composing speeches or drawing up documents which needed special care in the phrasing of language. . . Most of the personal work for the Maharaja was done in an unofficial capacity. He (Sri Aurobindo) was usually invited to breakfast with the Maharaja at the Palace and stayed on to do this work." (Sri Aurobindo on Himself, pp. 34-35.)

his book. Like a *tapaswi* engaged in yoga, he was wholly oblivious of all around him; perhaps even a house on fire would not break his concentration.

His library was stacked with all sorts of books in many of the European languages. A well-known firm of booksellers in Bombay were his suppliers. They used to send him every month, and sometimes once every week, long lists of new publications. Aurobindo would make the selections and send his orders. As soon as he drew his salary at the beginning of the month, he would remit to them fifty or sixty rupees, sometimes more, and they would send him on deposit account the books he had chosen. The books seldom came by post; they came by railway parcel packed in huge cases. The parcels arrived twice or thrice every month, he would read them up in the course of a week or ten days and send out fresh orders. I have never seen such voracious reading !

It would be a surprise to many of those who later came to think of him as a preacher of sedition and a revolutionary leader—some think so even now—that I never came across a single piece of revolutionary literature among the huge mass of books that were piled up in his library. Nor did I ever hear him utter a single word of reproach against the mighty British empire.<sup>1</sup>

All the time I lived with him I could never think of him except as a *brahma-charin* and a compassionate *sannyasin* who had given up his all, whose sole mission in life was to acquire knowledge, who was engaged in deep *tapasya* amidst the bustle of a noisy world, solely with the view that his mission be fulfilled....

(Compiled and translated by SANAT K. BANERJI)

<sup>1</sup> It will be realised that so long as Sri Aurobindo was in the Baroda service, he could not for obvious reasons take part openly in "seditious" activities against the British Government.

—Translator.

## SRI AUROBINDO'S YOGA, PHILOSOPHY AND ASHRAM

(*A Letter*)

It is remarkable that you have been able to perceive accurately some of the governing principles of our life here in your very first visit. If there is a misconception or two, here and there, it is understandable. And as I am assured that corrections would be welcome I wish to first draw your attention to them before proceeding to deal with the questions at the end of the letter.

First about *Guru in spiritual life*. It is of course a rule sanctified by tradition and confirmed in experience that a Guru who has already trod the Path and holds its Truth in himself is indispensable for the seeker of the life of the spirit. But this is not absolute. One may not choose a human Guru. It is possible to take to any of the Paths enunciated in the Scriptures and follow the course directed therein, with faith. The Knowledge contained in these Books of Light, based as it is on the realisations of those who have mapped out and perfected the Path, is instinct with a Power of its own—the Power of the Truth that underlies it—and under proper conditions it can act as a dynamic guide. For Truth is eternal and so is its inherent Power. Or one may rely on and trust to the Inner Guide in all, the Jagadguru who is seated within the Heart, and proceed in his sadhana as guided by Him. Where such reliance is sincere and the aspiration burning, the inner Guidance is always forthcoming and effective. It may come in many forms : through the instrumentality of human agencies, through a Word, spoken or written, through events or a whisper of circumstance in outer life and so on.

In either case, the stress is on individual effort. The entire load is taken on oneself and one builds up his own life drawing sustenance, on his own initiative, from wherever it is found. There have been great instances, even in contemporary history, of persons who have realised the object of their sadhana without the aid of a human Guru. But they are rare and it is not always safe for everyone to attempt to do so. Human nature is full of imperfections and one never knows when a wrong turn may be taken, where the mind may err and a single false step undo the labour of years.

Second : *The spiritual* is not the same as *the supramental* ('layer' or consciousness).

Along with the Seers of the Veda and the Upanishads, we conceive of the whole Creation—necessarily including this world—as an expression of the Spirit. The universe on all its planes of existence is a manifestation of the Spirit. Consequently, the Spirit with its nature—Consciousness—is there equally present on each of the levels of creation, veiled and latent on some, overt and active on others.

It is therefore possible for one to open to and realise the Spiritual Consciousness on any of the planes of his being, *e.g.* the physical or the vital (*pranic*) or the mental. One can remain for instance on the present level of his mental development but by an appropriate discipline of inward growth find his spiritual consciousness. To get at and breathe the spiritual consciousness it is not necessary to go above the highest summits of the Mind and reach out to what is beyond it, the Super-Mind.

The supramental is a particular grade, a special formulation of the Divine Consciousness in the ladder of manifestation. It is the poise of the Manifesting Consciousness where are concentrated the self-effective dynamisms of Truth-Knowledge and Truth-Power. Here the Spirit is not latent as on the lower levels of matter, life and mind; it is on the contrary fully manifest and overtly active without any limitation. The aim of our sadhana is to realise this state of consciousness and set it active in our being. To spiritualise oneself is one of the indispensable conditions forming, so to say, the ground-work of this Yoga whose crown lies in the attainment of this Supramental Consciousness.

Third : We do not look upon the *Mother as merely 'an enlightened soul'*.

To us the Mother is not a human personage, however exalted. She is not an executive, the head of an institution of which we all are members. Nor is She an Elder leading a host of disciples devoted to a common ideal. The One, to surrender to whom is our deepest aspiration, to live at whose feet is our greatest privilege, is our Guru in the fullest sense of the Indian tradition. At the least, She represents the Divine who is the object of our seeking. But to those of us who have been vouchsafed glimpses into the truth of Her Personality, She is infinitely more. To us She embodies the Divine, not merely because our Master Sri Aurobindo has stated so unequivocally, but more by reason of our own intimate perceptions and unmistakable experiences. We have known, times without number, thrills of power and joy coursing through our veins, granite blocks of Peace settling over our being, barriers of tremendous proportions whether in the waking or in the dream states dissolving in a moment at a single Call of Her Name. When we meditate upon Her, open to the Conscious-Force that emanates from Her, we feel almost bodily lifted and rushed through the Vasts of God. To those who live under Her protective wings

miracles are the normal act. We can only exclaim with Arjuna after the memorable Revelation of the Universal Form of the Lord :

I have seen what never was seen before,  
I rejoice.

Now to come to the doubts you have expressed in the account of your impressions of the Ashram. You observe :

1. *Sadhaks have almost no direct contact with the public and lead a life of sadhana. It seems that day-to-day problems of the local people do not affect them as they have no contact with them. In other words they have no sympathy with them. They rather try to keep aloof. They neither share in their difficulties and sorrows nor do they try to solve their problems. Perhaps they have purposely accepted it as their rule in order to remain solely occupied in their experiment of a higher life.*

I welcome this opportunity to answer to these points since criticisms of this kind are repeatedly aired by many of the dignitaries in social and public life when they visit the Ashram.

In the first place, is living 'with the people' and partaking of their daily joys and sorrows the only way of 'helping' them ? Is the doctor who opens a dispensary in a village and treats patients—albeit on his own terms—doing greater "service to the people" than the medical worker or a scientist who is concentrating all his energies and spends twenty hours a day in his laboratory striving to discover new means of alleviation of suffering, fresh methods of contributing to the general happiness and progress of mankind ?

The Ashram is something in the nature of a Research and Experimental Centre engaged in the development and establishment of a new pattern of society, a society that is based on the natural laws of the Soul. Instead of trying to meet and solve 'problems' one after another as they come, we seek to get at and eliminate the very root of all problems by some radical means. We believe *and see that this can be done* and that the fullest value of life can be derived only when it is lived from the spiritual level, in a spiritual consciousness. Only then could struggle, suffering, grief, pain lose their present edge and the reign of harmony, peace, joy begin to spread. To this end we are following the evolutionary line of ascent in Nature in a concentrated manner. We practise this discipline, the Yoga, in order to gain and communicate the right poise and consciousness which alone can fulfil the agelong aspiration of man for Knowledge, Power and Happiness. An environment has been created

by the Mother which is most conducive to the growth and development of these deeper impulses of the soul, both because of the collective aspiration for a common Ideal and due to the incessant pressure directed from above to purify and uplift. She has created a kind of Spiritual Reserve to ensure an uninterrupted progression of this unique endeavour in which all sincere seekers who have a call to this Ideal are admitted. Naturally every care is taken, as far as possible, to see that there is no dilution in the intensity of the spiritual atmosphere from external incursions. But genuine enquirers and seekers are not only permitted but even encouraged to come and see for themselves what is being done and if it appeals to them they are allowed to participate in whatever way that suits their circumstances.

The central aim of our life here is not Mukti, attainment of personal liberation. Nor is our life mainly devoted to the service of humanity. We strive to serve the Divine, to equip ourselves to express the intention of the Divine in life, to participate in the Divine Manifestation which after all is the true meaning of all life. Our goal is not to evolve and lay down one more line of spiritual development in this land of diverse paths of Yoga. It is to work out and perfect a *way of life* which shall bring out the maximum expression of Joy, Power, Knowledge and Peace in the lives of those who take to it. It is intended to be eventually the *Way of all Life*. The gains that we make in the course of our spiritual and other effort here are not and cannot be bottled up for the spiritual aggrandisement of a few individuals. Rather, they go to constitute a reservoir of spiritual Dynamism, a Higher Consciousness which shall, one day, swell, overflow and inundate the whole of humanity with its fertilising waters, *vardhayanti āpaḥ*.

The starting and the growth of the Sri Aurobindo International Educational Centre is intended to be one of the chief means by which the gains of the spiritual endeavour here are gradually made available to the wider world. Students and teachers from all parts of the globe come and live here, participate in the community life, imbibe the higher values that are sought to be lived and expressed to the best of each one's capacity, and when they go back to their places they cannot but serve as so many torches of the Light that is growing here.

*2. A lot of mysticism seemed to be prevailing in their sadhana. If by the experiences and concepts of the supramental plane a new consciousness permeates the intellect, mind, life and body, then a progressive development of the various lower levels must be outwardly apparent. One should be able to perceive clearly that the mind of the sadhak has been enlarged and elevated, at least not crippled and mutilated, and that he has been more or less*



*freed from superstitions and misconceptions. Do the sadhaks of the Ashram experience any such thing ?*

Naturally we do. Those who do the sadhana feel their progress in a concrete way. One does not have to wait till he gets experiences of the supra-mental plane in order to undergo the changes of mind, life and body mentioned above. In fact they begin to show themselves at much earlier stages, their precise character depending upon the nature of the individual. Usually the parts of the being that are most developed and ready begin to progress rapidly and the others follow slowly. Thus some begin to feel an increase of warmth in the heart, an awakening of Love which can grow into a spontaneous outflow of the feeling of oneness with All. In others the progress may be felt in the enlargement of the mind or an effortless detachment and the settling of a Peace in its texture. In still others, there may be a marked increase in the force of vitality in the being. Whatever the type of the change, one does feel in the sadhana here the effect of the working of the Yoga-Shakti to which one surrenders oneself at the very outset.

It is not quite clear what is meant by saying that mysticism is very rampant here. Does it mean mystification ? If so, I can say, with perfect regard to truth, that there is none. The entire teaching is set out openly in the pages of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The thousands of Letters of Sri Aurobindo and the Talks of the Mother cover almost every conceivable situation in sadhana and give the needed guidance. Things are clear, open and readily available to all who seek for it. But if by mysticism it is meant that developments and results in this sadhana are not submitted to the scrutiny of the reasoning mind, then surely it is so. And it could not be otherwise. For how can the logical reason be expected to examine and pronounce on the experiences of a realm of consciousness which is clearly beyond the range of Reason ? Even in our normal human life there are a number of movements from the heart which claim our allegiance without reference to Reason. The Reality of Existence exceeds the puny span of reason in every direction : above, below and around. It can be apprehended and experienced in its fullness by means of faculties other than Reason. And when one receives the impact of truths from these deeper and higher ranges of the Reality and they are corroborated in the realisations of others no further proof of their verity is required. That way all Yoga that is based on and works upon consciousness is mystic. Even a large element of the highest poetry and art of the world is of this character. There comes a perception of something in the Reality and that perception chooses its own expression without inhibiting itself to suit the frame of the human intelligence.

*There seemed to be no grade or course of a natural sadhana for the most ordinary layman or a common man desiring to follow this path. A special preliminary preparation seems to be necessary for a sadhak to do the sadhana of this path. Everything has to be surrendered to the Mother; one has to give up his natural field of work or service; one has to go to or live in Pondicherry to do this sadhana; one has to renounce his family.*

On the contrary this is, in a sense, the easiest Yoga. Anyone can practise its sadhana, whoever he is and wherever he may be. No special prior preparation is needed. Whatever be his nature, his temperament or training, there is a direction for him in this Yoga. All that is needed is a basic recognition that there is a Divinity within us and above and the sole meaning of life is to become aware of this Truth and grow into It. The means to become aware, to increase the awareness into a knowledge and to attain identity with the Divine in all the parts of one's being is the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Its speciality lies, among other things, in the comprehensiveness of its scope, means and goal. It is, moreover, unique for the reason that it allows full freedom to each individual to follow his own life of evolution. That is why there is no set schedule of rules, regulations, time-table etc. Only the broad course is laid down and is common to all the sadhaks of the Integral Yoga. Thus, for instance, Faith, Aspiration, Rejection (of all that is contrary to one's aspiration), and Surrender to the Divine, are the fundamental requisites. Meditation, Concentration, and Work—any of these or all of them in combination—are the means. The Grace of the Divine answering and supporting the call and the effort is the process. If one's nature is predominantly rajasic and has a strong inclination for activity he can start with that very stress of nature; for Work can be the means to orientate his movements of life, mind and body towards the Divine. Or one may be essentially mental in poise of nature; for him meditation, concentration, study are the most effective way. The main purpose is to turn the normal extrovert consciousness inward through means most natural to its development and train it through sustained purification, subtilisation and enlargement to change into a deeper or higher and still higher grade of consciousness till it is transfigured into the Divine Consciousness.

Thus it is not necessary to come to Pondicherry and join the Ashram in order to do this Yoga. One can practise it from where he is. It is largely a matter of cultivating and building up an inner life and so long as one has or can create circumstances favourable to the purpose it is not at all necessary to leave everything, renounce the family etc. One can go on with the normal work or profession one is placed in; renunciation is to be inner not outer. It is only in the advanced stages of the Yoga that, for a number of reasons into which we need

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not enter here, it may be advisable to stay in the Ashram, in close proximity to the Presence that has installed the Ideal. When one is accepted by the Mother as a member of the Ashram, it is understood that She undertakes to look after his material and spiritual needs. All reasonable requirements are provided for and he is made free to devote himself exclusively to sadhana. And it stands to reason that on his part he gives to Her whatever material possessions he has. This outer surrender of what *he has* is but a token, a sign of his readiness to effect the still more important inner surrender of what *he is* to the Higher Power.

M. P. PANDIT

# THE GRACE OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

## SOME REMINISCENCES

THERE is a lot of "I" in these reminiscences. But that is an unavoidable accident. For, they are penned not because of the person to whom certain things occurred : they are penned because of these things themselves. And if the person has any significance it is that he serves to set off all the more the incalculable play of Grace from the Karmic Law of Deserved Returns.

### I

It all goes back to the very beginning of my spiritual search. Something had awakened, of which I had never dreamt in my ultra-modern philosophy. And as a result I who had always kept my head intellectually high and looked down with a cool superior smile at the heat and hurry of that strange thing called "God-intoxication"—I looked around hungrily in the mundane twentieth-century city of Bombay for those flitting figures out of the past, clad in ochre robes—the sadhus and sannyasis. Several of them I caught in various corners of the metropolis and questioned about the Unknown that had come like a wind out of nowhere into my life and blown away all my worldly wits. I thus learned a few methods of meditation but the central self in me remained unsatisfied.

Then—of all persons—a Theosophist broke the name of Sri Aurobindo to me. That I should bump into a Theosophist who should speak of what he termed Sri Aurobindo's Cosmic Consciousness and not preach to me of the "White Lodge" and the "Great Masters" and the Isis-unveiling Madame Blavatsky—this was a touch of Sri Aurobindo's Grace already. What made it the more Grace-ful was that the Theosophist told me : "Nobody except Sri Aurobindo will satisfy the complex problem that you are, particularly the side of you which on the one hand is poetic and on the other philosophic."

A little later I came across a booklet in which there was a picture of Sri Aurobindo. I do not remember what the booklet was entitled or who its author was. Two memories have stayed with me : Sri Aurobindo was credited with the power of being in several places at once and he was described as a great linguist, having Greek and Latin at his tongue's tip and knowing French like

a Frenchman—apart from being, of course, a master of English. I don't know which of the two *siddhis*—multi-presence and polyglottism—appealed to me more. Perhaps the latter struck me as the more unusual in a Yogi. But neither drew me into any Virgilian stretching of hands for love to the other shore....I must have been especially dense : many have become Aurobindonians at a slighter pull.

I continued my quest. But there was also the ordinary life and its material needs. One day I noticed that my shoes looked rather shabby. So I drove myself to visit the market for a new pair. I never thought the Gods could have anything to do with such a locality, though I had read of Bacon's *idola fori*, "idols of the market-place". I bought the shoes I had wanted and the shopman wrapped the box up in a newspaper sheet. When, at home, I unwrapped it, the part of the sheet that fell over right in front of me bore the headline in bold type : "The Ashram of Sri Aurobindo Ghose." It was like a sun-burst. A visitor had written a long article. I devoured it and when I got to the end and understood how the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga stood for a new life not rejecting but transforming the main activities of man (including perhaps even the market-place), I rose up with the conviction that I had found what I had been seeking. Soon after, I wrote to the Ashram asking for permission to come. I got the permission and some months later—in the December of 1927—I reached Pondicherry. The shoes I had gone to buy were meant by Sri Aurobindo to be those of a Pilgrim !

## 2

Grace in the next ten and a half years during which I was an Ashramite is a story apart. I shall not deal with its abundance now. I pick up the thread from when I went back to Bombay for a long stay, keeping in contact inwardly, as well as by correspondence, with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother but outwardly unable to return and resume my life in the Ashram. Of course I used to make short trips. And one of them was for the *darshan* of November 24, 1950.

It was reported that Sri Aurobindo was not keeping well. I knew that he had complete control of the physical being. So whatever illness might be his would be something which he had consented to for some inscrutable purpose—had consented to and yet would fight against in order to work out some paradoxical victory. But there was a little tremble in my nerves. Everything, however, seemed to go right when as usual we saw the calm magnificence that was he—grand and gracious at the same time, sitting beside the radiant Mother.

From the other end of the long room across which we were going up to both of them I saw the Mother glance ahead and then lean a little to one side

and say something to Sri Aurobindo. His face broke into a smile and he kept looking and smiling. My wife who was just behind me said afterwards that he was smiling until I disappeared into the next room through which we had to pass out again. Such a thing he had never done with me before.

On the night of December 3 I caught the train for Madras on way to Bombay. The Mother was to meet us before we left, but owing to a slight turn for the worse in Sri Aurobindo's condition the meeting was said to be cancelled. Then suddenly news was brought that she would see me. I rushed to the Ashram courtyard and at the bottom of the central staircase she came and sat in a chair while I sat at her feet. Cool and radiant she was as ever and we talked of several things connected with my work.

A day or so before fixing my departure I had a vague feeling that I should stay on. But I gave no importance to it. I reached Bombay in the afternoon of December 5 and before I could leave the station a telegram was brought to me that Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn from his body early the same morning.

In the midst of this news that shook me to my foundations and still shakes me somewhat after all these years of understanding why Sri Aurobindo took so drastic a step, I remembered how he had shed that wonderful sustained smile. The thought of it is always a quenchless light in the deepest darkness that may try to cover me.

But the whole afternoon and evening of December 5 in Bombay were a cry to get back to Pondicherry and see once more the countenance which had granted that sweet parting grace. I requested the sister of a friend of mine, whose efficiency I admired, to manage somehow a seat for me on the night-plane. She herself and another Aurobindonian who had returned with me from Pondicherry wanted also to come. So I said, "We must have three seats." The air-office declared that no seats were available. There was the additional problem of securing accommodation at Nagpur where our plane would touch down and people not only from Bombay but from Delhi and elsewhere would catch another plane to reach Madras. It might become possible to go up to Nagpur; but what then? My friend's sister would accept no defeat. She pleaded with the officials to keep inquiring in all directions. After anxious hours we heard that just three seats could be found right up to Madras owing to sudden cancellations in several places.

We arrived at Madras early next morning and motored down to Pondicherry. By eleven we were in Sri Aurobindo's own room, standing beside the glorious body with the face on which there was not merely the far look of peace that one often finds when the soul has gone out: here was the look of a victorious tranquillity, a power that with no effort, with no loss of peace, was radiating itself and breaking through all obstacles in the earth's consciousness.

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Never in all our years in the Ashram had there been such an overwhelming experience of what Sri Aurobindo himself had called in a line of poetry—

Force one with unimaginable rest.

With a thundering intensity, as it were, from above our heads the presence and power of Sri Aurobindo plunged down to the depths of the heart. Sri Aurobindo had never done anything so stupendously creative as his own passing from the body !

Later I learned from the Mother that the moment he had left his body what he had termed the Mind of Light, the physical mind receiving the supramental Light, had been realised in her. The strange golden light that many saw upon his body that lay without a touch of discolouration or decay for five days was a sign of the triumph that he had wrested for the earth by sacrificing his own physical frame.

Deep within, each of us felt the glory that looked outwardly a tragedy. But the little human heart in us, the outer emotional self, could not always share in the sense of this glory. And I who had depended so much on Sri Aurobindo in all my writing-work—when he woke to inspiration the labouring poet, when he stirred to literary insight the fumbling critic, when he shaped out of absolute nothing the political commentator—I who almost every day despatched to him some piece of writing for consideration felt a void at the thought that he would not be in that room of his, listening so patiently to my poetry or prose and sending me by letter or telegram his precious guidance. A fellow-sadhaka spoke to the Mother about my plight. On December 12 the inmates of the Ashram met her again and each received from her hands a photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken after his passing. It was dusk, as far as I recollect. She must have seen a certain helplessness on my face. Smiling as she alone can do, she looked me in the eyes and said, “Nothing has changed. Call for inspiration and help as you have always done. You will get everything from Sri Aurobindo as before.”

This was simultaneously the Grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the crowning touch to all that they had done in those three weeks from November 24 onwards for a poor aspirant whose dependence on them was abject.

### 3

I went back to Bombay with the prayer within me that soon, very soon, the Mother might help me and my wife to be near her. At last the second Pilgrimage became a possibility. As if from something above the head, some uplifted luminous watching Will, as it were, the decision seemed to come in

February 1953. When it was conveyed to the Mother, she confirmed its authenticity. But to make the decision practicable in terms of rupees, annas and pies was not easy. During one of my short visits, I laid before her all the difficulties. At that time I was somewhat hard-up and I said, "Mother, I must have Rs. 500 to settle a few matters and pay for a thorough migration with my wife and our dog." The Mother replied, "You must have Rs. 500."

I went back and fixed the time of the second Pilgrimage a few months ahead. Weeks rolled by, but there appeared no prospect of those Rs. 500 materialising in a lump sum. In the December of the previous year an American journalist, Harvey Breit, had come to Bombay with a scheme of the Ford Foundation for a special India-supplement to the *Atlantic Monthly*. I met him and he commissioned an article on Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram. I wrote my piece, two thousand words or so. It was approved. I asked hesitatingly whether there would be any payment. "Of course," was the answer, "we'll write to you from the States." But even after months there was no sign of payment. Now the September of the next year was approaching, the month in which I had fixed my return to Pondicherry. Within a fortnight of D-Day (Divine Day, of course) I got a letter from America. It said that a cheque was enclosed on the Ford Foundation's account in an Indian Bank. I unfolded the cheque. There, unbelievably, was an order for Rs. 500. Not a pie more, not a pie less.

But the story of the Grace does not end here. A week later I received another letter. It was apologetic, saying that owing to certain unavoidable circumstances the supplement had to be cut down considerably and that though my article was much appreciated it could not be used. This did not mean the withdrawal of the payment. The payment would be made and I was even told that the compilers claimed no right on my article: it could be sold by me anywhere else.

So my article went all the way from India to the United States and came back to me with a gift of the exact amount which I had mentioned to the Mother and which she had confirmed. And, to take me to the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo, it had to be appropriately an article on Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram!

4

In connection with my second coming home there is the extraordinary incident of the house in which I was to be put. Although I got those Rs. 500, I could not carry out the migration as planned. A few months earlier I had heard from the Ashram Secretary that a certain flat had been selected for me with the approval of the Mother. But the negotiations fell through. A man



in Pondicherry stepped in and took away the flat. The Secretary wrote to me that the house-problem remained unsolved and was difficult to solve. He suggested that I should myself make a trip and help in the solution.

I arranged to come for the *darshan* of November 24 and stay on till December 9. I rang up a Travel Agency and made sure about my ticket. A day before leaving Bombay I went by bus to the Agency office to collect it. The bus stops a little way off from the office. I got down and was about to walk towards the office when somebody hailed me from the bus stand. It was a young man I had been introduced to in Pondicherry, a merchant. After the "Hullo"s, I was asked where I had been hurrying. Mentioning the office, I said, "I am preparing to go away to Pondi. I shall settle there."

"Where will you be putting up?"

"God knows! Nothing fixed. I'll have to hunt for a flat."

"But why? I have a flat there. And as my business is not at all looking up I am clearing out. Why don't you take the place over?"

"Well, it must suit me. Will you give me the address and write to the landlord about me?"

He scribbled the address down—"13 Rue Ananda Rangapoullé"—and I went with it to Pondicherry. When I showed it to the Ashram people they were surprised. It was the very flat that the Mother had approved of but had been snatched away at the last minute. Aided by a *sadhaka* who knew the landlord well, I got the place transferred with ease, and moved into it in February 1954.

The Mother's Grace is a tactician of unthinkable accuracy. It seemed to withdraw, as it were, during the first negotiations. But that was evidently a matter of "*reculer pour mieux sauter*"—"draw back for a better leap forward". And when it leaped, it was with an infallible aim. The number of factors combining to bring me my destined flat on a platter is quite big. The man who had butted in must be known to me: his business had to force him to leave Pondicherry: he had to be present at a particular place at a precise minute: he had to catch sight of me: he had to bring up the subject of my settling in Pondicherry. The Mother's Grace is just like the Mother herself—unexpected in turn and attentive to the smallest detail.

## 5

On February 29, 1956, I left for Bombay on account of my grandfather, 98 years old, who had been threatening to expire for quite a long time. The Mother had told me that I should be back before the 29th of March. It was the year in which great things were expected. I left by the morning train, reached Madras in the evening and caught the night mail to Bombay.

I went to sleep in the compartment and had a dream. I saw a wide open place, with the Mother seated at one end and people going to her to make *pranam*. I was at the very boundary of the place. It seemed I might miss the chance of the *pranam*. So I tried to hurry. But in the hurry I could not get my feet out of my slippers and in the excitement I woke up. When I opened my eyes I saw, against the opposite berth and the facing wall of the compartment, the Mother standing. Her body was in darkness, her face was in moonlight and both were transparent so that through them I could see the woodwork and part of the upholstery of the berth. I kept gazing for some time. Not believing my eyes, I shut them and opened them again. It made no difference to the vision. There still stood the transparent form of the Mother, the face softly shining. After looking for a few minutes I once more shut my eyes. When I reopened them the form was gone.

On reaching Bombay I wrote to the Mother about this mysterious apparition. I got no reply, but after a time I received letters from my wife in which it was said that the Mother wished me to return soon. From a friend I got the hint that something wonderful had happened. I came back as soon as I could. What had happened was the long-awaited Manifestation of the Supermind as a universal Force in the subtle-physical atmosphere. And it had happened on the 29th of February, late in the evening, during the collective meditation with the Mother, in the spacious playground of the Ashram.

Word got round that the Mother had remarked : "Only five people knew what took place—two in the Ashram and three outside." To get some clarification I took the report to the Mother. She said that she had not referred to people's knowing what had taken place : she had meant that something extraordinary had been experienced by five people as a result of the Manifestation : they may not at all have been aware of the true nature of the event. And she added : "Among those outside, I counted you. You wrote to me of your experience in the train on the night of the 29th February. Well, I had come to inform you. Don't you remember that many years ago, when you went to Bombay and the Supramental Manifestation was expected here, I promised you that I would let you know at once ? I came to you now in fulfilment of my promise."

I was absolutely overwhelmed. I could only stammer out, "Mother, you came to inform me, a person like me ? Oh, I feel so grateful, so grateful..."

6

Perhaps after this, everything would read like an anti-climax. But the Mother's Grace has a variety and a versatility that cannot but be marvellous.

I have already spoken of my grandfather who had been long a-dying and making fools out of the best doctors who, night after night, kept predicting the worst within hours, only to find that the next morning he would be heartily munching his breakfast. In the middle of April, 1957, he seemed to get over his troubles very markedly. He was enjoying the best health he had known for months. But just at that time the Mother suddenly called me to say, "You must go to Bombay soon. I have a strong impression that your grandfather will pass away shortly."

It was rather important that I should be in Bombay when he would die: the family situation and the financial problems demanded my presence there to take charge of everything. So I took the Mother's words as again a visitation of her Grace. But it proved difficult to book a berth from Madras. None was available till May 8. I told the Mother that I would be able to leave only on May 7 from Pondicherry. "Will this be all right?" She smiled and said, "Yes." Then she added, "I have been packing you with power all these days."

The train was delayed a little and I reached Bombay towards 4 p.m. on May 9. Everybody was surprised at my sudden appearance. Grandfather had suddenly taken a bad turn. The doctor was pessimistic, but, wise with past experience, did not dare to make any prediction. In the course of the next morning, grandfather breathed his last. And, strange to say, I who had come from a thousand miles away happened to be the only member of the family present to see him die. Nobody else, in spite of living in the same house, could appear in time for it.

In the management of grandfather's affairs I was amazed how the several faction in the family disappeared and all worked as one. Whether I was directly thinking of the Mother or no, something seemed to move irresistibly as if the power which she had "packed" into me unfolded itself automatically and brought success everywhere. The most impossible-looking things became child's play.

Announcing grandfather's demise to the Mother I wrote that now I as the eldest male survivor was the grand old man of the family. She replied, to my astonishment, that although I had been joking, it was quite true, for at the moment my grandfather had departed all in him that had been turned towards the right and the just had entered into me! Of course the right and the just, acting as if in tune with grandfather's own will, were much needed by me in managing his estate to everyone's satisfaction. And the Mother's remark showed clearly that she had been occultly watchful over all the results of the working of her Grace.

K. D. SETHNA

## GOD HAS CARED

THE brown dog, seen for so many months  
Sleeping with the naked street-boys on the path,  
Has been run over—still now in the gutter  
Children are tormenting a crow that cannot fly.  
'Ma, Ma'—Mother—the beggars cry.

Pass by, traveller, pass along there,  
There's not enough for everyone,  
So keep your own fat share.

A child is lying outside on a dirty cloth,  
Its legs and arms like yellow chicken-bones.  
Old crab-fingered women sit picking each other's hair.  
And the man on another's shoulders shouts 'No legs'  
Waving the stubs.

But all these hearts are bitter  
All these minds closed up.  
One cannot help the truly poor  
But only wish them luck.

Does God care ? Or is life too short to be seen ?  
Alone in his room, with no money to help another,  
One man pledges his life to change the nature of things.  
His fulcrum in other worlds, he works to perfect mankind,  
His will given to the Divine.

The growing-point of evolution  
Breaks the habits of the past.  
Poverty, sickness and the mass inertia  
Slowly give way at last.

MOTHER INDIA

Do men care ? Little known the leader passes,  
Near his 80th year. Oh his body is radiant.  
Do men see the work accomplished ? None can take up his gift,  
No heaven is yet on earth, superman is still unborn.  
But God has cared. The true revolution has begun.

For something new  
From behind the sun  
Has broken the repetition  
Of suffering, sleeping man.

Can you not see the air is light with angels ?  
Have you not heard the music of the earth reply ?

DICK BATSTONE

## NISHIKANTA POET IN CRISIS

*(Continued from the October issue)*

Now, something really revolutionary took place in my Bengali poetic composition. So far it was a real sadhana with me, as dry as the licking of a bare bone though here and there a few spots of taste, as it were, could be found. As a reward of my sadhana or bothered by my constant whining, Guru turned on a hidden tap. Since then, it was not I who used to write; the images, language, thought were foreign to my mind and imagination. Floored by my own symbols, I had at every step to ask Guru for enlightenment or suggestion. He labelled these queer productions as mystic surrealism.

Nishikanta, however, was strangely moved by them. He is always open to novelty. Though he could not understand much of this new stuff, his poetic insight felt at once that here was a field of treasure lying to be explored and it would pay enormous dividends to his creations as well. So like a gold-hunter (or like a drug-addict) he used to come every evening to my "den" and bawl out, "Now, what have you written today? Let me have a look." Then he would depart, with slow musing steps, muttering something, perhaps thinking how to utilise the precious gold that he had put into his pocket. I must say that his assimilative power is also exceptional.

Thus this surrealist current carried us on, but we took care not to neglect the realism either. After the poetic afflatus, we spent many a night inflating our stomachs with delicious preparations. Nishikanta himself was the cook. The Muse has graced him in poetry, Draupadi in the culinary art and Vrikodara in doing full justice to its results. But the wonder was that after such unyogic exaltations he could sit down to compose first-class poems, as if a full stomach were a gate to inspiration. That was why I used to say that both genius and genii were his attendants: the latter would often bring into action a veritable asura.

Now the asura began to take his turn: some ominous shadows could be scanned on the blue sky. On the one hand my newly found source dried up as suddenly as it had appeared, while, on the other hand, Nishikanta's inspiration too was reduced to a thin stream. He was now tormented with a spiritual conscience: "Poetry, painting I have had enough! Where is God? Have I burnt all my works to be caught again in Art's devilish snare?" This was the burden of his pathetic song.

The duel went on and all kinds of inner conflict scoured his outer consciousness. I believe that the Yogic Force after the first years of creative ananda had touched the subconscious, hence the reaction. This was a crucial period. The same thing happened in Harin's case. Guru's remark that "one cannot all the time remain up, one has to come down some time or other" could be applied to both, even to all.

But these are Yogic grounds, I had better not try to tread on them. Just at this moment of discontented heart-searching, the Mother fell ill and Sri Aurobindo stopped seeing our poems. Nishikanta in consequence stopped writing. What's the use if Sri Aurobindo did not see them? Not a quite ridiculous reason. Guru replied, "The poet writes out of his own inspiration. But Nishikanta went off the track and complained that the pressure was getting too much, he must seek relief by going out for a while. Guru tried to dissuade him, warning him that wherever he went his nature would accompany him, even to the cave. He had better try to conquer his vital restlessness by remaining where he was. Of no avail ! His *abhimān* carried him away. Such is our nature ! We want the Divine in two or three years. That is why Guru dubbed us amateur yogis. On my fiftieth birthday the Mother remarked with a smile, "Still a child !"

Guru's prophecy came true : the relief was not found; there was neither peace nor less war. Besides, whenever he tried to meditate on Shiva, Kali or Krishna, the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's presence used to surround him instead. Realising that the Ashram was his only haven of peace, he came back with a determination that no more art but God alone must be his quest. Sri Aurobindo also communicated to him that since the Yoga had descended into the subconscious, he could not send any inspiration. The Mother advised him to take up some physical work. He decided upon cooking in the Dining Room. Sri Aurobindo remarked, "His cooking is excellent." Everyone gave high praise to his preparations and consumed more quantity of food. But unfortunately his evil genius made him leave the work after a year. The inspiration took again a wrong turn and he tried to forget himself by preparing cheese, cake, biscuit, rasagolla etc, and by having long peregrinations with friends and by other diversions.

The vital being strong, it stood well all lawless onslaughts against nature. One day he bethought himself to prepare some vinegar. Collecting a lot of raw mangoes, he boiled them and drank two bottlefuls of that sharp liquid to test its concentration ! The inevitable result was stomach ulcer ! This first asuric attack on the body was followed soon by diabetes due to overeating. High blood pressure was in the offing. But his incredible life-energy erected a solid Maginot line against these concerted enemy thrusts. As I was then in Sri

Aurobindo's personal service my contact with him was reduced to urgent calls. Guru used always to enquire about him, hear his occasional poems, listen to his childish pranks with a smile and exclaim, "What a fellow !" Under such extreme indulgences the body at last cracked, the mind too thought often of running away. When the pressure reached its top pitch, Guru sent this message : "Let him stick anyhow." "Well, Kavi," I told him overjoyed, "Guru has given you unchartered freedom. No need of bothering about Yoga. Just stick anyhow." One day without any preamble Guru said, "I was seeing how everybody was getting on. Nishikanta also came to my thought." This was inconceivable. I had the impression that in his silent hours he was absorbed in exploring his Supermind: where could be the time for poor inframentals like us?

This is the long winding thread that bound us together. Now let us revert to our present story.

After Sri Aurobindo's passing, this thread got still more attenuated. Nishikanta was in the Ashram doctor's charge. I was called only in an emergency to carry some personal prayer to the Mother. A mortal disease now preyed on his lung, an abscess ! Ulcer, diabetes, high blood pressure and now the last straw, abscess. My heart dried up with fear. The very source of his unbounded energy was in peril. But even in this debilitated condition he had been seen coming with a stick to the Balcony darshan, going out for an evening walk and at night visiting the Playground for the Mother's blessings. "Then it could not be a lung abscess !" the sceptic voice might exclaim. There was no room for doubt, for surgeons with F.R.C.S. (Eng.) had under the X-ray made sure of the diagnosis.

Even from such a fell disease he was slowly recovering with the Mother's force and the doctor's help when the sudden call, of which I have spoken, startled me. "What's the matter again ? Won't the demons leave him in peace ? What can I do?" were my pointless reflections. I went all the same and saw that the poor fellow had taken to bed, the cruel mercy of the illness had reduced his paunch, but reduced too to phantom figures his artistic hands. The voice was feeble, the face cheerless. Slowly he said, "Take a chair and listen well. Since yesterday my legs have lost all sensation, I was almost tumbling down. I have so long managed to carry the body's burden; now the limbs are half-dead, the mind is more so for fear of losing the Mother's darshan. You know how even in wind and rain, against the doctor's orders, I have gone for the Mother's blessings. It is that that has kept me alive, not your medicines. I have very little faith in them. If the blessings are stopped, what's the use of life ? I have sent for you to tell the Mother that I may not be deprived of her darshan."

"What nonsense ? Don't get so easily upset!"



“No, I am not upset, neither am I sorry to die. How often have I wanted to discard this rotten frame and come back as a frolicking child in the Green Group ! But to live like a dummy without the Mother’s touch—to that I will never agree.”

“Who is asking you to agree ? You have yourself proved that the Mother’s Force can cure a serious abscess. This is only a temporary numbness due to diabetes. If you have patiently suffered so long, why despair when we are so near our goal ? You know 24th April is not far off.”

“Well, tell the Mother all the same.”

“Certainly !” Giving a dose of hope I came away, but with an unquiet mind. On consulting the doctor, I got the reply, “Don’t fear. It will pass away in two or three days.”

“But he says insulin has no effect. With the increase of the dose, the disease is also on the increase.”

“That’s the trouble with these people. They draw false conclusions. Tell me, when the percentage of sugar is so high, can it be brought down all at once ?”

I conveyed to the Mother Nishikanta’s prayer. Her answer took my breath away. She said, “Nishikanta has informed me that insulin is doing him great harm. Since in spite of it the disease is increasing he does not want any more of this painful treatment.” The doctor was also duly apprised of this. Both of us began to look at each other, more helpless than the patient. Anger and despair made me forget that we were dealing with a long suffering patient. I cried out that it was sheer suicide. Next day, faced with my annoyance, he said in a softer tone, “What to do ? I can’t bear any more. You know throughout this year the blessed injections have ant-bitten all over my body as if it had been sprinkled with sugar.” I could not check my smile at this dry humour. Nishikanta continued, “Not an inch of healthy skin is left anywhere. Now fever, pain in all the joints, hourly urination. Is there any relief ? Guru’s encouragement and yours have made me drive this rusty machine so long. Now it is past all endurance. Let me go, ask the Mother that I may come back to the Green Group.”

Abysmally dark note ! He was not a man to be easily persuaded to reason, once a wrong twist had taken place. He denied the efficacy of drugs, lost faith in them. The Grace of the Mother alone could come to the rescue. The condition drifted slowly towards a coma and, like an impotent witness, I was watching the pathetic scene.

My daily visits continued. There was no question of giving him hope or encouragement, for the patient had taken this fatal step quite conscious of his fate. When formerly he used to say as a joke, “My days are over. I am going,”

I could not resist replying, "Well, Kavi, remember what Sarat Chatterji used to say about Tagore : 'Tagore will first see us all at the burning ghat before he himself prepares for it.'" But things were different now. For the last few years whenever some physical crisis had pushed him into a dark world, I used to remind him that he must stick till April, 1956, after which our Ashram calender would mark a new era in our lives and he would be free from the evil clutch of his Saturn. I was so firm in this faith in the light of what the Mother had told me in 1954, namely, that 1955 would be a dark year for all of us, there would be attacks from within and without, even the body would be a target. These attacks were to continue till April 1956, when "something decisive would happen." During that crucial period all of us must stand with an iron will and faith by the side of the Divine.

This fiery conviction I had tried to instil into Nishikanta and lured him on like a child, with "8 months, 6, 4 months more." Now when the promised land of light was in view, should the boat capsize ? Only one month more left. At the end of February, the Mother's prophecy had been fulfilled : the supramental manifestation had begun, and the very next month, after returning with the Mother's blessings on his birthday, why this calamity ? My faith too got shaken. Had I so long fed him on an illusion ? Better then to be prepared for the worst. Easy to say. To see a genius blasted in early manhood admits of no consolation, in spite of Tagore's immortal verses—

This do I know :  
The flower that before blossoming  
Has fallen to the earth  
Is never lost—

The post-Tagore period holds no genius equal to Nishikanta's. I recalled Sri Aurobindo's utterance. As he was lying in bed, our discussion turned on genius. We asked, "What about Nishikanta ?" Opening out his two arms on both sides he exclaimed, "Ah, Nishikanta !" That eloquent gesture, so rare with him, had such a force of finality that it is still fresh in my memory. Such was the poet Nishikanta whom Guru had protected with his Grace and Power, whose sleeping genius he had awakened and developed and in whom perhaps he saw the future singer of divine ecstasy. How could he prematurely pass away ? More than the personal wrench, the loss to Bengali literature would be too great to endure.

At night as usual when I went to sleep upstairs, Champaklal, another of Sri Aurobindo's personal attendants, enquired about Nishikanta's health. His interest in him had grown out of Sri Aurobindo's own special concern

for him and, as we talked in the darkness, my thoughts and feelings must have reached Sri Aurobindo's listening presence behind the veil. As if inspired, Champaklal said, "Well, why not call another doctor?"

"What's the use?" I replied drily. "He doesn't want any treatment and there is no other cure for this illness."

"Still, the other doctor may make him more sensible. Mr. X. for instance carries a silent force with him and has a name. Who knows he may succeed where the others don't. Give him a trial," he said with emphasis.

"I have thought about it, but the Mother also had pronounced her verdict. I have first to bring round Nishikanta."

"Try!" he said with force. But I had no force in me.

"When man feels utterly helpless, then alone he turns towards God": that is the common saying. I turned to Guru and prayed, but my doubting mind lacked sole reliance on his Grace. I could not see in what way the help could come. Alas, for human vision and wisdom!

Next morning I was too busy to visit Nishikanta. As I was taking an afternoon nap, a boy arrived with the news that the condition was bad. "Quite expected. Nothing to be done. Go along, I am coming." Dismissing him abruptly I went up to have a much needed rest. The night's sleep had been disturbed. Through the small window I gazed and, in my mind, the bright pageant of the past moved along the blue sky in silent array till it changed into the melancholy present. A thin film of mist covered my eyes and made me look within. Suddenly a voice, "Doctor!" I looked around with a start. Two people used to address me like that: one was Champaklal and he was talking with somebody in the next room. Could it be Nishikanta's voice? "Good Lord, is he then..." Almost throttling that subconscious fear, I ran. There was no imminent danger, but one could feel its creeping chill approach.

"Doctor, can you do something?" came his somnolent voice, first sign of uraemia.

"What is it, Kavi?"

"Can you take me to the Mother?"

"In this condition? how, where?"

"To the Playground, on a stretcher. I want once to bow down at the Mother's feet."

A terrible fix! Take him in this condition among a crowd? Or not take him and leave his last wish unfulfilled? What an excruciating situation to fall into! Without a word I slipped away, hoping to have a talk with the Mother. Fortunately I caught her just in time, as if waiting for me, for on other days she used to be already in the bathroom. I conveyed Nishikanta's prayer. Her reply simply petrified me into a statue of hope and despair, doubt and fear, joy

and surprise. Gravely she began, "Listen, one year ago he wrote to me a letter in which he prayed that I must keep him alive till April 24th, that is three days more from now. And I gave him my word. You know how the whole of last year has been for him a series of upheavals and storms. Like a sentinel star, I kept my watch over him and never relaxed a moment in my protecting power. The last attack was the abscess. That too was healing up; but when on his last birthday he came for my blessings, I saw that something had gone wrong, there was a fissure in his faith and this dangerous attack has come upon that psychological trouble. You will tell him I want to see him on the 24th. Gathering all his strength, he must come on that solemn occasion."

"But I doubt if he will last out these few days even," I said with hesitation. The Mother kept quiet for a while, then : "Well, can't you call Dr. X ?"

Ah, I saw the hand of God extended with a smile. I answered, "Yes, Mother, I can. Only yesterday I was having a talk with him. He says that since you want that all treatment should be stopped, he can serve no useful purpose."

The Mother hastened to protest, "I didn't want. Nishikanta himself complained that medicines were only aggravating his suffering, he does not want them any more. So I had to take that step."

"But if we want to keep him alive till the 24th, injections can alone do it. Dr. X also concurs with this view."

"Very well, do it then. You will tell this to the doctor on my behalf and tell Nishikanta that he must submit to the doctor's treatment. Tell him further that I want to see him on the 24th."

With a happy sign I ran to catch hold of the doctor. He started his gigantic (*similia similibus* for a giant) treatment : insulin, glucose, vitamin etc. In an interval I asked, "How do you feel, doctor ? Will he survive ?"

"You can see for yourself. But since the Mother has uttered those words, her will must be done."

I felt bucked up. "After that ?"

"Let this be done first. She will see to the next step. It is not our concern."

The doctor's tone worked like a tonic. At night Champaklal greeted me with a smile. "You see, then, Guru has heard your prayer." With an abashed grin I replied : "I have to admit that even now Guru listens." I narrated to him the whole story. He remarked, "God's ways are mysterious and beyond our petty human measure."

"Exactly. That is what has surprised me most. Just look back at the sequence of events—that mysterious call at noon, the Mother's unusual delay in going for bath, her own proposal to call the doctor. If I had been late

by one minute, then I would have had to lose one crucial hour. One cannot avoid the conclusion that some conscious Power is at the helm of our affairs. An eye-opener indeed to our material intellect."

Now our concerted effort was aimed at keeping the patient alive till the 24th. The doctor had put his heart and soul into the bargain, the patient's C Group friends of the Playground had rallied round him, nursing him by turns. He was lucky in his friends : he had humoured them all by writing poems of laughters and tears on their birthdays and had also fed them more substantially. So they had come forward on their poet's danger. My role was purely moral. The more he used to say, "Doctor, on the last lap you will fail to carry me through. I shall have to go without the Mother's darshan," the more I felt choked, but sustained him with hope. Life was hanging by a slender thread. The Mother was kept informed twice a day. The doctor did not believe in wasting words, his whole being was engaged in meeting the challenge. The Ashram felt in its heart the threatened stroke of fate just before the darshan. In spite of strong doses of insulin, there was no perceptible response, the drowsy condition persisted broken now and then by a few staccato phrases and at times a groaning caused by an unbearable burning within. How heavy-footed trudged on the days ! All with an unflinching determination lifted high their hopes and prayed for the dawn of the 24th. That was our Mantra.

Meanwhile Champaklal paid a visit to the patient. Looking with an intent gaze and holding the patient's hands firm, he said "You will be all right." He told me afterwards of his inner conviction that he would survive.

At last the day of destiny dawned ! Kavi was informed about it. Our hearts too trembled at the touch of the morning light. Volunteers, stretchers and other preparations were afoot, the patient was given a sponge-bath. The Mother sent word that immediately after the darshan she would come down to see the patient below in the Meditation Hall. There should be nobody near about.

We started with the patient at about 10.30 a.m. and laid him at the foot of the stairs in the peaceful atmosphere of the Meditation Hall. A crowd of spectators was waiting at a distance for the Mother's descent. She came down with slow steps followed by Pranab, Champaklal and a few others. The patient was awakened from the stupor, and the stretcher raised knee-high so that the Mother could bless him standing. Nishikanta stretched out his two feeble hands ; the Mother at once clutched and drew them into her own and silently smiled into his wide open supplicating eyes. As if she would conquer the deadly foe by the almighty panacea, the smile. Then with her delicate fingers she smoothed his anguished brow, wiping away, as it were, all the dark karmic

scripts from it. Suddenly Nishikanta, pointing to his chest, whispered haltingly, "Mother, your foot here !" The stretcher was put down. The Mother, holding Pranab's arm for support, quietly placed her right foot over the patient's heart. Nishikanta pressed it with his eager hands. Sri Aurobindo's mantric verse came into my mind :

Heal with her feet the aching throb of life.

No sound, no words ; a spell of stillness, wonder and delight all around while a battle was going on between life and doom, between bliss and suffering. The unforgettable divine Lila was at last over.

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In the evening when I went to see Nishikanta, there was no longer that feverish restlessness, the face and the body breathed serenity. As he opened his eyes, I asked, "Hullo, Kavi, how do you feel ?" In a low voice he replied, "That hell-fire within has subsided. Now I can go in peace."

"What ? Did the Mother come down to make your going peaceful or unpeaceful ? None of those unholy words. Rather tell us how you felt when the Mother placed her foot...there."

"Ah, the relief ! the body seemed to have become ice-cool. Every cell was soothed with peace and peace."

"Bravo ! Sri Aurobindo has said that if this kind of peace can be brought down, there is no disease that cannot be cured. Three cheers for Guru !" The poet's face broke into a smile, after many days.

March, 1959. Another birthday. Kavi said, "No more death-days, henceforth only birthdays !"

*(Concluded)*

NIRODBARAN

## WORLD-LITERATURE

*(Continued from the October issue)*

(2)

Two classes, two trends are to be discerned in the literature of every country. As human life has two aspects—the natural and the spiritual—even so every literature has a popular and a classical style. The natural or the physical life is the foundation, and it supplies all necessary elements. But man's duty and his fulfilment consist in building up the spiritual life on this basis, and to mould the natural elements into the spiritual and to impart a spiritual meaning to them. Likewise the basic popular is to be re-shaped into the classical and raised to a higher and nobler status.

Now, what is meant by popular—"plebeian"—literature? It is the literature of the people, the common man, the literature that has grown up around the ordinary life of the ordinary run. When man is in his early childhood, when he has just dissociated himself from his mere animality and has begun to know and feel his own self, when he has learnt first to lisp, the delight which he then derives from expressing his feelings and perceptions through articulate words marks the origin of the first poet of nature. At this stage we find a spontaneous exuberance of kindly experiences. The poet's vision is utterly physical here. His eyes turn exclusively to the external world confined within his limited ken. The poet portrays through word and rhythm his normal daily experiences acquired in his own private chamber or while roving in the open fields around homely hamlets. His imagination is also circumscribed by such or similar environments. The language is soft, fluid and partly expressive—it is molten and gliding. His themes stem from the happiness and sorrow of the common life, ready at hand; nothing complex is to be found there.

Literary creation starts with proverbs and fairy tales. Another stage sets in when men do not relish merely the simple narration but want to narrate in a lucid and artistic manner. Not only that, they do not want to indulge in any ordinary subject but want to speak of something momentous and significant. And here is the foundation of true literature. But still there is the admixture of popular, plebeian manners, modes of rustic consciousness. The touch of spirituality, *i.e.* Soulfulness, the savour of a bliss found elsewhere in

seclusion and isolation and the wide universal experiences of a true seer have not yet penetrated there. The great poet exceeds not only his surroundings—his own people and land; he is able to acquaint us with other climes and times, and he succeeds even in expressing the thoughts of humanity at large; but in the parochial poet who may speak of such things there is still a reflection of narrowness, similar to tall talk in the mouths of children. Here there is not much selection, no restraint, no constructiveness, no high seriousness—there is instead an abundance, a prolixity, almost a confusion and an irresponsibility, as it were, and as in the ordinary life there is a pull towards the physical, the external and the small. The Ballads of the English and the Romantic Songs of the French fall under this category. Likewise, however deep in spiritual significance may be our *kirtans* or the songs of the religious wanderers of our country, they can, without injustice, be classed with those Ballads and Romances of the West.

But since the advent of Chaucer in English literature, the day we heard him say about his dearest Italian poet Petrarch “Whose rethorike swete”

Enlummynd all Ytaille of Poetrie,

what a new life and novel tune has appeared in English poetry, what a unique resplendence has illumined its firmament ! Chaucer elevated English literature as from a mundane to the spiritual level. He is the father of ‘Great Poetry’. He freed the language from the unrefined touch and flavour of narrow rusticity and entered as it were the realm of a higher, nobler, more luminous and wider perception and brought it down into his poetic creation. In French poetry also this parochial influence pervades all its Romances, the Chansons de Gestes, and even the Chanson de Roland. Real poetry, which is noble and of permanent value, was first introduced by Ronsard.

Even there poetry did not reach its deeper, its superior nature. It has had to rise one step higher : it crossed this third level and entered the fourth where poetry is in its very character vaster and wider and deeper—to be sure, Victor Hugo holds this touch of immensity. It is here that the poetic spirit has achieved a divine energising inspiration that wants to have a direct vision of the Truth and express it in words and rhythms in a noble manner. Victor Hugo may not have achieved, but he has touched the new bourne. Here the poet aims at infusing whatever is easy, simple, common and fluid with a new spirit. Nothing unnecessary, irrelevant, profuse and diffuse has any place in his creation. Ordinary every-day experiences are to be raised to the level of a vivid, luminous expression of something rare. ‘Great Poetry’ blossoms then and there, in this fourth stage. However fine Chaucer’s first outburst,



Enlumynd all Ytaille of Poetrie,

it is now surpassed in poetic valency by Marlowe's

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium ?

The 'bruit de tous les infinis' in Marlowe reminds us of the unique oceanic swell of Milton's verse and the Vedic mantra of infinite liberation ascribed to Varuna. Hence in France Malherbe had to appear on the scene after Ronsard. It was Malherbe who was the father of classical French literature, and it is he who paved the way for that prince of classics, Pierre Corneille.

The natural march of literature towards the classical style shows also the very *raison d'être* of literature. The literary genius of a particular nation does not seem to attain its full strength unless and until it can discard as far as possible all that is environmental, common, ordinary and parochial in outlook. For the ultimate aim of literature is neither to reflect nor to ape the all-too-familiar daily life in its theme and in its way of expression. The object of true literature is to scan the details of a greater life in a far-off, inner and higher world. But to that end literature has to accept and adopt this world too. It has to manifest that world in this world, but as a refuge, a repository and means. True, the classicism with which we are so familiar cannot be regarded as the highest revelation in literature, for the genuine and the counterfeit are not the same. The works of Milton and Pope, of Corneille and Delille, are not classics of the same type. For us Pope and Delille do not appear as true classics, at the best they are perhaps classical. Pope and Delille followed the same technique that had been introduced by Milton and Corneille in the literary art, but they went to an excess. We shall deal with the drawback attending this excessiveness and deformation later on. Nevertheless, do they not point to the real secret character of the literary virtue ?

In our Bengali literature Vidyapati and Chandidasa are the pioneer poets who made an attempt at creating genuine poetry surpassing all plebeian poetry. They had infused the popular literature with a new spirit, and thus formed a basis for real poetic utterance. The joy we derive from the songs of Vidyapati and Chandidasa can be called the real poetic pleasure. For example,

Hearken, O Madhava, Radha is at large. (Vidyapati)

or,

I shall store up my Beloved in my soul.

To none shall I disclose  
The perfect union of two hearts. (Chandidasa)

It is said that Valmiki is the pioneer poet in Sanskrit literature. In our Bengali literature it is Vidyapati, nay, to be more precise and accurate, it is Chandidasa who is the father of poetry. He raised the natural vital experiences to the level of the psychic. He has transformed even colloquial expressions into a deeper rhythm and flow. But even theirs was only the initial stage that required a long time to develop fullness and maturity. In truth, this is the third stage we have already referred to. Throughout the era of the Vaishnava poets coming down to the time of Bharat Chandra the same line of sadhana, of spiritual practice, continued. The Bengali poets who flourished after Chandidasa have hardly made any new contribution, they have not unveiled another layer of the soul of the poetic genius of Bengali literature. What they have done amounts to an external refinement and orderliness. The literature of this age has tried to transcend the ordinary thoughts, *i.e.* the manner of ordinary thinking, and has considerably succeeded too ; still the presence of imperfection, the signs of a lower flight loom large there. We do not find there—in the words of Matthew Arnold—‘a humanity variously and fully developed’ or a multifarious free scope of the universal life such as we have already mentioned.

This very achievement of breaking down the limited movements within a narrow compass and spreading it out into the vast has been won by Madhusudan, Bankim and Rabindranath in Bengali literature during the current period of English influence. The day Bankim produced his artistic beauty, ‘Kapalkundala,’ and Madhusudan penned—

In a battle face to face,  
When Birbahu,<sup>1</sup> the hero sovereign,  
Kissed the dust and departed to the land of Death—

the day Rabindranath could declare—

Not mother, not daughter, not bride art thou, O Beauty incarnate,  
O Urvasi, denizen of Paradise!—

was a momentous day for Bengali literature to proclaim the message of the universal muse and not exclusively its own parochial note. The genius of Bengal secured a place in the wide world overpassing the length and breadth of Bengal. And Bengali poetry reached that fourth stage or the highest status.

<sup>1</sup> The son of Ravana.

## MOTHER INDIA

Nevertheless, it may be asked if there has been the acme of literary creation that exceeds even the best creations of Madhusudan, Bankim and Rabindranath, I mean, the "truly classic literature" (*littérature vraiment classique*) of Sainte Beuve which will literally shine in letters of fire in the hearts of all men in all climes and times ? Is there in Bengali any literature that consists of words of purest revelation ? If so, to what extent ? According to us, there is not perhaps an absolute absence of such a literature. No doubt, it is there, but it is very rare, rather exceptional. Bengali literature in its great achievement has not been able to make that its normal stand: the supreme classic heights are still an aspiration, they are yet to be attained and possessed.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

*(Translated by Chinmoy from the Bengali)*

## METEORS AND FIREFLIES

IN the company of the humble it is easy to be humble. It is when we are with the proud, the vitally domineering, the blindly egotistic, the self-pleased scholar, the habitual and compulsive 'teacher', that to retain our humility and equanimity is indeed something of a legitimate accomplishment. Pride, like other pestilences of the lower nature, is extremely contagious, so that we are prompted to oppose pride with our own pride, which is as useful as quenching a fire with a bucketful of petrol.

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Condescension is the smug homage pride pays to its own prim preposterousness.

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I promised that I would make You alone my duty, my work, my endeavour, that I would go to You with all my little offerings of toil and accomplishment. But how was I to know, O my Beloved, that in the hours of my leisure Thou wouldst come to me ?

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Our opinions are important to us because they are so intimately ours. They are almost as dear to us as we are to ourselves, and to have them opposed or ridiculed by another is to find ourselves wounded and afflicted.

We forget that our opinions, far from being an essential part of us, can be as evanescent as a moonbeam, as changeable as a chameleon.

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They must themselves tread with exceeding care who dig holes for others.

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## MOTHER INDIA

Self-expression is perhaps necessary to our soul-growth and development and can also have a value to others. But we often err in according it too great a place, for after all it is surely not self-expression that is ultimately desired, but God-expression.

The difficulty does not lie so much in being able to write, talk, paint beautifully as in being able to lead a beautiful God-directed life.

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Desire is a dis-ease whose symptoms are anticipation, wanting, hoping, hungering, craving; the unhappy suspense between the admittance of a want disguised as a need, and its fulfilment—or eradication.

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Disputation over spiritual matters is merely the Devil in the pose of God's disciple working to destroy whatever harmony there may be among the children of Light.

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In the lonely hours we are often visited by sudden memories of our childhood, of the golden days when the world was yet new and the most simple things a source of wonder. Of candlelight; colour, and the why of moon and stars; of Christmas-trees, and boxes full of undiscovered things.

Of the wind wantonly weaving its way in the yellow corn, and a wide blue sky calling us out into its open freedom.

Of tall white ships in the harbour, and the smell of 'far-away' things; and the restless sea ever beckoning and casting its spell of 'yonder and away'.

Of quiet rain making rivulets on the window, and filling the world with a sweet and wistful sadness; of a spring morning with its heart-lifting light, and the fresh and shining green of the dew-drenched grass.

Of many things enrapt with splendour which the mind forgot, but which something in us always remembers, because even for a little while we gazed upon the miraculous and knew it to be so; so that now in maturity our habit-worn hearts are filled with an ache of longing and an unhappy sense of loss. For we would make of life a dun and dreary business, hastening perhaps to fill our coffers while cheating ourselves of priceless and timeless treasures; or like trudging travellers we have gathered about us the dust of the wayside, yet sadly wonder why our raiment, once so splendid, has dulled and lost its sheen.

## METEORS AND FIREFLIES

But is it then for our childhood that we long and the wonder-days that were?  
Ah, no. It is for the child-like purity and sweetness of our own souls.

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The flame of Aspiration can never sink so low that it cannot at once be  
rekindled by the fellow-flame of Inspiration.

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When we react to the ugliness of another's egoism, it is but our own  
ugliness recoiling from itself; when we see the beauty of another's soul, it is  
our own beauty admiring itself, when we see both ugliness and beauty as  
the one Beautiful, it is He within us smiling to himself without.

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That subtle fear we call Anxiety can justify itself as being commendable  
when we are anxious for progress, and therefore while adding to our self-  
esteem detract from our faith and trust. It can lend itself as a mask for Pride  
when we become anxious that others should regard us with a proper esteem,  
and so help bolster our confidence with a sense of our worthiness and fitness.  
It can invade, cloud, and inhibit our mental, vital and even physical functions,  
acting as an immediate contradiction of the first principle of our spiritual  
endeavour, which is Peace. It is a perverse and morbid stimulus involving,  
like worry, a wasteful and pointless expenditure of energy: so that while  
posing as a friend, as it so often does, it proceeds to feed itself on our  
resources.

"Beware of Anxiety," warns a Christian writer, "Next to sin, there is  
nothing that so much troubles the mind, strains the heart, distresses the soul,  
and confuses the judgement."

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To be sincere means also to remain unflattered by our own sincerity.

GODFREY

# NEW ROADS

## BOOK IX

### THE INTERMEDIATE WORLDS

#### I

FORGING on through Nights of wonder,  
Through vague mists of occult venture ;  
Traversing vast hills of Silence,  
Hills that rise on their own grandeur  
To the amber skies above them—  
There the Traveller paused to listen  
To the Voice that rolled like thunder,  
Saw the massing of the sound-waves  
March across the open spaces,  
Heard the mighty acclamation  
Echo through the fields of darkness  
There below his conscious station ;  
Heard the Song above the thunder  
Form into a choir of voices,  
Rise on wings of aspiration  
Like some Anthem of the heavens,  
Like some Concourse of the Titans  
That gave meaning first to Nature,  
Gave first breath to all the star forms  
Fashioned from the Cosmic Mantra.

Then the mists and storm-clouds parted  
To reveal New Roads of Beauty,  
Highways leading through the darkness,  
Through the middle worlds of splendour,  
Through the Intermediate sky-ways  
Of the Vital planes of wonder.  
Here the Traveller saw the Light-Lanes,

## NEW ROADS

- Saw vast climbing Roads of rapture  
Where the footsteps of the Godhead  
Passed—passed on, but never tarried ;  
Saw where gods had made a Pathway  
On to fields of new becomings ;  
Saw where mortal aspirations  
Stood bedazzled with these wonders,  
Where they rested on the Journey  
To enjoy the fruits of labour ;  
Saw the Bhakta in samadhi,  
Satisfied to sit enraptured ;  
Saw the contemplative Yogi  
Lost within his contemplation ;  
Saw the poet and the artist  
Lose the 'Purpose' to the image,  
Lose the soul in paint and poem ;  
Saw the intellectual greatness .  
Fall a victim to his prowess—  
Lost, ensnared by petty prizes  
On sharp peaks of cold ambition  
Where the sun shone bright and glaring,  
Shone with calculating brilliance  
But without that warm reflection  
Which is human gratitude.

So the Traveller paused a moment  
To appraise the cause, the meaning :  
Here apparently—a haven  
For the many souls advancing,  
But where something in the being  
Had not fully yet surrendered  
To the highest known conception  
Of divine Reality.

Something of the lower nature  
Yet demanded satisfaction;  
Something that desired and wanted  
And could still recall or capture  
Once again the ancient longings  
Nature had imposed on Nature.

So the Traveller to the Mother  
Bowed in reverence to Her person,



## MOTHER INDIA

To Her wide terrestrial Being,  
To Her universal Being,  
Then took council deep within him,  
Entered in the seat of Silence  
Where Her Peace was on the Waters;  
Peace, which manifested Power—  
Power of Knowledge, Power of Beauty,  
Power of Bliss beyond the Waters,  
Power of undivided Wisdom  
From Imperial Maheshwari,  
From the feet of Mahalakshmi,  
From the hand of Mahakali,  
From Mahasaraswati's brow—  
These the inner Roads of seeking,  
These the Four Great Roads to God.  
With this central Peace within him,  
With this Certitude divine,  
Onward climbed the Traveller, onward  
To the calling hills above him,  
To the Dawns beyond the 'moment'—  
Earth resounding to his footsteps,  
Heaven reflected in his eyes.

NORMAN DOWSETT

## THUS SANG MY SOUL

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

(21)

### VI. AGONY OF SEPARATION

*(Continued)*

#### 42. O MY SOLE CONSOLATION

Now when my mind refuses to aspire,  
When all seems dead and calm and dense,  
O play Thy fingers on heart's lightnings' lyre,  
Tingle once more its sleeping tunes.

Far from Thee, Mother, how can I survive ?  
Now nought can give me consolation.  
Bereaved, my each heart-cover tends to rive  
On way to last annihilation.

O lift all separating veils that keep  
Clouded Thy leaning golden grace,  
Let my mad mind now never aimless leap  
But, lake of love, mirror Thy beauteous Face.

#### 43. O WITHDRAW NOT !

O MOTHER, when thou once hast showered Thy Grace,  
Why must thou choose to hide Thy sunned moon-face,  
Thy love that ceaseless flowed from Thy sea-womb,  
Out of Thy fathomless core to my catacomb ?  
Helpless I pant for answer of Thy Fire  
That may enflame my soul and burn desire,  
Illume my stumbling mind, and its groping pry.  
Drive me not from Thy fold, keep me heart-nigh.  
Belie not the pledge eternal, shed Thy peaks,  
Let not to wilderness go the cry that seeks.  
O hear my heart which burns for Thy Embrace,  
Withdraw not when once thou hast showered Thy Grace.

*(To be continued)*

HAR KRISHAN SINGH

# INDIA OF THE AGES

## II

### INDOLOGY

If the ancient and medieval interpreters of our culture have not done full justice to the spirit of India, the same charge can be made with equal force against the modern interpreters who call themselves Indologists.

India was discovered for the West by the accidental conquests of the East India Company. In the early days of the Company's rule, the authorities found it to their interest to encourage the study of Sanskrit by their officials and merchants. It was one of these, Charles Wilkins, who first introduced Europe to the Sanskrit script in print. The enthusiasm of William Jones led to the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, his translation of the *Shakuntala* was rendered in German during the nineties and was warmly received by Goethe. The enforced detention in Paris in 1802, under Napoleon's orders, of another Englishman from India, Alexander Hamilton, helped some French and German scholars to learn Sanskrit. The new knowledge spread to Germany and France, and chairs for Sanskrit were opened in some of the Western universities by the second decade of the century. From there interest in Indic studies has spread all over the globe.

The nineteenth century in India was imitative of the West in this matter as in everything else. The Missionaries at Serampore (in West Bengal) had opened a printing press for their translations of the Bible. Rammohan Roy, the great pioneer of the Indian re-awakening, took this opportunity to publish his English translations of some of the Upanishads. But interest in the West was diverted at first not to the spiritual heritage of India, but to the philological values of the Sanskrit language. This led almost immediately to the beginnings of a science of Comparative Philology; another result of far-reaching importance was the compilation of the St. Petersburg Dictionary. Later in the century interest centred mainly round the Vedas. The full text of the Rigveda was published along with the commentary of Sayana, and there began a voluminous literature of interpretation. Elaborate theories were evolved to explain the Vedic cult, a new science of Comparative Mythology came into

being to account for the similarities between the ancient "Aryan" cultures, ingenious theories as to the origins of these "Aryan" peoples were constructed one after another, Vedic scholarship became the battleground of wits. There went along with this a growing interest in the philosophical literature of India, especially of Pali Buddhism, an attempt to build up an Indian archaeology, and a general belittling of the Puranic and other literary traditions.

India reacted galvanically. Some, like the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj, decried the Puranic tradition as unworthy of credence and made pilgrimages to the shrine where Max Müller preached. Others, like Rajendralal Mitra and R.G.Bhandarkar, took up the cue in archaeology and adopted a severely critical and "objective" attitude to Indian history; they made some original contributions on the approved modern pattern. A more militant group was headed by Swami Dayananda who refused to accept the new interpretation of our Vedas and gave his own solution to the problem of Vedic exegesis; his was a daring attempt and a challenge to modern scholarship. Swami Vivekananda studied the ancient Indian lore in the light of his own towering mind, was not prepared to accept any position of inferiority for our philosophies, and dared anybody to show him a single line in the Vedas which would prove the foreign origin of their authors. Bankimchandra and Tilak did some original thinking on the Gita. Tagore wrote beautifully on the gems of Sanskrit literature. These were morning voices which heralded the modern era.

Modern Indology begins in India with the turn of the century. A new spirit was abroad, a sense of pride in our heritage, a distrust of the foreigner, a desire to be free in our reading of the past. For the last few years, Sri Aurobindo had been assimilating the essence of India's culture. When he started writing for the *Bandemataram*, he poured forth his knowledge and his vision of India's future in language that set young hearts aflame. Almost overnight there came about a change in our outlook on the past. Jagadish Chandra Bose decided that the old Indian intuition of the universality of life-responses — *antaḥ-sanjñāḥ bhavanti ete sukha-duḥkha-samanvitāḥ*<sup>1</sup>—must be proved before Western scientists in a purely experimental manner. Prafulla Chandra Roy felt that we must have a history of Hindu Chemistry to prove that India had known science. Abanindranath Tagore forsook the Western art tradition and founded a new school of Indian art. Rabindranath composed some of his most inspiring poems around the great things done by Indians in the past — the beggar girl who parted with her only robe because Buddha was asking

<sup>1</sup> These (plants) have a consciousness in them and they feel pleasure and pain.

*Manusmṛiti* I. 49.

for alms, the Rajput queen and her attendants who fought in armour against the rude Pathan, the "bright drop of tear" that Shahjehan built for Mumtaz-mahal, the Maratha "robber chieftain" who overthrew the empire of the Mughal, the little child of the Sikhs who could face the dagger of the assassin for the name of the guru was on his lips. It was a sign that India was awakening.

Even the archaeologists and archivists of the succeeding age have caught some of the enthusiasm of the Swadeshi days and the work done by Indians during the last fifty years has been of a distinctive character. Indians have joined in the battle of words over the interpretation of the Vedas, they have sought to write their own version of the Upanishads and the philosophies, a venturesome task has been undertaken by Indian scholars to prepare an "authoritative" text of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Buddhism has been receiving as much attention in the land of its birth as outside India; Jainism, the devotional cults of north and south, even obscure religious sects which developed out of the *débris* of the old culture have been attracting more and more students; the Puranas are being scanned for chronology and cultural history, even the Tantra has been touched. We are getting comprehensive histories of Indian philosophy, literature, art and social development, the education and economics and foreign enterprise of India are being examined in detail, an attempt is being made to use all available material for a comprehensive history. Unpublished material is being properly looked after in a number of libraries, it is being catalogued and studied; even the Archaeological Department of Government is thinking of spending some monies. The signs are that Indology is coming of age.

Before we conclude this brief survey, it may be well to pause a little over the nature of the work done. This might show us the road to the future.

Perhaps the greatest thing that the Indologists have done, and for this we cannot be too grateful to the doughty pioneers from the West, is that they have saved our precious heirlooms from oblivion. It is thanks to them that the fragile remains of our culture, the palm-leaf manuscripts, the fresco paintings in temple and cave, the potsherds and seals of ancient sites have found a home and an international audience. This has helped to put India on the cultural map of the modern world.

They have also helped in the deciphering of forgotten scripts, painstakingly picked up the faint clues from inscriptions and coins, and tried to build on that slender basis a connected account of our political history. The chronology is still open to question on many important points, only a faint beginning has been made to date the pre-Mauryan times, even the chronological sequence is still being disputed in some cases,—the relative ages of the Vedic

and the Indus Valley cultures is a glaring instance in point. The dates of the Upanishads, the Epics and some of the great literary figures, like Kalidasa, Dandin and Bharavi, for example, have yet to be settled with precision. Nevertheless, it might be said with some truth that the framework of India's history from the time of the Mauryas to the present day has in some sort been erected and the credit for this goes entirely to the Indologist.

Deficiencies begin to appear when we come to the details. Much of the work of foreign Indologists has suffered from a general defect of perspective. Part of it was no doubt due to the accidental fact of India being a subject nation during the greater part of their work, but in part it must be ascribed too to the very nature of the case. Most Indologists of the West were trained in the Greek tradition; and however much they might try—there have of course been some great and honourable exceptions—they have found it difficult to shed their notions of European superiority over all "Oriental" peoples and their cultures. The result was that there has been a general tendency to belittle the importance of what they have found. In many instances, an impossible attempt has been made to find in earlier Greek models the origins of many things in India's science, literature or art; even Indian religion has not escaped the "influence" of Christianity. There has also been a puerile bargaining over dates. The Western scholars have tried on the whole to put things forward by at least a couple of centuries wherever that could be done with any plausibility, and the Indians have resisted with great vehemence. But perhaps the most unfortunate result was that there has been a general lack of sympathy and of any deep understanding of the *motifs* of Indian culture. The Indologists have mastered grammar and the lexicon, but they were no critics of literature or art, they had little training in philosophy or the social sciences, they lacked completely an initiation to spiritual experience. To judge a spiritual culture with the help of the mere mind and the unwillingness to reject preconceived theory could not produce the best results.

The discovery of Mohenjodaro, which perforce took the story of India back to some five thousand years, came as a not too pleasant surprise to many of the Indologists who would not concede any great antiquity to the Vedas. It wiped off at a stroke some of their pet theories, such for instance as that regarding the Phoenician origin of the Indian alphabets and the Greek origins of Indian sculpture. The battle over the dates, however, continues and serious attempts are still being made to put forward the clock by at least a thousand years, so that Mohenjodaro now "officially" begins somewhere about 2500 B.C. instead of the 3500 B.C. or earlier suggested by the first discoverers.

The Vedas have received more than their due share in the hands of Indo-

logists old and new. Here, too, chronology remains a difficult problem : the date ascribed to these documents ranges from somewhere about 4500 B.C. to 1500 B.C. and the controversy is not yet at an end. More serious than any question of dates is the value to be attached to these ancient hymns. Are they simply the childlike utterings of a primitive people or is there any deep and mystic content in these texts which have passed down the ages as containing the highest wisdom, the *śruti par excellence* ? In the very nature of the problem, a scholar who knows grammar but has no mystic experience finds himself at a disadvantage on this question

The Upanishads too have failed to evoke an adequate response from most modern students of our culture, and again for precisely the same reasons. The Upanishads too are *śruti*, they rank only next in importance to the Vedas. They have been edited and translated literally enough to suit the criteria of modern scholarship. But the translations have been done by men who have not entered into the spirit of the original.<sup>1</sup> The result is that the power of the word, the *mantra*, is missed and the texts lose most of their value. The modern interpreter considers the Upanishadic doctrines as "speculation". This falsifies the whole method of these ancient texts; for they were not the result of debate or speculation. The intuitive nature of the Upanishads has to be accepted before we can hope to restate their doctrine correctly.

The Epics have been the Cinderella of modern scholarship. "The Mahabharata," as Sri Aurobindo pointed out long ago, "is the pivot on which the history of Sanskrit literature and incidentally the history of Aryan civilisation in India must perforce turn. To the great discredit of European scholarship the problem of this all-important work is one that remains not only unsolved, but untouched. Yet until it is solved,...the history of our civilisation must remain in the air, a field for pedantic wranglings and worthless conjectures."<sup>2</sup> Indian scholarship has since taken up the formidable task of preparing an "authoritative" text; but that when completed would only be the beginning; for "until the confusion of its heterogeneous materials is reduced to some sort of order, the different layers of which it consists separated, classed and attributed to their relative dates, and its relations with the Ramayana on the one hand and the Puranic and classic literature on the other fully and patiently examined," the problem of the Mahabharata cannot be said to have been solved.<sup>3</sup>

The philosophies of India have been receiving more and more attention in the hands of Indologists, both foreign and Indian, and considerable work has been done on Buddhism in particular. But here too there is scope for improve-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sri Aurobindo : "On Translating the Upanishads" in *Eight Upanishads*.

<sup>2</sup> *Vyasa and Valmiki*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

ment. Buddhism has to be understood in its old Vedic and Upanishadic context, like all the other forms of Indian thought and religion. We have to understand clearly why it disappeared from India and how its main elements were utilised by the later Indian cults and ways of thought. In tracing the development of the other systems of philosophy, we cannot overlook the fact that "only a synthetic method of interpretation can explain a synthetic and intuitive philosophy. The analytical tendency began with the gradual divisions which ended in the establishment of the six philosophical schools.... Still, it is to be noted that while the philosophers thus split the catholicity of the ancient Truth into warring schools, the general Indian mind was always overpoweringly attracted by the synthetical tendency. The Gita seems to be in part the expression of such a synthetic reaction, the Puranas show constantly the same tendency and even into the philosophical schools it made its entry."<sup>1</sup>

The religio-philosophical systems of the Puranas, Tantras and the devotional cults of north and south India offer a vast field of research which has hardly yet been touched except on its fringes. Here it is the prejudice of the modern mind in its intolerance of anything symbolic or occult that has long stood in the way. The work of Woodroffe opened some of the closed doors, and the foundation of chairs in Indian culture and the modern Indian languages at many of the Indian universities is helping to promote entry into these comparatively obscure regions. But here too we must shed many of our prejudices and look at things from the viewpoint of the ancient and medieval mystics and occultists before we can hope to get at the right clues.

The classical literature in Sanskrit, and to a lesser extent in the Prakritic tongues, has been studied longest and one would expect considerable work in this field. The results, however, are disappointing. Most translation of Indian work is unsatisfactory from the literary point of view; of criticism and appreciation we have practically nothing. The reason apparently has been that the main energies of the scholars were engaged in wrangling over dates; and in any case very few of them had a sufficiently adequate literary training. Indian pundits are still bound by the canons of the old Alankara and many of them are not in a position to make comparisons with the masterpieces of the world's literature. Therefore our histories of literature are little better than descriptive catalogues; one seeks in them in vain for light on India's literary genius. As with literature, so with art. It is only with the turn of the century that Indian art has begun to be studied from the point of view of the artist. But the archaeologist still dominates and fine appreciations are rare. Technique is being studied in detail, but technique is not the whole of art.

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo. "Sanskrit Research", in *Arya*, 1916 (reprinted in *Mother India*, June, 1955).



An important aspect of India's history, the social and economic, was almost entirely neglected by the earlier Indologists. With the awakening of the national consciousness, the causes of our downfall began to be examined with some care by Indian publicists, and economic history came to receive more attention. Recently, monographs have also been appearing on certain aspects of India's sociological development; these are partly in justification of our social system and partly with a view to discern the meaning of our social stagnation. Here, too, much remains to be done. Perhaps one of the first needs is to understand the significance of our social and economic institutions in the context of India's main aim in life. Once we can relate these to the chief preoccupation of Indian culture, much that seems unconnected or meaningless in our social and economic history will fall into their respective places, and we need not in that case be over-anxious to read modern European theories into our ancient customs.

The Indologists have succeeded best in preparing a framework of political history; they have taken infinite pains over inscriptions and coins and other rare evidences bearing on our political history and have more or less finally laid down the main lines of that history from the time of the Mauryas. There are still important *lacunae* on points of detail, such for example as the development of political theory and the actual organisation of government in the different epochs. The real difficulty is, however, about the pre-Mauryan period for which inscriptions and other archaeological evidence are practically non-existent, and we have to fall back on literary records. This is a type of evidence which has not so far been adequately sifted, mainly perhaps owing to the preoccupation with epigraphy. But tradition cannot be ignored in any reconstruction of the past and literary records afford valuable data.

Now what we need most is a change in the spirit of our approach. Hitherto we have been mostly busy collecting data; henceforth we should concentrate more on finding their significance.

We need be in no hurry to build imposing edifices on scanty foundations in imitation of our predecessors. "The German scholarship possesses infinite capacity of acuteness, labour, marred by an impossible and fantastic imagination, the French of inference marred by insufficient command of facts, while in soundness of judgment Indian sane scholarship has both. It should stand first, for it must naturally move with a far greater familiarity and grasp in the sphere of Sanskrit studies than any foreign mind however able and industrious. But above all it must clearly have one advantage, an intimate feeling of the language, a sensitiveness to shades of style and expression and an instinctive feeling of what is or is not possible, which the European cannot hope to possess

unless he sacrifices his sense of racial superiority and lives in some great centre like Benares as a Pundit among Pundits....”<sup>1</sup>

“But to justify the hope it must first get rid on one side of its attachment to the methods of the Pundit and his subservience to traditional authority and on the other not give itself bound hand and foot to the method of the European scholar or imitate too freely that swiftly leaping ingenious mind of his which gives you in a trice a Scythian or a Persian Buddha, identifies conclusively Murghab and Maurya, Mayasura and Ahura Mazda and generally constructs with magical rapidity the wrong animal out of the wrong bone. We have to combine the laboriousness of the Pundit, the slow and patient conscientiousness of the physical scientist abhorrent of a too facile conclusion and the subtlety of the psychologist,... the patient thoroughness of the old and the flexibility and penetrating critical sense of the new...”<sup>2</sup>

But research however painstaking and scrupulous cannot give us more than the raw materials. Unless we know how to interpret the materials, we cannot write history. For this we must go back to our beginnings, read our past in the light of the vision which the founders of our culture had of the future, work out a plan, have a global view of history, give it a meaning. The work has been done in the mass by Sri Aurobindo. Indology can help fill in the details.

*(To be continued)*

SANAT K. BANERJI

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo : *Vyasa and Valmiki*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo : “Sanskrit Research”, *loc. cit.*

## SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM—A SYMBOL OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM is a living symbol of the Master's immortality and a sign of his work. In this world of ours, so full of darkness and disappointment, his Ashram is a beacon light and he is still dynamic in the heart of every member of it. It is here in the Ashram that he laid the foundation of the lofty ideals of his life and initiated a new era by giving a large practical form to his vision.

India is called the land of gods. She has never been devoid of spiritual heroes who have sacrificed their all for the sake of Truth. There has indeed been an unbroken chain of Saints and Sages here; yet that luminous development of Indian Spirituality which showed itself in the Vedic era and that flowering of power, knowledge and vitality which was then in evidence has never again been seen. To-day the most clamorous need is the emancipation of Man, but how can this be achieved without setting the consciousness free? In his enthusiasm for becoming civilized, Man has imprisoned the consciousness of Self; and so long as the soul is imprisoned, what freedom can there be? Who can impart freedom to one whose consciousness remains in chains? Awakened India is getting more and more attracted to the Sadhana of Knowledge and Shakti which is practised here in Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Even to-day the conclusions based on self-realisation at which our seers and saints arrived, as also the processes of Yoga which they originated, hold their unshakable and immortal place. The strong current of time has washed away the religions of many countries, but Indian spirituality and culture have remained fixed like rock in this furious flood. Our holy places deserve credit for maintaining those high standards and being the sanctuaries that provide inspiration to the seekers of spiritual knowledge. India will always remain indebted to Sri Aurobindo for the service which he has rendered to the age-long tradition by establishing his Ashram of Yoga.

The Ashram was organised on a practical basis after more than 16 years of rigorous tapasya on the part of Sri Aurobindo; and since then for more than 32 years it has been steadily developing under the Mother's guidance towards the mark of Sri Aurobindo's long-cherished dream. The *Arya* was first published in 1914 and the elaborate descriptions of the integral yoga which we find therein indicate the extent to which he was planning for world-wide work even at that time. Yet only after a certain crucial stage of what he called the

Divine Descent was the Ashram officially founded. It is then that the work for which he had come to the earth began on a broad visible basis.

As to what was the object of starting the Ashram, we find a reply in the following lines :

“This is not an Ashram like the others—the members are not Sannyasis; it is not *mokṣa* that is the sole aim of the Yoga here, what is being done here is a preparation for a work—a work which will be founded on Yogic consciousness and Yoga-Shakti and can have no other foundation.”

Life is the field of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. Renunciation here means the surrender of desires. To practise that renunciation it is not necessary to resort to hills, caves or forests and live in a bare and impoverished way. Inner detachment is true renunciation. Desireless and devoted work is the quickest way to progress on the path of Yoga. It is for this reason that work is given so much importance in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram. Work affords a wide field for the sadhana. All work—manual, artistic, educational or any other—is done here in an attitude of inner surrender.

“Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body's best prayer to the Divine.”

11-12-1945

THE MOTHER

These words of the Mother are the main mantra of life in the Ashram. They are not merely hung in the various departments of it, but are written in the very hearts of the Sadhaks. And they are enough to distinguish work in the Ashram from mere activism.

#### A GLIMPSE OF THE ASHRAM

Sri Aurobindo Ashram is a collection of houses in the heart of Pondicherry, beginning with a central block which in common practice is particularly known as the Ashram. This block is the place where Sri Aurobindo lived and where the Mother still lives. It was here that everyone used to assemble for collective meditation and Pranam. On the first floor of this building there are the rooms of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. On the ground floor just below Sri Aurobindo's rooms are the living rooms-cum-offices of the Secretary and the Manager. In front of the Manager's room are two verandahs, one connected behind the other. Formerly in the inner verandah, the Mother used to come down for accepting Pranams. This place together with the outer verandah is now known as the Meditation Hall. The Mother now comes down and

gives her General Blessings in the outer verandah. Beyond these verandahs is a large L-shaped courtyard, of which the north-south wing serves as a passage and has rooms for certain sadhaks on either side. The longer east-west wing leads to the Samadhi and terminates in the Reading Room. The Samadhi is situated to the north of this east-west wing with plenty of open space where sadhaks can assemble and meditate. Close to the Samadhi there is a large tree with thick foliage, giving cool shade to the Samadhi and the sadhaks. The shade lends peace and ananda to all who visit the place. The Mother calls the tree "Service;" and indeed it never disappoints the visitor. The park of Pondicherry is full of trees of this kind, but none of them is as dense as the one at the Samadhi. Once a year this great tree is laden with yellow flowers. Screened through the interstices of this tree the rays of the Sun give delight to the hearts of the sadhaks who sit around it, absorbed in meditation. The Mother does not allow any of its branches to be cut off. Its branches were hanging very low. In order to give them support, seven cement pillars were built—designed by a Czechoslovakian engineer named Sammer. They remind us of the Sanchi Stupa gate. It is the shade of this tree that keeps the whole courtyard cool.

Near it is a small piece of open ground, which serves as a garden. To the west of it is the workshop and to the north and east are living rooms for sadhaks, with small verandahs in front. Outside the verandahs are tall date-palms in large pots. Around these palms are long leaves resembling the hoods of snakes. They have no branches; only leaves come out of the earth. The rest of the garden is full of evergreens in pots, which are frequently changed. Great care is taken to maintain the beauty of this garden. Such cleanliness is observed around the Samadhi that you cannot find a single dead leaf there. There are incense sticks constantly burning at the Samadhi. Its upper centre is daily decorated artistically with flowers of many varieties and colours. On the altar of the Samadhi, there is a constant offering of flowers by the sadhaks. Someone is always there to attend to it. There are two marble slabs with letters in red on the sides of the Samadhi, bearing the Mother's words in French and English. The English version runs:

DECEMBER 9, 1950

TO THEE WHO HAST BEEN THE MATERIAL ENVELOPE OF OUR MASTER, TO THEE OUR INFINITE GRATITUDE, BEFORE THEE WHO HAST DONE SO MUCH FOR US, WHO HAST WORKED, STRUGGLED, SUFFERED, HOPED, ENDURED SO MUCH, BEFORE THEE WHO HAST WILLED ALL, ATTEMPTED ALL, PREPARED, ACHIEVED ALL FOR US, BEFORE THEE WE BOW DOWN AND IMPLORE THAT WE MAY NEVER FORGET EVEN FOR A MOMENT ALL WE OWE TO THEE.

At a little distance from the Samadhi there are staircases leading to the first floor. On one side is the workshop (already mentioned) and on the other there is a small plot of land full of pots of flowers. To the east of the workshop is a paved square with a gate, which is at the back of the Ashram. The Mother's car is garaged here. To the west of the workshop there is another garden, which serves as a nursery for season flowers. Here there are two pools of water, one foot in width, where lilies of various colours are in blossom. At first Pondicherry had white lilies only. Coloured lilies are a gift to the Ashram from the late Sir Akbar Hydari of Hyderabad. To the south-east and the south-west of the garden are two large creepers and beyond the pool are large pots full of green plants. Formerly students of art used to practise painting in this lap of Nature.

As mentioned above, there is the workshop on one side of this garden. On the other three sides there are various rooms. On the north there is a department from which oil, soap and other articles are distributed to the sadhaks. This is known as "Prosperity". On the south is a room from which fruits are distributed to the sadhaks. On the west is a cold storage for fruits ; and another room which used to be the dining room (1932-36) but which is now occupied by a sadhak.

The gate of the Ashram is covered with creepers and flanked by rockeries and flowers, of which the beauty is enchanting. However hot the sun may be in the street outside, the entrance to the Ashram is always cool and refreshing. To meet new-comers two sadhaks are present with happy faces at the gate from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. On the footpath outside the Ashram there are four tall Deodar trees standing like sentinels.

As soon as one enters the gate and crosses the verandah, one finds oneself in front of the Reception Room, where the secretary and others meet visitors, when necessary. To the east there are three photographs of Sri Aurobindo where many people go every morning to offer their homage. The walls of the room are lined with bookcases and paintings. To the west and the north are two rooms where the Ashram books are sold. Adjoining the Reception Room there is a smaller room which was formerly used as a Library, but which is now utilised as a Reading Room. Next to this there is a small room where the post is distributed and a box is kept for outgoing letters. To the north-west of the Reception Room is another room where newspapers are read. It will amuse people to know that the Mother once gave the name "Salle de Mensonge" (*i.e.* "The Room of Falsehood") to this room. Other rooms are named by the Mother "Entire Self-Giving", "Realisation," "Energy", "Devotion," "Divine Grace", "Immortality", etc. All these names have a spiritual *raison d'être*.

## MOTHER INDIA

Just above the Reception Room is an equally large hall, where the Mother comes on the first day of each month in order to give her "Prosperity" Blessings, when soap, clothes and other monthly requirements are distributed to the sadhaks. It was here that Sri Aurobindo gave his first Darshan on the 24th of November 1926, after which he went into retirement for concentrated work. Prior to this date he used to live in an adjoining room, which is now occupied by a sadhak.

In the courtyard to the east of the Reading Room there is a large Champak tree. Considerable care and pains are taken to keep it green and growing and in constant blossom. Twice or thrice a week sprays of water are pumped up to its high and spreading branches. When it is in full bloom the beauty of its flowers add to the grandeur of the whole Ashram; and their smell surcharges the air throughout the night. The whole place vibrates with a new life.

*(To be continued)*

NARAYANPRASAD

*(Translated by J. N. Welingkar from the Hindi)*

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**The Viziers of Bassora : A Dramatic Romance** by *Sri Aurobindo*. Publishers : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Price : Rs. 7 (Calico), Rs. 6 (Paper).

The publication of this play, for the first time, more than 50 years after it was written, is of special interest, as it is known that Sri Aurobindo had a particular fondness for it among his youthful works. In the Preface to *Collected Poems and Plays* it is mentioned as one of the pieces, written in Bengal, between 1905-10, but lost due to the house-searches, trials and hasty displacements incident to its author's political career at that time. Now it has happily come to light, together with another unpublished play, among the papers originally used as exhibits at the Alipore trial. These narrowly escaped destruction as waste-paper in 1936, but were preserved, unknown and unofficially, in a cupboard, until 1951, thanks to the enterprise of a record-keeper at the court. Apart from 8 errata, the text is now excellently produced by the Ashram press, with two facsimile pages of the manuscript.

As with *Perseus the Deliverer* and *Rodogune*, the scene of this play is in the Middle East, the fertile meeting-ground of Orient and Occident. The period is that of Haroun-al-Rashid and the Arabian Nights. The story is briefly this. There are two Viziers in Bassora, who serve their King Mohammed bin Suleyman Alzayni. They are Alfazzul Ibn Sawy and Almuene bin Khakan. The first is benevolent and respected for his fair-dealing; the second is infamous and cruel. Each Vizier has a young son, both uncontrollably amorous, but Ibn Sawy's son, Nureddene, is handsome and likeable, while Almuene's son, Fareed, is odiously unpleasant in every way. Each parent champions his own son and believes that, though their behaviour may disturb the people of Bassora, all is for the best.

Ibn Sawy is commissioned to buy a slave-girl for the king. He succeeds in purchasing Anice-al-jalice, a fabulous Persian beauty, thwarting Almuene who also wanted her for his son. Ibn Sawy decides to keep Anice secretly for ten days to restore her bloom after her experiences in the slave-market. But ten days is too long to keep her from his son Nureddene, who ruins his father's plans, with the help of a little conspiracy with Doonya, a cousin living in the house.



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Ibn Sawy, determined to sober his son and teach him wisdom, makes him swear absolute constancy to Anice, and then divides his riches between Nureddene and Doonya, whom he marries to Murad, the King's general. He decides to pack his wife off to her relatives and to go away himself for a year.

"Oh wherefore this ?" exclaims Ameenah, his wife. But Ibn Sawy replies, before leaving :

" 'Tis likely that the boy  
Left here in sole command, will waste his wealth  
And come to evil. If he's sober, well;  
If not, when he is bare as any rock,  
Abandoned by his friends, spewed out by all,  
It may be that in this sharp school and beaten  
With savage scourges the wild blood in him  
May learn sobriety and noble use;  
Then rescue him, assist his better nature.  
And we shall see too how the loves endure  
Betwixt him and the Persian..."

He concludes :

"All will end well, I hope,  
And I returning, glad, to Bassora,  
Embrace a son reformed, a happy niece  
Nursing her babe, and you, the gentle mother,  
Like the sweet kindly earth whose patient love  
Embraces even our faults and sins."

Having arranged this test Ibn Sawy leaves Bassora and the innocents are on their own. The bad Vizier Almuene now has a clear field. His first move is to bribe Ajebe his nephew to

Ruin wanton Nureddene,  
Gorge him with riot and excess; rob him  
Under a friendly guise; force him to spend  
Till he's a beggar. Most, delude him on  
To prone extremity of drunken shame.

All too quickly Nureddene is deeply in debt—his generosity making Ajebe's work easy. The creditors take everything; his friends leave him; only Anice is left to Nureddene—and there are still debts unmet. Anice

half-heartedly urges Nureddene to sell her. At this crisis Ajebe deserts his uncle and is reconciled with Nureddene, and agrees to help. He promises to buy Anice if she is put up for auction, and look after her until Ibn Sawy comes back. At the market, however, Almuene turns up at the bidding. He insults Anice, and Nureddene assaults him—to the delight of all present. Almuene lyingly reports at the palace that Nureddene and Anice have insulted the king as well as battered him, Almuene, unprovoked. Fortunately, however, the two lovers are forewarned of the King's fury and escape just in time on a river-boat to Bagdad—thanks to Ajebe.

In Bagdad Nureddene and Anice wander into Haroun-al-Rashid's garden. Ibrahim the gardener, an old hypocrite, overwhelmed by their beauty, entertains them in the pavilion, pretending to be the owner. Though quoting many eminent authorities against wine (Ibrahim Alhashhash bin Fuzfuz Bierbloon al Sandilani of Bassora—for one) Ibrahim produces bottles and there is drinking, song and much merriment. Haroun-al-Rashid, however, arrives disguised as a fish-seller and learns his guests' story. He asks a boon, Nureddene grants it, because, he says, 'Thou hast a face.' The fisherman asks for his slave-girl Anice. In return he gives Nureddene a letter to the King in Bassora with whom he says he has some influence. Nureddene goes off bewildered to deliver it, careless of life or death, having lost Anice. Meanwhile Haroun tells her who he is and that he will care for her.

In Bassora Fareed has tried to poison his father, who pardons him, nevertheless, saying it is a sign of spirit. When Nureddene appears with Haroun's letter Almuene reads it to the King. It tells him to hand over his throne to Nureddene and report to Bagdad, but Almuene secretly tears off the seal from the letter and tells the King it is a forgery. Nureddene is arrested. Meanwhile Fareed tries to carry off Doonya and Ajebe's slave-girls, and is killed by Murad. The climax comes when Ibn Sawy returns to Bassora to see his son with the executioner in the market-place, and is told by Almuene that he is fortunate that God has relieved him of family cares in his old age—that his wife and niece are slaves, his house destroyed and his son about to be cut down. Ibn Sawy exhorts his son to die well, but in the nick of time trumpets sound and Haroun's army arrives.

Anice has been anxious and made Haroun send a force to see that all is well. Haroun himself passes judgment on the King and on the bad Vizier, who is led off to his end. The remaining characters live happily, purged and tempered by their trials. Love, courage and truth prevail.

The main flavour of the play is one of youthful exuberance and a rich and lusty enjoyment of life. The high spirits in the drinking scene even overflow into the stage directions, where it is said of Anice, 'She lights the 80

candles of the great candelabrum'—just like that. The sensuousness has the happiness and innocence of Kalidasa, and is quite free from the shadows of any puritan feelings of guilt.

Although there is no deep spiritual meaning to this play, as there is for instance in *Vasavadutta*, and though the verse (which is vigorous and to the point) has no outstanding passages, the characters are remarkably vivid and differentiated—not of great subtlety or complexity but excellent dramatic types, full of clear-cut individuality and contrast. The whole construction of the play is confident and masterly; the many short scenes—26 altogether—give a pace and movement to the action which is excellent theatre. Indeed from the point of view of practical production this is perhaps the most mature and workmanlike of Sri Aurobindo's plays.

Sri Aurobindo is said to have remarked that no one would believe that the author of *The Viziers of Bassora* also wrote the epic *Savitri*. It is indeed written by another man—Aurobindo Ghose—the young man with the mischievous smile of the early photographs—and not the seer. But both men had the same love and affirmation of life, and the fact that the seer includes and fulfills this earlier man is further evidence of the richness and comprehensiveness of his character and the greatness of the vision that prompted the final integration.

DICK BAISTONE

**Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo**—(Second Series) by *Nirodbaran* Publishers : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Pages 293 ; Price Rs. 3.50 and 4.50.

Written in the early period of Nirodbaran's sadhana in the Ashram, these are further letters exchanged between himself and the Master during the years 1933 to 38, now compiled into this second series. Many of them were featured in *Mother India* and some of Sri Aurobindo's replies have appeared in previous publications but are here reprinted along with the original questions in order to supply the reader with the full frame of reference.

The letters have been carefully organized by the author into three main divisions : *Spirituality* which ranges over many problems of sadhana and the spiritual life in general ; *Art and Literature* comprising for the most part the various aspects of literary activity, with detailed discussions both on the techniques of writing poetry and on the Force and inspiration working through the poet; *Matters Medical* dealing with the various branches of medicine and examining not only their relative merits, their uses and abuses, but also their place generally in the larger context of the Divine workings.

Sri Aurobindo's letters, ever-helpful, ever-luminous, are well known to us. Apart from their general worth, there seems to be a particular value in this present collection in that it brings into clear relief the unique, unusual and often amusing relationship between this disciple and the Master.

One does not find, for example, in Nirod's queries much trace of the sort of humility which one might associate with appeals to a divine teacher. Rather we find, underlying a wide range of tones and attitudes in the questions, a certain chummy assertiveness. Sometimes the writer is blatantly dogmatic; sometimes pessimistically sure that he has hit upon a spiritual truth which cannot be applied to himself; at one time he is wistfully lacking in self-confidence and resolution; at another heavily depressed and discouraged. Now he is the western-trained intellectual apparently unable to comprehend subtle spiritual ideas with anything but the rigid physical mind; now the budding poet crying out impatiently for inspiration; now the allopathic doctor struggling to understand the principles and forces operating through other systems of medicine than his own. If there is sometimes a facade of bravado, of knowing a great deal, we come to realise that it is not all it appears to be, not to be taken at its face value. Moreover, throughout his questions we find a disarming frankness and straightforwardness, a sincere desire to understand with the mind what he cannot yet grasp intuitively.

One begins to feel a tenderness for the young sadhak, so eager to advance, so easily thrown into the depths of despair. But one feels also at times exasperated to the point of hilarity by what Sri Aurobindo calls his "wooden head" : he seems to ask the same questions again and again, failing to understand the central point in the Guru's answers.

The Master's letters, apart from the intrinsic wisdom they contain, give us new insights into the Divine tact and understanding in the unique personal relationship he has with each seeker. As one approaches the Divine, so he responds. The Master's replies outdo Nirod's in flippancy, impertinence, bluntness and humour—when these are called for.

"Eternal Jehovah ! You don't even know what Brahman is ! You will next be asking me what Yoga is.... In fact, sir, you are Brahman and you are pretending to be Nirod; when Nishikanta is translating Amal's poetry into Bengali, it is really Brahman translating Brahman's Brahman into Brahman. There, sir, I hope you are satisfied now."

When Nirod tells Sri Aurobindo of a visiting Englishman who objects to the Indians of the Ashram attempting to write in English, the Master says :

“How terrible ! Then of course everybody must stop at once. I too must not presume to write in English — for I have an Indian mind and spirit and am that dreadful Indian thing, a Yogi.”

*Nirodbaran* : I believe he would waive his objection in your case.

*Sri Aurobindo* : How graciously kind of him ! After all perhaps I can continue to write in English. Only poor Amal will have to stop. He can't write a line....

And a touch of whimsy —

“As for the Force, application of my force, short of the supramental,... depends...on...the sanction of the Unmentionable—I beg your pardon, I meant the Unnameable, Ineffable, Unknowable.”

But in response to the rigid externalising mind, the apparently self-satisfied *obiter dicta*, the Master sometimes lays on a heavy hand :

“...will you and others live always in the ordinary mundane social consciousness and feelings and ideas and judge me and my work from that sorry standpoint ?”

“It is the result I suppose of havins modern-minded disciples who know all about everything aod can judge better thao any Guru, but to whom the very claims of Yoga are something queer and cold and strange. Kismet !”

It is said that Nirodbaran wrote some of his letters on behalf of friends, deliberately incorporating into them a dramatic overtone which he himself did not feel but which was part of an ‘act’. Whatever the case may have been, there seems to run between the lines, if not on them, a characteristically personal note : the troubled intellect coupled with a frequent strain of despondency and pessimism which led Sri Aurobindo to call him “The Man of Sorrows”.

Yet again and again the Master cheers and encourages him. When he complains of Yoga being a difficult affair especially when great experiences don't come, Sri Aurobindo says :

“According to the affirmation of people acquainted with the subject, the preliminary preparation before getting any yogic experiences worth the name may extend to 12 years. After that one may legitimately expect something. You are far from the limit yet, so no reason to despair.”

In another letter :

“To cheer up, buck up and rest if you can, saying ‘Rome was not built in a day’—if you can’t, gloom it through it till the sun rises and the little birds chirp and all is well.”

Nirodbaran deserves our thanks for publishing these letters of his days of lesser wisdom and thus possibly laying himself open to some good-natured taunting; he has the consolation of knowing that the world is immeasurably the happier for the golden harvest he has reaped for its hours of soul-hunger and benighted seeking.

BEVERLEY SIEGERMAN

**Chandelier** by Chinmoy. Publishers : Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Pp. 52+2.  
Price : R. 1/-

I have much pleasure in reviewing this collection of thoughts of the young aspiring poet. This is the fourth book he has produced—an interesting successor to *Flame-Waves*, *The Infinite : Sri Aurobindo*, *The Mother of the Golden All*. Although these thoughts are in prose, many are really prose-poems. They came to him while riding on a cycle or in the playground or in bed before sleep could steal over his mind. Several seem to come from the pure intelligence, working in its right for mastery, for knowledge.

There are two possibilities of the action of the intelligent will. It can have a downward and outward orientation towards the restless and discursive activity of the mind : in this aspect it becomes a half-animal reason subservient to habit, to desire and the senses and is of no avail in the search for scientific or philosophical or spiritual knowledge. It can also have an upward and inward orientation towards a settled peace and equality in the calm and immutable purity of the conscious silent soul: this unified intelligence is not subservient to the senses, to desire or to the blind force of habit. Quite a number of thoughts in *Chandelier* are, in my opinion, born of this latter orientation.

In some of them we find psychological self-analysis and self-observation, well-phrased though not always striking. Others of a more general type blend an original individual note with some memory of the deliverances of the Great with which the author might have come into contact in his studies. Still others have a promising turn but do not reach the right crystallisation and stand with an impression of slight strain in the language. But there is a fair amount of expression that either bears an intuitive gleam in it or achieves an ideative acuity and felicity.

## MOTHER INDIA

We may cite some of the best pieces. A strong mystical suggestiveness permeates the very first thought : "Sri Aurobindo is the Father of a beginningless beginning and the Son of an endless end." A finely conceived surprise, touched with deep feeling, is the next : "The Mother always gives. We too give. Hers is the Blessing. Ours is the unworthiness." Here is an imaginative seizure of a paradoxical truth : "What is penury ? Penury is the fulfilment of desires. The more we slake the thirst of desires the bigger we become a round zero like an insatiable belly." And here is the felicitous expression of a personal aspiration : "I do not want to be a walking dictionary of the world. I want to be a fixed faith in the Unseen. Mastery is not my goal. My goal is surrender." A felicitous generality meets us in : "To judge others perfectly one must be in love-love." An example of inspired cleverness is : "Love is sacrifice. Sacrifice is bloom and doom—bloom of the Soul, doom of the Ego." Another of the same kind, but with a philosophical undertone to its psychological substance, is : "God is all-where when we say 'yes'. God is no-where when we say 'no'."

The author deserves encouragement for memorable things like these that at once delight and enlighten.

A. C. GANGULI

## THE GROWTH OF THE NEW WORLD UNION

SINCE we reported to the *Mother India* family concerning the birth of the New World Union and the beginnings of this movement for world peace and a New World on a spiritual foundation, there have been several significant developments. But before sharing this news with you, let us summarise what has been done during the first year of this infant movement.

We have widely distributed in India our pamphlets "A Call to a New World Union" and "More Light on the New World Union" along with our World Letter and "Suggestions for Individuals and Groups." We have also posted these abroad to many hundreds of persons of many lands, from the Ashram mailing lists and others. The responses we have had in personal contacts in India and by correspondence from India and abroad have been highly encouraging. They disclose a widespread feeling that the movement is timely and that there is urgent need to press the spiritual approach to the problem of world peace.

We have been endeavouring to establish a firm base for the movement in India before venturing out on a world tour to contact persons and societies of spiritual outlook. For this purpose we have visited during our four tours thirty-four cities and towns of this land, some of them several times : Pondicherry, Madras, Poona, Bombay, Surat, Nadiad, Mehmedabad, Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Agra, Delhi, Mathura, Brindaban, Meerut, Hardwar, Rishikesh, Srinagar, Gulmarg, Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahabad, Ayodhya, Basti, Banaras, Ranchi, Rourkela, Jamshedpur, Dhanbad, Calcutta, Nabadwip, Bangavani, Bhagalpur, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, Gauhati, Shillong.

In most of these places we have banded together nuclei of spiritual workers to form local units of the New World Union. We are giving serious attention currently to steps for strengthening the local centres, with emphasis on the inner growth of individuals and on their teamwork. While the foundations of the movement in India continue to be laid by our co-workers, we must venture forth to other parts of the world, beginning with East and Central Africa.

We have not so far made use to any extent of the services of the press and radio in support of this movement, for we believe that it should be allowed to unfold itself in a natural way, "as the Spirit moves", without resort to ordinary methods of propaganda, advertisement and exaggeration.

The deepest impression of our tours has been a vivid sense of a dynamic Divine Spirit, a sublime creative Force, mightily at work today. It seems to



manifest itself across the whole range of human life and at all levels of society — among “ordinary folk” and in those reputed to be spiritually advanced.

We have sought interviews with the latter, asking them how they see this movement, not that we might glory in the company which we keep (for that would mean a prideful stunting of our growth) and not for their endorsement of NWU (for it must stand on its own merits as an instrument of the Sovereign Divine Light and Force) nor even for their blessing (though that has been freely given) but in order that we might see how the new surge of the Divine Force is affecting them also, some of whom are leaders of societies of spiritual purpose which N.W.U. seeks ultimately to band together.

Among persons of reputed spiritual stature we have met Sri Anandamayee Ma in her Ashram near New Delhi; Sri Anirvan of Shillong, translator of *The Life Divine* into Bengali; Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj, a spiritual scholar of Banares; Swami Mahadevananda Giri Maharaj of Bholanand Ashram in Hardwar; Swami Pratyagatmananda Saraswati, a philosopher, poet, mathematician and spiritual explorer; Sri Ranga Avadhut, whose ashram is on the Nabada River in Gujarat; Swami Sivananda, head of the ashram at Rishikesh and founder of the Divine Life Society; Sadhu T.L. Vaswani, a prolific spiritual writer of Poona; Sri Vedanti Rampadartha Dasji, President of the All India Sadhu Samaj; Anjani Nandan Sharan, venerable editor of *Manas Pyush*, “Kothewala Maharaj” and Maithili Sharan or “Bhakat Maliji”, all of Ayodhya; Sri Satchidanandam Pillai, revered leader of the Saiva Siddhanta movement in South India.

Among persons well known in India we have interviewed Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Republic; Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister; Acharya Vinoba Bhave, founder of the Bhoodan movement and leader of the All India Sarva Seva Sangha ; Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, Sarvodaya leader, who has agreed to serve on the Working Committee of the NWU ; Yuvaraj Karan Singh, Governor of Kashmir ; Sri Rohit Mehta, General Secretary of the Theosophical Society, who also has agreed to serve on the Working Committee.

All of these eminent spiritual workers and leaders in public life gave us valuable suggestions or encouraging and inspiring messages of hope for the New World Union. They have generally emphasised that this movement has taken birth at the right moment in the history of the world, is divinely guided, and that a Higher Power than man will lead it to success. These are some of the suggestions and the spiritual counsel given to us during our interviews, as recorded immediately thereafter :

Amid this global madness, this movement must grow from psychic to

psychic. Not by tongue, nor brain, nor writing, but by heart and inner development. Although modern apparatus is necessary, behind it this psychic strength is essential. Then people, however otherwise inclined, must listen to the Call.

Suitable places should be selected to create spiritual bases. The rishis, the spiritual figures are generating and releasing power, spiritual current. The "Kalyan Shakti", the "Bhagavati Shakti" is always there above us and pouring incessantly Her Grace, but we are not in a position to receive it. To receive it, the *adhar* (i.e. the mind, life and body prepared to receive the spiritual consciousness and force) is essential.

The inner divinity within you is a guarantee, a promise that you are not left alone, and that one day you will realise your goal. As the seed of a tree embodies the full tree, so also the divinity within ensures your fulness in time.

This movement is very timely. The whole approach is good. Unite people, grow within, go ahead. You must not only quote from the modern thinkers, but also from the Vedas and Upanishads, as they embody great power. I suggest that you quote from the Rig Veda this *mantram*, very suitable for your movement : "Alike be your feelings, unified your hearts, common your aspirations, perfect your unity."

Nothing should be done in haste. This is not a cause of ordinary type.... You are destined to work hard for this, like "sappers and miners." Move on, whatever obstacles or hurdles block your way, move on! Keep yourselves always open. Make yourselves a zero. As the ploughman ploughs his land and moves repeatedly from one end of the field to the other, you are to plough this uneven world. You may see that people are sleeping after you have left. Again and again you are to knock on their doors and awaken them. Never feel disheartened or frustrated. Keep always ablaze the fire within. Never for a moment have you any right to brood over your mistakes. Go ahead. Leave it to the Divine to do the work, and make yourself open so that the Power can flow.... A true and integral spirituality should produce a purification of human relations.

The divine compassion is always there, but we cannot ordinarily consciously receive and utilise it for the peace and happiness of the world .... Only as the individual *adhar* enlarges itself through love of mankind, is universal work possible, and that *adhar* can be the medium of the Divine.... "Love thy neighbour as thyself." In this way an individual progressively becomes the universal *adhar*.... Individual aspiration is essential, as is the enlargement of the self through love and service for the collective good.

A high point of our tours has been Ayodhya, sacred to the name of Sri Rama and associated with one of the mighty movements of the Spirit in history. Vedanti Rampadarth Dasji, a *mahant* in whose ashram we were privileged to stay, has recently been chosen President of the Bharat Sadhu Samaj. The Secretary of this society, Kakkiji Maharaj, is also a *mahant* of Ayodhya. Both of them intend to visit the Ashram this winter. They and several leading pandits of Ayodhya are supporting both the creation of a Sri Aurobindo Centre there and the New World Union.

We see a sign of spiritual awakening in the meetings we had in this sacred town. The Spirit's pressure was potently felt, so that very few left even when the time came for *Arati* (special ceremony) in their own temples—an unprecedented thing, we were told.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, when it seemed that he would not be in Delhi at the time of our visit, had written : "The world is so rent with fear and hatred and conflict that it is difficult to do anything on a big, cooperative scale till that fear is removed and a spirit of cooperation takes its place.... All over the world there is this urge, which you have yourself felt, for some kind of world unity or union. I welcome this urge."

We had looked forward with prayerful anticipation to our visit to Kashmir. Because of the floods cutting off the heavenly vale, we flew from Pathankot to Srinagar. There we had a stimulating hour and a half with Yuvaraj Karan Singh. The youngest of the governors of Indian states, his approach to public service is indicated by his present Ph.D. thesis on "Sri Aurobindo's Political Philosophy" which he discussed with us. He told us that recently in Moscow he met the materialist philosophers and found that they were not aware of the writings of "modern Indian thinkers like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo." He said they were intrigued by the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, so far as he was able to expound it, and upon his return he has had a set of his works sent to them.

Our twelve hours with Acharya Vinoba Bhave and his party in Kashmir we shall long remember. With him were his aide, Sri Nabakrishna Choudhury, former Chief Minister of Orissa, and others. Our first sitting with Vinobaji found him reading carefully through our literature. When he came to our clear distinction between the intellectual, the moral and the religious, on the one hand, and the spiritual on the other, he read out the passage to those assembled and declared, "I entirely agree with this." Of the moral he said, "It is the sphere of the *relative*. Hamlet-like, it always debates, 'To do or not to do ; that is the question.'..." "The intellect," he observed, "lacks the experience which the psychic being has accumulated."

Ever since his historic talk a year ago on "The Future of Satyagraha"

## THE GROWTH OF THE NEW WORLD UNION

(quoted at length in our "More Light on the New World Union") Vinobaji has been stressing the necessity of our discovering and canalising the spiritual "Force that can meet and stand up to the force of the atom," if humanity is to survive. According to members of his party, and reports of his Bhoodan talks, he frequently points to Sri Aurobindo's explorations and findings in the field of the Supramental Light and Force as the only adequate solution. When we said to Vinobaji that he is clearly calling Gandhians to a new frontier, he replied, "Yes, very important."

The Acharya feels that the emphasis of NWU on spiritual realities, as distinct from religion, will appeal and be helpful to the people of all lands. He says he is "very hopeful" of this movement's usefulness in building a bridge across the Cold War chasm.

Vinobaji bade us have the closest cooperation with Sarva Seva Sangh which looks to him for guidance, and with other kindred movements. We began this collaboration during our third tour, as a result of talks with Sangh leaders in the Banaras headquarters of their movement, and recently we enjoyed a fortnight of fellowship and exploratory talks with their Assistant Secretary, Sri Krishna Raj Mehta, when he visited this Ashram. Then during the tour just ended we conferred with Sri Shankar Rao Deo, formerly General Secretary of the Congress and with Krishna Raj at the "Sadhana Kendra" Ashram which Vinobaji and their sense of need had inspired them to open in Banaras. These Sangh leaders requested us of the New World Union to supply them with the literature best suited to spiritual awakening and spiritual growth, and they will distribute this literature to their workers in every district of India, and provide further sadhana help in the Sadhana Kendra or elsewhere to the individual workers who respond earnestly.

*(To be continued)*

JAY SMITH

## SHUNASHEPA'S STORY IN THE "AITAREYA BRAHMANA" AND ITS SYMBOLISM IN THE "RIGVEDA"

(Continued from the October Issue)

WE shall first examine the text of the Brahmana. Harischandra prays to Varuna, "May a son be born to me, with him as an offering I will worship Varuna, *tena yaja varuṇam.*" The root *yaj* means to worship, to sacrifice. So "*tena yajā varuṇam*" may mean "I will sacrifice him to Varuna as a victim to be killed in the sacrifice"; or, since *tena* is in Instrumental case, it may more truly mean "I will worship Varuna with him as an offering". This does not mean that the person will inevitably be killed; it can mean that his life will be completely dedicated to the worship of Varuna. By Harischandra's promise, neither he nor Varuna ever meant that as soon as Rohita was born he should be killed: this is borne out by the fact that though Varuna reminds him several times of his promise he did not compel him to get his son killed as a victim in the sacrifice. What is shown is only a practice amongst kings and other families of the Aryan community that gods were prayed to for children with the promise that the children would be made to dedicate their lives to the worship of the gods. And generally the children kept the promises of their parents and gladly dedicated their lives to the worship of the gods. Anyhow, when Rohita was informed by his father of his promise he promptly refused to abide by it, went to the forest and brought Shunashepa to take his place in the worship of Varuna who gladly accepted and even preferred the substitute. At that time a Rajasuya sacrifice was being performed by the king and it was Varuna who suggested that the animal victim might be replaced by Shunashepa. Varuna being a god knew that if Shunashepa's sincerity were tested now he would come out successful in the test and then he would be able to completely dedicate his life to the god. This suggestion was put to the Rishis who were priests and to Shunashepa and his father and all of them agreed to the test. It may be asked why this part of the story has not been mentioned in the Brahmana. We hear in the Ramayana that Sita's chastity was tested by asking her to enter Fire and she came out unhurt: everything is mentioned there. So why was this not mentioned here? Perhaps to the people of the Brahmanic age it was not necessary to mention it. Again in the Non-Aryan communities in the Rigvedic and the Brahmanic days there may have been the practice of killing

men in sacrifices. We know that there is that practice amongst some men even today. So it is not improbable that in uncivilised communities then there was such a practice. To show the greatness of the gods to this class of people this fact of the story might not have been told in the Brahmana. There can be no doubt that Shunashepa and his father, as members of the Angirasa clan would have understood all this and so they have accepted such a test and specially because they had promised to Rohita that Shunashepa would serve as an offering in the worship to Varuna.

Now we shall examine Shunashepa's hymns in the Rigveda to see if there are any references in them to this occurrence.

R.V.1-24-1 :—*Kasya nūnam katamasyāmṛtānām manāmahe cāru devasya nāma;*—*ko no mahyā aditaye punardāt pītarām ca dṛśeyam mātaram ca.*

Meaning :—On the beautiful name of which god, amongst the Immortals, shall we meditate ? Who will deliver us again to the great Infinite Mother, that I may see Father and Mother?

Commentary :—It is said in the Brahmana that when Shunashepa saw the preparations for killing him, he resolved to surrender himself to the gods and began his prayer with this verse which along with other verses have become Mantras. In the Veda, Father and Mother always mean either Heaven and Earth, or Soul and Nature. So the meaning of this verse fully agrees both with the external meaning of the occurrence and the internal meaning of Shunashepa's inner consciousness to live the life of Father Heaven on the Mother Earth. Aditi is the indivisible Mother of the gods and the Creatress of worlds and their beings.

R.V. 1-24-2 :—*Agnervayam prathamasyāmṛtānām manāmahe cāru devasya nāma ;*—*sa no mahyā aditaye punardāt pītarām ca dṛśeyam mātaram ca.*

Meaning :—We will meditate upon the beautiful name of Fire (God-Will), the first amongst Immortals ; he will deliver us to the great Infinite Mother that I may see Father and Mother.

Commentary :—This Mantra also agrees with the circumstances of the occurrence, as narrated by the Brahmana. Fire, God-Will, the Will of the Supreme Divine, the Will to be and to create all the aspects of manifestation is itself first amongst the gods ; he the leader of gods is to be worshipped by Shunashepa ; all this is in agreement with the Vedic cult that he was practising.

R.V. 1-24-3 :—*Abhi tvā deva savitarīsānam vāryāṇām;*—*sadāvan bhāga-mīmahe.*

Meaning :—O Divine ever-protecting Creator ! we seek thee, the lord of all that is desirable for the share of divine enjoyment. .

Commentary :—In the Rigveda Varuna, Mitra, Bhaga and Aryaman are

four gods who are emanations from the Sun-God Savitri. Of them Sri Aurobindo says :

“Four great deities constantly appear in the Veda as closely allied in their nature and in their action, Varuna, Mitra, Bhaga, Aryaman...,”

“These four deities are, according to Sayana, solar powers, Varuna negatively as lord of the night, Mitra positively as lord of the day, Bhaga and Aryaman as names of the Sun. We need not attach much importance to these particular identifications, but it is certain that a solar character attaches to all the four. In them that peculiar feature of the Vedic gods, their essential oneness even in the play of their different personalities and functions, comes prominently to light. Not only are the four closely associated among themselves, but they seem to partake of each other’s nature and attributes, and all are evidently emanations of Surya Savitri, the divine being in his creative and illuminative solar form.

“Surya Savitri is the Creator. According to the Truth of things, in the terms of the *R̥tam*, the worlds are brought forth from the divine consciousness, from Aditi, goddess of infinite being, mother of the gods, the indivisible consciousness, the Light that cannot be impaired imaged by the mystic Cow that cannot be slain.” (*On the Veda*, page 342, 343.)

Shunashepa, in this verse, praises Surya Savitri, the Creator, for a share in the divine enjoyment of Bhaga, an emanation of Surya Savitri.

R.V. 1-24-4 :—*Yaściddh ta itthā bhagaḥ śasamānaḥ purā nidaḥ.  
adveṣaḥ hastayoḥ dadhe.*

Anvaya :—*Hi*=since; *cit yaḥ*=even he who is; *itthā*=truly; *te bhagaḥ*=thy Bhaga; *śasamānaḥ*=praiseworthy; *adveṣaḥ purā*=formerly unhating; *dadhe*=has placed (me); *nidaḥ hastayoḥ*=in the two hands of the binder.

Meaning :—Since he who is truly thy Bhaga, the God of Enjoyment, who is praiseworthy and formerly unhating has placed me in the hands of the binder.

Meaning by Sayana and Wilson :—(We ask for) that wealth (Bhaga) which has been retained in your hands and as such praised against every enemy and reproach.

Commentary :—The meaning I give is in complete accordance with Vedic etymology and grammar, Vedic Symbolism and Vedic Doctrine; the meaning of this Mantra indicates that while he wanted divine enjoyment of Bhaga, Bhaga has placed him in the hands of the binder, Harischandra.

The particles like “*cid*” and “*hi*” are not “*pada puranas*” as some grammarians think. They have their full significance in the Veda; Sri Aurobindo

has given the meanings which this verse gives to them, in most texts that he has translated. The Mysore edition of the Rigveda which follows Sayana and Wilson says it is not able to fix the meaning of "*purā nidah*". Some translators give it the meaning "beyond reproach". "*Pura*" means "formerly or in front"; it is not known if "*purā*" has got the meaning "beyond" anywhere in Sruti; it is only when we know this that this meaning can be accepted.

R.V. 1-24-5 :—*Bhaga-bhaktasya te vayam ut aśema tava avasā ;  
mūrdhānam rāya ārabhe.*

Meaning :—May we, who are of thee, obtain by thy help the enjoyment of Bhaga, for grasping the best of felicity.

Commentary :—From the viewpoint of the external meaning, here is an appeal to the Creator, Savitri, that in spite of his being placed in the hands of the binder, he may with the help of the Creator have the divine enjoyment of Bhaga.

The next ten verses of the Sukta are praises to the God Varuna. What may be considered as references to this occurrence or story alone are given below from the ten verses of this Sukta.

R.V. 1-24-9 :—*Asmat enaḥ mumugdhi*=release us from the sin.

R.V. 1-24-12 :—*Saḥ rājā varuṇaḥ mumoktu asmān*=may he the King Varuna release us.

R.V. 1-24-11 :—*Mā naḥ āyuh pra mosiḥ*=do not steal our life.

R.V. 1-24-13 :—*Śunah-śepo hyahvagr̥bītastrīṣvādītyam drupadeṣu bad-  
dhaḥ :—avanam rājā varuṇaḥ saṣṭjyādvīdvān adabdho, vimumoktu pāśān*

R.V. 1-24-13 :—Meaning :—Shunashepa, who is seized and bound thrice to the sacrificial post has called to the son of Aditi ; may he, the wise and unassailable Varuna, release him and liberate him from the bonds.

R.V. 1-24-14 :—*Ava te helo varuṇa namobhiava yajñebhirīmahe havvibhiḥ :  
kśayanasmabhyamasura pracetā rājānnenāmsi śīsrathaḥ kṛtāni.*

Meaning :—O Varuna, we bring down thy wrath by obeisance, sacrifices and offerings ; O wise and mighty king, for our sake slacken the sinful acts.

R.V. 1-24-15 :—*Uduttamam varuṇa pāśanasmadvādhamam vi madhyamam  
śrathāya :—athā vayamādītya vrate tava anāgasah aditaye syāma.*

Meaning :—O Varuna, take up from us the higher (mental) bonds ; take down the lower (physical) bonds and remove the middle (vital) bonds ; O son of Aditi, may we remain sinless in thy works before the infinite Mother.

It is now left to the reader to draw conclusions whether what Sri Aurobindo has said about the symbol is true or not. For some amongst mankind certain ideals of life become facts of manifestation and true only on the plane of spiritual consciousness ; to some they become manifest and true on the mental plane of consciousness, and to a few they become facts of manifestation on the vital and even on the physical planes of consciousness.



To Christ, the ideal of universal love and unity of all mankind was a fact not only of spiritual experience but also of mental and vital experience. It became a fact of physical experience only when he allowed himself to be crucified on the Cross. According to the history of Christianity it became a physical fact of realisation in the people of Europe when ten millions of Christ's devotees through a period of three hundred years allowed themselves to be killed for the spreading of Christ's religion and establishing it in Pagan Europe.

The Cross of Christ's crucifixion is a symbol of God's love for man amidst man's ignorance of God and his hatred of his human neighbour. It is this ignorance and this hatred that made man crucify Christ, the God-Man.

If the story of Shunashepa in the Brahmana is physically true may we not say then that the practice which may have been in vogue either of an animal or animal-man being killed at the altar of physical sacrifice to Life-Gods by Non-Aryan communities is yet used by the Rishi the God-Man as a symbol to offer the pure mental and religious man on the altar of the Ego-Sacrifice of man to the spiritual Gods ? Can it not be said of Shunashepa that even if the physical facts of his bondage were true it is truer still of his having been released from all bondage physical, vital and mental through the grace of the Vedic gods ? Shunashepa's prayer to the gods through his seven Suktas of one hundred and seven Mantras is a symbol of the achievement of the particular type of spiritual victory which he achieved for himself through them on account of an incident that surrounded his prayer and through which he also enabled others to achieve that particular type of spiritual victory. There are methods of discipline in his prayer of the seven Suktas which are spiritual for the spiritual aspirant, psychological for the aspirant of psychological perfection and ritualistic for the desirer of physical gains on the physical plane. These disciplines he himself underwent and made them and their results available to man. One can know these disciplines if one approaches the Veda through Sri Aurobindo's methods of Vedic doctrine, Vedic symbolism, Vedic grammar and Vedic philology, all of which are available in his writings.

*(To be continued)*

NARAYANA C. REDDY

# Students' Section

## TALKS ON POETRY

*(These Talks were given to a group of students starting their University life. They have been prepared for publication from notes and memory, except in the few places where they have been expanded a little. Here and there the material is slightly rearranged in the interest of unity of theme. As far as possible the actual turns of phrase used in the Class have been recovered, and, at the request of students, even the digressions have been preserved. The Talks make, in this form, somewhat unconventional pieces, but the aim has been to retain not only their touch of literature and serious thought but also their touch of life and laughter.)*

### TALK TEN

LAST time we caught hold of true Poetic Diction with the help of Macbeth's seas-incarnadining hand and had also an appreciative look at genuine Poetic Diction through Keats's magic casements. Today we shall make a few more quotations. No, I shall not start commenting on them in detail—banish that wrinkle of anxiety from your brows. After the magic casements of Keats, Sri Aurobindo's gate of dreams will be the proper thing to show you first. The hour is of dawn-break, when the mind hovers as if on a meeting-point of the physical world and some wonderful Beyond whose secret seems to shine upon us for a while till common day glares out again. Sri Aurobindo describes the slow tentative process of light taking a revelatory shape in the dim sky :

A wandering hand of pale enchanted light  
That moved along a fading moment's brink  
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge  
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.

The Poetic Diction here unerringly communicates the reality of a phenomenon at once spiritual and physical—a movement of fire and ether, which makes all the more intense the strange and the supreme by catching up from the

familiarities of earth-life the figures of hand and hinge and gate. No other kind of language would have done the work so well.

Before moving to the dawn-break Sri Aurobindo dwells upon the depths of the darkness. One phrase from the opening lines of the long account of those depths I shall cite as authentic Poetic Diction in another style. But I shall lead on to his phrase of mystical grandeur by way of some lines from other poets turning your eyes to the nocturnal sky with a more naturalistic and less supernatural touch, though with a grandeur poetically as memorable. Here is a poet named Beddoes speaking :

Crescented night and amethystine stars.

Just take in the picture for a moment. The crescent moon has grown, through the bold conversion of a noun into an adjective by a past-participial termination, a dynamic decoration of the darkness, a decoration which is not added to the darkness but brought forth by it as if from its own self: the night and the crescent are one fused presence. Also, the starlight is endowed with a precious magnitude by being not compared with the violet-hued pieces of quartz known as amethysts but packed with the very quality of these valuable stones by means of a majestic adjective. I may add that the adjective functions appropriately by its majesty : a short form like "amethyst" instead of "amethystine" would not have reflected in its metaphorical work the high nature of starry existence. How poor, though not quite unpoetic, would the line have been if Beddoes had not kindled up to an imaginative synthesis and a sensitive insight but written :

Night with her crescent and the stars like amethysts

Night in another mood, equally regal, appears in a sonnet-close of William Watson :

...and over me  
The everlasting taciturnity,  
The august, inhospitable, inhuman night  
Glittering magnificently unperturbed.

That is a high-water mark of power and bears a semi-mystical suggestion. The word "taciturnity" means "reserve in speech", "aversion to communication"—it derives from the Latin "taciturnus" which again comes from "tacitus" in the same language. "Tacitus" means "silent". A famous Roman

historian has the name Tacitus—a writer of forceful brevity that, by not uttering everything, filled a few words with penetrating substance. Hear the phrase in which he castigated Roman imperialists : “Solitudinem faciunt et pacem appellant”—“they make a solitude and call it peace.” It was bold indeed of Tacitus to show up as destructive pretentiousness the ambitions of generals who were his own countrymen and contemporaries. The brevity of Tacitus had very often a bite in it.

The proverb goes that a barking dog seldom bites. Tacitus may be termed, because of his sharp yet controlled expression, a biting dog who never barked. Don't think there is any insult in being termed a dog. The term is not exactly a bit of true Poetic Diction, but if a certain beautiful wild flower growing in hedges can be called the Dog-rose and the brightest star in the sky, namely Sirius, can be called the Dog-star, surely Tacitus would not mind my doggy description of him—particularly as it is not quite far from his own kind of style. Besides, I am an incurable lover of the tail-wagging species, as an eighteenth-century practitioner of false Poetic Diction would have put it, and so my phrase is intended to be a tremendous compliment. I believe that if the Supramental fulfilment were not in store for humanity what T. Earle Welby has said would be the last word possible in man's favour : “The only incontrovertible argument for the continuation of the human race is that a world without men would be intolerable to dogs.” And let us not forget that even the Supermental destiny which Sri Aurobindo holds out for us can be felt by us as a possibility if our imagination expresses the gripping Grace of God in a language reminiscent of the dog-world : that gripping Grace without which none can hope to be even within ten thousand miles of the Supermind can best be designated, after the poet Francis Thompson, as the Hound of Heaven, a Power which is all the time after us with a hound's tenacity in order to save us in spite of ourselves ! More prosaically but still pointedly we may declare that we shall reach the Supermind because of being dogged by divinity. And what is wrong with associating divinity itself with a doggy movement ? Where we read “Dog” an Arab or a Persian who reads not from left to right but from right to left would say “God”. More philosophically we may crystallise the whole involutory and evolutionary process by the formula : “A dog is really a god seen from the other end.” You see how easily we can plunge into mystical thought if we possess a dogged mind and can push into mysticism anyhow.

And now that we are back to where we started from after quoting Watson's “everlasting taciturnity” we may appositely finish our examples of true Poetic Diction with Sri Aurobindo's visionary penetration of the night's darkest phase :

## MOTHER INDIA

Almost one felt opaque, impenetrable,  
In the sombre silence of her eyeless muse  
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite.

The last line is a masterpiece not only of Poetic Diction but also of spiritual poetry, a *Mantra* in the profoundest sense, words born from the very reality of the Supreme rather than found by the human intelligence about a superhuman condition.

Apropos of a special diction in poetry I may sound a note of warning. One should never go in for a rich attractive word without getting down to its meaning. One must never rest with guess-work from certain surface suggestions. There is the story of a budding poet who once read the word "carminative" on a bottle of cinnamon. He was very much taken up with the beauty of the word and saw in it affinities to words like "carmine" and the Latin word "carmen" which connotes "song". He wrote a love-poem and sent it to his girl-friend with one line reading :

My passion carminative as wine.

The lucky lady was non-plussed by the new word and consulted her dictionary. Imagine her surprise and horror when she read that "carminative" means "tending to reduce windiness in the bowels" !

During my school-days I wrote an essay in verse on a Library and wanted to speak of the heaps and heaps of books there on diverse subjects. But I looked out for somewhat uncommon words for my idea. My dictionary gave me "mound" for a heap and I went from "mound" to other words and produced the couplet :

O there were mounds of metaphysical mystery  
And poetry-piles and haemorrhoids of history !

I felt I had achieved the grand style, especially with the last phrase. I showed my work to my father who happened to be a doctor. He burst into devastating laughter and made me sink into the ground for shame by informing me that haemorrhoids were small bleeding boils so placed in the body that it would be difficult for one to sit down comfortably....It was the word "pile" with a sense other than "mound" that had made an utter fool of me. When I found "haemorrhoid" for "pile" I should have looked up that impressive polysyllable in my dictionary.

Talking of my essay on a Library I am reminded of two notices put up in a South-Indian library. One ran : "Loose dogs not allowed." The phrase

“loose dog”, which was intended literally, suggests half-jocularly half-contemptuously a person of lax morality. The second notice, somewhat in contradiction to the first, said : “Only low conversation permitted.” Evidently what was intended was a prohibition of loud talk, but in English “low conversation” signifies talk which is coarse or vulgar, the likely conversation of a loose dog !

The word “carminative” recalls an amusing incident between an Indian and an Englishman. It may perhaps be considered as touched just a little by “low conversation”, though really it is not since what it directly refers to is something quite respectable. To be on the safe side, let me request the ladies here to shut their ears for a moment, at least to pretend to do so. Well, the Indian and the Englishman, after getting to be friends, decided to visit each other’s houses. The Englishman went to the Indian’s. The Indian took him round, showing all the quarters of the place. From the front they went to the rear. There the Englishman found all the windows shut. Seeing the question on his face, the Indian smiled and said : “Sir, my back-side is very windy. How is yours ?” You can imagine the effect on the sedate Englishman.

We Indians have to be wary of the traps of English idiom. Thus, outside a chemist’s shop in Bombay, you will read : “We dispense with accuracy.” “To dispense” means “to make up and give out medicines,” but “to dispense with” means “to do without”. A chemist whose job it is to provide you with medicines according to a doctor’s prescription would be a terrible danger if he neglected accuracy. Sometimes mistakes occur by a wrong combination of words in a foreign language : two words that are clearly known by themselves may constitute a howler when wrongly combined. In the days when I was in charge of the Ashram’s furniture department—yes, strange as it may seem, I had to furnish rooms with tables and chairs and beds instead of sitting quietly in my own and writing poetry—in those days I once got a chit from a European but non-English resident : “Will you please send four wooden blocks to understand my table ?” I wrote back : “Certainly—since luckily you haven’t asked for four blockheads.” Sometimes it is the pronunciation that plays havoc. When Pavitra was here in the early days he used to pronounce English in a Frenchier way than now. His “r” was very French indeed. The French “r” is from the throat and to a non-French ear it may be almost inaudible. Now Pavitra said very often to a Bengali sadhaka who had become friendly with him : “I am a brother to you all.” The friend always heard, “I am a bother to you all”. And naturally he said with emphatic politeness, “Oh no, no ! ” and Pavitra would feel such an outcast on being refused to be considered a brother. He thought the Indians so very peculiar. You will find this story told by Sri Aurobindo in his correspondence with Nirodbaran.

The mispronouncing or mishearing of words in other languages has sometimes a farcical effect. The first Indian baronet was a Parsi, a man named Jamshedjee Cursetjee Jeejeebhoy. When he went to England he was invited by Queen Victoria to a party. A grandly attired butler stood at the door of the reception hall and announced the names of the visitors as they came. When the Parsi baronet arrived, the butler inquired his name. He got the answer : "Jamshedjee Cursetjee Jeejeebhoy." The butler was a little puzzled but he kept his aplomb and, looking at the Queen, announced in a loud voice : "Damn says he. Curse says he. She's a boy."

Certain mannerisms are also to be avoided. We get into the nervous habit of inserting "You see" or "You know" into our sentences every now and then. A lecturer could very well waste ten minutes out of his fifty by "you see"-ing and "You know"-ing. Another mannerism is "what's called". I have heard a great Bengali scholar in philosophy, now dead, use it with outrageous results. He once visited the Ashram and lectured on the progress of Indian thought in the world. And this is one of the sentences with which he developed his subject : "Then what's called Vivekananda sailed away and after many what's called hardships reached Chicago and there at the Parliaments of Religions he at last what's called appeared." I simply had to get up and what's called run away in order to avoid an explosion of laughter.

I have quoted this learned professor as using the word "hardships". He used it correctly though comically, but I had at College a Science teacher who, knowing that a difficulty is a hardship, would ask about the text which we were studying and in which several points were often hard to grasp : "Have you any hardships ?" Another misuse of the language, rather a creative one this time, was by a Japanese Consul who visited the British Consul without an appointment. His wife had done the same the day before. This Japanese had always imagined the word "encroach" to be "hencroach". So with the intention of being logically correct in English he bowed and said : "Sir, yesterday you were kind enough to let my wife hencroach upon your time. May I today be allowed to cockroach upon it ?".

Often a foreign word casts a spell on us. The name of a villainous character in a famous Russian novel is Raskolnikov. It has all sorts of sinister suggestions for an English ear. But to a Russian it is just what to an Englishman would be a name like Higginbottom. A Russian once remarked that to him the most musical word in the English language was "coal-scuttle", which stands for a pail to carry coals in. All the more if we do not know a language well we fall under the spell of certain sounds. That reminds me in general of the magical effects of incomprehensible words. A name, in ancient thought, was a clue to the nature of a thing. In the Atharva Veda we find a Rishi saying : "O fever, I

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know thy name. Thou shalt not escape me." The practice of modern doctors, in order to create impressive authority for themselves, is to employ names not as revealers of the secrets of diseases but as dumbfounders of the diseased persons visiting them. They substitute a mysterious term for a commonplace one which all their patients understand. When the mysterious term is employed the patient experiences great relief as if he felt the doctor knew the occult evil causing the suffering and therefore possessed the power to deal with it. In a scene in a play of Molière's we find this practice illustrated :

*Patient* : I suffer with my head, Doctor.

*Doctor* : Oh I know. That's Cephalalgia.

*Patient* : My digestion is also bad.

*Doctor* : Don't worry at all. I know what it is. It's Dyspepsia.

Now Cephalalgia means Headache, and Dyspepsia means Indigestion. The doctor, by merely employing Greek terms, brought instant confidence to the patient. By the way, if I did not know English and went only by my ear I should almost declare the most musical English word to be Dyspepsia and I would imagine it to be the name of a flower !

We have also to guard against certain peculiarities in the saying of names in a foreign language. Words starting with "pneum" do not sound their "p". "A-s-th-m-a" is better pronounced "azma" or "asma" than "asthma". Some English proper names are a devil of a problem. Thus what is written as Marjoriebanks is pronounced Marshbanks. What is written as Cholmondeley is pronounced Chumly. Once the well-known journalist Horatio Bottomley went to interview Lord Cholmondeley. Not being intimate with aristocratic nomenclature he asked the butler whether Lord Chol-mon-de-ley would be good enough to give him a few minutes. The butler politely but with a superior air said, "I shall ask Lord Chumly about it. What name shall I give him as yours, Sir ?" Horatio Bottomley handed his visiting card to the butler, and when the latter was looking at the word "Bottomley" the journalist said with great *hauteur* : "Please tell Lord Chumly that Mr. Bumly has come to see him."

## TALK ELEVEN

I find on my table two books that look like the collections of my own poems. Who has placed them there ? Oh, the lady on the last bench ? Well, what am I supposed to do with my own books ? Do you want me to read some poems out of them ? I don't know whether I can do so—but we shall see. All depends on whether I can show modesty convincingly enough and then overcome it entirely for your sake !



This morning I must be very very very serious to balance the light-heartedness of last time. I must be so long-faced that I can't even say, "Good morning." But if I said "Bad morning" you'd again start laughing. So I'll just keep a solemn countenance and mournfully sigh out the morning's goodness. But, really speaking, laughter is the most natural accompaniment of study in a Poetry Class. No doubt, Arnold has said that great poetry carries a high seriousness with it. But poetry's high seriousness has behind it a creative Ananda. Poetry, says Sri Aurobindo, repeats in its own way and on a small scale the original universal Delight with which the Supreme Soul created all things and set the cosmic rhythms going. Now, it should be very natural for Ananda both to smile and to laugh. Of course there can be a quiet or dumb happiness—a happiness which is ineffable. And poetry, with its burden of unspoken magnitudes, has to do with an ineffable bliss, but its work is to convey that bliss by means of wonderful speech just as the Supreme Soul is believed to have set the World-Word vibrating. And if sound is permitted—nay, demanded—in connection with the spiritual Ananda that is at the heart of poetry, a legitimacy is given to express this Ananda by laughter also while we are dealing with the work of poets. Even the Gods are said to laugh—they who are the masters of the Spirit's Delight. Kalidasa characterises the whiteness of Mount Kailasa as the eternal laughter of a God. And Homer's Gods are constantly breaking into laughter over the follies of men. Aeschylus, one of the greatest of the Greek poets, saw Neptune laughing in that immortal line :

The innumerable laughter of the waves.

Sri Aurobindo's vision of the Kingdom of God does not banish laughter, though it agrees with the Christian notion that in Heaven there is no giving or taking in marriage. Perhaps it is particularly the absence of marriage in Heaven that makes laughter possible there—marriage is a pretty serious affair. Sri Aurobindo remarks too that humour is the salt of life. Well, it is at least one of the salts. There are many kinds—bathing salts, smelling salts, somersaults. I suppose humour should be considered somersaulty !

Well, let its somersault land us back into our subject : Poetic Diction. Poetic Diction is not to be avoided like the plague, but aspirants to poetry should be careful about it just as much as about Proselike Diction. Otherwise they will perpetrate poems like the one that was sent to an editor, bearing the title : *Why do I Live ?* The editor replied under the title : "Because you sent your poem from a safe distance and did not personally hand it to me." I don't know whether this particular poet enjoyed the joke at his expense. But poets, as a rule, are not dull fellows. They have a fund of humour which

comes out at times at the most odd moments. Don't you know what Campbell once did ? He took his poem on the Battle of Hohenlinden to a publisher. Its first stanza runs :

On Linden when the sun was low  
All bloodless lay the untrodden snow  
And dark as Winter was the flow  
Of Iser rolling rapidly.

After handing the piece to his friend, Campbell whose head was still humming with poetry stepped out to the stairs but missed his footing and went tumbling down. His friend rushed to the landing and asked : "What's happening ?" Campbell shouted back in the midst of his tumble : "I, sir, rolling rapidly."

The line so wittily used by Campbell is not a piece of marked Poetic Diction. But it is a well-turned thing. And even very good lines can be written without Poetic Diction and with words of the most simple and ordinary character. We have already illustrated how even words like "shop" and "business" and "digestion" can be rendered most effectively poetic. But the majority of such miracles depend on a context of marked Poetic Diction, charming or dynamic. What I want to give you now are lines of a Proselike Diction without being prosaic, lines observing too an almost prose-order in the run of their words and yet achieving poetic distinction because of a subtle power of rhythm and intensity of form which convey an emotion or an idea in a manner beyond prose. There is the line Shakespeare has put into Hamlet's mouth—

To be or not to be, that is the question—

perhaps the most famous question asked in all poetry. There is also the query of Shakespeare's Lear, which we have already quoted :

Why should a horse, a dog, a rat have life  
And thou no breath at all ?

There is Donne's impatient protest to his girl-friend:

For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love.

There is Sri Aurobindo's line :

All our earth starts in mud and ends with sky.

We have cited Beddoes in a moment of high polysyllabic Poetic Diction. Here he is in a moment of ordinary speech, completely monosyllabic which yet is poignant poetry :

I shall see him  
No more. All hell is made of these two words.

The poetic form which brings the two words concerned just at the start of the line contributes to the penetrating effect of this proselike poetry.

I have referred to a subtle power of rhythm and intensity of form as differentiating such poetry from prose. Rhythm and form can be very open and evident at times and produce a poetry of marvellous word-music. This word-music is often produced with the help of Poetic Diction. But it does not necessarily depend on it. Let me tell you some lines with a distinct musical effect. Herrick has one on music itself :

Melting melodious words to lutes of amber.

The musicality of Milton's

And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay

is undeniable. Sri Aurobindo's

O my sweet flower,  
Art thou too whelmed in this fierce wailing flood ?

has a remarkable music, at once relentless and mournful in its mood. The hard consonants—the *t*'s and *d*'s—communicate a sense of relentless doom, while the *m* in "whelmed", pressed between two other consonants and involving a shutting of the lips, suggests the flood's dense massive flow as well as its absorptive power. There are other effects too, but perhaps the arrangement of the vowels, long or short, is the principal factor in the musicality of the rhythm. Their arrangement, in combination with the right kind of consonants, is also responsible for Shakespeare's enchantment of the ear in that verse on Autumnal trees :

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

The mellifluousness of the birds is brought by the repeated trill of the *r* and it deepens in the mind the pathos of the absence which is spoken of and which

is rhythmically suggested by the moan of the *n* in “ruined” and “sang”. The first spondee and the last spondee—“Bare ru...” and “birds sang”—play with their heavy insistence the part of beginning and completing the sense of an unendurable burden of sadness. About the melody of birds there is another phrase equally musical—it is Keats’s—where the poet speaks of their presence and not their absence :

And hearken to the birds’ love-learnèd song  
The dewy leaves among.

The words “bare” and “ruin” which are so effective in Shakespeare’s line recur in one of Milton’s, which has led a critic to aver that it is the most musical in the English language :

To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.

Nothing of paramount importance, though “Athenian” has considerable associations in the European mind, seems said here. What confers poetic immortality on the line is its pattern of assonances and long vowels. There is no Poetic Diction present, unless we count the inversion “ruin bare” to be constituting it. Nor is Poetic Diction, except again by one inversion, at play in the second of the following two verses of Milton’s —

And saw the Ravens with their horny beaks  
Food to Elijah bringing, Even and Morn —

yet this line is a source of endless pleasure to the ear by its ringing of bells. In itself—that is, if we omit the work of the Ravens—it tells of an extremely commonplace act. But the rhythm breathes magic into it.

We shall pause a little. Since one of you has taken all the trouble to bring my books of poems here, I should not leave them quite unopened. What poem would you like me to read ? *Triumph is All* ? Very well. It is the poet’s Credo, his confession of faith. People believe in the Divine on the strength of the happiness they get or the beauty they see around, but that would be to depend on conditions and, when those conditions on which they have reared their confidence are shaken or removed, what happens ?... This poet is an absolutist: he makes his position independent of this or that reason. He will feel and love and declare the Divine Presence in joy and sorrow, light and shadow, youth and old age, life and death. Now listen :

MOTHER INDIA

I build Thee not on golden dreams  
Nor on the wide world's winsomeness :  
Deeper than all I set my love —  
A faith that is foundationless !

Not only where thy silver steps  
Twinkle a night of nenuphars,  
But everywhere I see Thy heaven :  
I love the night between the stars.

O mine the smiling power to feel  
A secret sun with blinded eyes,  
And through a dreaming worship bear  
As benediction wintry skies.

For ever in my heart I hear  
A time-beat of eternal bliss.  
White Omnipresence ! where is fear ?  
The mouth of hell can be thy kiss.

The whole world is my resting-place :  
Thy beauty is my motherland :  
Sweet enemies are wounds of age—  
My body breaks but by Thy hand.

Triumph is all—as though beneath  
An unseen flag of rapture's red  
A beating of great drums went on  
With every giant drummer dead !

I shall say a few explanatory words, especially about the last stanza which may seem a little bewildering. In the first stanza there is "a faith that is foundationless" : this may appear disparaging to the faith, but really it strikes home by an extreme statement the absoluteness of the faith, its disdain of being erected on anything that may be regarded as its justification, its foundation : in other words, its *raison d'être* is in itself. But being "foundationless" is not to be without depth : rather, all foundations are too shallow. In the second stanza we have two lines of Poetic Diction—the word "nenuphars" being the most notable instance of it. This word means "water-lilies". The Divine's luminous steps are pictured as kindling in the depths of the night the stars looking like

water-lilies in a dark pool. The result—"a night of nenuphars"—is to be contrasted to "the night between the stars", the sheer darkness which too the poet visions as the heaven of the Divine. The verse,

I love the night between the stars

is a favourite of mine—just as it is of a friend who remarks that it has struck on an originality of substance brought out movingly in simple and common words uncommonly combined to suit that substance without yet losing straightforwardness. In the third stanza we get a hint of what this night really is. An inner eye that needs no proof of the Divine is suggested : a happy dreaming worship that can feel the Divine's splendour although the outer sight is lost in total darkness. Further, the arch of the sky is seen as a curved palm held over the head and even the gloomy sky of winter is felt by the poet-dreamer's worshipping face as if he were receiving a blessing under that curved palm. The fourth stanza has a poetic pun in "time-beat" : on the one hand eternity and time are juxtaposed and the bliss of the former is said to be experienced in the movements of the latter—on the other hand music has always a "time", a certain "tempo", and since here something is heard in the heart the term is apposite to the idea that eternal bliss has grown the very sound of the heart. The sense of eternity-in-time links up with the "White Omnipresence" and the banishment of all fear, while the sense of eternal bliss in the heart connects with the feeling of the kiss of the Divine Love in even the crudest, cruellest and most calamitous touch of experience. I may mention for your interest that a businessman almost jumped up with pleasure on reading :

White Omnipresence ! where is fear ?  
The mouth of hell can be thy kiss.

No doubt, he is an Aurobindonian, but such a strong response to poetry I had never expected him to give. Maybe his business was in a terrible slump and he had got into nasty holes and these lines cut across his depression, lighting up the fact that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were always there to help if one could fill one's mind and heart with aspiration for their Grace. Stanza five applies the idea of omnipresence concretely to the world we live in : peace and security can be felt in every place, every country, because of the enfolding and sustaining love of the Spirit, a love as of a mother for her child : there is the mother-suggestion in the use of the term "motherland" for the Divine's beauty present secretly in all parts of the earth. The two closing lines of this stanza apply to the process of time what has been just applied to the extension

of space : all periods of one's life, even old age with its infirmities, become full of the Divine's contact, the Divine's gracious action. From "the wounds of age" as "sweet enemies" the transition is made by imaginative logic to the idea of death and there the climax is worked out of the poem's central theme : triumph is all. This theme recalls a phrase like "ripeness is all" in Shakespeare, which too is joined with the death-idea :

Men must endure  
Their going hence even as their coming hither :  
Ripeness is all...

But the death-idea in the present poem is not necessarily confined to the actual cessation of life : it creates a symbol and the symbol is worked out by a paradoxical picture. Think of a band of giant drummers in an army. They are all killed and the flag under which they had lived and drummed has fallen also. Yet there is a victorious action : an invisible flag, red with the flush of rapture, is flying and beneath it great drums are still heard beating. This mighty miraculous drumming in the midst of complete apparent defeat and death symbolises the supreme achievement of faith. Note the sound-effect of the last two lines. The *r*'s of "rapture's red" in the second line of the stanza are taken up in both these lines and combined with repeated *t*'s and *d*'s around *n*'s and *m*'s to build a sound-picture of resonant and insistent triumph.

There you are ! I hope the lady on the last bench is satisfied. What else, madam ?...Oh the word "madam" reminds me of something. I once told you that poetry goes as far back as the most primitive times as a natural expression of whatever means most to the hoping, striving, aching or exulting self in us. I quoted to you the Australian blackfellow's Kangaroo-cry. I may add now that we may regard poetry as the very first self-expression of man. Do you know what the first words of Adam to Eve were in the Garden of Eden ? According to the Bible, Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs while he was asleep. What the Bible forgets to tell us is that as soon as he woke up and found her in front of him he bowed and introduced himself to her with the couplet :

Madam,  
I'm Adam.

Here from the sheer beginning of human life you have poetry with not only reason in it but also rhyme. And there is even more to it. You may be remembering my pointing out to you that Shakespeare never lost a chance to be devilishly clever at the same time that he was godlike in greatness. Adam summed up in brief all the cleverness to come in the tribe of poets. His small sentence

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is what is called a palindrome, a phrase that reads the same whether you say it forward or backward. Read "Madam, I'm Adam" from right to left and you will have the same thing as from left to right.

Perhaps the most famous palindrome is a statement put into the mouth of Napoleon. Napoleon, before he was banished to the God-forsaken island of St. Helena far out in the southern wastes of the Atlantic ocean, had been exiled to the frequently man-visited isle of Elba in the Mediterranean. This happened after the Battle of Leipzig, known as the Battle of the Standards because the flags of five or more nations were flying in it against Napoleon who had returned very much reduced in strength from Moscow. But, although he was defeated and put away on Elba, he was hardly the man who could stay put, as the Americans say. The explosive energy that was in him sought every chance to get out of Elba. And he did manage an escape under the very noses of his captors. While sailing under disguise out of the island, his boat was crossed by a British steamer. The captain of the steamer put his horn to his mouth and asked, "What news of Napoleon?" Napoleon himself answered back from his boat, "The Emperor is in excellent health." Yes, the Emperor was in high spirits and fighting fit, but his stay in Elba had altered a good deal of the European situation. A Bourbon had been placed on the French throne, the Army had gone over to the new king, the British and the Prussians had consolidated their positions. Napoleon, of course, made a great bid for power, took over the Army again and valiantly met the British and the Prussians at Waterloo. But to no avail—he lost the battle and his military career came to an end. Somehow Elba had prepared his undoing, it had undermined his ability. During his reminiscent spells at St. Helena he is supposed to have said to the British attendant there: "Able was I ere I saw Elba." Here you have a palindrome of seven words.

Now, if we have still a few minutes to go, I'll open the other of the two books on my table and satisfy you with one more recitation. Let me read *This Errant Life*. It is a poem written in a mood of half-dejection half-wistfulness. One morning the poet felt very much the pull of human things in the midst of his spiritual aspirations. All that attracts the heart of a mere man came up before his vision and he expressed the deep draw of it in spite of the transiency with which it is associated. But his spiritual yearning too remained. So he declared that the human cannot become the divine unless and until the divine becomes the human and answers as the Avatar the heavenward longing of earth:

This errant life is dear although it dies,  
And human lips are sweet although they sing



MOTHER INDIA

Of stars estranged from us, and youth's emprise  
Is wondrous yet although an unsure thing.

Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness,  
I fear to soar lest tender bonds decrease.  
If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow  
Its mortal longings, lean down from above;  
Temper the unborn Light no thought can trace,  
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow;  
For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate :  
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,  
And all Thy formless glory turn to love  
And mould Thy love into a human face.

The poem is simple enough not to call for much explanation. And your looks tell me that you already are familiar with it somehow. Oh you have been made to study it in the past by two professors ? I did not know it had become as famous as all that. But Sri Aurobindo has given it rather high praise and it has been translated into both Bengali and Gujarati. It has, I suppose, what one may term a poignantly profound sweetness. But by an irony of fate the way it was printed opposite its Gujarati translation knocked some of its high seriousness out by a printer's devil. I hope this mistake does not accidentally happen to be a shrewd comment on the poet's character : in the phrase,

If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow  
Its mortal longings...

the printed version misread "mortal" as "moral" !

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

# SRI AUROBINDO'S *VASAVADUTTA*

## A COMMENTARY

### I

*Vasavadutta* is a Dramatic Romance of the Psychicised Life-Spirit evolving, growing and maturing in this world of earth-consciousness guided by the twin values of Love and Beauty and realising the Delight of Existence, Ananda. It depicts the supreme wisdom of making every contact of life and shock of circumstance a source of joy, by the renunciation of egoistic desire which puts a false value on persons and things and by a free and complete self-giving which brings about a 'fellowship with Essence' in all relationships. It is indeed a dramatic presentation of the Upanishadic message applied to life: "*Tena tyaktena bunjeethā*, By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy." As Vasuntha surmises in the play :

There is a wanton in this royal heart  
Who gives herself to all and all are hers.  
Perhaps that too is wisdom. For, Alurca,  
This world is other than our standards are  
And it obeys a vaster thought than ours,  
Our narrow thoughts ! The fathomless desire  
Of some huge spirit is its secret law.  
It keeps its own tremendous forces penned  
And bears us where it wills, not where we would.  
Even his petty world man cannot rule.  
We fear, we blame; life wantons her own way,  
A little ashamed, but obstinate still, because  
We check but cannot her. O, Vuthsa's wise !  
Because he seeks each thing in its own way,  
He enjoys.

This kind of life of psychic harmony is contrasted with other kinds of life of different mental orientations with their varying degrees of disharmony and difficulty in mutual understanding and in the understanding of this new kind of life and personality. But the new influences the old, dissolves its natural propensity

for complicating life and making a mess of it and establishes harmony even in the real world of diplomacy, selfishness and impulsiveness. It is not a fragile exotic blossom, but even becomes a naturalised growth in this soil.

II

The growing psychic consciousness in life is embodied in the personalities of the hero and the heroine—Vuthsa and Vasavadutta. Vuthsa, the name of the nation in the original tale of the *Ocean of the Rivers of Many Tales*, is used by Sri Aurobindo as a personal name of King Udayan and that is not without its symbolic significance. The secret divine principle of harmony, sweetness and light in the sanctuary of man's inmost consciousness has in all spiritual traditions and mysteries been described as the child and its emergence and domination of outer life are recognised as the first condition and happy prelude to man's ascent in the ladder of the higher Divine Consciousness. In the profound words of Heraclitus, "The kingdom is of the child." The man of psychic awareness evolves from harmony to harmony and walks on the 'sunlit path'. Vuthsa is indeed this child, though he has not yet become ready for the vertical ascent in the realm of Spiritual Consciousness. And Vasavadutta is looked upon as the gift of the gods to iron Mahasegu.

Vuthsa is so highly and so variously endowed with the qualities of nobility, beauty, boldness and cultural accomplishments and artistic gifts that even his enemies cannot but refer in superlatives to him. Here is Gopalaca who has 'seen him in the fight and has lived to wonder', paying him a warm tribute :

O, he ranges  
As lightly through the passages of war  
As might the moonbeam feet of some bright laughing girl,  
  
Her skill concealing in her reckless grace,  
The measures of a rapid dance."

And Mahasegu cannot but admit :

But many gods stood smiling at his birth.  
Luxmie came full of fortunate days ; Vishnu  
Poured down his radiant sanction in the skies  
And promised his far stride across the earth ;  
Magic Saruswathie between his hands  
Laid down her lotus arts.

We see him first as the son and pupil of the wise statesman Yougundharayan. He has an exquisite taste for the beauties of Nature, Art and Love and his will is for delight :

The dawn has spent her glories and I seek  
Alurca and Vasuntha for the harp  
With chanted verse and lyric ease until  
The golden silences of noon arrive.  
See this strange flower I plucked below the stream !  
Each petal is a thought.

And he feels

They are not beautiful,  
This State, these schemings. War is beautiful,  
And the bright ranks of armoured men and steel  
That singing kisses steel and the white flocking  
Of arrows that are homing birds of war.

Already he is dreaming of the wonder of Avunthie, Vasavadutta, a name of leaping swiftness, and he hopes:

One day I shall behold a marvellous face  
And hear heaven's harps defeated by a voice.

Love, Beauty and Delight are the godheads he worships and he seems to talk even with a childish irresponsibility when he says to his wise minister :

O then,  
The gods shall keep thee at my strong demand  
To be the aged minister of my sons.  
Thus they must hear. Of what use are the gods  
If they crown not our just desires on earth ?

and asks him about the State's cares :

Are they not for thee,  
My mind's wise father ? Chide me not. See now,  
It is thy fault for being great and wise.  
What thou canst fashion sovereignly and well,  
Why should I do much worse ?

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He seeks the wise man's permission :

I may then go  
And listen to Alurca with his harp ?

But he evolves very quickly out of this immaturity with the coming of Gopalaca into his palace and into his bosom, for he obeys his heart which leaped up in him when he saw his face though he is sufficiently apologetic to his minister :

Frown not, my father...  
Be sure my heart is wise.

The essential qualities of his personality increase in intensity with his growing maturity and welcoming Gopalaca is an extension of his dictum :

The harmony of kindred souls that seek  
Each other on the strings of body and mind,  
Is all the music for which life was born.

And he wants his jealous friends to rejoice with him

That I have found my brother, joy in my joy,  
Love with my love, think with my thoughts ; the rest  
Leave to much older wiser men whose schemings  
Have made God's world an office and a mart. ·  
We are young, let us indulge our hearts.

He remains an unwearied worshipper of the same godheads of Love, Beauty and Delight :

Love itself is sweet enough  
Though unreturned ; and there are silent hearts.  
.....  
O, earth is honey ; let me taste her all.  
Our rapture here is short before we go  
To other sweetness on some rarer height  
Of the upclimbing tiers that are the world.  
.....  
Shall we awaken in Alurca's hands

SRI AUROBINDO'S "VASAVADUTTA"

The living voices of the harp ? Or will'st thou  
That I should play the heaven-taught airs thou lov'st  
On the Gundharva's magical guitar  
Which lures even woodland beasts ? For the elephant  
Comes trumpeting to the enchanted sound,  
A coloured blaze of beauty on the sward  
The peacocks dance and the snake's brilliant hood  
Lifts rhythm'd yearning from the emerald herb.

But he has begun to develop an independent will in unison with his deeper heart ; he still asks Yougundharayan's permission to go to Avunthie's borders with Gopalaca for hunting, though he almost takes it for granted :

Alurca, tell

The Minister that we go to hunt the deer  
In Vindhya's forests on Avunthie's verge.  
That's if my will's allowed.

From the moment of his visit to the forests on the border along with Gopalaca when he even gives himself wholly of his own accord into his friend's hands, he has become an independent man who wills to visit Avunthie and to return with difficulty and only wants Yougundharayan and all who harbour blind uneasy thoughts to be told :

"Whatever seeks me from Fate, man or god,  
Leave all between me and the strength that seeks.  
War shall not sound without thy prince's leave.  
Vuthsa will rescue Vuthsa."

And when Vasuntha tells him :

I will tell  
But know not if he'll hear—

he replies :

He knows who is  
His sovereign.

So the lion's cub breaks out "To measure with the large and dangerous world/  
The bounding rapture of his youth and force." And he says to Gopalaca:

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I must be cooped,  
It seems, and guarded in a golden cage,  
As I was watched in Cowsambie once.  
So all men think to do their will with me.  
But now I warn you all that I will have  
My freedom and will do my own dear will  
By fraud or violence greater than your own.

.....

But I will,  
And carry with me something costlier far  
Than what thou stealest from Cowsambie's realm.  
For I will have revenge.

.....

They will not come. My fate must ride with me  
Unhindered to Ujjayinie.

.....

Vishnu (has smiled) on me.

But the will does not dry his heart or imagination; he can embrace Vicurna in friendship and appreciate the beauties of a life in tune with Nature and the golden city as well.

Cf.

O this, O this  
Is what I often dreamed, to be alone  
With one I love far from the pomp of courts,  
Not ringed with guards and anxious friendships round,  
Free like a common man to walk alone  
Among the endless forest silences,  
By gliding rivers and over deciduous hills,  
In every haunt where earth, our mother, smiles  
Whispering to her children. Let me rest awhile  
My head upon thy lap, Gopalaca,  
Before we plunge into this emerald world.  
Shall we not wander in her green-roofed house  
Where mighty Nature hides herself from men,  
And be the friends of the great skyward peaks  
That call us by their silence, bathe in tarns,  
Dream where the cascades leap, and often spend  
Slow moonless nights inarmed in leafy huts

Happier than palaces, or in our mood  
Wrestle with the fierce tiger in his den  
Or chase the deer with wind-swift feet, and share  
With the rough forest-dwellers natural food  
Plucked from the laden bounty of the trees,  
Before we seek the citted haunts of men ?  
Shall we not do these things, Gopalaca ?

.....

Oh, then, it is all gain  
That awaits me in Avunthie. O the night  
With all her glorious stars and from the trees  
Milhons of shrill cigalas peal one note,  
A thunderous melody ! Shall we be soon  
In the golden city ? But it will be night  
And I shall hardly see her famous fanes.

Vuthsa in Avunthie shows himself the Kshatriya of ancient tradition, the chivalrous Knight-Errant with a high sense of National Honour and dignified courage and composure, confident superiority and mastery over adverse circumstances and the capacity for complete self-giving in love. Thus he could smile to see how strong and arrogant minds (like Mahasegu's) dream themselves masters of the things they do and he could declare to Mahasegu :

There is a kingship which exceeds the king;  
For Vuthsa unworthy, Vuthsa captive, slain,  
This is not captive, this cannot be slain.  
It far transcends our petty human forms,  
It is a nation's greatness. That, O king,  
Was once Parikshit, that Urjoona's seed,  
Janmejaya, that was Sathaneka,  
That Vuthsa; and when Vuthsa is no more,  
That shall live deathless in a hundred kings—

and to Vasavadutta :

But this belongs to many other souls.

Their names are endless. Bharuth first  
Who ruled the Aryan earth that bears his name,  
And great Dushyanta and Pururavus'



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Famed warlike son and all their peerless line,  
Urjoona and Parikshit and his sons  
Whom God descended to enthrone, and all  
Who shall come after us, my heirs and thine  
Who choosest me, and a great nation's multitudes,  
And the Kuru ancestors and long posterity  
Who all must give consent.

He feels the rapture of vital-physical union with her :

one large soul  
Parted in two dear bodies for more bliss.

All that he has, he can and is, are offered to her, his heart's sovereign queen. Cf.

Dost thou choose  
To know the songs that shake the tranquil gods  
Or hear on earth the harps of heaven ? dost thou  
Desire the line and hue of living truth  
That makes earth's shadows pale ? or wilt thou have  
The infinite abysmal silences  
Made vocal, clothed with form ? These things at birth  
The Kinnarie, Vidyadhar and Gundharva  
Around me crowding on Himaloy dumb  
Gave to the silent god that smiled in me  
Before my outer mind held thought. All these  
I can make thine.'

.....

Dost thou desire  
The earth made thine by my victorious bow ?  
Send me then forth to battle ; earth is thine.

And he will wed her in the heroic way of the true Kshatriya :

Thou thinkst I'll take thee from thy father's hands  
Like a poor Brahmin begging for a dole ?  
Not so do heroes' children wed, nor they  
Who from the loins of puissant princes sprang.  
With the free interchange of looks and hearts  
Nobly self-given, heaven for the priest

SRI AUROBINDO'S "VASAVADUTTA"

And the heart's answers for the holy verse,  
They are wedded or by wished-for violence torn  
Consenting, yet resisting from the midst  
Of many armed men. So will I wed thee,  
O Vasavadutta, so wilt bear by force  
Out of the house and city of my foes  
Breaking through hostile gates.

Mahasegu was grossly mistaken when he expected that

Wine, music, flowers  
And a girl's dawning smile can weave him chains  
Of vernal softness stronger than bonds can give  
Of unyielding iron. Two lips shall seal his strength,  
Two eyes of all his acts be tyrant stars.

On the other hand Vuthsa makes the great discovery of the power of love in cementing and winning hearts and the supreme ecstasy of it all :

Music is sweet ; to rule the heart's rich chords  
Of human lyres much sweeter. Art's sublime  
But to combine great ends more sovereign still,  
Accepting danger and difficulty to break  
Through proud and violent opposites to our will.  
Song is divine, but more divine is love.

The diplomacy of the calculating mind and the unfeeling heart which makes statecraft a ruthless game of power-politics and God's world of beauty and love an office and mart is not unavoidable. Love is the great disentangler and the true diplomat. Everybody plays into his hands and every incident advances his purposes. Vasavadutta asks him to do with her what he wills, for she is his, and she is silent when her father's army pursues them in order that his heroism may not suffer. Munjoolica feels an affinity with his plight and helps him hatch the plan of escape and becomes his charioteer and messenger. Ungarica sees all within and without and feels happy and prepares the impatient Vicurna to await his chance of helping Vuthsa. And Gopalaca is only too ready to incline his heart to 'this fair moonlight's result and all that follows after'. Yougundharayan sends Vasuntha with his message at this ripe hour. No wonder Vuthsa sings the glory of the Divine Antaryamin, the eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden :

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This world's the puppet of a silent Will  
Which moves unguessed behind our acts and thoughts ;  
Events bewildered follow its dim guidance  
And flock where are they needed. Is't not thus,  
O Thou, our divine Master, that Thou rulest,  
Nor car'st at all because Thy joy and power  
Are seated in Thyself beyond the ages ?

(Cf. *Īśvarasarvabhūtānām hṛddeśe Ajoona tiṣṭhati*  
*Bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā.*)

And he returns to his country in victory and triumph with his Luxmie, breaking thrice through the surrounding phalanx of the foe and begs his minister's pardon for the secrecy of the adventures and exploits. Yougundharayan receives him as "My pupil and son no more, but hero and monarch !", for he has 'set his foot on Avunthie's head'. And the statesman executes the commands of his sovereign to arrange for a parley, for war must not break out except in defence.

All his faculties—mind, heart, senses and will—have been blended and harmonised into an integrated whole by the Psychic consciousness. Even that most corrupting element—the power of imperial majesty—has fused itself with a sublime dignity and matchless grace.

Cf.,

Cowsambie's majesty  
Will brook not even in this, Gopalaca,  
A foreign summons. Surely my will and love  
Shall throne most high, not strong Avunthie's child  
But Vasavadutta; whether alone, her will  
And mine, the nation and the kingdom's good  
Consenting shall decide. Therefore this claim  
Urge not, my brother.

And

For thou art Luxmie. Thou beside me, Fate  
And Fortune, peace and battle must obey  
The vagrant lightest-winged of my desires.

(*To be continued*)

M. V. SEETARAMAN

## AN INITIATION

UNIQUE Uttarpara Speech ! It was in May, 1909. The place is only about five miles from the western border of Calcutta, and Sri Aurobindo had to pass through Howrah, a town on the west bank of the Ganges, just opposite the then capital of India.

Sri Aurobindo was in a horse-coach—motorcars were not so frequent as now. It was a summer noon, the sun was emitting fire from the horizon, but the pleaders of the Howrah Bar were not idle. Somehow they got the scent, ran to the carriage and caught hold of the reins. They entreated the escort to stop for a few minutes there in the Howrah Town Hall; they were eager to offer their obeisance to the hero and saint. In a moment the news spread like wild fire. The courts, both civil and criminal, were emptied of the lawyers and the litigants, only the limbs-of-law were all alone seated on their bench, counting the beams and rafters of the court rooms.

There were, in those days, only two high schools hard by the Municipal office, on the first floor of which is located the town Hall even to this day. Ripon Collegiate School (Howrah Branch) represented itself *en masse* in the meeting. It was founded by Sir (then Babu) Surendranath Banerji, during the seventies of the last century, and my father happened to be his student there. I heard it from him, that while one day this Surendranath or Surrender-Not, as he was pet-named by his countrymen, was with his students in the class, he in a fit of excitement thundered, "I shall shatter the foundations of the British Empire in India." He did shake them by his extraordinary power of oratory. But many other real qualities of a leader were not sufficiently developed in him, and hence to root the alien government out was reserved for the Extremists, of which Sri Aurobindo was the foremost. But further digression will be unwelcome. This Ripon School was closed.

The other one was the Government School, where I had been admitted only a few months earlier. The Headmaster there was a young man from East Bengal, anglicised from head to foot, a grandson-in-law of Devendranath Tagore, father of 'Kaviguru' Rabindranath. He had been several years in England, and had come out a barrister-at-law, but preferred to be in the Education Department, and retired from the service as an Assistant Director of Public Instruction, Bengal—native as he was, the topmost post was not for him, no matter what highest qualifications he might have had to his credit.

Like Dr. K. D. Ghose (Sri Aurobindo's father), this Mr. J. N. Mukherji was undoubtedly a 'swadeshi' in his heart of hearts, but how could he officially close the school to honour a man of the revolutionary party? Some students of the higher classes applied for leave. It was not granted, though at the same time a junior teacher was stealthily directed to escort them up to the meeting, and bring them back to the school in an hour. I was then a student of the lower form, so could not express myself in black and white. But go I must. Not knowing the proper procedure, I rushed even without permission into the private chamber of the 'Saheb'. He was called such for his European dress and manners; even his countenance was exactly like an occidental's. Involuntarily I touched his booted feet to salute him in the Indian way, and thus the day was won. I had my books. I got a fond slap on my left cheek, my books were all snatched from me, deposited with the 'Chaprasai' waiting at the door, with a direction to return them to me when I would be back, and a hint was given to the gateman to open the back door for me. I was ordered to be always with my teacher in the meeting.

I took Sri Aurobindo within me through my eyes: it was my initiation. A man of comparatively short stature, with clean-shaven chin, scanty moustache on the upper lip, combed but not parted hair on the head, a creased chaddar on the left shoulder, a very ordinary shirt and a simple dhoti!

The President of the meeting, some senior pleader, delivered a beautiful speech, another speaker, possibly the Head Master of the Collegiate School, gave one nicer and longer still. Sri Aurobindo spoke only a few words in reply to the addresses. In comparison, his was the smallest speech, and there was not much oratorical glow in it; but what of that? His was the most charming. Personally speaking, none of them went into my brain—all the three were in English; I then knew no more than the A-B-C of the language, and, to-day for me, collecting pebbles on the sea-shore, the vast ocean of English literature lies still unexplored. The gesture, posture and modulation of voice of the two previous speakers somewhat appealed to me even then; but by his creation of a grave atmosphere with his serene and prophetic tone Sri Aurobindo impressed me most, and the whole house no less. The hall resounded with claps and other expressions of overflowing joy among the audience, when the two speakers introduced Sri Aurobindo to them; but the vote of thanks by him, the observed of all observers in the meeting, for the unexpected honour done to him by the citizens of Howrah, made them spell-bound, somewhat meditative with the spiritual fervour of his speech. I was possessed with a frenzied desire to touch his feet, but was prevented by my revered teacher, lest I might create a scene there. We came back to our school. Full twenty-seven years after, my aspiration bore fruit, I bowed at the holy feet of my Master,

he showered his blessings on my head with his benign touch on the 24th November, 1936. The initiation became perfect, I was accepted as a child of the Divine Mother.

Sometime in 1906-7, Sri Aurobindo came to Shibpur, a locality comprising two southernmost wards of Howrah. He was taken to a house almost within stone's-throw from my ancestral home. It was a secret inspection of a branch of Anusilan Samiti, a society founded by his followers under his direction. The historians are mute in the matter, his biographers fail to find out his day-to-day movements. But I heard it from different reliable sources, that there was a split among the members of the Samiti, and he went there to heal the cleavage. Years after I had crossed the barrier of my boyhood and become an adolescent, when this news came to my ears, it thrilled me indeed to think that my place had been sanctified by the dust of his feet.

I cannot remember well when I heard Sri Aurobindo's name for the first time. Maybe during his *Bande Mataram* days. The paper would come to our house, and every evening it was read out before a mixed audience of three generations, not exactly of the same family, but of one clan,—the major portion explained in the vernacular to suit the ladies and children, unlettered as they were in English. It is still fresh in my memory how my father read out the news items and editorials from the paper, sitting in a spacious hall of one of his distant uncles. He it was who brought Sri Aurobindo's name to my ears first. Though his political career was sealed in his very school days, yet he admired, rather worshipped, Sri Aurobindo as a nationalist or extremist. He got his two sons admitted into an Anusilan Samiti more than a mile off from our place. The famous Howrah Bomb (Gang) Case (1911) had already uprooted the Shibpur organisation—most of its members were either jailed or outlawed or interned or punished in various other ways. The rest went underground. This branch Samiti was also abolished when the mother-institution was declared unlawful in 1915. Jotin Mukherji or "*Bagha Jotin*" (he did actually kill a ferocious tiger, single-handed) was the right-hand man of Sri Aurobindo when he was in Bengal, and became the ring-leader of the secret society when he left Bengal for Pondicherry in 1910. In 1915, this dauntless soul waged war against the British artillery with only four lieutenants by him on the bank of Buri Balam in Orissa. Like those legendary Kshatriyas of the Puranas, he did not know how to show his back to the enemies, and fell fighting on the battle-field. Without him his organisation also fell under the heavy stroke of the British.

Now, the initiation will remain incomplete if the Divine Mother be not there in the heart. In 1935, the dying father directed the sorrowing son to find his haven in Pondicherry for spiritual inspiration and progress. But it

was impossible without the Mother's Grace. She was unknown to the son till then.

Inscrutable are the ways of Providence. In a miraculous way I got permission from the Mother for Darshan and Pranam in 1936. Pranam was possible before the 24th April Darshan of 1939. And it came to me almost unasked.

Failing to get any reply to two or three letters addressed to the Master, I was dejected, my vanity was somewhat wounded. I prayed even for some service there, if I was not accepted as a disciple. A neighbour of ours, Srish Chandra Goswami, came to my rescue. This Srish Goswami is not unfamiliar to the readers of *Sri Aurobindo On Himself and On The Mother*. He had been visiting the Ashram every now and then since 1923. Only last year he left his body. Goswami was consulted. Looking at the copies of those letters he remarked, "They have only paved the path. Now you have to pray to the Mother." "But how ? I do not know her, nor does she know me." "Yes, yes, she knows you," was the reply. Finding me still hesitant, the large-hearted Goswami consoled, "All right, I am writing a letter to the Mother tomorrow. I shall state in it your case, and pray for your permission. But know it for certain, unless you go there nothing permanent can be decided." In a week the secretary's letter permitting me to go to the Ashram for the next November Darshan came to my hand. I started by the first week of October, 1936.

'Love at first sight' is a stock phrase of the psychologists. It came to be literally true, when I set my foot on the bounds of the Ashram. The Vedic hymn describing the whole universe—the air, the flowing rivers, the herbs, the night and morn, even the very earthly dust—as full of sweet honey is not the imagination of a poet, but the realisation of a mystic and yogi. Everything here seemed to me celestial, something spiritual. In those days we were allowed to make obeisance to the Mother every day at 10 in the forenoon. On the day following my arrival, an inmate of the Ashram took me to the Mother, as directed by the secretary.

My whole being was filled with bliss to touch our Divine Mother's feet and feel her holy hand on my head. Then came the double glory of the 24th of November, 1936, when the hands of both our Mother and Master—Hara-Parvati of the scriptures—pressed my head affectionately: Pranam to the Mother, then to Sri Aurobindo, and then again to both.

PRABHAKAR MUKHERJI

## WHY YOU SHOULD EXERCISE

THIS is the Age of Reason. Men and women, young or old, rich or poor, literate or illiterate,—everybody has a tendency, more or less, to look at his problems in the light of reason. But, unfortunately, man is not always reasonable in his reasonings. Like many of his talents his reasoning faculty also is used often in a perverted way and, instead of taking him towards truth, it leads him towards falsehood. When one wants to do a thing, even if it be not quite desirable, he is sure to build up strong reasons in its support and proceed to do it. So too, when one does not want a thing he will find reasons against it. It can be said generally that there is always a strong tendency to justify one's actions with the help of reason and when there is lack of true reason some excuse is somehow or other, found out in support of one's movements.

Gone are the days when a simple and candid faith could work wonders. The majority of people today cannot rest assured in their faith. Almost always they look at the pros and the cons of everything through the reasoning mind. Perhaps it is a reaction against dogmas, prejudices and superstitions that grew up when blind faith lost its connection with true and illuminating knowledge. Anyway, man in the present age needs something more to be able adequately to tackle his problems. What is needed is the combination of Faith, Knowledge and Reason. Reason is a great power and can give a strong push forward when it is based on true knowledge and supported by a strong faith. Otherwise it fails and serves only to confirm the rules of ignorance and falsehood.

The same truth holds good in the matter of Physical Exercise. People generally know about its utility, yet how many of them practise it even when they want to keep healthy and fit? They know all right that regulated physical exercise helps to keep one healthy and fit, but that knowledge does not carry sufficient strength to push them into its devout practice.

Those who do not take physical exercise have a whole host of "reasons" in support. Some of the most common are :—

- 1) I have no inclination for it and I do not like it.
- 2) I do plenty of work and I get my exercise automatically through it.
- 3) I become tired after my day's work and there is no energy left for participation in physical exercise.
- 4) I have simply no time to take physical exercise.

Now let us see how we can meet these excuses. In the first case it can be



said that simply to move by the impulse of likes and dislikes cannot take one very far. If one takes this attitude in life, if one is solely guided by his likes and dislikes, one day he is likely to see that there is practically nothing left to him which he likes. Life must be approached from the point of view of integral progress and integral perfection, both individual and social, and whatever is helpful to this end must be pursued in right earnest. One has, then, some definite ideal, a noble purpose in life and he would gladly welcome everything that helps him to make a progress in his path of perfection. A healthy and fit body means more efficient and hard work for the progress of the individual and the society and a rational programme of physical exercises is one of the sure means of achieving a healthy and fit body. The habit of physical exercise is as useful and important as the other activities which help to maintain life such as food and drink, sleep and rest, clothing, work, hygienic habits, inner poise etc. Postponement of physical exercise on the plea of sheer dislike is patently short-sighted.

The second excuse, that one can get plenty of exercise from work, is not quite correct. Of course, from the bodily point of view it is infinitely better than that of those who do not participate in any kind of physical work at all, but it is not sufficient. Work cannot replace physical exercise for these reasons :

1) No work can give all-round movements to all the different parts of the body. This can easily be done by a systematically arranged programme of physical exercises.

2) Work does not provide opportunities—as do physical exercises—for moving the joints and muscles to the maximum range of movement. This is very important for the preservation of youth or to retard the approach of old age for a considerable period of time. It enables the joints to keep supple and the muscles to retain their proper tone. Suppleness of the joints and good tone of the muscles are associated with youth and are the reverse of the signs of old age. Physical exercise can help immensely in this respect.

3) Progression in exercise plays a very important part for proper growth and development of the body. Demands on the muscles to take on harder work are made progressively; as the body gets accustomed to certain exercises, it is given more work in a progressive manner by increasing the difficulties, and to meet this demand the muscles have to grow in strength and efficiency. Routine work cannot do this in the same way. However difficult the work may be from the point of view of physical labour, once one gets accustomed to it, he can go on working automatically and the question of progression does not arise at all. For the same reason, a weaker man cannot participate in a work demanding very hard physical labour when it falls upon him suddenly. But progressive exercises can provide the same man with a graduated work, starting from very simple

exercises and increasing the difficulty step by step to something quite strenuous; in this way his strength and endurance also increase and he goes on to become a strong man.

4) While doing work man has to concentrate on *work* in order to get it done properly whereas a man taking exercise concentrates on his *body* so that the body is strengthened and developed properly. Whatever physical exercise ensues from work is obtained as its bi-product and surely it helps one to keep healthy and fit to some extent. But physical exercises are solely meant to develop the body, make it beautiful and bestow health on the participants in a direct and sustained way.

5) Each work has a tendency to put its special stamp on the body. And that is not always good for the body either from the point of view of health or of beauty. A well-planned programme of physical exercises can counteract or even correct these tendencies and help to maintain health and a good form.

Certainly, we do not depreciate work nor advise people to leave work and do plenty of physical exercises only. "Work is the body's best prayer to the Divine." It is the field of one's self-expression. All that we mean to say is that work cannot replace physical exercise which contributes in a special way to the development of the body and life.

Regarding the third excuse, it can be said generally that the fatigue produced by work is mostly of a mental and nervous nature unless it be a very hard physical work demanding a great labour. When fatigue is produced as a result of hard physical labour, surely rest is the best cure. But for milder types of work, which is generally the case, the fatigue can be more effectively removed by suitable exercises. When the muscles, joints and limbs are made to work vigorously through a well-planned system of exercises, the heart and lungs start working at a faster rate, causing an improved circulation and the intake of plenty of fresh air due to increased respiration, and the combination of these two processes replenishes the body as if with a great flow of life-energy, removing all kinds of dull and tired feelings. It is said, "Change of work is rest." This change of work from one's occupation to physical exercise can give a very good rest to the mind and nerves. This applies specially to students and sedentary workers. Their feeling of tiredness is altogether of a mental and nervous kind and the best way to cure it is to take part in active physical exercises, where there are plenty of movements in all the different parts of the body. Moreover, this habit of taking regular physical exercise tones up the whole system and makes the body stronger and more enduring. Thus the body will be able to take on more strain of work without feeling it and be able to postpone the onset of fatigue for longer periods of time. Besides, there are various kinds of exercises to suit each individual according to his age, constitution, physical condition,

temperament, occupation, available time etc., and there is enough scope for everybody to draw great benefit from the regular practice of physical exercises designed to suit his needs.

The plea of want of time is purely a question of interest or lack of it. It is a hard truth that when one has interest in anything time is found for it easily whereas if there is no interest, it gets difficult to find time. Those who say that they do not find time for exercise will see, if they sincerely check up their daily programme, how much time is wasted on useless things. Some of the world's busiest men have been known to take their exercises daily and they avow that regular exercise keeps them fit for more and better work. It is merely a question of adjustment of time in one's daily programme. Surely one can find ten or fifteen minutes for exercise and it is sufficient to keep one fit. Indeed, where there is a will there is a way.

For students and growing youths, regular physical exercise is most important. This habit will not only keep them fit and healthy, help them to grow soundly and proportionately, but it will do much to maintain a kind of balance in the whole being. Generally speaking, young people are full of vitality and physical energy. In their studies and normal programme of the day, very little of it is used and there remains a great surplus. It must have proper channel for its outlet. Otherwise it can either be distorted and perverted in its use and lead towards undesirable habits and practices or, when not given any suitable expression, it may bring in a feeling of frustration or even an unbalanced state of the mind and body. The best thing is to use this physical energy for one's progress and there cannot be anything better for young and growing people than games, sports and physical exercises. It keeps their body and mind in a perfect state of equilibrium, improves their health and appearance and develops a certain character and personality which can be very useful for success in later life.

Furthermore there are other advantages to be derived from regular, well-planned, physical exercises :

1) Exercise increases the rate of circulation in the body. When the circulation is sluggish there develop all kinds of physical pains and discomforts which can be diminished or removed by a programme of well-planned physical exercises.

2) A system of rational exercises can do much to improve the functions of all the internal organs and build up their strength. In this way it can help the organs and glands to do their work more efficiently and that means a healthy, buoyant and glowing state of health.

3) Exercise helps in proper elimination of wastes from the body. It is known that collection of internal filth due to lack of proper elimination can cause a great number of diseases.

## WHY YOU SHOULD EXERCISE

4) Exercise can help to remove lactic acids and other fatigue-producing elements from the body.

5) Exercise creates demands on the body and its condition is improved as it goes to meet the demands : exercise breaks down the tissues by muscular activities and when the body builds them up again during the time of sleep and rest, with the help of improved circulation and proper nourishment, it builds them stronger and healthier. Thus the physical condition is improved.

6) Exercise gives control over all the muscles of the body and can build quick reactions, coordination and balance in the system and it teaches the whole body to act in accordance with one's will. Thus it enables the body to react in the right way in times of danger and thus often avoid fatal accidents.

7) Progressive exercises can help the physically deficient and injured individuals to overcome their disabilities. Exercise in combination with heat and massage can do much to get over them.

8) It is wiser to do exercise and practise health-habits when one is in a healthy state of body than to get sick and then try all sorts of things for its cure. Though progressive exercises can give health to an unhealthy person, yet, if one takes regular exercise and sticks to good health habits, he can successfully avoid physical irregularities. Pure blood and increased circulation makes it easier for the kidneys and liver to do their work of straining the impurities from the blood, and so there are less possibilities of kidney and liver diseases. Exercise helps to strengthen the heart and keeps the arteries flexible so that heart troubles and allied diseases are avoided.

9) Exercise provides a change and makes one feel fresh and buoyant. It quickens the circulation and thus purifies the blood and when this pure blood feeds the brain as well as the other parts of the body, it can give one a lift and make the mind fresh, cheerful and alert.

10) The improved health and physical condition due to well-planned exercises helps one very much to gain that confidence in the body and the mind which is important for every kind of endeavour.

So let us all, young and old, take to physical exercise, each one finding the type of exercise that suits the kind of life he leads, and, by a regular practice, giving to his whole being health, strength and joy.

PRANAB KUMAR BHATTACHARYA