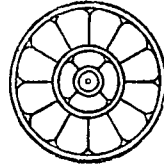


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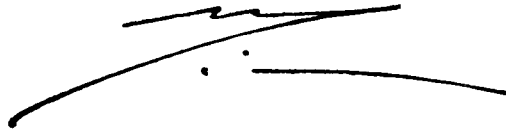


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute.

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. XII

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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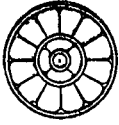
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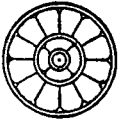
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THE MOTHER'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE



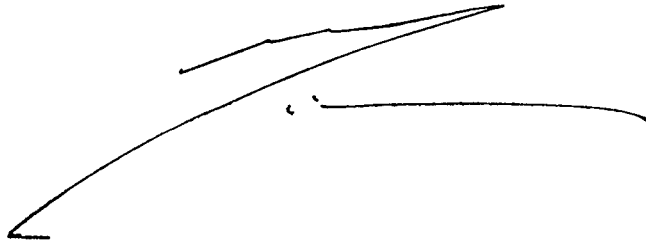
1967

*Le monde merveilleux se félicite,
à nos portes,
qui attend notre appel
pour descendre sur la terre...*



1967

*This wonderful world of delight
waiting at our gates for our call,
to come down upon earth...*



WORDS OF THE MOTHER

Si tu peut toujours sourire à la vie, la vie aussi sourira toujours.

If you can always smile to life, life will always smile to you.

Si on peut éternellement sourire, on est éternellement jeune.

If one can smile eternally, one is eternally young.

6-10-1960

*

*

When will you learn to tie up your tongue? You should not express good news in such a rejoicing open fashion. There are always around us certain small entities and other occult forces which, as soon as they hear things like "X is improving very much in health", start laughing. And they say, "Oh, there is a great improvement? We shall see about it!" And then they spoil everything.

I observe their action everywhere. So it is better to be restrained. By looking at you I can at once know whether there is improvement or not. Of course, when I ask you for news, you must give it. But, when it is good news, express it without much demonstration. Speak it out casually, in a neutral tone. This will not draw unfriendly attention.

19-11-1960

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

NEW SERIES

(These talks are from the Note-books of Dr. Nirodbaran who used to record most of the conversations which Sri Aurobindo had with his attendants and a few others, after the accident to his leg in November 1938. Besides the recorder, the attendants were : Dr. Manilal, Dr. Becherlal, Purani, Champaklal, Dr. Satyendra and Mulshanker. As the Notes were not seen by Sri Aurobindo himself, the responsibility for the Master's words rests entirely with Nirodbaran. He does not vouch for absolute accuracy, but he has tried his best to reproduce them faithfully. He has made the same attempt for the speeches of the others.

For the last few months we have been publishing some talks of March 1940. It is now planned to follow a chronological order and begin at the very beginning. The four earliest talks, after Sri Aurobindo's accident, appeared in Mother India in 1952. We are now picking up where we then stopped and shall continue systematically.

Some of the matter has already appeared though, not in every detail or wholly in the same manner in Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo (First Series) and in Life of Sri Aurobindo, both brought out by A. B. Purani—some (marked here with an asterisk) will appear in the future, by Nirodbaran's collaboration, as part of Purani's Third Series of Evening Talks—some, like the matter that ran last year from the Mother India of August 15 to that of December 5, figures in no past publication or in any future one already projected, but is exclusive to Mother India. The three types of matter are at times found in one and the same talk.)

MOTHER INDIA

DECEMBER 13, 1938

EVENING

N : The other day, while we were talking about poetry, you quoted some passages from the Veda. I would like to know how the Mantras in the Vedas and the Upanishads were composed. It seems they were actually heard by the Rishis. Is it an inner hearing ?

SRI AUROBINDO : Yes, it is an inner hearing. Sometimes one hears a line, or a passage, or even a whole poem ; sometimes they simply come down. The best poetry is always written in that way.

N : I remember very well that line of mine, "A fathomless beauty in a sphere of pain," coming as if someone had whispered it into my ear.

SRI AUROBINDO : Quite; that is the inner hearing. But occasionally one may be deceived. Inspiration from the lower planes also can come in an automatic way.

N : Oh yes. I have been deceived many times like that. Lines which came at once and automatically and which I thought high-class turned out quite ordinary by your remarks.

SRI AUROBINDO : One writes wonderful poems in dreams, surrealist poems ; but when they are written down on paper they seem worthless.

Even in a poet like Shakespeare, in whom, I suppose, poetry always flowed, there are differences of inspiration. In the passage in *Henry IV*, invoking sleep, the three lines—

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge ?—

leap out strikingly from the rest. There is no doubt at all that they have descended from above without any interruption. Or look at that lyric of his, beginning "Take, O take those lips away"¹—the whole of it has come down from above.

¹ Take, O take those lips away,
That so sweetly were foresworn;
And those eyes, the break of day,
Lights that do mislead the morn :
But my kisses bring again,
Bring again,
Seals of love, but sealed in vain,
Sealed in vain.

Measure for Measure, Act IV, Scene 1.

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

At this point of the conversation Dr. M entered the room. Dr. M asked Sri Aurobindo about his health. After some time the Mother came in and sat on the spare cot.

*DR. M (*addressing the Mother*) : Is it a sin to kill scorpions, bugs and mosquitoes ? Somehow I can't kill bugs but I kill mosquitoes.

MOTHER : Why ? Because of the smell of bugs ?

DR. M : Probably.

MOTHER : Put your question to Sri Aurobindo. (*Smiling to Sri Aurobindo*) When I first came here, I used to drive away mosquitoes by Yogic Force. Sri Aurobindo didn't approve of it.

SRI AUROBINDO : Because you were making friendship with them.

DR. M : Sir, is it a sin to kill them ?

SRI AUROBINDO : What is sin ? If you don't kill them, they will go and bite some other people and won't that be a sin to you ?

DR. M : But they have life, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO : Yes, they have—

DR. M : And if one kills them—

SRI AUROBINDO : Well, what happens ?

DR. M : One will be liable to sin.

MOTHER : Plants also have life. You don't mean to say that a mosquito is more precious than a rose ? You don't know perhaps how the plants feel.

DR. M : I don't mean that we otherwise don't kill : say, when we breathe micro-organisms.

MOTHER (*smiling*) : Don't doctors kill ?

DR. M : Yes, Mother, but our killing isn't intentional.

N : It is said that the Jains hire people to feed bugs.

DR. M : No, that's just a story.

SRI AUROBINDO : At any rate I know of a story that is in history, in connection with the Jains. When Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India, he defeated a Jain king through the help of that king's brother. He imprisoned the king and put the brother on the throne and left the dethroned king in his charge. The brother didn't know what to do with the prisoner. Being a Jain, he couldn't kill. So he got a pit dug below his throne and threw his prisoner there and covered up the pit with mud. As a result, the dethroned king died—but the brother didn't kill him ! (*Laughter*)

MOTHER : In order to be a true non-killing Jain, one must be a Yogi. Then one can deal rightly with these animals and insects.

DR. M : Yes, Mother. But is one justified in killing scorpions and snakes ?

* From here onward, part of the matter is as indicated in the Box-note.

SRI AUROBINDO : Why not ? One must kill in self-defence. I don't mean that you must hunt them out and kill them. But when you see that they are endangering your life or those of others, you have every right to kill them.

N : People say that killing a dog or a cat is not so harmful as taking the life of a human being. Do you agree ?

The question was lost in a volley of other questions fired by some of the attendants.

SRI AUROBINDO : Did you say that killing a dog or a cat is not so harmful as taking the life of a human being ?

MOTHER : N seems to be a humanitarian.

SRI AUROBINDO : Life is life, whether in a cat or a dog or a man. There is no difference as regards that. The difference is a conception of human beings—for their own advantage perhaps.

Then the talk shifted to Homeopathy, and everyone, including Dr. Savor who happened to be present, started citing instances in favour of Homeopathy and mentioning its miraculous cures. It was said even to cure religious depression, anger, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO : Anger, the scientists say, is due to secretions of the glands. Even love, according to them, is merely due to a secretion. (*Half smiling*) But can Homeopathy cure egoism ?

DR. SAVOOR : If it did, I should be the first to apply for the medicine.

DR. M : The fact that you are conscious of egoism makes half the cure. Isn't that so, Sir ?

SRI AUROBINDO : Not necessarily. But it is the first step.

N : And what's the second ?

Sri Aurobindo : To detach oneself from all these things. To think as if they belonged to the outer being or to someone else. As one goes on doing that, the Purusha or Soul gradually withdraws its sanction from the Prakriti or Nature, and the Prakriti loses its hold until finally a spiritual control takes place. But if one associates oneself with the Prakriti, then the Purusha becomes a slave to it, *anīsh*, *sakshi*. Rejection, of course, is a stronger means. One has to reject these things before they enter into one, as I did with the thoughts when I was at Baroda. This method is more powerful and the results too are quicker. There is also a mental control, but there it is the mind trying to control the vital being. The control is only partial and temporary. The thing is rather suppressed within and can come out on any opportunity.

I have heard of a Yogi in Benares who was bathing in one of the ghats. In the next ghat a beautiful Kashmiri woman came to bathe. As soon as he saw her, he fell upon her and tried to outrage her. His was evidently a case of mental control.

But sometimes, by Yoga, things which were not felt before come up. I have heard about it from many persons. In my own case, I saw anger coming up and possessing me. It was absolutely uncontrollable when it came. I was very much surprised as to my own nature. Anger has always been foreign to it. At another time (1908), while I was an undertrial prisoner in Alipore, my anger would have led to a terrible catastrophe which luckily was avoided. Prisoners there had to wait outside for some time before entering the cells. As we were doing so the Scotch Warder came and gave me a push. The young men around me became very excited and I did nothing but I gave him such a look that he immediately fled and called the Jailor. It was a communicative anger and all the young men rallied round to attack him. When the Jailor who was rather a religious man arrived, the Warder said I had given him an "insubordinate look". The Jailor asked me and I told him I had never been used to such treatment. He pacified the whole group and said while going : "We have each to bear our cross." But by anger such as I had I don't mean the Rudrabhava which I have experienced a few times.

N : Is Rudrabhava something like Ramakrishna's snake-story ?

SRI AUROBINDO : Not at all. It is not at all a show of anger. It is something genuine—a violent severity against something very wrong. Anger one knows by its feeling and sensation. It rises from below, while Rudrabhava rises from the heart. I shall give you an instance. Once X became very violent, shouting at the Mother and shaking his fists at her. When I heard the shouting, a violent severity came down that was absolutely uncontrollable. I went out and said, "Who is shouting at the Mother ? Who is shouting there ?" As soon as X heard me, he became quiet.

N : X, I have been told, had a very violent temper.

SRI AUROBINDO : Yes. He was otherwise an earnest sadhak, became conscious of many things and did make some progress. But these fits used to come to him now and then. Some Asuric forces used to catch hold of him and he couldn't control himself. It is these forces that have made him fail in Yoga, for I hear that he doesn't have the attacks now outside. When he was in their grip, he couldn't see that he was in the wrong. He blamed me and the Mother, though we had been very lenient and considerate to him. After some time, he was able to recognise his fault and admit it and promise that he would never do it again. But again he would be swept away by the

MOTHER INDIA

forces. Sometimes his vanity and self-esteem would come in the way of admitting his faults immediately.

That's the mistake. One must not justify one's wrong-doing. If one does that, it comes again and makes it difficult for one to get rid of it.

N : Y, after doing so much tapasya, is speaking of going away. He has been here 12 years !

SRI AUROBINDO : What tapasya ? If we give him complete freedom and control over things he will perhaps stay.

N : He says he is helping the Mother in the work.

SRI AUROBINDO : Helping only ? I thought he was conducting the Ashram !

N : But won't these people one day realise the Divine ?

SRI AUROBINDO : Everyone will arrive at the Divine. A once asked the Mother if he would realise God. The Mother replied that he would, unless he did something idiotic and cut short his life. And that is just what he almost did !

TALKS OF THE MOTHER

(These are Notes written down after attending the talks of the Mother in 1947 a propos of her Prayers and Meditations. Every day a Prayer or two were read out and the Mother commented on them or answered questions put to her. Most of the comments deal with perennial problems of the spiritual life. Some refer to partiular occasions; but, just because those occasions are now past, the comments do not lose their point : they always have a wider bearing and join up with the general ones. The Notes are by A. B. Purani.)

12.9.1947

Prayers read : September 4 and 5, 1914

Now that the victory of the Divine is approaching the material plane, the danger too is nearer and greater. Sri Aurobindo has said, and I too see, that now we must all become soldiers in a battle and follow strict discipline. The Prayers that we have read are applicable to the recent events that happened on August 15. For the moment the danger has been thrown back; but the struggle between the Divine and the adverse forces has become, and is bound to become, more and more acute. They will try their best to destroy as much as possible and they will approach the main centre of the Divine's working. What is begun by them may be nothing. But they will concentrate here as the victory approaches. It is not now a question of sitting in meditation. The adverse forces are growing more and more hardy and violent and, as you know, humanity is quite stupid. It will allow all kinds of lies and falsehoods and let itself be governed by them.

You can see the situation in India. Instead of the festival of freedom won, there is fighting and slaughter. So let each one of you look into himself and bring about a perfect purification of himself and not allow anything that will open the doors to the hostile forces. It is because of the gravity and urgency of the situation that you must have no contradictory movement—nothing that goes against the spiritual aspiration or the will of the Divine in you. You must become free and pure. We know that each one has his difficulty and we have tolerated it so long. But now the danger is very close and may be great.

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Q. How is one to know what comes in the way and what contradicts the Divine?

It is very easy to know it if you are sincere. I can tell each of you or you can come and tell me your difficulty and I shall tell you what is to be done. It can be anything—from big things like impulse, desire, ambition, to small, mean or insignificant ones. You can always know it because immediately you submit to it you are thrown away from the Divine : there is a revolt.

13-9-1947

Prayers read : September 6 and 9, 1914

What is “amour intégrale” ? “Integral” means total in the sense of something that is totally “conscious”. All the parts must become conscious ; then they can have “integral love.”

How to be conscious ? By looking around, as you do when you try to find a thief in the dark with your touch. Try to feel and find the contrary and contradictory movements in yourself.

*

*

There are two processes in Nature : (1) inertia which refuses to change or become conscious and (2) destruction in order to bring about a change in matter or life or anything.

That is to say, Nature’s own ways are obscure : either she has immobility, unconsciousness, hardness, even absurdity, or else she breaks up and wastes immense quantities of matter and energy and she destroys like a blind force and wants to try something else.

We want to introduce some other process now.

Q. Can we change Nature’s ways?

Yes, we can. Otherwise there would be no use in doing Yoga. It is an old idea, very firmly fixed in man’s mind, that the processes of Nature cannot be changed. Either you have to leave Nature behind and retire for liberation or you have to submit to her processes. But these alternatives are not inevitable. Our Yoga means that if the blindness and inertia go from Nature, then the process of evolution brings about a change in us and the world also changes. We take to something better than Nature’s processes because Nature, left to herself, will always be imperfect.

Q. You spoke yesterday about the near approach of the Divine's victory in the material world. How far does that victory depend upon us, the disciples?

From one point of view one can say that the time is fixed. But from another point of view it can be said that much depends upon the attitude of the sadhakas. For the human mind this question of time is very difficult because mind wants to believe trenchantly that either everything is fixed or nothing is fixed—it is all predetermination or all a world of chance. But it is not like that; it is simple and yet subtle. What is time? Time and space are processes—not ultimate truths—they are the true illusions. They can be taken up and also discarded by the Divine. There is division—division of movement, energy, etc. That is to say, certain conditions are necessary to bring about the change or the result that translates itself in man's consciousness as time and space. There is a certain determination of forces at work and, if the determination changes, the time and the space for the result change also.

From the point of view of the Divine Consciousness it is not the things that count, their quantity or quality, but the process. Really speaking, the process counts.

What is this process for the Divine? It is a certain relation between vibrations of elements, of forces, which is required to bring about the change or transformation of result, whatever you call it.

You can translate this roughly by saying that there is energy and there is resistance, both taken together as a whole. Now the process will change if for some reason or other the resistance changes. If the resistance is reduced to the minimum the result is instantaneously attained.

You have to imagine the whole process of evolution from the start. It first proceeds like a chaos. Then something intervenes and arranges it. Then the same chaos becomes a world., a cosmos. This is what is translated to us as time and space.

Q. Can we accelerate the Divine action?

Yes. You can see that it was like that from the very beginning. That is to say, a perfectly free movement or play of infinite forces starts—like a chaos, as I said. Then the forces slowly become conscious. But as there are infinitely multiple, infinitely numerous forces, the order does not come all at once, and the condition of things leaves the door open to all kinds of accidents and mishaps. Now, when man becomes conscious he can reduce this chance to the minimum. The final result can be said to be attained when there is perfect

order everywhere—the whole world in perfect order : each tiny drop mirroring that perfect order.

Q. Can one say that it would be like the whole sun in each drop of water?

Yes. It is the complexity of the work that is the problem. Something has gone out in complete freedom and then you have to get the whole thing put in perfect order. Whenever I work on or in someone, I don't make him do great things or purify him but I only put him in order. It is like a mechanical chemistry of consciousness. The scientist has to know two things—the others don't matter to him. First, the constitution of matter and, secondly, the different dimensions. In the inner work the material dimensions don't exist : space, as we know it, is negated. The inner work—the work of changing the consciousness—can be said to be the work of God with the world. It can be done in a stone or in a man. Only, in the case of the stone there is no collaboration ; therefore the working will be slow. In man's consciousness, collaboration is possible and the work can be done quickly. It depends upon opening and receptivity. That is to say, there is a certain condition of things in which time does not exist. If, for instance, what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind is brought into contact with matter—with material conditions—then the cure of a disease, conversion of consciousness, or change in the circumstances of the world is possible at once. It is not more difficult to change the outer circumstances than to change the consciousness of man.

The important thing is the contact of the Supermind with matter. When great physical changes are produced in Nature—for example, when the eruptions of volcanoes take place or continents are submerged—then there is a similar process.

LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO

PRAYER AND ASPIRATION—ADVERSE FORCES AND INERTIA

SRI AUROBINDO : Prayers should be full of confidence without sorrow or lamenting. 14-3-1935

There is no hopelessness except when the will chooses the worse path. 24-6-1935

Q : Is it really impossible for the human being, with the burden of his lower nature, to tread the sun-lit path always?

SRI AUROBINDO : It is not impossible. But only one or two have been able to do it—which proves that it is not easy. 12-9-1935

Q : Can one really do nothing for a smooth transformation of one's external nature with no serious revolts, attacks or falls?

SRI AUROBINDO : Yes, but it is not easy. It needs either a calm resolute will governing the whole being or a very great samata to have a quite smooth transformation. If they are there, then there are no revolts though there may be difficulties, no attacks, only a conscious dealing with the defects of the nature no falls but only setting right of wrong steps or movements. 12-9-1935

Q : You have said, "It is a matter of the most external consciousness being sufficiently fortified so that there should be no disturbance even there." Could you say in what way it has been fortified, if at all?

SRI AUROBINDO : I meant that it has to be fortified—it is the faith, surrender, equality that bring the strength into it, if they can be made complete everywhere. 12-9-1935

Q : I see that some sadhaks here are not much attacked by the adverse suggestions. Is it because a higher pressure for change is not put on them, so that the hostile forces do not bother them, and therefore they are free from any resistance?

SRI AUROBINDO : Whether a pressure is put or not the adverse forces can always make suggestions—but there are a few who do not receive them. 17-9-1935

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H. had a strong ego which he never thought of giving up. If the love is absolute and complete and there has never been any vital demand connected with it, then suggestions of revolt cannot come. 17-9-1935

I am not aware that they or anybody lives constantly on the intuitive plane. All are at grips with the difficulties of the physical consciousness at present—though of course to one like A the suggestion of revolt cannot come—at least it has never done so up to now. 16-9-1935

K was not mentioned, so I did not speak of him. As for the others, they may get suggestions but do not yield to them. 17-9-1935

Aspiration, untiring will, steady calm and detachment, make the best conditions (for the sadhana). 19-9-1935

It is never too early to make the complete surrender. Some things may need to wait, but not that. 28-4-1935

Q : How is one to deal with inertia?

SRI AUROBINDO : The first means is not to get upset when it comes or when it stays. The second is to detach yourself, not only yourself above but yourself below and not identify. The third is to reject everything that is raised by the inertia and not regard it as your own or accept it at all.

If you can do these things then there will be something in you that remains perfectly quiet even in the greatest inertia. Through that quiet part you can bring down peace, force, even light and knowledge into the inertia itself. 3-8-1935

Q : People say that when will-power is used on the fatigue, the fatigue sometimes increases.

SRI AUROBINDO : It is not the right kind of will-power then, probably they use some fighting or effortful will-power instead of the quiet but strong will that calls down the higher consciousness and force. 5-8-1935

The inertia simply prepares the ground—when there is the inert passivity, the adverse Force tries to take advantage of it to push in its own suggestions. 10-9-1935

The adverse forces feel that there is something in you that is discounted and restive because of the continuance of the inertia and they hope

LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO

that by pressing more and more they will create a revolt. What is important for you in these circumstances is to make your faith, surrender and samata absolute. That is as great and essential a progress as to have high experiences, etc.

11-9-1935

They [faith, surrender and samata] have to be put into every part and atom of the being so that there may be no possibility of a contrary vibration anywhere.

12-9-1935

Q : How to pray during the period of intense inertia?

SRI AUROBINDO : A quiet prayer or remembrance of the object of aspiration without a pull for results is the way for doing that. If along with that, there is a faith that it is sure to come, it is the best for this condition.

27-10-1935

What do you mean by active means ? The power to refuse and to reject is always there in the being and to go on rejecting till the rejecting is effective. Nothing can obstruct a quiet aspiration except one's own acquiescence in the inertia.

30-10-1935

From NAGIN DOSHI

“AHANKAR” OR THE EGO

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translated by Nirranjan from the Bengali essay in “Dharma o Jatiyata”)

THE meaning of the word, “Ahankar”, has become so distorted in our language that often a confusion arises when we try to explain the main principles of the Aryan Dharma. Pride is only a particular effect of the rajasic ego, yet this is the meaning generally attributed to the word “Ahankar”; any talk on giving up “Ahankar” brings to the mind the idea of giving up pride or the rajasic ego. In fact, any awareness of “I” is “Ahankar”. The awareness of “I” is created in the overmental Self (the Self of the higher mind) and in the play of the three principles of Nature, its three modes are revealed: the sattwic ego, the rajasic ego and the tamasic ego. The sattwic ego brings knowledge and happiness. “I am receiving knowledge, I am full of delight”—these feelings are actions of the sattwic ego. The ego of the sadhak, the devotee, the man of knowledge, the disinterested worker is the sattwic ego which brings knowledge and delight. The rajasic ego stands for action. “I am doing the work, I am winning, I am losing, I am making effort, the success in work is mine, the failure is mine, I am strong, I am fortunate, I am happy, I am unhappy”—all these feelings are predominantly rajasic, dynamic and generate desire. The tamasic ego is full of ignorance and inertia. “I am wretched, I am helpless, I am lazy, incapable and good for nothing, I have no hope, I am sinking into the lower nature, my only salvation is to sink into the lower nature”—all these feelings are predominantly tamasic and produce inertia and obscurity. Those afflicted with the tamasic ego have no pride though they have the ego in full measure but that ego has a downward movement and leads to death and extinction in the void of the Brahman. Just as pride has ego, in the same way humility also has ego; just as strength has ego, in the same way weakness also has ego. Those who have no pride because of their tamasic nature are mean, feeble and servile out of fear and despair. Tamasic humility, tamasic forgiveness, tamasic endurance have no value whatsoever and do not produce any good result. Blessed indeed is he who perceiving Narayana everywhere is humble, tolerant and full of forgiveness. Delivered from all these impulsions coming from the ego, one who has gone

“AHANKAR” OR THE EGO

beyond the spell of the three modes of Nature has neither pride nor humility. Satisfied with whatever feeling is given to his instrumental being of life and mind by the universal Shakti of the Divine and free from all attachment, he enjoys invariable peace and felicity. The tamasic ego must be avoided in every way. To destroy it completely by awakening the rajasic ego with the help of knowledge coming from “sattwa” is the first step towards progress. Growth of knowledge, faith and devotion is the means of liberating oneself from the grip of the rajasic ego. A person predominantly sattwic does not say, “I am happy” ; he says, “Happiness is flowing in my heart” ; he does not say, “I am wise ;” he says, “Knowledge is growing in me.” He knows that this happiness and this knowledge do not belong to him but to the Mother of the Universe. Yet when in all kinds of feelings there is a bondage to the enjoyment of delight, then the feeling of the man of knowledge or the devotee is still proceeding from the ego. Simply by saying, “It is happening in me”, one cannot abolish the ego-sense. Only the person who has gone beyond the modes of Nature has completely triumphed over the ego. He knows that the “jiva”, the embodied being, is the witness and enjoyer, the Supreme is the giver of sanction, and that Nature is the master, and that there is no “I”, all being a play in knowledge and ignorance of the Shakti of the sole Brahman without a second. The sense of ego is only a feeling born of illusion in the nature established in the “jiva”, the embodied being. In the final stage this feeling of egolessness merges into Sachchidananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. But having gone beyond the modes of Nature one who still stays in the divine play by the will of the Lord respects the separate existence of the Lord and the “jiva”, the embodied being, and, considering himself a portion of the Divine in Nature, he accomplishes his work in the Lila, the divine play. This feeling cannot be called the ego. Even the Supreme has this feeling. There is no ignorance or attachment in Him, but His state of beatitude instead of being self-absorbed is turned towards the world. One who possesses this consciousness is indeed a soul liberated in life. Liberation by dissolution can be gained only after the fall of the body. The state of liberation in life can be realised in the body itself.

SRI AUROBINDO AND EDUCATION

(2)

AN INDICTMENT

“THE most ingeniously complete machine for murder that human stupidity ever invented, and murder not only of man’s body but of a man’s soul, of that sacred fire of individuality in him which is far holier and more precious than this mere mortal breath...the Moloch to whom we stupidly sacrifice India’s most hopeful sons :”¹ this in a nutshell was Sri Aurobindo’s first impression of the system of higher education prevalent in India when he first came into close personal touch with it in the nineties of the last century.

What precisely were the defects which called for such strong comment ? The defects were many ; they vitiated the whole aim and method of our education.

“If the physical training it provides is contemptible and the moral training nil, the mental training is also meagre in quantity and worthless in quality.... It is a fundamental and deplorable error by which we in this country have confused education with the acquisition of knowledge and interpreted knowledge itself in a singularly narrow and illiberal sense.

“To give the student knowledge is necessary, but it is still more necessary to build up in him the power of knowledge. It would hardly be a good technical education for a carpenter to be taught how to fell trees so as to provide himself with wood and never to learn how to prepare tables and chairs and cabinets or even what tools were necessary for his craft. Yet this is precisely what our system of education does. It trains the memory and provides the student with a store of facts and secondhand ideas. The memory is the woodcutter’s axe and the store he acquires is the wood he has cut down in his course of tree-felling. When he has done this, the University says to him, ‘We now declare you a Bachelor of Carpentry, we have given you a good and sharp axe and a fair nucleus of wood to begin with. Go on, my son, the world is full of forests and provided the Forest Officer does not object, you can cut

¹ Essay on Bankim Chandra Chatterji, in *Induprakash*, 1894.

down trees and provide yourself with wood to your heart's content.' Now the student who goes forth thus equipped, may become a great timber merchant ; but, unless he is an exceptional genius, he will never be even a moderate carpenter. Or to return from the simile to the facts, the graduate from our colleges may be a good clerk, a decent vakil or a tolerable medical practitioner, but unless he is an exceptional genius, he will never be a great administrator or a great lawyer or an eminent medical specialist. These eminences have to be filled up mainly by Europeans. If an Indian wishes to rise to them, he has to travel thousands of miles over the sea in order to breathe an atmosphere of liberal knowledge, original science and sound culture.

"Amount of knowledge is in itself not of first importance, but to make the best use of what we know. The easy assumption of our educationists that we have only to supply the mind with a smattering of facts in each department of knowledge and the mind can be trusted to develop itself and take its own suitable road is contrary to science, contrary to human experience and contrary to the universal opinion of civilised countries.... Much as we have lost as a nation, we have always preserved our intellectual alertness, quickness and originality; but even this last gift is threatened by our University system, and if it goes, it will be the beginning of irretrievable degradation and final extinction..."¹

There have been other blunders equally serious. "While we insist on passing our students through a rigid and cast-iron course of knowledge in everything, we give them real knowledge in nothing..."² "A very remarkable feature of modern training which has been subjected in India to a reduction *ad absurdum* is the practice of teaching by snippets. A subject is taught a little at a time, in conjunction with a host of others, with the result that what might be well learnt in a single year is badly learned in seven and the boy goes out ill-equipped, served with imperfect parcels of knowledge, master of none of the great departments of human knowledge ...In defence of the modern system it is alleged that the attention of children is easily tired and cannot be subjected to the strain of long application to a single subject. The frequent change of subjects gives rest to the mind. The question naturally arises : are the children of modern times then so different from the ancients, and, if so, have we not made them so by discouraging prolonged concentration ? A very young child cannot, indeed, apply himself; but a very young child is unfit for school teaching of any kind. A child of seven or eight, and that is the earliest permissible age

¹ This was originally written in the Baroda period and was first published in *Mother India*, April, 1953.

² *Ibid.*

MOTHER INDIA

for the commencement of any regular kind of study, is capable of a good deal of concentration if he is interested. Interest is, after all, the basis of concentration. We make his lessons supremely uninteresting and repellent to the child, a harsh compulsion the basis of teaching and then complain of his restless inattention. The substitution of a natural self-education by the child for the present unnatural system will remove this objection of inability ... Teaching by snippets must be relegated to the lumber-room of dead sorrows.”¹

Then, there were the examinations.

“We are a scholastic people, and in our life examinations and degrees fill up half the book.”² “But examinations, however important, are only a preliminary. I lay stress upon this because there is too much of a tendency in this country to regard education as a mere episode, finished when once the degree is obtained.”³

“People commonly say that it is because the services are made the object of education that this state of things exists. This I believe to be a great mistake. A degree is necessary for service and therefore people try to get a degree. Good ! let it remain so. But in order for a student to get a degree let us make it absolutely necessary that he shall have a good education. If a worthless education is sufficient in order to secure this object and a good education quite unessential, it is obvious that the student will not incur great trouble and diversion of energy in order to acquire what he feels to be unnecessary. But change this state of things, make culture and true science essential and the same interested motive which now makes him content with a bad education will then compel him to strive after culture and true science. As practical men we must recognise that the pure enthusiasm of knowledge for knowledge’s sake operates only in exceptional minds or in exceptional eras. In civilised countries a general desire for knowledge as a motive for education does exist but it is largely accompanied with the earthier feeling that knowledge is necessary to keep up one’s position in society or to succeed in certain lucrative or respectable pursuits or professions. We in India have become so barbarous that we send our children to school with the grossest utilitarian motive unmixed with any disinterested desire for knowledge; but the education we receive is itself responsible for this. Nobody can cherish disinterested enthusiasm for a bad education; it can only be regarded as a means to some practical end. But make the education good, thorough

¹ *A System of National Education*, Chapter 4.

² “Bankim Chandra Chatterji”

³ An address to Baroda College students, 1899 (quoted in Purani’s *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Appendix 3.)

and interesting and the love of knowledge will of itself awake in the mind and so mingle with and modify more selfish objects.”¹

Education is largely a matter of environment. It is here again that our system failed lamentably.

“With a limited creature like man, the power of the environment is immense. Genius, it is true, exists independently of environments and by much reading and observation may attain to self-expression, but it is environment that makes self-expression easy and natural; that provides sureness, verve, stimulus. Here lies the importance to the mind in its early stage of self-culture of the social surroundings,—that sort of surroundings which our Universities do nothing and ought to have done everything to create....”²

Sri Aurobindo recognises the difficulties that stood in the way. “There are many obstacles to this result in the circumstances of Indian Universities. The Colleges are not collected in one town but are scattered among many. [This was spoken in 1899 when India had not yet started any of the existing residential universities.] They are new also, the creation of not more than fifty years—and fifty years is a short period in the life of a University ...For the success of this attempt time is needed, but your efforts are also needed....”³

But in spite of all our efforts, conditions were bound to remain unsatisfactory so long as an alien bureaucracy had the controlling hand, and this in spite of the fact that most of our teachers were of Indian birth.

“The Indian Colleges affiliated to the Indian Universities may, for the purposes of our argument, be wholly manned by Indian teachers or wholly supplied with the sinews of war by Indian gentlemen; still they would be foreign institutions. For the conditions of affiliation under the new Education Act [this was written in 1907] provide that their whole policy should be left to be determined by an authority which are not themselves. So also the Calcutta University, or any other Indian University may be composed wholly of Indian Fellows; but so long as their every single act or proposal has to be ultimately regulated, as under the new law, by the will of a Power which is not themselves, that University can never be called a National University, but always remain a foreign institution....”⁴

We could not, so Sri Aurobindo concludes, expect any better results from

¹ *Mother India, loc. cit.*

² “Bankim Chandra Chatterji.”

³ Purani, *op. cit.*

⁴ *Bandemataram, 18.4.07.*

a system of education that had been devised by a foreign Government in their own interests.

“It extends to a limited few and fails to inspire even them with any divine wonderment, the curiosity to know or the passion to leave the world better than they have found it by a single act or thought. Imparted with the pre-determined purpose of reconciling the mind of its recipient with the order of things as they are, it has necessarily culminated in the production of a monstrous species whose object in acquiring knowledge cannot reach beyond the vision of mere luxurious animal life, who have been content with merely thinking of and describing the incidents of the political slavery in the language of freedom learned from the noble literature of England, and then imagining themselves free; who have been content with the mere explanations their text-books give of their country’s economic condition, content furthermore with their life of mere external conformity to ancient customs which they have ceased to have faith in, with the daily insincerities of the disorganised society around them which they have not the moral force to reorganise. This passive life of acquiescence in things that be, lived by the average English educated Indian, is the most effective piece of destructive criticism on the education given by the Indian Government ...”¹

There could be only one immediate solution. The control of education must be shifted to a national authority. We must have a system of national education.

(To be continued)

SANAT K. BANERJI

¹ *Bandemataram*, 14.7.07.

SRI AUROBINDO ON INDIA'S DESTINY

(The theme on which Sri Aurobindo had been harping ever since the inception of the Swadeshi movement, namely that it was a divine event leading to far-off consequences, finds in the article reproduced below a philosophical justification. This justification is based on an appeal to history and was meant to disarm the growing band of sceptics among our countrymen who counselled "moderation" as the bureaucracy began to show its teeth and repression spread terror in the land.)

SING FULLER LIFE*

WHEN we say that the Nationalist movement is a divine event and immense are its possibilities few people seem to take us seriously. It is laughed away as the cry of those who do not know their mind, have no idea of their strength and far less any settled plan of work. The so-called pretentious practical men of the world do not believe that throughout nature one increasing purpose runs. They have too high an idea of themselves and are apt to suppose that they themselves are the authors of everything that happens in this world. The unreasonable and unfounded conceit of these petty minds is to a great extent responsible for the fierce opposition which is offered to the progress of humanity all over the world. Every blind and unimaginative autocrat from Canute to Mr. Morley, befooled by individual or racial pride, has called out to the waves—"Thus far and no further." But the waves have treated them as their toys proving that they move at the bidding of a higher power than man. This is not mere rigmarole. This is not the rhetoric of an enthusiast, nor the straitened philosophy of a local observer who mistakes the accidents of one time and place for principles of universal knowledge. They are the utterances of the wisdom that lives through all life, extends to all extent, spreads undivided, operates unspent. When a nation takes a step forward, it is very seldom a conscious effort: Providence guides it from the apparent object to the hidden purpose which gradually breaks upon the view.

Professor Seeley gave expression to a very valuable truth when he spoke of England having conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence

* *Bandemataram Weekly*, 2.2.08.

of mind. There was no absence of mind as far as the immediate purpose, the pursuit of commerce and industry was concerned. But it was soon found out that the flag must follow to protect the trade and the necessary steps were taken to found an Empire. Men thus do things in a fit of absence of mind with a gross material end in view but Providence is always behind them and leads them on to that end which at first escapes the short vision. Seeley has really contributed to the true wisdom of the world by emphasising this fit of absence of mind in which a great work was undertaken. The conscious design comes at a later stage when the possibilities are at least dimly realised, when a people is made to feel its strength and self-consciousness acts as a living force. No man can actually discover what he is capable of doing unless he has done something and felt his strength. The necessary preliminary preparation through which a man is urged to go before he should aspire to anything great cannot be acquired by dissociating from work which brings forth the very qualities with which he is asked to be equipped in advance. Providence makes a man conscious of strength sometimes by leading him blindfold into enterprises for which he scarcely felt himself fit before and it is always with opportunities opened up to him by an unknown hand that he develops his full strength and marches on to his destiny. Could Newton with all his native genius give us the law of gravitation if he were not furnished with the opportunity to watch the fall of an apple in a God's garden? The master mind no doubt set itself working on this primary datum which might have escaped less vigilant observers but the datum came to him all the same unsought and he began to build upon it. The element of some sort of consciousness which inspires determined activities is always awakened by a higher agent and when we are supplied with such a consciousness reason comes to the help of faith and their co-operation results in a practical programme of work with a conscious design.

Bengal declared the boycott in a fit of absence of mind. The immediate object in view was the redress of a political grievance. It was not very hopeful at the beginning about this new departure in its line of political protest. But energy and determination came flowing on Bengal as it were from outside. The whole Province entered on a new life and gave proof of an energy of will never exhibited before. Unexpected success crowned its efforts during a very short time. It then began to feel that death need not be its destiny and life can once more be brought back if well-directed attempts are made. One event happened after another tending to make Bengal self-conscious. Boycott was an unconscious act of independence which has brought struggle in its train calling upon the people to shake off their accustomed indolence and apathy. The sense of irreparable weakness began to give place to a growing feeling of strength.

SRI AUROBINDO ON INDIA'S DESTINY

The people came to think that their future need not be a hopeless blank unless they choose to make it so. Hope came to us as it comes to all, and signs of life made themselves visible everywhere. In their presence the sceptics had to soften down their voice of despair and words of faith and hope began to make themselves heard. Fresh events came with fresh lessons intensifying self-consciousness till it formulated a definite aspiration aided by the knowledge of History and Political Science. Truth broke through the restraints of ignorance and weakness and began to press its claim for recognition. We saw as it were with a suddenly enlarged vision the broad principle of National progress and felt an imperative call for acting up to it. It is this principle which now demands mastery in our thoughts and actions and the quarrel rages round it and it alone. We have long groped in the dark and now that the light has flashed upon us we cannot afford to lose it again. We want to fan it into a steady flame for our guidance and secure it against the moist breath of scepticism and timidity which threatens to put it out....

(Compiled by SANAT K. BANERJI)

THE CAUSE OF INDIA'S DECLINE

WHAT is the cause—the fundamental cause—of India's decline? The mighty nation that was once the vanguard of the world in the field of learning and culture, whose all-round genius had almost no equal, is now ruthlessly stricken with poverty, incapacity, weakness and stands on the verge of destruction. Many are the factors that are said to have brought about such a downfall. But what is the main, the source cause? Loss of vitality, for that is the foremost feature. This statement applies equally to an individual as to a nation. When vitality runs short, the life-energy falls to a low ebb; weakness, disease and death gradually force their way. But India was, as it were, the fount of all energies. History bears witness to the fact that more than once India slipped into an alien atmosphere and almost crashed towards a total downfall, but always it was only for a short while: for she mustered strength again from somewhere and, infused with a new life, she recovered her health and strength to rise again to a greater greatness. It happens however that her present crisis is very radical and unprecedented. It is a question of yes or no for ever. How could India come to such a pass? What sin, what violation of the Law could deprive her of her vitality to such an enormous extent?

There are three primary causes that have led to the diminution of India's life-energy. Let us study them one after another.

Firstly, in order of time and importance, the root cause is the institution of Sannyasa, renunciation, and the influence of the theory of illusion. What does the ideal of Sannyasa teach us? The world is an illusion. The highest good consists in escape from life and withdrawal from action. The play of the natural instincts and propensities which comprises the ordinary social life of man is considered the lower nature. If man wants to attain to his highest nature, his true Self, then he will have to control his outgoing tendencies, stop them totally and finally turn them inward. The *summum bonum* of life is the absorption in the static Brahman.¹

¹ The genuine spirituality of India as embodied in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita has never approved of the renunciation of life and action.

“Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man.”

Isha Upanishad (tr. by Sri Aurobindo)

Needless to say that a creed whose fundamental principle is to escape from life cannot but dry up the sap of life. The outgoing faculties of human life are bound to recede, dwindle and vanish or remain atrophied when it is inculcated that life and the living of life lead one astray from the ultimate Truth. The conception of life as a mirage cannot help life to bloom and manifest. On the contrary, it is sure to effect a gradual cessation of life.

It may be argued however that the ideal of Sannyasa, renunciation, was never meant for the whole of humanity. The Sannyasins neither expect nor wish that all and sundry should give up their respective vocations in life and retire to the mountains and forests and remain absorbed in the sole communion with God. They also admit the necessity of the outgoing movements in human life. The world is not an ultimate reality, but its pragmatic reality cannot be denied. In the course of leading a normal life when spontaneously a spirit of renunciation dawns on one, then that is the proper time to accept the life of renunciation for spiritual attainment. The institution of Sannyasa stands at the top of the society. One has to reach it through the household life fulfilling one's duties as a householder.

Quite true. But the ideal of renunciation gained slowly and occupied people's mind to such an inordinate degree that all other ideals fell into insignificance before this one ideal. The real truth, the real good lies outside the pale of worldly life. The sooner one can get rid of this life, the better. Besides, life was considered not as a way to the Goal beyond, but as a great obstacle to it. To our normal conception a householder is but a despicable sinner. We began to look down upon life and its activities even when we were within the precincts of life itself. Instead of augmenting all the spheres of our activities we wanted to dig out and cast away their very roots. In spite of such an attitude the common men did not become pure of passion and life-attachments.

“All creatures follow the bent of their own nature. Repression is of no avail.”

The Gita

The upshot amounts to this that even while we remained in active life, our zeal for action slowed down and diminished. We became overwhelmed with a pensive mood—a collective sense of the vanity of vanities brooded on our life. The active life was, no doubt, retained, but restricted within a narrow compass, it was unavoidable. The way of life in the end became confined solely to the physical plane. Only the animal propensities were attended to. We missed all high ideals of action. In the social life we were deprived of all collective enterprises. Our only aim was somehow to satisfy our personal needs and those of our family members. And this is called *prāktanṣay*—“exhausting

the consequences of past actions". We paid no heed to the high or large enterprise of the life-energy, and these became altogether meaningless to us. All our energies were diverted to and hemmed in the channels of envy, jealousy and ill-feeling; "eat, drink and be merry"—as much as your depleted life-energy allows—became the motto of our life.

From outside, new shackles were imposed on the life-energy that was already diminishing and dying out from within. The religious codes of Manu and others prescribed the routine of life in all its details. The canons enjoined on us taught how to regulate our life as to what to do and not to do. The march of our life followed the rut of the rules laid down by the law-givers for the regulation of our daily life and the duties on special occasions. We could not deviate from the rules in the least for fear of censure and tyranny of the society. The customs that were in the beginning merely a spontaneous discipline changed into an inexorable chain and bondage. It is true that the living current of life does not and cannot adhere to all these injunctions of fixed laws. Life has a rhythm of its own. It creates its own law. The rules that do not take into account this rhythm and law become a hindrance to the natural progress of life. The urge of life, being hampered at every step, is bound to become weakened and crippled. The hard and fast rules that the mentors of our society had introduced even for inessential and trifling matters of life deprived the life-energy of its natural zest and zeal, made it move like a machine. Consequently our vitality waned and life became nothing more than a bundle of rules. Perhaps the original intention was not to allow the vital energy to run amuck or break the bounds of discipline. Anyhow we missed the art of maintaining freedom in the midst of bondage.¹ This is the second cause that robbed India of her vitality.

The Caste-system is the third cause. The differentiation of castes and sub-castes has practically split India into innumerable divisions. We Indians are bloated with pride and assert that we belong to the Aryan clan. But do we know how many different strains of blood went to form this Indian nation? If there be any Aryan spirit in India, it is not in the blood of the Indians, but in their education and culture. And this education and culture too has mingled with those of other civilisations. When the Indian nation was living and powerful, it had considerably added to its life and power by absorbing new blood

¹ Many people hold that this rigid discipline saved Hinduism and the characteristic features of India during the periods of foreign incursions. But it cannot be admitted that if India had followed her own normal bent of life she would not have been able to save herself, assimilate the foreigners, the members of other religions and cast away what was not worthy of assimilation. On the whole, this austere discipline, the attempt at it which had, as it were, enfeebled and confined the life-energy within a dungeon, has done more harm than good.

THE CAUSE OF INDIA'S DECLINE

and new life-energy. But as the frame of the Caste-system grew more and more rigid, new sub-castes began to make their appearance. Social intercourse and matrimonial alliances ceased to take place. And, as a result, the power of unity yielded to the infirmity of division. No doubt, the maintenance of the purity of blood of a clan may be at times necessary. When a small group acquires some speciality in education and culture, in order to perpetuate this virtue it is obviously needed that it should keep aloof from the other groups. This speciality may last for long, but not for ever. With the march of time its decline is bound to ensue. Besides, it does no good to retain a particular quality for all time, since with the change of time the usefulness of even good qualities will change. There comes the demand for qualities suitable to the age. Purity, *i.e.*, continuance of the type, fixity for its own sake, leads to stagnation and disintegration. According to the nature and capacity of persons and groups different systems of education and culture can and should be admitted in a society. Aptitude and inclination of men should decide groupings. There is no need for arbitrary or notion-made laws. But in the present-day society we find high and solid walls of division raised everywhere even amongst the subcastes. So the social relationship has considerably narrowed down, and from generation to generation the social intercourse has been confined within groupings of a few families. Virility and the life-energy fail under such circumstances to retain their original vigour.

All these causes were responsible for the foreign yoke to be laid. The remnant of the life-energy was liquidated under the pressure of this subjugation. And that brought the *coup de grâce* which seemed to seal the fate of the Indian nation for good.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(Translated by Chinmoy from the original Bengali in "Bharat Rahasya")

FOR EVER LOVE, O BEAUTIFUL SLAVE OF GOD

THESE words from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* are the striking title of an exquisite brochure just published by the Ashram. The brochure contains, first, a remarkable passage, again from *Savitri*, which brings out the true significance of the Work and the Process that are going on under the direction of the Mother. It opens with the lines—

She walked in their front towards a greater light,
Their leader and queen over their hearts and souls,
One close to their bosoms, yet divine and far—

and continues :

To see her was a summons to adore...

Opened to a breath is the new diviner air,
Opened to man is a freer, happier world...

One greater than themselves, too wide for their ken,
Their minds could not understand nor wholly know,
Their lives replied to hers, moved at her words :
They felt a godhead and obeyed a call...

They felt a larger future meet their walk;
She held their hands, she chose for them their paths...

This text printed on a gold-bordered sheet is followed by five magnificent Portraits of the Mother, whose significances are :

Aspiration,
Trust,
Certitude,
Perception,
Realisation.

“FOR EVER LOVE, O BEAUTIFUL SLAVE OF GOD”

And, we would add, this series of spiritual progression is closely linked to the Message given by the Mother on the first day of 1961 :

“This wonderful world of delight waiting at our gates for our call, to come down upon earth...”

The Portraits and the Text are enclosed in a folder of the colour of the Mother's Standard with Her Symbol in gold.

It is a deeply moving experience to study this brochure, an experience of the tangible growth of the soul.

M.P. PANDIT

THE ALCHEMY OF LOVE

(Continued from the last issue)

IV

IN the last essay we discussed at some length the nature of the verse-drama, its conditions of success and its vision of the law of Karma, the Aeschylean dictum that the doer shall feel the result of his actions. Hence it follows that every drama which is not merely a play has as its soul-breath some metaphysic and as a consequence some vision of the moral balance which if disturbed brings about the catastrophe in tragedy and laughter and ridicule in comedy. In the classical conception of perfection man led by reason should lead a balanced life, the Apollonian ideal, 'nothing too much'. For Aristotle tragedy is serious and elevated and involves emotions of a particular sort. It looks at man and his states, in a world in which there is an element of chance or fate, but in which, at least so far as man himself is concerned, there is a definite moral order of some sort, and not moral chaos. He defines it thus : "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these and similar emotions." To complete the picture, here is his definition of the tragic hero : "A man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty." Thus we see that Prometheus is not tainted by any depravity but suffers for loving humankind:

Thou didst them too much honour ! thou, a God,
Braving for man's poor sake the wrath of Gods.

Or as the Chorus says :

...Headstrong and over-daring,
Too little hast thou honoured Zeus ! Too much, humanity !

THE ALCHEMY OF LOVE

Similarly Oedipus meets his tragic end because of his arrogance and all but blind self-assurance. At the end of the classical tragedy we feel that the cosmic law is implacable and man has either to submit to it or go under. As Prometheus says :

I must bear
All that is doomed, as best I may; well knowing
None can do battle with Necessity—

and again later on :

No freedom from my chains,
Till I have bowed to endless agonies !
Frail are all arts beside Necessity.

LEADER : But of Necessity who holds the helm ?

PROMETHEUS : The Fates three-formed, the unforgetting Furies.

LEADER : Is Zeus less strong than these ?

PROMETHEUS : Not even He can baffle destiny.

And further on the Chorus again deprecating Prometheus' excessive love for Man says :

Yon race that wanders weak as dreams, and blinded,
With frailty and impotence to bind it ?
This frame of things God founded, no plan of Man may shake.

Therefore it is important to remember that in the Greek conception Man cannot transcend himself; he must live and die as a frail creature set against the steel-frame of cosmic law and the over-arching Fate that is more powerful than even Zeus and has already brought the fall of his predecessor Saturn and is sure to dethrone Zeus as well at the appointed hour. Man is ignorant and impotent nor is there anything in him which when awakened or discovered can make him omniscient and omnipotent, possessed of a Power

...no Fate can perturb or vanquish,
Calmer than mountains, wider than marching waters,
A single might of luminous quiet
Tirelessly bearing the worlds and ages¹.

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems and Plays*, Vol. II, page 283 (*Jivanmukta*).

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Thus according to the Hindu spiritual and Western Christian conception the aim of man's life is to transcend himself by coming in contact with his inner divinity. Man's humanhood is just a stage in the evolution of his soul which is a flame in our hearts ever urging us to rise higher and ever higher. It is this that is invoked in Sri Aurobindo's poem, *Rose of God* :

Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,
Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name¹.

It is this 'unconquerable soul' which enables the English poet Henley to affirm in his poem *Invictus* :

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed...

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

Another poem of Sri Aurobindo's brings out the whole truth and power of this immanent divinity :

Soul in the Ignorance, wake from its stupor.
Flake of the world-fire, spark of Divinity,
Lift up thy mind and thy heart into glory.
Sun in the darkness, recover thy lustre.

One, universal, ensphering creation,
Wheeling no more with inconscient Nature,
Feel thyself God-born, know thyself deathless.
Timeless return to thy immortal existence.²

This being the nature of the human soul, the immanent divinity, what the Veda again and again invokes as "that which is immortal in mortals", the whole meaning and drift of earthly existence will be the unfoldment of this

¹ *Ibid*, page 302 (*Rose of God*).

² *Ibid*, p. 367 (*Soul in the Ignorance*).

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soul through the countless experiences of life and what appears to the superficial view as a blind steam-roller marching heedlessly turns out to be an omniscient power leading us infallibly towards the foreseen epiphany. In this interpretative vision pain and torture are not inflicted by God as punishments for our sins but as experiences necessary for the refinement of our otherwise cruder base metal. Here the following lines from Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Iliad* will give us a deep insight into the need and nature of suffering. They show the gaze of Zeus "the Father of men on his creatures":

He in the animal racked knew the god that is slowly delivered ;
Therefore his heart rejoiced. Not alone the mind in its trouble
God beholds, but the spirit behind that has joy for the torture.
Might not our human gaze on the smoke of a furnace, the burning
Red, intolerable, anguish of ore that is fused in the hell-heat,
Shrink and yearn for coolness and peace and condemn all the labour ?
Rather look to the purity coming, the steel in its beauty,
Rather rejoice with the master who stands in his gladness accepting
Heat of the glorious god and the fruitful pain of the iron.

So we see that the apparent tragedies of life are really the hammer-strokes that break our fetters or the birth-pangs for the delivery of a god. That is why Keats who suffered so much in life, physically as well as emotionally, refused to call the world a veil of tears, but instead named it the vale of soul-making. In another letter he writes, "The best of men have but a portion of good in them—a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames which creates the ferment of existence—by which a man is propelled to act and strive and buffet with circumstance" (Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 23 Jan. 1818). The divine soul in us descends into this brute world to emerge triumphant with the riches of darkness. Addressing the Bird of Fire which symbolises the human aspiration for the spiritual realisation Sri Aurobindo writes :

Rich and red is thy breast, O bird, like blood of a soul climbing the hard
crag-teeth world, wounded and nude,
A ruby of flame-petalled love in the silver-gold altar-vase of moon-edged
night and rising day.

Before we take up a critical discussion of the drama we shall quote two more statements of Sri Aurobindo on the nature of the soul's evolution. Both are from his book *The Life Divine*. In the first he says :

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“Missioned to lead man in the Ignorance towards the light of the Divine Consciousness, it takes the essence of all experience in the Ignorance to form a nucleus of soul-growth in the nature ; the rest it turns into material for the future growth of the instruments which it has to use until they are ready to be a luminous instrumentation of the Divine. It is this secret psychic entity which is the true original Conscience in us deeper than the constructed and conventional conscience of the moralist, for it is this which points always towards Truth and Right and Beauty, towards Love and Harmony and all that is a divine possibility in us, and persists till these things become the major need of our nature. It is the psychic personality in us that flowers as the saint, the sage, the seer ; when it reaches its full strength, it turns the being towards the Knowledge of Self and the Divine, towards the supreme Truth, the supreme Good, the supreme Beauty, Love and Bliss, the divine heights and largenesses, and opens us to the touch of spiritual sympathy, universality, oneness. On the contrary, where the psychic personality is weak, crude or ill-developed, the finer parts and movements in us are lacking or poor in character and power, even though the mind may be forceful and brilliant, the heart of vital emotions hard and strong and masterful, the life-force dominant and successful, the bodily existence rich and fortunate and an apparent lord and victor.”¹

In the light of the above statement the play *Eric* will unfold its deepest significances. As a matter of fact the description of the ill-developed psychic personality on the threshold of its emergence exactly congrues with Eric the hero of the play.

Another chapter in *The Life Divine* ends with these inspiring words, pregnant with the true meaning of human life :

“In this progressive world, with this human creature in whom the divine spark has been kindled, real wisdom is likely to dwell with the higher aspiration rather than with the denial of aspiration or with the hope that limits and circumscribes itself within those narrow walls of apparent possibility which are only our intermediate house of training. In the spiritual order of things, the higher we project our view and our aspiration, the greater the Truth that seeks to descend upon us, because it is already there within us and calls for its release from the covering that conceals it in manifested Nature.”

¹ P. 208 (American Edition). 2. P. 248.

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V

Goethe once remarked that he was not formed to write tragedies, because he could not tolerate discords unresolved. *Eric* is not only not tragic but there is not a single tragic scene in the whole play. Neither is it a comedy because the comic spirit is out of keeping with its Aeschylean grandeur and sublimity. The whole course of the play runs towards the development of the characters, towards the enrichment of the soul by the experience of love and beauty, sympathy and spontaneous self-giving that is the boon of Love when it visits the human heart. The characters gain in complexity out of the interplay of resolute strength and unwavering determination, which are symbolised by the images of cold blasts, steel and lion, with the sweet honey of love which is the golden hoop that binds the hearts.

The characters of the play are not revealed by their own actions and words only but by what others observe in them. For instance, Swegn's remarks about Eric give us a clue about his nature as it was before the opening scene. Eric's

stroke is like the lightning's, silent, straight,
Not to be parried.

This part of the exposition is held back from us till the fourth Act so that we can see how the passage of time has had a mellowing effect on the hero. Now

'He treats victorious. When his kingdom shook
His party faltered, then he did not treat
Nor used another envoy than his sword.'

There is an aspiration for summer, warmth of love and amity and a revulsion from cold severity, crude violence and implacable animosity. In Act V Aslaug implores Swegn :

O brother, cast the snows out of thy heart.
Let there be summer.

And Hertha adds :

Yield, husband to the sun.

Gunthar, too, noticing the change in Eric observes :

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...Scythia shall own our yoke,
The Volga's frozen waves endure our march,
Unless the young God's fancy rose-ensnared
To Italian joys attracted amorously
Should long for sunnier realms or lead his high
Exultant mind to lord in eastern Rome.

We have seen Aslaug's appeal to her brother in the fifth Act. Setting it beside what she told Hertha in the first Act we can to some extent peer into the way the gods do their work on human beings. These are her words :

Better our barren empire of the snows !
Nobler with reindeer herding to survive,
Or else a free and miserable death
Together.

But when Love's alchemising magic begins to work in her, she herself is puzzled; for, things which so long had been scorned and spurned by her as unworthy of noble natures have begun to sprout and blossom in her. Says she :

What shakes me ? Have I learned
To pity, to tremble ? That were new indeed
In Olaf's race. Give me self-knowledge, gods.
What are these unaccustomed moods you send
Into my bosom ? They are foreign here.

Her terse single-line answers also remind us of the stiff single lines of Aeschylus, especially those of Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*. When Clytemnestra breaks to the Leader of the Chorus the news of Troy's fall, the latter unable to credit it asks :

Is it some dream that awes thee to belief ?

And Clytemnestra replies :

I take no fancies of a drowsy brain.
LEADER : Then is it some light-winged rumour swells thy hopes ?
CLYTEMNESTRA : Thou ratest me no wiser than a child.

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Similarly in *Prometheus Bound*, Io importuning Prometheus to disclose her Fate says :

Do not in pity
Soothe me with pleasant falsehoods. Such untruth,
To me is foulest of all weaknesses.

And here when Eric threatens Aslaug with these words :

I give thee grace no longer, bear thy doom—

she replies :

My doom is in my hands, not thine.

And when he again vaunts his stormy strength, she quietly but firmly retorts :

I have seen thy strength. I cherish mine unseen.

But the love that Eric is aiming to spark off in her is of a sublimer nature. It will not sap their heroic strength but sweeten and ennoble it, generate in them the godlike virtues of wideness, compassion and the will to bring harmony, amity and unity among the Norwegian people who have been so far glorying in wintry bleakness of heart and soulless valour. We shall quote Eric's words, full of a rare poetic power, blending many tones of emotion in an exquisite harmony :

Whatever was thy purpose, thou art taken,
Aslaug, thou sweet and violent soul surprised,
Intended for me when the stars were planned !
Sweetly, O Aslaug, to thy doom consent,
The doom to love, the death of hatred. Draw
No useless curtaining of shamed refusal
Between our yearnings, passionately take
Thy leap of love across the abyss of hate.
Force not thy soul to anger. Leave veils and falterings
For meaner hearts. Between us let there be
A noble daylight.

The third line recalls to our minds the last line in Dante's *Divine Comedy* :

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The love that moves the sun and the other stars.

This theme finds a fuller expression in another soliloquy of Eric's in the third Act, where also the tenth line sends our minds to Dante's closing phrase :

There was the wide flaw,
The coldness of the radiance that I was.
This was the vacant gap I could not fill.
It left my soul the torso of a god,
A great design unfinished and my works
Mighty and crude like things admired that pass,
Bare of the immortality that keeps
The ages. O, the word they spoke was true !
'Tis Love, 'tis Love that fills up the gulfs of Time.
By Love we find our kinship with the stars,
The spacious uses of the sky. God's image
Lives nobly perfect in the soul he made,
When Love completes the godhead in a man.

(To be continued)

RAVINDRA KHANNA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

INTERVIEWS

(Continued)

THOSE were the days when the Mother used to come on the terrace. Once a sadhak was asked to stand by the side of a friend of his, a new-comer, so that the Mother might see him. One look and the man's face began quivering, his eyes watering, his whole body thrilling. Such experiences are not uncommon. The Mother's look sees in us more than we know, more than we can tell. She herself explains the mystery of her look :

“When I am in the presence of a person, I look into his eyes. And if the person is sincere or transparent, I go down into him through his eyes, I see his soul clearly. But, and that is precisely the experience, it happens at times that I see a little cloud. I continue, I see a screen. I still continue and sometimes it is a wall ; then it is something absolutely black. And you must pass through all that, have to bore holes in order to enter, even then you are not sure if at the last minute you will not find yourself before a bronze door, so thick that you may never pass through and it may be impossible to see his soul. In that case, I can say immediately that the person is not sincere. I can say also, in a more literary way, that he is not transparent.”

A's connection with the Ashram goes back to the year 1935. He had come with the intention of having Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and had no knowledge of the Mother.

When he saw a European lady, dressed in silk, receiving Pranams and giving blessings, his old *samskāras* so overpowered him that he did not feel like going for Pranam. And when Kaka Kalelkar, a well-known figure in India, who had also come for *Darshan*, asked him to go for Pranam, he expressed some reluctance but ultimately went up.

With his very first interview with the Mother, a new chapter opened in the life of A. When, later he went to take leave of the Mother he had the fear lest he should not be able to follow her accent; so he had got by heart a sentence which he uttered on meeting the Mother. Her simple answer was “Yes”.

And it created such a vibration within that all his initial nervousness, so natural to one meeting a great personality, gave place to a sense of self-confidence and a feeling arose in him that in dealing with the Mother there should be no fear.

Then he prayed for a spiritual push to facilitate his sadhana at his own place and closed his eyes in meditation before the Mother. Only two or three minutes, and he felt a cooling sensation of peace and joy within. It was a touch which is still fresh in his mind.

Another instance of how even a single utterance of the Mother carries a world of meaning. A was invited from four different places to work. He put the list of them before the Mother. His own intention was preferably to work at Gaziabad. But she said, "Charthawal." It is a village seven miles away from the nearest Railway station. When he inquired why she had chosen that particular place, she answered, "Because there you will have full freedom of work."

These words at once stirred his soul and seemed to fill it with a celestial breadth of freedom.

At present there are 40 members in all at the Charthawal centre. Whenever A comes to the Ashram a few of them accompany him, for one of whom he bears the whole cost. His 250 acres of land, all lost, came back into his possession by the Mother's grace and now forms the property of the Ashram Trust.

A was here for two months during his first stay. It took him nine days to get rid of his inhibitions. Though he had been Principal of Gurukul Kangri for a long time and is held in high esteem by our national leaders he is yet as simple as a child. One feels quite at home with him. Tell him whatever you like to his face, nothing will ruffle him. Anything undesirable he will smile away.

By looking into the soul of a man, the Master used to visualise his possibilities and deal with him accordingly, irrespective of his position intellectual, financial, social or otherwise. When A expressed his desire to be enlisted as a permanent member of the Ashram, the Master wrote :

"I have made no final decision about your request, but it does not seem to me advisable, as yet at least, for you to remain here longer than the two months you had settled on when you came. This yoga is a long and difficult one, and one has to travel far before there can be any question of a Supramental illumination or transformation. It means, besides, a constant breaking up of past formations and realisations which would not be easy for you, as you have advanced fairly far on another line of Sadhana, with its own lights and inspiring sources.

My advice to you would be to go on in the direction you had already been following and see where it leads you. If any light from my writings is of use to you, you can take it, or if any help from me is necessary you will get it from within. But if in the end it is destined that you should enter this path of Yoga, you will get the necessary realisations, which will make that possible. At present it seems to me premature for you to enter this way or stay here for any great length of time."

Let me here take the opportunity of turning to another page of A's history which will show that it is 'an error' for one to follow what applies to another. Once A asked permission for six months' stay in the Ashram and six months outside. Sri Aurobindo gave no reply. Then A broached the question again through an attendant of the Master. Now there was the reply, "That will be all right."

At this time K dissuaded him, citing his own case, that the Master had told him that "it would be disastrous for him to go outside." This made A change his mind and he wrote to the Master to say so. And the Master wrote back :

"What has been said to you about your going out is an error. There are those for whom it would be disastrous to go out, for others it will be meaningless because there is no true reason for their going, it will be merely an act of vital restlessness and dissipation of the consciousness harmful to the sadhana or the attraction of a call from the lower nature and away from sadhana. In other cases that will not apply at all. There is no rigid rule for everybody—the one general rule is that no one shall go out under pressure of a vital insistence. In your case we have expressly approved of your spending part of the time outside; therefore you need not have any doubt or apprehension in the matter."

One cannot pass through the rough-and-tumble of life, unscathed. But there are chance moments too when a breath of fragrance, a soft touch of the zephyr cools our brow. An experience like this, one can never forget. Such an experience came over the lives of Sisir Kumar Mitra, Dr. Tan-Yun Shan and Dr. C. R. Reddy which are recorded in their writings.

After his first interview with the Mother (1943) Norman Dowsett, an Englishman, gave his reactions as follows :

"I was taken to her in the evening and my first impression was something of a shock, because I had gone to her with very definite preconceived ideas on how a 'Mother' should look : something demure about her dress, looking perhaps more nun-like than otherwise—in fact, an epitome of all the saintly women I had learnt about in the lives of the saints and in books from my earliest days of reading,—such was my expectation.

“I made my first mistake by trying to talk to her in my poor French, which I had not used conversationally for over twenty years. She was, of course, very gentle with my ignorance, asking me where I had gone to school in France etc., but I could not get over the initial shock to my ‘English conservative ego’.

“That evening I returned to my hotel disconsolate and unhappy to the very depths of my vital being. I had bought, that morning, a little book : *Conversations with The Mother*. I flung myself on the bed and started to read. There, on the page in front of me the words seemed to leap at my consciousness, penetrating and touching something deep within my heart : “*The whole mental world in which you live is limited...do not judge the Divine by outward appearances nor by the preconceived ideas of your limited intelligence.*”

“I know not now which of these words were from the printed page and which were those imprinted on my heart, but I knew this was Truth, it was an experience of the one Truth which we always long for over the dry desert of our lives : something inexpressible of an inner certainty which includes all love, all Beauty, all Delight and all Knowledge, yet passes all our understanding.

“My eyes flooded with tears and I wept as a little child that was once lost and has now come back to its mother.

“The next day, I was impatient to go to her. I went with a large tray of deep-red roses, and in my heart was a prayer asking forgiveness for my stupidity. She received me with such love that I, was overwhelmed, no word was spoken by me but she said simply : “I know, it is all right.” And my being knew it had come back to its home.”

Why the Mother gives interview or Pranam or accords permission to some and refuses it to others is a matter above human comprehension. There is no hard and fast rule or custom. Some time ago a popular actor appeared at the gate as a chance visitor. When he expressed his desire to the gate-keeper to see the Mother, the latter wondered how, coming without even permission, he could hope for an interview. But the visitor insisted that word might be sent to the Mother on his behalf.

The Mother acceded to his request. He was all joy after meeting her. To a member of the Ashram he spoke movingly of the great love with which she had received him. He disclosed that he had invoked the Mother’s help in his long-cherished desire to produce a film with a spiritual bent and the Mother had given her gracious assent. This is one of the many instances in which the Mother gives encouragement to any initiative anywhere that makes for human progress towards spirituality.

A learned Sashtri of high standing had been repeatedly seeking but never received the Mother’s permission to visit the Ashram. Then one day he

came without notice. He had the hope that he would be able to get the permission after coming here. The office was informed. Shortly, however, without waiting for an answer he came out of the reception room and started packing up and was going away. When he was asked why he was not waiting a bit to see the secretary he said—'I needn't, I can see what's inside from the very outside', meaning a life-like painting of Gandharvas drawn on the model of Ajanta by Syed Ahmad, a Hyderabad artist, and presented to the Mother by Sir Akber Hydari. It is said that the Mother appreciated the work very much and directed that it should be hung up in the reception room.

All departments of the Ashram centre round the Mother. Nothing can be done without her knowledge or approval. When a new concern is started she gives the organiser all help and allows him free scope for full experiment. If anything goes wrong she never takes any action or calls for explanation but suffers all expenses without a word.

Heads of the various departments approach her with all sorts of problems to which she gives a ready solution. When the great building named Golconde was being constructed, a difficult engineering problem arose and all attempts to solve it failed. A suggestion was made to put the case before the Mother. "But how could the Mother be helpful in such a technical matter?" doubted some. Still they agreed to the course suggested. After listening to the engineers the Mother said, "Is it not possible to try this way?"—explaining to them what she meant. The engineers were taken aback to see that that was *the* solution of the tangle.

At times she simply goes on hearing what one has to say and, without a single word in reply, she gives a fresh flower or a packet of petals. And the thing works.

Often the same is the case with Ashram departments. Persons in charge make or write reports which the Mother listens to or reads but says nothing. Instead she gives her blessings in writing or in flowers. But the purpose behind the report is served. Whenever an emergency arises and the mind gets clouded or confused and does not know what to do or how to proceed, people simply send word to the Mother, her light dawns upon the consciousness and the thing needed gets done. Besides, a report to the Mother on any matter of gravity brings instant relief in its train.

Once an indispensable stuff ran short in one of our Stores, leaving only just sufficient for a month. The man in charge had never had such an experience. He communicated the fact to the Mother and that particular stuff came pouring in from outside sources. Since then no occasion has arisen of any deficiency. It may sound strange but it is an objective fact.

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Call it a miracle if you like but such miracles are of daily occurrence here. To us they are commonplaces.

“According even to Rao,” writes K.M. Munshi after putting a query to our Vice-consul in Pondicherry in those days, “the Ashram was a solar system wherein the planets, major and minor, revolved noiselessly in well-regulated orbits round the Mother. She took interest in everyone, she was looked upon with confidence ; and yet there was freedom for everyone to pursue his path of evolution in the Aurobindonian way.”

Though the writer here has in mind things external alone, yet these are not the sole gifts of the Mother. To moisten parched lips and make them smile again, to clothe grey wastes of the inner being with verdure are gifts of no small value.

When someone, bereaved of a near and dear one, comes up to the Mother, she expresses no word of sorrow, none of condolence or consolation. Instead she infuses her Force into the soul of the man which helps him instantly out of his sorrow. She steepes his being in such divine love and fills him with such celestial beauty by her smile that he returns quite a changed man after a brief interview.

It is said that the real test of the builders of life lies in their power to mould the life of others—not in their teachings and sermons ; it is in their own life, in their acts and their dealings with the world.

The living example of the Mother’s powers of organisation, maintenance, development and her infusion of her spiritual consciousness into everything, is the Ashram, growing around her. An instance will speak for itself. As is customary with sannyasins, Fredrick Bushnell of Boston had come here in ochre garb for three days while on a tour of India and Ceylon. On the day of his departure he pressed for an interview. He was told : “Where is the hurry ?” He was astonished. His impatience and a sense of urgency for departure got on his nerves. The Mother saw him in her own time. The roving sannyasin has since (1953) been here as a member of the Ashram, having his separate home in an island about 20 minutes’ drive from here. The room of his sadhana itself is a vivid illustration of his devotion. It is only the Mother’s power that could tame a restless nature like his.¹

A sadhak who has been doing his sadhana at the feet of the Mother for more than two decades, narrating what he has got from her life, writes : “The first thing I learned from her was that the power of love is endless ; the universe can be changed by this power. I have seen nothing but the victory

¹ At the moment he is on a visit to the United States

of the Mother's Love in every case. Her Love descends in constant showers upon the miserable, the weak, the wicked ; and such is the purifying power of her Love that the guilty confess their guilt and feel fortunate with her blessings. No punishment, no harsh word, only Love. Who can say how many gloomy lives she has flooded with her light, how many afflicted hearts with her bliss, how many agitated minds with her peace ? The second thing I learned is that if one's life has to be elevated, brought into the light from the dark, then it must not be through words of teaching, not by coercion ; only his consciousness has to be raised to a higher level. But who can help develop another's consciousness ? The one who has had true union with the Divine. Third : her patience is boundless. She fronts every obstacle, every disorder and violence, every challenging circumstance as Patience incarnate, proof against vacillation. No power can overcome this towering rock of firmness. In the end, opposition and revolt defeat themselves ; her Patience stands triumphant. This is no philosophical teaching. This is a teaching that the Mother's day-to-day life gives us—the teaching that possesses our hearts and minds.”¹

Each has his own approach to the Mother. Before 1940, it was mostly at the time of *Darshan* that people from outside would come in numbers. The April *Darshan* started in 1939, began to draw more and more people, especially students, teachers and lawyers.

Once an eminent advocate of Patna High court came in May 1945. We felt surprised that he had come when there was no *Darshan*. Questioned why he had come at such a time, he said in a happy tone, “Why, the Mother is there. Let the ground be prepared first.” In those days accomodation was a problem. His first letter to the Mother said that if no room was available for him he would be content to remain under a roadside tree.

In February 1960, when a suggestion was made to a newcomer by a friend to seek an interview with the Mother, he calmly replied, “Where is the capacity in me to appreciate her ? What good is there in taking her time for nothing ? How can I profit by it ?” How free was he from curiosity ! How correct was his attitude !

In May of the same year, a high official of Behar Government came with four or five friends on a short visit to the Ashram. While going round the various departments, within an hour or two, he repeated about 10 times the question, “How to see the Mother ? Who can take me to her ? Whom to approach for help ?” This intense urge to meet the Mother is also in its own way the correct attitude. An attitude is correct according as it truly represents an inner truth.

(To be continued)

NARAYANPRASAD

¹ Rishabhchand, *In the Mother's Light*.

THOUGHTS

Do you aspire to soar aloft ? Then be not a corpulent rhinoceros. Do you desire to attain a lofty status ? Then do not rummage the refuse. Ingenuity will not bring fulfilment. Gaining fulfilment you will not need any ingenuity.

Do you desire to fly ? Do you desire to attain a lofty status ? Then satisfy the necessary conditions. If you want to make the Everest your home, first learn the art of respiration at high altitudes.

*

*

As a child, I very much enjoyed sitting round the bonfire in the village. And often I would go and sit near it. But when the blaze was scorching I would draw back and, when it was pleasant to bear, draw near it.

Even after I was grown up I did something similar, or rather could not but do it. At times I drew away from the light of the Guru and at times I came close to it.

The extent to which we can come close and then are forced to withdraw is the meaning of our *adhukār*.

GIRDHARLAL

(Translated from the author's Gujarati "Uparāma")

LINE AFTER LINE

LINE after line I have built and broken.
Each holds a thought of measured dimension;
Each bears a rhythm of earth-bound reach—
Feel, my pen,
The Vast that is flowing within !
Write with transmuted power—write then alone
When each impeccable line
Shall answer thee back
With its ever-youthful strokes and starry punctuations
From the measureless sheet of heaven above.

SHIV SHARAN DIKSHIT

SIGNPOSTS AND SYMBOLS

"VINGT-ET-UNS"

Author's Note

These poems came to the writer some two decades ago; revised recently, they are now being serially published in batches of Twos.

The pieces number Twenty-One in all; and each of them comprises of just Twenty-One lines: hence the cryptic sub-title "Vingt-et-uns".

Apart from their recondite value as psychological signposts in the growth of the writer's being, the poems might presumably provide amusing and useful material for aesthetic enquiry—as to the adequacy or otherwise of the novel mould into which spiritual experience is here sought to be cast and the technique-mode governing the multilateral symbolism thereof.

Incidentally, the writer knows only now that 'Vingt-et-un' is a gambling card-game; and that knowledge imparts to him the hope that his successful (?) gamble with the new Form may well inspire other lovers of the Muse to try their hand at this new Form-and-Game and come off with better windfalls!

I

OUR Life's a River rising out of springs,
Gangotri-like, fed ever by drizzles fine
On superconscient Heights! Drip-trickles slow
Seek hands of comradeship with gurgles shy,
And, struggling thro' shrubs and ferns, meander on,
Right-circumventing huge custodian-rocks;
Fast gathering strength from brother-rills that pour
Foam-silver tributes and sister-streams that bear
Fond-babbling memories of a hundred hills,
From right and left the waters headlong dart—
A single laughter of adventure-joy,
A rippling movement of fulfilment-bliss!
Past numerous tortuous windings in and out,
Past leaps abrupt and falls precipitate,
Past toiled alluring calls of static lakes
And all the chequered play of arbour'd shade
And colour and sound and conflict on the way—
The waters run, and run ahead, till lo!
The sole-aspired Sea breaks forth to sight:
And the last heave to that One Terminus
Seals union sempiternal each moment fresh-renewed!

SIGNPOSTS AND SYMBOLS

2

The streams come pouring down the lofty crests
Of Heights deep-planted in ecstasy of poise :
A poise unbroken, massive, brooding stern,
Full-circumspective though seeming fast-absorbed :
A poise that keeps its foothold firm of earth
While seeking converse with farthest-reaching skies :
A poise that breathes the keen ethereal airs
Of rarest altitudes and, breathing, bears
Condensed returns for that dear faithful Earth,
Standing service arduous in aspiration mute !
The streams come pouring down the shaggy crests,
Swaying and sweeping, lashing from side to side,
Beating flanks stubborn into furrows wide,
And, filtering through clefts, crevices, fissures fine,
Overflowing tanks, fresh-chiselling dams and banks,
Surcharging pores and vitalising soil,
New-build up tissues that stabilise the gains :
Gains changed to gifts in cycles evergreen,
Gifts rich and thick and profuse, as centuries roll,
So the streams come pouring, pouring ever on—
And Heaven and Earth are joined in full circuit evermore !

CHIMANBHAI PATEL

NEW ROADS

BOOK X

(v)

THERE came to earth
Gold, from the Peaks of God;
From the feet of Bliss
where that immortal trod :
Mahahladini—
Goddess of Delight !
Mother divine,
Queen of the descending Light.

Dawn-kissed, the dew,
in that first hour She chose—
Awoke new life
from the soil of the psychic Rose.

Then proud through inconscient mists,
breaking to sight,
Sun-climbing Highways
were glimpsed on the edge of Day;
Winged summits of grandeur
haloed with golden Light
Beckoned the Traveller
tread the aurelian Way.

Promise of conquest
over Death and Desire
Flamed from new heavens
ancient with Vedic Fire.

★

★

Then fell upon the earth
a mighty storm—
Veiling men's sight,
perverting shape and form;
Malignant—like a flood
of turbulent seas
Engulfing the valley,
shrouding the witnessing trees :

NEW ROADS

Tumult and thunder—crash !
downpour and driving rain—
Torrent and lightning-flash !
scourge of the beast and the grain;

And the beast in man,
the grain—the seed in the mire
Which feeds the dull mind
memories of desire :

The lurid self
which mocks at Time and Truth
Yet steals the substance
of immortal youth.

Death destroys
when Time and harmony vie
With discordant Fate—
then, Darkness is torn from the sky !

*

*

But suddenly
the night was calm and still,
As if obeying
some high and mightier Will;

The heavens opened
to reveal a light
Of jewelled Splendour
challenging the Night !

A golden Silence
hung poised over earth and sky
As if awaiting
a new Divinity—

Now will the world soon see
a Greater Dawn
Climb from the purple deeps
where Life was born !

NORMAN DOWSETT

THUS SANG MY SOUL

(32)

VII. MOTHERING THE BOND OF LOVE : PRAYERS AND PRAISES

(Continued)

60. O MAKE ME THINE !

O MOTHER, make my praying heart
So simple, so devotion-hued,
Born pure of ego rent apart,
It may burn white in gratitude.

O Mother, make my monkey-mind
So locked in calm world-wakeful trance
That never an ignorant willing find
Its way through my deep light-expanse.

O Mother, make this being mine
So pliant to Thy Will and free
That wholly bloomed incarnadine
Inseparably it dwells with Thee.

61. O MAKE THY EACH TOUCH FOR ME SWEET !

O Mother, every touch of Thine make sweet.
What comes to my love-thirsty soul from Thee—
Warmth or rejective coldness, smile or threat—
Be bringer of supreme felicity.

Despite goodwill and loyalty if defeat
Be Thy unquestionable fiat for me,
I heart it as the gift of Thy Flower-Feet
Bearing the seeds of summit-victory.

(To be continued)

HAR KRISHAN SINGH

THE MARXIST APPROACH TO LITERATURE

(Continued from the issue of December 5, 1960)

II

WE may concede that Marxism seems to have made a genuine contribution to literary theory in stressing the fact that literature does not exist in the void, that a study of the writer's environment and society is of great help in our task of understanding and appreciating his work. But it would appear that Marxism always mistakes conditions for causes. Unless you have enough to eat you cannot write a poem. As a matter of fact, you cannot live. You may have, however, a lot to eat and be incapable of writing a poem. The material means of production may condition and qualify literature, but they do not cause literature and certainly do not explain literature. Similarly it is not the social conditions that produce a work of art. They may make the production of a work of art or a piece of literature possible but they do not and cannot produce one. A work of art is obviously produced by the artist and not by the society to which he belongs. And the Marxists minimise altogether the part played by the individual artist in the creation of a work of art.

No, "Marxism tells us nothing about the nature of art; it does not reveal even the sort of half-truths and distortions of truth which psycho-analysis gives us. It has nothing to tell us about the nature of the impulse which compels the artist to seek utterance and to compel his intractable material to assume a beautiful form. It throws no light and can throw no light on the nature of the artist's technique. And it is this technique which makes it possible for us to share the artist's experience and find pleasure in doing so....Marxism tends to be very uncritical in its evaluation of a work of art. It neglects the technique, the beauty of form, the purely artistic qualities and tends to judge, praise and condemn by an examination of the matter. Just one example would serve to show this uncritical attitude. In one of his letters Marx wrote to Engels: 'In Balzac's *Le Curé de Village* (*The Village Curate*) there is the following: "If industrial production were not *double the value of its cost price in money*, there would be no commerce." What do you say to that?' The economists would at once recognize that in the sentence quoted by Marx Balzac approaches the

idea of surplus value. And the rhetorical question put by Marx means in effect that Balzac must have been a great writer because he had a glimpse of surplus value !”³⁸

We, thus, see that it is always a sociological or economic standard which a Marxist brings to bear upon the valuation of a work of art. He fails to perceive that literature is essentially a human product, and it is a part, perhaps a most valuable part of culture, which man has created for the satisfaction of his spiritual and natural human needs. “It is co-existent with human nature, or, at least, it existed in human nature as the flower is contained in the seed. The essence of art is experience. A dance of light and colour in some corner of the universe catches the eye of the artist, draws him out body and soul together. There is at the same time some inner need which is forcing itself upon the outer world, seeking expression. When this inner need which is forcing itself out harmonises with, merges into the beauty which we might say is forcing itself in, the result is artistic experience which expresses itself in some form of art. Such experiences are important because they differ from average experience in variety, range, depth, value. These experiences have to be communicated and the way in which the artist works, his means of communication, is his technique. The technique is just the means of getting the work to correspond precisely with his experience. And technique matters because on the success of the technique depends our successful participation in the artist’s experiences, the satisfaction of our desire for spiritual wholeness. For it is this spiritual wholeness which the arts make possible of achievement.”³⁹

Well, it is idle to expect that the Marxist or Soviet writer would ever achieve this quality of “spiritual wholeness” unless it is a writer like Boris Pasternak who, however, is hardly to be taken as a representative Communist writer ; and even in his case it is more of spiritual emptiness than wholeness that we become aware of, in his famous book *Dr. Zhivago*. Nevertheless, there is a genuine attempt here to reach something of the spiritual wholeness on the part of the hero and heroine of the novel. But as regards the divine purpose of art, *i.e.* that aspect of it through which it makes us aware of what our Indian spiritual culture and wisdom has discovered as divine beauty and harmony and delight, and thus achieves the fulfilment of its highest destiny, it is something which still sounds quite strange, even dangerously capitalistic and imperialistic to Communist ears. But there is one thing certainly which the Marxists have tried to do from the very beginning. It is to give art and literature back to the people. Lenin told his countrymen : “Art belongs to the people, its roots should penetrate deeply into the very thick of the masses of the people. It should be comprehensible to these masses and loved by them. It should unite the emotions, thoughts and will of these masses and

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arouse them.” And in actual practice, in accordance with this dictum, the Soviet writer has sought to produce a literature which is “closely woven into the life of every individual citizen so as to broaden and enrich his whole personality”.⁴⁰ In the Soviet system art and literature have taken on “a new and unprecedented importance for state and society. The responsibility of the artist increases and society develops a new respect for him. He is no longer regarded as “an eccentric” or “a hired entertainer”. He is “an architect of the social soul...Art becomes as much a necessity of life as municipal lighting or elementary education. The artist becomes as indispensable a member of society as any other teacher of essential knowledge.”⁴¹

Here we cannot help admitting to our shame that, as things stand at present in the capitalist system, we cannot speak of our contemporary art and literature in such terms of social collaboration. On the contrary, as George Thomson tells us in his interesting little book *Marxism and Poetry*, “Our contemporary poetry is...the work of a small and isolated section of the community, the middle-class intelligentsia...bourgeois poetry has lost touch with the underlying forces of social change. Its range has contracted—the range of its content and the range of its appeal. It is no longer the work of a people, or even of a class, but of a coterie. Unless the bourgeois poet can learn to reorientate his art, he will soon have nobody to sing to but himself...all poetry is in origin a social act, in which poet and people commune. Our poetry has been individualised to such a degree that it has lost touch with its source of life. It has withered at the root.” (pp. 65-66)

Now it does not need to be a Marxist or a Communist to see that there is a good deal of truth in what George Thomson says of our contemporary literature or what Christopher Caudwell says about the future of poetry in the concluding chapter of his book *Illusion and Reality* which may be regarded as an almost classic book of Marxist literary criticism by an English author. If a Marxist critic tells us, as the Irish playwright J.M. Synge told us in the early decades of this century, that “all art is a collaboration”, or that “Art can only be fully understood as a social phenomenon”,⁴² or that “The Communist poet is concerned to a degree never known before with the realisation of all the values contained in the relations of human beings in real life”,⁴³ we are not to dismiss these ideals as Communist nonsense. On the contrary, we are to see how much of these ideals can be assimilated, and in what way, into our vision of the future of man and his social life and ultimate destiny. As the Mother has said, “True art is intended to express the beautiful but in close intimacy with the universal movement. The greatest nations and the most cultured races have always considered art as a part of life and made it subservient to life.... Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed

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in all the movements of existence. This manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part... True art is a whole and an ensemble ; it is one and of one piece with life.”⁴⁴ And just as we, on this side of the Iron Curtain—which, by the way, we are happy to see lifting a little in recent years—would like to remind ourselves of the truth of these words of the Mother, we would wish that our materialist, Communist brothers should attempt to widen the range of their vision of even social, material reality and be able to see that this world is not really composed of two blocs : the bourgeois and the proleteriat, the “West” and the “East”, as they think, but is one “great human family”,⁴⁵ which lives, flourishes and progresses on the living principle of an essential unity and oneness and not the Marxist theory of class differences and class struggles.

It is only when this vision touches and inspires the Marxist artist and he also begins to perceive with increasing joy and wonder the truth of the Spiritual Reality behind Matter that he will be able to produce a literature worthy of being ranked with the literary masterpieces of the world.

(Concluded)

SHREE KRISHNA PRASAD

REFERENCES

38,39 “Marxism and Literature” by K. Ahmad in *Current Studies*, Patna College, p. 77.

40,41 *Soviet Art and Artists* by Jack Chen, p. 8.

42 *Ibid*, p. 2.

43 *Illusion and Reality* by Christopher Caudwell, p. 247.

44 Quoted from the Mother’s Message to the visiting team of Russian Athletes in April 1956.

45 *Words of the Mother*, 1st Series.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Uparama (Gujarati) : Writer and Publisher : *Girdharlal*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. pp. 52, 'Priceless', December 1959.

This book contains 108 poems in lyrical prose, a couplet for dedication and a preface—all written in a style such that by a small-size publication the writer has introduced and set up a forceful way of saying profound things in brief. The poetry is in high flights of thoughts which seem to have emerged directly from vivid experiences and the prose has the strength of convictions which one would form after deep searching.

We have a trend in Gujarati poetry which seeks philosophical aspects, but it may be said without any prejudice that the burden upsets the vessel, the heaviness isolates them for a very limited academic sphere. Happily Girdharlal's poems are full of life, eloquent and likeable. The reader goes through a number and is soon lifted up into a wide sphere of new thought, even new experience. Curtains begin to lift over his horizons almost electrically.

And yet, picture after picture, drawn by him, unfolds before us in a rhythmic majesty, there is no jerk or jolt. A sense of guidance overtakes us as soon as the first line is read. The reader is led onwards unconsciously. If the simplicity lends a charm, the symbols and similes used are very pointed. A fair critic should admit they are novel and the writer's own. I should have quoted a few by way of example but I am afraid a rendering into another language will lose a portion of their spiritual import. A rendering may be possible to the writer himself : it cannot be attempted by a reviewer.

From its form, we shall now turn to see its 'inside', though both have grown so close to each other that each strengthens the other. The form helps the meaning to reveal itself easily and have a firm, impact on the reader. But it is nevertheless the 'meaning' which is of real significance.

The writer floats into heights and plunges into depths as if they belonged to him equally, he illuminates them by disclosing new values. He invokes Divinity, feeling himself as a part of it, and unfolds in his prayers a new purpose of Divine Grace.

But Girdharlal is not always just on wings. He often touches ground and possesses the readers by putting searching questions and by exposing the minute egos which take shelter and grow under false cloaks. He tears them

open so that people may see for themselves clearly. He wants that people should not err again. And he becomes a helpful guide to show the way where none seemed to exist just a while ago. He picks up a word from the Gita and so aptly puts it in his poem that it begins to twinkle a new light.

When one comes to the end of the book, the book is not set apart. It enters within and forms a part of oneself. First a feeling of being searched, then bewilderment, then soon on their heels an inner questioning. One gets a sensation of tender shocks, but ultimately begins to rely on the writer and be bold to follow in the new path.

Such a book requires more readings to get at the real gist. It cannot get old, it is created to remain fresh. It is a treasure for those who have found it, but only for those who empty their hearts and give place to the rich, new, fresh and invigorating spiritual drink.

NANOOBHAI D. DAVE

Sapphires of Solitude by *V. Madhusudan Reddy* (Published by V. Man Mohan Reddy, University Road, Hyderabad-7). Price : Rs. 2-00.

A collection of poems bearing so exquisite a title and with such a tasteful get-up makes the reader at once curious to plunge into it. And the highly encouraging introduction by the eminent *littérateur* V. K. Gokak fills one with great hopes.

For a poet it is extremely painful to witness his poems getting criticised unfavourably. Yet a time comes when an impartial evaluation of what he writes becomes indispensable, and beneficial too ; and the sooner the better probably.

Much of the book under review smells of workmanship rather than of pure spontaneous poetry. My first objection against these poems is their technique which attempts to create effects with too liberal a rush of assonances ; the second and the more important objection is the interference of the mind of ideas and of ideals.

As far as Reddy's ideas and poetical feelings are concerned, no critic can fail to acknowledge their sincerity and loftiness. And he is not incapable of converting them into poetry. I cannot help quoting a few lines from this book, where Reddy reaches the top of his form from the point of view of poetic perfection, from the point of view of happy all-fusion. The concluding phrase of the following stanza is so very perfect an expression and has such a

depth and felicity of vision and word that it can claim clear immortality for its intense inwardness ;

Yonder rises the sheer splendour
Of the pinioned skies,
And my heart is caught under
The moon-grip of still music.

The reader cannot but thrill to repeat aloud such lines that reveal a world of original poetry where beauty is inherent and comes naked in her true splendour ! The poet becomes almost prophetic in his utterance at times :

Words come whispering from worlds half asleep ;
Consciousness upon consciousness, summits too steep,
Where melodies mingle in a transparent stream
That moves on musing in dream...
Weary of births the soul-flower sits entranced in its seed ;
Across the frontiers, the Apocalypse hastens with lightning speed.

I envy the poet who can give birth to an essentially poetic (should I again venture to call "immortal" ?) line like "Weary of births the soul-flower sits entranced in its seed". But it is a pity he cannot keep to this magic-mystic height all through in his significant musings or even to the lesser yet inwardly atmospheric level of "Words come whispering from worlds half asleep".

The majority of these thirty-eight poems cannot claim the praise I am compelled to give such sparks of the true fire.

In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo wrote, "For poetry three things are necessary. First, there must be emotional sincerity and poetical feeling.... Next, a mastery over language and a faculty of rhythm perfected by a knowledge of the technique of poetic and rhythmic expression.... Finally, there must be the power of inspiration, the creative energy, and that makes the whole difference between the poet and the good verse-writer...."

The poems under review are considered in this light. As I have already stated, Reddy possesses the first quality required. And he has to wait for the other two to come finished and flawless. In the meantime what he can best do is to read and re-read (I ask this of him, however conscious I may be of his academic accomplishments !) the finest lyrics of the past masters and certainly of Sri Aurobindo, and absorb their rhythmic richness so that his inner poetic awareness may grow confident of its accent and its form. Then, in the near future, he shall come out with his second volume of poems where poetical

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imagery, emotion, idea, technique—everything shall get transfigured by the God-touch of spontaneous creative energy !

Before concluding, I humbly feel the necessity of passing another critical remark : V.K. Gokak seems to take in a very general sense the term 'Overhead' which Sri Aurobindo applies to a certain kind of poetry. It is difficult to understand how, when the poetic quality of the book is itself in question, it can be considered "one more significant addition to the overhead poetry that is steadily growing in the wake of Sri Aurobindo". Overhead poetry is the rarest of rare blooms. Even all that is mystical and spiritual is not necessarily overhead. Not only the substance, not only the expressive word, but also the rhythm has to come sheer from regions above the mind in order to make the genuine overhead afflatus. Of course, poetry can be very authentic without being overhead. Poetry is the inner touch moulding the form to perfection. And, as Sri Aurobindo has said, the originating source of poetry can be anywhere—the subtle-physical plane, the vital plane, the plane of the dynamic or creative intelligence, the plane of dynamic vision, the psychic—and the overhead levels culminating in the Overmind which gives the *Mantra* proper.

Reddy surely deserves encouragement, for he has the root of poetry in him. But the poetic plant needs great tending—and one has to be very careful lest other growths get mixed up with it and pass themselves off as the magic flower.

PRITHWINDRA

The Divine Awakener By *Svami Rajeswarananda*. Pub. Sevashram, Esanya Road, Tiruvannamalai N.A.Dt. Pp. 480, Price Rs. 5.50.

Svami Rajeswarananda is a prolific writer in the field of Religion, Yoga, Philosophy and Dharma. Among his many assignments is the editorship of the monthly journal *Call Divine* and the fact that the collection of his editorials comprising this volume has run into three editions testifies to their wide appeal. The topics covered are large in number : ethics, scriptures, philosophical concepts, sadhana, Karma, fate, symbolism, quotations from Yoga Vasishta, Shankara etc., etc. And though the approach of the author is mainly from the standpoint of the Shankara Advaita, there is much in these observations that is of interest to the general seeker of spiritual values. To a few sentences :

'*Meditation* is no vacuum nor a state of negation, passive and inactive. It is a continuous flow of thought, one-pointed, towards the Ideal, in one sense,

Meditation is a collection of all your faculties and forces, well focussed and brought under your control, and perfectly surrendered unto the Divine...'

'*Evil* is a negative good. It has no power except that which you give it.'

'*Faith* is the voice of the Divinity within you.'

'*Man* is an expression of God and God is the reality of man.'

Speaking about smile and frown, the author writes : 'It takes about twenty-six muscles to make a smile and sixty-two to make a frown.' A counsel to remember time and again !

M. P. PANDIT

Glimpses of Reality By *A.R.I. Shaikh Biyabani*. Pub. Author, 827/16 Boottee Street, Camp, Poona. Pp. 66, Price Rs. 2.

A disciple of the Sufi saint Sadguru Sri Shahasahib Biyabany, the author has had certain convincing experiences of the supra-physical life and sees the solution to the myriad problems of humanity in the unitive Truth of God. He has evidently thought deeply about the social and political conditions of the society today and this book contains his observations and suggestions with which few would disagree. He regrets the *lacuna* that is being created in the Educational Programme in the country by the elimination of all that is not secular and the consequent relegation of all soul-values to the background.

Speaking of Destiny, the author rightly points out that the hold of Fate, Karma, is rigid only on matter and life in matter; it is loosened as one rises higher into the realm of the spiritual consciousness and it is possible even to change one's destiny by the force of the Spirit.

In a brief section on life-after-death, Mr. Shaikh writes that one can direct one's journey in the supraphysical planes after death only if he has acquired the necessary control over his subtle body (or bodies) by appropriate discipline during his life-time. This is in conformity with the wisdom of the Upanishads as also of all occult experience. We cannot, however, follow the author in his differentiation and description of the several bodies or sheaths of man and their interaction. Perhaps a deeper study of the subject is called for.

M. P. PANDIT

Students' Section

TALKS ON POETRY

TALK TWENTY-THREE

(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 interests of unity of theme. As far as possible the actual turns of phrase used in the Talks have been recovered and, at the request of the 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.)

WE have brought Shakespeare and Eliot together apropos of the latter's lines on evening as an etherized patient. But Eliot and Sarojini Naidu would indeed be strange associates, the one a sophisticated modernist, the other a romantic traditionalist, the one intellectually inspired, the other emotionally beauty-swept. Yet there are some tracks in my mind along which I must bring them together : perhaps the very ingeniousness of Shakespeare and Eliot drives me in this matter.

The lines we have quoted from Eliot I have considered the surgeon's delight. Well, the husband of the Indian poetess was a doctor and it is by marrying him that Sarojini Chattopadhyaya became Sarojini Naidu. Once an Indian admirer of hers made the fact of her marriage responsible for not only her new name "Mrs. Naidu" but also her original maiden name. At a public gathering which she was going to address, the chairman happened to refer to her husband as the eminent surgeon Dr. Naidu. A man in the audience turned to his neighbour and, with examples like Yogi and Yogini in his mind, said with an air of wonderful discovery: "Oh now I understand. It is because of being Surgeon Naidu's wife that she is called Surgeoni Naidu !"

What this "Surgeoni" does in her poetic capacity is to cut through conventional responses to life and Nature and reach a colourful novelty that can

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occasionally rival anything the cleverness-wallahs can spring on us in iconopoeia. See her write about Indian Dancers :

And smiles are entwining like magical serpents the poppies of lips
that are opiate-sweet...

To make a smile not only an entity by itself, independent of the lips' curvature—to make a smile also a magical serpent : this is surely a cleverly penetrating imaginative act in the context of the poem. If a smile is an expression of a mood, a magical serpent of a smile is a sinuous and swaying inner delight which is the enchanted source of the body's dance-movement : at once we are drawn from the physical to the psychological, from the outer to the inner form, the mind's way of feeling and seeing, the way which is the true stuff of art-expression. Sarojin! Naidu is ingeniously iconopoeic also in that brief description of the crescent moon, where she discloses by a sharp gleaming touch the high and sacred sense her country's antiquity had of every detail of social custom and structure : she calls the crescent

A caste-mark on the azure brows of heaven...

But, of course, this poetess is most notable for her emotional intensities or subtleties. An instance of the latter are those three lines from *In Salutation to the Eternal Peace*, which may be regarded as the Indian religious transfiguration of the etherized evening-mood of introvert neurotic modernism :

What care I for the world's loud weariness,
Who dream in twilight granaries Thou dost bless
With delicate sheaves of mellow silences ?

A surgeon like Dr. Naidu may not give a whoop of joy at this post-harvesting picture of meditation. But our Yogic surgeons may take an equally keen pleasure in thinking of the results of a heavenly harvester's scythe as in thinking of the results of an earthly F.R.C.S.'s scalpel.

Eliot himself is not incapable of a larger and intenser imagination than the opening lines we have discussed of his poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, or that ironic summing up—in the same poem—of the entire triviality of modern life :

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

The concluding phrase indicates, through the size of the object to which it refers, the smallness of our interests and motives and achievements. It also

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indicates the stuff of which our daily life is composed. What is measured out is like coffee, a common drink associated with routine mornings and afternoons and accompanied by issueless conversation. Something far other than a coffee-spoon existence is, however, within the range of Eliot's poetic iconopoeia, and he can rise though not very frequently to the grand style from the merely queer and *recherché* which modern poets affect. Look at him verbally vivify an adventure of the soul, dangerous and arduous:

Across a whole Thibet of broken stones
That lie fang-up, a lifetime's march...

Fang means tooth and denotes here the cutting edges of the splintered stones. Imagining a whole Thibet of teeth, one thinks of a huge dragon's mouth; yet, thanks to the stone-picture, this subtle suggestion is held within the sense of physical reality, so that nothing flamboyant is said in spite of the passionate feeling and seeing. But, owing to the associations of the word "Thibet," physical reality itself, without being obscured, is enveloped with a powerful aura of strange significances widening it out into an inner world of pilgrim vision and priestly aspiration endlessly forcing their way through unknown difficult elevations.

The image of the fangs reminds me of a picture in Sri Aurobindo which is a masterpiece of realistic mysticism. He is speaking of the "Bird of Fire" moving between some soul-depth in man and some spirit-wideness above of secret illuminations:

Rich and red is thy breast, O bird, like the blood of a soul climbing
the hard crag-teeth world, wounded and nude,
A ruby of flame-petalled love in the silver-gold altar vase of moon-
edged night and rising day...

This is what may be termed esoteric poetry presented in all its profound suggestiveness without the intervention of the interpretative intellect—iconopoeia in a sense which has already been illustrated in certain passages of Sri Aurobindo's incantatory *Rose of God*. There is also an iconopoetic poetry which is mysterious rather than mystical or else is mystery hovering on the verge of mysticism. Look at Keats's description of the sea-bottom, taking us like Milton "under the glassy, cool, translucent wave" but showing us instead of a "Sabrina fair" in whom we may recognise just an imaginatively idealised human loveliness a Nature-scene shot through and through with a delicately deep subjectivity :

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...nor bright nor sombre wholly
But mingled up, a gleaming melancholy,
A dusky empire and its diadems,
One faint eternal eventide of gems.

The subjective tone is set immediately by "gleaming melancholy" which tends to convert the next two lines into the reflection of a soul-domain as much as an image of the under-water world. In "a dusky empire and its diadems" we seem to have the gloom-glow of a realm of mysterious majestic beings held together by an unnamed Overlord or Emperor, and this realm becomes in the last line a portion as if of some eternity of hidden lights whose reality is conjured up for us by an extreme felicity of phrase : mark the word "eventide" combining the suggestion of evening with that of tide, meeting the poetic demands of the occasion from the viewpoint of both colour and substance, implying both the subdued multi-lustre and the sweeping liquid mass and thus preparing for the glimmery water-wrapped jewels. I consider this line one of the most beautiful in all poetry—it is superlative at once as melopoeia and as iconopoeia. Milton's Sabrina-lines also are iconopoeic as well as melopoeic, but their quality is different : it is less penetrative.

We have mystery on the verge of mysticism in quite a dissimilar mode in another phrase of Keats's, which too has the sea for its theme. Now the mode is more intellectual than sensuous and we have not a mood-picture but the evocation of a strange presence pursuing a strange function. The evocation is achieved through the play of an imaginative profundity upon the bare fact of waves washing against land :

The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.

It is impossible to think that the poet is no more than imaging with a mixture of simile and metaphor the physical purification of the earth by the sea. As soon as we think so we can give body to our idea only by ridiculously reducing, as C. Day Lewis has remarked, the image to a mere illustration of the problem of sewage-disposal ! An unformulable spiritual potency is suggested in what the waters are doing : man's tainted earthly existence is felt as coming under the constant influence of fathomless forces from the vast depths of his soul-being which is purificatory with its ocean-like reflection of some immaculate heavenliness.

We have said that Keats's iconopoeia here is more intellectual than sensuous—"priestlike", "pure ablution", "human" serve hardly a visual purpose :

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the only sensuous word is "moving". But there is nevertheless a general reminder, as also noted by Day Lewis, of the religious rite of asperges, an indirect vague picture of a priestly procession occupied with the work of sprinkling holy water. Iconopoeia of the mysterious that just peeps into the mystical is sovereignly brought us by Keats without any such description, any outlined image of this sort, in a line which is not even a mood-picture but only the statement of an emotional fact plus an intellectual conception : Keats does the miracle with the help of one indefinite colour-word :

I loved her to the very white of truth.

One feels immediately that some extreme of depth is expressed. But what is this depth ? I have called "white" an indefinite colour-word not because the colour itself is in doubt but because no unequivocal clue is afforded us of the reality intended by the vision. One may interpret "white" in prime reference to either "I" or "her" or "truth". The first alternative would yield the idea : "I loved her truly." The second would give the notion : "I loved the true self of her." The third would frame the thought : "I loved the divine truth in her." By not tilting the expression in favour of any of the three concepts Keats fuses all of them and renders his vagueness many-meaning : the vagueness arises not by a lack of ultimate clarity but by a denseness due to three clarities being simultaneously present. The word "white" itself may be taken as a pointer to a triplicity of significance-shade, just as actual sunlight holds fundamentally the three primary colours—red, yellow, blue. Red would here stand for the passionate intensity of "I loved her truly", yellow for the idealistic keenness of "I loved the true self of her", blue for the spiritual ecstasy of "I loved the divine truth in her"—and the basic original white for a pure infinite of mystery that is the truth of love and the love of truth.

The word "white" has been used by other poets also as part of memorable iconopoeia. Yeats has made a famous comment on some lines of Burns which he quotes as running :

The white moon is setting behind the white wave,
And Time is setting with me, O !

Yeats says : "Take from them the whiteness of the moon and of the waves, whose relation to the setting of Time is too subtle for the intellect, and you take from them their beauty. But, when all are together, moon and wave and whiteness and setting Time and the last melancholy cry, they evoke an emotion which cannot be evoked by any other arrangement of colours and sounds and

forms." Cleanth Brooks and R.P. Warren point out that though the picture would be more beautiful if we substituted "gold moon" and "gold wave", something would be lost : the beauty would not be organic to the theme, it would be too rich for the idea and emotion of "setting" which call for a paleness as of something waning or dying. What Brooks and Warren say is correct, but I should remark with a bit of kill-joy prosaicality that the symbolic effect seen in the lines and the "relation too subtle for the intellect" which is read there may be largely of Yeats's own making. Not that the lines as quoted by him are wanting in all that he finds in them. The trouble is that Burns who was a poet very far by temperament from being symbolically subtle does not seem to have written them as quoted. David Daiches, in a broadcast¹ on the bicentenary of Burns's birth on January 5 1959, refers to the Scots singer's "magical use of symbolic colour which so impressed the poet W.B. Yeats" but quotes the version of the lines in the original Scots dialect thus :

The wan moon is setting ayont the white wave,
And time is setting with me, oh !—

a version which is indeed very finely atmospheric yet conveys the writer's mood with a distinct and intellectually seizable correspondence in Nature by describing the moon as "wan" : "wan" means "pallid" and suggests waning or dying.

"White" is an absolutely vital term in Shelley's celebrated simile—

Life like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity—

but plays its role in a context of clear-cut spiritual thought-vision : the lines are luminous rather than mysterious. We have mystery touching mysticism in a somewhat homely way in the modern poet John Wain's :

But she towards whom (though far) I softly cry,
When asked, immediately would find it out,
Swiftly as white intuitive pigeons fly.

The familiar pigeons become a symbol, though vaguely, of an inner revelatory power. "Intuitive" is indeed poetically apt and directly significant, but the

¹ *The Listener*, January 29, 1959, p. 205.

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essential suggestion is no less in "white". And, so far as the actual word is concerned, "white" is irreplaceable. One may hope to light upon a substitute for "intuitive", but nothing can do duty for "white". Only the ascription of "whiteness" to the pigeons that seem to know their way by an infallible inner feeling can bring for us a quality of sheer truth-vision unclouded or unweakened by any tinge of complex and confused human nature.

Mysterious iconopoeic poetry of the kind we are illustrating can crystallise also by presenting clearly an unknown figure instead of vaguely a known one. This figure differs from the shapes of esoteric poetry by not exactly going above reason as much as by acting from behind it, so to speak. It differs from the poetry of Eliot's "whole Thibet" which does not baffle the reason but largens beyond it and provides a hold through which elusive suggestions may be groped for. The poetry presenting a finely realised figure of a mystery tends to break away from whatever hold the reason lays upon it and even to escape from all intention the poet himself may have had. Eliot has almost a moment of such poetry in his *Gerontion* at the end of a passage which is a series of forceful poetic thinkings in which remorse is expressed at the waste of knowledge about the presence of Christ :

These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

Expositors of Eliot have tracked a clever connection between this line and what precedes the passage whose close it forms and Eliot must have been aware of that connection when, speaking of "depraved May" and the springing in it of "dogwood and chestnut," he added the highly original expression "flowering judas" for one of the rank growths of depravity, a tree which symbolises betrayal and could come to bear the wrath of God. However, the line, on its own, appears to stand in a sort of independent life, making the tree itself both tearful and wrathful, and shadowing some cryptic reality intenser than anything the inspired intellect wanted to fashion.

In older poetry too we have similar figures. Perhaps the most famous short example of the baffling is in Milton's *Lycidas*. A passage there talks of the greed of the new clergy of Milton's day, the failure of the pastors to look after their flock of believers. After recounting this clergy's slothful wickedness Milton caps the description of the harm done with the semi-mysterious lines—

Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing done—

lines which perhaps have the Church of Rome in mind : the word "wolf" may be an allusion to the legendary she-wolf which had suckled the founders

of Rome. But the real "baffler" comes soon on the heels of these verses, Milton breaks out into a most sombre warning :

But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once and smite no more.

This is terrific. The presence of an unerring and inevitable doom as if from weird regions beyond the human confronts us. But what is the "two-handed engine" ? Don't bring in anything like our steam engine. There was no such puffing monster in Milton's day; and it cannot be two-handed in any pertinent sense, though the engine-driver has two hands. The origin of the word "engine" is the Latin *ingenium* meaning "skill". So, in general, an engine is an instrument which is "something skilful". In Milton's lines, the image has a particular significance : it points to an instrument employed with skill by two hands to do a work of destruction. And it seems to acquire some precision in the light of a formidable phrase in Book VI of *Paradise Lost*. There the angel Michael, the leader of God's armies against Satan and his rebel hosts, is pictured fighting :

the sword of Michael smote and felled
Squadrons at once : with huge two-handed sway
Brandished aloft, the horrid edge came down
Wide-wasting...¹

Then there is another passage in the same Book of *Paradise Lost*, in which Michael and Satan are pictured as opposed with their arms "uplifted imminent", aiming "one stroke... That might determine, and not need repeat..."² Here we have the exact equivalent of

Stands ready to smite once and smite no more.

The "two-handed engine" is evidently a long heavy sword, such as was often in use in Mediaeval times, allowing and requiring both hands to hold the hilt in order to do its work which was "wide-wasting" with even a single stroke. But is there a special meaning in such a sword being selected by Milton ? Some critics opine that he is referring to Parliament with its two Houses—the House of Commons and the House of Lords. And indeed Parliament did behead the chief of the English clergy, Archbishop Laud. But surely Milton could not have foreseen this event which happened in 1645, eight years after the writing

¹ *Ll.* 260-63.

² *Ll.* 317-18.

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of *Lycidas*. Nor was the instrument of Laud's execution a sword : it was an axe. And, though the executioner's axe was operated with both hands together and though Milton in his pamphlet *Of Reformation in England* does speak of "the Axe of God's reformation", he nowhere himself makes it "two-handed" as he makes Michael's sword, and the Axe he mentions in his pamphlet has nothing to do with Parliament. Besides, Parliament as such is too poor an original for the engine-wielder of Milton's lines. Even if Parliament was in Milton's mind, it has somehow opened an inner eye in him to a supernatural power of judgment and retribution and overruling government that has a touch of the Omnipotent. The phrase "God's reformation" is a good hint to combine with the phrase about the "two-handed sway" of the sword of Michael, the divine warrior. Something archetypal, as it were, which goes beyond all earthly authority, has manifested through the poet's imagination : what is conjured up is God as righteous Wrath with full force and needing just one smite to end anything.

An image that has sometimes been taken to represent this Wrath in a mysterious manner is the animal addressed by Blake in the poem he entitled : *The Tyger*. I prefer, for Blake's own purposes, this old spelling used by him of the animal's name : the *y* instead of an *i* adds visually to the challenge of that animal as a symbol, for a long threatening tongue seems to be thrust out. If I had my own way, I should respell the whole name and accompany the sense of tongue-thrust with a roaring onomatopoeia : Tygerrrh.

Before we touch upon the poem, let me make a few digressive remarks. In the popular mind the tiger is contrasted to the lion, though both are acknowledged to be beasts of prey and feared by most men. The lion is said to be a gentleman who never exercises his ferocity except when he is hungry : the tiger is regarded as a ruffian who delights in ferocity for its own sake and would display it at any time. This is a gross libel—and any self-respecting tiger would resent it. As the libel is almost as old as history, I wouldn't be surprised if the tiger has avenged it by attacking its calumniator whenever it has met him. But big-game hunters have testified that this animal too, for all its fiercer aspect, is no different from the lion. If it feels that you are out for its skin or that you will be a nuisance in some way or other, it will go for your blood; but if its belly is full and your mind is on your own business, it will not sidetrack to slaughter you. Of course, you must realise the tiger's idea of what minding your own business means. I gather that the main thing is not to make any movement which it may misunderstand : this amounts practically to saying that you must make no movement at all if escape by movement is not possible. Animals, as you must have observed, are not interested in still objects : whatever moves is alive for them and may be considered a potential danger. I have read of a

hunter who came face to face unexpectedly in an unarmed moment with a tiger. Instead of making any movement he just sat down on his haunches, still as a stone, looking straight at the carnivore. The tiger eyed him with uncertainty for a minute, then itself sat down and kept looking at him coolly for a while, finally yawned with boredom and, swishing its tail a little contemptuously, turned away. Would you dub this a ruffian's behaviour? I would call it quite gentlemanly. I believe that the reason for our usual slander is that the tiger perhaps takes offence more quickly than the lion. There was a Frenchman who said about it: "Cet animal est très méchant, il se défend quand on l'attaque!" ("This animal is very nasty, it defends itself when attacked!")

My own personal experience is more of lions than of tigers. On way to England at the age of six I went with my parents to a friend at Aden when the ship stopped at that port for half a day. This friend had kept a lion as a pet. A year or so before our visit the animal seems to have outgrown the pet-stage and was put into a cage. We were taken to pay our respects to it. It was said to have lost its interest in life ever since it had been caged. As soon as it spotted me it appeared to find life most interesting. For, it followed my movements and glued its gaze very appreciatively to my limbs. I suppose I should have been highly flattered at such attention to my boyish juiciness.

Years later I came across another member of this species, which also got interested in me—but under different circumstances. I had a few hours in hand at Madras *en route* to Pondicherry; so I decided to visit the Zoological Gardens. There was a magnificent lioness in a big cage which, in addition to having its own bars, was surrounded by an iron railing at a distance of about three feet from them. I noticed that the lioness had thrown its tail outside the bars on to the space between them and the railing. The idea came to me that here was the tail of the grandest animal on earth within touching distance and that I would be the silliest animal on earth if I missed the opportunity. I leaned over the railing and put the palm of my right hand on the fine tuft of hair at the tail's end. As if a shaft of lightning from a sombre cloud had been drawn back into the lowering darkness the tail was retrieved into the cage by the offended posterior of the lioness, and the beautiful body turned in an eye's twinkle and the glorious muzzle sent forth a thunder that fairly threw me off my balance. The next moment the animal lost its interest in me and walked away. But that violent *volte-face* had sent with its thunder a hexametrical line of Sri Aurobindo's into my mind: at the end of his *Ahana* the Goddess of Dawn tells the spiritual seeker that he surely would meet true Joy

When thy desires I have seized and devoured like a lioness preying.

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If it had been a tigress whose tail-end I had known, the unique honour of touching, I would have remembered another line of Sri Aurobindo's, which is perhaps the most poetic example of descriptive much-in-little iconopoeia about the creature whose image Blake has taken to symbolise his theme :

Gleaming eyes and mighty chest and soft soundless paws of grandeur
and murder.

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

THE BREATH OF THE SPIRIT

Aime-moi ! Ces deux mots sont mes verbes suprêmes.
Car étant ton Dieu tout puissant, je peux vouloir,
Mais je ne veux d'abord que pouvoir que tu m'aimes.

(Love me ! These two syllables are my supreme words. For, being thy God omnipotent, I can will all, but I wish first only to be able to make thee love me.)

VERLAINE

Le désir est comme une flamme brillante, et ce qu'il a touché n'est plus que de la cendre,—poussière légère qu'un peu de vent disperse—ne pensons donc qu'à ce qui est éternel.

(Desire is like a brilliant flame, and what it has touched becomes mere ash,—light dust that a breath of wind scatters : let us then think only of what is eternal.)

CALDERON

A chaque instant Tu me suis, Tu me gardes,
Et lorsque je T'appelle, oh jamais Tu ne tardes;
Et si parfois Tu sembles Te cacher
C'est Toi qui viens m'aider à Te chercher.

(At each moment Thou followest me and protectest me, and when I call Thee, oh never dost Thou delay; and if sometimes Thou seemest to hide Thyself, it is Thou that comest to help me find Thee.)

ST. THÉRÈSE