

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

DECEMBER 1980

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TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

The enormous rise in the cost of paper, production and distribution and the change in some other factors have forced us to raise by a small margin our subscription from 1980. We have kept the margin as small as possible because the cost of living is everywhere on the increase. In passing, we may state that the cost to us of each copy of *Mother India* is more than Rs. 3/-. It is only the donations and advertisements that help us out to a great extent.

Among the other factors mentioned above, there is our decision of reverting to the use of envelopes instead of wrappers for posting in India. Complaints have come in that the edges of the copies got crumpled and that sometimes the wrappers got torn so that the copies were not delivered. But the cost of envelopes has shot up from the rate of Rs. 55/- in 1976 to the present rate of Rs. 200/- per thousand (a 300% increment).

The Indian postage per copy is now 15 paise instead of 10. Posting abroad by sea-mail now costs Rs.1.50 instead of 50 paise as in 1976.

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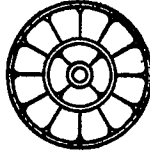
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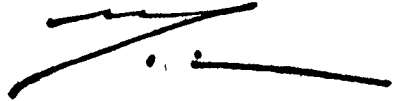
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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AN APPEAL TO OUR WELL-WISHERS

Mother India is in need of donations of any amount that can be spared.

The scheme of Life-Membership is still in force. If attended to, it can also help.

Advertisements too can be a good contribution. Tariff cards can be had on application.

Increase in the number of subscribers is always welcome.

We shall be grateful for help in any form, and particularly in the form of donations.

The donations will be tax-free if sent ear-marked for us through the Ashram Trust.

AN EXPLANATION TO OUR WELL-WISHERS

The good number of our advertisements must not be taken as a sign of great gain.

We pay a very large commission on several of them, and after deducting press-charges our profit is small on the whole.

CHRISTMAS

WORDS OF THE MOTHER

Father Christmas,

I invoke you today!

Answer our call. Come bearing all your marvellous gifts. You are the great dispenser of worldly possessions; you are the untiring friend who hears every request and grants it generously. Give each one the material object he desires, and as for me, give me enough, give me much so that I may give largely to all.

*

(Significances of the gifts offered by the three Magi to Jesus at the time of his birth)

Gold:	wealth of the world and supramental knowledge.
Frankincense:	purification of the vital.
Myrrh:	immortalisation of the body.

JESUS AND THE AUROVILLE-CHILDREN

GUIDANCE FROM THE MOTHER

JESUS is one of the many forms which the Divine has assumed to enter into relationship with the earth. But there are and there will be many others; and the children of Auroville should replace the exclusiveness of one religion by the wide faith of knowledge.

(The Mother on Auroville, p. 41.)

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

LIGHT FROM THE MOTHER

THE spiritual spirit is not contrary to a religious feeling of adoration, devotion and consecration. But what is wrong in the religions is the fixity of the mind clinging to one formula as an exclusive truth. One must always remember that formulas are only a mental expression of the truth and that this truth can always be expressed in many other ways.

6 December 1964

You express your faith in Sri Aurobindo with certain words which are for you the best expression of this faith; this is quite all right. But if you are convinced that these words are the only correct ones to express what Sri Aurobindo is, then you become dogmatic and are ready to create a religion.

3 March 1965

THE TRUE INNER GESTURE

POINTERS BY THE MOTHER

THE most terrible thing is when you do not have the strength, the courage, something indomitable. How often they come and tell me : "I want to die, I want to run away, I want to die." They get the answer : "Well, then, die to yourself! You are not asked to let your ego survive! Die to yourself since you want to die! Have that courage, the true courage to die to your egoism"...

One day a moment comes when the thing has to be done, when one must make the true inner gesture that liberates. To tell the truth, just now there is upon earth an opportunity which presents itself after thousands of years, a conscious help with the necessary power. It was once believed that nothing had the power to wipe away the consequence of a Karma, that it was only by exhausting it through a series of purificatory acts that the consequences could be transformed, exhausted, effaced. But with the supramental power, this can be done without the need of going through all the steps of the process of liberation.

November 1958

"DISASTER" AND DIVINE GRACE

INSIGHTS FROM THE MOTHER

PEOPLE who make an effort to progress and grow consciousness realise that what at one time in their lives they took to be a disaster or a calamity may appear fifteen years later like a blessing, an effect of Grace, some highest good. From a higher standpoint, it is quite obvious that if you bring your highest consciousness down into your life, it will bring the greatest good into your life.

People who have made some progress always have this experience. They see clearly that the so-called "disaster" was in fact the starting-point of their ascension, an ascension which could not have taken place without it. If someone has the inner vision and is able to enter his higher consciousness at will, he will see that it is the greatest good that happens to him when he is in contact with his highest consciousness.

But, to be able to understand this, there are two conditions. You must make an effort for progress and be utterly sincere, for if you are not sincere, you will never have any insight into your own life. You must be able to look at yourself and say, "How tiny I am."

THE MOTHER'S MESSAGE TO SHRADDHALU'S CHILDREN

WHEN he left his body, his psychic being came directly to me, very conscious, luminous and happy, and did not leave me. It is waiting in peace and joy for an appropriate rebirth in which he will fulfil the plans he had made for helping in the Divine's work.

9 August 1963

SRI AUROBINDO ON ASPIRATION

NOTHING can obstruct a quiet aspiration except one's own acquiescence in the inertia.

13.10.1935

Aspiration is never really difficult. Rejection may not be immediately effective, but to maintain the will of rejection and refusal is always possible.

This is not enough by itself—there must also be the steady will for transformation.

1.12.1953

DECEMBER 5

A SADHIKA'S STATEMENTS IN 1956 AND THE MOTHER'S COMMENT

First Statement

THIS is my experience during the meditation. I had no sense of body. There was nothing except infinite space. Then I heard a voice which said: "From now on, I will rule the world." I asked: "Who is that 'I'?" The answer came: "The Supermind." Then I laughed and asked: "But who is the Supermind?" At the same time I said "Sri Aurobindo", as if addressing him—and then there was a sort of stroke on my mind and I knew that I had uttered the answer.

It was all darkness. It was from this darkness that the voice came. When the last answer "Sri Aurobindo" came I was looking into the darkness. Out of it very slowly an egg-shaped fire came. At first it was quite red, then it became a little golden together with red. Then it began to move round and round me. This was the Supermind come forward to rule the world.

The Mother's Comment: "It is quite correct."

Second Statement

When I asked Mother what was the meaning of "From now on", she said: "The very moment the meditation started at 10 o'clock in the morning. So far Sri Aurobindo was not doing anything." Mother herself saw the same fire. She saw the oval lit-up picture, which was there, of Sri Aurobindo becoming red at first and then golden. It was something grand and intense. The background of the light was all dark and in the darkness all the gods—Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva—were lying as if heaped like rocks. It meant that their reign was over and Sri Aurobindo's had begun.

SEHRA

NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

THE COMPLETE SET

(Continued from the issue of 24 November, 1980)

July 21, 1935

Why am I getting so disturbed? Life seems to be a wash-out. Have I fallen again into the blessed lower vital dungeon?

I SUPPOSE so. It is the vital that refuses to leave its movements and yet at the same time can't enjoy them (i.e. why life seems to be a wash-out).

I am more and more relapsing into a gloom and glum.

Tamas of a disappointed but still recalcitrant vital.

Do you intend to give me a push or a kick this time at the Darshan, or just a touch as usual?

I think for that your vital has to make up its mind whether it is going to leave its old moorings or not. Otherwise a kick will only give a gloom and glum and a push make it tumble down and say "O Lord! what a wash-out is life!"

July 22, 1935

It is because I made up my mind long ago to leave the old moorings that I was able to kick at the old life, but the moorings seem to be very deep beyond my human reach.

Yes, you made up your mind and it remains made up—but I was speaking of your vital and its mind. It is because your vital is kicking against your made-up mind that there is the trouble. You ought to talk to it more seriously and firmly and when necessary give it a calm and judicious whipping until it becomes a good boy.

July 23, 1935

If the emanation is the Mother herself why do we make a big case of our troubles? No faith in the emanation?

If anyone is conscious of the Mother's presence, he does not make a big case of his

troubles.¹ Even if one is not, yet those who have faith or are not touched by your Man of Sorrows are not making the row you speak of. Nobody *has* to make a big case. People do it because they are ignorant and unconscious.

A.B. says if we see things impartially we'll find that happiness predominates over sorrow. It is hard for me to concur with this observation.

It is fundamentally true for most people that the pleasure of life, of existence in itself, predominates over the troubles of life; otherwise most people would want to die whereas the fact is that everybody wants to live—and if you proposed to them an easy means of eternal extinction they would decline without thanks. That is what A.B. is saying and it is undeniable. It is also true that this comes from the Ananda of existence which is behind everything and is reflected in the instinctive pleasure of existence. Naturally, this instinctive essential pleasure is not the Ananda,—it is only a pale and dim reflection of it in an inferior life-consciousness—but it is enough for its purpose. I have said that myself somewhere and I do not see anything absurd or excessive in the statement.

This is how one sees things from the cosmic consciousness, I suppose.

Not at all. There are plenty of people, not endowed with the cosmic consciousness who have said and written the same thing. It is no new theory or statement.

In the face of what we see in the world today, it is not easy to accept A.B.'s viewpoint. Just look at India, with its famines and starvation and unemployment! In spite of this, how can it be said that the Ananda of this bare existence surpasses all suffering?

All that is only a feature of the present time when everything is out of order. One can't argue from that and speak as if it were the normal existence of the human race. Even with all this trouble and disorder² are all these human beings feeling so miserable as you say? They have so much to vex and trouble them yet they go on chatting, laughing, enjoying what they can. Why?

(Against the second part of the question Sri Aurobindo wrote in the margin.)

For most people it does. All are not men of sorrows like yourself or fallen into the Byronic vein. Some of course have so miserable an existence that it stifles the innate pleasure of life—but these are after all a small minority.

¹ In the daily report of our sadhana we used to send to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

² Conjectural reading.

But you have yourself written in The Riddle of This World that this is an unideal and unsatisfactory world strongly marked with the stamp of inadequacy, suffering and evil.

That is when you look at what the world ought to be and lay stress on what it should be. The idealists' question is why should there be pain at all even if it is outweighed by the fundamental pleasure of existence? The real crux is why should inadequacy, limit and suffering come across this natural pleasure of life? It does not mean that life is essentially miserable in its very nature.

People will invite A.B. to come down from his hyper-optimism into the material earth-consciousness and see for himself.

A.B. is not an ass. He knows perfectly well what is taking place in the material earth-consciousness and would be very anxious to plunge into the fray to make things better, if I allowed him, but I don't and won't.

I am trying to have a dash again at poetry.

Very glad to hear it.

July 24, 1935

I hear that X saw the Divine in the Mother at first sight. It seems that he has come to the top rung of your spiritual ladder. In your heavenly Parliament he must have been in charge of a very important portfolio!

What top rung and what Parliament? There is no such thing as a heavenly parliament. X progressed smoothly and rapidly from the beginning in Yoga, first, because he was in dead earnest; secondly, because he had a clear and solid mind and a strong and tenacious will in complete control of the nerves; thirdly, because his vital being was calm, strong and solid; finally and chiefly, because he had a complete faith and devotion to the Mother.

As for seeing the Divine in the Mother at first sight, he is not the only one to do that. Plenty of people have done that, who had no chance of any portfolios, e.g. Z's cousin, a Musulman girl, who as soon as she met her declared, "This is not a woman, she is a goddess", and has been having significant dreams of her ever since, and whenever she is in trouble, thinks of her and gets helped out of the trouble. It is not so difficult to see the Divine in the Mother as you make it out to be.

July 26, 1935

Your general notice about the suspension of correspondence has struck terror! My

only yoga consisted in this correspondence with you.

You can count yourself among the exceptions who are allowed to write (with Dilip, Arjava and others). But don't flourish your good fortune (if it is one) in the face of others—keep it dark.

July 28, 1935

We accepted X's report about his aunt's temperature being 99°, with some suspicion.

I did not believe at all in this 99°. X is an overmental sadhak who creates facts according to his liking by the power of *vāk*.

July 29, 1935

So your remarks about A.B. only prove that he was not of the common stock.

I don't know. It only proves that he was a good "adhar".

If one comes down from the higher planes, as I understand some people have done for your work, everything becomes a Grand Trunk Road for him.

Nobody has found this Yoga a Grand Trunk Road, neither A.B. nor K nor even myself or the Mother. All such ideas are a romantic illusion.

I don't know what the Musulman lady exactly saw. From what you say it seems to be a flash of intuition.

Not at all, it was a direct sense of the Godhead in her—for I suppose you mean by intuition a sort of idea that comes suddenly? That is what people usually understand by intuition. It was not that in her case nor in X's.

But is it not extremely difficult to see the fully flaming resplendent Divine Mother?

I don't believe X or anybody would have that at first view. That can only come if one has already developed the faculty of vision in the occult planes. What is of more importance is the clear perception or intimate inner feeling or direct sense, "This is She." I think you are inclined to be too romantic and poetic and too little spiritually realistic in these things.

With many people the faculty of this kind of occult vision is the first to develop when they begin sadhana. With others it is there naturally or comes on occasions without any practice of yoga. But with people who live mainly in the intellect (awfe

excepted) this faculty is not usually there by nature and most have much difficulty in developing it. It was so even with me.

It would be something of a miracle to see things without the faculty of seeing. We don't deal much in miracles of that kind.

July 30, 1935

About X's aunt—to detect T.B. bacilli in the urine it has to be injected into a guinea-pig—the doctor says, for absolute certainty. The charge for it will be Rs.7. X is not very willing. I suppose it can be omitted though important for the patient.

Yes, you can insist on his forking out that, if he is unwilling. Luck for the guinea-pig!

Darshan is approaching. Would it be more profitable to concentrate and meditate than try to write poems with much difficulty?

If one can concentrate, it is always good to concentrate—darshan or no darshan.

I started 2 sonnets, wrote 4 lines of each, but could complete neither. Should my project be adjourned sine die?

It can be adjourned if you like, but not *sine die*.

You have permitted S to have a stove, I hear. Have you also permitted him to cook and gobble rasogollas? I ask for information, because if he is supposed to digest, it is all right—otherwise!

July 31, 1935

Yes, I permitted the stove since he was complaining of much flatulence, so that he could take milk diluted with barley and sago, but rasogollas not at all.

I am informed that he ate two rasogollas and offered [some] to P. P told him to confess, but he has not done so—for fear I suppose that his stove should be taken away. X some time ago wrote that S was making sweets, but one cannot always believe X's statements, so I said nothing about it.

If the stove is taken away he will again complain of flatulence. Please see then if you can find out some way.

I don't know; but one can't be responsible for the results if he goes on like that. If he expects the Divine Force to be always fighting against his Rasogollas to protect his confounded liver!

August 1, 1935

Today we got the result of the urine exam. The poor pig died of toxic symptoms. No definite light on the diagnosis.

Alas, poor pig!

August 2, 1935

X is strongly suspected of stealing some ideas from a novel of Y, given to him for reading. Should he not have avoided it?

Of course he should. But if you knew much of literary and artistic people, you would not be surprised at anything they do.

It has really pained me very much. Everywhere the same humanity!

Of course. That's what I have been telling all along. It is not without reason that I am eager to see something better on this well-meaning but this woe-begone planet.

August 3, 1935

What disciples we are of what a Master! I wish you had chosen or called some better stuff—perhaps somebody like Z.

As to the disciples, I agree!—Yes, but would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly solve the problem. And would they consent to follow my path?—that is another question. And if they were put to the test, would not the common humanity suddenly reveal itself?—that is still another question.

August 5, 1935

(Referring to something personal:) You really rescued me yesterday. My humble thanks. Got a few knocks though—

Knocks and shocks are good for the soul, according to some philosophers. Agree?

August 6, 1935

I suppose I have to agree, since you said I have to allow myself to be kicked along. But what about the other philosophers?

The kicking was suggested as a mild stimulant—it could not be included in shocks and knocks. However knocks can help—as man is now constituted—but it is not part of my philosophy, only a view-point of experience.

August 7, 1935

J has a swelling of her lower lip; she surmises that it is a hint to stop her from talking too much. When I smiled incredulously, she argued that it was quite possible.

It is possible. It depends on the person and how he or she takes things.

She added that I could ask you if I, liked. What do you say about the great hint?

Hints are hints only when you take them—otherwise they are only swellings on a lip.

I send a small poem with Nishikanto's correction. Am I in any way following in his footsteps?

How? Your manner is quite unlike his.

What did you mean by 'Poet is out'? Forceps delivery can't be more difficult.

He is out, but with difficulty.

A poem of 14 lines taking so many days! Anyway what do you think of it?

My brother Monomohan in his early days would have taken 40 and been surprised at his own rash celerity in writing. I like it very well.

I am afraid I haven't been able to bring out in the sestet what I wanted to.

The sestet is very good, except perhaps that the last 2 lines change a little from the rhythm of the rest.

August 8, 1935

N scorched her hand with hot milk. I think it would be good to keep some picric acid for people dealing with fire-works! It will save them some suffering.

It would be a good idea, but we cannot trust people not to misuse or do mischievous things with it. It would have to be kept shut up under Dyuman's care or somebody else's and so not always available at once.

August 11, 1935

Today I lost my temper over a patient's obstinacy. He would not listen to my instructions. But can you tell me why I've been feeling a sort of antagonism towards him?

It may be a Dr. Fell affair. "The reason why I cannot tell"—or it may be the result of a feeling of accumulated bother.

August 16, 1935

Well, Sir, have I covered a few milestones on the journey to the Infinite?

Move on, move on!

Some time back you wrote to me: "Never has there been such an uprush of mud and brimstone as during the past few months. However the Caravan goes on and today there was some promise of better things." What about the uprush of mud? Has it settled down, and are people now floating in the flood of the Supramental?

It is still there, but personally I have become superior to it and am travelling forward like a flash of lightning, that is to say zig-zag but fairly fast. Now I have got the hang of the whole hanged thing—like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his own case to anybody but myself) and am working it out figure by figure.

As for people, no! They are not floating in the supramental—some are floating in the higher mind, others, rushing up into it and flopping down into the subconscious alternately, are swinging from heaven into hell and back into heaven, again back into hell *ad infinitum*, some are sticking fast contentedly or discontentedly in the mud, some are sitting in the mud and dreaming dreams and seeing visions, some have their legs in the mud and their head in the heavens etc., etc., an infinity of combinations, while many are simply nowhere. But console yourself—these things, it seems, are inevitable in the process of great transformations.

I send a poem as an offering—the result of the Darshan.

By the way very much pleased with your offering. Even if he is slow in delivery and his Muse not অনন্ত প্রসব¹ like Harin's or Dilip's or —, the poet is undeniable.

¹ infinitely fertile

August 17, 1935

You say that you are running fast—but you have been doing that all your life; how is it going to help us and our sadhana?

Rubbish!—If my being able to solve the problem of the subconscious in the sadhana is of no importance, then of course it won't affect anybody. Otherwise it may.

I don't see any chances of our being speeded up by your running.

That is of no importance at present. To get the closed doors open is just now the thing to be done and I am doing it. Speeding people through them can come in its own time when the doors and the people are ready.

What is this mathematical formula that you have all of a sudden found out?

I told you it was unintelligible to anybody but myself, so how the deuce do you expect me to give it to you in a tangible form?—It is my mathematical discovery—don't seek for any other cause—my grand new, brand-new mathematical formula!

Chand writes that while he was meditating in a quiet place, he saw a very brilliant mass of reddish light above the temple there. What does it mean?

Don't know. Red means a hundred different things and the particular sense depends upon the shade and the context. If he is getting calm and peace, that is more important.

August 19, 1935

It appears you have made many people happy at this Darshan in spite of their oscillations, sitting contentedly on their mud thrones. My discontented self is one of that happy group!

Well, one can be happy in a swing, or even in the mud! The perfect sadhak should indeed be happy in all circumstances. সর্বথা বর্তমানোপি¹ as the Gita puts it.

But any big deal near at hand?

What great expectations! Besides I am not Roosevelt. I am only going ahead, therefore visibly cheerful though not yet demonstrably exuberant.

¹ in all conditions

But whatever it may be, keep up this patting, Sir, for heaven's sake!

Don't know. Provided no sadhak interprets my pappings as blows and cries, "Why did you thrash me, Sir?"

August 20, 1935

I am very very happy, Sir. Almost floating in the Supramental bliss. Not only that, I feel you have done after all really something this time. Is this happiness an expression of the psychic or of inner vital?

The psychic of course, with the vital in dependence on it.

What do you think of your namesake, I mean Aurobindo Bose—engineer? I like him very much.

A very fine fellow with much stuff in him and both strong and truly sincere in his spiritual aspiration.

He says that very soon you will be getting 2 to 3 lakhs of rupees and he wants me to get it verified from you.

Let us hope! Let us hope! It would be very handy indeed.

I beg to be pardoned for one thing; today Dilipda has been saying that he was very happy with this Darshan. I was so moved that I let out the secret of your 'running fast'. Has it been a mistake to let it out?

No—only you must not tell it to too many people. It is only because I don't want speculation for gossip about such things as that spoils the atmosphere.

(To be continued)

THE REVISED EDITION OF *THE FUTURE POETRY*

NEWLY-WRITTEN OR CORRECTED MATTER

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1980)

Chapter XII is perhaps the most extensively revised chapter in The Future Poetry. Each paragraph has alterations and additions made during the earlier period (late 1920s-early 1930s), and all but one paragraph further revisions from the later period (1950). The whole last paragraph and the end of the preceding one were added in 1950.

CHAPTER XII

The Course of English Poetry—4

IN the work of the intellectual and classical age of English poetry, one is again struck by the same phenomenon that we meet throughout, an extraordinary force for achievement limited by a characteristic defect which turns in the actual execution to half-success or a splendid failure. A big streak of rawness somewhere, a wrong turn of the hand or an imperfect balance of the faculties wastes the power spent and makes the total result much inferior to what it should have been with so much nerve of energy to speed it or so broad a wing of genius to raise it into the highest empyrean heights. The mind of this age went for its sustaining influence and its suggestive models to Greece, Rome and France. That was inevitable; for these have been the three typically intellectual nations of Europe. It is these three literatures that have achieved, each following its own different way and peculiar spirit, the best in form and substance that that kind of inspiration can produce. The English mind, not natively possessed of any inborn intellectual depth and subtlety, not trained to a fine classical lucidity and sure aesthetic taste, had to turn to these sources, if the attempt was to be made at all. Steeping itself in these sources, it might hope to blend with the classical clarity and form its own masculine force and strenuousness, its strong imagination, its deeper colour and profounder intuitive suggestiveness and so arrive at something new and great to which the world could turn as another supreme element of its aesthetic culture. But the effect actually obtained did not answer to the possibility offered. To arrive at this perfection, this new turn of poetry ought to have kept, transmuted but not diminished, all that was best in the Elizabethan spirit and to have coloured, enriched and sweetened with its magic touch the classical form and the intellectual motive. There was instead a revolutionary departure, a breaking away, decisive rejection and entirely new attempt with no roots in the past. In the end not only was the preceding structure of poetry abolished, but all its strong and brilliant Muses were expelled from their seats. A stucco imitation classical temple,

very elegant, very cold and very empty, was erected in the vacant place, and the gods of satire and didactic commonplace set up in a shrine which was built more like a coffee-house than a sanctuary. A sterile brilliance, a set polished rhetoric was the poor final outcome.

The age set out with a promise of better things; for a time it seemed almost on the right path. Milton's early poetry is the fruit of a strong classical intellectuality still touched with a glow and beauty which has been left by a fast-receding tide of romantic colour, spontaneous warmth of emotion and passion and vital intuition, gifts of a greater depth and force of life. Many softer influences wove themselves together into his high language and rhythm and were fused in his personality into something wonderfully strong, rich and beautiful. Suggestions and secrets were caught from Chaucer, Peele, Spencer, Shakespeare, and their hints gave a strange grace to a style whose austerity of power had been nourished by great classical influences. A touch of Virgilian beauty and majesty, a poise of Lucretian grandeur, a note of Aeschylean sublimity, the finest gifts of the ancients coloured or mellowed by richer romantic elements and subtly toned into each other, entered in and helped to prepare the early Miltonic manner. Magnified and exalted by the stress of an original personality, noble and austere, their result was the blending of a peculiar kind of greatness and beauty not elsewhere found in English verse. The substance is often slight, for it is as yet Milton's imagination rather than his soul or his whole mind that is using the poetic form; but the form itself is of a faultless beauty. Already, in spite of this slenderness of substance, we can see the coming change; the retreat of the first exuberant life-force and a strong turning of the intelligence upon life to view it sedately from its own intellectual centre of vision are now firmly in evidence. Some of the Elizabethans had tried their hand at this turn, but with no great poetical success; when they wrote their best, even though they tried to think closely and strongly, life took possession of the thought or itself quivered out into thought-expression. Here on the contrary, even in the two poems that are avowedly expressions of vital moods, it is the intellect and its imaginations that are making the mood a material for reflective brooding; there is no longer here the free and spontaneous life mood chanting its own sight and emotion to its own moved delight. In the minor Carolean poets we have some lingering of the colours of the Elizabethan sunset; something of the life-sense and quick emotional value are still there but too thinned and diluted to support any intensity or greatness of speech or manner, and finally they die away into trivialities of the intelligence playing insincerely with the movements of the emotional nature. For the reflective idea already predominates over sight and intimate emotion; the mind is looking at the thing felt and is no longer taken up and carried away in the wave of feeling. Some of this work is mystic in its subject or motive; but that too, except in some luminous lines or passages, suffers from the same desiccating influence. The opening of an age of intellect was not the time when a great mystical poetry could leap into existence.

This ebb is rapid and the change is soon complete. The colour has faded, the

sweetness has vanished, song has fallen into a dead hush. For a whole long dry metallic century the lyrical faculty disappeared from the English tongue. The grandiose epic chant of Milton breaks what would be otherwise a complete silence of all higher or profounder poetic power; but it is a Milton who has turned away from the richer beauty and promise of his youth, lost the Virgilian accent, put away from him all Pagan delicacies of colour and grace and sweetness to express only in fit greatness of speech and form the conception of Heaven and Hell and man and the universe which his imagination had built out of his beliefs and reviewed in the vision of his soul. One is moved to speculate on what we might have had from him if, instead of writing after the long silence of his poetic genius during which he remained absorbed in barren political controversy until public and private calamities compelled him to go back to himself and his true power, he had written his master work in a ripened continuity and deepened strength of his earlier style and vision. Nothing quite so great perhaps, but surely something more opulent, many-toned and perfect. As things happened, it is by *Paradise Lost* that he occupies his high rank among the poets. That too imperfect grandiose epic is the one supreme fruit left by the attempt of English poetry to seize the classical manner, achieve beauty of poetic expression disciplined by a high intellectual severity and forge a complete balance and measured perfection of architectonic form and structure.

Paradise Lost is one of the few great epic poems in the world's literature; certain qualities in it reach heights which no other of them had climbed, even though as a whole it has defects and elements of failure which are absent in the other great world epics. Rhythm and speech have never attained to a mightier amplitude of epic expression and movement; seldom has there been an equal sublimity of flight. And to a great extent Milton has done in this respect what he had set out to do; he has given English poetic speech a language of intellectual thought which is of itself highly poetic without depending on any of the formal aids of poetic expression except those which are always essential and indispensable, a speech which succeeds by its own intrinsic force and is in its very grain poetry and in its very grain inspired intellectual thought-utterance. This is always the aim of the classical poet in his style and movement, and Milton has fulfilled it. At the same time he has raised this achievement to a highest possible pitch by that peculiar grandeur in the soul and manner of the utterance and that magnificence of sound-tones and amplitude of the gait in the rhythm which belong to him alone of poets. These qualities are easily sustained throughout this long work, because with him they are less an art, great artist though he is, than the natural language of his spirit and the natural sound of its motion. His aim is high, his subject loftier than that of any one of his predecessors except Dante. There is nowhere any more magnificently successful opening than the conception and execution of his Satan and Hell; nowhere has there been a more powerful portraiture of the living spirit of egoistic revolt fallen to its natural element of darkness and pain and yet still sustained by the greatness of the divine principle from which it was born, even when it has lost oneness with it and faces it with dissonance and defiance. If the rest of the

epic had been equal to its opening books, there would have been no greater poem, few as great in literature.

But here too the total performance failed and fell below the promise. *Paradise Lost* compels our admiration throughout by its greatness of style and rhythm, but as a whole, in spite of its mighty opening, its whole substance as distinct from its more magnificent or striking parts has failed to enter victoriously either into the mind or into the heart of the world; much of it has not lodged itself deeply in its imagination or enriched sovereignly the acquired stock of its more intimate poetical thought and experience. But the poem that does neither of these things, however noble its powers of language and rhythm, has missed its destiny. The reason is not to be found in the disparity between Milton's professed aim, which was to justify the ways of God to man, and the intellectual means available to him for fulfilling his purpose. The theology of the Puritan religion was a poor enough aid for so ambitious a purpose; but the Scriptural legend treated was poetically sufficient if only it had received throughout a deeper interpretation. Dante's theology had the advantage of the richness of import and spiritual experience of mediaeval Catholicism, but intellectually it was not so deep and vast a purpose any more satisfying or durable. Still through his primitive symbols Dante has seen and has revealed things which make his work throughout poetically and creatively great and sufficient up to a certain high, if narrow level. It is here that Milton failed altogether. Nor is the failure mainly intellectual; it is of a more radical kind. It is true that he had not an original intellect; his mind was scholastic and traditional to a point that discouraged any free thinking power; but he had an original soul and personality and the vision of a poet. It is not the province of poetry to justify intellectually the ways of God to man; what it can do, is to reveal them: but just here is the point of failure. Milton has seen Satan and Death and Sin and Hell and Chaos; there is a scriptural greatness in his account of these things. But he has not seen God and heaven and man or the soul embodied in humanity, at once divine and fallen, enslaved to suffering and evil, striving for redemption, yearning for a forfeited bliss and perfection. On this side there is no inner greatness in the poetic interpretation of his materials. In other words, he has ended by stumbling over the rock of offence that always awaits poetry in which the intellectual element is too predominant, the fatal danger of a failure of vision: he has tried to poetise the stock ideas of his religion and not reached through sight to a living figure of Truth and its great expressive thoughts or revelatory symbols.

This failure extends itself to all the elements of his later work; it is definitive and he never, except in passages, recovered from it. His language and rhythm remain unflatteringly great to the end, but they are only a splendid robe and the body they clothe is a nobly carved but lifeless image. His architectural structure is always greatly and classically proportioned; but structure has two elements, or two methods,—there is the schematic form that is thought out and there is the incarnating organic body which grows from an inward artistic and poetic vision. Milton's structures are thought out; they have not been seen, much less been lived out into their inevitable mea-

suers and free lines of inspired perfection. The difference will become evident if we make a simple comparison with Homer and Dante or even with the structural power, much less inspired and vital than theirs, but always finely aesthetic and artistic, of Virgil. Poetry may be intellectual, but only in the sense of having a strong intellectual strain in it and of putting forward as its aim the play of imaginative thought in the service of the poetical intelligence; but that must be supported very strongly by the quickening emotion or by the imaginative vision to which the id ea opens. Milton's earlier work is suffused by his power of imaginative vision; the opening books of *Paradise Lost* are upborne by the greatness of the soul that finds expression in its harmonies of speech and sound and by the greatness of its sight. But in the later books and still more in the *Samson Agonistes* and the *Paradise Regained* this flame sinks; the thought becomes intellectually externalised, the sight is obvious and on the surface. Milton writing poetry could never fail in greatness and power, nor could he descend, as did Wordsworth and others, in style, turn and rhythm below his well-attained high poetical level; but the supreme vitalising fire has sunk. The method and idea retain sublimity, but the deeper spirit has departed.

Much greater, initial and essential was the defect in the poetry that followed this strong beginning. Here all is unredeemed intellectuality and even the very first elements of the genuine poetic inspiration are for the most part, one might almost say, entirely absent. Pope and Dryden and their school, except now and then and as if by accident,—Dryden especially has lines sometimes in which he suddenly rises above his method,—are busy only with one aim, with thinking in verse, thinking with a clear force, energy and point or with a certain rhetorical pomp and effectiveness, in a well-turned and well-polished metrical system. That seems to have been their sole idea of “numbers”, of poetry, and it is an idea of unexampled poverty and falsity. No doubt this was a necessary phase, and perhaps, the English creative mind being what it then was, rich and strong but confused and lawless and always addicted in its poetry to quite the reverse of a clear intellectual method, it had to go to an opposite extreme. It had to sacrifice for a time many of its native powers in order to learn as best it could how to arrive at a firm and straightforward expression of thought in a just, well-harmonised, precise and lucid speech; an inborn gift in all the Latin tongues, in a half-Teutonic speech attacked by the Celtic richness of imagination this power had to be acquired even at a cost. But the sacrifice made was immense and entailed much effort of recovery in the later development of the language. The writers of this rationalising age got rid of the Elizabethan language with its opulent confusion, its often involved expression, its lapses into trailing and awkward syntax, its perplexed turn in which ideas and images jostle and stumble together, fall into each other's arms and strain and burden the expression in a way which is sometimes stimulating and exhilarating, but sometimes merely embarrassing and awkward; they got rid of the crudeness and extravagance but lost all the rich imagination and vision, the sweetness, lyrism, grace and colour, and replaced it with acute point and emphatic glitter. They got rid too of Milton's Latinisms and poetic inversions, substi-

tuting smaller rhetorical artifices of their own device, —dismissed his great and packed turns of speech, filling in the void left by the departure of this grandeur with what claimed to be a noble style, but was no more than a spurious rhetorical pomp. Still the work they had to do they did effectively, with talent, energy, even an undeniable genius.

If the substance of this poetry had been of a higher worth, it would have been less open to depreciation and need not have excited so vehement a reaction or fallen so low from its exaggerated pride of place. But the substance was too often on a par with the method and often below it. It took for its models the Augustan poets of Rome, but it substituted a certain perfection of polish and brilliance and often an element of superficiality and triviality for the strength and weight of the Latin manner. It followed more sincerely the contemporary French models; but it missed their best normal qualities, their culture, taste, tact of expression, and missed too the greater gifts of the classical French poetry. For, though that poetry may often fall short of the intensest poetic delight by its excessive cult of reason and taste, though it may run often in too thin a stream, though it may indulge the rhetorical urn too consistently to achieve utterly the highest heights of speech, yet it has ideas and a strong or delicate power, a true nobility of character in Corneille, a fine grace of poetic sentiment and a supreme delicacy and fine passion in Racine. But the verse of these pseudo-Augustan writers does not call in these greater gifts : it is occupied with expressing thought, but its thought has most often little or none of the greater values. This Muse is all brain of facile reasoning, but has no heart, no depth or sweetness of character, no high nobility of will, no fine appeal or charm of the joy and sorrow of life. In this flood of brilliant and forcefully phrased commonplace, even ideas which have depths behind them tend to become shallow and external by the way of their expression. The mind of these writers has no great seeing eye on life. Its satire is the part of their work which is still most alive; for here the Anglo-Saxon spirit gets back to itself, leaves the attempt at a Gallicised refinement, finds its own robust vigour and arrives at a brutal, but still a genuine and sometimes really poetic vigour and truth of expression. Energy and driving force, the English virtues, are indeed, a general merit of the verse of Pope and Dryden and in this respect they excel their French exemplars. Their expression is striking in its precision; each couplet rings out with a remarkable force of finality and much coin of their minting has passed into common speech and citation. If there is not much gold of poetry here, there is at least much well-gilt copper coin of a good currency, useful for small purchases and petty traffic. But in the end one is tired of a monotonous brilliance of language, wearied out by the always repeated trick of decisiveness and point of rhythm. This verse has to be read by couplets and passages; for each poem is only a long string of them and, except in one or two instances, the true classical gift, the power of structure is absent. There is an almost complete void of the larger genuine thought-power which is necessary for structure. This intellectual age of English poetry did its work, but, as was inevitable with so pronounced a departure from the true or at least the higher line, that work gives the

impression, if not of a resonant failure, at least of a fall or a considerable descent to lower levels. This Augustan age not only falls infinitely far below the Roman from which it drew so much of its inspiration, but gives an impression of great inferiority when compared with the work of the Victorians and one is tempted to say that a little of the work of Wordsworth and Keats and Shelley has immeasurably more poetic value than all this silver and tin and copper of these workers and the less precious metals whose superficiality of workmanship was a pride of this age.

But although this much has to be said, it would be by itself too one-sided and depreciative a view of the work of what is after all a period of the most brilliant and energetic writing and a verse which in its own way and its own technique is most carefully wrought and might even claim a title to a supreme craftsmanship: nor can we ignore the fact that in certain types such as satire, the mock heroic, the set didactic poem these writers achieved the highest height of a consummate and often impeccable excellence. Moreover some work was done especially by Dryden which even on the higher levels of poetry can challenge comparison with the work of the Elizabethans and the greater poets of later times. Even the satire of Pope and Dryden rises sometimes into a high poetic value beyond the level they normally reached and they have some great outbursts which have the power not only to please or delight by their force and incisiveness or their weight of thought or their powerful presentation of life, but to move to emotion, as great poetry moves us. It is not necessary here to say more in vindication of the excelling work of these writers; their fame abides and no belittling can successfully depreciate their work or discount its excellence. We are concerned only here with their place in the development, and mainly, the psychological development of English poetry. Its place there, its value is mostly in the direction of a sheer intellectuality concerned with the more superficial aspects of thought and life deliberately barren of emotion except the more superficial; lyricism has run dry, beauty has become artificial where at all it survives, passion is replaced by rhetoric, the heart is silent, life has civilised, urbanised, socialised and stylised itself too much to have any more a very living contact with Nature. As the literature of an age of this kind this poetry or this powerful verse has an enormous merit of its own and could hardly be better for its purpose. Much more perhaps than any other age of intellectual writing, it has restricted itself to its task; in doing so it has restricted its claims to poetic greatness of the highest kind, but it has admirably done its work. That work is not faultless; it has too much of the baser lead of rhetoric, too frequent a pomposity and artifice, too little of Roman nobility and too little of English sincerity to be of the first value. But it stands out well enough on its own lower summit and surveys well enough from that inferior eminence a reach of country that has, if not any beauty, its own interest, order and value. There we may leave it and turn to the next striking and always revolutionary outburst of this great stream of English poetic literature.

AUGUSTUS CAESAR AND THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THEIR CONTEMPORANEITY

DECEMBER 25, year 0 : this has been observed for centuries as the date of the birth of Jesus. The historical situation of it has been highlighted from two statements in the New Testament. The Gospel of Matthew (2.1) tells us that "Jesus was born in Judaea, in the days of Herod the king..." The Gospel of Luke (2.1-5) has the information that Jesus' mother Mary, when she was "great with child" (believed to be by the Holy Ghost's "overshadowing") was taken by her husband Joseph to Bethlehem, which was "his own city", for both of them to be taxed along with "all the world" according to "a decree from Caesar Augustus", which was passed "when Cyrenius was governor of Syria".

By our present computation of the Christian era both these statements are inaccurate—except for the broad contemporaneity of Jesus and Augustus and for the fact that Jesus' birthplace Bethlehem fell within the empire of the latter whose reign covered 30 B.C.-14 A.D. by our present computation and who therefore was responsible for the appointment not only of "Cyrenius", the Bible's name for the Roman "Quirinius", but also of Herod I to their respective posts. In two points the data of Matthew and Luke are faulty by the present calendar. Herod I has been found to have died in 4 B.C. So Jesus could not have been born after that year. The census under Quirinius, by the same calendar, took place in 6 A.D. So, if this census synchronised with the year of Jesus' birth, Jesus could not have been born before that year. A bewildering dilemma is thus created.

To avoid it we must convict Luke of a half-error. Half because the linkage of Jesus' birth with Quirinius's census is wrong and yet the linkage of this event with Quirinius's governorship of Syria could be right because a fragment of a Roman inscription discovered at Antioch has revealed that Quirinius had come as the legate of Augustus to the Near East once before 6 A.D. on a military assignment and had established his seat of government as well as his headquarters in Syria between 10 and 7. B.C.¹ So Jesus' birth may be dated to this interval with 7 B.C. as the latest possibility. This dating would synchronise it with Herod's reign on the one hand and "Cyrenius"'s governorship on the other. The paradox of being "before Christ" arises simply from our current confused calendar which was fixed in the sixth century by the Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus who made a number of mistakes and miscalculations.

7 B.C. is particularly appropriate if we are to credit the legend of the unusual star which the Magi, the Wise Men of the East, are said by Matthew (2.1-2) to have followed as a guide towards the one "who is born king of the Jews". The visit of the Magi may not be history, but, as Kepler calculated in 1603, there was indeed an abnormal phenomenon in the night-sky in 7 B.C. The planets Jupiter and Saturn were

¹ *The Bible as History* by Werner Keller (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1957), p 327

in "conjunction"—that is, appeared very close to each other—in the constellation Pisces in a markedly visible manner in the sky of the Mediterranean area three times in that year: on May 29, October 3 and December 4.¹ On the third occasion they would seem to have dissolved into one great brilliant star.² P. Schnabel, the German scholar, deciphering the Neo-Babylonian cuneiform writings of a famous professional institute in the ancient world, the School of Astrology at Sipper in Babylonia, found a confirmation of Kepler in a note about the position of the planets in the constellation of Pisces, carefully marking in Jupiter and Saturn over a period of five months in what would be reckoned as 7 B.C. in our calendar.³ As Jesus is said to have been already born before the Magi saw the impressive astral phenomenon, his birth must have preceded this phenomenon's most concentrated and brightest development—that is, it must have been sometime prior to December 4 in that year.

Such a date need not be in conflict with fact, since December 25 for Jesus' nativity is referred to in documents as Christmas Day in 354 A.D. for the first time and was evidently chosen in order to replace an old Roman festival known as *Dies Natalis Invicti*, "the birthday of the unconquered", the occasion of the winter solstice when the day's length begins to gain on the length of the night. Furthermore, there is the declaration in Luke's Gospel (2.8) about the time Jesus was born: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Meteorological observation has shown that during the last 2000 years in which, according to all existing information, the climate of Palestine has not changed, Bethlehem at Christmas-time would be in the grip of frost and no cattle could be in the fields in that temperature.⁴ The Jewish religious book, the Talmud, remarks that in that neighbourhood the flocks were put out to grass in March and brought in again at the beginning of November.⁵ Hence, if Luke is to be believed, Jesus must have been born not at nearly the end of December but between March and November in 7 B.C.

When Jesus was born, Augustus had been emperor for 23 years and during that time as well as after and certainly before the public ministry of Jesus which started after his baptism by John the Baptist, when "Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3.23), Augustus had put his stamp upon his epoch. This stamp is commonly forgotten when we speak of the period of Jesus' birth, which is thought to be eminently memorable because of it and because of the career that followed. But this period, we may remind ourselves, is known to general history as the Augustan Age.

What is most striking as between the two illustrious contemporaries is that just as Jesus came to be called the Son of God, worshipped as divine and considered mankind's Saviour as well as the inaugurator of a new era moving towards the Kingdom of God, Augustus was heralded by poets like Virgil as the creator of a Golden Age of peace and prosperity and accepted from the East worship as a divine being and saviour of humanity. Like the virginal conception the Gospels of Matthew and Luke

¹ *Ibid.*, pp 330-31. ² *Ibid.*, p 334. ³ *Ibid.*, p 331 ⁴ *Ibid.*, p 336. ⁵ *Ibid.*

picture for Jesus, a supernatural birth brought about by a deity's intervention was surmised for Augustus. Whatever the travesty of the deific title in relation to some of his successors like Nero, Caligula and Domitian who claimed it as an inheritance from its first bearer, here was a natural spontaneous ascription by his compatriots to one felt to be of extraordinary greatness, as if sent by Heaven on a sovereign mission.

A further point of interest and significance in the comparison arises from the use of the Greek word *euangelion* in regard to Jesus by Paul and the other writers of the New Testament. This word, translated "Gospel" in English, connoting "Glad Tidings" or "Good News", is illuminated the most by the same term's employment in the imperial Roman cult associated with Augustus. Howard Clark Kee, in his *Jesus in History: An Approach to the Study of the Gospels*,¹ writes:

"It meant an announcement of the benefits the empire enjoyed through the gracious authority of Caesar, the divinely appointed ruler of Rome. Although the fuller documentation for this meaning of *euangelion* comes in part from post-New Testament writers, such as Plutarch (A.D. 46?-120?) in *De Fortuna Romanorum*² there is inscriptional evidence going back to the time of Augustus for the use of *euangelion* in connection with the imperial cult: 'The birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of tidings of joy [*euangelion*] on his account.'³ Gerhard Friedrich has summarized what the term implied when associated with the saving power and person of the emperor:

The ruler is divine by nature. His power extends to men, to animals, to the earth and to the sea. Nature belongs to him; the wind and the waves are subject to him. He works miracles and heals men. He is the savior of the world who also redeems individuals from their difficulties.⁴

The emperor's divinity was attested by signs in the heavens at both his birth and his death that showed he belonged among the gods. Although some leading scholars have denied the link between the meaning of *euangelion* as applied to the first four books of the New Testament and the connotation it carries in the imperial cult,⁵ the connection has recently and rightly been reaffirmed in an important study of gospel

¹ Published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1977, pp 133-34

² In the Loeb edition of Plutarch the treatise is found in *Moralia*, vol. 2, trans F C. Babbitt (New York Putnam's, 1928), pp. 73-89.

³ A photograph, transcription, and translation of this 9 B C. text from Priene, can be found in Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, rev. ed., trans. L R.M. Strachan (New York. Harper & Row, n.d), p 366 and Figure 70 Whether the *euangelion* is understood to be the announcement of his birth (so Deissmann) or the fulfillment of the Sibylline prophecies about Augustus (so Eduard Norden in Deissmann, p 366, n. 8), the analogy with the use of the term by Mark and the other evangelists is evident. The full Greek text is in Wilhelm Dittenberger *Oriens Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* [Selected Greek inscriptions from the Orient], vol 2, no 458 (reprinted, Hildesheim Olms, 1960), lines 40-79 (the point at which the passage under study appears).

⁴ Friedrich, "Evangelizesthai" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich : Eerdmans, 1965), p. 724.

⁵ For example, Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol 1, trans Kendrick Grobel (New York. Scribner's), 1951), p 87.

origins by Wilhelm Schneemelcher.¹

All this attribution of a more-than-human personality to Augustus Caesar, a status comparable in general formulation to that of his contemporary of Palestine in a different sphere, draws our attention because of a certain correspondence between Sri Aurobindo and a disciple in 1937. The latter was discussing the subject of past lives, and Sri Aurobindo in the course of his replies distinguished between arriving at conclusions by means of "sight" (spiritual vision) and coming to them by "inference". After writing that he was never certain that a poet-friend of the disciple and, for some time, a fellow-sadhak had been Shelley in a past life, Sri Aurobindo added: "as I am for instance about Dilip having been Horace. I am certain because that was 'seen' [by the Mother] and I myself can remember very well (psychically, not in any outward event) my contact with his personality then." (19.7.1937)

When the disciple suggested that Sri Aurobindo might have been Julius Caesar or Mark Antony and the Master gave a clue that he had been neither, the disciple wrote: "So who remains a famous person in contact with Horace? The answer is unmistakable: Caesar Octavianus, afterwards Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. Have I at last hit the nail on the head? If so, will you please tell me, as you did about Leonardo da Vinci, what exactly he stood for in the history of Europe?"

About Leonardo the disciple had asked Sri Aurobindo: "Mother or you are said to have declared that a divine descent was attempted 'during the Renaissance with Leonardo da Vinci as its centre—a credible report since you were Leonardo and Mother Mona Lisa. But I shall be much interested to know something about the inner side of the phenomenon. Was there a secretly recognised mystic consciousness at work—that is, recognised by da Vinci? Was he aware of his semi-Avatarhood, aware of the work he was destined to do, aware of the spiritual planes?"

Sri Aurobindo replied: "Never heard before of my declaring or anybody declaring such a thing. What Leonardo da Vinci held in himself was all the new age of Europe on its many sides. But there was no question of Avatarhood or consciousness of a descent or pressure of spiritual planes. Mysticism was no part of what he had to manifest." (16.7.1937)

Now, to the question about Augustus, Sri Aurobindo gave the answer: "Augustus Caesar organised the life of the Roman empire and it was this that made the framework of the first transmission of the Graeco-Roman civilisation to Europe—he came for that work and the writings of Virgil and Horace and others helped greatly towards the success of his mission. After the interlude of the Middle Ages, this civilisation was reborn in a new mould in what is called the Renaissance, not in its life aspects but in its intellectual aspects. It was therefore a supreme intellectual, Leonardo da Vinci, who took up again this work and summarised in himself the seeds of modern Europe." (29.7.1937)

The appearance of Augustus in the very period when Christianity had its origi-

¹ In *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. Mel Wilson and others (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1963), pp. 72-73.

nation seems to have answered a need of the future Europe standing on the threshold of an era in which a new powerful spirit had broken in upon old Judaism and a Graecised Near East and a rising Roman culture. Its invasion, with its "Christ crucified", its faith in things unseen, its unearthly formula of "Love your enemies" and its passion for the Beyond, called for a complementary if not counterpoising force. While its soulful *enthousiasmos* brought something highly fecundating by means of a subtilising light from the deep heart of religious aspiration, it brought also a threat to the existing progressive *élan* of the European consciousness. There was the danger of its submerging the glory that was the Greek mind of inspired reason and chastened aesthetic sense and the grandeur that was the Roman vitality building a manifold order, moulding strength of character and striking out pathways of world-communication. A millennium and a half later, Leonardo embodied a well-tempered synthesis of the two currents and gave it a forward-looking face of analytic-eyed imagination. Augustus made the synthesis achievable and a complex yet balanced modern psychology a predictable part of "things to come" by embodying to the *n*th degree one side of that synthesis at a critical time, a time when Jesus Christ embodied to the maximum the other side and might have tilted by his luminous extreme the fate of Europe in favour of an inward other-worldliness based on an outward primitivism.

However, by a paradox of Divine Destiny, Augustus served also to render possible, instead of negating, the development of the Christian *euwangelion* as a component of the future. For, despite occasional persecution, Roman rule fostered Christianity through the *Pax Romana* which Augustus had established. This Roman Peace by its maintenance of political stability, easy communications and flourishing trade, ensured not only the survival and transmission of the Classical heritage but also the means for the diffusion of Christ's message.

K. D. SETHNA

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OUR DESTINY HUMAN AND DIVINE

A LETTER TO A LAY NUN

YOUR account of your new life in Bihar is a bit of an eye-opener to us. Your own eyes too must have opened somewhat—but it must have been a good thing for all around you to receive so much of their fine blue in the midst of a rather grey existence.

I am sure you have managed to adjust yourself as a soldier of God is bound to do. The only thing which may keep you unadjusted is the absence of a typewriter! Well, this absence will help keep my presence actively remembered—if at all I am in danger of being swallowed up

In the dark backward and abysm of Time,

as Shakespeare puts it, though elsewhere than in his sonnets, my exploration of which you were kind enough to start typing for me in those luminous afternoons in the Ashram.

Poverty in India is something far beyond what an American could dream of (rather, could “nightmare” of). But you will also find an attitude of acceptance not discoverable in the U.S. I don’t mean a fatalistic attitude, though that is there at times. I mean an attitude which can allow one to smile again and again despite the sad circumstances. This comes of not laying on outer life such an enormous stress as falls on it in the West. Even bodily infirmities and accidents don’t loom very large in the Indian mind. Provided the lesser looming does not render one passive, it tends to make for more of quiet happiness than elsewhere.

Leprosy is still a big problem in our subcontinent. Pondicherry itself has a sorry exhibition of lepers. Luckily the disease is not very communicable. In fact, hardly any adult catches it. If it appears in adult life, it is only after a long incubation from the time of childhood. Children are more exposed. Usually, there is no risk except when one comes in extremely close contact, such as sleeping in a leper’s bed or being wrapped in his clothes. Adults, however, have to be careful not to be carriers to children, which they can be in spite of the practical immunity they themselves enjoy.

The subject of leprosy brings up that of philanthropy, on which you have put me a question. St. Francis undertook to kiss the wounds of lepers. Gandhi used to go out of his way to handle leprosy bodies and massage them and make them comfortable. We must admire the compassion and the courage involved—but foolishness too is involved, a certain perversity of philanthropic goodness. Fellow-feeling can be exercised in a wiser way and, as for helping lepers, one does not need to do such exceedingly out-of-the-common things as might invite infection—especially a gesture like St. Francis’s. Perhaps the saintly passion with which he burned had the subtle power to protect him, but his example does not cry out to be

followed. Even some such passion did not protect Father Damien. Most of whatever else of philanthropy the little friar of Assisi did may be worth following if one's turn of temperament points in that direction. But Francis was not merely a philanthropist. And his life gives me the cue to say a few things which I consider to be of central importance.

It is not easy to say them in an understandable manner. One is likely to be misinterpreted as running down a noble activity. I call the activity noble when I have in mind persons like you who are genuinely devoted to the service of their fellow-creatures. Often it is merely a noble-looking means of pandering to one's ego—the desire to be accounted good, the greed for publicity and fame, the urge to use one's high reputation for one's private benefit. But there is surely a fine species of philanthropy and there are natures that have a true bent for it, just as there are natures with a true penchant for art or science or philosophy, industry or business or even warfare. Then philanthropy becomes a worthy occupation—a mode of fulfilling one's destiny. However, there is a human destiny and there is a divine destiny. The former proves one a dedicated brother or sister of God's children. The latter shows one to be a consecrated child of God.

This is certainly the essential, the fundamental destiny of each one. Along with it, one has to pursue the right line—or lines—of one's nature, whether philanthropy or any of the others I have listed. There is no compulsion to give oneself exclusively to philanthropic activity. We can't wish a Shakespeare to stop writing plays or a Beethoven to cease composing symphonies and carry on social service any more than we can wish them to become doctors or engineers when their natural turn is towards drama or music. What we can unquestionably ask them, as well as everybody else, is to be considerate and honest and to exercise some control over their "drives". Such a call on them goes inevitably with their being members of a community. If they answer it while being playwright or composer or anything else, they fulfil their human destiny, as much as does he or she whose being is drawn towards philanthropy as a career.

Still, in none of these expressions of one's being is there the fulfilment of what I have termed one's divine destiny. That destiny is met only when one moves towards the realisation of God by the *via mystica*. All may not have it in them to be a Saint Teresa or a Mirabai, a Meister Eckhart or a Ramana Maharshi—much less to come anywhere near the Mother or Sri Aurobindo. But all can make a beginning in the inner life. By the inner life I do not mean merely the practice of religion—going to Church or temple, saying prayers or making *puya*. I do not here envisage even the adoption of the life of a priest or a *sadhu*. No doubt, a priest or a *sadhu* is nearer the inner life than the ordinary religious person, yet the critical threshold may still remain uncrossed. A direct devotion to the Divine is required—a constant habit of what I would summarise as: "Remember and offer." As a background to this movement there would be an attempt at detachment from one's common self, a stepping back from its immediate reactions and, as a result, a wide equanimity, a deep peace. The formula of "Remember and offer" would take the whole of one's life, outer no less than

inner, into the compass of spirituality and establish a persistent connection with a Higher Light, Love and Power—until in an increasing degree they descend into one's mind, one's heart, one's centres of vitality and stream out in their pure state into the world through one's soul which feels spontaneously the Divine as its Source and Sovereign.

Not philanthropy alone, but all other forms of living are insufficient. They fall short of the basic demand on man from the great Beyond, the great Around, the great Within that variously haunt every consciousness which is not immersed totally in the passing moment. The danger of the intensely philanthropic outlook and movement is that, more than the other forms of living, it is prone to regard itself as the *ne plus ultra* of being what life is meant to be. Not only does it incline to forget that there are hundreds of ways of human fulfilment, but it also overlooks the fact that it fails to be authentic spirituality. The ringing slogans of high ethics—"Love thy neighbour as thyself", "To love man is to love God"—can deafen us to the still small voice from the inmost silence and the call of Krishna's flute from dream-distances. Yes, such is the allure of the altruistic mission that we are tempted to consider ourselves as obeying God's dictate to the full. Actually, the altruist is doing no more than serving, however creditably, an attenuated and subtilised version of the ego. Here is nothing to be ashamed of: far from it, here is something to be happy about. But we must guard ourselves against growing oblivious of the real aim in life.

If one's altruistic act is not inwardly offered to God, if His Presence is not invoked to enter us and guide the philanthropic gesture correctly, if an endeavour at mystical communion at all times is not made while serving our brothers and sisters, then all such service remains in the realm of Ignorance and there is no direct awakening of the soul, no straight flowering into a sense of God's fatherhood and motherhood. Here the figure of St. Francis is an apt reminder. For, he was, first and foremost, one swept by mystic communion with God—and, even if he had not been philanthropic, he would have consummated his divine destiny.

I would be the last to dissuade a person like you from philanthropic activity. What I would point out, first, is that it is not the ultimate and, secondly, that there are other activities equally legitimate if one's nature tends towards them and, thirdly, that those who are seriously intent on progressive union with God are not obliged to be remorse-stricken if they do not give themselves to social service. On this last matter I may add that these people are not indifferent to humanity—they simply put humanity next to divinity, holding as they do that the greatest boon they can bring to the former is to become radiating centres of a Consciousness higher than the human, centres from which a luminous sweetness and strength and wisdom can flow out to ease the sorrowful, nerve the weary, enlighten the seeker and help all of them to get into touch with their souls and thereby acquire some awareness of the Super-human in a direct manner.

Not that the mystics, the Yogis, should shirk the several functions of a collective existence. They must work harmoniously in whatever mode they can to build a

fairer future on earth—but the work, again, is not in itself the goal. The Latin proverb goes: *Quis laborat orat*, “He who works prays.” But I would say with our Mother: “To work for the Divine is to pray with the body.” What counts is the spiritual attitude, the remembering and offering. To be free from the ego and to channelise what the Rigveda hymned as *satyam ritam brihat*, “the True, the Right, the Vast” or, in more open language, the eternal and infinite Godhead—this has to be the motive of all work. For, it is through such work that the Aurobindonian transformation can have the chance to take place both within and without.

I have rambled along, spurred by your question about the responsibility for philanthropy. I have done so because I am positive that you are in tune with the old injunction, “Love thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy body” and that therefore you vibrate sympathetically to our life here. Whatever your physical background, whatever your psychological training, whatever your ostensible vocation—all of them valuable in my view—and wherever you may be by choice or by duty, I feel you always at the Samadhi and, on a lesser plane, in my office-room in which, too, I hope, some light and delight drawn by the Integral Yoga from beyond the ordinary world are at play. Always I see you as a lovely and loving companion in the adventure to which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have beckoned those who are ready to recognise themselves as their own. Officially, outwardly you may have a life apart, but, just as many shall come from the East and the West to sit at the table of the Divine, so too many may go to the East and the West and yet be in spirit where Sri Aurobindo’s ambrosia and the Mother’s nectar are invisibly but most palpably spread out.

I thank you for keeping Sehra and me in your thoughts and for the repeated concern you show for the typing of my book.

Take great care of yourself and keep us posted about your doings. We miss you very much.

9.11.1979

AMAL KIRAN

THE PROBLEM OF ARYAN ORIGINS

by K. D. SETHNA

Many of our pet ideas are shown to be baseless and the current antinomy of “Aryan” and “Dravidian” which has caused a good deal of bad blood is resolved with the help of history, archaeology, literature and linguistics forming a comprehensive framework for the insights and researches of India’s greatest seer and thinker: Sri Aurobindo.

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AN IRISH DON ON SAVITRI
A LETTER TO PREMA NANDKUMAR

Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland,
21 July 1961

... I WAS much interested in your learned thesis, and greatly appreciated the privilege of studying it, and also of making the acquaintance of *Savitri*, a truly remarkable poem.... Several things impressed me in studying *Savitri*. The beautiful printing of the book, of which many of our great University Presses would have been proud. Again, and these are more important, and of course, more likely to strike a Western than an Indian reader, there are two points which struck me emphatically. (1) The frequent echoes—quite deliberate—of well-known lines in English poetry in *Savitri*. They are all over the place. (2) Sri Aurobindo says somewhere in the prose notes that he has discussed and examined in the poem every important philosophical theory—I forget his exact words—this is substantially true, you have touched on the matter in various places in your thesis, but a detailed examination would call for a book all to itself. Some day perhaps you or a pupil of yours will write this book; but it would call of course for considerable philosophical equipment. I may add that I was immensely impressed by the extraordinary combination of East and West in the poem, of ancient Indian lore with the thought and experience of the modern cosmopolitan world.

H. D. WHITE

(With acknowledgement to Prema Nandkumar)

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AN ANCIENT TEXT ON HIMACHAL (HIMALAYA)

HE who thinks of Himachal, even though he should not behold him, is greater than he who performs all worship at Kashi. And he who meditates upon Himachal shall have pardon of all sins. All things that die on Himachal, and in dying think of His snows, are freed from evil. In a hundred ages of the gods I could not tell you of the glories of Himachal, where Shiva lives and where the Ganga falls from the foot of Vishnu like the slender stalk of the lotus flower. Truly, as the dew is dried up by the morning sun so are the sorrows of mankind dried by the sight of Himachal.

A MODERN TEXT ON THE SOUTHERN HILLS

THE Ganges, though flowing from the foot of Vishnu and through Siva's hair, is not an ancient stream. Geology, looking farther than religion, knows of a time when neither the river nor the Himalayas that nourished it existed, and an ocean flowed over the holy places of Hindustan. The mountains rose, their debris silted up the ocean, the gods took their seats on them and contrived the river, and the India we call immemorial came into being. But India is really far older. In the days of the prehistoric ocean the southern part of the peninsula already existed, and the high places of Dravida have been land since land began, and have seen on the one side the sinking of a continent that joined them to Africa, and on the other the upheaval of the Himalayas from the sea. They are older than anything in the world. No water has ever covered them, and the sun who has watched them for countless aeons may still discern in their outlines forms that were his before our globe was torn from his bosom. If flesh of the sun's flesh is to be touched anywhere, it is here among the incredible antiquity of these hills.

E. M. FORSTER

LOVE AND HATE

A blindfold search and wrestle and fumbling clasp
Of a half-seen Nature and a hidden Soul,
A game of hide and seek in twilight rooms,
A play of love and hate and fear and hope
Continues in the nursery of mind,
Its hard and heavy romp of self-born twins.

SRI AUROBINDO, *Savitri*

BUDDHA has well said:

“Hatreds never cease by hatreds in this world. By love alone they cease. This is an ancient Law.”

Love always builds while hatred breaks.

I have been in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for the last twenty-five years. I have gone through countless experiences in the pursuit of spirituality, both bitter and sweet.

If I had not passed through various and horrible phases in my life, the Mother would not have taken the trouble to write to me thousands of letters—each bearing the eternal Truth and Wisdom; and I would not have bothered to share with the whole of humanity her luminous words.

The Mother also gave me numerous talks whose reports by me she later corrected.

In her own time and by her Grace I wish to bring out the volumes of *The Story of a Soul*. I have stated in the *Story* the ascension of my consciousness—but without leaving out my deficiencies and setbacks.

The Mother gave the Message for this *Story* in 1972:

“This is the interesting Story of how a being discovers the Divine Life.”

To discover the Divine Life is no joke or child’s play.

The Mother alone knew the truth of my being and she wrote to me in one of her letters:

“No one wants you to reach your goal more than *I do* and I will always do exactly what is needed to make you realise the Divine Truth and Love, of that you can be sure—absolutely sure.”

The critical judgment of human beings is ambiguous and false. They generally emphasise negative aspects. But their hatred never affects the action and splendour of the Divine Grace.

Here too I may quote a letter which the Mother wrote to me in 1965:

“When someone is entirely dedicated to the Divine, for this one the opinions of others are of little importance.”

Ever since I came to stay near the Mother, I had been conscious of my deficiencies. I have prayed to her constantly to rid me of them.

The Mother wrote to me:

“To become aware of one’s deficiencies is a sign of great progress and the door open on the road to success in Sadhana. So rejoice and keep confident—all is well.”

I have even written in the foreword to my book *White Roses*, which was recently printed in the Mother’s own handwriting:

“There are also some personal letters which cannot be avoided, because without them the continuity of the series is broken and they touch on general points no less than on personal ones. They express some of my deficiencies but I have not hesitated to place them before the world. Besides, human nature is of one piece and what is said to me may apply to others as well.”

Lately I have been hearing chance remarks on what the Mother in her talks with X said about some defects of mine in the course of a certain episode. But this should not ruffle me. For, I have never hidden anything from the Mother nor have I pretended to be a saint in front of her. I was extremely frank—in fact, I was like an open book before her. I may add that the episode concerned has been recounted impartially by myself in *The Story of a Soul*.

She once wrote to me of my having a childlike nature.

In 1956 the Mother told me:

“Your soul is ready for Nirvana. I can give it to you just now—within a trice (*She snapped her fingers*). But I want your whole being to unite with the Divine. Such is your soul’s aspiration also. So this will be fulfilled.”

The nature of human beings is such that they leave out the fine qualities in a person and cling to what the Mother has casually remarked about one or what has been created by their own petty conceptions and imaginations. On this one-sided view they feed their hatred.

Curiously enough, most of the unfriendly criticism comes from a jealousy of all the praise which has been given by the Mother in several contexts to the target of their venom.

My love and faith in the Mother are unshakable. I have appreciated her ways of working in me from the occult and the spiritual points of view. She was and is and

will be my true eternal Mother who will never fail me.

She also confided in me a bit of her opinion of people in certain contexts. But I will never betray her trust, for she never wanted personal remarks to be made public. She wrote to me in 1967:

“Nobody knows the exact truth of things here. And each one speaks as if he knows, but in fact nobody knows.

“If the truth were revealed one day to all, most of the people here, like everywhere, would be terrified by the enormity of their ignorance or their wrong interpretations.

“So I advise all to be in peace and to abstain from all judgment—it is safe.”

She also wrote to me in 1966:

“Goodness! why do you listen to all these stories? They simply spoil your mind and your *Sadhana*. But you must know that in each and everyone of my children, whenever they talk, speak or act under the impulse of falsehood, it acts on my body like a blow.

“So do not listen to all these stories and think only of the Love Divine!”

I am eternally grateful to the Mother for all that she has done and will do for me. She had full right to say anything about me. I am honoured, because she knew my imperfections and, in the very act of censure, must have done the needful to liberate me from ignorance.

The letter which she wrote to me in 1966 is itself the proof:

“Your soul is with you, visible and shining, its warmth and sweetness can be felt clearly.

“So be peaceful and at rest: you have crossed the dangerous bridge and you are on the luminous side.

“I love you.”

I remembered to have given in 1967 a folder to the Mother just before my spiritual birthday to write all my defects on the sheets within it, so that I might improve myself. She was really surprised. I prayed to her again and again to do so. Then she advised me what I should do to attain the conscious and concrete union with the Divine. On the opening page she wrote:

“Bonne Fête

Let it be the true new birth—the birth
in the Divine Consciousness from which
one never comes out again.”

I was thrilled and tears of joy ran down my cheeks. Who would want to come out of the Supreme Consciousness?

This reminds me of two letters of the Mother which I received in 1956:

“Do not forget your soul. Remember your aspiration. You are born for the Divine and you will find the Divine.”

She sent me a card depicting a tower, together with these lines:

“Let your aspiration be like this tower, pointing always towards the sky, ceaselessly, unshakably, and it will overcome all the divisions in the being, all the obstacles, all the difficulties.

“I know that in all sincerity you want the Divine and the Divine alone, and the Divine is already with you for the Victory.”

Perhaps most of the people are unaware that apart from the letters which are published in *White Roses*, I have still hundreds of the Mother's letters concerning my soul, its aspiration, my future, my work and my goal.

If people believe in the Mother and her Force, they may as well believe in her written words.

During the year 1955 some people told me something which made me sick. In answer to my letter the Mother wrote:

“Why do you listen to all the rubbish people say? They are full of mischief and throw their poison on everybody.

“One thing you must know and never forget—it is that all that is *true* and *sincere* will always be kept—only what is false and insincere will disappear.

“So in the measure in which your need for me is sincere and genuine, *it will be fulfilled.*”

The Mother made me know how dearly she loved me, but at the same time she never spared me whenever I was wrong. She chided me for my own good.

She wrote to me in 1956:

“Of one thing you can be sure, if I was not certain that you will reach your goal I would never scold you, because it would be useless—my scolding is a proof of my conviction that you will succeed.

“My love and blessings are always active with you.”

I wrote to the Mother asking whether my nature could be changed. She answered:

“Yes, my dear child, the nature can change, completely change with the practice of

Yoga—nothing is impossible for the Divine Grace—it can transform a being so totally that all that seemed for it completely impossible becomes not only possible but *done*. That is what I want to do for you—so that all your difficulties will become like unreal nightmares and vanish in an inexistent past.

“The Grace is there working for that transformation.

With my love and blessings.”

The relevant verses from *Savitri* Book Two, p. 98 are quite apt:

...Our nature's glass shows not our real self;
That greatness still abides held back within.

I have written in my book—*Salutations*—consisting of Prayers to the Mother before I met her:

“...This too I know that in this life of mine I shall have to rebel a lot. Everybody will turn against me, they will slander me, they will scorn me, they will hate me. And I shall hardly escape what is called calamity and suffering. But it does not matter. I have the confidence that I have Your protection, so much that no harm can come to me.

“Let mountains of misfortune fall upon me, let the deadly poison of a hostile world be my drink. Even so, shall I not gain at last the Divine Love?”

HUTA

THE SUPREME SUNRISE

O ASPIRING night! you must not despond,
The dawn is not far, just wait and respond,
When she appears, the vibrations of light
Shall evoke the music of morning's delight.
Roses are strewn on the path by the Dawn,
The grace comes ahead of the Glory Divine;
A grandiose reception is ready for the Lord
The moment He appears with the golden Sunshine
Lo, He comes out from the aureate arc,
The flowers unfold to offer their all,
The singing beauties ascend the sky,
They welcome their master who answers their call.
The aspiring night is fulfilled allwise,
Her richest reward is the Supreme Sunrise.

BHANUSHANKAR BHATT

ETERNITY—MY MOTHER AND MY MATE

ETERNAL CHILD

GLIMMERING in an argent firmament,
A mystic moon aglow lovingly mild
Beckons me tenderly, a mother to her child.
Out of my soul white yearning arms are sent
As if back to their parent-orb were bent
Two moon-rays turning home. Intensive, wild,
My longing flames up, like a rocket trailed,
And by my deep need's call the hush is rent:

“O boundless Lap of Love where I belong,
Dissolve my limits with your light's caresses,
To silence kiss the brow's thought-buzzing hive;
Murmuring trance-tunes of mystical sleep-song,
Enshower on me with your dense golden tresses
Heavenly dreams that divinise earth-life...”

ETERNAL LOVER

I am in Love! Flame-shiver and ice-fire
Run through my veins, a cataract of bliss,
Joy-geysers in my soul gush higher and higher—
Passionate ecstasy kindled by Thy kiss
Of light, ambrosia's paradisaal well.
O Infinite! my Paramour Divine
Whose gold embrace is delight unutterable,
Consume me till completely I am Thine.
One thing alone I value in my life:
My love for Thee. To love Thee ever more!
Only for this one boon I crave, and strive
To flower as perfect rose around Love's core.
Vivid Eternity, Thy immense sun-gaze
Is haloed by an all-beautiful loving Face!

ALEXANDER BRODT

POEMS BEFORE AND AFTER 1973

OFFERING IX

NO MORE MY SHORES—1968

No more my shores—
For the impetuous crescendo
And retreat of tide;

No more my trees
For spring and summer
Visitation.

Branches and the sand deserted
Make so sad and dull a moan.

I go...I go to a high place,
Sea in perspective calm,
Birds insignificant beneath my air

Where distance levels all desire
Above the things that now require
No more of me;

And here at ease, I sit and wait.
This place is desolate.

NOW THERE IS NO LONGER...—JULY 1979

Now there is no longer even desire to be;
Only to rest in the quiet sanctuary
Of Thy Peace and Love.

Around me like a turbulent stream
Life moves with vibrations violent in desire.
Here on my island hilltop
High above the rushing waters
Only the spray of those violent waters
Mist and moisten me a little
Bringing at times some small vibrations
To disturb my peace.

In Thy warm and loving Sun I dry
 As I sit looking down at the battle of fishes.
 Slaves to instinct and habit,
 With and against the stream they swim,
 Leaping waterfalls with such intensity
 Only to float downstream again exhausted to the sea.
 To and fro they flutter and flash, eat and are eaten,
 Live and die in Nature-inspired obscurity.

Eons ago a fish climbed out of the water
 And the slow process began—
 Fish to man to Superman.

I call to them from the peace of my island hilltop,
 "Are you not more than this?
 Reject those turbulent waters.
 Take the first step...be free."

ELIZABETH STILLER

MUSIC TO PIERCE EARS BY

DOWN town it's wedding time again!
 Celebration! Celebration!
 Loudspeakers out in battle array—
 two or three have crept up close—
 each voice at different pitch, full-screaming,
 as though being murdered by fiends.

The pre-dawn dark explodes in sound
 as the first note, with a fierce malignity,
 shatters the peace for the day.
 We hearing folk are driven away—
 the rest stay calm, their ears long deafened
 by the red-hot assault of the decibels.

At dusk I return—a neighbour's girl
 screams in my ear, above the din,
 "It's ear-piercing!" pointing to a loudspeaker.
 "It certainly is!" I shout back.
 She says, "I mean the ceremony.
 They're celebrating a little girl's ear-piercing!"

"U"

THE SECRET OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

AN AUROBINDONIAN APPROACH

(Continued from the issue of November 24, 1980)

UTTANKA comes across the *kṣapanak* on his way back from Pausya's court. Although this intriguing figure is appearing and vanishing intermittently, which ought to attract the attention of a vigilant pilgrim, Uttanka, in his overweening confidence, takes no precautions. The *kṣapanak* is not merely a mendicant adept at fasting, but also represents "pause, interruption of study, defilement, impurity; one who destroys; diminishing, suppressing, expelling".⁸³ In other words, here is one of the enemy powers of the nether world of inconscience, the Dasyu, the Dāsa, the Paṇi, the Vṛtra or Vala. The enigmatic and ambiguous nature of this force is clearly put across through his intermittent appearing and vanishing: a play of darkness and light, a will-o'-the-wisp. Uttanka's discernment, however, has been obscured firstly by a swollen ego which thinks the task has been accomplished, leading to a loss of vigilance, and secondly by having given way to anger in cursing Pausya. We see that he experiences a fall into the crude physical consciousness, represented by his leaving the heavenly earrings on the ground and going off to micturate, or (in the *Aśvamedhika Parva*) being so taken up in plucking berries for food that he lets them fall to the ground. In both versions the key facts are that the divine treasure is not kept properly but allowed to be sullied by contact with the lower consciousness which is waiting to steal it; and that the custodian or the seeker gives a higher priority to his physical needs instead of safeguarding the dearly won treasure. The reversion from the psychic consciousness to the purely material level is inevitably followed by the loss of the power and the sovereignty which had been achieved laboriously after conquering the ogre Saudāsa (originally also a *kṣatriya* just as the Paṇis are basically emanations of the Truth, but almost wholly obscured) and seeking out the invisible Madayanti, custodian of the treasure. Takṣaka, the *kṣapanak*, is Vyāsa's analogue not only of Ahi-Vṛtra but also of the Vedic Daśyus, the "dividers", for the word *takṣ* signifies "to cut, to reduce by dividing".⁸⁴ Like his Vedic compatriots, Takṣaka steals the wealth of knowledge Uttanka has brought from the upper and inner worlds of Light. The stick with which Uttanka furiously digs away into the nether world is the luminous goad of Pūṣan which rives open the sealed heart to evoke the mantra of Uttanka's invocations to Agni and Indra which follow.⁸⁵

The working of this Mantra is ushered in by Dakṣiṇa as described beautifully in *Savitri* (I.3.p. 38):

A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,
Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind
Bringing her rhythmic sense of hidden things...

Bared with a stab of flame the closed Beyond....
 Overleaping with a sole and perilous bound
 The high black wall hiding superconscience,
 She broke in with inspired speech for scythe
 And plundered the Unknowable's vast estate...
 A traveller between summit and abyss
 She joined the distant ends, the viewless deeps,
 Or streaked along the roads of Heaven and Hell
 Pursuing all knowledge like a questing hound...
 Spokesman of the silent seeings of the Supreme,
 She brought immortal words to mortal men.

The mantric invocations of Uttanka parallel the Vedic hymns in serving much more than to convey a thought. The very sound-vibrations of the words helped to bring about a particular rhythm in the psycho-nervous being, concentrating the inner spiritual energy for a specific purpose.⁸⁶ Purani⁸⁷ has shown that the very names of the deities were originally used in their psychological sense, as suggested by the Sanskrit roots, and only later crystallised into proper names of individual gods. As Kenneth Gilbert aptly puts it, "Through the means of mantra the ṛṣi attuned to the 'waves' (Gods) of energy of the One Infinite 'Ocean' (Divine Spirit) of Energy...if the God of a particular verse is Indra then the ṛṣi is invoking the power (*śakti*) of Indra. The vibration connected with that certain mantra (both the verse and the name of the God) corresponds with the manifestation of the *Indra-śakti*, and therefore the ṛṣi is able to arouse and make use of the power of Indra through the Vedic verse...*Indra* and *Indriyas* ('that which is of Indra') would be originally sound-vibrations associated with the power of the mind for coordinating the higher perceptual faculties. Later Indra became a distinct individual God-figure with vast conceptual and psychological significance."⁸⁸

Uttanka's invocation to Agni, which finally restores the earrings to him, assumes greater significance from the appellative used for him in the *Aśvamedhika Parva* account: *Bhārgava*. The Bhṛigus were renowned as the seers who brought Agni out from the waters into the world of men: the Hindu Prometheus. Moreover, it is they who diffuse the sacrificial flame throughout the world of men and bring him to the navel of the earth (*Rigveda* I.143.4). The navel is the occult centre of the lower vital impulses, which is why Agni is smoky when invoked by Uttanka, and why he is urged to blow into the anus of the horse (*apāna* representing the lower vital airs).⁸⁹ Uttanka, therefore, is an aspirant being initiated into the Bhṛigu Fire Mystery, which is the arousal of the divine flame in the lowermost depths of the consciousness for permeating the entire *bhūr* (earth, the world of men), purifying that earthy consciousness and raising it to the higher worlds of Truth and Knowledge and Joy and Power, the eternal Vedic goals:

Then kindling the gold tongue of sacrifice,
 Calling the powers of a bright hemisphere,
 We shall shed the discredit of our mortal state,
 Make the abysm a road for Heaven's descent,
 Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray
 And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire.⁹⁰

This initiation, which appears to last for four days (the time-limit set by Veda's wife for obtaining the earrings), culminates in the union of Indra and Agni, one astride the other (the man with the horse) as the experience is figured forth to Uttanka:

A flaming thunder, a creator flash,
 His victor Light rode on her deathless Force:
 A cenataur's mighty gallop bore the god.
 Life throned with mind, a double majesty.⁹¹

It is this joint action on the human consciousness of Knowledge and Force which unlocks the secret of the universe to the novitiate:

He found the occult cave, the mystic door
 Near to the well of vision in the soul...
 The text and glossary of the Vedic truth
 Are there;...
 He read the original ukase kept back
 In the locked archives of the spirit's crypt,
 And saw the signature and fiery seal
 Of Wisdom on the dim Power's hooded work
 Who builds in Ignorance the steps of Light...
 Interpreting the universe by soul signs
 He read from within the text of the without:
 The riddle grew plain and lost its catch obscure.⁹²

What are we to make of the ominous warning Veda's wife voices when she tells Uttanka that he must return with the earrings within four days, on pain of a dire curse? Within the psycho-spiritual world which the Uttanka myth represents through symbols, this stands for the damnation which the aspiring soul faces if it falters or falls by the way en route to the supernal goal:

Often the pilgrim on the Eternal's road
 Ill-lit from clouds by the pale moon of Mind,
 Or in devious by-ways wandering alone,...
 Falls overpowered by her lion leap...

Obscured was the Truth-light in the cavern heart
 That burns unwitnessed in the altar crypt
 Behind the still velamen's secrecy
 Companioning the Godhead of the shrine...
 Once a companion of the sacred Fire,
 The mortal perishes to God and Light,
 An adversary governs heart and brain,
 A Nature hostile to the Mother-force.
 The self of life yields up its instruments
 To Titan and demoniac agencies
 That aggrandise earth-nature and disframe:...
 A silence falls upon the spirit's heights,
 From the veiled sanctuary the God retired,
 Empty and cold is the chamber of the Bride;...
 Then by the Angel of the Vigil Tower
 A name is struck from the recording book;
 A flame that sang in Heaven sinks quenched and mute,
 In ruin ends the epic of a soul.
 This is the tragedy of the inner death
 When forfeited is the divine element
 And only a mind and body live to die.⁹⁴

The *Aśvamedhika Parva* 58.60 provides a final corroboration of the interpretation which sees Uttanka's story as Vyāsa's re-casting of the Vedic Angirasa Myth:

Thus, O Janmayeya, Uttanka, the great soul, brought the
 begemmed divine earrings, having covered all the three worlds.⁹⁵

These three worlds are those of the physical nature (*bhūr*), the vital worlds of desires (*bhuvār*) and the world of illumined mind (*svār*). With Indra's assistance, Uttanka bores into the darkness of the physical inconscience to discover the psychic flame hidden within and uses it to recover the illuminations of Truth, the spiritual wealth, stolen from him by the nether powers during a lapse in his concentration. It is by conquering the vital sex-desire and purifying himself that he was able to attain these treasures. And, again, he lost them by succumbing to the demands of the physical consciousness, necessitating an intervention by Indra-Puṣan to descend into the subconscious *Pātāla*, and an invocation to Agni to lift him back to the *Svar*-heights. A close analogue to the Uttanka experience can be found in the *Rigveda* I.6 as explained with superb clarity by Nolini Kanta Gupta:

"The true nature of the pure thought-power is to reveal the mental being by degrees. It is in the true mental being that the real existence and nature of a

creature abide. The mental being comes more and more to the fore with the gradual development of the perennial surge of original thoughts. The pure thought-power when manifested presses forth a particular form of the mental being. Then it merges into the heart of the aspirant and comes out from there with a new form and truth. Thus the thought-power reveals the presiding divine Deity of sacrificial fire and spiritual evolution. A 'name' is the manifest power of truth, called 'numen' in Latin. The process of sadhana does not always follow a straight line. At times it goes into the deeper regions of consciousness and emerges from there with a new truth. Hence we notice a play of dissolution and manifestation. The Vedic seers used to express thus the idea: dawn follows night and night follows dawn, dawn then moves forward in a never-ending succession revealing infinite truth.

In the innermost recesses of consciousness, in the depth of the night, in inert matter lie hidden the rays of knowledge. The divinised mental being penetrates those secret recesses in search of the rays of knowledge imbedded, stolen and stored there and drives the darkness away to rescue the knowledge-rays symbolised by a pair of cows. It is the mental being that turns the twilight of consciousness into the state of full awakening.

What does actually happen when Indra reveals the knowledge-rays after purging out ignorance and darkness? There echoes in the occult hearing the concrete messages of the vast truth... They infuse the aspirant with a clear and pointed intellect which can discern the quintessence of truth...

The truth contained in the material earth which is illumined by the mental light as well as the truth of the vital world filled with pure enjoyment and inspiration are concretely apprehended by the aspirant. Earth, air, sky, i.e. the vast truths of the body, life and mind that are captured by the mental being manifest their divine essence in the aspirant. Indra is the divine mental being and Indra is the power that is capable of revealing the truth.⁹⁶

A consolidated account of what we have discovered in the Uttanka myth can now be attempted. Once the period of apprenticeship is over, the aspirant is ready to be initiated into the Bhārgava Mysteries. A pre-condition, however, is that he should come forward with the desire that the knowledge he has gathered so far intellectually be guided by proper discernment in his quest. His mission is to obtain the golden treasure, Truth, of Puṣan's or Indra's realm for the barren field of the physical nature, Ahalyā, and invest it with Light, Sovereignty, Power of the *kṣatriya*. This supernal light glows even in the darkness of ignorance (draws down the lights of the heavenly bodies, as Madayanti says) and descends according to the readiness and the capacity of the human receptacle (the earrings adjust to the size of the wearer). The path to this goal is beset with ogres, but the preceptor's guidance (Gorama's blessings and Veda's friendship with Indra resulting in Uttanka's being fed with the *purīṣa-amṛta*) save him.

Certain conditions are at the foot of success in this quest. First among these is chastity, the second is purity, and the third, and most important, is constant vigilance and concentration born of humility and devotion to the goal. These are revealed in Uttanka's refusal to service his guru's wife; his inability to discern the queen until he has purified himself; his dropping the earrings on the ground for eating or relieving himself; and his failure to appreciate the threat posed by the apparition of the *Kṣapanak*, because of his inner discernment having been obscured by anger and pride, resulting in loss of the earrings. The intense concentration bordering on desperation which he brings to bear in his efforts to pierce through into the subterranean nāga-realm evokes a response from the higher world of *svar* whence lightning flashes of Pure Illumination descend to rive open the hidden cavern within his heart where the psychic fire is lit, nurtured in turn by Ignorance and Knowledge, Night and Dawn. As the enemy powers do not respond to persuasion, the mantric invocation to Knowledge and Force arises from the heart. Now comes the action of the inner flame, purifying the being by burning up the vital desires and dross (smoke) evoked by the practice of *prāṇāyāma* (blowing into the apertures of the horse) concentrated on cleansing the lower vital consciousness. The same Agni then reaches Uttanka, in time, to his guru's abode (Knowledge-Veda or Gotama-Light) with the lost treasure of the divine realms:

The smoke of his passion is overcome and this vital Will, this burning desire in the Life becomes the Steed that carries us up to the highest levels,—the white Steed that gallops in the front of the Dawns...the great increasing states of illuminated force and being...which are the eternal future of the mortal when he has attained immortality.⁹³

Before we leave the Uttanka episode, it is interesting to find how Vyāsa has carefully selected what could be a pre or proto-historic feature in the Ṛigveda for this myth. In the Ṛigveda VII.18.6 the Bhṛigus are celebrated as opponents of Sudāsa; in the Mahābhārata this reference has been utilised in a subtle manner in the encounter between the Bhārgava Uttanka and the monarch-turned-ogre Saudāsa son of Sudāsa. How carefully, indeed, Vyāsa keeps to his sources in retelling the Vedas for the uninitiated!

(To be continued)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

NOTES

⁹³ Moncer-Williams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Clarendon, 1960), p. 326

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

⁹⁵ *cf.* n. 81 above.

⁹⁶ Sri Aurobindo: *The Upanishads*, *op cit* p. 168 ff

⁹⁷ Purani *Studies in Vedic Interpretation*, *op cit*. p 217

⁹⁸ Gilbert. *Wisdom of the Veda*, *op. cit* p. 35

⁸⁹ *Upanishads, op. cit.* p. 159.⁹⁰ *Savitri* II. 5, pp. 171-172.⁹¹ *ibid.*, II. 3. p. 126⁹² *ibid.*, I. 5. p. 74, 76.⁹³ *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 360 and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire, op. cit.* p. 499.

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THE EGO-CENTRIC IMBECILITY

It is quite possible for a human being not to remain hopelessly preoccupied with himself only. Essentially we are infinite, eternal and immortal. Our bondage is an illusion, our limitations are self-imposed, worries are nothing more than childish lamentations and imaginary afflictions.

In what place shall I find a proper lodging suitable for me? What food will supply me with the needed nutrition? What atmosphere and what kind of association would help me in my spiritual progress?—all these and many other worries occupy constantly my outward consciousness.

It is exactly that kind of preoccupation which has been called by the Mother “The ego-centric Imbecility.” And she says that it is because of this imbecility that all goes wrong. By taking excessive and fastidious care of our health we disturb our normal and natural physical functions and invite diseases and deterioration. When left entirely to itself and to the Grace, the human body can very well remain healthy and active for a long time.

When we step back a little and enter into our inner consciousness we find there the self-existent peace, the stabilised harmony, the unmixed joy, and we feel with certainty that every event is being shaped in the best possible way by the omnipresent divine Grace. It is not at all difficult for us to perceive that at each moment a luminous guidance is there to decide our actions, control our thoughts, purify our emotions and lead us triumphantly towards our divine fulfilment. If we blind ourselves with our imbecility, even then our steps are infallibly oriented towards the golden Path but the pace will be slowed down. A tranquil atmosphere envelops us at all times to give us a glimpse of an all-powerful Grace. We must not cherish in ourselves the presence designated “The Old Man” by Sri Aurobindo.

SAILEN ROY

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF A. C. SWINBURNE'S *GARDEN OF PROSERPINE*

The Garden of Proserpine is a brief lyric of a dozen stanzas in the Iambic metre. Every stanza consists of eight lines. Every line is a trimeter. The rhyme-pattern is ab ab cccb. There are two sets of feminine rhymes in every stanza, the first set occurring alternately in the first and the third lines, and the second coming in succession in the fifth, sixth and seventh. In the opening stanza, for instance, the first group of feminine rhymes is quiet and riot, and the second group is growing, sowing and mowing. The extraordinary musical quality of this poem is due largely to this 'fine excess' of feminine rhymes which, combined with the masculine rhymes in the second, fourth and eighth lines, produce indeed a veritable feast of melody. And except in the eleventh stanza where 'river' is made to rhyme with 'ever' and 'never', the rhyming is absolutely flawless throughout.

We may mention two more defects which reveal themselves on a detailed and minute examination of the poem. The first is that of a false antithesis between harvest time and mowing, which occurs in the seventh line of the first stanza. The balance in sound is perfect, but not in sense, since 'mowing' does not bear the same relation to 'harvest-time' as 'sowing' bears to 'reaping folk' in the preceding line. The second defect is the use of a word or two merely for the sake of rhyme. But these defects are too trivial to deserve any serious consideration. Certain critics take objection to the use of the word 'diurnal' in the concluding stanza on the ground that it is an ugly word and should, therefore, have been avoided. Well, we do not understand these critics; for we feel that the word is quite legitimate for the purposes of poetry and coming where it does it produces a fine effect on our ears. It is, indeed, one of the supremely melodious poems in the whole range of English verse. A.C. Swinburne carried the prosody of the romantic age to its extreme point of mellifluousness and introduced into it a quality of speed, of throbbing velocity, which no one, not even Shelley, had anticipated.

The Garden of Proserpine is remarkable also for its facility of composition and its alliterative effects. Here are a few examples of its alliterated music:

Blown buds of barren flowers.

Or

Wan waves and wet winds labour.

Or, again,

To men that mix and meet her.

The stanza in which the poem is written is one of the most original and one of the most beautiful patterns ever devised by the metrical genius of a poet. For lyrical poetry, indeed, it is as admirable as is the Spenserian stanza for narrative.

Swinburne is generally regarded as deficient in the pictorial quality of poetry.

But this poem, it must be admitted, is distinguished for its imagery. The picture of Proserpine, wife of Pluto and queen of the Underworld and, therefore, the goddess of sleep and death, is superb. She is pale, or yellow, or golden in complexion. She wears on her forehead a crown of leaves. She has a look of imperturbable calm. Her hands are cold. Their very touch heals the fever and fret of life. Her lips are languid and whosoever kisses them languishes away into a swoon. She is more beautiful than Venus, Goddess of love and beauty, who fears to greet her lest she should be stricken with the spell of her loveliness. Men come from many times and lands to meet her.

And spring and seed and swallow
Take wing for her and follow
Where summer song rings hollow
And flowers are put to scorn.

And her function is to gather all things mortal "with cold immortal hands." The picture is exquisitely integrated and appeals not only to our sense of sight but also to our sense of touch and our sense of taste.

Her languid lips are sweeter
Than love's who fears to greet her
To men that mix and meet her
From many times and lands.

Another excellent picture is that of Proserpine's garden. Absolute quiet prevails here. It is free from the waves and winds constantly howling outside. It is 'a sleepy world of streams.' It is free from tears and laughter, free from sowing and mowing, free from those desires and dreams and vain ambitions which vex the mental peace of men in the miserable mundane world. There is here no growth of any kind—

But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine.

A more imaginative picture is hardly to be found in English poetry.

The Garden of Proserpine is a typical poem of Swinburne. It gives a fine expression to his pessimistic attitude towards life. There is in the world nothing which is permanent. Power, Beauty, Joy, Love—all alike are morsels for the mouth of Death. Swinburne is not, at least in this poem, a Christian poet. He is thoroughly pagan. He does not believe in God. He does not believe in heaven or hell. He does not believe in the Christian doctrine of Resurrection, for he says 'that dead men rise up never.' He does not believe in the Immortality of the Soul. He believes in 'only the sleep eternal in an eternal night.' He believes only in the everlasting sleep of death.

It is worthwhile, however, to bear in mind that the poet's attitude toward death

is not that of pessimism. The fact of death is for him, on the contrary, a source of great consolation, nay, even fit for thanks giving and jubilation. It frees us from those hopes and fears between whose extremes our life swings monotonously like a pendulum. The poet thanks the gods, if there be any gods,

That no life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never,
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

ADARSH BALA

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EUROPE 1974

A TRAVELOGUE

(44)

FRENCH was the language of the educated classes in Europe for several centuries. In Frederick the Great's "Sans Souci", everyone spoke French and Voltaire was his mentor. Catherine the Great did everything in her power to bring French into her court. Considering the distance from Paris to Moscow or St. Petersburg, her travail must have been great.

How the French language came into being is a very interesting story. Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, tells us that Gaul (France) was a Latin-speaking land when it formed part of the Roman Empire. But the Latin the common people spoke was a broken and imperfect dialect, whereas the higher classes spoke the language as the Romans spoke it. The common people naturally did not care for the finer syntax or the faultless diction of the language. So when the barbarians invaded Gaul their language easily permeated this broken Latin of the common people to produce two distinct French dialects known as Langue d'oc and Langue d'oïl.

Southern France, Provence and the adjoining regions spoke the Langue d'oc, a soft and musical tongue that all linguists and savants agree to have been the sweetest language ever spoken anywhere. It was precisely here that the Albigensian Heresy grew and, when these people were subdued, unfortunately the Langue d'oc too was swept away, considered by the rulers as the language of the heretical religion. Earlier, when it had become settled and polished a group of poets came into existence called the Troubadours. These poets composed lyrical love-songs and satires that were sung in all the courts of France and Europe. They inspired all the earlier poets of Christendom. With the persecution the songs of the Troubadours were stilled forever.

Northern France that spoke the Langue d'oïl produced a group of writers known as the Trouveurs who wrote epic and narrative poems called romances. They sang the chivalry and the heroism of the knights. The Story of Ronald belongs to this group. Ronald was a general of Charles the Great and the story was the description of his Spanish wars. Some of these narrations reached Homeric animation and grandeur. Poets all over Europe were influenced by the works of these Trouveurs. Chaucer, Spenser, and even Tennyson, they say, were very much under their spell. The most famous among the early prose-writers was Froissart who was known as the French Herodotus. Based on the works of these early writers, during the Middle Ages, every style, every type, every species of literature had been tried in France. The *grand finale* was reached during the reign of Louis XIV. As his reign saw an all-round uplifting of the French national life, so too in literature there was a sort of

Golden Age. Corneille's Tragedies have never been surpassed. He has been called the Father of French Tragedy. Racine too was superb. Molière has left an unforgettable mark in the field of French Comedy. Two other names adorn this period, Descartes and La Fontaine.

Our Mother knew several languages. She spoke fluent English. But She was at her best when speaking French. This must appear a truism to many, as they will argue, "Why, Mother herself was French!" But we know that there are innumerable people in India who are perfectly at home in the English language but not in their own mother tongues. If the Mother spoke French perfectly it was because She loved the language for its clarity and elegance and sweetness. The vocabulary is vast and rich and is able to express all the finer shades of thought and meaning. She regarded French as a perfect instrument for describing ultra-material phenomena and for recording her own spiritual experiences. For Sanat used to say, "If it is not clear it is not French" and often quoted the great Frenchman whose very sobriquet "Anatole France" embodied his keen sense of his country's genius: "Clarté, puis clarté, encore clarté."

The Mother once said that She had read about five thousand books in English and a whole library in French. We were amazed at her superhuman dexterity when She told us the story of how as a little girl She had made thirty mistakes in a dictation given to Her and then in one year's time She wrote faultless French. Her contribution to the French language is unique and one feels that it will never be surpassed, at least not in the particular line She adopted. Her *Prières et Méditations* is supreme poetry, and Her *Découverte Suprême* is simply magnificent. If Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Hugo or Dumas, Her early contemporaries, had seen Her writings they would have given Her the highest acclamations. "From where did She get such incomparable diction and such mellifluous language?" they would have wondered.

In everyday life the Mother's adaptability to changing Her style of speaking whenever She wished was phenomenal. When addressing a class She spoke in a manner that was quite different from the style She chose when speaking to an individual. Here Her diction and voice changed completely. And when speaking to Pavitra (P.B. St-Hilaire), Director of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, it was another French. That must be the most exquisite French such as spoken by the aristocracy and the highest literary classes in Paris.

Remembering all that, we tried to catch every word that was spoken around us in Paris. Sanat would sometimes start a conversation with the receptionist or the man at the newspaper-kiosk so that I might hear the French natural to a Parisian. Of course we had no opportunity to hear the French current at the Elysée Palace, (the President's Palace). That would have been our lot if Sanat had remained in the Diplomatic Service. But we were invited to another kind of Heavenly Palace in Pondicherry. However, we were confirmed in the conviction that French is a very polite and elegant language. I had lost my heart to it when I had been a student in the first form and learnt from my French teacher the French Nursery rhyme;

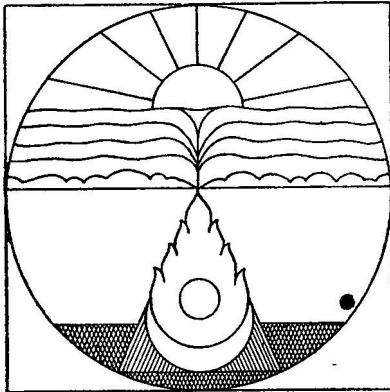
Je suis un petit enfant de belle figure
Qui aime bien les bonbons et les confitures.

The Mother encouraged even grown-up people who had been educated outside to learn French. In those days She used to take a class of grown-ups. And once She gave me a great surprise and joy by commenting, "She has a very good pronunciation."

The French the Mother used when talking to us and the French She had used while speaking to her guests in Her drawing room in Paris, between these two there must have been a wide gap. It had been customary of great aristocratic ladies in France from the Eighteenth Century onward to let their drawing-rooms be used as a sort of private club. In those days there were no clubs as we understand the term now. What sort of people gathered in a particular drawing-room naturally depended upon the hostess, her taste and inclinations. The Mother has left us with a faint inkling as to what kind of people gathered in Her drawing-room. Perhaps Anatole France and André Maurois, Rodin and Alexandra David-Neel and Abdul Baha, son of the great Persian religious preacher Bahauulla?

(To be continued)

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BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Chaitanya and Mira—Two Plays by *Dilip Kumar Roy*. Pp: 197. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Publication Department, Pondicherry. Price: Rs. 40.

JANUARY 6, 1980. The Indo-Anglian literary world was shocked to hear the passing of Dilip Kumar Roy, the well-known poet, playwright, polyglot, composer, singer and mystic. As author he has more than 70 books in Bengali and English. The great seer Sri Aurobindo called him, "A friend and a son, a part of my existence."

Very much encouraged by his father, Dilip writes in his *Pilgrims of the Stars*: "...my enthusiasm carried me away and I turned to our mythological storehouse, the tales of heroes and devotees...." The two plays under review are on the devotees of Lord Krishna.

"Chaitanya" is about Bishwambhar Misra, later called by himself Chaitanya, who had an intense love for Krishna from his very early age. Afraid that he would become a Sadhu, his parents performed his marriage with a beautiful girl named Vishnupriya at the age of eighteen. But how could the physical beauty of a girl lure the devotee who had no interest in worldly things? His mother and wife cajoled him. His friends threatened him. But none was able to stop him from becoming a mendicant. The play tells us about the aspiration, conflict and illumination of Chaitanya. Here we see the mother, Sachi, whose affection for her son is beyond measure, when she whimpers out:

"I cannot see, child, what will happen when
You, my one world, will leave me, wandering back
To your great worlds—leaving no world for me."

But Chaitanya who has 'heard the call' leaves his 'home and all for Brindavan, a mendicant in His name', with a 'soul of dauntless aspiration', though scholars like Keshav and Murari call the path he has chosen 'stark midsummer madness' and 'mere moonshine'. Finally we meet Jagai and Madhai, two notorious roughts who intimidate Chaitanya, "So either mend your ways, fool—or beware!", only to fall prostrate at his feet and cry out, "Forgive us, Lord, our sins—We cry from Hell", for Chaitanya taught people that "to reach God, people must travel the path of love. To love God was to love humanity: To serve humanity was to serve God."

The second play is on Mira, the beautiful queen of Mevar who left her palace and throne to roam, begging, like Chaitanya, her way to Brindavan and singing His name. Here we encounter four pundits, who find a "method in her madness", dub her words 'perdition' and threaten her, saying, "Behave yourself... or we will ostracize you." But when their darkness is redeemed by her light, they become her disciples. We witness how Ajit, the proud pedant, is transformed into a humble devotee. We too understand with Ajit:

"To do His will in glad and full surrender
 Is the way to the last fulfilment. We are tested
 At every step so we may shed our self-will.
 'Tis only when we die to our old self
 That we may claim our birthright godly freedom."

Both the plays, each in three acts, glorify and bring to light the trials and tribulations of the two renowned devotees of Lord Krishna. There is much fine poetry in the plays and, like the poetic drama of T.S. Eliot, they are 'Plays of Situations'. Dilip Kumar Roy, like T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry, takes only the typical and universal human emotions and gives them artistic form. His skill in fusing the poetic sense and dramatic perception is admirable and his language varies according to emotion and feeling. Rhetoric occupies a significant place in poetic drama and the rhetoric in these two plays shows the master craftsmanship of the author. A carnival of heavenly songs lure us and leave us in a mystic trance. Allusions, episodes and mystic parables delight us. The presentation of characters holds us. A few lines here and there make us remember some of the important characters in literature. To substantiate, the lines, "There is method in her madness" and "We will leave you to your fate... You are beyond redemption", are echoes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Polonius) and T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (Four Tempters) respectively and the four pundits resemble the four knights in *Murder in the Cathedral*, in their arguments.

Indo-Anglian literature is proud of its numerous novelists, poets and short-story writers. But there are very few dramatists, and particularly poetic-dramatists are only a handful. These two plays are good enough to be classed among the best in Indo-Anglian Poetic Drama.

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