MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

MAY 1980

Price : Rs. 2.00

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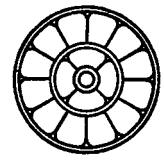
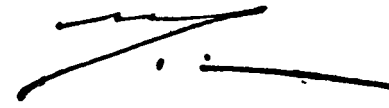


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Editor's Phone: 782
Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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Published by: P. COUNOUMA
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST, PONDICHERRY-605002
Printed by: AMIYO RANJAN GANGULI
at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry-605002
PRINTED IN INDIA
Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R. N. 8667/63

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXII **No. 5**

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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THE METHOD OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA

WORDS OF THE MOTHER

"There is no other method in this Yoga except to concentrate, preferably in the heart, and call the presence and power of the Mother to take up the being and by the workings of her force transform the consciousness; one can concentrate also in the head or between the eyebrows, but for many this is a too difficult opening."

SRI AUROBINDO

Mother, why is it better to concentrate in the heart?

HE says here that it is easier. For some people it is more difficult, it depends on one's nature. But it is better because if you concentrate there, deeply enough, it is there that you enter into contact with the psychic for the first time while if you concentrate in the head you have to pass later from the head to the heart to be able to identify yourself with the psychic being. And if you concentrate by gathering the energies, it is better to gather them here, because it is in this centre, in this region of the being that you find the will to progress, the force of purification, and the most intense and effective aspiration. The aspiration that comes from the heart is much more effective than that from the head.

3 November 1954

LIFE AND THE PSYCHIC BEING

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

Mother, does an individual's life depend on the experience his psychic being wants to have?

VERY much!

I was speaking about just this with someone today, and I said this, that if one can become fully conscious of his psychic being, at the same time one understands, necessarily, the reason of his present existence and the experience this psychic being wants to have; and instead of having it somewhat half consciously and more than half unconsciously, one can shorten this experience and so help his psychic being to cover in a limited number of years the experiences it would perhaps take several life-times to go through. That is to say, the help is reciprocal. The psychic, when it has an influence on the outer life, brings to it light, order and quietude and the joy of the divine contact. But also the physical being, the body-consciousness, if it is identified with the psychic consciousness, and through that learns what kind of experience the psychic being wants to have, it can help it to have these experiences in a very brief time, and not only save time but save many lives for the psychic being. It is a mutual help.

In brief, this is what yoga means. Yoga helps you to become fully conscious of your destiny, that is, your mission in the universe, and not only at the present moment but what it was in the past and what it will be in the future. And because of this knowledge you can gather by a concentration of the consciousness all these experiences in a very short time and gain lives, do in a few years what could take a fairly considerable number of lives to achieve. The psychic being goes progressively through all these experiences towards its full maturity and complete independence, its liberation—in the sense that it no longer needs any new life. If it wants to come back to the physical world, it returns, because it has something to do there and it chooses freely to return. But till then, till this liberation, it is compelled to return to have all the experiences it needs. Well, if it happens that once the physical being is developed and conscious enough and has enough goodwill to be able to become fully aware of the psychic being it can then and there create all the circumstances, the outer experiences necessary for the psychic being to attain its maturity in this very life.

INNER LIFE AND OUTER ACTIVITY

THE MOTHER ANSWERS A QUESTION

Mother, an inner effort is often spoilt by dispersions in outer activities.

WHEN one is outwardly active, how to keep the concentration?... Oh, this should not be very difficult. Truly it should not be very difficult. For me what seems difficult is not to keep a kind of intensity of inner consciousness, to be separated from it; this seems something impossible. Once one catches that within oneself, how can one separate from it, if you have had it once, if it has become a reality for you, this consciousness and this inner union with the psychic, and this consciousness and intensity of aspiration, and this flame which is always lit? Why, whatever one may be doing, this cannot be extinguished, it is always there.

It seems to me that to separate oneself from it, once it is there, you must deliberately close the door, like this, upon it, and say, "I am no longer interested in it." But if one truly has the will to keep the contact, it doesn't seem very difficult to me. It seems that one must really have the will to turn one's back upon it for it to go away; otherwise it is there, behind everything, all things, constantly. And if on the contrary one has made it a habit, when saying something, when making a movement, simply a movement or doing anything at all, to refer always to that, in there, not to feel capable of doing something without having that at the back, there, to tell you, "Yes, this way, not that way. That, no, not that, this", then it is difficult to live without it.

Some people, because it troubles them, because it puts a control on their impulses and they want to feel absolutely free and independent (what they call independent), seem deliberately to bang the door, like that, they slam the door violently to stop it. Then naturally, once it is done, then one becomes something so superficial, so weak, so petty, so ignorant, so stupid! How can one bear to be like that? It seems to me that immediately the instinct would be to take a step backwards, open the door hurriedly and put oneself again into contact, saying, "No, no, no, not this state, not this frightful state of ignorance"—in which you don't even know what you ought to say or ought not to say, what you ought to do or ought not to do, where you should go or should not go, nothing, nothing, you are in an obscure and incoherent immensity. It is a dreadful state. But when the door is open and this thing is behind, it is absolutely comfortable at every minute, as though one were leaning one's back against a great light, a great consciousness, like this.... "Ah, now, here we are, this is what ought to be done, that's what ought to be said, this is the movement to be made", etc. So, then one is comfortable, quiet, without anguish, without any problem, without any anxiety. One does what one wants to do; whether people take it more or less well is their affair, but for oneself it is like that.

And note that I am telling you this because I take the greatest care to open your door, inside all of you, and if you have only a little... a small movement of concentra-

tion within you, you don't have to spend those long periods in front of a closed door which does not move, of which you do not have the key, and which you do not know how to open. Sometimes one has to wait stuck to the door for hours or for days or months or sometimes for years, and you do not know what to do. It is not like that for you, my children.

The door is open, only one must look towards it. One must not turn one's back to it.

Ah, that's all?

23 February 1955

CORRECTION

THERE was an error in the boxnote to "Towards the Supermind" in the issue of April 24 (p. 204). The date of the Talk by the Mother is not "soon after the second 'anniversary' " of the Supramental Manifestation, but 27 June 1956, a few months after the actual occurrence of the great event on 29 February of the same year.

A SONNET BY NIRODBARAN

WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS

A VOICELESS mystery invades my soul,
A
(Like the) sudden rush of wide immensity
From a (far-) distant height of some snow-covered pole
Flooded with peace and joy of life to be.

The *are*
Restless waves (fall) in (to) a trancèd sleep
Made one with the profundity of the height(:)
Rising to heaven, lone, austere and steep;
A giant eagle poised in realms of delight.

Numerous flocks of bewildered throbs of wings
Afloat on the sky's dark concentric rim:
A lightning from the horizon swiftly flings
A path of gold, a flowing of luminous stream.

wings
Lost (birds) discover their forgotten way
To the home of the Sun-crowned immortal Day.

May 12, 1937

Q: Now here is the poem. I send it to illustrate to you the result of allowing oneself a free rein. You asked me to go on writing to establish a free flow and then to recast....

A. The result is good on the whole. Subject to a few slight alterations which being slight I have made. The first quatrain is very fine. Only snow-covered is a false note. The second quatrain is still finer—only two slight alterations here. The couplet (if one substitutes wings for birds) is finest.

Only the third stanza has got tangled. The second line can stand—the others have to be recast.

Q: Now is this then the right process judging by the result?

A: Yes, it looks like it.

Q: I take up my pen to write, a fear creeps in saying that perhaps what I shall write will be un-English and all labour will be lost. You are taking so much trouble and giving your precious time, is it worthwhile?

A: It is because you are finding your way. You have got the inspiration, but the mental mixture rises from time to time; that has to be got rid of, so I am taking trouble. I wouldn't if it were not worthwhile.

Q: The 3rd quatrain has no link with the above.

A: It has gone wrong.

Detailed Comments

3. A snow-covered pole flooded with peace and joy doesn't sound convincing.
5. Kindly stop putting cretics at the beginning of a line.
8. Good Lord, sir, this anapaest in the last part jerks and is quite inappropriate to the poise of the eagle.
9. flocks of throbs of things? No wonder everybody gets bewildered. The rhythm, besides, is all too jerky.
12. A stream always flows, no necessity to emphasise that fact. These birds travel on the stream? Then why wings and throbs?
13. Lost birds sounds queer, as if some sparrows were going to heaven. "Wings" is necessary. The wings and flings in quatrain 3 can go.

MYSELF

I was born on the breath of a dream—
Some wish from earth has brought me here
And I bear the struggle to justify its claim.

He who wished for me has done his work
And soon will know the fruit of that passioned call.
Where I am needed, I come, and cannot refuse
And where Love flows freely I am bound—
Its slave, Its servant, Its thrall.

PATTI

THE REVISED EDITION OF *THE FUTURE POETRY*

NEWLY-WRITTEN OR CORRECTED MATTER

(*Continued from the issue of April 24, 1980*)

(The revision of Chapter V consists of changes and additions in every paragraph. The last two paragraphs are more heavily revised than the rest: one considerable passage has been added to the penultimate paragraph and several shorter passages to that paragraph and the final one. Except for three or four lines from the later period, all the revision is from the earlier period, that is, from the 1930's.)

CHAPTER V

Poetic Vision and the Mantra

THIS highest intensity of style and movement which is the crest of the poetical impulse in its self-expression, the point at which the aesthetic, the vital, the intellectual elements of poetic speech pass into the spiritual, justifies itself perfectly when it is the body of a deep, high or wide spiritual vision into which the life-sense, the thought, the emotion, the appeal of beauty in the thing discovered and in its expression,—for all great poetic utterance is discovery,—rise on the wave of the culminating poetic inspiration and pass into an ecstasy of sight. In the lesser poets these moments are rare and come like brilliant accidents, angels' visits; in the greater they are more frequent outbursts; but in the greatest they abound because they arise from a constant faculty of poetic vision and poetic speech which has its lesser and its greater moments, but never entirely fails these supreme masters of the expressive word.

Vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist. The Kavi[1] was in the idea of the ancients the seer and revealer of truth, and though we have wandered far enough from that ideal to demand from him only the pleasure of the ear and the amusement of the aesthetic faculty, still all great poetry instinctively preserves something of that higher turn of its own aim and significance. Poetry, in fact, being Art, must attempt to make us see, and since it is to the inner senses that it has to address itself,—for the ear is its only physical gate of entry and even there its real appeal is to an inner hearing,—and since its object is to make us live within ourselves what the poet has embodied in his verse, it is an inner sight which he opens in us, and this inner sight must have been intense in him before he can

[1] The Sanskrit word for poet. In classical Sanskrit it is applied to any maker of verse or even of prose, but in the Vedic it meant the poet-seer who saw the Truth and found in a subtle truth-hearing the inspired word of his vision.

awaken it in us.

Therefore the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it. Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, Kalidasa, however much they may differ in everything else, are at one in having this as the fundamental character of their greatness. Their supremacy does not lie essentially in a greater thought-power or a more lavish imagery or a more penetrating force of passion and emotion; these things they may have had, one being more gifted in one direction, another in others, but these other powers were aids to their poetic expression rather than its essence or its source. There is often more thought in a short essay of Bacon's than in a whole play of Shakespeare's, but not even a hundred cryptograms can make him the author of the dramas; for, as he showed when he tried to write poetry, the very nature of his thought-power and the characteristic way of expression of the born philosophic thinker hampered him in poetic expression. It was the constant outstreaming of form and thought and image from an abundant inner vision of life which made Shakespeare, whatever his other deficiencies, the sovereign dramatic poet. Sight is the essential poetic gift. The archetypal poet in a world of original ideas is, we may say, a Soul that sees in itself intimately this world and all the others and God and Nature and the life of beings and sets flowing from its centre a surge of creative rhythm and word-images which become the expressive body of the vision. The great poets are those who repeat in some measure this ideal creation, *kavayaḥ satya-śrutaḥ*, seers of the poetic truth and hearers of its word.

The tendency of the modern mind at the present day seems to be towards laying a predominant value on the thought in poetry. We live still in an age which is in a great intellectual trouble and ferment about life and the world and is developing enormously the human intelligence,—often at the expense of other powers which are no less necessary to self-knowledge,—in order to grapple with life and master it. We are seeking always and in many directions to decipher the enigma of things, the cryptogram of the worlds which we are set to read, and to decipher it by the aid of the intellect; and for the most part we are much too busy living and thinking to have leisure to be silent and see. We expect the poet to use his great mastery of language to help us in this endeavour; we ask of him not so much perfect beauty of song or largeness of creative vision as a message to our perplexed and seeking intellects. Therefore we hear constantly today of the "philosophy" of a poet, even the most inveterate beautifier of commonplaces being forcibly gifted by his admirers with a philosophy, or of his message,—the message of Tagore, the message of Whitman. We are asking then of the poet to be, not a supreme singer or an inspired seer of the worlds, but a philosopher, a prophet, a teacher, even something perhaps of a religious or ethical preacher. It is necessary therefore to say that when I claim for the poet the role of a seer of Truth and find the source of great poetry in a great and revealing vision of life or God or the gods or man or Nature, I do not mean that it is necessary for him to have an intellectual philosophy of life or a message for humanity, which he chooses to express in verse

because he has the metrical gift and the gift of imagery, or that he must give us a solution of the problems of the age, or come with a mission to improve mankind, or, as it is said, "to leave the world better than he found it." As a man, he may have these things, but the less he allows them to get the better of his poetic gift, the happier it will be for his poetry. Material for his poetry they may give, an influence in it they may be, provided they are transmuted into vision and life by the poetic spirit, but they can be neither its soul nor its aim, nor give the law to its creative activity and its expression.

The poet-seer sees differently, thinks in another way, voices himself in quite another manner than the philosopher or the prophet. The prophet announces the Truth as the Word, the Law or the command of the Eternal, he is the giver of the message; the poet shows us Truth in its power of beauty, in its symbol or image, or reveals it to us in the workings of Nature or in the workings of life, and when he has done that, his whole work is done; he need not be its explicit spokesman or its official messenger. The philosopher's business is to discriminate Truth and put its parts and aspects into intellectual relation with each other; the poet's is to seize and embody aspects of Truth in their living relations, or rather—for that is too philosophical a language—to see her features and, excited by the vision, create in the beauty of her image.

No doubt, the prophet may have in him a poet who breaks out often into speech and surrounds with the vivid atmosphere of life the directness of his message; he may follow up his injunction "Take no thought for the morrow," by a revealing image of the beauty of the truth he enounces, in the life of Nature, in the figure of the lily, or link it to human life by apologue and parable. The philosopher may bring in the aid of colour and image to give some relief and hue to his dry light of reason and water his arid path of abstractions with some healing dew of poetry. But these are ornaments and not the substance of his work; and if the philosopher makes his thought substance of poetry, he ceases to be a philosophic thinker and becomes a poet-seer of Truth. Thus the more rigid metaphysicians are perhaps right in denying to Nietzsche the name of philosopher; for Nietzsche does not think, but always sees, turbidly or clearly, rightly or distortedly, but with the eye of the seer rather than with the brain of the thinker. On the other hand we may get great poetry which is full of a prophetic enthusiasm of utterance or is largely or even wholly philosophic in its matter; but this prophetic poetry gives us no direct message, only a mass of sublime inspirations of thought and image, and this philosophic poetry is poetry and lives as poetry only in so far as it departs from the method, the expression, the way of seeing proper to the philosophic mind. It must be vision pouring itself into thought-images and not thought trying to observe truth and distinguish its province and bounds and fences.

In earlier days this distinction was not at all clearly understood and therefore we find even poets of great power attempting to set philosophic systems to music or even much more prosaic matter than a philosophic system, Hesiod and Virgil setting about even a manual of agriculture in verse! In Rome, always a little blunt of perception in the aesthetic mind, her two greatest poets fell a victim to this unhappy conception,

with results which are a lesson and a warning to all posterity. Lucretius' work lives only, in spite of the majestic energy behind it, by its splendid digressions into pure poetry. Virgil's Georgics by fine passages and pictures of Nature and beauties of word and image; but in both the general substance is lifeless matter which has floated to us on the stream of Time, saved only by the beauty of its setting. India, and perhaps India alone, managed once or twice to turn this kind of philosophic attempt into a poetic success, in the Gita, in the Upanishads and some minor works modelled upon them. But the difference is great. The Gita owes its poetical success to its starting from a great and critical situation in life, its constant keeping of that in view and always returning upon it, and to its method which is to seize on a spiritual experience or moment or stage of the inner life and throw it into the form of thought; and this though a delicate operation, can well abide within the limits of the poetic manner of speech. Only where it overburdens itself with metaphysical matter and deviates into sheer philosophic definition and discrimination, which happens especially in two or three of its closing chapters, does the poetic voice sink under the weight, even occasionally into flattest versified prose. The Upanishads too, and much more, are not at all philosophic thinking, but spiritual seeing; these ancient stanzas are a rush of spiritual intuitions, flames of a burning fire of mystic experience, waves of an inner sea of light and life, and they throw themselves into the language and cadence of poetry because that is their natural speech and a more intellectual utterance would have falsified their vision.

Nowadays we have clarified our aesthetic perceptions sufficiently to avoid the mistake of the Roman poets; but in a subtler form the intellectual tendency still shows a dangerous spirit of encroachment. For the impulse to teach is upon us, the inclination to be an observer and critic of life,—there could be no more perilous definition than Arnold's poetic "criticism of life," in spite of the saving epithet,—to clothe, merely, in the forms of poetry a critical or philosophic idea of life to the detriment of our vision. Allegory with its intellectual ingenuities, its facile wedding of the abstract idea and the concrete image, shows a tendency to invade again the domain of poetry. And there are other signs of the intellectual malady of which we are almost all of us the victims. Therefore it is well to insist that the native power of poetry is in its sight, not in its intellectual thought-matter, and its safety is in adhering to this native principle of vision; its conception, its thought, its emotion, its presentation, its structure must rise out of that or else rise into it before it takes its finished form. The poetic vision of things is not a criticism of life, not an intellectual or philosophic view of it, but a soul-view, a seizing by the inner sense. The Mantra too is not in its substance or its form a poetic enunciation of philosophic verities, but a rhythmic revelation or intuition arising out of the soul's sight of God and Nature and itself and of the world and of the inner truth—occult to the outward eye—of all that peoples it, the secrets of their life and being.

In the attempt to fix the view of life which Art must take, distinctions are constantly laid down, such as the necessity of a subjective or an objective treatment or of a

realistic or an idealistic view, which mislead more than they enlighten. Certainly, one poet may seem to excel in the concrete presentation of things and falter or be less sure in his grasp of the purely subjective, while another may move freely in the more subjective worlds and be less at home in the concrete; and both may be poets of a high order. But when we look closer, we see that just as a certain objectivity is necessary to make poetry live and the thing seen stand out before our eyes, so on the other hand even the most objective presentation starts from an inner view and subjective process of creation of at least a personal interpretation and transmutation of the thing seen. The poet really creates out of himself and not out of what he sees outwardly: that outward seeing only serves to excite the inner vision to its work. Otherwise his work would be a mechanical construction and putting together, not a living creation.

Sheer objectivity brings us down from art to photography; and the attempt to diminish the subjective view to the vanishing-point so as to get an accurate presentation is proper to science, not to poetry. We are not thereby likely to get a greater truth or reality, but very much the reverse; for the scientific presentation of things, however valid in its own domain, that of the senses and the observing reason, is not true to the soul. It is not the integral truth or the whole vision of things, for it gives only their process and machinery and mechanic law, but not their inner life and spirit. That is the error in realism,—in its theory, at least, for its practice is something other than what it intends or pretends to be. Realistic art does not and cannot give us a scientifically accurate presentation of life, because Art is not and cannot be Science. What it does do, is to make an arbitrary selection of motives, forms and hues, here of dull blues and greys and browns and dingy whites and sordid yellows, there of violent blacks and reds, and the result is sometimes a thing of power and sometimes a nightmare. Idealistic art makes a different selection and produces either a work of nobly-coloured power or soft-hued beauty or else a high-pitched and false travesty or a specious day-dream. In these distinctions there is no safety; nor can any rule be laid down for the poet, since he must necessarily go by what he is and what he sees, except that he should work from the living poetic centre within him and not exile himself into artificial standpoints.

From our present point of view we may say that the poet may do as he pleases in all that is not the essential matter. Thought-matter may be prominent in his work or life-substance predominate. He may proceed by sheer force of presentation or by direct power of interpretation. He may make this world his text, or wander into regions beyond, or soar straight into the pure empyrean of the infinite. To arrive at the Mantra he may start from the colour of a rose, or the power or beauty of a character, or the splendour of an action, or go away from all these into his own secret soul and its most hidden movements. The one thing needful is that he should be able to go beyond the word or image he uses or the form of the thing he sees, not be limited by them, but get into the light of that which they have the power to reveal and flood them with it until they overflow with its suggestions or seem even to lose themselves and disappear into the revelation and the apocalypse. At the highest he himself dis-

appears into sight; the personality of the seer is lost in the eternity of the vision, and the Spirit of all seems alone to be there speaking out sovereignly its own secrets.

But the poetic vision, like everything else, follows necessarily the evolution of the human mind and according to the age and environment, it has its ascents and descents, its high levels and its low returns. Ordinarily, it follows the sequence of an abrupt ascent pushing to a rapid decline. The eye of early man is turned upon the physical world about him, the interest of the story of life and its primary ideas and emotions; he sees man and his world only, or he sees the other worlds and their gods and beings, but it is still his own physical world in a magnified and heightened image. He asks little of poetry except a more forceful vision of familiar things, things real and things commonly imagined, which will help him to see them more largely and feel them more strongly and give him a certain inspiration to live them more powerfully. Next,—but this transition is sometimes brief or even quite overleaped,—there comes a period in which he feels the joy and curiosity and rich adventure of the expanding life-force within him, the passion and romance of existence and it is this in all its vivid colour that he expects art and poetry to express and satisfy him through the imagination and the emotions with its charm and power. Afterwards he begins to intellectualise, but still on the same subject-matter; he asks now from the poet a view of things enlightened by the inspired reason and beautifully shaped by the first strong and clear joy of his developed aesthetic sense. A vital poetry appealing to the imagination through the sense-mind and the emotions and a poetry interpretative of life to the intelligence are the fruit of these ages. A later poetry tends always to return on these forms with a more subtilised intellect and a richer life-experience. But, having got so far, it can go no farther and there is the beginning of a decadence.

Great things may be done by poetry within these limits and the limited lifetime it gives to a literature; but it is evident that the poet will have a certain difficulty in getting to a deeper vision, because he has to lean entirely on the external thought and form; he must be subservient to them because they are the only safe support he knows, and he gets at what truth he can that may be beyond them with their veil still thickly interposing between him and a greater light. A higher level can come, bringing with it the possibility of a renewed and prolonged course for the poetic impulse, if the mind of man begins to see more intimately the forces behind life, the powers concealed by our subjective existence. The poet can attempt to reveal these unsuspected ranges and motives and use the outward physical and vital and thought symbol only as a suggestion of greater things. Yet a higher level can be attained, deeper depths, larger horizons when the soul in things comes nearer to man or when other worlds than the physical open themselves to him. And the entire liberation of the poetic vision to see most profoundly and the poetic power to do its highest work will arrive when the spiritual itself is the possession of the greatest minds and the age stands on the verge of its revelation.

Therefore it is not sufficient for poetry to attain high intensities of word and rhythm; it must have, to fill them, an answering intensity of vision and always new and

more and more uplifted or inward ranges of experience. And this does not depend only on the individual power of vision of the poet, but on the mind of his age and country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment. A lesser poet in a greater age may give us occasionally things which exceed in this kind the work of less favoured immortals. The religious poetry of the later Indian tongues has for us fervours of poetic revelation which in the great classics are absent, even though no mediaeval poet can rank in power with Valmiki and Kalidasa. The modern literatures of Europe commonly fall short of the Greek perfection of harmony and form, but they give us what the greatest Greek poets had not and could not have. And in our own days a poet of secondary power in his moments of inspiration can get to a vision far more satisfying to the deepest soul within us than Shakespeare's or Dante's. Greatest of all is the promise of the age that is coming, if the race fulfils its highest and largest opening possibilities and does not founder in a vitalistic bog or remain tied in the materialistic paddock; for it will be an age in which all the worlds are beginning to withdraw their screens from man's gaze and invite his experience, and he will be near to the revelation of the Spirit of which they are, as we choose, the obscuring veils, the significant forms and symbols or else the transparent raiment. It is as yet uncertain to which of these consummations destiny is leading us.

THE FIGHTER FOR THE FUTURE

ARMY of God in the dawn of the Aureate Age's arrival
Fronting the king of the Titans, Night, the demoniac Evil,
Tyrant who keeps earth locked in the claws of his sombre dominions—
Sun-riders, we sweep in luminous storm, flashing lightning-pinions,
Knights of the Truth whose invincible sword is the soul's keen flaming,
Archers of Splendour, swift Spirit-rays in staccatos aiming.
"Victory to the Divine Reign of the future!" our war-hymn's chorus,
Holding high, fluttering proudly, the banner of Light's gold-lotus
Down we descend into hellish abysms, bleak bottomless holes. Night
Lurks there menacing, gigantic, a monster of colossal dark might—
Myriads of Tartarus-talons his terrible sole attire—
Whose million ghost-heads spew dragon-tongues of sulphurous fire,
Lashing out ever to swallow into his black belly all Lights,
Vainly; unbending, our soul-forces attack—out of us God fights!

ALEXANDER BRODT

NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

EDITOR'S NOTE

Arranged according to subject-matter, the correspondence which Nirodbaran had with Sri Aurobindo appeared in bookform in 1969. It was again presented in the Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education *from November 1971 to August 1975. But it was arranged in a chronological sequence and included portions which had been omitted in the earlier publication. The period covered was from February to April 1933. The series is now continued on the same plan from the time it broke off in the* Bulletin, *except for some parts which will appear in the Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual in the present year. Nirodbaran's questions are in italics, Sri Aurobindo's answers in Roman type.*

April 13, 1935

What is this revolutionary invention of yours? Tea a cause of loss of hair? I am sure all the tea plantations over the world will send up loud lamentations if this theory be true!

It was not the tea but the 3p milk and the cause and effect were psycho-physical, so there is no difficulty in accepting the theory.

X says that I have in me some capacity for "intuitive criticism"—whatever it may mean. I don't think I have got the right type of mind for criticism, or enough knowledge. Behind my bad logic, do you see any signs of a budding critic—intuitive or otherwise?

It is the easiest thing in the world to be a critic. Just look wise and slang the subject in grave well-turned sentences. It does not matter what you say.

What are the things, if any, that have a chance of getting manifested in me—poetry, prose, philosophy, etc., or medicine? I am asking for a yogic prophecy.

Why bother your head? When the supramental comes, and you bloom into a superman, you will just pick up anything you want and become perfect in it with a bang.

By the way Mother told D, it seems, that she would look as young as a girl of 16 in ten years' time. That would obviously mean the descent of your Supermind in the physical and its transformation.

I don't know. As you know Time has only one lock of hair (too much tea drinking?) and the difficulty is to catch it.

April 15, 1935

I had a dream last night. I went for Prânam, saw that Mother was in a playful mood with me. She took a flower, gave it and took it back. Then she took another flower and did the same thing. It was 'Power over the sex-centre'. I don't remember whether ultimately she gave it or not. But why this hesitation?

The playing in that way simply means a gradual working. The offering of the flower indicates a play of the force, e.g. on the sex-centre. The taking of the flower away means that the sex-centre is not yet ready, but the play of the flower is not without effect, that is something has been done to prepare the centre.

I can only take your statement about my blooming into a superman as a great sarcastic joke.

It is a joke and not a joke. One must rely on the Divine and yet do some enabling sadhana—the Divine gives the fruits not by the measure of the sadhana but by the measure of the soul's sincerity and its aspiration. Also worrying does no good—I shall be this, I shall be that, what shall I be? Say "I am ready to be not what I want but what the Divine wants me to be"—all the rest should go on that base.

Your "blooming into a superman" reminds me of an interesting argument we had with some people. They contended that our aspiring for the Supermind was not something sober—that we should aspire for the Divine realisation only. I told them that it was you who wanted the Supermind for the earth, not we.

I don't see what is wrong in my aspiring for the Supermind in spite of knowing all my weaknesses. The Divine Grace is there on which we rely at every moment, and if the central sincerity is there, there is nothing wrong, I think, in entertaining such an aspiration.

By Divine realisation is meant the spiritual realisation—the realisation of Self, Bhagwan or Brahman on the mental-spiritual or else the overmental plane. That is a thing (at any rate the mental-spiritual) which thousands have done. So it is obviously easier to do than the supramental. Also nobody can have the supramental realisation who has not had the spiritual. So far your opponent is right.

It is true that neither can be got in an effective way unless the whole being is turned towards it—unless there is a real and very serious spirit and dynamic reality of sadhana. So far you are right and the opponent also is right.

It is true that I want the supramental not for myself but for the earth and souls

born on the earth, and certainly therefore I cannot object if anybody wants the supramental. But there are the conditions. He must want the Divine Will first and the soul's surrender and the spiritual realisation (through works, bhakti, knowledge, self-perfection) on the way. So there everybody is right.

The central sincerity is the first thing and sufficient for an aspiration to be entertained—a total sincerity is needed for the aspiration to be fulfilled. Amen!

What do you exactly mean by the measure of the soul's sincerity?

I mean by the measure of the soul's sincerity a yearning after the Divine and its aspiration towards the higher life.

April 16, 1935

I am sorry I was the cause of Y's "terrible upsets". It is because he made some contemptuous remarks about me and Jaswant regarding our feast. Both of us attacked him in the D.R. indirectly, which made him very furious.

Why attach any importance? If one gets angry at other people's criticisms, one would need to be angry all the time—for all the time there is criticism going on.

The soul aspires for union with the Divine. Poetry, literature, music etc... do they have then any place in that aspiration?

They are first in life a preparation of the consciousness—but when one does Yoga it can become a part of the sadhana if done for the Divine and by the Divine Force. But one should not want to be a poet for the sake of being a poet only, or for fame, applause etc.

From your statement I conclude that tendency does not matter much; I can go on as I am doing, to-day this, to-morrow that, so on. The Divine will do whatever is necessary.

Yes.

Certainly I would like to be what you want, only I don't know what you want me to be.

I want you to be open and in contact with the Peace and Presence and Force. All else will come if that is there and then one need not be troubled by the time it takes in the peripeties of the sadhana.

April 17, 1935

I find, Sir, that you have most skilfully steered clear between two troubled seas of argument. Allow me to bring the discussion back to the point from where it started.

I have seen K's letter. By transformation, I find, you mean wholly living in the Divine. Then where is the difference between the Divine realisation as you define it, and the transformation you are yourself seeking for us? Did not persons like Ramakrishna, for example, who had this realisation, merge their consciousness entirely in the Divine, and thus had this kind of transformation? I think there is a difference, because you speak of a complete transformation—of mind, life and even the body. Obviously, then, those whose realisation of the Divine is on the mental-spiritual plane cannot have the physical consummation. What degree of transformation was achieved by Krishna, Chaitanya, Buddha, B.G.?

There are different statuses (*avasthā*) of the Divine Consciousness. There are also different statuses of transformation. First is the psychic transformation, in which all is in contact with the Divine through the individual psychic consciousness. Next is the spiritual transformation in which all is merged in the Divine in the cosmic consciousness. Third is the supramental transformation in which all becomes supramentalised in the divine gnostic consciousness. It is only with the last that there can begin the complete transformation of mind, life and body—in my sense of completeness.

You are mistaken in two respects. First, the endeavour towards this achievement is not new and some Yogis have achieved it, I believe—but not in the way I want it. They achieved it as a personal siddhi maintained by Yoga-siddhi—not a dharma of the nature (physical transformation). Secondly, the supramental transformation is not the same as the spiritual-mental. It is a change of mind, life and body which the mental or overmental-spiritual cannot achieve All whom you mention were spirituals, but in different ways. Krishna's mind, for instance, was overmentalised, Ramakrishna's intuitive, Chaitanya's spiritual-psychic, Buddha's illumined higher mental. I don't know about B.G —he seems to have been brilliant but rather chaotic. All that is different from the supramental. Then take the vital of the Paramhansas. It is said their vital behaves either like a child (Ramakrishna) or like a madman or like a demon or like something inert (cf. Jadabharata). Well, there is nothing supramental in all that So?

One can be a fit instrument of the Divine in any of the transformations. The question is an instrument for what?

My main contention was that we can *aspire for the Supermind since you had so emphatically stated that its realisation and the subsequent transformation of our entire existence was the ideal you stood for. Hence anyone ridiculing such an aspiration was*

arguing against our ideal. Of course, I admit that the necessary conditions must be fulfilled by people.

X ridicules them because they are not yet fit for the spiritual realisation, some not even for the psychic and yet say they are aspirants for the supermind. He says let us sincerely try for and achieve the spiritual and not talk about the greater things still much beyond us. A rational attitude

I feel that your reply is too conciliatory; otherwise, I don't see why the supramental realisation should be looked upon as a secondary thing or a by-product especially as you also say that the divinisation of the body cannot be done without it. Not secondary or by-product at all, but ultimate.

(Against the last part of my sentence Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Not in the sense I want."

In your letter of the 15th you said you "want the Supramental for the earth and souls born on the earth, and certainly therefore I cannot object if anybody wants the Supramental"—the tone seems to be a little conciliatory. "I cannot object" sounds also feeble.

I put it like that because a premature ambition for the supramental may be disastrous. (e.g. B, N etc.)

Either you have become wiser (excuse me!) or you want to make us wiser.

If you mean that I did not realise the difficulties before, you are mistaken.

R is complaining of increasing headache—it can't be the slight astigmatism that is the cause of such intense aches. So will you dive into possibilities and bring up the pearl of knowledge?

TWO DREAM-EXPERIENCES OF CHAMPAKLAL

RELATED BY HIMSELF

1

A Dream around 10.45 p.m. on 26 December 1979

SRI Aurobindo was reciting *Savitri* in a very sweet and melodious voice. The tune of some musical instrument was also heard. It was something like a flute yet not a flute. It was the sound of some musical instrument which I have never heard before. I have had the grace of hearing Sri Aurobindo playing the flute in my dream, several times, but this was such a marvellous and elevating tune and voice too! I could hear Nirod also reciting *Savitri* along with Him. I became very quiet. My whole body grew extremely peaceful. I wanted to go and listen to this enchanting voice and music. It was coming from the 'long passage' (as The Mother called it) outside Sri Aurobindo's room where He used to sit in His chair and write and recite *Savitri* and I used to listen in the adjoining 'Meditation Hall'. At last I made a great effort to get up. I jumped and ran to the long passage. But it was dark! I looked at Nirod's place. His light was on and he was standing in the middle of the room. Seeing me running out of Sri Aurobindo's room, he enquired, "What is the matter? You dreamt of something or what?"

I found nothing there and realised that it was all a dream! But it was so concrete and living! I did not answer Nirod. I was not in a condition to say anything at that time. I quietly returned to my bed in Sri Aurobindo's room.

2

A Very Loving and Lovely Dream on the Night of 2 February 1980

I saw my own dead body just in front of me. The whole body was suffused with a glowing snow-white light whose rays were spreading all over the place. There was a snow-white shining ball upon the heart. I watched all this solemnly and quietly. All of a sudden my eyes were drawn to a little distance away from me. I saw the Mother with a beautiful baby in Her lap. I felt that I myself was that baby! The Mother caressed the baby's forehead, then head, and the whole body. It was more than caressing—I don't find the proper word. The Mother continued to do this for some time.

Now I noticed that the baby opened his eyes and with a sweet smile started gazing at the Mother. She gave a tender kiss between his brows and looked at him, steadily, with an endearing smile full of love and compassion. This time the baby was as if in a brilliant snow-white liquid light and his body too seemed to be made

of that very light. As I saw this, I felt how nice it would be if I died very often like this!

I don't remember the dream further but a wonderful inexpressible feeling remains imprinted on me of the way The Mother was looking at and fondling the baby. It was so deep and touching.

SOME QUESTIONS ON TRANSFORMATION AND SRI AUROBINDO

A REPLY TO A READER'S LETTER

I AM glad you liked the way our correspondence has figured in *Mother India* under the caption "Sri Aurobindo's Views *vis-ā-vis* the Mother's." The new points you have raised on some other matters are welcome.

The issue of 300 years for total transformation has several bearings. In the first place, it is a mistake on your part to set in opposition the late letter dated 6 December 1949 in which Sri Aurobindo speaks of full physical transformation—"the divine body"[1]—as a matter of the remote future and the earlier letter where he writes "My faith and will are for the now." You believe that this earlier communication belongs to 1923-24 and that around 1933-1934 some spiritual events occurred to alter Sri Aurobindo's perspective. Actually the letter in question dates to 28 December 1934, your very period.[2] Besides, I was present in the Ashram at the time and can vouch that nothing happened of the sort you suppose. Furthermore, the statements of the two letters do not fall within the same universe of discourse. The one of 28 December 1934 relates to the "advent" of the "Supramental". This should properly connote the first decisive descent into the physical, as a result of which the final supramentalisation of the body could take shape if the descent increased and expanded and became integrally detailed in the course of a long time. We cannot imagine Sri Aurobindo holding that the body's supramentalisation could be achieved pretty soon. What he wanted pretty soon was only the first descent. There is no contradiction between the two letters.

In respect of the 300 years, what your visitor friends have told you makes little sense to me. All who joined the Ashram in the 1930s with a grasp of what Sri Aurobindo was doing believed — and, according to me, on Sri Aurobindo's own authority—that the total transformation was certain, but nobody with his wits about him would fancy that it was round the corner. So no room was really left for disappointment on learning of the 300 years. Again, not to decide to take up the Aurobindonian Yoga if one knew that the body could be supramentalised only after three centuries strikes me as utter incomprehension of what Sri Aurobindo was attempting. Was one ever told that one would surely die before becoming 300 years old? If one were so informed, one might feel some justification in fighting shy of the whole venture. But in fact the understanding was that this Yoga would keep on sustaining one, lengthen one's life and give one a long-enough span of years to complete the Aurobindonian programme.

Even otherwise—even if one were not persuaded of life-prolongation—I should

[1] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1953), pp. 423-4.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp 233-4.

imagine that one would not back out of a Yoga whose guides were such grand beings as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and which could achieve under them wonderful inner results beyond all previous spiritual dreams. The entire picture presented to you of the early period of Yogic initiation seems to me distorted and irrational.

Furthermore, you write of people telling you of having kept pace with Sri Aurobindo's sadhana and, in this connection, you mention the Overmind. I can't help laughing. On 24 March 1934 Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Even the Overmind is for all but the Mother and myself either unrealised or only an influence, mostly subjective."[1] If anybody makes the claim you record, then he or she must be a paragon of spiritual conceit and was bound to go wrong and deserve the epitaph we framed for one who in the same context suffered a spiritual fall in the 'thirties: "Undermined by Overmind." There is also the suggestion to you by your friends that some people left the Ashram because they failed to keep pace. But if everybody acted on such failure, who could ever remain in the Ashram? The Ashram would become a howling wilderness. All are bound to fail in this respect—though the inability to move with ease constantly from a Nanga Parvat through a Kanchenjanga to an Everest need not spell doom: it is the natural characteristic of the plodding sadhaks of so exalted and exacting a Yoga. The other pretension, that this Yoga had nothing more to give and further progress—beyond the Supermind, I suppose!—was possible only outside the Ashram, bespeaks abysmal ignorance. No Yoga outside has even heard of the Supermind. Besides, even much below the Supermind there is quite a lot in this Yoga to be received and it makes no sense to say that one has reached a "finis" to what the light and power and grace of our two gurus had to pour into the receptive vessel. Sadhaks quitted the Ashram simply because they either had strayed too much from the path or could no longer control their common egoistic urges and wanted a free field for them. Several of the names you cite are well known to me. We were all fellow-strugglers and from my own deficiencies as well as acquaintance with their difficulties I am aware of what went on in their beings and I refuse to accept the explanations now offered.

About the Master's departure, there was a purpose in it. Whoever asks about it may be advised to con carefully my long article: "The Passing of Sri Aurobindo: Its Inner Significance and Consequence", which the Mother fully approved and endorsed on three separate occasions.

As for the accident to Sri Aurobindo on the night of 23 November 1938, he has himself said, as reported by Nirodbaran: "The hostile forces have tried many times to prevent things like the Darshan but I have succeeded in warding off all their attacks. At the time the accident to my leg happened, I was occupied with guarding the Mother and I forgot about myself. I didn't think the hostiles would attack me. That was my mistake."[2] Perhaps the tiger-skin on which he slipped is symbolic of the fierce forces of the physical-vital world. I don't think it was deliberately used—as you

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 397.

[2] *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, Calcutta, 1966), p. 44.

suspect—by any black magician to topple Sri Aurobindo during his pacings.

Your speculation about the supramental change in dust and rocks as a result of the transformation of human cells is rather a bit of science-fiction. True, the appearance of the Supermind in the gross-physical world will have a universal action—the Supermind is just the Power whose action is bound to be universal—but the action will be very subtle at first and the Supramental will be expressed according to the stage reached by material objects. Merely because the ultimate constituents—proton, electron, neutron, etc.—of a human body are the same as those of dust and rocks, the supramental transformation of the latter can be almost as little expected in the immediate future as the mental transformation of them might have been expected when the Mind appeared in evolution and mentalised the physico-vital organism. The human body's ultimate constituents have been built up into cells—and this structure makes a lot of difference to the domains where the descended or manifested Supermind can be effective.

9 December 1979

K. D. SETHNA

WITHDRAWAL

To be on the highest suspension of the wool-soft cloud,
Above every sunbeam, above all height,
To sit in the darkest deepest corner of the temple,
Eyes shut, the heart's flame the only light!

Waiting—for ever waiting for you—
When will you pass by with your gentle tread
Upon this eager heart of mine
And free it of all groundless dread?

Raise me into an ether that is devoid
Of feeling—I beg your grace,
Forgetfulness, eyes shut in meditation,
Withdrawn, in deep silence that is bliss.

MINNIE N. CANTEENWALLA

ANTI-MIDAS-TOUCH

It is a far cry
From the antics
Of performing scholars
And the demagogic balderdash
Of literary charlatans.
A breath of fresh air
After days of suffocation.

Stand off,
Scribes and Pharisees;
Stop blowing
Pedantic trumpets;
Here comes love
Transformed into learning,
Humility unfolding
Its wealth of pride,
And silence bursting forth
Into songs of thunder.

While mountebanks everywhere
Spread out self's fripperies,
And pompous pundits
Play for power and gain,
He pours out his being
In sheer joy of giving
Like a poet.

He dwells on syntax
Structure, tense and case
As though they are violets and roses
Fresh from the garden.
And at his anti-Midas touch
[illegible]-dened grounds of antique lore
Spring to lush-green life again.

M. L. THANGAPPA

THE SUPERHUMAN'S FIRE

HOLDING the summons of death,
O King of ever-night state!
On whose life have you come to draw
the pall of miserable fate?

O Lord of the dark and false!
blinding the aim of birth,
you can never rule again
our beautiful God-made earth.

Go back! Go back!
with your impuissant breath.
We are the Eternal's sons
free from the fear of death.

We bow to the lovely soil
on which our feet are set,
the land of Truth and Light
which we can never forget.

Nor can we die,
leaving her sweet embrace;
let us repose in her lap
of green and flowery grace.

We have started our journey
on the divinising way
to turn all earthly life
an Ever-golden Day.

Worthless pride of Time,
we shall never suffer its ire;
all are now guarded safe
by the Superhuman's Fire.

HRUSHIKESH (with AMAL)

THE CLOUD MESSENGER

A NEW TRANSLATION OF KALIDASA'S *MEGHADUTA*

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1980)

Now is the time when from the slighted curve
Of quivering lashes errant lovers quell
Sweet angry tears; so from the sun's path swerve,

Who seeks too his dear lotus, to dispel
The dew from her closed face—how hot would feel
His wrath shouldst thou his radiant hand repel!

Resistless does thy mirrored beauty steal
Into Deep River's dreams; so must thy flight
Pause when from a still pool leaps the appeal

Of minnowed glances quick and flashing white
As the moon-lily. After thou hast sipped
Her joy and wouldst depart, poignant thy plight:

For from her sand-fair body hast thou slipped
The blue and flowing dress her reedy hands
Now hold before her—such a maid bare-hipped

To leave thy utmost fortitude demands!
Aspiring now to Skanda's Peak, a great
Fresh wind will lift thee across jungled lands

Where wild figs ripen and Earth's lungs dilate
With new life at thy touch, breathing a scent
That will the elephants intoxicate

To splendid trumpeting. The permanent
Abode of the War-God is here, a Power
Worthy of worship: all thy element

Transforming to a cloud of blossoms, shower
Thy fitting tribute on him moist with dew
From the ethereal Ganges—for an hour

Divine witnessed his advent to subdue
The Heaven-defying hosts; the Fire his womb,
From Shiva's more than sun-bright seed he grew.

His bird of majesty whose moulted plume
Night-hued, light-ringed bedecks the Mother's ear,
Whose brilliant-cornered eye keen rays illume

From Shiva's brow, that peacock will for sheer
Exuberance dance when thy deep thunder's call
Rebounding from the caverns it shall hear.

The Youth adored whom cradled once the tall
Straight arrow-reeds, thy course again pursue
While airy minstrels shun thy raindrops' fall

On magic lutes. Here Rantideva slew
In mighty herds the blessed kine that yearned
For Heaven; the blood of sacrifice he drew

Poured in a river that to water turned
And flows still as an image men esteem
On earth of the immortal Fame he earned.

Stoop low to render the enchanted stream
Thy homage, poising for a reverent drink
Thy huge dark shape above the ripples' gleam;

As from a height that makes the landscape shrink
Remote the fairy picture is surveyed,
Sky-wanderers enrapt will surely think

Earth's bosom with a single thread arrayed
Of shimmering pearls amid whose slender chain
A large and glorious sapphire is displayed.

Continuing thy march, thou wilt sustain
From damsels of luxurious Dashapur
Bewitching looks, whose mingled lustres strain

Past upturned lashes robbing the allure
Of bees on wind-tossed jasmine and with dance

Of supple tendril-brows their spell secure.

Yet breaking not thy pilgrimage, advance
Plunging thy shadow into the hushed core
Of holy country, where the dread expanse

Of Kurukshetra with the relics hoar
Of slaughtered heroes teems—there even as thou
Drenchest the blushing flowers did Arjun pour

On kingly faces from his God-given bow
Sharp crowded shafts. Brother of the divine
Dusk charioteer, the wielder of the plough

Shrank from that strife of kin: leaving the wine
He cherished and her eyes once mirrored there,
He sought near sacred waters the benign

Ascetic life—waters thou too must share
Of sweet Saraswati; then pure within,
Like him mere robes of blackness wilt thou wear.

(To be continued)

RICHARD HARTZ

NOTES

The wielder of the plough : Balarama, elder brother of Krishna. The ploughshare was his preferred weapon and he performed superhuman deeds with it. He was as light in complexion as Krishna was dark, but he habitually wore black garments.

POEMS BEFORE AND AFTER 1973

OFFERING IV: *LET ME BE—1976*

LET me be,
With golden bill,
A Bird of Bliss;
To Heaven fling me.
Wings of Grace now
Bring me where You will.

I shall become Your bell
And never still
And You in tallest
Towers swing me.
Wind of Grace come
Ring me when You will.

Lift up Your pen
Of whitest quill,
And I...and I
Ink of delight be;
Hand of Grace now
Write me where You will.

And when only Your
Touch can thrill
This tender harp,
Bring Love to string me
And Song of Grace to
Sing me when You will.

Make me subtly wrought,
Your altar grill;
Of diamond light
Thy Mystic Sign be
With Flowers of Grace.
Refine me as You will.

Take all...take all
From me until

I am Your reed
And know You only.
Breath of Grace shall
Blow me when You will.

I am Your seed. Earth is
Your luminous pasture. Till.
With Waters of Joy to
Overflow me
Sun of Grace shall
Grow me where You will.

Bring Your oil of Truth
And fill
This humble lamp. Burn
Bright, oh, bright be
Flame of Grace to
Light me and You will.

Free at last, my soul is
Poised and still
And in Your hand, Your
Radiance glowing.
Come, Heart of Grace
Knowing *I am Your Will.*

ELIZABETH STILLER

INDIA AND HER CULTURE

A REVIEW-ARTICLE

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1980)

WE shall now launch on a brief scrutiny of certain aspects in the strictly historical sections, particularly those relating to ancient times, in *A Cultural History of India*, edited by A.L. Basham. Let it be understood from the outset that whatever criticism we may offer does not reflect on the general competence of these sections. The way in which the various authors have meshed their facts and theories to make harmonious patterns cannot help being admired.

Basham's "Introduction" presents at one place a very thought-provoking set of contrasts. He writes:

"The Athenian Acropolis was at least 500 years old before the first surviving stone Hindu temple was built. Some of the most popular gods of Hinduism, for instance, Ganeśa and Hanumān, are not attested until well after the time of Christ. Certain other features of Hinduism also, for instance, the cult of the divine Rāma and the complex and difficult system of physical training known as *haṭha yoga*, are centuries later than Christianity.

"Yet the older strata of India's cultural life go back beyond anything we have in the West. The whole of the *Rig Veda* had been composed long before the *Iliad*, and there is hardly anything in the Old Testament in its present form which is as old even as the latest Rig Vedic hymns. Some practices and beliefs of popular Hinduism, for instance the cults of the sacred bull and the *pipal* tree, are as old as the prehistoric Harappā culture, and probably even older...

"No land on earth has such a long cultural continuity as India, since, though there were more ancient civilizations, notably in Egypt and Iraq, these were virtually forgotten by the inhabitants of those lands, and were overlaid by new intrusive cultures, until nobody remembered the *Book of the Dead* or the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and great kings such as Ramesses II or Hammurabi were not recorded in any living tradition. Only nineteenth-century scholarship resurrected them from oblivion, and if they are now national heroes, remembered by every school-child in their respective lands, this is not thanks either to the historical genius or to the retentive folk-memory of the countries concerned.

"On the other hand in India the brahmin still repeats in his daily worship Vedic hymns composed over 3,000 years ago, and tradition recalls heroic chieftains and the great battles fought by them at about the same time. In respect of the length of continuous tradition China comes second to India and Greece makes a poor third" (pp. 1-2).

There is nothing to fault here—except the implied chronological relation between

the Harappā Culture and the Rigveda. Perhaps a *caveat* may be entered also in connection with "the cult of the divine Rāma". For, its dating depends on the age we allot to Kālidāsa. Rāma is already "divine" in the work of this poet and playwright whose date is still disputed. The current computation may be seen from Krishna Kripalani's "Classical Culture" in the volume before us: "Kālidāsa is associated with 'Vikramāditya' in tradition, but this may refer to Skanda Gupta, who used that title, whilst the poet is also supposed to have met the Vākāṭaka Pravarasena II (*c.* 410-40)" (p. 182). Kripalani omits to mention that tradition does not regard the word "Vikramāditya" as a title: it takes it as the very name of the monarch under whom Kālidāsa is believed to have flourished, and this King Vikramāditya is supposed to have lived in the first century B.C. The traditional chronology has not yet been definitively disproved.

Our genuine difference with Basham, however, bears on the time-order in which he places the Harappā Culture (known also as the Indus Civilisation) and the Rigveda. His explicit stance emerges in the passage: "The pre-Vedic Harappā culture bequeathed to later times sacred animals and trees, the Mother Goddess, the preoccupation with personal cleanliness, and, less certainly, other aspects of Indian culture. From the Vedic Āryans came many of the gods, the Vedic hymns, some of the most important personal rituals of Hinduism, the patriarchal and patrilineal family system, and the horse..." (p. 2). Towards the end of his "Conclusion", Basham while discussing what he calls "India's three main racial types" informs us that "in the second millennium B.C. came the Āryans, speakers of an Indo-European language which was the cousin of those of classical Europe" (p. 6).

In setting within the second millennium B. C. the Vedic Āryans as invaders of India, Basham is at one with most modern historians who plump roundly for 1500 B.C. We shall comment on this view at a little length when we reach the article "The Early Āryans" by T. Burrow. At the moment we may draw attention to the point Basham makes about "the horse" as a Vedic Āryan contribution to India. He implies that the Harappā Culture did not know the domesticated horse, *Equus caballus Linn.* B. B. Lal, author of "The Indus Civilization", the chapter next to Basham's "Introduction", is more or less of the same mind while listing the animals domesticated by the Harappā Culture. He finds the bull, pig, dog, cat and perhaps elephant well attested but adds: "the data about the camel and horse are less conclusive" (p. 17). Lal's position, although not so negative as Basham's, is at the same time more censurable, for, unlike Basham, he brings in the Harappān site Surkotadā in Kutch, mentioning several items of it brought to light by recent excavations and yet has not a word on its most momentous feature: the clear-cut equine evidence. J. P. Joshi, who led the excavations in 1965, 1967 and 1968, states that among the animals "which were either domesticated or were in the process of domestication", the excavators discovered not only the "ass (*Equus onager indicus*)" but also the "horse (*Equus caballus Linn.*)", and he goes on to say: "A lot of equine bones right from earlier to top levels have been recovered. A majority of them are phalanges and teeth.... The Harappāns of Surkotadā knew *Equus* right from the time of their arrival at

Surkotadā."[1] As Surkotadā, dating from beyond 2000 B.C., was certainly connected with the greater centres of the civilisation it represented—namely, Mohenjo-dāro in Sind and the name-site Harappā in the Punjab—no doubt can be entertained that the horse, the typical Āryan animal, was known to the Harappans at least 500 years before the supposed Āryan entry into India.

In view of this fact, the Harappā Culture would itself appear to be Āryan in at least some of its elements. We may dub them "pre-Vedic Aryanism". But there is no reason to consider it "pre-Vedic" instead of being a derivative from the Rigveda—unless we have incontrovertible proof that the Vedic Āryans hailed from outside India in the middle of the second millennium B.C. Is there any such proof?

Burrow writes with confidence that 200 years after "the Āryans, an invading people", had arrived in the subcontinent "there began to come into being a collection of religious hymns which were eventually organized as the *Ṛgveda*, the final redaction of which probably antedates 1000 B.C."—and he adjoins: "Our knowledge of the Āryans in India during this earliest period is based primarily on this work" (p. 20). Now, if we accept Burrow's estimate, which is that of all of Basham's team, that the Āryans' "first arrival... is probably to be dated about 1500 B.C." (*ibid.*), what are we to infer? The principal bit of "knowledge" we should obtain from the Rigveda is of its composers' entry into a new land from some place abroad. And we may also expect that the remains of their freshly settled culture would be identified by archaeology. But actually Burrow is compelled to tell us: "The Āryan invasion of India is recorded in no written document, and it cannot yet be traced archaeologically" (p. 21). Mind you, the drift of the first part of Burrow's statement is that the Rigveda is not alone in failing to breathe the slightest hint of its composers being foreigners: the entire corpus of subsequent Indian literature is devoid of the least pointer to their foreignness. How are we to account for this massive and sustained omission, which makes the total archaeological blank just what we should anticipate?

Apropos of the hypothesised "migration", Burrow can only say: "a sufficient period of time must have elapsed for any clear recollection of it to have disappeared, since the hymns contain no certain references to such an event" (pp. 20-21). Simultaneously, he assures us: "The final stage of this migration cannot have been very far removed from the beginning of the composition of the *Ṛgveda*" (p. 20). We already know the interval according to him: 200 years. Is it credible that a bare span of two centuries was enough to blot out the memory of so momentous and history-changing an occurrence as the penetration into an unknown country from an original home elsewhere?

One may possibly concede that by some freak the Rigvedics in 1300 B.C. omitted to allude to the influx of their ancestors into India in 1500. But surely these ancestors must be taken to have told their children of the event and the information

[1] "Exploration in Kutch and Excavation at Surkotada and New Light on Harappa Migration", *Journal of the Oriental Institute* (M.S. University of Baroda), Sept.-Dec. 1972, Nos. 1-2, pp. 135, 136, 138.

must have passed on to the composers of the hymns and they in their turn must have transmitted it to their posterity by word of mouth. Why then, in the whole range of Indian writing from the Vedas down to the Puranas, is there no sign of any memory? Here is a silence which cannot help being immensely significant. We cannot lightly speak of an inconclusive *argumentum e silentio*. Even with regard to the Rigvedics by themselves, Burrow feels the responsibility to give an explanation. The responsibility grows a hundredfold in view of their successors through the millennia. The odds are indeed heavy against what Burrow wants us to believe.

All the more are they such when we catch from his own pen the sheer contrast of the situation to the one obtaining in the case of the Rigvedics' fellow-Āryans, the Iranians. About them Burrow writes: "The beginning of their occupation of Iran is commonly put not earlier than 1000 B.C.... The Iranians retained a memory of their original home, under the name of *airyanam vaējō* (*Ērān Vēj*)..." (p. 21). The descendants of the ancient Iranians, who migrated to India and are the present-day Parsis, remember Iran even after nearly 1300 years. The Rigvedics, for all practical purposes, appear to be indigenous to the land.

The sole proof Burrow proffers in the teeth of all the negative indications is "on the basis of comparative philology" (p. 21). His argument runs: "The Indo-European languages, of which Sanskrit in its Vedic form is one of the oldest members, originated in Europe; and the only possible way by which a language belonging to this family could be carried all the way to India was a migration of the people speaking it. The general outline of this process can be elucidated to some extent on the basis of the mutual relationship of the languages concerned" (*ibid.*).

Linguistic arguments are notoriously controversial—and Burrow's proposed elucidation can tell, if at all, only—in his own words—"to some extent". But even on assuming a migration originally from some locale in Europe, as he claims, we have nothing to show that it took place in the middle of the second millennium B.C. or anywhere near-about. When the recollection of it is said to be lost, the migration could have been only in the most remote antiquity. No ground exists—especially as archaeology is forced to be dumb—to date a Vedic invasion as Burrow and his ilk suggest. No doubt, without the assumption of a post-Harappan invasion we may still make the Rigveda post-Harappan. But that would be an arbitrary choice.

Burrow brings in "a treaty between the Hittite and Mitanni kings [of the Near East], in which appear four names familiar from the Veda, namely, Indra, Varuna, Mitra, and Nāsatya" (p. 23). Then he reminds us that "the date of the Āryans in the Near East corresponds roughly with that commonly assumed for the Āryan migration into India" and he concludes that "they both proceeded from the same base, i.e. north-eastern Iran, territory which was later to be taken over by the Iranians" (p. 24).

Here is surely no unchallengeable logic. The date of the Āryans in the Near East —1500-1300 B.C.—has no binding force on the Rigveda's date. No route for them from north-eastern Iran has even been traced. They could have gone to the Near East not from a common area with the Rigvedics in north-eastern Iran but from the bor-

derlands of India some time before 1500 B.C.—borderlands where a group of mixed tongues called the Paiśācha languages are spoken. About them even in our century the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*[1] has said: "They possess an extraordinary archaic character. Words are still in every-day use which are almost identical with the forms they assumed in Vedic hymns." Again, most of the Rigvedic godheads were worshipped in later times. Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* (XIV.3) mentions them. Mitra and Varuna under the guise of Mithro and Horon appear on the coins of the Kushānas,[2] and Gupta times attest the cults of Indra and Varuna.[3] We should not be struck as with a gross anomaly in a post-Vedic period by those deities invoked in the Near-Eastern document. The Rigvedics could have been in India much earlier than the Mitanni kings in the Near East. Nothing like the chronological clue connecting the latter with the Hittite kings exists for them.

Burrow makes some further assumptions—which have to be equally set aside. He identifies the Dāsa-Dasyus, the hostile beings mentioned in the Rigvedic hymns, with the Harappans and directs our attention to the Rigvedic war-god Indra being known as *puraṃdara*, "destroyer of cities" and to the fire-god Agni's similar role—"understandably," Burrow adds, "since many of the Indus cities appear to have been destroyed by fire" (p. 25). Then he caps his reasoning with the assertion: "In view of these repeated references the conclusion seems inescapable that the destruction of the Indus cities was the work of the Aryans" (*Ibid.*).

Even Basham is somewhat taken aback by Burrow's cocksureness. He footnotes it thus: "This statement may not apply to Mohenjo-dāro in Sind, where strong evidence has been produced to show that the city decayed owing to frequent disastrous floods." But Basham rather apologetically continues: "Mohenjo-dāro, however, was not in the main line of the Āryan advance." Lal in "The Indus Civilization" rules out not only the violent destruction of Mohenjo-dāro but also that of Harappā in the Punjab (p. 19), a site directly in the path of the supposed invaders. Introducing another site, Kālibangan of Rajasthan, he remarks: "At this site, neither the invader nor the flood can be invoked. Here perhaps the drying up of the Ghagger—gradual or sudden, owing either to climatic changes or to the diversion of the waters resulting from factors at or near their source—may have been the cause of the desertion of the site. Pestilence and the erosion of the surrounding landscape owing to over-exploitation may also be reasons for the end of certain settlements." On Lal's testimony, the postulated Āryan advance cannot be held responsible at all for the end of the Indus cities.

What about Burrow's ascribing the end of many of them to "fire"? Once Harappā, Mohenjo-dāro and Kālibangan are excluded, do any cities remain as candidates for enemy incendiarism? Are Kot Diji in Sind, Lothal in Saurāshtra or Surkotadā in Kutch to be considered as having been subjected to destruction by fire? No.

[1] Vol. I, p. 356 (Oxford 1967).
[2] R.K. Mookerji, *Ancient India* (Allahabad 1956), p 247.
[3] R.K Mookerji, *The Gupta Empire* (Bombay 1947), p. 137

Out of all the Harappan settlements, just one city—Gumla—in the extreme north-west seems to have been burnt by attackers known archaeologically as "the Grave People". To identify them as invading Vedic Āryans will need a lot of proving. Burrow has no discernible prop for his contention in the name of Agni.

As for equating the Dāsa-Dasyus to the Harappans, we can confute him out of his own mouth because the former—as can be categorically deduced from the Rig-veda—were pastoral or mountain folk whereas the Harappā Culture was definitely urban, as Burrow himself admits, calling it "a city civilization of a highly developed type" (p. 25).

What, then, shall we make of the term *pur* in the Rigveda? Until the discovery of the Indus Civilisation, *pur* was never understood by the majority of Sanskrit scholars as "city" in the strict sense. It was interpreted as meaning a "fort" built of ramparts of hardened earth with primitive palisades and a ditch for temporary refuge in times of tribal or natural disturbances. Only the walled cities of the Indus Civilisation seduced Wheeler into reinterpreting it.[1] But if the Vedic Aryans cannot be brought into hostile confrontation with the Harappā Culture we must return to the significance very persuasively read by A.A. Macdonnel and A.B. Keith in their monumental *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*.[2]

Naturally, with the label of invading foreigners removed from the Vedic Aryans, the popular racial dichotomy of Āryan and Dravidian becomes suspect. Ancient India looms as the home of a single many-charactered race—dolichocephalic, "long-headed", on the whole—and "Āryan" and "Dravidian" grow undeniably no more than linguistic distinctions. But here too some pitfalls must be guarded against. If a language is basically different from another it is likely to involve a fundamentally different culture. And both a different language and a different culture seem to be in Basham's mind when he writes apropos of Tamilnādu: "Here, over 2,000 years ago, the Tamil people developed a fairly advanced civilization independently of the Āryan north..." (p. 6). John R. Marr, author of "The Early Dravidians" in the same volume, speaking of "the earliest Tamil literature" which "represents probably the most important single contribution of Dravidian language and culture to the Indian heritage", is more moderate in tone. For, while affirming that "these poems present a distinct culture", he yet grants: "It is clear that a good deal of synthesis with Indo-Āryan, especially Brāhmanical, cultural and linguistic elements from the north had already taken place" (p. 34). Actually, hardly any evidence of "independence" can be produced. Nor can we quite agree with Marr that in the period prior to the third century B.C., when the earliest Tamil inscriptions in Brahmi script were made, "there was... a relatively undifferentiated non-Indo-Āryan speech in the south to which the term *Proto-Dravidian* is usually applied" (p. 30). Proto-Dravidian may be the parent from which the various later Dravidian speeches in their differentiated forms derived. But it need not have been an essentially non-Indo-Āryan language. If the most ancient

[1] *The Indus Civilization* (Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 131-2.

[2] London, 1912, I, p. 31.

"Sangham" literature around "the commencement of the Christian era" (*ibid.*) is sufficiently Sanskritised in both spirit and sound, Proto-Dravidian, which must be closer to Tamil than to any other Dravidian tongue since Tamil antedates all the rest, need not be deemed utterly free of Sanskritisation. Even as regards so-called typically Tamil turns of speech one may rightly hesitate to rule out Indo-Aryan.

In this context we may recommend for serious study a remarkable group of papers recently published though written nearly fifty years ago: R. Swaminatha Aiyar's *Dravidian Theories*.[1] Aiyar presses for a radical revision of several notions largely accepted today of Rigvedic or other borrowings by Sanskrit from Dravidian. After a detailed examination of the conjugation of verbs, particularly tense and mood signs, basic vocabulary and nominal declension and grammatical structures, he is disposed to hold that Dravidian is an extreme species of popularised Indo-Aryan, a kind of ultra-Prakrit. With acute linguistic analysis Aiyar demonstrates camouflaged Sanskrit origins almost everywhere.

His far-reaching conclusions are broadly in tune with the results of Sri Aurobindo's linguistic research. Sri Aurobindo could discern in Tamil a close rapport not only with Sanskrit but also with Sanskrit's European sisters: Greek and Latin—and even a link in this Dravidian language for certain discrepancies between these three Āryan tongues. In fact, he goes to the length of opining that Sanskrit and Tamil could be side-by-side divergent developments from a common primitive speech.

This concept is in harmony with Sri Aurobindo's general impression during his stay in South India that most of the Indian subcontinent is inhabited by one essentially homogeneous race—whether we term it, as he says, "Dravidian" or "Indo-Afghan" —with minor local variations within it and expressing itself in diverse ramifications of a unitary root-culture which has its earliest representation in the Rigveda. But we must remember how Sri Aurobindo interprets this scripture. He has elaborately shown its true interpretation to lie not in a totally ritualistic sense as urged with a host of inconsistencies by the Indian commentator Sayana nor wholly in the semi-naturalistic semi-anthropological view adopted with a lot of *ad-hoc* conjectures by modern European scholars. Without denying all relevance to such approaches, he sees the Rigveda to be at bottom a symbolic record—the story of a great inner spiritual adventure in which powers of darkness were fought with the help of Gods and Goddesses of a superhuman illumination, an adventure making use of the physical associations of life in early India—cow, horse, chariot, weapons, wealth, food, river, mountain, clouds, rain, dawn, sun, etc.—to indicate mystical states and events. To Sri Aurobindo the Rigveda is the natural predecessor of the Upanishads and the later spirituality and mystical philosophy of India. And, as he does not subscribe to the "Āryan-invasion" hypothesis, his overall vision must differ from Basham's statement: "Only when Āryan culture was fertilized by the indigenous culture did it begin to advance to form the classical civilization of India" (pp. 6-7).

[1] Published by the Madras Law Journal Office, 1975.

Not that Basham should be reckoned as exceptionally misguided in this respect. On the contrary, he is usually one of the most balanced of modern historians. And, in the issues where he is off the mark according to the Aurobindonian perspective, he is in quite renowned company. What is wrong is their frequent tendency to draw inferences from insufficient data in order to fit facts into a pattern which has considerable plausibility in non-Indian areas: *e. g.*, the to-and-fro in Central Asia and Europe between 2000 and 1000 B.C. of peoples speaking Indo-European languages. A chapter of unorthodox opinion, critical of current assumptions and deriving sustenance from persistent Indian traditions and lending due weight to insights from a versatile genius like Sri Aurobindo, would have been a happy supplement to a book packed with so much learning sitting so gracefully on such a large group of keen scholars.

It is to be expected that here and there any of them might slip up. Often the peccadillo of one gets counterpoised by the correct stance of another. Thus, in the acute and wide-ranging contribution from Romila Thapar, the sole feminine star in the erudite galaxy, "Aśokan India and the Gupta Age", we have the rather loose statement about the king whom the Greeks named "Sandrocottus" and who is generally identified with Chandragupta Maurya: "He proceeded to annex various parts of northern India and campaigned against the Greek Seleucus Nicator, the former general of Alexander. The successful outcome of this campaign brought him the trans-Indus region and areas of Afghanistan" (p. 38). The reference to the confrontation with Seleucus is inaccurate in its suggestion. It seems to imply an attack on this successor of Alexander by the Indian monarch. A harking-back to the original source of information—Appian (*Syr.* 55)—would have shown that Seleucus and not Sandrocottus was the aggressor. H.G. Rawlinson's "Early Contacts between India and Europe" has evidently consulted the Classical authority; for, he reports: "...when in 305 B.C. Seleucus Nicator tried to repeat his predecessor's exploits, he was defeated and glad to come to terms" (430).

Even Rawlinson is slightly mistaken in writing "defeated". Neither Appian nor Plutarch (*Lives*, LXII) mentions actual fighting between the Greek and the Indian. Most probably, as soon as the former, on crossing the Indus, saw the latter ready to meet him with a formidable army he decided that discretion was the better part of valour.

Perhaps I am being too finicky over trivial technicalities, but there are one or two other points elsewhere in Thapar which give one rather sharply to think. She writes: "Megasthenes who visited India as the ambassador of Seleucus Nicator and stayed at the Mauryan Court during the reign of Chandragupta, describes the king receiving complaints and discussing matters of state even when being massaged. Aśoka emphatically declares in one of his edicts that, no matter where he may be, no member of the ministerial council should be debarred from seeing him" (p. 40). It is curious that Thapar has not noted a contradiction here. In Rock Edict V Aśoka declares: "For a very long time past previously there was no despatch of business and no reporting at all hours. This, therefore, I have done, namely, that at all hours

and in all places... the Reporters may report people's business to me..."[1] R. K. Mookerji has well commented: "Aśoka's strictures against his predecessors do not apply even to his grandfather whose devotion to public work is thus described by Megasthenes: 'The king may not sleep during the day-time. He leaves the palace not only in time of war, but also for the purposes of judging cases. He then remains in court for the whole day without allowing the business to be interrupted, even though the hour arrives when he must needs attend to his person' (McCrindle, p. 72). Curtius (VIII.9) adds: 'The palace is open to all comers, even when the king is having his hair combed and dressed. It is then that he gives audience to ambassadors and administers justice to his subjects' (*Ib.*, *Ancient India*, p. 58, n.)."[2]

Sandrocottus, according to Megasthenes and Curtius, did exactly what Asoka says his predecessors failed to do. Mookerji is surprised—and quite legitimately—at the discrepancy between the two testimonies, for he, along with most historians of our day, takes Sandrocottus to be Aśoka's grandfather. Both the testimonies, however, can be correct if Sandrocottus is not Chandragupta Maurya but another eminent Chandragupta who, like the great Maurya, also founded a new line of kings at Pātaliputra ("Palimbothra" of Megasthenes and Curtius)—Chandragupta of the Imperial Guptas who, by the current chronology, came to the throne in 320 A.D. "A fantastic substitute!" Thapar and Basham as well as Lal and Burrow and even Rawlinson would exclaim. Yet the chronology we can gather from the Purāṇas' series of dynastic periods commencing from the Kaliyuga whose date was fixed by Indian astronomers as 3102 B.C. would place the Gupta line precisely where Sandrocottus occurs—in the time of Alexander. Is that a mere coincidence? But the discrepancy we have marked is not the only one between the Greek or Latin accounts and the history built up on the basis of Sir William Jones's equation of Sandrocottus with the initiator of the Maurya dynasty. For instance, we should expect a marked reference to Buddhism in the period just anterior to Aśoka. Instead, there is no recognisable signpost to it at all, whereas we can identify quite a lot about Brahmins, Jains and the cultists of Shiva and Krishna. A brief section discussing these contradictions and dealing without prejudice with India's own time-scheme as sketched in the Puranas would have lent extra piquancy if not greater point to a volume like Basham's.

A truce now to controversy. Let me close with some appreciative glances at the rich material laid out in chapter after chapter. As a Parsi I may round off by touching on a few allusions to my own community. Basham, listing the diversity of "racial types among the inhabitants of India", mentions "the small but vigorous Parsi community" who, in contrast to the other entrants into the country, "have kept their stock pure" (p. 7). Alas, there has been a price for the purity. We are a fast diminishing unit in spite of the energetic and enterprising nature of its components. At the present pace of decline in the birth-rate no Parsi as such may be left after about seventy years. We have been prominent enough to be missed. H.F. Owen, in "The Nation-

[1] D.R Bhandarkar, *Aśoka* (Calcutta 1932), p. 315.
[2] *Aśoka* (Delhi 1955), pp. 144-5, fn. 5.

alist Movement", puts the Parsis among "the first groups to be mobilized in the nationalist associations and *sabhas* and in Congress in the 1870s and 1880s", comprising "Western-educated Indians" (p. 401). The earliest instance of English interest in our country, not as merchants but as antiquarians and explorers, Henry Lord's *Display of Two Forraigne Sects in the East Indies* (1630), gives an account of the Parsis as well as the Hindus of Surat. Among Parsi celebrities who played an important role in public life we often rank Dadabhoy Naoroji, Pherozshah Mehta and Jamshedji Tata. J.T.F. Jordens, author of "Hindu Religions and Social Reform in British India", throws into relief a figure mostly forgotten: "It was a Bombay Pārsī, Behrāmjī Malabārī (1853-1912), who launched the issue that set social reform on its way to becoming consciously national: the campaign for the legal checking of infant marriage by an Age of Consent Bill. Malabārī's campaign was different from earlier ones in that it was the work of a determined and skilful journalist who was primarily intent on putting the concrete and harrowing reality before the people in such a way that it could not be ignored. And ignored it was not. No other cause excited such a storm over the whole of India for such a prolonged period. No reformer or politician could afford not to take sides. The Age of Consent Bill controversy put social reform on the national map, never to be ignored again, and achieved the indissoluble wedding of social reform with the nationalist movement" (pp. 373-4). Malabari, however, was more than a powerful journalist-*cum*-reformer. He was also a very talented poet in Gujarati, fit, in my opinion, to rank with his more well known co-religionist poet, Ardaser Khabardar, who wrote verse in both Gujarati and English, though more commendably in the former.

Finally, I may remind the readers of *A Cultural History* that it is the ancestors of the Parsis who gave India the name by which the majority of her inhabitants have come to be known. Quite appropriately we may introduce our point by quoting a sentence from S. Radhakrishnan's article: "The great river of Hindu life, usually serene but not without its rapids, reaches back so far that only a long view can do justice to its nature" (p. 61). A long view takes us to the information in Basham's "Preface": "The river Indus is known in Sanskrit as *Sindhu*. The Indus region, most of it now Pakistan, became a satrapy of the Achaemenian Empire of Iran under the name Hindush, the Indian *s* becoming Persian *h* by a regular sound-shift between the two languages" (vii). A longer view carries us to one of the most ancient traditons recollected in the Parsi scripture, the Avesta: there the Rigvedic *Sapta-Sindhava* (VIII.24.25)—"land of seven rivers"—appears as *Hapta-Hindava* (Vendidad, I.73). And not inaptly we may connect the Rigveda with the Avesta and the Hindus with the Parsis, for theirs originally were similar cults revolving round the adoration and invocation of Fire which in the Rigveda is termed "the Immortal in mortals" and in the Avesta "the Son of God", both the designations proving the worshipped element a symbol of the human soul aspiring in its passionate purity to the Divine Light and Love.

(*Concluded*)

K. D. SETHNA

CORRECTIVE POSTSCRIPT

In the first instalment (April) of this review-article I took A. L. Basham's "Dr. Rāghavan Iyer" as a mistake for the current form "Dr. V. Rāghavan" used by that scholar himself. Now I learn that there is a political scientist named "Dr. Rāghavan Iyer". I also see that, in footnote 17 on p. 145 of the book, "V. Rāghavan" is mentioned. So I seem to have erred, confusing two different persons.

K. D. S.

THE PLACE OF D.G. ROSSETTI'S *BLESSED DAMOZEL* IN ENGLISH POETRY

The Blessed Damozel is a poem of twenty-four stanzas written in the Iambic meter. Every stanza consists of six lines which are tetrameters and trimeters alternately. There are subtle metrical variations in almost every stanza. The rhyme-scheme is abcbdb. Thus an original feature of the poem is that in every stanza three lines are left unrhymed, the first, third and fifth. As such, the poem is an exquisitely triumphant compromise between rhymed and unrhymed verse. Law and freedom join hands to create beauty.

The poem was written when Rossetti was only twenty-one. It is also his most popular piece, the piece on which is based his reputation with the general reader. It expresses the longing of a maiden in heaven for her lover on earth and is remarkable for its mingling of sad hope and certain faith:

"I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come," she said.
"Have I not prayed in Heaven?—on earth,
Lord, Lord, has he not prayed?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?"

The emotion of love is strangely blended with profound religious feeling. It expresses the power of prayer, alluding to the well-known words of Jesus: 'Whatever two hearts sincerely pray for shall be granted unto them.' Indeed, the whole poem is instinct with the religious mysticism of the Middle Ages as well as with the strength and sincerity of human love and the heavenly purity and innocence of the Damozel's heart. Its religious mysticism finds a beautiful expression in the stanza which has a reference to

"That shrine, occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirred continually
With prayer sent up to God"....

and also in the stanza which refers to the Tree of Life,

"That living mystic tree,
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
Saith His name audibly."

The Dove of Christian art symbolises the Holy Ghost, one of the three major mysteries of Christianity.

But what is even more startling about the whole poem than its being steeped in medieval religious mysticism is the fact that this mysticism is combined with realism. Concrete details are brought before our eyes with a vividness which is surprising. The curled moon flutters 'like a little feather' far down the gulf of space. The souls of lovers mount up to God, 'like thin flames'. Far below, the earth 'spins like a fretful midge.'

Another notable feature of the poem is the union brought about with extraordinary skill between the impressions of infinite distance and those of nearness. Heaven is depicted as so remote from our world that when the Blessed Damozel, leaning out from its 'golden bar,' looks down towards our world, the earth appears to her infinitesimal and yet love annihilates all distance so that the lover, sitting on the earth, sees her smile and hears her tears. Never was the power of Love over sundering spaces so beautifully expressed in English poetry.

But even more worthy of attention and admiration than these unions of opposites is the portrayal of human love in the courts of Heaven. As pure as the angels it is, as pure as Mary and her virgin saints, and yet it is the very love with which the Blessed Damozel thrilled when she and her lover went hand in hand upon the earth—the same love, only grown stronger and purer. And the sense of its beauty, its strength and its purity makes her brave enough to say that when he comes she will take him by the hand and lead him straight to the very throne of God. Just as infinite space and a little patch of earth meet in this poem, so do love immortal and love human. Not even Dante has portrayed the divine passion with more boldness or more delicacy. Thus the poem is not only a mystic vision characteristic of the Middle Ages; it touches also the very springs of life and love today. It is universal in its appeal; for whether human love will have the power to endure beyond the grave is a question which is very close to the most vital interests of every man's life.

The poem is remarkable too for its magical imagery. The picture of the Blessed Damozel, for instance, is brought before our eyes with all that vivid and exquisite colouring which is characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite art. Her eyes are deeper than the depth of waters stilled at even. She has three lilies in her hand and seven stars in her hair. She has a white rose of Mary's gift adorning her robe which is ungirt from clasp to hem. Her hair lies along her back and is yellow like ripe corn. And subtly surcharged with all of Rossetti's sensuousness is the stanza:

"And still she bow'd herself and stoop'd
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she lean'd on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm."

Rossetti reveals in this poem a wonderful eye for similes. He is perhaps one of the greatest masters of the concise and condensed Romantic simile, as Arnold is of the elaborate Classic simile. When we read, for instance, that the eyes of the Blessed Damozel are deeper than the depth of waters stilled at even, we pause not only in reverence for the beauty of her soul that looks out at us from those eyes but also with delight at the image itself which calls up to us the picture of them. The simile not only reveals but also illuminates their beauty. We linger too over the music of the words by which the picture is conveyed.

In this stanza we find that the heat of passion is so great that the bar has become warm only by the leaning of the beloved upon it. The beloved of the renowned Hindi poet Bihari's *Satasai* (सतसई) also has a similar heat of passion in herself. Her love for her lover appears greater when Bihari says:

आडै दै आते बसन, जाडे हूं की राति।
साहस कै कै सनेहु बस, सखी सबै ढिग जाति ॥२९॥ पृ० १६३

"The beloved is suffering so scorchingly with the fire of separation from the lover that it has become difficult for anyone to reach near the beloved. Even the friends of the beloved after making a lot of effort and mustering all courage are hardly able to approach her." The poet means that the friends of the beloved have to approach her wearing wet clothes on a winter's night, otherwise their bodies may get scorched by the extreme heat of the passionately warm body of the beloved.

Another stanza of Bihari's *Satasai* also gives the same idea as Rossetti:

औधाई सीसी सुलखि विरह-बरनि बिललात।
बिचहि सूखि गुलाब गौ, छीटौ दयो न गात ॥ ॥५५॥ पृ० १७४

The poet tells us quite a little story. One lady tells another lady that on seeing the beloved suffering with the torturous pain of separation from her lover she thought that she should pour a vial full of rose-water over her. But as soon as she endeavoured to do that, she found the heated flames of separation rising so fast and pointedly that all the rose-water of the vial became dry before it could touch the passionately warm body of the beloved and not a drop of rose-water could be sprinkled.

We should like to say a word about that genuine note of pathos which is so admirably struck here and there in Rossetti's poem. The Damozel's yearning for her lover on earth is extremely touching. She gazes wistfully towards the earth in order to assure herself whether angels are bringing her lover to Heaven or not. When she finds that the angels' path becomes vague in distant spheres, she is disappointed and, casting her arms along the golden barriers, lays her face between her hands and weeps.

Rossetti's conception of Heaven is vibrant with humanity. It is nearer to the aching heart than that of any other English poet, than that of Milton, for instance. No doubt, his Heaven is exceedingly remote from earth, but it is not too bright for na-

tures like our own. It is full of tenderness, kindness and warmth. It is not a place of Miltonic 'sexless souls' and 'ideal quires', but one where common loves remain, with only this difference that, whereas on earth love enjoyed a short-lived union with its object, in Heaven it is lifted by God to endless unity. Heavenly love is thus, to Rossetti, a consummation or an eternisation of earthly love.

In form and structure the poem reveals several features of striking originality. All the three methods of poetic expression—the descriptive or narrative, the dramatic and the lyrical—are combined with sensitive felicity. One daring and excellent device is worthy of special mention, the device by which the thoughts of the distant lover, still enchained on earth, are expressed at intervals in lines within brackets. These lines are remarkable for their perfect simplicity of style, their imaginative quality, and their dramatic intensity. And the main body of the poem is wonderful in its sweetness of simple pathos, in its musical spell, in the magic of its pictures, in its delicate archaic handling of language, and in its peculiar, indescribable quaintness which is not of the nineteenth century at all but of the Middle Ages, the Italian Middle Ages before the time of Raphael, which were the spiritual home of Rossetti, even though in flesh and blood he lived in Victorian England. We conclude this brief estimate of *The Blessed Damozel* with what an eminent critic, Stopford A. Brooke, writes about it:

"It is a lovely thing, as exquisite in tenderness and sublimated thought as it is in form and finish.... The subject is noble and appeals to universal feeling. No one who has loved and lost, and waits here below, or there above, but must have cherished its main thought and felt its main emotion. The ornament is beautiful, and is charged with human feeling. It is not the work of fancy but of imagination piercing with vital power into the heart of the subject, and radiating new thought, new feeling, through every verse, even every line."

ADARSH BALA

THE STUPID GURU AND THE FOOLISH DISCIPLES

A FREE TRANSLATION OF VEERAMA MUNIVAR'S TAMIL *STORY OF GURU PARAMARTHA*

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1980)

3. Travel By Bullock

MANY days later, the guru and his disciples happened to go to a far-off place. The disciples hired a bullock to carry their master. The rate was Rs. 3 per day. Side-saddled, Guru Paramartha proceeded, followed by his disciples and the bullock-man.

It was a hot summer's day. The merciless sun was making blisters on their feet. The guru started sweating and so felt tired. Had not Matti noticed the sad plight of the guru and run to him with timely help, the latter would have fallen from the bullock and fractured his limbs.

"Hold on! I feel dizzy. Let us take rest awhile and then proceed," said the guru in a dying tone.

The entire place was under the surveillance of the sun. There was no other shade than the bullock's. The old guru took rest under the shade of the bullock. Peithai and Mileichan fanned the master with palmyra leaves. Some precious and costly minutes rolled by. They resumed their journey and before sunset reached a village chaultry.

"Here is your money, Rs. 3. Take it with your bullock," said the guru to the bullock-man.

"That's not enough," refused the bullock-man.

"Why? That is what you demanded."

"Of course! That is the payment for my bullock. What about the payment for its shade? Didn't you utilize that shade for taking rest?" retorted the bullock-man.

"Money for the shade!" exclaimed the guru. "Yes," replied the bullock-man. As the argument went on, a big crowd gathered.

The Munsif—the village-chief—came to the spot and inquired. The guru spoke of the bullock-man's illegal demand.

He heard the entire story and said, "I know how to solve it. Let me tell you what I experienced once. A couple of years ago, I stayed in a far-away inn. As I was tasting the food I had bought from the inn-keeper, there came a pleasant odour from his kitchen. I sniffed and enjoyed the smell. The inn-keeper noticed it and demanded money for inhaling the odour. We went to the chief of the village for justice.

"The chief was an honest, impartial and upright man. He did justice to the case by giving the verdict, 'Smell for smell.' Food is a concrete thing. It should be exchanged with only another concrete thing. So money can be given. But odour whether pleasant or unpleasant is only abstract. An abstract thing can never equal a

concrete one. So, for the pleasant odour of food you have inhaled, let the inn-keeper inhale the pleasanter smell of money." So saying, the judge called the inn-keeper nearer and rubbed the money-bag on his nose vehemently. The inn-keeper unable to bear the excruciating pain cried in agony and ran off.

"Is this not justice? A thorn should be removed by another thorn. An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. Smell for smell. In your case it is shade for shade. Let the bullock-man enjoy the shade of the money-bag." Thus the village-chief gave his verdict and with his own money-bag banged the left ear of the bullock-man, and asked, "Did you hear me?" The bang made the bullock-man's eardrum vibrate. He covered his ear with his palm and prostrated himself before the guru and requested, "Kindly pardon me. I have reaped what I have sown. I will never in my life earn money in illegal ways." Then he wiped his tears and walked away with his bullock.

The guru with all his heart blessed the village-chief for his wisdom.

(End of Chapter Three)

4. Horse-Fishing

The cocks heralded the arrival of the sun. Guru Paramartha woke up with a start. He was terribly scared of the scorching sun. He made his disciples get up from their deep slumber and soon they were all ready for their journey.

The sun was in the mid-sky before they could cover a distance of ten miles. The guru as usual felt tired and so they took rest in a coconut grove.

Mileichan had a taste for sight-seeing. He felt an urge to look round the place. He appealed to his guru who readily granted him permission. Like a little merry lamb he jumped hither and thither and reached a river bank. On the bank stood a temple for God Iyanar. In front of it stood a majestic clay horse—the vehicle of God Iyanar. Mileichan was fascinated by its craftsmanship.

Then he went two steps further into the river to wash his hands and legs clean. He saw a horse in the river. It was actually the reflection of the clay model. At first look he guessed it correctly. But he had his second thoughts. The image in the river was slightly bigger than the clay model. There was a gush of wind that produced ripples on the surface of the river. The floating ripples made the image move hither and thither. Mileichan looked back at the clay model. The clay horse stood still while the horse in the river wavered.

Mileichan's quick brain concluded that the river-horse was a live one. To make himself certain, he threw a small stone at the image of the horse. The stone made the image move its legs and body vehemently. "Oh! It is a real horse full of life. See how it wriggles like a worm! It is all because of the stone that I threw at it. I should catch the horse for my master, even at the risk of my life." Talking to himself he rushed to the grove where the guru and his disciples were taking rest.

Eager to catch the horse without any delay Mileichan narrated what he had seen

and sought the help of his friends. Everyone except the aged guru ran to the river and saw the horse lying in the river. Joyous at heart they put their heads together and thought of various plans to trap the animal. All their plans had one drawback or another and so failed.

Matti soon came out with a novel idea. "We can catch the horse with the help of a fishing rod. That is the only way," he declared. None raised any objection to the plan.

Madaiyan ran and fetched a long rope to be used as the fishing-line. As for the fishing-hook, he tied a sickle to one end of the rope. Only the bait remained. They smeared some cooked rice on the sickle. The complete fishing-tackle was ready.

Matti held the one end of the rope tightly and threw the other that had the sickle into the river at the image of the horse. The sickle fell with a thud and the waves tossed the image violently.

"The horse is infuriated. It is restless," they cried, and ran. But Matti who had the one end of the rope in his hand stood boldly, though he receded a few steps.

A few minutes later, the fishes in the river began gnawing at the sickle smeared with cooked rice. The rope drifted and made Matti cry, "Come along. Come here. The horse is caught. The horse is caught. The horse is ours. The sickle is inside the horse's throat. The horse is ours."

All those who had run away out of fear came back rushing. Matti found it difficult to pull, for the sickle got entangled in the bush of water-plants. They joined hands to pull the baited horse. It was a real tug-of-war. They employed force and fell back one on another. The sickle came out and with it some uprooted water-plants.

Unable to recover from the shock they lay on the ground disappointed. A villager came to their help. They requested him for a good plan to trap the horse.

The villager laughed like a shower of granites falling on a tinned roof. He then covered the clay model with his shawl. The image in the river disappeared. "That is only illusion," he said.

The disciples cursed themselves for their stupid act. Matti lectured the villager on the importance of a horse for their master and of their struggles to possess one.

The villager heard the story sympathetically. Laughing, he said, "You are innocent and ignorant people. I pity you. I will donate a horse to your guru. The horse is lame and old and blind in one eye. But I think it is quite suitable for your master's purposes. If you would like to have the horse, you can come with me to the village."

"We would like to have it," the disciples shouted in a chorus, proud to have at last fulfilled their guru's wish for an equine conveyance.

All of them started walking towards the village.

(End of Chapter Four)

(To be continued)

P. RAJA

THE COPY CATS

A SHORT STORY FOR CHILDREN

THIS is the story of a little girl called Betse and of her two cats. But at the beginning of the story Betse has only one cat whose name is Copy. Actually she's called Coppie which is an abbreviation of Copper, which is the colour of the cat's stripes. But Betse's birthday cards to her cat are addressed to Dear Copy. This is simply because her spelling has always been poor. It still is. But more to the point is that one day Copy disappeared. Betse was the first to notice it. It was her cat. This was at lunch time and when Copy didn't come home that night nor the next morning Betse curled up on her bed and wept. She wept for so long and so hard that her mother and father brought her a Copy II. This one wasn't at all like the first Copy. She was a smaller cat with a copper moustache and copper eyebrows and copper knees. And her stripes were all colours.

Betse woke up one morning to find the cat on her bed. But she didn't want another cat. She wanted Copy and she went down to breakfast having spoken only one sentence to it: "This is Copy's bed." At this point she didn't even know that it was Copy II lying on her bed. But after breakfast she felt guilty and went up and apologised. Once you start speaking to a cat you're very much in danger of wanting to pick it up specially if it opens its mouth at you to answer and no noise comes out but you can see it is all pink inside. Betse thought, "What if it's mute?" and she picked it up and that was that.

Betse never quite stopped looking for the cat that was Copy I nor stopped listening for its paw scraping against the door when the wind rustled but she did give Copy II the green cushion that had once been Copy I's and her appetite came back and she settled down to her studies and did rather well in all her subjects. Except spelling. Her parents didn't mind too much. They thought spelling couldn't make much difference in life.

One day her Uncle Fetherall came to tea. He was her favourite uncle. Seeing Copy II on the green cushion, he said,

"My, that cat's changed."

"It's not the same cat," said Betse handing him his tea.

"What's her name?"

"Copy II," said Betse.

"Oh then she's a copy cat."

"Oh really is she, Uncle Fetherall?" Betse asked in excitement for she'd often heard about them without quite knowing what a copy-cat was nor how it tied in with the name of her cat. "Why? Is it because she copied Copy I's name?"

"Yes."

"But it's not her fault she was *given* that name."

Her uncle ignored this. "Copy-cats are very clever and very rare. I wouldn't

worry about it."

Next day Copy I returned.

The first they knew of it was a howling and miaowing and general caterwauling. Betse ran into the room in time to see the green cushion flying, white stuffing flying, fur flying and then all was quiet...for ten seconds. The cats now surveyed each other from opposite sides of the room and made strangled noises in their throats.

Betse stared at Copy I, ran over to her and put her arms about her neck. She felt something hot on her forearm and when she saw the red line appear she looked at it with interest; it took her time to understand that Copy I had unsheathed her claws at her.

"Copy," she said, "it's me, it's Betse," but Copy merely stared at the other corner of the room as if to say, "Yes and who's that?"

"I can explain," said Betse. "You see, Copy darling, they thought you weren't coming back. And they went out to buy Copy II. How were they to know, poor dears? They did their best." She and Copy had always spoken of her parents as They—and perfectly understood each other. But now, though Betse had spoken in her most calming voice which never failed to unarch Copy's back, the cat remained as stiff and bent as a bridge within the circle of her arms.

"Copy!" she said reproachfully. "We could all be friends." And she began stroking Copy's fur but it would not lie down. "Copy," she said, "you used to be a very reasonable cat. You used to be." There was silence in the room and Betse was thinking that it is not difficult to be reasonable when you get the best of everything, in fact when you get everything and everybody gives you their attention and there is nobody else. She began to wonder whether Copy had ever really and truly been a reasonable cat. She even wondered if such a thing existed. "Well," she said, withdrawing her arms which had begun to ache from the unnatural position, "we'll just have to make the best of it, I suppose."

The best of it turned out to be no good.

The green cushion was put away and Copy II was given a red cushion while Copy I was given a blue one. They both had tassels on them until the second day when Copy I tore those of the red cushion right off. Then she tore right into the red cushion and when she had reduced it to tatters she tried the same thing with Copy II.

"It's beyond a joke," Betse explained to her uncle Fetherall the next day. She had dark circles under her eyes and several new scratches on her legs as well as her arms. "Even now you can hear them." Betse had said *them* out of loyalty to Copy I with whom in fact she had nearly lost patience. What you could hear was Copy I making rasping threats in her throat at Copy II who was in a room on the other side of the house. Copy II kept silent. Sometimes, though rarely, she mewed plaintively. Betse didn't like to think it but it did seem that Copy II had the sweeter disposition.

"It's difficult for Copy I," said Uncle Fetherall. "She's suffered. In fact she's suffering. Cats have very delicate nervous systems."

"Yes?" said Betse listening, for Uncle Fetherall was very good at solutions.

There was a silence and she tried not to ask what she should do. She knew that he was working something out. But when he said nothing for a long time she could no longer stand it.

"What shall I do?" she wailed. "Why won't they be friends? They just won't and I've tried everything. And it's not my fault. I never asked for a second cat." She was in fact wishing that she'd never asked for a first cat.

"You are," said Uncle Fetherall gravely, "on the horns of...a dilemma."

"Am I?" said Betse looking about her, curious, and, for the first time in some days, pleased. Uncle Fetherall's words filled her with confidence.

"Yes," said Uncle Fetherall, "there is no mistaking it. Or them. For there are two horns. And they are most uncomfortable places to be on." Uncle Fetherall sipped his lemon tea.

"Yes, yes," said Betse feeling more and more sure that that was exactly where she was. She could see herself perched on the slippery horns of some mad charging animal. "You're quite right, Uncle Fether. What shall I do?"

"Do? Oh my dear, you must get off as quickly as possible. Those cats, as they are, are a liability, both of them." Betse was afraid he was going to suggest she get rid of both her cats. "They're no good to you at all." She was even more afraid he was going to, but he said, "Cats have no more right to make a nuisance of themselves than anyone else." She was sure he was going to. Surely he wouldn't suggest the S.P.C.A.? Finally he said, "How do you spell their names?"

"C-O-P-Y," spelt Betse.

"Good. There is only one good thing in the whole situation."

"What is that, Uncle Fether?" She thought he was going to say "You" meaning that it was she, Betse, and she spread her skirt a little on the chair, but he said,

"It is that they are both copy cats."

"Oh," she said, and then to hide her disappointment and embarrassment she asked, "Really?"

"Yes, they are both copy cats and so if you do things properly instead of having a liability you may very soon have...What's the opposite of a liability?"

"An asset," mumbled Betse, for though she was the worst in her class at spelling she was the best at words and in any case her father was a businessman and she knew all sorts of words like "takeover" and "input".

"Right," said Uncle Fetherall, "and in any case there's another good thing in the situation—it's *you* of course. Perhaps that's what I should have said first because you're at least as important as the copy cats in all this."

"What do I have to do?" asked Betse trying not to sound too pleased, but she sounded very pleased indeed and very excited.

"Train 'em. Copy cats are the only cats in the world who can become circus cats."

"And who's to train me?"

"I'll train you."

There followed days of hard discipline and Spartan existence. Betse got up every

morning at five and went first to Copy II's room and made her jump through a hoop which she held with one hand while in the other—just on the opposite side of the hoop—she held a saucer of fish. It didn't take Copy II long to realise that if she tried to go around the hoop Betse always held the saucer high above her head and in a very short time Copy II was jumping through the hoop every morning.

"That's right," said Uncle Fetherall. "Anything a big cat can do a small cat can and probably better." It took longer with Copy I but she jumped through the hoop on the fifth morning after Copy II had and only after Uncle Fetherall had said, "Change the hoop. She can smell the other cat on this one."

They went from hoops to balancing balls on the end of their noses and swinging toy mice around by the tails while waltzing to the tune of "Tales from the Vienna Woods".

"That's very good," said Uncle Fetherall, "but they're doing it separately now. Now we want to get them to do it together."

Betse noticed that though he said "we" he did not say how they were to go about it. But since she knew that sooner or later it had to be done she drew a deep breath one day and took Copy I and her cushion and hoop into Copy II's room. Several days and cushions later she had both Copies going through the hoop not only one after another but both together.

Uncle Fetherall had been right but only up to a point. Both cats could now be in the same room together but...only as long as they and Betse were absorbed with the training and the performance. Both Copys tried to outdo each other in elegance and daring which, as Uncle Fetherall pointed out, made them improve very fast.

The time had now come for them to go to the circus and by now the Copy-Cats, as they were to be billed, had no trouble in finding work, together with their trainer, Bouncing Betse.

You'd have thought, as Betse first did with a good deal of worry, that a large audience would have made the Copy-Cats nervous but actually, as Uncle Fetherall had predicted, the thing about Copy-Cats was that they were very vain and there was nothing they liked better than a big audience. In fact Copy I could always be seen to look, as the drums rolled before her jump through the paper-covered hoop with the flames painted on it, slyly around at the audience to make sure that no seats were empty. There very seldom were any empty seats, for the Copy-Cats soon drew very large audiences and the larger and more enthusiastic the audience the better the performance. Betse also found that applause went to her head or at least went somewhere, for it made her try harder and made the performance perfect in every detail.

One night, though, they drew a very poor audience. This was simply because a famous soprano was singing at the town hall. But Betse did not know about that and neither did the Copy-Cats though they probably would have been indignant in any case. For Betse it was worse. *She* worried about their losing their job. And if there were no Bouncing Betse and her Copper Copy-Cats she thought they might have to go back to the old days of cat-eat-cat at home with her, Betse, running distraught around

the house to keep her pets apart. It was, no doubt, this very worrying thought that made her somewhat careless.

In case we haven't mentioned it, the very first number on their performance was a very simple one. It consisted of Copy I sitting on her red cushion and Copy II sitting on her blue cushion atop two pedestals which were ten feet apart. They sat entirely still while their number was announced and explained to the audience. The drums rolled briefly, then Betse cracked her little whip and Copy I and Copy II took off precisely at the same moment and crossed each other in mid-air and at precisely the same moment landed on each other's cushion. This may not sound very impressive but since they started off at quite a distance from each other and performed the simple feat with great ease and grace it always caused the audience to sit up right from the start. After this Betse had to get the cats off their cushions as quickly as possible because Copy I never felt comfortable on Copy II's blue cushion and always started looking about her and twisting her neck around and even digging into the cushion so that its blue velvet had to be changed frequently.

Well, on this particular night that the soprano was singing at the Town Hall, with half the town wishing they could be watching the Copy-Cats but having to listen to German songs, Betse, worried though she was, was not too worried to notice that right from the beginning Copy I was terribly restless. She was, in fact, digging her nails deeply into the cushion from the very commencement of the introduction, and by the end of it all her fur was standing up on end and her tail was actually waving even as the ring master was saying " ..while the Copy-Cats wait as still as statues for their daring flight through the air. This number is performed entirely without nets." It was at this point that Betse noticed with horror that she had given Copy I the blue cushion.

(To be concluded)

MAGGI

INDIAN LIFE IN ENGLISH WRITINGS

Part III: India Looks at Itself (Man's View)

(Continued from the issue of March 1980)

WHAT was valid of *Cheemeen* was true of *Godan* as well. If Takazi Pillai wrote a documentary of human tragedy in *Cheemeen* Premchand four decades earlier wrote *Godan*, a documentary of suffering in the villages of Uttar Pradesh. The suffering and tragedy of existence were the common denominator in both the cases. Takazi Pillai gave a pin-point focus on the lives of fishermen in Kerala. Premchand offered us a greater canvas, the image was many-sided, treating both the poor and the rich, the exploiter and the exploited, the money-lender, the landlord, the professor, the mill-owner and the social worker, all of whom formed the varied ingredients in the drama at different levels. *Cheemeen* was a simple tale told without sophistication, *Godan* was almost an Indian *Les Misérables* in its depth, range and treatment. No wonder the critics hailed it as a *chef d'œuvre*, a landmark not only in Hindi literature but in the field of all Indian fiction.

The story in *Godan* revolved around a cow. Bhola, a widower, was a fairly well-to-do milk-man, possessing several cow-heads, one of which he gave along with its calf to Hori on the condition that he found for Bhola a suitable bride.

Hori was a middle-aged peasant in a village, Semari, near Lucknow. He had separated from his brothers Shobha and Hira who lived in adjoining huts. He had a little patch of land where he grew barley, sugarcane and wheat. His wife Dhania, at thirty-five, was becoming senile due to poverty and over-work. They had three children, a grown-up boy Gobar, a twelve-year old daughter Sona and an eight-year old child Rupa who, being the youngest, was the pet of the family.

When Hori came home with the cow, both Hira and Sobha became jealous, for a cow was considered a symbol of prosperity in the village. They wondered how Hori could procure this animal although he was already heavily in debt to Pateshwari, the money-lender.

To complicate matters, Hori's son Gobar got infatuated with Jhuniya the young widowed daughter of Bhola. Again the cow became the source of this contact which very soon turned into blind love. Jhuniya confessed to Gobar that many men were after her including the old priest Datadin who finding himself alone with her in the house attempted to make love to her. In this manner the two young persons came together. Then the inevitable occurred. Jhuniya, when she found herself pregnant, eloped with Gobar a few months after the cow had come to Hori's place.

Further complication followed suit. Rai Saheb, the landlord of the village, now residing in Lucknow, sent his agents to Semari with orders that unless all dues and rents were paid, he would not allow the tenant-farmers to till the soil. The idea was to collect Rupees 20,000, an amount needed for the Rai Saheb to stand for the forth-

coming Municipal election. Similar customs prevailed in the feudal system under the British rule in other provinces as well. The Ryots had to pay for the lord's son's marriage, for building his house, for his expenses to go abroad, in fact any other pretext was enough to extract money.

One day Hori went to the residence of the Rai Saheb who remarked about his tenants: 'I find plenty to laugh at when they are hard up. Hori, riches and fellow-feeling never go hand in hand... They think I am immune to unhappiness. If I cry, it is to mock at sorrow. If I fall ill, it is because I find comfort in sickness! If I don't marry, I am selfish; if I do, I am carnal. If I don't drink, I am a miser; if I do, I drink the blood of my people... we have become so big that deceit is now the salt of our lives. In fact, we have reached that stage of divinity where other men's tears only arouse our mirth.' (*Godan* by Premchand, tr. by Jai Ratan and P Lal, Bombay, Jaico, 1956, pp. 13-14)

While Hori, who could be taken as a true representative of the poverty stricken debt-burdened village humanity, toiled, the rich were having a jolly time in the cities with tea-parties where worlds were made and destroyed, fates of nations determined, or else they were holding picnic parties. One party was composed of Malati, Mehta, Rai Saheb and Khurshid and others who went to the village on a spree. The contrast between this and the village-conditions was overwhelming.

In the village some of the party got stranded and they experienced some bitter lessons. They saw how the futile luxury to which they had got habituated did not satisfy them at the end, while some poor shoe-makers, for example, were happy amid poverty and want.

While the rich were utterly narrow in their views, Hori with his poverty was compassionate and broad-minded. Jhuniya, in full term of her pregnancy and having nowhere to go, came to Hori and confessed her sin. Gobar had gone away to Lucknow to try his fortune there. The pair had quarrelled and there she was, stranded. If she went back to her father's place, her brothers would beat her life out.

Hori and Dhaniya accepted Jhuniya as if she were their formally wedded daughter-in-law.

Another misfortune occurred. The cow, the bone of contention and the source of so much misery, suddenly died, poisoned by one of the two brothers of Hori. The police appeared on the scene, took bribes and left without taking any action.

Datadin, the old lecherous priest who had earlier censored Hori for harbouring an unmarried pregnant woman in his house, found himself in a precarious predicament. It came to light that Matadin, his son, was having illicit relations with a woman of the cobbler community who were untouchables. Yet the *panchayet* headed by Datadin 'the custodian of justice, held a council of war' (*Ibid* p. 95), war against the sinner Hori. But did the *panchayet* dare to touch or censor Matadin, Datadin's son? Or punish Jhenguri Singh, who was an old man of fifty with three wives and who carried on liaisons with other women? The whole village knew of it. Not only that, his third wife had affairs with other men. 'The Thakur believed in dealing with his wives with

an iron hand... But what happened behind his back... well, that's a different story.' (*Ibid*)

The *panchayet*, blind to the wrong-doings of its rich members, imposed a heavy fine on Hori to be paid in money and in kind. The money had to be raised by a loan from Pateshwari. The other payment consisted of almost the entire yield of wheat and peas (*dal*). Dhaniya was furious. 'Let them excommunicate us,' she cried, 'We can't starve.' But Hori was a God-fearing and law-abiding person. He paid all, almost emptying his barn and making heavier his already heavy debt.

Now Bhola appeared with his claim for the payment of the cow he had given to Hori. No matter that the cow was dead, no matter that Hori was in debt; what did he care? Bhola, in lieu of the cow, snatched away Hori's bullocks and departed. The cup of misery for Hori was full. A farmer without his bullocks, commented Premchand, was a person without his limbs.

Gobar in the meantime fled and after some minor adventures reached Lucknow. He found shelter in Mirza Khurshid's outhouse. He also procured a job in a nearby tea-stall.

Jhuniya in due time gave birth to a boy, which added to Hori's penury. He had to mortgage his house to raise a little money. At last he was reduced to the level of a day-labourer under the cruel and heartless Datadin.

At this juncture Gobar came back from the city. He was a changed man in new and shining clothes, swaggering with city-talk. He brought presents for each of the family. Everyone rejoiced. Hope dawned in their hearts, perhaps this was the end of their misery.

He then exposed Patesharı's trick of having received cash towards the taxes, but failing to issue a receipt. He also threatened the *panchayet* that he would take legal action against it on Hori's case. If Hori had been firm, Gobar's action could have been fruitful. Disgusted, Gobar left his home for Lucknow along with Jhuniya and the child.

Returning to Lucknow, Gobar found his post taken by another person. He joined the mill as a labourer. It was Rai Saheb's mill. He got ready cash, which induced him to take to drink. He neglected his family. His first-born died due to neglect. Now Jhuniya was expecting her second child, whom she delivered with the help of a kindly neighbour Chuniya. Chuniya also tided her over the initial difficulties since Gobar was in jail, having joined the strikers in the mill.

On return from jail, Gobar, Jhuniya and the second child went to live in Miss Malati's outhouse. He was employed as a gardener. Mr. Mehta, the professor, too came and stayed in the same house, as he had to vacate his own bungalow. The child became a great favourite with Mr. Mehta and Miss Malati.

In the village Semari there was a furore. Datadin's son Matadin had long been having relationship with one of the shoe-maker's daughters, Selia. Now Selia gave birth to a child. The cobblers dragged Datadin from his house and made him eat cow's flesh, causing the greatest insult to a Brahmin and the custodian of justice. But the

panchayet quietly closed its eyes to the whole issue, specially Datadin's son's transgression.

Hori in the meantime mortgaged his land, to raise the needed money for his daughter Sona's wedding. Sona was now seventeen. The marriage went off well. Sona's in-laws and husband were fairly well-to-do. They were farmers in another village. Selia, the cobbler's daughter, after polluting Datadin's son, turned her eyes on Sona's husband. But Sona had a caustic tongue like her mother. Selia had to beat a retreat.

Hori could not abandon his dream of possessing a cow. He took a job under a contractor building roads, so that with the money he earned he could buy a cow. He spent very little on himself and collected pice by pice all he could.

Rai Saheb, the landlord of the village, met a disastrous end. He had given his daughter in marriage to one Raja Saheb. The expenses were huge. He had to keep up appearances, and towards this end he borrowed heavily. The debt was huge. Eventually he lost his position in the council. Bankrupt, he lost all his land as well.

Hori, working in the road, got a sunstroke. He had been starving and famished. He became unconscious and had to be carried home on a stretcher. On the way, he became delirious. In his delirium he spoke of a cow.

Before they could reach Hori's house, Hori 'vomited again and his body went cold. Darkness swam before his eyes like a phantasmagoria, in disordered sequence... He found himself milking a celestial cow, giving milk to Mangal. Then the cow changed into a goddess.' (*Ibid.* p. 287)

This was the end of Hori. A critic might find the tale inconclusive, or might find that the tale had no moral such as we discovered in *Kanthapura*. But Premchand was not concerned with morals or poetical justice, he took life as he found it, as it presented itself to him, with all its irony, tragedy and ruthlessness. Life was inexorable, and cared nothing for the rich or the poor, the fortunate or the unfortunate, the Brahmin or the untouchable.

Premchand was a realist in the line of Hugo or Balzac; he did not possess the morbidity of Dostoevsky, or the poetical *finesse* of Tagore. Neither did he possess the ribald and often satirical humour which is to be found in Dickens.

The tragedy in *Godan* was the tragedy of Premchand himself, his dire struggle against poverty, his fight to uphold an ideal. Hori possessed certain moral codes of justice, which he never abandoned in the face of terrible wrongs, so too did Premchand in his real life. That is why *Godan* was such a living documentary of the Indian peasantry.

(To be continued)

ROMEN PALIT

EUROPE 1974

A TRAVELOGUE

(38)

IT WAS the day we were to return to the Continent. The first thing we did that morning, was to pack our suitcases. For we would not return from our last sight-seeing of London, before our luggage had to be packed nicely inside the hold of our coach.

"We start at six o'clock sharp, you all must be here by five-thirty": this was the advice given to us as we left the hotel.

After the day's excursion Sanat and I sat in a woodland munching snacks. We were exhausted but very happy. Sanat liked London immensely and I simply fell in love with the metropolis. We talked of the things we had seen, and the things that had to be left out for want of time. He described the places he thought I ought to have visited. The whole party had a wonderful time in London, for language was no bar and everyone had someone or other to show them round. So when we all sat down inside our coach silence fell upon us, there was no sound of talking or laughter. Everyone felt unhappy that the time of parting should come so soon. Our guide knew exactly how to play upon our moods and sentiments. As the coach accelerated, the tape recorder inside our coach sang:

How do I teach my hands not to shake,
My heart not to break,
My eyes not to cry,
When it is time to say goodbye?

I thought some people would start laughing. But I was surprised to find that they did nothing of the sort. Everyone was absorbed in their own thoughts and looking out of the window, trying to catch a last glimpse of the place where they had had such a wonderful time.

*

After about two hours' journey we came to Canterbury. The church looked different and magnificent on top of the hill. Floodlighting enhanced its beauty. Nothing very extraordinary happened on the boat. We crossed the English Channel peacefully and slept well. At the crack of dawn we anchored at Zee Bruge and started immediately for Paris. Our old driver greeted us warmly and as he turned south leaving our old road, I felt like singing.

With hound and horn each rosy morn
Let us Bucks-a-Hunting go,

And I'll sing Tally Ho, and I'll sing Tally Ho.

We passed the Franco-Belgian border without much ado, then stopped at a wayside Inn to have tea. As I stepped down, Sanat said with a smile, "This is France." "Oh, so we are standing on holy ground, for our Mother was born here," I thought. From then onwards I saw very little of what was going on around me. The country we passed through was part of the Great Plain of Europe and it was the granary of France, perforce on all sides there was nothing but emerald fields.

*

Our route lay very near Dunkirk, Ypres and Waterloo. Each of these names had a tremendous historical background and we became thoughtful. To the west lay Crecy which had seen the nadir of French power and glory, only to be raised to their zenith by Joan of Arc. By the Treaty of Troyes even the crown of France was to have passed on to the English King. The night is darkest before the dawn. At the right moment the Deliverer came. Patriotism was not wholly extinct in spite of the tremendous defeat and the war dragged on. Far to the south the city of Orléans lay in close siege. A young peasant girl with a sensitive soul heard voices which commanded her to undertake the work of delivering France. The imaginative and impulsive French responded to her call. Patriotism alone could not save the country, something else was needed. That something the strange deliverer provided: religious enthusiasm. Heaven's messenger kindled a flame that very few could resist. Dispirited French soldiers were inspired with a new courage. Joan of Arc forced the English to raise the siege of Orléans. She then conducted the Dauphin to Reims and crowned him Charles VII of France. However, this wonderful Ambassador of God fell into the hands of the English who burnt her as a heretic and a witch, at Rouen in 1431. The Deliverer did not live to see the fruits of her work. But soon the English had nothing on the Continent save Calais. The Mother was Joan of Arc, they say.

*

Suddenly in the golden light of the morning the Mother's face seemed to hover in front of me; first small then as immense as the sky, touching the far horizon. She looked so beautiful. I wondered why Maurice Magre had written only about the Mother's hands and fingers. Why did he not write something about her face? Perhaps he realised that it was not humanly possible to capture that glory. The Mother then looked exactly as I had seen her on our first meeting. Before that I had admired the Mother and Sri Aurobindo because Sanat admired them, that was all. That fateful morning standing casually in the queue I approached the Mother, unconsciously surveying her, her dress and veil and how she sat on the darshan seat. Suddenly she caught my eyes and forced me to look into her own. Two beautiful blue eyes seemed to

smile at me. I stood motionless. Forcefully she drew me into the Holy of Holies. I was amazed: What is it? I thought; a glow, a flicker, a warm pure flame, a golden presence that was at once the Mother and the Beloved, I was overwhelmed. I felt as if I were an intruder, as if I saw something I ought not to have seen, I felt I was too profane for that wonderful shrine. So many hours passed by and I sat there in the corner of the travel couch and dreamed of the Mother. The Mother will come again to carry on Sri Aurobindo's work, be born in some other clime than Paris this time, wear a different name. She will have other adorers or it may very well be that we who loved her so much shall come again to work with her. But Madame Mira Alfassa will never again walk on this too earthly earth of ours. I wept bitterly, sitting quietly. "We are nearing Paris," said Sanat, and I woke up from my dream.

(To be continued)

CHAUNDONA & SANAT K. BANERJI