

# MOTHER INDIA

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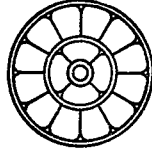
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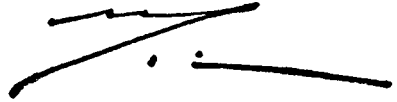


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Editor's Phone: 4782

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Editor: K. D. SETHNA

Managing Editor: K. R. PODDAR

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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXIV

No. 7

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."*

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# THE SPIRITUAL PATH

## THE MOTHER'S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

*Are there any signs which indicate that one is ready for the path, especially if one has no spiritual teacher?*

YES, the most important indication is a perfect equality of soul in all circumstances. It is an absolutely indispensable basis; something very quiet, calm, peaceful, the feeling of a great force. Not the quietness that comes from inertia but the sensation of a concentrated power which keeps you always steady, whatever happens, even in circumstances which may appear to you the most terrible in your life. That is the first sign.

A second sign: you feel completely imprisoned in your ordinary normal consciousness, as in something extremely hard, something suffocating and intolerable, as though you had to pierce a hole in a brass wall. And the torture becomes almost unbearable, it is stifling; there is an inner effort to break through and you cannot manage to break through. This also is one of the first signs. It means that your inner consciousness has reached a point where its outer mould is much too small for it—the mould of ordinary life, of ordinary activities, ordinary relations, all that becomes so small, so petty; you feel within you a force to break all that.

There is yet another sign: when you concentrate and have an aspiration, you feel something coming down into you, you receive an answer; you feel a light, a peace, a force coming down; and almost immediately—you need not wait or spend a very long time—nothing but an inner aspiration, a call, and the answer comes. This also means that the relation has been established.

\*

*When the consciousness feels imprisoned within its too narrow external mould, what should be done?*

You must particularly not be violent, for if you are violent, you will come out of it tired, exhausted, without any results. You must concentrate all the forces of aspiration. If you are conscious of the inner flame, you should put into this flame all that you find strongest in you by way of aspiration, of a call, and hold yourself as quiet as you can, calling, with a deep reliance that the answer will come; and when you are in this state, with your aspiration and concentrated force, with your inner flame, press gently upon this kind of outer crust, without violence, but with insistence, as long as you can, without getting agitated, irritated or excited. You must be perfectly quiet, must call and push.

It will not succeed the first time. You must begin again as many times as is

necessary, but suddenly, one day, you are on the other side! Then you emerge in an ocean of light.

If you fight, if you are restless, if you struggle, you will get nothing at all; and if you become irritable you will only get a headache, that is all.

Yes, it is that. To gather together all your power of aspiration, make of it something intensely concentrated, in an absolute tranquillity, to be conscious of your inner flame and throw into it all you can that it may burn ever higher and higher, and then call with your consciousness and, slowly, push. You are sure to succeed one day.

Mother reads a comment made by someone during her talk in 1929:

*“In the case of some persons who turn to the Divine it happens that every material prop or everything they are fond of is removed from their life. And if they love someone he also is taken away.”*

*Questions and Answers 1929 (14 April)*

We enter here into a big problem... The notion of what is good for a being and what isn't is not the same to his evolved consciousness as to the divine consciousness. What appears to you good, favourable, is not always what's best for you from a spiritual point of view. It is this which must be learnt from the beginning, that the divine perception of what will lead you fastest to the goal is absolutely different from yours, and that you cannot understand it. That is why you must say to yourself from the beginning, “It is all right. I shall accept everything and I shall understand later on.”

So often you come across persons who, before they began yoga, had a relatively easy life, and as soon as they come to yoga, all the circumstances to which they were particularly attached break away from them more or less brutally. Then they are troubled; they do not perhaps have the frankness to admit it to themselves, they perhaps take recourse to other thoughts and other words, but it comes to this: “How is it? I am good and I am not treated kindly!”

The entire human notion of justice is there. “You try to become good and what cataclysms befall you! All the things you loved are taken away from you, all the pleasures you have had are taken away from you, all the people whom you loved leave you; it is indeed not worth the trouble to be good and to have made an effort.” And if you follow your reasoning far enough, all of a sudden you come upon the canker—so, you wanted to do yoga out of self-interest, you wanted to be good out of self-interest, you thought your situation would be better and you would be given a bon-bon for your wisdom! And that does not happen!... Well, this refusal is the best lesson that could ever be given to you. For as long as your aspiration hides a desire and as long as in your heart there is the spirit of bargaining with the Divine, things will come and give you blows till you wake up to the true consciousness within you which makes no conditions, no bargains. That's all.

*Since the time I have been doing yoga I find that all my affairs are going better than before. So I conclude...*

Perhaps your aspiration was truly sincere and disinterested. In such a case, things must happen like that.

*If someone who has been bad and wicked, suddenly decides to change, does he immediately hear the small inner voice which warns every time one does something bad?*

Everything depends upon the form the reversal, the inner conversion has taken. If the change is sudden, yes, one can immediately become conscious of the small voice, but if it is gradual, the best effects will also be gradual. It depends absolutely on each case, one cannot tell. If a kind of tearing, an illumination takes place, then yes, one has immediately the inner indication. It can even be retrospective. That is, while thinking of certain past acts, one may get a clear vision of what one was, compared with what one now is. Besides, each time there is a true change in the being, each time one overcomes a fault, one has the clear vision of a whole set of things which seemed quite natural and which now pass across the screen like a dark spot; you see the origin, the causes and the effects. If you have a precise, exact memory and have for a certain length of time, say a period of ten years, made sincere efforts to transform yourself, to consecrate yourself more and more, and if you could recollect what you were before, you would say, "It is not possible, I was not like that!" And yet you were indeed like that. There is such a distance between what one was before, what seemed quite natural to you before and what seems to you natural now, that you cannot believe you are the same person. This is the surest indication that you have truly progressed.

*When can one say that one has truly entered the spiritual path?*

The first sign (it is not the same for everybody) but in a chronological order, I believe, is that everything else appears to you absolutely without importance. Your entire life, all your activities, all your movements continue, if circumstances so arrange things, but they all seem to you utterly unimportant, this is no longer the meaning of your existence. I believe this is the first sign.

There may be another; for example, the feeling that everything is different, of living differently, of a light in the mind which was not there before, of a peace in the heart which was not there before. That does make a change; but the positive change usually comes later, very rarely does it come at first except in a flash at the time of conversion when one has decided to take up the spiritual life. Sometimes, it begins like a great illumination, a deep joy enters into you; but generally, afterwards this goes into the background, for there are too many imperfections still persisting in you... It is not disgust, it is not contempt, but everything appears to you so uninter-

esting that it is truly not worth the trouble of attending to it. For instance, when you are in the midst of certain physical conditions, pleasant or unpleasant (the two extremes meet), you say to yourself, "It was so important to me, all that? But it has no importance at all!" You have the impression that you have truly turned over to the other side.

Some imagine that the sign of spiritual life is the capacity to sit in a corner and meditate! That is a very, very common idea. I do not want to be severe, but most people who make much of their capacity for meditation—I do not think they meditate even for one minute out of one hour. Those who meditate truly never speak about it; for them it is quite a natural thing. When it has become a natural thing, without any glory about it, you may begin to tell yourself that you are making progress. Those who talk about it and think that this gives them superiority over other human beings, you may be sure, are most of the time in a state of complete inertia.

It is very difficult to meditate. There are all kinds of meditations.... You may take an idea and follow it to arrive at a given result—this is an active meditation; people who want to solve a problem or to write, meditate in this way without knowing that they are meditating. Others sit down and try to concentrate on something without following an idea—simply to concentrate on a point in order to intensify one's power of concentration; and this brings about what usually happens when you concentrate upon a point: if you succeed in gathering your capacity for concentration sufficiently upon a point whether mental, vital or physical, at a given moment you pass through and enter into another consciousness. Others still try to drive out from their head all movements, ideas, reflexes, reactions and to arrive at a truly silent tranquillity. This is extremely difficult; there are people who have tried for twenty-five years and not succeeded, for it is somewhat like taking a bull by the horns.

There is another kind of meditation which consists in being as quiet as one can be but without trying to stop all thoughts, for there are thoughts which are purely mechanical and if you try to stop these you will need years, and into the bargain you will not be sure of the result; instead of that you gather together all your consciousness and remain as quiet and peaceful as possible, you detach yourself from external things as though they do not interest you at all, and all of a sudden, you brighten the flame of aspiration and throw into it everything that comes to you so that the flame may rise higher and higher, higher and higher; you identify yourself with it and you go up to the extreme point of your consciousness and aspiration, thinking of nothing else—simply, an aspiration which mounts, mounts, mounts, without thinking a minute of the result, of what may happen and specially of what may not, and above all without desiring that something may come—simply, the joy of an aspiration which mounts and mounts and mounts, intensifying itself more and more in a constant concentration. And there I may assure you that what happens is the best that can happen. That is, it is the maximum of your possibilities which is realised when you do this. These possibilities may be very different according to individuals. But then all these worries about trying to be silent, going behind appearances, calling a force which



answers, waiting for an answer to your questions, all that vanishes like an unreal vapour. And if you succeed in living consciously in this flame, in this column of mounting aspiration, you will see that even if you do not have an immediate result, after a time something will happen.

12 February 1951

*(Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 4, pp. 97-98, 100-105)*

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## SRI AUROBINDO

THE quiet vastness of mountain tops  
I see in Your beautiful Eyes, O Lord,  
Silences of purple-shadowed deep-wooded summits—  
An ancient peace sounds in my heart its chord,  
Unruffled mind, a consciousness detached,  
Yet for our pleas a love compassionate  
And help never denied—heart's ease descending  
From an unperturbed Gaze deciding our fate.

MINNIE N. CANTEENWALLA

# NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

## THE COMPLETE SET

(Continued from the issue of June 1982)

January 2, 1936

*R asks me to send you these medical reports.*

Reports no use unless the medical hieroglyphics are interpreted.

*Today P came for her eyes. All on a sudden she burst into sobs—God knows why!*

God doesn't.

P is a sort of weeping machine—touch a spring even unintentionally and it starts off.

January 3, 1936

*I am sending 4 reports—3 on urine and 1 on blood. The first ones will give you an idea of the progress of the disease up to the present stage of cure. You will see that blood-urea has come down to normal. Albumin—an abnormal product in the urine—is present indicating heart-failure in the absence of any kidney lesion. The presence of blood in the urine is due to the same reason. I hope, these 'hieroglyphics' are now as clear as water.*

I am afraid it is not so clear, though it is sufficiently watery. What I wanted to know was whether there had been such a miraculous change as Valle and the Pondicherry doctors seem to say and which were the medical facts on which they based their opinion—in other words whether the Force had really acted or not and, if so, to what extent—of course from the “pathological” point of view; for it is evident that the man is not dead and is in much better health than before. He had nephritis, blood-pressure, albumin and a number of other pleasant things whether as “symptoms” or as root-illnesses. I gather that these have gone practically. But I also gather or seem to from your remarks that G's appearance does not amount to much. But I am not clear about that. However, it is not of much importance.

*This year is said to be your brightest year according to the horoscope, Sir.*

Horoscope by whom? According to a famous Calcutta astrologer (I have forgotten

his name) my biggest time comes much later, though the immediately ensuing period is also remarkable. Like doctors, astrologers differ.

*But whatever miracle might happen, I don't see any chance for my caravan!*

Too many dogs of depression bark?

*What about B. P.'s work? Forgetfulness?*

Not forgetfulness; but these things are not always easy to arrange.

*January 4, 1936*

*A is suffering from chronic dysentery. Shall we give emetine injections?*

Mother does not favour emetine, it is not without its disadvantages, at least from our point of view.

*Please read C's letter regarding Mahendra Sircar's opinion on your philosophy. But I don't understand how an authority on your Yogic philosophy can compare your Yoga with Ramakrishna's!*

In a way he is, i.e., he is an authority on his own ideas about my Yogic philosophy. But from whom can you expect more than that?

*Yet he is considered an authority on your Yogic philosophy.*

Yes, but he is an authority on my philosophy, not on my Yoga. There is a difference.

*Why, Sir, reports not so clear? Judging from the pathological reports alone (3.1.36) the change is nothing short of a miracle.*

I am interested to see today that Valle pronounces "a perfect cure"—according to R, heart and pulse normal at 70 and 72, blood tension normal, oedema of feet, chill and headache gone, while kidney of interstitial nephritis of 8 years' standing cured, urinary symptoms normal, enough vitality to walk on verandah and attend business freely, solid food from tomorrow. He has asked R to look in now and again—perhaps to be sure that solid food does not upset him. But all the same this is more than I expected as yet though not more than I tried for—for one should always, in these things, have moderate expectations but a big endeavour. I don't overlook the possibility of a fall back or sudden catastrophe by a reverse movement; but if he can stand normal diet and not go to excess again, he may live longer than was at all probable on

any rational forecast before. Let us see.

*But there is chronic heart-failure, and a chronic high blood-pressure has altered the condition of the vessels so that a normal healthy life is impossible.*

That is not impossible to alter. It is doubtful because G is not a favourable subject and sheer matter (this is a very material degeneration) is not yet conquered. But all the same I have myself been surprised by the massive rapidity and scrupulous exactness (an unusual combination) of G's responses in this rather extravagant experiment. It is why I gave much of the credit to R's mediumship and the rapid action (that I find undeniable) of his drugs.

*Too many dogs of depression, Sir, too many! And not only dogs, but cats and jackals and a host of other friends have made my life a misery!*

Why are you so fond of this menagerie as to keep it with you? Turn them out into the street. Or, if that is not charitable to others, drown them in the sea. Don't shake your sorrowful head and say it is easier to say than to do. It is quite possible. It is only the Man of Sorrows that prevents it.

*January 5, 1936*

*I had a look at J's rashes and eczema with your questionnaire on it. Since our treatment is only symptomatic I wonder if we can try R.*

I am not very enthusiastic about this idea. R demands an implicit obedience from his patients which J would not give—and they would certainly clash very soon. There are other reasons also.

*When a medicine is a specific, it is scientifically supposed to be active on one particular disease and therefore quite successful; for instance emetine in dysentery and quinine in malaria. But you don't give your approval even though these medicines are specific in these particular diseases.*

It is not enough for a medicine to be a specific. Certain drugs have other effects or possible effects which can be ignored by the physician who only wants to cure his case, but cannot be in a whole-view of the system and its reactions. The unfavourable reactions of quinine are admitted by medical opinion itself and doctors in Europe have been long searching for a substitute for quinine.

*X complains of vomiting, giddiness etc. I'm afraid these three Panjabi brothers and sister are rather—I mean physically—*

Very bad health, all of them. The stalwart Panjabi is not much in evidence. One of the type who came could not progress. Another was tall but thin and ill. These—

*I send a poem retouched by Nishukanta. Do put a few of your comments against the lines or expressions which are not quite right.*

That is beyond me. I can only give my personal impression which amounts to "I like it exceedingly well."

January 6, 1936

*Henceforth I shall send you two note-books: one exclusively for medical reports and the other for personal matters.*

Yes, this will be very good.

*I hope this innovation won't be a burden to you—I won't report about small cuts and bruises, of course.*

No burden at all.

*There has often been a discussion and hence a difference of opinion on the relative greatness of different branches of Art. Some of us are disposed to think of music as the highest; poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, embroidery following thus in order of merit. Though one may not agree to such a classification, still because of the universality and most direct appeal of music cannot one give it preference? Poetry is rather limited in its scope and painting even more so. They have to be understood in order to be appreciated in their fullest measure whereas music, apart from the technical aspect which is not absolutely obligatory for an appeal, need not. You know of the stories of beasts and snakes being charmed, not to speak of the hard-headed Yamaraja, by music! Take your Love and Death as an example of poetic excellence. I am afraid people would throng round a piece of music sung by one of the renowned singers, more than round the recital of your poem. Yes, you may have the satisfaction of having an audience of intellectuals and then it will prove my contention that poetry has a limited appeal. Now about painting. I hear quite a number of people have lost their heads over Mona Lisa, even over a copy of it, but I have come away quite sound and strong without even being touched in the heart and I am sure many others have done so. This substantiates again my theory that painting is restricted in its scope. But will you turn the tables by this very fact of the restricted scope and difficult technique of painting and poetry and frame the order: Painting, Poetry, Music and so on. Is there really a hierarchy of planes in the Occult?*

I fear I must disappoint you. I am *not* going to pass the Gods through a competitive examination and assign a highest place to one and lower places to others. What an idea! Each has his or her own province on the summits and what is the necessity of putting them in rivalry with the others? It is a sort of Judgment of Paris you want to impose on me? Well, but what became of Paris and Troy? You want me to give the crown or the apple to Music and enrage the Goddesses of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Embroidery, all the Nine Muses, so that they will kick at our publications and exhibitions and troop off to other places? We shall have to build in the future—what then shall we do if the Goddess of Architecture turns severely and says, “I am an inferior Power, am I? Go and ask your Nirod to build your house with his beloved music!”

Your test of precedence—universal appeal—is all wrong. I don’t know that it is true, in the first place. Some kind of sound called music appeals to everybody, but has really great music a universal appeal? And, speaking of arts, more people go to the theatre or read fiction than go to the opera or a concert. What becomes then of the superior universality of music, even in the cheapest sense of universality? Rudyard Kipling’s *Barrack Room Ballads* exercises a more universal appeal than was ever reached by Milton or Keats—we will say nothing of writers like Blake or Francis Thompson; a band on the pier at a seaside resort will please more people than a great piece of music with the orchestration conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. In a world of gods it might be true that the highest makes the most universal appeal, but here in a world of beasts and men (you bring in the beasts—why not play to Bushy<sup>1</sup> and try how she responds?) it is usually the inferior things that have the more general if not quite universal appeal. On the other hand the opposite system you suggest (the tables turned upside down—the least universal and the most difficult appeal makes the greatest art) would also have its dangers. At that rate we should have to concede that the cubist and abstract painters had reached the highest art possible, only rivalled by the uptodate modernist poets of whom it has been said that their works are not at all either read or understood by the public, are read and understood only by the poet himself and are read without being understood by his personal friends and admirers.

When you speak of direct appeal, you are perhaps touching something true. Technique does not come in—for although to have a complete and expert judgment or appreciation you must know the technique not only in music and painting where it is more difficult, but in poetry and architecture also, it is something else and not that kind of judgment of which you are speaking. It is perhaps true that music goes direct to the intuition and feeling with the least necessity for the use of the thinking mind with its strongly limiting conceptions as a self-imposed middleman, while painting and sculpture do need it and poetry still more. At that rate music would come first, architecture next, then sculpture and painting, poetry last. I am aware

<sup>1</sup> An Ashram cat (Editor).

that Housman posits nonsense as the essence of pure poetry and considers its appeal to be quite direct—not to the soul but to somewhere about the stomach. But then there is hardly any pure poetry in this world and the little there is is still *mélangé* with at least a homeopathic dose of intellectual meaning. But again if I admit this thesis of excellence by directness, I shall be getting myself into dangerous waters. For modern painting has become either cubist or abstract and it claims to have got rid of mental representation and established in art the very method of music; it paints not the object, but the truth behind the object—by the use of pure line and colour and geometrical form which is the basis of all forms or else by figures that are not representations but significances. For instance a modern painter wishing to make a portrait of you will paint at the top a clock surrounded by three triangles, below them a chaos of rhomboids and at the bottom two table castors to represent your feet and he will put in underneath this powerful design, “Portrait of Nirod”. Perhaps your soul will leap up in answer to its direct appeal and recognise at once the truth behind the object, behind your vanished physical self,—you will greet your psychic being or your Atman or at least your inner physical or vital being. Perhaps also you won't. Poetry also seems to be striving towards the same end by the same means—the getting away from mind into the depths of life or, as the profane might put it, arriving at truth and beauty through ugliness and unintelligibility. From that you will perhaps deduce that the attempt of painting and poetry to do what music alone can do easily and directly without these acrobatics is futile because it is contrary to their nature—which proves your thesis that music is the highest art because most direct in its appeal to the soul and the feelings. Maybe—or maybe not; as the Jains put it, *syâd vâ na syâd vâ*.

I have written so much, you will see, in order to say nothing—or at least to avoid your attempt at putting me in an embarrassing dilemma.

Q.E.F.

N.B. This is *my* answer not the Mother's.

(*To be continued*)

# AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

RECOLLECTIONS BY SAHANA

*(Continued from the issue of June 1982)*

MYSELF: I am so contented when I feel that I am nothing more than an instrument.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is very good that all has come back so strongly. It is the full surrender of the vital. 19-4-33

MYSELF: I am quite happy and cheerful, the ananda and the sense of beautiful love and deep devotion is there. Only I hope today my talking too much did not do any harm.

SRI AUROBINDO: If it is only occasional, it ought not to have any effect.

23-4-33

MYSELF: Mother, the peculiar thing is this that I can understand the whole thing so well, so clearly, but if I just pay a little attention to the feelings of sentiment, all other things surge up with it; one has to be so careful all the time!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is just what you have not to do. Fling it back decisively and briefly and do not let your mind dwell in this idea. Keep the gate shut on these hostile forces and their suggestions. 26-4-33

MYSELF: I am very well in most respects by your Grace, only a pull is there of the old habit of inquisitiveness and curiosity of the physical mind. I was able to separate myself from this movement (of habit) as something which was passing through me, and I was simply looking at it without paying any attention, but the pull of which I have written drew my attention in that direction. I was calling you calmly and refused quietly to pay any attention. Mother, I am writing to you only to let you know about the pull so that it may not do any mischief. It was like this: a small part of me was feeling this pull to turn and look at what was going on—and all the other parts saw this quite clearly. I felt it was not I but a part of me and even that was also not quite connected as there was a sense of separateness, I felt detached.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is by separateness that the elimination becomes possible.

5-5-33

MYSELF: Mother, will you please explain to me what you mean by your Mahakali method? Why don't you use this method with everybody?

SRI AUROBINDO: All these things depend on the person, the condition, the circumstances. The Mother uses the method you speak of, the Mahakali method,



(1) with those in whom there is a great eagerness to progress and a fundamental sincerity somewhere even in the vital, (2) with those whom she meets intimately and who she knows will not resent or misunderstand her severity or take it for a withdrawal of kindness or grace but will regard it as a true grace and help to their sadhana. There are others who cannot bear this method—if it was continued they would run a thousand miles away in misunderstanding and revolt and despair. What the Mother wants is for people to have their full chance for their soul, be the method short and swift or long and tortuous. Each she must treat according to his nature.

9.5.33

MYSELF: When I have done something wrong I suffer from it and I torture myself.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a certain excess and exaggeration somewhere in your vital. A greater constant calm and control in your vital—the whole of it—is necessary. For these movements do not help—they prevent a quick recovery and shake the nerves and the body and push to unreasonable action.

20.5.33

MYSELF: I understand well that unless I can be free from the ego, there is no deliverance for me. Yet this ego doesn't seem to budge at all. Then I doubt if I would be able to continue my sadhana. The thought of going away also often comes to the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the same irrational tendency in the vital—pushed by a strong ego-feeling. It is through that the adverse force acts and the impulse towards going away is one of the favourite suggestions of this force with the purpose of breaking the yoga.

MYSELF: When one wants to wipe out the past and build up one's future with you as the guide, why then should there be so much attachment for the fallen remnants of the past? Should the memory always be in bondage even after understanding all this?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is because the old habitual ways of thinking and feeling have still roots in the physical mind and vital and subconscious; you have either to root them out or to work them out.

25.5.33

MYSELF: Mother, I feel so happy to be alone. Have you permitted this, because I wanted it? Or because you thought it to be necessary for me? If it was a mistake on my part or if I have taken a wrong path to isolate myself in this way, then I will do gladly whatever you want me to do.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is best for your sadhana to be apart.

2.6.33

*(To be continued)*

(Sahana's letters translated by Nirodbaran from the Bengali)

# THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

*(Continued from the issue of June 1982)*

## The Mother's Message

This is the  
interesting story of  
how a being discovers  
the Divine Life



12

DURING the month of May, I showed the Mother the idol of Maheshwari, which she admired. I also took with me a small image of Vishnu. I had two images of Vishnu—one small and one big, but there was no idol of Mahakali. I told the Mother about this and she said with a laugh:

“Why, but we shall transform Vishnu into Mahakali! You can give Kali’s clothes to this idol and everything will be all right.”

Once again she laughed heartily. Her laughter still rings in my ears like the rippling sound of a rivulet.

The morning of the next day the Mother sent me a card showing her own sketch of the flower Hibiscus along with these lines:

“To my dear little child,  
 “To my sweet Huta  
 “Here is the promised Java flower which you can use as a model.  
 “Naturally you will have to do them quite small.  
 “My love and blessings are always with you.”

This was the first of the sketches she sent to me.

Now for transforming Vishnu into Mahakali! According to her instructions, I made a tiny garland for Mahakali, of the red Java flower (Hibiscus, “Power”), made of red crêpe paper. I also made a golden dress and a petticoat of gold brocade. I stitched tiny gold jingle bells around its hem. While decorating the idol with a crown, some ornaments and clothes, I was much amused to see the striking transformation. I wondered what Vishnu and Mahakali must have felt and I laughed to myself.... This work really raised my consciousness and I longed increasingly for the Divine and I wrote to the Mother about it.

She sent me a fine card depicting the flowers of the Gul Mohur and these lines followed:

“I have read your excellent and loving letter, and send you these flowers of ‘realisation’ with the assurance that I shall lead you to your goal and that all of your aspiration will be fulfilled.

“My love, my blessings and my help will never leave you, even for a second.”

I was lost in my work and to encourage me she sent a card saying:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my very sweet Huta who does work with so much taste and skill.

“I keep you in my arms with all my love and force and my blessings are always with you.”

On the other side of the same card there was one of her quotations:

“To work for the Divine is to pray with the body.”

My work absorbed me so much that I just could not get time to write a letter even to my brother. But now I thought that I should write in spite of the late hour of night:

Respected brother Laljibhai,

Greetings along with the Mother's blessings.

I have received your letter and got all the news. Do write to me often. On the very day I heard from you I went to see the Mother as usual in the evening. So I had a talk with her about your letter. I informed her that as soon as the licence for the Sugar Mill would be confirmed you would come here and that you had discussed the matter with our father and brothers. I gave your heartiest greeting to the Mother. She got up from her couch, opened a drawer of her cupboard and gave a blessing packet for you. I am enclosing it.

At the moment I have no letter from our mother. I hope you have written to her. I trust all of you are well. I am fine, and day by day experience the Mother's Grace, compassion and love increasingly.

The swimming costume you will be sending is very welcome. I have written to my sister-in-law to send a paint-box and some personal things of mine at the convenience of all of you or else please bring them along with you when you come. This would be best. But do whatever you find suitable.

There is no particular news to give from here.

All of you are very much in my thoughts. I do understand that now I should abandon all attachments but I cannot help remembering my dear ones. Family relationship is always such. But gradually I should get over it.

There should be in my life, in my consciousness, nothing but the Divine; then and then only shall I be able to progress and attain my goal.

The Mother is aware of my difficulties in getting free from these attachments. I also told her about them. Her working in me is constant and at the end there will be a victory.

I know within me that neither do I ever leave the Mother nor does she leave me, because every day in the morning I receive a bouquet of white roses and her letter in which she reveals wonderful unfathomable things.

I have written much. Now you all will be coming here. How nice!

Please remember me to all there and give my fond love to the kids.

Our Divine Mother has asked me to convey to you her blessings.

With warm regards,

Huta

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To attain the peak of perfection in order to find the Divine was a most difficult task. I asked myself how many more dangerous bridges there were to cross, how many more setbacks, mishaps and disappointments to be experienced. An icy

shiver ran up my spine. I was quite aware of my imperfections but, deep within, I aspired to reach the Truth no matter what happened to me.

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

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

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

“With my love and blessings.”

She did not fail to encourage me:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my very sweet Huta who is fast advancing towards her goal of perfect union with the Divine.”

Her assurance and constant support kept me going. I was all too conscious of the weaknesses of my outer being—its conflicts and strifes. I knew there had to be a total change of my nature which was strongly rooted in the subconscious and resolutely resisted any conversion. I also knew that the nether forces would stop at nothing to gain their ends.

To comfort me, the Mother sent a card showing delicate pink flowers, Oleanders, with these words:

“These flowers meaning ‘sweetness’ seem to represent you very nicely. I am sending them to you with all my love.

“The force, help and blessings are always with you.”

One day, quite unexpectedly, a gift of books came from the Mother. They were: *Bases of Yoga, Elements of Yoga, Lights on Yoga, More Lights on Yoga, The Mother*, and so on. It was evident that she wished me to read them all.

About this time I too had the feeling that I should read the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in order to understand their teachings but I found them very hard to grasp. So I left off reading the English books, but the Gujarati translations too were almost the same. Sometimes I read Gujarati novels—especially when I was out of sorts—just to take my mind off things.

I went to the Mother in the evening as usual and thanked her for the books. I also told her of my general light reading, expressed my difficulties with serious matter and asked her what I should do.

While she took my hands in her own warm clasp, her glowing eyes were smiling as she said:

“Child, first of all you must stop reading the Gujarati novels and must read Sri Aurobindo’s books and mine. Try to read a sentence or two and concentrate on them and then go to sleep. You will surely get a response from the reading and will feel that you are in the Divine’s arms. Then you will get a pleasant and peaceful sleep at night.

“In sleep itself there can be a growth in the cells of the brain, and not merely while you think actively.

“If you read spiritual books and then sleep, then I can start working upon the cells of your brain and after some time you will surely understand, easily and clearly and by yourself, the books which you have read before.”

I asked the Mother, “How do you work upon the cells of the brain?” A sweet smile touched her lips and she replied:

“Indeed, I go to everybody at night in my subtle body, whether they are conscious or unconscious of my Presence. I put my Force on them. Certainly there is an effect, but if they are conscious of my Presence and Force, naturally they find more joy.”

I wondered in what state she must be seeing us while we were fast asleep! Much later, I came to know that when the Mother spoke to a sadhak about her going to him during his sleep, he asked her what she had observed. She answered: “You were snoring away!”

The Mother has explained nicely in her letter to somebody who had put the question: “How should one read the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?” Her answer ran:

“The true method is to read a little at a time, with concentration, then keep the mind as silent as possible, without trying actively to understand but turned upward in silence and aspiring to the Light. The understanding will come little by little.

“And later, in a year or two, you will read the same thing and then you will know that the first contact was vague and incomplete and that the true understanding comes later on when you have tried to put it into practice.”

I cannot resist quoting a humorous episodé about the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s books.

In those early days of the year 1955 I used to go to the house of Mrs. C. T. Shah who had come to settle here from Africa (Uganda). She was very kind to me.

We often went to the Playground together. Once on our way we met a lady of rather ample proportions. It was a sight to watch her in shirt and shorts for the

marching in the Playground. She had been in the Ashram for many years. She said "Hello" to us. Mrs. Shah asked her what she had been doing of late. She said: "Oh, nothing in particular. But now I am trying to read the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He and she always insist on opening oneself to their Force. They say: 'Open your heart to the divine Light.' But, unhappily, I do not know how to open myself. I racked my brain without result. What should I do? How to do it? Sometimes I think of just opening the buttons of my blouse in front of the Mother and saying to her: 'Here, I have opened myself!' "

I laughed at the way the Integral Yoga could be understood.

It was while I was still with the Mother after expressing my gratitude for the books, that I had countless defeatist thoughts. Suppose I failed to understand the books she had given me! If I could not understand the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's teachings, how could I ever attain my goal? I did not know how to meditate, how to quiet my mind, how to stop thinking and worrying, in order to achieve the divine peace. I told her what was racing through my mind and she regarded me with compassionate eyes, as she answered in a grave voice:

"My child, suppose there is a house, and in that house there are sweetness, light and peace—but it is surrounded by falsehood. Now, if you step out of the house and close the door, you will find yourself unprotected in the midst of bad vibrations which will enter your heart and upset everything. There are various kinds of vibrations of the lower forces.

"To save yourself from the adverse forces you should do this: at once you must step back and re-enter your house—the heart—so that none can touch and trouble your true self. After entering the house you must keep quiet and call the Divine. Then you will certainly have an experience of the Divine's Love and Sweetness. You will feel that the Lord has now taken you into His arms. Thus you will have the happiest moments of your life. This is one of the ways. If you follow it, you will not have to bother about the lower forces. Here there is no need of concentration, which takes time. But this is a good experiment—it is not the work of the brain, it is not an intellectual effort either. If you go within your heart, you can get everything, because everything is there. You will not feel lonely; you will feel always the Divine's Presence.

"If there are no useless and lower elements in you, you can feel the Divine's Light and Presence. Of course, it takes time to get the Supreme Truth. But first of all comes peace, then light and finally the strength. Only in peace can you realise everything. Do you know, Sri Aurobindo too has written the same."

She embraced me warmly and I quietly withdrew from her room.

That night I felt as if my whole being was electrified by strange vibrations. They gave me the feeling of drowning—going down, down into a deep, hitherto unexplored well of unknown things such as I had never imagined. It was a clear indica-

tion that sooner or later I would be compelled to go on some dreadful expedition in spiritual life. I was conscious of cold pricks of fear all over me. I was really ashamed of my own weakness. But I could not help it. I drifted between wakefulness and sleep and nothing was clear.

The next morning, in answer to a letter of the previous evening the Mother wrote:

“I am here all right and not hiding myself—it is the children who are too blind and unconscious to see. They must open their true eyes and then they will see—they must wake up to the true consciousness and then they will understand.

“With my love and blessings.”

I came across this passage written by Sri Aurobindo in the *Bulletin*, August, 1967, p. 83:

“It is not by your mind that you can hope to understand the Divine and its action, but by the growth of a true and divine consciousness within you. If the Divine were to unveil and reveal itself in all its glory, the mind might feel a presence, but it would not understand its action or its nature. It is in the measure of your own realisation and by the birth and growth of that greater consciousness in yourself that you will see the Divine and understand its action even behind its terrestrial disguises.”

Yes, indeed, I had asked the Mother why she hid her real Self, the Supreme, from her children.... This question rose in me because now I was reading Sri Aurobindo's book, *The Mother*.

Later that morning I went to the Mother to show her the idol, Mahakali. She appreciated the work. I also took Mahasaraswati to her and she asked me to dress her in red and white. Then I looked at her, trying to find her real Self! She looked at me with loving, laughing eyes. She knew exactly what puzzled me! Suddenly she folded me in her arms and lightly kissed me on the forehead, and for a while I nestled in her soft embrace. Lastly she gave me an exquisite smile which the Supreme alone can give.

As usual I left the decorated Mahakali in the stores and went to Golconde, and at midday the Mother sent me some *prasad*. While having lunch, I wondered how I should decorate Mahasaraswati. I also pictured the Mother to myself—how she had smiled, how she had been impressed by the image of Mahakali and how her expression had changed on seeing it. I was still brooding meditatively like this when I went to take my nap.

While asleep, I felt that somebody was knocking at my door but I did not pay any attention. Once again I heard the steady knock. I was much annoyed because I was feeling terribly sleepy, but I was forced to get up in my subtle body to open the door. Then my heart missed a beat. Mahakali was standing there, grand, glorious, grace-



ful, luminous and smiling, wearing the same golden dress that I had made. I asked myself instantly, "Is She really there?" With sheer amazement and a cry of joy, I at once embraced her and called to her loudly, "O my beloved Mother..." I felt her living Presence, but soon she disappeared from my clasp. I was completely shaken by this unforgettable experience. At once I opened my eyes. I was in my bed with my arms outstretched.

In the evening I went to the Mother and related my vision to her. Her beautiful eyes were twinkling as she said:

"Yes, my child, I came to you this afternoon."

I gasped, and then caught her hands and asked, "O Mother, but then why did you go away so soon? What was the hurry? Why didn't you talk with me? You did not even give me enough time to behold your heavenly matchless Beauty." My eyes were swimming with tears.

The Mother laughed softly, her eyes sparkled with joy and amusement. She drew me close to her and kissed my cheeks and gently started stroking my hair without uttering a single word. I felt strongly that she was deeply moved by my feelings. Ah! secretly, I had always loved Mahakali much more than the other Powers of the Supreme Mother. Sri Aurobindo has given a perfect description of her in *The Mother*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 25, pp. 28-29:

"... There is in her an overwhelming intensity, a mighty passion of force to achieve, a divine violence rushing to shatter every limit and obstacle. All her divinity leaps out in a splendour of tempestuous action; she is there for swiftness, for the immediately effective process, the rapid and direct stroke, the frontal assault that carries everything before it. Terrible is her face to the Asura, dangerous and ruthless her mood against the haters of the Divine; for she is the Warrior of the Worlds who never shrinks from the battle. Intolerant of imperfection, she deals roughly with all in man that is unwilling and she is severe to all that is obstinately ignorant and obscure; her wrath is immediate and dire against treachery and falsehood and malignity; ill-will is smitten at once by her scourge. Indifference, negligence and sloth in the divine work she cannot bear and she smites awake at once with sharp pain, if need be, the untimely slumberer and the loiterer. The impulses that are swift and straight and frank, the movements that are unreserved and absolute, the aspiration that mounts in flame are the motion of Mahakali..."

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written enormously about this powerful aspect of the Divine Shakti. But I would like to quote a brief statement by Sri Aurobindo about Mahakali and Kali:

“Mahakali and Kali are not the same. Kali is a lesser form. Mahakali in the higher planes appears usually with the golden colour.”

But in his *Thoughts and Aphorisms* Sri Aurobindo uses “Kali” for a supreme Power. The Mother has declared beautifully in her Cent. Ed. Vol. 10, p. 85, about this Kali:

“It is good and necessary to possess all the divine qualities that these gods represent and symbolise; that is why Sri Aurobindo invokes them and asks them to take the possession of his nature. But for one who wants union with the Supreme, for one who aspires for the supreme Realisation, this cannot be sufficient. This is why at the end he calls upon Kali to give him the power to go beyond them all.

“For Kali is the most powerful aspect of the universal Mother and her power is greater than that of all the gods in her creation. To unite with her means therefore to become more vast, more complete, more powerful than all the gods together and that is why Sri Aurobindo places union with her above and beyond all the others.”

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The Mother sent me a lovely card showing a painting of a creeper with orange-coloured flowers and these lines written on it:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my very sweet Huta who is climbing towards the Divine Consciousness—as this pretty creeper—around my love and strength and help that are serving as support. With my blessings.”

I plunged once again into my work. I wanted to have a snow-white swan made of papier mâché as Mahasaraswati’s throne and also a tiny sitar for her to hold in her hand. I ran to and fro from Golconde to the Cottage Industries to get all the things done for the idols. I forgot the dreadful heat—I forgot everything while doing this work which I really loved.

The Mother knew of all my movements and she wrote:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta who is doing such lovely things for me.

“With all my love, help and blessings I am constantly with you.”

She never failed to show her appreciation of even the smallest thing.

Later that evening, before I went to the Mother, I felt a sickening sensation of deep unease and despondency. A terrible anxiety was pressing down upon me. I said to her without any hesitation:

“Mother, I do not feel like doing this Yoga—it is too tough, and you know very well how ignorant I am about the Divine Life and there seems no end to the difficulties, obscurities and obstructions. In this condition how can I find the Divine and unite with Him? Everything seems to me dubious and...” The rest of my sentence died on my lips as I looked up into those piercing blue-grey eyes—so deep were they, and unfathomable.

She raised her eyebrows and said with wide-open eyes:

“Child! what are you saying? Are you feeling all right? Now look here, when you have chosen to do Yoga you have to go through with it. You have also to collaborate with the Divine and open fully to the Divine Light and Force.”

She remained silent for a moment or two with her eyes half-closed, and then continued:

“If people have no need of the Divine, then of course I have no connection with them—they do whatever they like. But those who seek the Divine must not have any self-will against the Divine’s Will. Also there must not be any lower elements—ill-will and a bad nature—in them. They should give themselves fully to the Divine alone.”

I stared at her for a second in shocked silence, because I knew too well that I could not live without the Divine. The Mother patted my hand which was in hers and said affectionately:

“My child, leave everything to me and I will do the sadhana for you, and take you to your goal.”

My spirits revived momentarily, only to sink again because I felt that to surmount the lower elements which were strongly influenced by the evil forces was too much for me. But now the die was cast. I knew within me that I had to go through with this life.... The Mother had said correctly in one of her talks, published in the *Bulletin*, November 1956, pp. 83-87.

“...To do Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga means to ask for an integral transformation, to have one single aim in life so that nothing else exists except that....

“...For it is not an easy path. Time is needed, patience is needed, much endurance and much perseverance and courage and indefatigable goodwill. If you feel capable of having those qualities, start on the way. But once you have started, it is finished, you do not fall back, you must go to the end. That is why one must take a resolution knowing fully what one is doing.

“As soon as you have set your feet on the path, everything changes within you. Outwardly the conditions remain similar to those of others, but within there

is a great difference: a consciousness is there that works constantly to correct your position, places in the light the obstacles that impede or stop your progress, causes you to get, so to say, a knock on your nose against your own error and blindness. There is a kind of absoluteness in the consciousness which does not allow you to deviate from the path.

“But it is so only for those who have decided to do Yoga....

“...Yoga is not a joke; when you choose it you must know what you do. Once you have chosen it, you must stick to it. You have no right to waver, you must go through....”

I wondered whether the Mother would do sadhana for me! Sri Aurobindo has written aptly in Cent. Ed., Vol. 25, p. 219:

“Naturally, the Mother does the Sadhana in each Sadhak—only it is conditioned by their zeal and their receptivity.”

The next morning, I received a card of a blue painted peacock, and these words below the picture, dealing with the state of mind which is obstructive to Yoga:

“My dear little child, do not fear—it is fear that helps that thing to come. Do not doubt—it is doubt that helps it to come. Do not expect it in any way—it is expectation that helps it to come.

“Concentrate only on me and on the certitude of the coming victory—it is the most powerful weapon to chase it for ever.

“Keep courage and faith—I am with you.

“With my love and blessings.”

*(To be continued)*

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## TWO CLARIFICATIONS

### ANSWERS TO READERS' QUESTIONS

#### I

#### On the Agenda and the Divine Will

I CAN see that although you do not favour Satprem for a moment you are genuinely puzzled at the turn that things have taken in relation to the *Agenda*. Your puzzlement may be summed up as follows: "How is it that the Divine Mother who, by definition, must be both omniscient and omnipotent, has allowed the *Agenda* to be got hold of entirely by Satprem in spite of her telling her son André that in case of publication it should be edited by him—without necessarily meaning utter exclusion of Satprem as collaborator? No matter if the Divine Mother has left her body she cannot cease having all-knowledge and all-power: why then did she not prevent its being published wrongly? Could not her Will have even destroyed by some means the very original if she had wanted? Is it possible that she has changed her once-expressed intention?"

Just because the intention the Divine Mother had once expressed has not been fulfilled you need not suppose she has changed it. Such a philosophy would be too facile. You forget that she undertook her world-work under certain conditions of the universe as it has been and still is—conditions of a difficult and long-drawn-out evolutionary process in which anti-divine no less than undivine forces have play and, because of the Inconscience and the Ignorance that are part and parcel of this process, get the chance of impeding the Divine Mother's work. If it were not so, all could be achieved by a miraculous wave of the wand by her and there would be no need for slow laborious sadhana and no call for what we have termed "the sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo" or for the Divine Mother to suffer as she did.

Doubtless, the action of a superhuman will goes on behind the scenes and there are even direct luminous interventions at times but not everything that we consider as deserving to be done is carried out by it or even regarded as possible to carry out. The universe being what it is, many wrong turns can occur and we have to fight them as best we can with aspiration in our minds and devotion in our hearts. Just because something occurs in a certain way, we are not justified in thinking that this way is divinely ordained.

Of course, we have to believe—with Hamlet—that

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we may.

The Supreme has an over-all action and guides the world's evolution subtly, secretly,

on the whole, but in details a host of undivine and anti-divine movements can take place in an evolution that starts from the Inconscience and proceeds through the Ignorance towards the Knowledge. There are thoughts to be rejected, words to be averted, deeds to be countered. Invoking the Divine Mother's help we have to go forward to the best of our lights and take our share in the inner and outer battle. We may commit mistakes, but that does not imply that we should never dare to correct anything but must accept everything as being perfectly in order and requiring no opposition from us. The easy argument, that Satprem could not have ignored the Divine Mother's wish unless she herself had been helping him, is a specious one. If it is right, why do you not equally argue that unless she herself were helping us we could not oppose him? According to this argument whatever happens has automatically her support and assistance. In that case we would end with visioning a chaos of conflicting activities, all of them right at the same time. The element of discrimination and choice, on which the Divine Mother has always insisted, would lose all significance. Her appeal to us to do Yoga, which constantly involves that element, would be meaningless.

I know that from a certain standpoint she can be seen as doing everything—and indeed if we pray to her to reveal her hand in all that is unfortunate and tragic and disastrous in our lives we shall get the touch of her Grace and move more and more out of darkness towards her light and feel the worst circumstances aiding the progress of our souls. But even to pray thus to her and gain the benefit of her hidden hand we have to discriminate and choose, encourage faith and aspiration, set aside the cry of despair rising from our all-too-human hearts. Mere fatalism or a blind acquiescence in the formula “Whatever is, is right” should not be the result of the standpoint which I have spoken of. The true result should be a deep equanimity, a freedom from hatred and malice, a calm self-dedicated dynamism—the state of consciousness in which Sri Krishna commanded Arjuna to make a crucial choice and to fight. Let me, however, add that a self-righteous frame of mind in which we grow fanatical and intolerant and exclusivist is not a movement towards a general “Krishna-consciousness” for any fight, but a drive towards a species of Spanish Inquisition or of a Herrenvolk Hitlerism.

What you say at the end of your letter is to my mind correct: “Satprem's *Agenda* minus Satprem (the Mother's temporary private references, the editor's personal footnotes, etc.) would be quite all right.” Perhaps in relation to “minus” I should draw a distinction between the Divine Mother's Satprem and Satprem's own Satprem. She disclosed a great deal to the former and expected him to live up to her will and wish. What a pity that the latter has got so badly mixed up with the “True love” or “Truth-love” that is the real self his spiritually given name was intended to evoke and bring forward!

23.4.1982

### On the El Chinchonal Eruption and the Supramental Future

What Sri Aurobindo has said about India's Independence on 15 August—that the date being the same as of his birthday is not a mere coincidence nor a fortuitous accident but the seal and sanction of the Divine Force that guided his steps in the work with which he began life—this statement cannot be generalised to mean that whatever occurs on certain great days in our spiritual calendar or even on this very day is symbolic and significant. Although I have written a long article on many events in world-history that took place on 15 August—an article which was approved by Sri Aurobindo for *Mother India*—I cannot bring myself to attach much meaning to the eruption of the El Chinchonal volcano in south-east Mexico after centuries of quiescence on 29 March, the date on which the Mother first came to Pondicherry and met Sri Aurobindo—much less to the army reporting about it on 4 April, the date of Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry. The Mother never encouraged too much speculation along such lines. Fancy can easily start playing if we take too seriously this sort of matching. When an earthquake occurred in a certain year, Gandhi declared that it was due to old-fashioned Hindus refusing the entry of Harijans into temples. His opponents countered that, because in certain temples the Harijans had been allowed, Mother India had protested by an earthquake. What either party said could be a good occasion for a mirthquake!

Besides, south-east Mexico seems far too out of the range of immediately meaningful places in the Aurobindonian world-vision. And to think of Rudra Pralaya, the world-destructive dance of Shiva, commencing in El Chinchonal is quite a fantasy. The present manifestation, which is to culminate in a supramentalisation of earth-life, has been said by the Mother to need no Pralaya at all. A Pralaya is needed when the beings created are incapable of growing indefinitely in spirituality. A new experiment has then to be tried. Occult knowledge says that several such experiments were made in the course of universal history. At last has come an experiment which is capable of making endless progress and manifesting the Supermind. So to think in terms of any Pralaya is to forget the special nature of an earth which is assured of an Aurobindonian future.

Don't, however, run away with the idea that this future is just round the corner. I am amazed at your proclamation: "Sri Nolini was wrong when he said (1973) that Transformation was not cancelled but postponed. Neither cancelled nor postponed. Sri Aurobindo Himself said in *The Mother*, Letters (p. 49), letter dated 13.8.1933: '...Afterwards there will be a further transformation by the Supramental.' 'Afterwards' means after 1973."

What Sri Aurobindo wrote about was two steps in transformation made possible for the earth-consciousness by the Divine Mother's embodiment. The first step would be a preparation "to receive the Supramental". The next step, which would

come “afterwards”, would be the supramentalisation brought about by what has been received, leading initially to a limited new race and not to a supramentalisation of all beings who represent the earth-consciousness. There is not the slightest reference to 1973 or any other date, for no disembodiment of the Divine Mother such as took place on 17 November of that year was in view at that time. Another manner of putting the same situation in essence is in a letter dated 14.1.1932,<sup>1</sup> which begins by speaking of the descent of the Supermind as “a rapid evolutionary process compressed into a few years which proceeds by taking up the present nature into its Light and pouring its Truth into the inferior planes”. Then Sri Aurobindo says: “That cannot be done in the whole world at a time, but it is done like all processes first through selected Adharas and then on a wider scale. We have to do it through ourselves first and through the circle of sadhaks gathered around in the terrestrial consciousness as typified here. If a few open, that is sufficient for the process to be possible.” The letter to which you draw my attention has as little bearing as this one on Nolini’s statement.

Nolini meant that since even the second of the two pioneers who were on earth for supramentalisation did not carry out the plan we cannot hope to see the plan achieved in her absence. This is a logical conclusion from Sri Aurobindo’s clear-cut declaration in April 1935,<sup>2</sup> selfless yet underlining the indispensability of his own attainment: “If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself it cannot be done in others.” I may add in tune with Sri Aurobindo’s basic intention: “If it is also not done in his equal and partner, the Mother, how can it be done in us?” However, workers like Sri Aurobindo and the Mother never give up: so they will find ways and means of consummating in the time to come the vision they tried to materialise in the 20th century. There can be no cancellation of it but humanity will have to wait now that both the Gurus are disembodied. There has to be a postponement. At least one of the Gurus will have to return to carry further the project of evolving man into superman.

Indeed, with the Supramental Manifestation on 29 February 1956 in the earth’s subtle-physical layer a fact, the advent of supramentalisation of even the gross physical is certain—but in a long process of evolution. The immediate victory the Mother had toiled for in her own body and wished to extend to the bodies of those who had been open to her has not been won and therefore none of us can expect to win it in the present age without her. We must surely do the Aurobindonian Yoga as far as it lies in our power—and a great deal does lie in it. What Sri Aurobindo has termed psychicisation and spiritualisation are within our capacity. We are capable too of at least a touch of the Supermind in our inner being and perhaps some reflection of this touch in our outer nature. But a full establishment of the Supermind in anyone can-

<sup>1</sup> *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953), pp. 382-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.



not be hoped for unless the Mother comes back to the earth.

You may recall Sri Aurobindo's command to her in 1950 some months before he launched his mysterious "sacrifice": "You have to fulfil our Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation." If her endeavour to obey it is to succeed, she cannot but visit our earth once more. How she will do it is past anybody's guessing. She may make an extraordinary entry through a selected human womb or she may fuse her psychic being from beyond with the psychic being in a grown-up body that is somehow ready on earth or else she may by an occult action project a form of herself directly into our space-time from the subtle-physical plane. Since her work has to be completed she must and will choose to be a part of earth-life again.

Let us do our utmost to prepare ourselves for the mighty event instead of indulging in grandiose dreams about our own abilities and letting our imagination go gambling over a Mexican eruption or any earthquake such as Gandhi and his critics commented on. Beyond earthquake and mirthquake let us aspire for the divine birthquake in whatever mode the Mother may adopt.

24.4.1982

AMAL KIRAN

## SUMMER

If a year were earth's one day  
Now it is high noon.  
Outbursts of energy radiate  
From tumult of thoughts that split and unite  
In the sun's heart. It is summer.

Summer, when intimacies burn,  
Tempers get frayed, emotions thin,  
Cells sweat, shrivel and shrink,  
Scorched desires soon turn perverse  
And seared joys vie with dry verse  
To entertain.

Seems the Preserver is at play alone,  
It is too warm for conception,  
Not hot enough for destruction.

People vary,  
For some it is a long siesta  
They are lost in somnolence.  
Others work and even love  
Their heat in sympathy with the sun's.

For some, smiles and songs have burrowed deep  
Searching for hibernating joys, parched lips  
Whisper bitter nothings, while minds laze and languish.

But there are some who see Her face,  
Hear Her voice in the golden rays.  
Then everything alters, though nothing has changed.  
Sun still shines bright, sea breeze still awaits  
Rise of the lone evening star.  
But the heat no more sears,  
For deep within windows open onto azure skies.

There is a soft rain of dancing hymns,  
Flakes of rose petals shower Grace,  
The grass is green in inner valleys  
And mist recedes from silent heights.

A great peace wells up from deep within  
And, spreading, cools the light without.  
The I in the depth knows, the choice is his  
Whether it be dawn, noon or night.

DINKAR

# HOW I BECAME A HINDU

## Editor's Note

*Here is a series of articles which first appeared in the New-Delhi weekly, Organiser, from September 27 to November 15, 1981. By courtesy of that periodical as well as permission of the author, Sita Ram Goel, we are reproducing it in Mother India.*

*The Editor found it not only fascinating in itself but also very appropriate to our troubled many-mooded time—a personal document sincere, straightforward, open-minded, deeply motivated and written in a style of sensitive vitality.*

*The term “Hindu” in the title has no sectarian bias, no suggestion of dogmatic religiosity. It bears essentially the same spiritual sense that Sri Aurobindo gave it when in his great Uttarpada Speech of 1909 he called Hinduism the Sanātana Dharma, the Eternal Religion, “because it is the universal religion which embraces all others” and “whose protection and upraising before the world” he regarded as “the work before us”.*

*By “us” was meant the nation that he was striving to free and show its true destiny in the wide human family no less than in its own historical career—the nation that has produced the seers of the Rigveda, the Upanishads and the Gita and a host of spiritual leaders of later ages, amongst whom Sri Aurobindo himself would now be considered the crowning figure with his synthesis of the profound past and the complex present into a drive beyond them towards a future which would fulfil the outer along with the inner life of both East and West.*

## Author's Note

*(I promised this intellectual autobiography to my critical friend Hashmat, some twenty years ago. Hashmat wrote frequently in the Organiser under the general heading “Pakistan X-Rayed”. It is years since I lost track of him. But I never forgot my promise. I wonder what I would have written twenty years ago. I also wonder how this story will shape if I wait for another twenty years. And I do not know what its worth is to-day. But I am impelled to write it because in to-day's India it is not sufficient to be a Hindu by birth, as even my challenger Hashmat claimed to be. Hindu society and culture are under attack from several quarters. One has to be a conscious and convinced Hindu to meet and survive that attack. One has to find one's roots in Sanātana Dharma.)*

## I

I WAS born a Hindu. But I had ceased to be one by the time I came out of college at the age of 22. I had become a Marxist and a militant atheist. I had come to believe that the Hindu scriptures should be burnt in a bonfire if India was to be saved.

It was fifteen years later that I could see this culmination as the explosion of an

inflated ego. During those years of self-poisoning, I was sincerely convinced that I was engaged in a philosophical exploration of cosmic proportions.

How my ego got inflated to a point where I could see nothing beyond my own morbid mental constructions is no exceptional story. It happens to many of us mortals. What is relevant in my story is the seeking and the suffering and the struggle to break out of that spider's web of my own weaving. I will fit in the filaments as I proceed.

My earliest memory of an awakening to interests other than those with which a young boy is normally occupied goes back to when I was eight years old. My family was living in Calcutta. My father was a total failure as a broker in the jute goods market. But he was a great story-teller. He could hardly be called an educated person, having spent only 2-3 years in a village school. But he had imbibed a lot of the traditional lore by attending kathas and kirtanas in his younger days. His knowledge of Hindu mythology, legendary heroes and the lives of saints was prolific.

One fine evening he started telling me the lengthy and complex story of the *Mahābhārata*. The narrative lasted for more than a month, each instalment lasting over an hour. I absorbed every event and episode with rapt attention and bated breath. The sheer strength of some of the characters as they strode across the story lifted me up and above the humdrum of everyday life and made me dwell in the company of immortals.

The *Mahābhārata* has been my most favourite book ever since. I regard it as the greatest work ever composed. My yearning for reading this great story in print led to a funny episode a few years later. I was a student of the fifth standard in my village in Haryana. An Urdu magazine was publishing a *verbatim* translation of the *Mahābhārata* in monthly instalments. The only subscriber to it in our village was a retired veteran of the First World War. But he kept the series locked in his *baithak* and stubbornly refused to lend them even to his own son who was my classmate. The two of us watched his timings in the *baithak*, broke into it *via* the skylight on the roof, read the series one after another and restored them to their original resting place. The crime was never discovered.

The character that impressed me most in the *Mahābhārata* was, of course, Sri Krishna. His great words and deeds left me enthralled. The admiration was to deepen in subsequent years till it grew into worship. His name became a sacred mantra. Sri Krishna is the foundation, the middle and the apex of the *Mahābhārata*. My own feeling was summed up later when my friend and teacher Ram Swarup remarked: "Sri Krishna is the highest symbol of Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Power which the human psyche has thrown up."

But I was painfully surprised when a wise man in the village equated the *Mahābhārata* with *Aalāh-ūdal* and warned that the narration, even the possession, of these two stories always led to feuds and bloodshed. I have read *Aalāh-ūdal* also, the entire 52 martial episodes rendered into sonorous verse by Matrumal Attar. And I feel very strongly that the comparison is absolutely superficial and the belief purely super-

stitious. Hindus in the North have neglected the *Mahābhārata* for a long time. The very fact that the *Mahābhārata* has come to be equated with *Aalāh-ūdal* in the popular mind in the North is indicative of a great intellectual and cultural decline.

To return to my story. While still in Calcutta I made my first contact with another mighty scripture, the *Grantha Saheb* of Sri Garibdas. This Jat saint of Haryana has been the patron saint of my family ever since an ancestor of ours, who was the saint's contemporary, became his votary in the first half of the 18th century. We revere him as the *Saiguru* who was an avatar of the highest Being. He was totally illiterate but composed and sang some 18,000 verses of very sublime poetry which scales the highest spiritual heights. The story goes that my ancestor would not have his first morning sip of water unless he had paid homage to the saint who lived at a distance of 4 miles from our village.

My father was able to acquire a copy of the first printed edition of the *Grantha Saheb* of Sri Garibdas soon after it was published from Baroda. He would frequently read it out to my mother and myself with his own running commentary on the lives of saints and bhaktas as they were mentioned in the sakhis and ragas. I also sometimes sat turning the pages of this grand work. I hardly had the mental equipment to understand the deep mystic messages. But the stories of some great saints like Kabir, Nanak, Ravidas, Dadu, Namadev, Chippa, Pipa and Dhanna were very strongly impressed on my mind, as also the stories of renowned Muslim sufis like Rabiya, Mansur, Adham Sultan, Junaid, Bazzid and Shams Tabriz. These stories were to flower into an abiding *satsaṅga* in the years to come.

During that year's stay in Calcutta, I also came in contact with the freedom movement for the first time. It was at its brightest and stormiest peak—the Salt Satyagraha. The atmosphere was full of Mahatma Gandhi and Bharata Mata. I sobbed uncontrollably as I watched the mammoth procession following the body of Jatindra Nath Das on its way to the Nimtallah burning ghat. The martyrdom of Bhagat Singh came soon after. I became vaguely aware that my country was not free. My mother told me that we were being ruled by a queen sitting on a throne across the seven seas. History for her had not moved since the days of Queen Victoria.

The Congress movement was never strong in my countryside which was dominated by the Zamindars League of Sir Chhotu Ram. But the Arya Samaj movement was sweeping everything before it. Almost all men of note in the village were Arya Samajists, including the half-a-dozen freedom fighters who had been to jail. The preachers and songsters of the Arya Samaj visited our village very frequently. I was always keen to attend these sessions, many times late into the night. It was from their lectures and bhajans that I learnt my first lessons in nationalism. The point of this nationalism, however, was turned not against the British rulers but against Muslim invaders and tyrants like Mahmud Ghaznavi, Mohammed Ghorī, Alauddin Khalji and Aurangzeb. The national heroes were Prithivi Raj Chauhan, Maharana Pratap, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bairagi and Raja Surajmal of Bharatpur. They became a part of my religious consciousness along with the heroes

of the *Mahābhārata* and the saints and sufis of the *Grantha Saheb* of Sri Garibdas.

The Arya Samaj of my young days in the village had three main themes to which they devoted the largest part of their programme—the Muslims, the Sanatanis, the Puranas. The Muslims were portrayed as people who could not help doing everything that was unwholesome. The Sanatani Brahmins with their priestcraft were the great misleaders of mankind. And the Puranas, concocted by the Sanatanis, were the source of every superstition and puerile tradition prevalent in Hindu Society.

I never felt any animosity towards the Muslims except the Muslim invaders and kings already mentioned. Our house was in a neighbourhood full of Muslim *telis*. Most of them had Hindu names like Shankar and Mohan. They participated in Holi and Diwali. Only their women wore trousers unlike the Hindu women of the village. My Muslim neighbours were gentle, quiet, unassuming and very hard-working people. We addressed them as uncles and grandpas and their women as aunts and grandmothers. An elderly member of their clan who lived alone in a big but deserted Hindu *haveli* was a very strong albeit lovable character. I did not like it when someone passed unkind remarks about these Muslims on account of their religion, which was not unoften.

Nor did I lose my respect for the Brahmins. Some of them in our village were quite learned. Others inspired great respect by the dignity of their demeanour in the midst of great poverty. None of these venerable ones was an Arya Samajist. On the other hand, the president of the Arya Samaj in our village was quite a questionable character. He was president of the Congress also. One of his great exploits, of which he was very proud, was to defecate in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the village temple. I always avoided him and many a time turned back when I saw him coming from the other side of some village street.

But I did take very seriously the Arya Samajist denunciation of the Puranas and the Sanatanis. They became something tantamount to the effeminate and immoral in my mind.

There was not much of traditional Sanatanism in my family, owing to the influence of Sri Garibdas, a saint in the *nirguṇa* tradition of Kabir and Nanak. Our women did keep some fasts, performed some rituals and visited the temple and the *śivaliṅga*. But the menfolk were mostly convinced of the futility of idol-worship and did not normally participate in any rituals. The Brahmin priest was not seen in our homes except on occasions like marriage and death. The great religious event in our family was the *pāṭha* of the *Grantha Saheb* performed by Garibdasi sadhus who stayed with us for weeks at a time. I remember very vividly how lofty a view I took of my own *nirguṇa* doctrines and how I looked upon my classmates from Sanatani families whose ways I thought unmanly. I particularly disliked their going to the annual *melā* of a Devi in a neighbouring town. God for me was a male person. Devi-worship was a defilement of the true faith.

And I cannot help laughing even now when I remember my first encounter with a Purana. *Shrimad Bhagvad* was the only Purana known and available in our village.

I had a strong urge to read it. But I was always afraid that I might get caught in the act. It was years later when I had left the village and joined a school in Delhi that I borrowed a copy of *Shrimad Bhagvad* from the local Harijan Ashram and stealthily brought it home. As I read it, I was watchful lest someone should see me in the midst of this "indulgence" and spread the story abroad. I did not find it repulsive in the least, though I thought some of the stories highly exaggerated. But on the whole it did not impress me. Sri Krishna of the *Mahābhārata* was strongly stamped on my mind. I found him missing in the *Bhagvad*. His frolics with the gopis left me cold. I, however, lived to learn that the Puranas were an integral part of that mansion of Vedic spirituality of which the *Mahābhārata* was the crowning arch.

One day I attended a *havan* performed under Arya Samaj auspices. Someone persuaded me to take the sacred thread which several of my classmates had been displaying with great pride. I had long wanted to wear it the same way with one yellow ring round the throat before it passed down my shoulder. Little did I know that this was not permissible in my family. The sacred thread according to the Sanatanist tradition was taken at a colourful ceremony some time before one's marriage. So as soon as I appeared before my grandfather proudly displaying my new acquisition round my neck, he became furious, rushed at me and tore away my sacred thread with some force. It hurt me physically. But the hurt he caused to my self-respect was considerably greater. I made up my mind to defy the family all along the line.

My interest in the Arya Samaj brought me in contact with the newly established Harijan Ashram in our village. I was already a high-school student in Delhi. During the summer vacation a friend in the village asked me to join a *sahabhoja* in which Harijans were to serve sweetened rice to caste Hindus. I went to the Harijan Ashram and watched the assembly which included practically all emancipated luminaries of our village. I did not share the meal because the Harijans who were serving rice and the caste Hindus who were eating it were dripping with perspiration in that midday of a hot month. But when I came out and was asked by some orthodox people whether I had partaken of the "*chamar*" food, I did not deny it. Deep down inside me I wished that my hygienic inhibitions had not stopped me from doing what I had thought right and proper.

It was perhaps this sense of guilt which took me to the Harijan Ashram a few days later. The man in charge was a member of my own caste and a veteran freedom-fighter who had spent long spells in jail. He was tough and devoutly dedicated to Harijan uplift. One could hardly discuss anything with him without his introducing the Harijan problem into it. He made a deep impression on me, even though he was short-tempered and intolerant towards everything which he could not trace to Mahatma Gandhi. Seeing him taking care of a band of young Harijan boys, I often suspected that his loyalty to Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps secondary to his dedication to Harijan uplift.

It was this gentleman who told me that the *sahabhoja* had been organised not by the Arya Samaj but by the Harijan uplift movement of Mahatma Gandhi. And I was



surprised, perhaps shocked, when he told me that the Mahatma was not an Arya Samajist but a Sanatani. He himself was a convert from the Arya Samaj to the Mahatma's way of worship and thought. This revelation landed me in a great dilemma. My knowledge of the Arya Samaj did not go beyond what its preachers in the village had told me. My knowledge of the Mahatma's doctrine was poorer still. But I was convinced that being a Sanatani was something disreputable. How could a great man like Mahatma Gandhi be a Sanatani? Yet I revered him with all my mind and all my heart. I had heard and myself shouted him *jaya* for several years.

As chance would have it, the dilemma was resolved in the next few days without any great intellectual effort on my part. One of my younger contemporaries who came to me every day for lessons informed me that the *Satyartha Prakash* was one of the several books he had borrowed from his school library in our district town. Copies of this *magnum opus* of the Arya Samaj were readily available in private homes in our village as well in libraries in Delhi. But I had never felt any interest in it. Now suddenly I was eager to study it and find out what it was all about.

I do not remember at this distance in time my reactions to the learned discussions which the *Satyartha Prakash* carried on many subjects. But I do remember very vividly the painful shock I received as I read its remarks about Kabir and Nanak. These were two of the most hallowed names I had cherished since my first awakening to a religious consciousness. I concluded that Swami Dayananda had been unnecessarily unkind to these great saints and that his way of thinking was wrong. That was the end of the Arya Samaj for me at that time. It was years later when I read Sri Aurobindo's *Bankim—Tulak—Dayananda* that I bowed, in repentance and renewed reverence, before that fearless lion of a man who tried his best to rescue and revive the Vedic vision amongst the Hindus. A true understanding and appreciation of the crucial cultural role which the Arya Samaj played at a critical juncture in our national life dawned on me simultaneously.

Now I moved towards Mahatma Gandhi and moved very fast. The Harijan Ashram had a lot of his writings in its small library. It also subscribed to the weekly *Harijan* in Hindi. I spent hours and hours poring over the Mahatma's works. I became a regular visitor to the Sasta Sahitya Mandal shop in Dariba in Delhi, even though I was too poor to afford even its very cheaply priced publications. And it was not long before I became a full-fledged Gandhian. I started wearing homespun and handwoven khadi which my mother got prepared for me by the village weaver. I plied the *charkha* at home and the *takli* while I walked the streets. And I tried to keep the 16 vows which Mahatma Gandhi had prescribed in his *Mangala Prabhata*. Whenever I was in the village, I spent practically the whole of my time in the Harijan Ashram. I never absented myself from the evening prayers, during which the *shabads* sung by some Harijan boys and elders, with the accompaniment of the *ektara*, were my most rewarding experience at that time.

(To be continued)

SITA RAM GOEL

## COMING TO TERMS

THERE is no change in the goal, nor could there be,  
The goal is ever the same, ever the same,  
But must I not in terms of reality  
Revise the outdated script, find a new name  
For the play itself, courageously admit  
My nature's truth before transfiguring it?

Coming to terms: repudiating fiction  
No matter how comforting or sublime  
And stating again in an unmannered diction  
The eternal theme, in terms of present time;  
Yet open to the truth of what has been  
And calling down the truth that must begin.

But yet before that great initiation,  
That total change of self to something new,  
Can take place, must I not to its foundation  
Raze down the old structure and make a true  
Assessment of the site, with line and plumb  
Probe into depths forbidden, dark and dumb?

Coming to terms, although unlike the poet  
Or rhetor, who obscure with brilliant speech  
Reality, disfigure more than show it  
In its true light, which is beyond their reach.  
But now it is the rhetorician's hour  
And even the real poet feels his power.

Words are the stuff of lies: so the semantic  
Philosopher defines the link that binds  
The phoneme and significance. The mantic  
Voice of the poet soars above the minds  
Of those that hear him and on higher planes  
Unites the two so that no link remains.

Coming to terms with passion, then, for passion  
If not life's master is chief minister  
Of its reactions; for, whatever fashion  
I act, with its mute councils I concur.  
And then, with a well-phrased communiqué,  
Wipe out the lie and wash its stain away.

There is a truth of passion or at least  
 The fact of its existence. In the cave  
 The plaintive howling of a wounded beast  
 Or a chained madman, who begins to rave  
 Whenever obligated to forgo  
 Indulgence in what rises from below.

To come to terms: the genuine invasion  
 Of what is called desire, the palpable  
 Ascension of dissatisfied sensation  
 That, unappeased and unappeasable,  
 Sows in the field of life a rankling seed  
 Of undeniably persistent need.

A web of biochemical attraction,  
 Zoodynamic power real as thought  
 Or matter, snaring in inert reaction,  
 Two charged polarities, that dangle, caught  
 Within the web their interactions name  
 Desire, till new terms make it a new game.

New terms for old; for power is prismatic,  
 One colour with a sevenfold scale of tones,  
 A hierarchic gamut never static,  
 That climbs from the inertness of the stones,  
 Through lust and love and thought and word to reach  
 The all-creative name surpassing speech.

So passion can ascend the scale, attaining  
 A higher pitch while keeping its full force,  
 Finding its right relation by remaining  
 Detached in wedlock and not by divorce.  
 Its satisfaction found in a pure song  
 Beyond all labelling of right and wrong.

Coming to terms, and by right incantation,  
 Each word vibrant with the reality  
 Of what I am, preparing transformation  
 Into what I was made for and must be.  
 Desire, rightly expressed, released above  
 Into an unconfined expanse of love.

## POEMS BEFORE AND AFTER 1973

### OFFERING : XIV

*O, MY COUNTRY, I HAVE KNOWN YOUR SWEET AIR—1967*

O, My Country,  
I have known your sweet air and pure waters,  
Climbed imperishable hills, in sun smelled pine,  
With loon on lake saw moon rise and fall,  
Savouring night's August flavour;  
Deep-welling from earth clean and cool springs tasted  
Refreshed and the machine was only  
Slow mourn of train, a far moan beyond mountains.

So close was I on mountain top to rock  
And the green-blue mist of country  
With lakes more violet-blue than heather  
In feathering aspen and weathered fir,  
And further to eye the land sloping to Canada.

On sand-locked ponds in secret lashes of hemlock  
There was no boat other than sunken log,  
Rush-fringed orchid bogs with pitcher plant  
Cruel only to ant and impetuous fly,  
Flowed-land slowdrowned by stream,  
Wild rose dreaming and lily padding to shore,  
Deer-nibbled geometry of straightest line.

Armadas of water-spiders made miniature wake  
In swift dissolving angles on the smooth rivers,  
Weed-tangle ripples below;  
Undercurrent the one deception here.  
This I accepted.

Out of the gold glowing knowing of childhood  
I built dreams of coming of age,  
Of growing ripe and old in the folded pages of a quiet book;  
Now look about me, as night draws near.

Oh, My Country, where I with such hopes  
Swam pure waters and breathed sweet air,

Returned with gladness from foreign places,  
Now look about me. *Nothing sings.*

In Night's embrace gentle things  
Scream. Air thickens  
With beat of wings.  
The meadow sickens,  
The dove  
Called traitor for love,  
Black lamb writhing in bloody fleece  
While hawk and eagle *prey for peace.*

ELIZABETH STILLER

Analog to *I Have Come Into A New Country*

# EUROPE 1974

## A TRAVELOGUE

(41)

HERODOTUS the Greek historian (485-425 B.C.) was surprised and puzzled that what appeared to him to be a single land-mass should have been given three names: Europe, Asia and Africa. We after twenty-four centuries are equally surprised and puzzled to find that Europe has got its name from an Asian princess; for Europe was the name of the daughter of the King of Tyre, and Asia was the name of the wife (a goddess and a European) of Prometheus the Greek god who brought down fire from heaven for mankind.

Geographically we can say that the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Dardanelles and the Ural Mountain in the north divide the Eurasian land-mass : the Western part is called Europe and the Eastern part Asia. To the south of this watershed there grew up some of the most ancient civilisations that were to be the sources of other civilisations in later times. Here we shall not discuss them, rather we shall continue from the point that is highly significant regarding our East-West relationship.

In Greece and in Persia two magnificent civilisations grew up. The Greeks and the Persians were "Aryans", but their civilisations developed at a tangent to each other. If a process could have been evolved of unification they could have been complementaries, one completing the other. But that was not to be. Persia was a wealthy monarchy and Greece a country that consisted of City-States, and they experimented in various forms of Government. The Persians (Asians) called the Greeks (Europeans) ill-fed, meanly dressed, irreligious, irreverent, ignorant, impolite, talkative, inquisitive, liars, and said that they had no respect for the decencies and the mysteries of life. The Greeks too had matching names. They called the Persians (Asians) over-fed, too elaborately-robed, of a haughty overbearing disposition, and said that their cities were too crowded, the individual drowned in the crowd, and their art over-ornate: in short they were beastly.

Now who was going to beat whom? In fact they did beat each other several times. Cyrus the Great, Darius and Xerxes all followed the policy of expansion and built a Trans-continental Empire. They did not leave out Egypt or even Russia. For it is an amazing fact of history that invading Russia was not an original idea of Hitler or Napoleon, or even of Genghis Khan. It was Darius who, hearing that there was land north-west of his Empire, desired to bring it under his benevolent Government. But the Russians had no army, no arms, so they fled and got lost in the almost infinite steppe-lands. Darius could not extend his protection to these people and had to withdraw from the barbarian country. At this point of history the Greeks feared the Persians. Eventually they came to like them. If not actually like them, at least they learnt to tolerate and admire them. They sought the protection of the Persian king,

specially Darius. Darius was much respected. But Pausanias the Greek general defeated the troops of Xerxes and entered the Persian camp. He ordered the king's servants to prepare a great Persian banquet like the one they would prepare for their king and general. Then he ordered his men to prepare a typical Greek banquet. The two tables were put side by side. Then Pausanias called to his followers, "Gentlemen, I asked you here in order to show you the folly of these Persians who living in this style came to Greece to rob us of our poverty." For the Persians' table was full of silk and brocade cloth and gold and silver plates and flagons, and it was overflowing with delicious food. The Greek table was bare and sparsely filled. This is a typical incident to show the difference between the two civilisations. But the Greeks originally took largely from the old civilisations of the East. People might fight shy to acknowledge this but the ancient Greeks themselves knew of it and had the humility to acknowledge it. Even their alphabet they got from the Phoenicians.

Then came Alexander the Great and his conquests and his route is all too well known by the students of history. He came to the East as a conqueror and was transformed, with the contact of the East, into a unifier. He had the vision of a great World Empire where a fusion of cultures would not be impossible. He could see admirable things in the Asians and find fault with the Europeans, that is, his own men. He understood that both East and West could learn from each other. And the thing the Europeans detest as Kow-tow, Alexander found very pleasing. He taught his men to consider the whole world as their fatherland, the entire earth their camp. Darius too had an identical dream. One was a European *par excellence* and the other an Asian of the highest order.

People of one civilisation would always disparage the people of another civilisation, more so if they could catch them in their decline. Another point that puzzles many is the fact that the East and the West are partitioned off very conveniently. But a closer scrutiny gives us another picture. How can the Chinese, the Indian, the Persian and the Egyptian civilisations be packed off as one civilisation? They may have some points of similarity but they are four distinct entities. They cannot be dumped together as the East.

A great civilisation, no matter what great heights it has scaled and how magnificent it has been, sooner or later gets exhausted and then comes its decline. It is no longer a creative and progressive energy but a spent force. In due course it goes down, perhaps to rise again in another cycle of human progress.

Greece went down in face of the robust Romans, never to rise again, its ideals were taken up and carried over to Europe sixteen centuries later. Persia too fell but rose again under the Sassanid kings. So powerful did the kingdom become that the rulers again started the policy of expansion, taking Cyrus the great and Darius as examples. At this point a clash with the Romans was inevitable. Antioch fell in A.D. 260 under the onslaught of the Persian king Ardeshir. The Roman Emperor Valerian and his 70,000 legionaries were taken captive by king Shapur. Eventually the Roman Empire too fell and it is a patent fact that the Eastern Roman Empire continued because the

Emperors had become almost Eastern potentates. By becoming half Eastern they kept the East at bay. The vanquished always conquers the conqueror in some way or other.

To put it in a nutshell: the Greek civilisation stood for two great ideas, Humanism and Freedom. Yet we hear that half the population in ancient Greece consisted of slaves and the position of women was no better. Humanism is a great idea, no doubt and the English poet has put it very pointedly:

Know then thyself; presume not god to scan,  
The proper study of mankind is man.

But what about the little poem "Abou Ben Adhem"? Here the poet reveals that Humanism was not absent in the East. One is touched by the Arab leader's poignant concern for his fellow-men. This is just an example. Asians are rated for their other-worldliness. Yet when Alexander's soldiers refused to fight another battle in the Ganges valley were they afraid of some other-worldly entity or of the invincible army of the King whom the Greeks called Xandrames? The Greek historians have given a stunning list of the components of this army.

The world is full of surprises. The European temperament too is not of one piece. The story runs that when Philip II of Spain bade farewell to the famous Armada he entered a church to pray. He prayed for ten hours. The next day he prayed again. While Elizabeth the English Queen, when she heard of the coming of the Armada, went down to Tillbury to inspect her fighting men.

*(To be continued)*

CHAUNDONA & SANAT K. BANERJI



## ORACLE TO THE COCK OF FRANCE

NOSTRADAMUS is a name which belongs to popular culture, to the world of the almanac and sensational forecasting. The main events of European history are supposed to have been prophesied in his riddling verses: the execution of Charles I, the French Revolution, the career of Napoleon, the rise of Hitler (Goebbels used the prophecies in his propaganda). I understand that even Nixon and the tapes were foreseen by Nostradamus! These extraordinary successes make all the more alarming the supposed prophecies as yet unfulfilled.

Though this strange prophet has been famous in sub-culture for 400 years, in itself an interesting phenomenon, there has been no modern critical edition of the *Prophéties* and no sustained attempt at putting this substantial body of French verse into historical context. The edition of the *Prophecies and Enigmas of Nostradamus* by Liberté LeVert<sup>1</sup> has now filled this gap. It contains all the quatrains in the 1555 first edition and others from the second and third series. They are printed exactly as in the original French, together with a new literal English translation. The critical commentary sweeps away all the nonsense that has grown up around the prophecies in their passage through the centuries.

The reader will derive a good deal of enjoyment from this lively commentary, which unravels the allusions as referring mainly to the events of Nostradamus's own times, not to ages yet unborn. The retirement of a great personage to a small place is not a prophecy of Napoleon on Elba but reflects the retirement of the Emperor Charles V, which had occurred not long before the publication of the prophecies. When Nostradamus speaks of "Bretagne" he means Brittany: hence political convulsions in "Bretagne" are not prophecies of the execution of Charles I and other sensational events in British history but are about happenings in Brittany in the sixteenth century. "Hister" is the river Danube, not a bosh shot at "Hitler". The prophecies are almost entirely concerned with sixteenth-century history, with particular reference to the French monarchy and its relations with other contemporary powers. When Nostradamus actually makes a prophecy of something which is to occur in the future, he is nearly always wrong, his most tremendous blunder being the presage of a glorious career for Henri II made shortly before that monarch's unexpected death in a joust.

The double task of providing for the first time a reliable text and translation of Nostradamus's poetry and of sweeping away the trashy interpretations with which centuries of low-grade exploitation have covered it, has at last unveiled the real Nostradamus and his work. As LeVert says, we have not hitherto known either.

Michel de Nostradame (1503-1566) was born at Saint Rémy, near Marseille. On both sides of his family he was descended from converted Jews. He always proclaimed his adhesion to the Catholic Church, though he did not entirely escape In-

<sup>1</sup> *The Prophecies and Enigmas of Nostradamus*. Translated and edited by Liberté E. LeVert. 257 pp. Glen Rock, New Jersey: Firebell Books. \$15.

quisitorial enquiry. He was grounded in Latin at the papal school in Avignon, then trained as a doctor at Montpellier, specializing in the plague. Rabelais was a medical student at Montpellier at the same time as Nostradamus; there is no evidence that these two unusual students knew one another. Nostradamus's education was evidently rather rich and varied (he always said that he learned to prophesy from his family) and there is no doubt that he was a learned man—he worked for a time with the great scholar J. C. Scaliger.

In 1555, Nostradamus published at Lyon the first series of *Les prophéties*, which attracted the attention of the French court. He was summoned to Paris; Catherine de Medici was deeply interested in the occult; Nostradamus, who was an astrologer (not a very good one according to LeVert), seemed a likely person to find favour at court and to be useful both as astrologer and doctor. He lived on the fringe of court favour though he was not fully accepted until too late. The misfortune of the untimely death of Henri II probably delayed his career.

From the standpoint of his accurately edited text of the *Prophéties* and newly directed examination of it, LeVert arrives at some important discoveries. He reveals Nostradamus, first of all, to have had a good knowledge of versification. Though his verse prophecies relate to the almanac world, they are by no means popular doggerel; as refined by a learned hand they become minor French poetry of the sixteenth century. LeVert analyses the versification closely and uses it to help with the riddles. Noting that Nostradamus observes the caesura strictly he finds this a guide in deciphering. For example, a worrying character called "Voldrap" disappears when it is noticed that "vol" comes at the end of the first half of a line and "drap" at the beginning of the second half; "Voldrap" was born of a printer's disregard of the caesura.

Second, LeVert offers a new interpretation of the prophecies in terms of the world in which Nostradamus lived. There were quite enough sensational events in the sixteenth century for a prophet to brood over without filling in with colourful allusions to Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon, or Hitler. LeVert knows his way about in the sixteenth century extremely well, though he wears his historical erudition lightly and wittily. He does not force interpretations but simply leaves blanks where he cannot understand. He is amusingly aware of the cautious obscurity in which prophets from the Delphic oracle onwards have veiled their meanings. Through the dark sayings of the prophecies he traces events in the French invasions of Italy; the sack of Rome by the imperialists; adventures of well-known personages of the French court; the spread of new heresies from Germany and Switzerland; and the policies, victories, and defeats of the leading power centres of the age—the German Emperor, Charles V; the French King, Francis I and his successors; the Republic of Venice; and, of course, the Papacy. Fully alive to political allegory, he gives close attention to the Eagle (the Emperor), the Cock (the King of France), and the Lion (Venice), in their constantly recurring appearances. With shocking disrespect he refers to these noble creatures as "the usual military zoo"!

It seems evident (though LeVert does not go into this) that Nostradamus's favourite creature is the Cock of the French monarchy. The crucial prophecy is the one about Henri II which should have made Nostradamus's fortune had it not been for that unlucky joust.

Au chef du monde le grand Chyren (Henri II) sera,  
Plus oultre après aymé; craint, redoubté  
Son bruit & loz les cieulx surpassera,  
Et du seul titre victeur fort contenté.

(At the head of the world shall be the great Chyren. "Plus ultra" [is left] behind. [Great Chyren shall be] loved, feared, dreaded, [Chyren's] fame and renown shall rise above the skies. And with the single title, "Victor" [he shall be] well content.)

As unriddled by LeVert this means that the French King Henri II ("Chyren" is an anagram of "Henric") will be universal monarch, leaving far behind the German Emperor, Charles V with his famous motto *Plus Ultra*. Everyone at the time would have understood this as contrasting the French monarch with the German Emperor and claiming for the former the right to world rule, which the German Emperor claimed. The imperial device with its proud motto was very well known in France and was replied to by the device of Henri II, a crescent moon with the motto *Donec totum impleat orbem* (Until the moon [of French monarchy] fills the world).

Nostradamus is moving in the great world of "Imperial themes", the themes of universal empire for French monarchy or German Empire, aspirations which lay at the root of the struggles of the age. Both the imperial figures claimed the aura of Roman Empire and the Trojan descent (to which the prophecies often allude). Naturally, Nostradamus weighted his prophecy on the French side.

In what light did Nostradamus see himself? How did he wish to present himself to his readers? The opening quatrains of the series make an impressive claim to divine inspiration. "Seated alone at night in serious study" he sees a flame appearing. "Wand in hand", he performs magical rites and, in fear and trembling "sees the divine splendour". In the following quatrains he sees what sound like visions of a universal monarchy and a weakened papacy, but very obscurely worded. The prophet takes care not to be too explicit. LeVert thinks that Nostradamus does not really believe in all this, but is aiming only at a conventional invocation of the muse. Yet these things were taken very seriously in the sixteenth century. The poet Ronsard made claims to inspiration by divine *furor* and made prophetic statements about the times. He respected Nostradamus as a prophet.

What Ronsard says about Nostradamus (not quoted by LeVert) is revealing as to how a contemporary poet regarded him. For him Nostradamus is a prophet sent from God to warn France of danger, but these warnings have not been heeded. Ronsard asks whether Nostradamus's enthusiasm is inspired directly by the Eternal God, or by some good or bad demon or angel. But he has no doubt that the words of this

sombre and melancholy prophet are inspired. He has read into the prophecies meanings which might relate to the wild prophecies of universal religious rule for French monarchy that were the theme of the strange Christian Cabbalist, Guillaume Postel, though Nostradamus was a much more hard-headed character than Postel. Yet it seems that contemporaries, like Ronsard, might read Nostradamus's prophecies as prophetic in the Hebraic sense, and relating to the religious destinies of France.

There is another side of Nostradamus which raises interesting questions. He was a writer who took a popular form, the almanac type of prognostication, and re-expressed it in terms of classical or humanistic versions of prophetic themes. As LeVert says, he is a kind of humanist, with some knowledge of classical texts on prophecy such as Marsilio Ficino was reviving. He is in a sense a humanist, related to the "élitist" Renaissance culture of Ronsard and the Pléiade. Yet he comes out of the popular almanac tradition, and it was in that tradition that his name survived. Nostradamus became a name used by popular almanac writers, but Nostradamus the minor Renaissance poet was forgotten. He is a curious example of how a popular form could be taken up for a while into an educated milieu, afterwards falling back again into sub-culture. Nostradamus's fellow medical student at Montpellier, Rabelais, shows a somewhat similar use of popular culture, in his case the French farce tradition, to convey weighty themes. One might say that Rabelais's name, too, survives as a farcical *bon viveur* rather than as the enthusiastic evangelical whom modern research has revealed.

The light-hearted style in which LeVert presents his edition of Nostradamus does not obscure the fact that he has done a serious and original piece of research in excavating this author and his work.

FRANCES YATES

(With acknowledgment to the *Times Literary Supplement*, March 14, 1980, p. 285)

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Sri Aurobindo—His Life Unique.** By *Rishabhchand*. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Pages: 427. Price: Rs. 50/-

To write the biography of Sri Aurobindo is an arduous affair for he once declared that his life was not there on the surface to see. And none can deny the fact that the surface events of life are generally the major parts of biographies. Though Sri Aurobindo was not interested in the writing of his biographies (an example of his modesty) the answers he gave to his disciples from time to time about his life encouraged and enabled his biographers to write about the apparently human and really divine Sri Aurobindo.

It was Thomas Carlyle who remarked: “No great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men.” Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the doyen of Indo-Anglian literature, was the first in the list of Sri Aurobindo’s Boswells. In the Preface to his full-length biography titled *Sri Aurobindo*, Iyengar wrote: “... this study, being the first of its kind in English, will supply the need for an easy and reliable introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s life and works.” Many others including A. B. Purani and R. R. Diwakar followed suit. And here is one more—Rishabhchand.

Rishabhchand conveniently divides his biography of the Yogi’s Yogi into five unequal sections.

The introductory part of the book presents a short account of Sri Aurobindo from his birth in 1872 to his return to Baroda after 14 years of education in England in 1893. A sketch of Sri Aurobindo’s parents, Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghosh, a confirmed Anglophile, and Srimati Swarnalata Devi, ‘the rose of Rangpur’, opens us vistas of the days gone by. We are delighted to read why and when Arvinda Ackroyd Ghosh dropped Ackroyd from his name and how self-taught was he in the classics of the West. Light is thrown on the meaning of the name ‘Aurobindo’ and how this son of an Anglophile turned a patriot and helped form a secret society called ‘Lotus and Dagger’, in which “all the members took the vow to adopt each some chosen part which would help in leading to the overthrow of foreign rule”.

**Sri Aurobindo in Baroda**, the second section of the book, begins with the memorable year 1893 when Sri Aurobindo came back from England to fight for the freedom of India and release his “imprisoned godhead”. His love for books, his method of teaching (he was a professor and later a Vice-Principal), his mode of living, his attitude towards money, his liking for various languages and his diverse other activities are discussed in a pleasing vein.

“A poet first and everything else afterwards”, Sri Aurobindo was also an excellent translator. What R. C. Dutt, the translator of the two great epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, said when he saw some translated portions of them by Sri Aurobindo is worthy of mention here: “If I had seen your translations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* before, I would not have published mine. I can now very

well see that by the side of your magnificent translations, mine appear as mere child's play."

The spiritual experiences Sri Aurobindo had at different places, the letters he wrote to his wife Mrinalini and other friends mirror his heart and soul. We see him with a consuming passion to "see God face to face", and a patriot who looks upon his country as his mother. We read the political views of Sri Aurobindo and understand the three sides to his political ideas and activities. We encounter him in search of a guru and later as a student of yoga. The results of yoga as explained by Sri Aurobindo himself make delightful reading. This section comes to a close when Sri Aurobindo received the expected call from Bengal and left Baroda in July 1906.

Rishabhchand begins the bulkiest third section **Sri Aurobindo in Bengal** by discussing the causes and results of the partition of Bengal and the national forces that sprang up in reaction to it with the intention to give the readers a proper grasp of the full significance of Sri Aurobindo's manifold political life. He makes a study of the subsequent political movements in the country and shows us what constitutes Sri Aurobindo's contribution to it. He then focusses attention on different personalities like Sister Nivedita and Rabindranath Tagore who had the insight to perceive earlier than many others the spiritual greatness of Sri Aurobindo and the mission of his life. Then there follows a brief and rapid estimate of the aim, ideals and achievements of the three greatest political leaders of contemporary India who worked with Sri Aurobindo: Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bepin Chandra Pal.

The discussion on the launching and development of *Bande Mataram*, a daily, brings to light its importance in the National movement. We read about 'The Calcutta National Congress' and the famous 'Alipur Bomb Case' and we are amazed at the providential move that saved Sri Aurobindo from the trap so tactfully laid for him by the British bureaucracy. Here Sri Aurobindo himself gives a very interesting account of the search of his house and his arrest—"that day was the last page of a chapter of my life". Sri Aurobindo's experiences in the Alipur Jail where he realized the 'Narayana' within him are of great interest to the readers. The various fiery speeches delivered by Sri Aurobindo at different places find a place here. Finally we come to know who persuaded Sri Aurobindo to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted.

**Sri Aurobindo at Chandernagore**, the last but one section, is the shortest. We are told how Motilal Roy conducted Sri Aurobindo to his house. It is shocking to read that Sri Aurobindo gave company to bats, cockroaches and spiders in a dark apartment so that the agents of the British government might not get the scent of his whereabouts. His successive moves to two or three places and his departure from Chandernagore and his arrival at Pondicherry are all very vividly pictured.

**Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry** enlightens us on the arrival of Sri Aurobindo by the steamer *Dupleix* at Pondicherry on April 4, 1910. His stay at Shankar Chetty's house in Coumoutty St., the contacts that Poet Subramania Bharati had with Sri Aurobindo, the arrival of Mr. Paul Richard, his interview with Sri Aurobindo, the

Yogi's interpretation of a Yogachakra (a mystic symbol which Paul Richard had brought from his wife Mirra, to be known later as the Mother), Sri Aurobindo's fasting for 23 days while walking eight hours a day and carrying on his usual intellectual work, the famous Yogi Nagai Japata's prophecy regarding the arrival of a yogi from the North to the South and many other topics of interest adorn this last section.

A long quote from Nolini Kanta Gupta's *Reminiscences* takes us back to the old Pondicherry and we get a clear view of the civic life of Pondicherry at the time when Sri Aurobindo settled in it and the dangers and hardships to which he was exposed. It is supplemented by a short but highly informative and interesting history of this ancient town and its suburbs. Rishabhchand also furnishes the details regarding the arrival of the Mother at Pondicherry, her meeting with Sri Aurobindo and her founding a society called 'L'Idée Nouvelle' ('The New Idea') and the starting of the monthly *Arya*.

The content and several other aspects of the first issue of *Arya* given in this section are of immense use to research scholars. The seven letters written by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to each other reproduced here tell us the subject of their yoga.

"A life that is worth writing at all, is worth writing minutely and truthfully": so remarked Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The biographer Rishabhchand, I believe, very closely followed the words of the poet. Yes, the description is very minute in whatever the biographer writes. To cite an example—while informing us of the marriage of Sri Aurobindo with Srimati Mrinalini Bose, he tells us who acted as the go-between. The style of Rishabhchand holds us, for it seeks to be honest and direct. In short, this is a highly informative and useful book for students of literature, philosophy and history. The common reader too will find enough delight in going through it.

But I will not be doing justice as a reviewer if I fail to point out the most startling factual errors that occur in a single line on page 369, where Rishabhchand quotes from =1, a quarterly organ from Auroville: "The poet prince Ilango, brother of the Chera King Kovalan, describes how Auroville appeared in the first century." Firstly, the Chera king was not Kovalan but Chenguttuvan. Kovalan is the name of the hero of the great Tamil epic *Silappathikaram* by the Poet Prince Ilango. Secondly, Poet Ilango in the text quoted from the epic (thanks to the beautiful translation) did not refer to the place where Auroville is built now but to the present city Pondicherry, once called 'Poduke'.

P. RAJA