

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SEPTEMBER 1982

Price: Rs. 2.75

## A SMALL RAISE IN INLAND SUBSCRIPTION RATES FROM JANUARY 1983

Owing to increased costs the inland rates cannot help being raised a little—amounting only to 40 paise more per month.

### INLAND

Annual: Rs. 30.00

Life Membership: Rs. 420.00

### OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$11.00 or £5.50

Life Membership: \$154.00 or £77.00

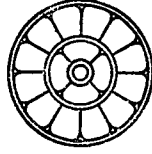
Air Mail:

Annual: \$32.00 for American & Pacific countries

£14.00 for all other countries

Life Membership: \$448.00 for American & Pacific countries

£196.00 for all other countries

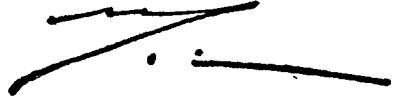


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



All Rights Reserved. No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Editor's Phone: 4782

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Editor: K. D. SETHNA

Managing Editor: K. R. PODDAR

Published by: P. COUNUMA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST, PONDICHERRY - 605 002

Printed by: AMIYO RANJAN GANGULI

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry - 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R. N. 8667/63

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXIV

No. 9

---

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

---

## CONTENTS

"OH!...IT IS HUMAN NATURE": THE MOTHER'S TALK ON APRIL 19, 1951		... 559
THE LIVING SHRINE (Poem)	<i>Bhanushanker Bhatt</i>	... 564
NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO: THE COMPLETE SET		... 565
AN APPEAL	<i>Leena Dowsett</i>	... 571
AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO: RECOLLECTIONS BY SAHANA		... 572
THE STORY OF A SOUL	<i>Huta</i>	... 575
TOWARDS FREEDOM AND PERFECTION: TWO PERSONAL LETTERS	<i>Amal Kiran</i>	... 593
PONDICHERRY (Poem)	<i>Minnie N. Canteenwalla</i>	... 597
HOW I BECAME A HINDU	<i>Sita Ram Goel</i>	... 598
POEMS (Poem)	<i>Dinkar</i>	... 603
BONE ANALYSIS: CLUE TO THE HARAPPA CULTURE'S DOWNFALL	from <i>Science Digest</i>	... 604
A VISIT TO A MAD POET: IN MEMORIAM: EZRA POUND 1885-1972	<i>Navoditte</i>	... 605
A FAIRY-TALE DREAM	<i>C. Neville</i>	... 612

## “OH!... IT IS HUMAN NATURE”

THE MOTHER'S TALK ON APRIL 19, 1951

*“This yoga can only be done to the end by those who are in total earnest about it and ready to abolish their little human ego and its demands in order to find themselves in the Divine. It cannot be done in a spirit of levity or laxity; the work is too high and difficult, the adverse powers in the lower Nature too ready to take advantage of the least sanction or the smallest opening, the aspiration and tapasya needed too constant and intense. It cannot be done if there is a petulant self-assertion of the ideas of the human mind or wilful indulgence of the demands and instincts and pretensions of the lowest part of the being, commonly justified under the name of human nature.”*

Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, p. 1310

EVERYBODY knows this; those who do not want to change their way of doing things or their way of being always say, “Oh! what do you expect, it is human nature.” This is what is called a “wilful indulgence”. That is to say, instead of becoming conscious that these are weaknesses and difficulties on the way, one justifies these things, saying, “Oh! it can't be helped, it is human nature.” One wants to continue to do what one is doing, without changing, one is full of a wilful indulgence of one's demands. For the lower nature of man always demands things; it says, “These are necessities, these are needs, I can't do without them.” Then, the instincts—a sort of instinct for one's own satisfaction—and pretensions: the lower being claims that it has a considerable importance and must be given what is necessary for it, otherwise it won't be able to live; it asserts that it alone is important, and so on. It is all this which creates obstacles, all these obscure, ignorant movements, all these justifications of the old ways of being: those who fly into a temper and say, “What do you expect, it can't be helped”, and everything one does saying, “Oh! it is human nature”, everything one justifies saying, “What can be done, people are like that, there is nothing to be done about it.” It is the old idea that we are born with a particular nature and must get adjusted to it, for we cannot change it.

So Sri Aurobindo tells us that if one cannot change the nature it is not worth the trouble of doing yoga, for yoga is done precisely in order to change the nature, otherwise it has no meaning.

*When the little ego is abolished, can't one “find oneself in the Divine” directly?*

But one can find oneself in the Divine even before having completely abolished one's little ego, for, to abolish one's little ego is not a little affair!

*But how is it to be done?*

How is it to be done? How to abolish the ego?—First of all, you must want to do it, and there are very few people who want to. And that is exactly what they say, it is this justification of their way of being. “That is the way I am made, I can’t do otherwise. And then, if I change this, if I change that or if I do without this thing or if I get rid of that other, I shall no longer exist!” And if one doesn’t say this openly, one thinks it. And all these little desires, these little satisfactions, these little reactions, all these small ways of being, one clings to them, clings hard—one sticks to them, one doesn’t want to let them go. I have seen hundreds of cases where someone’s difficulty had been removed (with a particular power a certain difficulty had been removed), but after a few days he brought it back with enthusiasm. He said, “But without that I do not exist any longer!” I have known people who had been given mental silence almost spontaneously and who, after a day or two, came back frightened: “Have I become an idiot?”—for the mental machine was not working all the time.... You cannot imagine it, you don’t know how very difficult it is to separate oneself from this little ego; how much it gets into the way though it is so small. It takes up so much room while being so microscopic. It is very difficult. One pushes it away in certain very obvious things; for example, if there is something good and someone rushes to make sure of having it first, even jostling his neighbour (this happens very frequently in ordinary life), then here one becomes quite aware that this is not very, very elegant, so one begins to suppress these crudities, one makes a big effort—and one becomes highly self-satisfied: “I am not selfish, I give what is good to others, I don’t keep it for myself”, and one begins to get puffed up. And so one is filled with a moral egoism which is much worse than physical egoism, for it is conscious of its superiority. And then there are those who have left everything, given up everything, who have left their families, distributed their belongings, gone into solitude, who live an ascetic life, and who are terribly conscious of their superiority, who look down at poor humanity from the height of their spiritual grandeur—and they have, these people, such a formidable ego that unless it is broken into small bits, never, never will they see the Divine. So it is not such an easy task. It takes a lot of time. And I must tell you that even when the work is done, it must always be begun again.

Physically, we depend upon food to live—unfortunately. For with food, we daily and constantly take in a formidable amount of inconscience, of *tamas*, heaviness, stupidity. One can’t do otherwise—unless constantly, without a break, we remain completely aware and, as soon as an element is introduced into our body, we immediately work upon it to extract from it only the light and reject all that may darken our consciousness. This is the origin and rational explanation of the religious practice of consecrating one’s food to God before taking it. When eating one aspires that this food may not be taken for the little human ego but as an offering to the divine consciousness within oneself. In all yogas, all religions, this is encouraged. This is the origin of that practice, of contacting the consciousness behind, precisely to diminish as much as possible the absorption of an inconscience which increases daily, constantly, without one’s being aware of it.

Vitality, it is the same thing. You live vitally in the vital world with all the currents of vital force entering, going out, joining and opposing each other, quarrelling and intermingling in your consciousness, and even if you have made a personal effort to purify your vital consciousness, to master in it the desire-being and the little human ego, you are constantly under a sort of obligation to absorb all the contrary vibrations which come from those with whom you live. One can't shut oneself up in an ivory tower, it is yet more difficult vitally than physically, and one takes in all sorts of things; and unless one is constantly wide awake, constantly on one's guard, and has quite an efficient control over all that enters, so as not to admit in one's consciousness unwanted elements, one catches the constant contagion of all desires, all the lower movements, all the small obscure reactions, all the unwanted vibrations which come to us from those around us.

Mentally, it is still worse. The human mind is a public place open on all sides, and in this public place, things come, go, cross from all directions; and some settle there and these are not always the best. And there, to obtain control over that multitude is the most difficult of all controls. Try to control the thought coming into your mind, you will see. Simply, you will see to what a degree you have to be watchful, like a sentinel, with the eyes of the mind wide open, and then keep an extremely clear vision of the ideas which conform to your aspirations and those which do not. And you must police at every minute that public place where roads from all sides meet, so that all passers-by do not rush in. It is a big job. Then, don't forget that even if you make sincere efforts, it is not in a day, not in a month, not in a year that you will reach the end of all these difficulties. When one begins, one must begin with an unshakable patience. One must say, “Even if it takes fifty years, even if it takes a hundred years, even if it takes several lives, what I want to accomplish, I shall accomplish.”

Once you have decided upon this, once you are quite conscious that things are like that and that the goal is worth the trouble of a constant and sustained effort, you may begin. Otherwise, after a time you will fall flat; you will get discouraged, you will tell yourself, “Oh! it is very difficult—I do it and then it is undone, I do it again and it is once again undone, and then I do it again and it is perpetually undone.... Then what? When will I get there?” One must have plenty of patience. The work may be undone a hundred times, you will do it again a hundred and one times; it may be undone a thousand times, you will re-do it a thousand and one times, until finally it is no longer undone. And finally it is no longer undone.

Only, you see, if one were made all of a piece, it would be very easy, but one is made of many pieces. Then, there is one piece which is ahead, which has worked hard, is very conscious, altogether awake, and when it is there, all goes well, one does not allow anything to enter, one is on one's guard, and then... one goes to sleep and the next day when one gets up it is another part which is there and one tells oneself, “But where then is all the work I have done?...” And one must begin all over again. Begin all over again until all the parts, one after another, enter the field of conscious-

ness and each one can be changed. And when you reach the end of your tether, there is a change, you have made progress—afterwards, you must make another, but still that one is made. But it is completely made only when all the pieces of the being are brought like that, one after another, to the front, and upon all without exception you have impressed the consciousness, the light, the will and the goal, in such a way that everything changes.

This is not to discourage you, but to warn you. I do not want you to say afterwards, “Oh! if I had known it was so difficult, I would not have started.” You must know that it is excessively difficult and begin with great firmness and continue to the end, even if the end is a very long way off—there are many things to do. Now, I may tell you that if you do it sincerely, with application and care, it is extremely interesting. Even those whose life is quite monotonous, without interest (there are, you know, poor people who have to do utterly uninteresting work and always the same thing, and always in the same conditions, and whose mind is not sufficiently awakened to be able to find an interest in anything whatever), even those people, if they begin to do this little work upon themselves, of control, of elimination, that is to say, if each element which comes with its ignorance, its unconsciousness, its egoism, is put before the will to change and one remains awake, compares, observes, studies and slowly acts, that becomes infinitely interesting, one makes marvellous and quite unexpected discoveries. One finds in oneself lots of small hidden folds, little things one had not seen at the beginning; one undertakes a sort of inner chase, goes hunting into small dark corners and tells oneself: “What, I was like that! this was there in me, I am harbouring this little thing!”—sometimes so sordid, so mean, so nasty. And once it has been discovered, how wonderful! One puts the light upon it and it disappears and you no longer have those reactions which made you so sad before, when you used to say, “Oh! I shall never get there.” For instance, you take a very simple resolution (apparently very simple): “I shall never tell a lie again.” And suddenly, without your knowing why or how, the lie springs up all by itself and you notice it after you have uttered it: “But this is not correct—what I have just said; it was something else I meant to say.” So you search, search... “How did it happen? How did I think like that and speak like that? Who spoke in me, who pushed me?...” You may give yourself quite a satisfactory explanation and say, “It came from outside” or “It was a moment of unconsciousness”, and not think any longer about it. And the next time, it begins again. Instead of that, you search: “What can be the motive of one who tells lies?...” and you push—you push and all of a sudden you discover in a little corner something which wants to justify itself, thrust itself forward or assert its own way of seeing (no matter what, there are a number of reasons), show itself a little different from what it is so that people may have a good opinion of you and think you someone very remarkable... It was that which spoke in you—not your active consciousness, but what was there and pushed the consciousness from behind. When you were not quite on your guard, it made use of your mouth, your tongue, and then there you were! The lie came out. I am giving you this example—there are a mil-

lion others. And it is extremely interesting. And to the extent one discovers this within oneself and says sincerely, “It must change”, one finds that one acquires a sort of inner clear-sightedness, one gradually becomes aware of what goes on in others and instead of flying into a temper when they are not quite what one would like them to be, one begins to understand how things happen, how it is that one is “like this”, how reactions are produced... Then, with the indulgence of knowledge, one smiles. One no longer judges severely, one offers the difficulty in oneself or in others, whatever may be its centre of manifestation, to the divine Consciousness, asking for its transformation.

On June 8, 1966, at the time of the publication of this talk, Mother spoke about the same question in terms of her present experience which forms the basis of the “yoga of the body”.

Precisely this is what I have been doing for the last two days. The last two days I have spent all my time seeing all this accumulation, oh! heaps of little sordid things which one lives constantly, very tiny sordid things. And so there is only one way—there is only one way, always the same: to offer.

It is almost as though this Supreme Consciousness were putting you in touch with things long forgotten, which belong to the past, which even are or were or seemed to be completely effaced, with which you no longer have any contact, all sorts of little circumstances, which yet are seen in the new consciousness, in their true place and make such a poor, miserable, mean, sordid whole of the entire life, the entire general human life. And so, it is a luminous joy of offering all this for transformation, for transfiguration.

Now it has become the very movement of the cellular consciousness. All weaknesses, all responses to adverse suggestions (I mean the smallest things of every minute in the cells), are taken in the same movement of offering (and these come sometimes in waves, to such an extent that the body feels it will swoon before this assault), and then comes a light, so warm, so deep, so powerful, which puts everything back in order, in its place, and opens the way to transformation.

These periods are very difficult periods of the bodily life; one feels that there is now only one thing which decides, the Supreme Will. There is no longer any support—any support, from the support of habit to the support of knowledge and of will, all the supports have vanished—there is only the Supreme.

*(Silence)*

Aspiration in the cellular consciousness for perfect sincerity of consecration. And the lived experience—lived intensely—that it is only this absolute sincerity of consecration which allows existence.

The least pretension is an alliance with the forces of dissolution and of death.



Well, it is like a song of the cells—but they must not even have the insincerity of watching themselves do it—the song of the cells: “Thy Will, O Lord, Thy Will.”

And the great habit of depending upon the will of others, the consciousness of others, the reactions of others (of others and of all things), this kind of universal comedy at which all play to all and everything plays to everything, ought to be replaced by an absolute, spontaneous sincerity of consecration.

It is evident that this perfection of sincerity is possible only in the most material part of the consciousness.

It is there that one can succeed in being, existing, doing, without watching oneself being, watching oneself existing, watching oneself doing, with an absolute sincerity.

*(Questions and Answers, 1950-51, pp. 332-40.)*

---

## THE LIVING SHRINE

THE soul of man deputed his ego and retired,  
 Anarchy prevailed, a cry was raised, “The ego be fired!”  
 If man could find his soul within  
 And recover his hold over his deputy,  
 The game is not lost, he can still win  
 His lost kingdom and rule without rivalry.  
 But man must dive deep into his heart  
 To find his soul, force ego to depart.  
 The diver will touch a lever,—upward he flies  
 Till he reaches the temple on the topmost heights.  
 A bell begins to ring, the curtain to rise,  
 The Divine gives Darshan lit by a thousand lights.  
 Every human being is a living shrine  
 Of the one Supreme, the Deathless Divine.

BHANUSHANKAR BHATT

# NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

## THE COMPLETE SET

(Continued from the issue of August 15, 1982)

January 22, 1936

*Nishikanta sends another poem. He is determined to go at you with his literary volleys.*

Kept them till tomorrow. Am racing with time to get work finished before 8 a.m. in the morning, so no time to receive today's volley.

*J says she has been feeling terribly lonely for the last few days, had a terrible impulse to go away.*

The usual terrible seems to have come simultaneously to you, D and her after leaving some others.

*She says that if it happens off and on, it would be a hard job to stick.*

Some people had it terribly once a week or even once a day for months together, yet they stuck or got stuck.

*But what is this loneliness due to? Her isolation?*

No way. It is the usual hubbub of the vital. D used to get this "loneliness" in the full swing of his tea parties, concerts and daily meetings. Nothing to do with isolation. Many isolated people don't feel lonely at all.

*When a person, with few or no friends, comes to see you, how to turn your face away? If any disturbance results from it I can bear if it is helpful, but when it becomes too frequent it'll be unbearable.*

Let us hope it will not be too frequent. Don't want you to fall again either into the flummocks and the flumps or into the dumps. Don't look for these words, at least the first two in the dictionary, they aren't there—my own Joycean neologisms.

January 22, 1936

*Penrose's condition is better, number of motions is reduced, but a new complaint has*

*sprung up. She was given pomegranate juice which she vomited at once, due perhaps to the reflex atony of the stomach. Since then there is nausea and palpitation now and then.*

That was the Mother's impression. Of course pomegranate juice may well have assisted (as she vomited after it), if it was the wrong (medicinal) kind of pomegranate and crushed out of the grains and seeds (becoming strong and bitter) instead of pressed out without crushing. Ordinary pomegranate juice many people take and there are no such results.

I myself was taking it daily at one time; I took it once or twice even prepared in the wrong way without any inconvenience. But if the bitter medicinal kind were given her in a weak condition of the stomach, it might well aggravate.

*I am surprised, Sir, that you are still complaining of time !*

Are you? You wouldn't be if you were in my place.

*No time, no time ! it is going to be an eternal problem with you, it seems ! After the reduction of correspondence—cutting off the evening mail—it leaves you absolutely free for other things. Now that your correspondence is reduced, I suppose you are working at your Savitri.*

Where is the reduction of correspondence? I have to be occupied with correspondence from 8.0 to 12 p.m. (minus one hour), again after bath and meal from 2.30 to 7 a.m. All that apart from afternoon work. And still much is left undone. And you think I can write Savitri? You evidently believe in miracles!

*What about the poem you promised, Sir ?*

I have no time even to think about it or about writing poems at all.

*Muthu K. Swamy & Co. are starting a journal. I said I would give one of Nishikanta's English poems. May I ?*

I don't know whether it will be suitable to the kind of "journal" they can produce.

*January 23, 1936*

*But do you really mean that till 7 a.m. your pen goes on at an aeroplane speed ? Then it must be due more to outside correspondence. I don't see many books or envelopes now on the staircase. Is the supramental freedom from these not in view ?*

Your not seeing unfortunately does not dematerialise them. Books are mainly for the Mother and there is sometimes a mountain, but letters galore. On some days only there is a lull and then I can do something.

*A most stimulating formula I find in your letter—"Within there is a soul, and above there is Grace"—about which you say "This is all you know or need to know." Is that all really?*

For anyone who wants the spiritual life, yes, it is enough.

*Can one arrive at what is called "a state of grace" simply by sticking or simply because there is a soul within?*

Yes, one can, plenty of people have done it.

*But then the soul is there in everybody and Grace is above everybody. How is it that people have turned their backs on the Divine?*

Because of rajasic ego, ambition, vanity—because they believed in their own efforts and not in the Grace.

*I have never heard that Grace did everything. And, where it seems to do so, how do we know that somebody has not done sadhana in his past life? You can't deny it, can you?*

You can't affirm it, can you?

I could point you at many instances in spiritual history—beginning with the famous Jagai Madha. But it is no use against a brain that does not want to admit that  $2+2=4$ .

*Simple sticking won't do. In that case our Ashram cat Bushy would have a chance.*

Of course she has—of rising to a new grade of birth with all in her favour in the next life.

*Because one has to make a Herculean effort in Sadhana I rather hesitate to believe much in Grace. Is not Grace something that comes down unconditionally?*

It does not depend on conditions—which is rather a different thing from an unconditional surrender to any and every sadhak.

*Even Ramakrishna's baby-cat type of sadhak has to make a decisive movement of*

*surrender and compel the rest of the being to obedience, which, let me tell you, sir, is the most difficult thing on earth.*

I never heard that the baby cat was like that—if it were it would not be a baby cat. (It is the baby monkey trying to become a baby cat who does that.) But you have evidently so great a knowledge of spiritual things (surpassing mine and Ramakrishna's) that I can only bow my head and pass humbly on to people with less knowledge.

*If anybody can do the baby-cat surrender at a stroke, is it not because his "unfinished curve" in the past life has finished in this?*

Hail, Rishi, all-knower! Tell us all about our past lives.

*Surely the soul instead of sleeping has to aspire etc. to call down its Lord the Grace. Where do you see that aspiration in me? If you build my spiritual castle on those one or two minutes' brief visitations of Ananda and that too once or twice only, excluding the moments of darshan of your great self, which also have been sometimes marred in these three years—and if you build my poetic mansion on little trickles, then I can only say—well, what shall I say?*

Better say nothing. It will sound less foolish.

*You have often inveighed against my asking you not to use yourself as an argument against the Divine. But what is the history of your sadhana in your own words—a Herculean practice of Pranayam, concentration and what not and then, after years and years of waiting, the Grace of Brahman. Still you are pañcamukha in praise of Grace!*

What a wooden head! What is the use of saying things if you deliberately misinterpret what I write? I said clearly that the pranayam brought me nothing of any kind of spiritual realisation. I had stopped it long before. The Brahman experience came when I was groping for a way, doing no sadhana at all, making no effort because I did not know what effort to make, all having failed. Then in three days I got an experience which most Yogis get only at the end of a long Yoga, got it without wanting or trying after it, got it to the surprise of Lele who was trying to get me something quite different. But I don't suppose you are able to understand—so I say no more. I can only look mournfully at your un-understanding pate.

*Calling for ropes and waiting till they come is all right, but who knows what may happen meanwhile. Won't the expeditionist expire in the jungles, in trying to scale the Himalayas?*

Who asks him to explore the jungles (of his own logic, I suppose) or climb the Himalayas? What has this to do with what I said? I did not tell you to make Herculean efforts.

*I remember instances where people have failed in their sadhana and gone away. The Divine couldn't do much because he says he doesn't propose to do anything against the will of the individual, which means aspiration, rejection, surrender, before the Grace comes down.*

It can mean also waiting on the Grace of the Divine! The will of the individual in this respect does not mean anything like that. If the will of the individual is towards perdition, if his ego becomes hostile to the Divine, then the Divine is not bound to show him a Grace he does not want at all and kicks at.

*It seems to me that behind any difficult endeavour, there is the seeking for Ananda which acts as the motive-power, isn't it so?*

Not that I know of!

*Take the case of X. My God, to think that after all those Napoleonic efforts in poetry, and having succeeded, one is still driven to desperation because, after all, one has obtained nothing spiritually in spite of aspiration, meditation etc.—this is blood-curdling and at once smashes your theory of Karmayoga through poetry.*

Napoleonic rubbish! He was the worst poet in the world before he came here and here immediately as soon as I put my force he began writing beautiful poems. Yet it was by his Napoleonic efforts that he did it. Imbecility, thy name is ego.

I was not putting any Karmayoga theory—I was simply mocking at your absurd idea that it was by your own mighty efforts that you had succeeded in writing poetry which any good judge (you are not one) would call genuine poetry.

*I would not like to invite the same inevitable fate on my weak bony shoulders. So in every way is there room for Hallelujah or for Jeremiad?*

All right, sir, Jeremy away.

*To think that five or six years more of barren desert stretch between me and the Divine Grace, coagulates my blood!*

Coagulate! coagulate! coagulate!

*Please give an answer to these points.*

*Non monsieur,—j'ai d'autres chats à fouetter.* I have other cats to whip—I can't go on whipping one cat all the time. A few lashes in the margin are all I can spare for you just now.

There are three main possibilities for the sadhak—

(1) To wait on the Grace and rely on the Divine. (2) To do everything himself like the full Adwaitin and the Buddhist. (3) To take the middle path, go forward by aspiration and rejection etc. helped by the Force.

The first, it appears, is too easy for you to do it, the second is too difficult for you to do, the third being easy in parts and difficult in parts is as impossible for you to do it. Right? Amen! ! !

*N is passing excessive phosphate. Shall we make a microscopic exam. ?*

Do you want to microscope him out of existence? The loss of phosphates, I suppose, explains his weakness.

*January 24, 1936*

*Very well, Sir, whip the cats and dogs, bulls and hogs, to your heart's content ! Only the whipping has been rather severe in my case, but no help since I have surrendered my life and death at your feet. O cruel one, I shall accept all whipping as a gift of your compassion.*

Righto.

*(To be continued)*

## AN APPEAL

Dear Nirod,

Some months ago, in *Mother India*, one of Sri Aurobindo's answers stated that "spinach water is poisonous"! Now you (and I) naturally understood that he meant it for that particular patient. I believe the patient had something wrong with his inner engineering works!

Now, this has caused a decline in the consumption of spinach (humans, being what they are, always imagine "this means me") and the spinach vendors suffer as their sales go down. Added to this I find life harder! because the friend that used to send me nicely cooked spinach (with a little chopped onion) twice a week, decides that I should not eat it, and stops sending it! This means I have to buy! My Scottish blood rises in righteous indignation.

Will you do something for me? Remember, it will be the first favour I have asked for in all our years of sadhana.

Please ask Amal to put a small footnote<sup>1</sup> under your next issue of "Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo", reminding humans that Sri Aurobindo did not mean it for all and sundry (certainly not sundry). He could just remind people that: "One man's meat is another man's poisson" (sorry, I mean poison).

For example, most people can safely eat mangoes. A delightful fruit. But remember there are some of the less fortunate ones who cannot. I am one, I dare not, I just "boil" over.

"SHALOM."

LEENA DOWSETT

<sup>1</sup> A full place at the head of a page rather than a contracted one at the foot was considered more appropriate for an appeal so heady and not really footling. (Editor)



# AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

RECOLLECTIONS BY SAHANA

*(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1982)*

MYSELF: Mother, please don't suppose that I have been weak enough to want back what I have once given up. Not at all, in spite of all hard struggle. Those incidents regarding X and Y have all been completely excised from my memory. Still a tension is there. I know that ego, self-love, self-importance are at the root of it all, but at the same time I forget it all as quickly. It has been reduced to a tiny little thing, but how persistently it sticks, like a leech! My God, problems and problems!

SRI AUROBINDO: That means it is an obstinate but irrational and mechanical survival of the old movement. That in fact is how these things do try to survive. It is bound to go if you do not give it fresh life. 23.6.33

MYSELF: My mind says how happy it will be when it will be quite free from these bad thoughts! What else shall I write to you, Mother? Do make me free for ever so that not a tinge abides anywhere—make a clean sweep!

SRI AUROBINDO: I have no doubt of it—you have only to understand it rightly and you can get at once to the right ground. 23.6.33

MYSELF: I went to hear the part-recital of a famous drama in someone's house. I liked it, I must say, but the inner being doesn't respond as before in a different atmosphere. I enjoyed it but not with my whole self. Some part watches always the movement of other parts. Nowadays many things which remained at one time unnoticed, are now easily detected, because the vision has turned inward so that I am becoming clearer to my own eyes. Therefore it is no longer possible to enjoy things, in a state unaware of myself. There is always something watching one's varied movements.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a great and indispensable progress to have reached this condition. 10.7.33

MYSELF: Dear Mother, this morning I was getting up after pranam when I saw a sadhak meditating. I saw with open eyes a bright blue light on the wall behind him. A sort of meditative mood came upon me, as I kept on watching the light. Then I closed my eyes; after a while when I opened them, there was such a dazzling golden light that I could look only for some instants. Then I saw not only light, but a figure of light. As soon as I tried to concentrate on it, it vanished. Again, when my mind turned towards you, suddenly this glittering light on the wall attracted my sight. I

looked at it for quite some time. Was it really a vision or something else?

SRI AUROBINDO: The bright blue light was probably the light of the spiritualised mind and the golden light is that of the higher planes of knowledge. Probably it was the light of some Being you saw projected before you, but the vision not being developed you did not see the figure clearly. Sometimes these lights are those of some form or Power of the Mother—many see like that. 20.7.33

MYSELF: In ordinary life, we boast so much of our reason and judgement, but there is no end of error in these judgements.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not the question of ordinary life. In ordinary life people always judge wrongly because they judge by mental standards. The human mind is an instrument not of truth but of ignorance and error. 25.8.33

MYSELF: Mother, we struggle so much over your outer contact, but the inner contact is of no less importance. Then why don't we yearn for it as much as we do for the outer contact?

SRI AUROBINDO: The outward touch is helpful, but the inward is still more helpful when one is accustomed to receive it with a certain concreteness—and the outward touch is not always fully possible, while the inward can be there all the time.

MYSELF: Mother, very often I observe that those persons with whom we live have ways of life different from ours. These don't quite agree with our ways. For this reason an irritation is caused and a kind of uneasiness lingers in the mind. Is there a way to get rid of it at the very root?

SRI AUROBINDO: What you say is right. Those one lives with have always some ways and manners that do not agree with one's own and may grate on the mind. To observe quietly and not resent is part of the discipline in life. Not to be moved or affected at all but see with equanimity the play of the nature in all is the discipline of sadhana.

MYSELF: My vital (external) seems to be like an untrained horse—so impulsive that it is hard to control it. It will not come under any discipline easily, and is happy to roam about at its sweet fancy. However, since you have said that the external vital must undergo some discipline, I have taken up an attitude to follow regarding work. It seems some good result is coming, thanks to your Grace.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is true that for the external vital an outer discipline is necessary for the purification, otherwise it remains restless and fanciful and at the mercy of its own impulse—so that no basis can be built there for a quiet and abiding higher consciousness to remain firmly. The attitude you have taken for the work is of course the best one, and applying it steadily the progress you feel was bound to come and is sure to increase.

**MYSELF:** I see very well that my consciousness has become externalised. When shall I become free from taking interest in the discussions and criticisms made by other people? One part of mine is very eager to join in the discussions. Now it is kept down; otherwise it will pop up at any opportunity. At times in moods of confidence I feel that I have nothing to do with these things. But alas, the moods don't last and I lose my proper condition. However, when a veil falls upon the light of awareness, it produces a suffocation and I cry, "Oh how I wish I could get out of this intolerable situation!"

**SRI AUROBINDO:** It all comes from your allowing yourself to externalise too much in your contact with N and P and the yielding to this interest in N's talk about others. You must keep that entirely aloof from you.

It is also better to be more strict about not talking of others and criticising them with the ordinary mind—not only in the case of Y and X but all. It is necessary in order to develop a deeper consciousness and outlook on things that understands in silence the movements of Nature in oneself and others and is not moved or disturbed or superficially interested and drawn into an external movement.

Dismiss all that and get back into your poise. 26.8.33

**MYSELF:** Mother, this evening I sang and felt much better, as if some light was there. Otherwise the whole day was in a neutral state. The vital and the psychic alternating with each other and thereby bringing endless joy and endless suffering. What an upheaval!

**SRI AUROBINDO:** It is because this has been a constant and long-indulged habit. These habits of the physical vital are almost automatic in their action and it takes either a very strong will or a persistent effort of self-discipline to get out of this automatic, almost reflex action. You should not therefore be discouraged by the difficulty, but go on with the necessary perseverance of the will to press it out of existence. 27.8.33

**MYSELF:** Rejection has to be done: I know it but to yield oneself again and again to what has to be rejected is a condition I cannot bear, nor the suffering caused by it.

**SRI AUROBINDO:** The lower vital is not a part that listens to reason. There is no why to its action; it acts in a particular way because it has long been accustomed to act in that way, and it goes on even if the doing brings a painful reaction. 27.8.33

*(To be continued)*

(Sahana's Bengali letters translated by Nirodbaran)

# THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

*(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1982)*

## The Mother's Message

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



To adorn the image of the Supreme Mother was quite an experience. The Mother asked me to dress her in white and gold—she even asked me to paint her nails in gold.

After the completion of the petticoat, I showed it to the Mother in the evening. While seeing it she exclaimed:

“Child, why is it open on the sides? It should be stitched properly.”

I smiled and said: “Because the idol is such that I have to keep the petticoat open so that I can wrap it round the Supreme Mother and then fasten the hooks.”  
The Mother said:

“But can’t she jump straight away into the petticoat from above?”

And she laughed—the warmth of her quick laughter matched the humorous look in her bright eyes.

I thought to myself that she could even crack a joke about herself. For, she was the Supreme Mother!

In the stillness of the night, I opened the book, *The Mother*, and read this remarkable description of the Supreme Mother:

“...The one original transcendent Shakti, the Mother stands above all the worlds and bears in her eternal consciousness the Supreme Divine. Alone, she harbours the absolute Power and the ineffable Presence; containing or calling the Truths that have to be manifested, she brings them down from the Mystery in which they were hidden into the light of her infinite consciousness and gives them a force in her omnipotent power and her boundless life and a body in the universe...”

Sri Aurobindo, in the Centenary Edition, Vol. 22, p. 384, has given a beautiful explanation about the Transcendent Mother:

“This is what is termed the Adya Shakti; she is the Supreme Consciousness and Power above the universe and it is by her that all the Gods are manifested, and even the supramental Ishwara comes into manifestation through her—the supramental Purushottama of whom the Gods are Powers and Personalities.”

The next morning a tiny card depicting flowers came from the Mother, bringing these encouraging words:

“Bonjour to my dear little child Huta,  
With my love and blessings to face all difficulties.”

Before the 24th November—the Darshan Day—I had to finish decorating all the Gods and Goddesses. The Mother expressed her wish to see them earlier in her private Stores before they would be sent for the exhibition. Alas! there was still much work left to do. I became impatient and worried. Countless thoughts raced through my mind. I wrote to the Mother asking her why, when I was doing the Di-

vine's work, there should be so many obstructions and such a lack of collaboration from some people.

On a card on which was a picture of a scarlet macaw, the Mother replied:

"The black snake is dangerous *only if you side with it*. Without *your consent or support* it is POWERLESS. Only refuse its suggestions and it will soon be defeated.

"With my love and blessings always."

My peace of mind was shattered. I experienced a dreadful feeling of shock and became so queer and touchy that I could not possibly regain my composure. In that state I went to the Mother in the evening. At once she held my hand and looked intently into my eyes. Then, while telling her about my woes, I wept. Instantly she gathered me into her arms and tried to soothe me with all her love and tenderness, but I was in no mood to be soothed. I sank my head into her lap, and sobbed bitterly. She put her hand on my head—gently stroking my hair. I raised my head, staring up at the Mother and met her compassionate eyes. Gently she brushed away the tears from my eyes and spoke while patting my hands. Her voice was soft, but her powerful eyes probed my whole being.

"Once there was a baby cat. It was in its mother's mouth. Suddenly it jumped from the mouth and went to play with a scorpion. Its mother warned it against playing with the bad creature but it would not listen. Now, by its very nature, the scorpion stung the baby cat. The kitten screamed and wept. At once it ran to its mother and told her all about the scorpion. The mother asked, 'Then why did you jump out of my mouth?'

"So, child, the hostile forces are like scorpions. They are very nasty indeed. If you do not look at them or listen to them they can be destroyed. People should constantly refuse to listen when the evil forces put false suggestions before them. Otherwise these forces would destroy everything.

"There are so many beings and in each being there are so many other beings also. They come at every moment and take many different forms and harass the true being. The devil always spreads his influence in human lives.

"I know how the hostile forces enter peoples' brains—it is through anger, dislike and innumerable desires and useless matters. First of all, anger catches the legs and gradually it goes up to the navel and then to the heart and finally to the brain, and people get terribly hurt. Once anger enters the brain, it is difficult to control oneself. So we should prevent it from entering and then it is easier to overcome.

"In the ordinary world people remain mostly satisfied with small pleasures—but, indeed, some part of their being aspires for higher things. Here, there is nothing except the Divine, so naturally the lower vital and the lower mind and other parts of the being begin to make an uproar and they revolt against the

true being and upset people. There may also be at times interference from other people. But one should not mind whether they are kind to one or not. None have any right to interfere with others' affairs—it is not their business. On the contrary they should remember their goal and the Divine. And whatever comes from Him they should accept, and surrender themselves to the Divine's Will. This comes by constant practice. Everyone has to change himself sooner or later. I am constantly working in people; whether they are conscious or not, whether they feel or not—the Grace is always there.

“If people submit to the hostile forces then what is the use? When these bad forces come and start their mischief people should ignore them and build the wall of a clear ‘NO’ in front of them. And they should repeat ‘The Divine’s Victory is certain.’

“Everyone must turn to the Divine Light and surrender to the Truth alone. I know the end and the *Victory is certain*.

“You see, already I have given all the strength that you need. Now you have to use it and reject all lower things from your nature. I am always with you to help you.

“You must be cleverer at outplaying the tricks of the hostile forces and their suggestions. You must do everything possible against them. Also you must remain firm in your aspiration for the Goal.

“Everybody has difficulties but truly there is a joy in getting out of them. If you have this joy, you can realise the real thing, not otherwise.”

I was still badly shaken by my own emotions and truly despised myself for them, but at that moment I really suffered and was still sobbing my heart out. Holding me still closer, the Mother stroked my hair with infinite tenderness. I did not wish to remain any longer with the Mother and was about to take my leave when she grasped my hand and said with concern:

“My child, look at your nose! It has become so red, you cannot go out like that—people must not see you in this state. Come with me.”

She led me to her bathroom but it did not look like one. It was painted green and packed with the most lovely roses—some half-open, some in full bloom—they were of all colours, shapes and fragrances. Roses were arranged on a large stand having several graded tiers and this was placed in one corner of the bathroom. The sweet scent filled my nostrils, the coolness of peace enfolded me and I forgot my agony. The atmosphere and aroma of the bathroom were heavenly. I felt as though I never wanted to leave this place because everything was so sublimely beautiful.

I was awakened from my reverie when the Mother held a powder-box in front of me. She opened it and fluffed a layer of scented pink powder over my face with a soft puff—especially over my nose. After that she said with a smile:

“Voilà! Now look in the mirror and see whether I have applied the powder correctly.”

I peeped into the mirror for a second and told her that everything was perfect and I thanked her. As a matter of fact, I was totally overwhelmed and thought that I was dreaming—I could not possibly bring myself to believe it all. Had this really happened?

We went back to her living room and she took a glass of some liquid from the table, probably Lithiné water, took a sip or two and then asked me to drink it. Now, according to the Indian custom, I did not want to drink water from the same glass as she had. I asked her how I could drink from her glass. She gazed at me intently for a moment, yet I felt in those powerful eyes a hint of softness. Then she gave me the glass and said:

“It does not matter, drink it.”

Well, I held the glass with my two trembling hands and drank it with half-shut eyes. The Mother was very close to me, I could feel the warmth and strength that emanated from her. She watched my movements all the time. The water tasted a bit sour, but it was nice all the same and I felt much refreshed. Now, instead of putting the glass on the table, unconsciously I gave it back to the Mother to set it on the table. At once I saw a glimmer of amusement in her eyes. I was so astonished that I did not know what I was doing—I forgot everything in her soothing Presence. Then apologetically I raised my eyes to her compassionate face. We exchanged smiles. She gave me white roses and other flowers and embraced me fondly. I went off with a happy heart.

The next morning, the Mother sent me a card of painted yellow chrysanthemums, accompanied by these lines:

“To my dear little child, to my sweet Huta  
 “Remain open to the Divine’s *energy* that will give you the strength to keep  
 up your resolution to remain always in the Divine’s protection.  
 “With my love, help and blessings for ever.”

\*

In those days the Pondicherry bazaar was not much to look at—only two rows of uneven shops with broken steps was called the main bazaar! The open gutters near the shops stank terribly. However, we had to do with our small market-place.

I went to one of the shops. A tiny throne attracted my eyes. It looked like a royal chair with a red velvet cushion. I bought it and thought that it would be nice if I placed one of the Mother’s latest photographs on the chair and exhibited it along with the Gods and Goddesses.



I wrote to the Mother to send me her latest photograph. She answered:

“I have seen the small photos that are with Champaklal. He has only *one kind* the same as the one you have already, so I am not sending you another one. But you will find enclosed the gold beads.

“With my love, strength and all help for a full success.

“My blessings are always with you.”

I placed on the chair the small photograph of the Mother with a gold chain, which I found in the Mother’s Stores. I used the gold beads for the Supreme Mother.

My work was going on fairly steadily. I tried more and more to remain absorbed in it, forgetting all unpleasant incidents.

My nature is such that I always like to accomplish all work quietly, precisely, systematically and in its proper time. I dislike rushing and running to finish the work at the last moment. I like everything to be organised accurately so that the work may not suffer or get ruined. I have observed that when work is done in haste, there always lurks behind it some insincerity, disharmony and imperfection. I suffered a lot owing to my scrupulous habit, because people would not understand me and called me a fussy and obsessed person.

On 8th June the Mother sent me a copy of *Savitri* with her love and blessings. At that time I thought that it was impossible to understand and grasp the very essence of the epic. It was incredible. And once more the dreadful feeling of inferiority crept into my consciousness.

In the evening I went to the Mother. We meditated together for quite some time. I felt a little relieved. But it was temporary. I went to my room at Golconde. A torrent of tears sprang to my eyes, hot and difficult to control for a long while.

That evening there was a French class in the courtyard of the Playground. The Mother used to sit on her special chair against the spiritual map of undivided India—in the centre of which there is the Mother’s symbol.

People sat nearby to hear her answers to the questions put by the Ashram children.

I have read about the Mother’s map in her Cent. Ed., Vol. 13, p. 368:

“The map was made after the partition. It is the map of the true India in spite of all passing appearances, and it will always remain the map of the true India, whatever people may think about it.”

In the same volume p. 380, the Mother has also said:

“India is not the earth, rivers and mountains of this land, neither is it a collective name for the inhabitants of this country. India is a living being, as much living as, say, Shiva. India is a goddess as Shiva is a god. If she likes, she can manifest in human form.”

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written and spoken voluminously about India.

Since I had a lot of work to do I did not attend the class. That night I wrote a letter to Laljibhai in answer to his:

“Respected Brother,

Greetings with the Mother’s blessings.

All your letters have reached me. I am perfectly aware of the unpleasant situation there.

Whatever the Supreme Lord has willed is bound to happen.

I wish you all well. My health is all right, and I am getting on with the spiritual life which is not at all easy. I have no idea what shape the future will take.

I have already written to our mother.

Please do remember me to all there with my best wishes. My fond love to the children.

With the Mother’s blessings and my regards.”

Huta

The volume of *Savitri* was just lying in front of me. I touched it and my eyes filled with tears, because to follow it was beyond my comprehension. At once I felt strong vibrations in my head and started receiving all sorts of suggestions. I sat in a frozen silence, making no effort to sort them out. The chaotic suggestions wrought havoc inside me. I felt I was good for nothing.

The Mother sent me a card which showed a fine parrot and the following words:

“Let the remembrance of the *Truth* be always with you.

“My love, blessings and help are and will always be with you.”

I could not possibly make up my mind between the Divine and the devil. I was utterly mystified by two enormous Forces—I could not tell which one was right and which one wrong.

Later that evening I saw the Mother at the Playground in her room. It was Sunday. She had a little more time.

As she studied me for a long moment she put her left hand to her brows and then said rather severely:

“Child, if you do not make any resolution, and do not take one definite decision, the difficulties will often come and always you will suffer. But you do not know that the Divine has already taken the decision for you. I organise everything in your being but you revolt against the Divine’s work and you are not ready to collaborate. So you should not complain or say anything.

“You feel tired of all outer things and circumstances, but as a matter of fact

all difficulties are in your own nature and that is why you feel so. Brooding over small matters and thinking constantly about your own interests instead of trying to reach your goal, you really waste your time.

“If your mind wavers from one side to the other, then your difficulties are sure to persist: there will be no end to them. On the contrary, if you turn your consciousness to the Divine alone, then there will be no more trouble and suffering.

“In any case, sooner or later the adverse forces must give up their sway and accept the Truth. Take, for example, a plant growing between two stones. If you cut off the top of the plant above the stones, it will surely grow over and over again, but if you push aside the stones, and root it out once for all, that will be the end of it. The same applies to human nature and its wrong habits. The rooting out of these habits may give some pain at the time, but afterwards they will be gone for good.

“My child, if you leave everything to the Divine and make a total surrender and rely only on the Divine, the Divine will soon lead you to your goal. In fact, the Divine is doing Yoga for those who are ready to do everything according to the Divine’s Will.”

Tears brimmed my eyes as I looked at the Mother and said: “Mother, all that you have said is perfectly right. But some parts of my being are weak and helpless against the adverse suggestions. No matter how hard I try to give myself completely to the Divine, I feel a strong resistance in me and it is really very difficult to get out of my subconscious. I am at my wit’s end and utterly lost. Since I go on troubling and disturbing you, will it not be best if I withdraw from this life...?” And my voice broke—I fought back my tears.

The Mother went again into a trance for a few minutes and then said gravely, looking straight into my eyes:

“Those who put an end to their lives do not act rightly. That which should be done in this body is not done. This place—the earth—is the only place where you can always remain conscious of the Divine. And it is in the body that you have to attain union with the Divine. Otherwise after death all the parts of the being scatter and in no way can they unite. Also, for many births there is no solution and, before the solution comes, a million difficulties arise—even more than in this present life. Once you are united with the Divine in this body, you are free from all bondage and whenever you wish to withdraw from the physical life, you are free to do so.”

There was a heavy cold sensation in the pit of my stomach and for several minutes my brain simply refused to accept the truth of what she had just told me.

The Mother raised my face towards hers and looked into my tear-filled eyes and

then gave me flowers and kissed my forehead.

That very night while sitting in an armchair, I brooded on all that she had said to me, and felt that I was really helpless against the reigning falsehood and I asked myself eagerly, "Is there any chance of getting away from my small self, changing entirely my whole life and consecrating it integrally to the Divine?" My thoughts were a tangled mess; the harder I struggled to find a pattern, the worse became the skeins. My eyes, aching with fatigue and with many shed and unshed tears, closed involuntarily and I fell into a troubled sleep.

The next morning, I received from the Mother a pretty card of Oleander flowers together with these lines:

"Bonjour to my little child, to my sweet Huta who will become all sweetness, love and devotion, forgetting all the past difficulties and living in the joy of a perfect consecration.

"With my love and blessings."

She saw me in the evening and said with compassion:

"There are different kinds of natures in human beings, which are moving in a cycle. But always you have to put them before the Divine's Light. Even if you cannot see the Light, the Light is always there. If you become conscious of it, you get joy from its movements. But it is certain that one day the Light will suddenly reveal itself and surprise you. Then you will say, 'Oh! what is this?' Indeed, the Divine is working ceaselessly for this realisation—whether you feel it or not, the Divine's work is going on.

"For this there is no need of any university degree or sharpness of intellect—what is to be done will be done automatically by the Grace and you will see the Light with wonder.

"My child, you must eat properly, sleep peacefully, read and do your work. At the same time you should also pray and remember the Divine frequently by keeping your aspiration and faith intact and rejecting all false suggestions."

It was Monday—the Mother's translation class. I sat in the class with a restless mind. The feeling of utter misery, loneliness, helplessness and an inferiority complex still persisted. Suddenly everything seemed to have gone wrong. Tears streamed down my cheeks. I did not want anybody to see my tears. So I hid my face in the crook of my arms and put my head on the bench. After a while, when I raised my head, I saw the Mother looking at me. Eyes like hers measured and fathomed everything. Then her gaze met mine again and again to check my vagrant thoughts. After the class she parted with a charming smile. I did not go into her room to collect the flowers she had given me. With an unhappy heart I reached home, and the first thing I did was to hide the volume of *Savitri* in my cupboard. I knew I would

never ever understand the epic.

Later I didn't even go to the Ashram and stand at my place from where I could see the Mother when she arrived from the Playground. Usually I was always there to receive her enchanting smile or sometimes flowers.

That very night in my sleep I heard the Mother reciting *Savitri*. Her voice was very distinct—sweet and soothing like a well-tuned chime of bells. I also felt strongly the warmth of her Presence.

In the morning the Mother sent me a pretty card accompanied by these lines:

“En route vers la Victoire!

“With all my love, help and blessings, always.”

More and more she tried to give me self-confidence. But I knew my unfortunate nature and was aware of the ruthless churning in my whole being day and night. I tried hard to stop my tears, yet they filled my eyes instantly each time I was attacked by the nether forces. But all the same my little mind thought it was rather a vain hope and yet one worth a try: despite all ordeals my soul would endure and aspire till the Victory was won.

As always, I met the Mother in the evening. She looked deeply into my eyes and went into a profound meditation for a few moments, still holding my hands. Then she said:

“To do yoga is to reject all adverse elements and remember the Divine constantly.

“Total surrender is to give up all likings and dislikings. This, however, does not happen in a day. You must practise incessantly and sincerely and you will gradually get it.

“There is no question of being fit or unfit for that, because everyone has to find the Divine sooner or later.

“Those who are in the Ashram are really fortunate. There are millions of people who lead an ordinary life and are born and die without knowing anything about the Divine Life. They have also no real idea of the Ashram. There are only a few hundreds who know the Truth.”

Once again she plunged into a trance for a few seconds. Then with a tender smile she caressed my hands and took me into her arms for a moment or two. At that time I felt like remaining within her clasp for ever. I related to her my experience of the previous night. She said:

“Yes, indeed, I recited *Savitri* to you and it was a passage from Book Eleven, ‘The Book of Everlasting Day’, the conversation between the Supreme Lord and Savitri.”

There was a bright, inscrutable smile in her eyes.

At once a memory came winging back to me: what a coincidence that it was also lines from Book Eleven, which had impressed me so much before ever I came to the Ashram!

\*

Days passed by with the same routine. I got bored and unusually restless. I asked myself whether I actually led the spiritual life or was wasting my time.

On 15th June the Mother sent me a card showing a peacock on it—underneath the card she had written:

“This bird of birth to spiritual life.”

On the same card she inscribed:

“With my love, help, strength and blessings always.”

This illuminating passage from Sri Aurobindo in the Cent. Ed., Vol. 19, p. 1018 about the spiritual life is apt :

“...All spiritual life is in its principle a growth into divine living. It is difficult to fix the frontier where the mental ceases and the divine life begins, for the two project into each other and there is a long space of their intermingled existence. A great part of this interspace,—when the spiritual urge does not turn away from earth or world altogether,—can be seen as the process of a higher life in the making. As the mind and life become illumined with the light of the Spirit, they put on or reflect something of the divinity, the secret greater Reality, and this must increase until the interspace has been crossed and the whole existence is unified in the full light and power of the spiritual principle....”

It was Friday. The Mother and I met in the evening at the Playground, and meditated together for a short while.

Later in the evening there was a French class. I did not sit in the courtyard of the Playground, but went home to finish my pending work of decorating the Supreme Mother.

The next morning a card arrived from the Mother with these words:

“Be sure, quite sure, that my love, force, protection, help and blessings are constantly with you.”

In the afternoon I went to the tennis court to see the Mother playing tennis. I sat very close against the wall so that I might receive her smile. Sometimes from the

opposite side a ball came and hit me and the Mother laughed.

That day it was Saturday. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry to see a movie. The Mother first censored the movie, then she would see it with all of us. Her chair was put in the middle. Those days the movie-screen was not as big as it is at present.

I remembered to have seen a puppet-show with horrible music at the Playground. It was extremely boring. The Mother kept on looking at it because of her children: otherwise everyone would go away and the people who had come from outside and demonstrated it would feel offended.

I could not see any more.

On 19th June the Mother wrote:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta,

À tout à l’heure.

“With my love, strength, protection and blessings always.”

It was Tuesday. The Mother saw me in the morning in the Meditation Hall upstairs. She showed her pleasure on seeing the image of the Supreme Mother with her white and gold attire.

I also showed her her own photograph on the royal chair. She was much amused and said:

“Child, it will be good if you do not keep my photograph among the Gods and Goddesses and exhibit it. Come with me. I shall show you the place where this nice chair with the photograph will remain.”

Then the Mother led me to the room where Sri Aurobindo and she had given Darshan to people in the early days. I placed the chair where she wanted—in a small cupboard to the right. She smiled pleasantly.

After receiving fragrant flowers and a soft kiss on my forehead I made my way to the Mother’s Stores. I kept there the idol of the Supreme Mother along with those of the Four Powers.

Now, indeed, I recollect the luminous and gorgeous appearance of the Supreme Mother and these lines from the Upanishads, Cent. Ed., Vol. 12, p. 255, flash across my mind:

या प्राणेन सम्भवत्यदितिर्देवतामयी ।

गुहां प्रविश्य तिष्ठन्ती या भूतेभिर्व्यजायत ।

एतद्दे तत् ॥ ७ ॥

“This Aditi, the Mother of the Gods, who was born through the Prana and by the mingling of the elements had her being: deep in the heart of things she has entered, there she is seated. *This is That thou seekest.*”

I wondered why the Mother showed her unwillingness to exhibit her photograph among the Gods and Goddesses. But here is the explanation by the Mother in her Cent. Ed., Vol., 3, pp. 173-74 :

“...Above the mind there are several levels of conscious being, among which the really divine world is what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the world of the Truth. But in between is what he has distinguished as the Overmind, the world of the cosmic Gods. Now it is this Overmind that has up to the present governed our world: it is the highest that man has been able to attain in illumined consciousness. It has been taken for the Supreme Divine and all those who have reached it have never for a moment doubted that they have touched the true Spirit. For, its splendours are so great to the ordinary human consciousness that it is absolutely dazzled into believing that here at last is the crowning reality. And yet the fact is that the Overmind is far below the true Divine. It is not the authentic home of the Truth. It is only the domain of the *formateurs*, all those creative powers and deities to whom men have bowed down since the beginning of history. And the reason why the true Divine has not manifested and transformed the earth-nature is precisely that the Overmind has been mistaken for the Supermind. The cosmic Gods do not wholly live in the Truth-Consciousness: they are only in touch with it and represent, each of them, an aspect of its glories....

“The Overmind, therefore, does not and cannot possess the power to transform humanity into divine nature. For that, the Supramental is the sole effective agent. And what exactly differentiates our Yoga from attempts in the past to spiritualise life is that we know that the splendours of the Overmind are not the highest reality but only an intermediate step between the mind and the true Divine.”

People may ask why I was exhibiting the idol of the Supreme Mother. It was to show the ultimate source from which all the Gods and Goddesses had come.

From the Mother's Stores I went to Golconde. It was already late. The dining room at Golconde was almost empty. I had lunch and the *Prasad* which the Mother had sent me. Afterwards I retired to my room for a nap.

In the evening I went to the Mother. It was a joy to meditate with her. As a matter of fact, I did not know how to meditate. I simply closed my eyes, and relished the sweet warmth of her Presence and Peace.

Then the Mother laid her hands for a moment over mine, with a light, firm pressure that was reassuring.

She chose many flowers and gave them to me, and took me into her arms and embraced me fondly. Then I made my exit.

Later there was a distribution of nuts in small bags. I stood before the Mother to receive them. She held my hands and looked at me concentratedly. With a smile



she gave a tiny bag of nuts. I took my seat against a wall from where I could see her.

While munching the roasted groundnuts I observed people who were receiving the nuts from the Mother. Her expression changed with each individual. I was amused to see the expression of people and the way they walked! Among them I remember a French lady who suffered from one thing or another—God alone knew what. She was staying at Golconde on the 2nd floor—just above my room. In the middle of the night she used to scream. I simply shuddered and called Maniben to sleep in my room. She used to sleep on the floor on a mat. She was very kind to me.

One of my failings was a lack of self-confidence and fearlessness. Eventually the French lady left the Ashram.

At the Playground, after finishing the nuts I put the small bag in a basket where all the empty bags were collected.

I made for home. From there I went to the Ashram to see the Mother when she came to go to her apartment after the heavy activities at the Playground.

The Mother never failed to appreciate and encourage the way I worked. She wrote:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta who is doing such fine work and pretty things.

“My love, force, protection and help are always with you as well as my blessings.”

The completion of decorating the image of Mother India was satisfactory. But I needed a lion to put near the idol. The Mother sent a lion made out of marble, along with these words:

“I am sending you the small lion. It needs a little retouching, but I suppose you will be able to do it.

“My love, force, protection and help are always with you along with my blessings that do not leave you.”

I painted the lion here and there with gold, red and black paint. Now it looked very elegant.

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have written so many things about Mother India. Here I cannot restrain myself from quoting the Mother:

“O India, Land of light and spiritual knowledge!  
Wake up to your true mission in the world,  
show the way to union and harmony.”

I was indeed submerged in my work and forgot my existence among the Gods and Goddesses.

On 24th June the Mother sent me *Radha's Prayer*:

“O Thou whom at first sight I knew for the Lord of my being and my God, receive my offering.

“Thine are all my thoughts, all my emotions, all the sentiments of my heart, all my sensations, all the movements of my life, each cell of my body, each drop of my blood. I am absolutely and altogether Thine, Thine without reserve. What Thou wilt of me, that I shall be. Whether Thou choosest for me life or death, happiness or sorrow, pleasure or suffering, all that comes to me from Thee will be welcome. Each one of Thy gifts will be always for me a gift divine bringing with it the supreme Felicity.”

She wrote on the same card:

“My love, force, strength and help are always with you and my blessings do not leave you.”

Sri Aurobindo has written in the Cent. Ed., Vol. 23, p. 796:

“Radha is the personification of the absolute love for the Divine, total and integral in all parts of the being from the highest spiritual to the physical, bringing the absolute self-giving and total consecration of all the being and calling down into the body and the most material nature the supreme Ananda.”

The Mother has said in her Cent. Ed., Vol. 13, p. 39 about Krishna:

“...Between 11 and 13 a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God but man’s possibility of uniting with Him, of realising Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine. This, along with a practical discipline for its fulfilment, was given to me during my body’s sleep by several teachers, some of whom I met afterwards on the physical plane.

“Later on, as the interior and exterior development proceeded, the spiritual and psychic relation with one of these beings became more and more clear and frequent; and although I knew little of the Indian philosophies and religions at that time I was led to call him Krishna, and henceforth I was aware that it was with him (whom I knew I should meet on earth one day) that the divine work was to be done....

“As soon as I saw Sri Aurobindo I recognised in him the well-known being whom I used to call Krishna... And this is enough to explain why I am fully convinced that my place and my work are near him, in India.”

Here I wish to quote some lines from *Savitri*, Cent. Ed., Vol. 29, p. 701. They tell us what effect there will be on earth when the Divine has answered the Prayer of

Radha who is Perfect Love for the Divine and one of the most beautiful aspects of the Supreme Mother:

“Hearts touched by thy love shall answer to my call,  
 Discover the ancient music of the spheres  
 In the revealing accents of thy voice,  
 And nearer draw to me because thou art:  
 Enamoured of thy spirit’s loveliness  
 They shall embrace my body in thy soul,  
 Hear in thy life the beauty of my laugh,  
 Know the thrilled bliss with which I made the worlds.  
 All that thou hast, shall be for others’ bliss,  
 All that thou art, shall to my hands belong.”

As on other days the Mother and I had meditation together in her room at the Playground. The next morning she sent me a card featuring the flower *Amaryllis* in different colours—together with these words:

“Here is the ‘conversion of the vital’ and the ‘consecration of the vital’ (white), which will put an end to all your troubles and for which the Grace is working ceaselessly—even when you are not aware of it.”

The following lines from the Cent. Ed., Vol. 24, p. 1292 are apposite:

“It is through a change in the vital that the deliverance from the blind vital energy must come—by the emergence of the true vital which is strong, wide, at peace, a willing instrument of the Divine and of the Divine alone.”

From my own experience, I dare say that it is not at all easy to convert the vital into something stupendous. The vital being reminds me of a quagmire. The more one struggles to come out of it, the more one sinks into it and yet nothing is impossible for the Divine’s Grace.

One more card came from the Mother, showing a sunflower and saying:

“Here is ‘Consciousness turned exclusively towards the Divine.’ Is it not a pretty flower? Let it be a living reality. All my love, help, strength and blessings are always with you for that.”

\*

The next idol which was to be decorated was of Mother Nature. These verses from *Savitri*, Bk. 4, Canto 3, p. 380 are quite appropriate:

“The bosom of our mother kept for us still  
Her austere regions and her musing depths,  
Her impersonal reaches lonely and inspired  
And the mightinesses of her rapture haunts.”

Right from the very beginning of my childhood I liked beautiful things—I especially loved and still love to watch the splendours of Nature. I never get bored with her grandeur. I still remember vividly the magnificent scenery when I travelled by train from Genoa (Italy) to Paris in 1952 with one of my brothers. Actually we had been travelling through Europe by car, but in Genoa my brother was suddenly taken ill, and we had to go by train. The driver followed us with the car to Paris.

It was a moonlit night, the sky was cloudless, the moon with a bluish tinge and approaching the full was sailing serenely, throwing its cool light upon the snow-clad Alps, and the reflection turned the mountains into a shimmering pale blue light. There was a great beauty and silence.

Indeed, the Mother knew about my love of beauty and she sent me a card with a quotation from herself:

“It is through Beauty that the Divine manifests in the physical, in the mental through Knowledge, in the vital through Power, and in the psychic through Love.”

She also wrote on the same card:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta who is a true lover of Beauty, the Divine aspect of physical life. With my love and blessings, the Grace is always with you.”

The Mother must have seen and felt in my true being the intense urge to create something new—something wonderful. That was why she encouraged me in that direction. I remember the passage in her *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 281:

“In the world of forms a lack of Beauty is a fault as great as lack of Truth in the world of ideas. For Beauty is the homage which Nature renders to the supreme Master of the universe; Beauty is the divine language in the form. A consciousness of the Divine which is not externally translated by an understanding and an expression of Beauty would be an incomplete consciousness.

“But true Beauty is as difficult to discover, to understand and, above all, to live as any other expression of the Divine; this discovery and this expression demand as much impersonality and abdication of egoism as the discovery of Truth or Bliss. Pure Beauty is universal, and one must be universal in order to see and recognise it....”

Sri Aurobindo has written in *The Human Cycle* on Suprarational Beauty, Cent. Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 134-35:

“What has been said of great creative art, that being the form in which normally our highest and intensest aesthetic satisfaction is achieved, applies to all beauty, beauty in Nature, beauty in life as well as beauty in art. We find that in the end the place of reason and the limits of its achievement are precisely of the same kind in regard to beauty as in regard to religion....

“It is in truth seeking, as in religion, for the Divine, the All-Beautiful in man, in nature, in life, in thought, in art; for God is Beauty and Delight hidden in the variation of his masks and forms. When, fulfilled in our growing sense and knowledge of beauty and delight in beauty and our power for beauty, we are able to identify ourselves in soul with this Absolute and Divine in all the forms and activities of the world and shape an image of our inner and our outer life in the highest image we can perceive and embody of the All-Beautiful, then the aesthetic being in us who was born for this end, has fulfilled himself and risen to his divine consummation. To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.”

It was the last day of June. The Mother sent me a quotation from her own writings:

“Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence. This manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part.”

On the same card she wrote:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta who loves beauty and works for it.

“With my love and blessings always.

“P.S. enclosed the Rs.100 for July.”

I was pleased to receive the money. For, I needed to get numerous things done for the image of Mother Nature—“The Mother of Multitude”. I was positive that it would take considerable time for me to arrange everything in perfect order and I was prepared for it.

*(To be continued)*

Copyright © Huta D. Hindocha

#### Note

Huta thanks all who have written to her in appreciation of “The Story”.

# TOWARDS FREEDOM AND PERFECTION

## TWO PERSONAL LETTERS

*(Continuing the series of May 1982)*

### 3—To Minnie

You have inquired about my daily routine or, in Wordsworthian language, my “diurnal course”. The Wordsworthian language is not inappropriate since it comes from a poem in which he speaks of “a thing which could not feel/The touch of earthly years”. I may now explain a certain feature of my day-to-day life which tries constantly to get away from that troublesome touch. Perhaps the explanation will help you also in your moods of fears and anxieties.

When I am working, my mind is on what I read or write, but all my waking hours I am not editor or author. I am very much an ordinary human being—and at present some memories of the near past are fairly unpleasant. I have found a method by which not only are their effects avoided but also the avoidance grows an active part of sadhana.

What I may describe as a fluid mass of general consciousness lies between the brain-mind and the heart of emotion in each of us. Every thought that enters the being rests for the fraction of a second on the surface of this mass before it sinks from the mind-level to the heart. If one attends to it, it immediately starts sinking and once it does it cannot help reaching the emotional level. Then the memories of which I have spoken become painful. What one has to do is to pay no attention at all to the thought but simply sweep it out and away. A single moment’s hesitation in doing this will let it plunge in the direction of the heart. One must refuse to take the slightest interest in it, abstain from the least desire to probe its contents.

Although the procedure I am mentioning is far from easy, it is possible to follow it. But to create a blank on the mental surface is only the first step. In fact, side by side with the saving of the heart from the touch of thought, there occurs a movement of the thought-bare heart itself towards its own inner recesses. At the core of the heart—at the inmost level—is the true soul. The soul is griefless, fearless, stainless, void of the outer being’s past and present. It has a dimension of its own, far from all frailty and from all flux. If one has done Yoga for long, one can feel its presence in a general way and draw an instinctive guidance from it. But the transfer of one’s whole life-centre to it is our aim. By this transfer one’s freedom is not merely negative—a thought-excluding mind. A positive bliss which is the very stuff of existence and therefore independent of persons, objects or circumstances comes into play. One should bend all one’s effort towards it. And a ground for it is prepared by the process I have outlined.

To build permanently on the prepared ground, one must not merely sweep every

unattended thought out and away. One must sweep it towards the Divine Mother. Thus a constant gesture is made of dedication and devotion. At once the heart which is kept free from thought grows more and more aware of its inmost reality as the Divine Mother's Divine Child. Finally its core will kindle into the outer self, and every act be governed openly by the Psychic Being, the Rigveda's Agni who is "the immortal within the mortal" and "the bringer of all the Sun-Gods".

The last phrase is highly significant. For, in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo whoever has felt the interiorising within the heart, whoever has known the motion of a breakthrough towards the soul-depth has also to a greater or lesser extent the strange accompanying sense of a developing breakthrough across some Beyond that is like a vast of unknown brightness watching one's embodied career. One may recall an expression of Wordsworth's in which he addresses the child-consciousness in which the soul-feeling is yet unsullied by the earth:

Thou over whom thy Immortality  
Broods like the Day....

A Presence from a far ether seems on the point of pressing its golden way down to meet the Agni-activity or of drawing up this activity into the noonday-spaces of a birthless and deathless infinitude. Perhaps the two miraculous consummations can be simultaneous, a double manifestation which is at once an all-perfecting Here and an all-liberating Yonder. That would indeed be a truly Aurobindonian fulfilment.

O for that future fusion.

#### 4—To Astrid

I have quite a heap of letters from you, each opening a gate into gladness in my heart and soul. I mention heart as well as soul because the soul in its embodiment in us helps the human to become divine while the heart enables the divine to become human in that embodiment. No doubt, the heart has to be drawn into the soul so that all the emotional being may be purified, refined and illumined. But the soul in which the heart dwells has to be projected if we are to live our lives in relationship with one another and if every one of us human creatures has to count. The dwelling of the emotional nature within the psyche tends to turn the latter towards the earth instead of getting absorbed in a far-off Wonder-World. Of course, the psyche is meant to concern itself with an evolutionary experiment, but there is often a sadness in it at the mess into which it has been thrust and a resultant urge to move away from the bitter taste of common life and get lost in a golden honey of aloneness with the Alone. To keep the human touch always is particularly helpful in our Yoga, for we have to set the Divine working in each level of existence. The only thing to guard against is the slide into substituting social sweetness in place of the great earthward cry of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri, charged with the soul's radiance and rapture:

A lonely freedom cannot satisfy  
 A heart that has grown one with every heart:  
 I am a deputy of the aspiring world,  
 My spirit's liberty I ask for all.

Indeed, there has to be a transforming of relationships. Not an easy job, since the all-too-human crops up again and again. Even at times one may feel that one can never fight free of it. One feels held down by ages and ages of the ordinary rut, and questions: "Is there any hope, any possibility, of change?" Here, as a poet I should say that the soul not only has the stir of such a hope in its inmost recesses but also finds a visible or audible stimulus to it in what Wordsworth calls "many a secret place" in Nature where the more-than-human suddenly beckons from the apparently less-than-human.

Take for example the response on your part—which you write about—to the early morning hour. It is typically psychic. The psyche is certainly within the time-process but it is also beyond it because it is the one entity that persists from birth to changeful birth and is not devoured by the forces of mutability and transience. It has a time-eternity. But it has this in its very substance because it has, too, the essence of the Transcendent which is its ultimate source and which is above the lengthy seemingly unbroken series of past, present and future. Having come from the Timeless into time the chain of events does not really grip it. It goes indeed from life to life and death to death, yet it always carries the sense of the Unbound (though not necessarily the sense of the Boundless, which belongs properly to the single Spirit rather than to the individual Soul). Intrinsically immune to the apparent binding of the world-chain of Karma, it is instinctively, even if not conceptually, aware of the fact which the Mother once underlined that the universe is created anew every instant although from instant to instant it appears to continue as before. What the Mother meant us to recognise is that a divine opportunity exists at all times for us to change instead of believing that we have to drag the past with us as we go through the present into the future. The very time-process gives us a hint or glint of this wonderful truth. It is at the dawn-glimmer each day that we are granted an intuition of the ever-new creative movement of the Supreme Shakti in the cosmos.

Suddenly the world seems flamingly fluid at day-break. Even the word "day-break" may be taken as significant. The long line of temporal happenings is as if rifted when Eos "the rosy-figured" appears, Aurora shows her flawless face, Usha magically takes form, and our being realises—through a glow that vanishes before it can be scanned and yet is to the deepest self in us as if all eternity quintessenced in a point—that everything can be re-made, rendered unfadingly fresh, experienced as a godlike surprise. An immortal light pierces through the dusk of earth's diurnal history. An especial revelation of this luminous immortality is figured in those lines of *Savitri*:



Into a far-off nook of heaven there came  
 A slow miraculous gesture's dim appeal...  
 A wandering hand of pale enchanted light  
 That glowed along a fading moment's brink,  
 Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge  
 A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.

Yes, on that day "when Satyavan must die" and Savitri wrestle with Death, the Supernal Splendour put a touch of more memorable gold into "the dawn moment's glamour" (a phrase from Sri Aurobindo's *Ahana*). But at each dawn-blush a contact occurs between the endless world-flux and the everlasting, all-creative and all-transformative Supermind. The psyche in us, child of the Supermind, awakes to this contact for the twinkling of an eye and has the sudden ecstatic intimation of the Perfect, the Plenary, the unlimitedly Potential. Actually, the psyche is always aware in its depths, but across the night of the mind, life and body which surrounds it God's universe grants its surface-sight a small alchemic reminder every passing day.

AMAL KIRAN

---

### MRS. MINNIE N. CANTEENWALLA

—sister of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)—who had been a true child of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother ever since her late teens and whom Sri Aurobindo had declared even at that time to be "a born poet" passed away on 10th August in Bombay. She would have been 69 on 7th September.

She was well known to the readers of *Mother India* by her poems, two of which appear in this very issue.

# PONDICHERRY

## BY DAY

SWEET breeze, the hot sun's burning embrace,  
Deeply turquoise shimmering skies—  
Little quaint town of Bliss,  
My heart caught within inseparable ties.

The severely radiant equatorial sun  
Energising, infusing life anew.  
Huge thirsty trees drink in the light,  
The pure brilliance soaks our beings through.

Tiny white villas, dear to my heart,  
Stand waiting ever for vibrant sun-gloWS—  
Silences dreaming in the sparkling day,  
Peace-filled streets where the Golden Future flows!

13-4-1982

## BY NIGHT

Late evening, the brink of darkness,  
Little sea-port of the restless waves,  
Dark purple sky—a dome of stars—  
Deep tones from far ocean-caves.

Each quiet lane on the edge of sleep,  
Small town lulled with peace,  
Swept by the sound of a world yet to come  
In the pervading calm amongst slumbering trees.

Laden with the yearned-for Promise  
Are cool breezes wafted to an inner land—  
In the dim night, for the waiting ones,  
A Glorious Gift from an all-mighty Hand!

15.4.1982

MINNIE N. CANTEENWALLA

## HOW I BECAME A HINDU

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1982)

3

FOUR years after leaving college I was ready to join the Communist Party of India when it declared war on the newly born Republic of India in February 1948. I conveyed my decision to my friend Ram Swarup, whom I had met after leaving college and who was to exercise a decisive influence on my intellectual evolution. He wrote back immediately : “You are too intelligent not to become a communist. But you are also too intelligent to remain one for long”.

This was a prophecy which came true. It was only a year and a few months later that I renounced Marxism as an inadequate philosophy, realised that the Communist Party of India was a fifth-column for the advancement of Russian Imperialism in India and denounced the Soviet Union under Stalin as a vast slave empire. Before I tell the story of that transformation, I have to look back and point towards planting some other seeds in my mind. These seeds were to sprout into life as soon as the spell of Marxism was broken and grow into an abiding faith in *Sanātana Dharma*.

The first college teacher to leave a lasting impression on my intellectual growth was our professor of Sanskrit. This great language and its literature were not my main subject in B. A. Hons. I was only supposed to qualify in it in a supplementary examination and then forget all about it. The prescribed course was the first four chapters of *Dasakumāracharit* of Dandin and a few cantos of *Kirātārjunīyam* of Bharavi, with some grammar and translation work thrown in as an aid. In the normal course, therefore, a casual student like me should not have attracted any notice from our Sanskrit professor, nor he from me. But we were fated, as it were, to fascinate each other. The outcome of this meeting was not only my lasting love for the Sanskrit language and literature but several other decisive departures in my way of looking at Hindu philosophy and history.

This professor had spent several years in Europe to earn his Ph D. He had also taught at Santiniketan for some time. But these were only his outer accomplishments which several other professors also had in their own fields. What mattered most to me about him was his vast erudition in the wide fields of traditional Indian philosophy, Indian history and Indian languages and literatures. Every single line of prose and poetry in the prescribed texts was for him an occasion to launch on a learned discourse in comparative linguistics, metaphysics, history, archaeology, and what not. His contempt for modern Indologists was always as obvious as his admiration for everything which was traditionally Hindu.

He startled me one day when he poured undisguised contempt on Sir S. Radhakrishnan who, in his opinion, had tried to fit Hindu philosophy into the strait-jacket of a conceptual framework borrowed from Western philosophy. I had not studied

any Hindu philosophy so far. Nor had I read any writings of Radhakrishnan. But this was a famous name in which every Indian was supposed to take legitimate pride. The professor clinched the argument by stating that a man venturing to write on Hindu philosophy without a knowledge of Sanskrit was like a man writing cheques without a bank balance. Later on I was to discover that the professor was more than right in his indictment.

Another day he came down very heavily on the theory of an Aryan invasion of India in the second millennium B.C. I had never suspected that this theory was a deliberate plant by Western Indologists to prove that India was a *dharmasālā* which no racial, religious or linguistic group in India could claim as its original home. Our teachers of history in school and college had always started their first lessons in Indian history with the advent of the wild Aryans who destroyed the cities in the Indus Valley, who drove the Dravidians towards the South and whose warlike ballads were preserved in the Rigveda. The professor dismissed all this history as a cock-and-bull story for which there was no proof, literary or archaeological.

It was the strong influence of our Sanskrit teacher which made me stand up in protest when our history teacher traced the Bhakti Movement in medieval India to the influence of Islam. It was revolting to hear him quoting Dr. Tarachand approvingly while he taught that Shankaracharya was drawn towards monotheism due to his association with some Arab merchants who had settled down in Kerala towards the end of seventh century A.D. The history teacher challenged me to write a rival thesis disproving what Tarachand had propounded. I wrote a rather long paper on the Bhakti Movement which took me an hour to read before a full class. The history teacher praised me for arguing my case very ably from my own premises. But he was adamant that a well-known authority like Tarachand could not be wrong.

I came very close to our Sanskrit professor who also cherished me as his pet student. He organised a Sanskrit Parishad of which he made me the first secretary. He could speak Sanskrit extempore and very fluently. He encouraged me also to write and read out my speeches in Sanskrit. It was quite an effort in which he helped me. I succeeded and surprised many people who had never known me as a Sanskritist. I also had the opportunity to listen to some famous scholars who came to address two succeeding annual sessions of our Sanskrit Parishad.

But he strongly disapproved of my association with Harijan work. In fact he was not prepared to believe that I could be engaged in such a disgraceful activity when one of my classmates who wanted to praise me before him lodged the first information report. He, therefore, called me to his presence and put the question straight to me. I told him the truth. There was no reproach in his eyes or words. He tried gentle persuasion with some instances of depravity which he thought was hereditarily ingrained in a certain class of people. I had too much respect for him to enter into an argument. But I did not tell him that I did not agree.

This great scholar and teacher fell seriously ill before I started moving towards Marxism. And he died before I left college. I wonder if I would have wandered into

Marxism and atheism had I continued under his influence. I also wonder if we two would have ever agreed, one way or the other, about the problem of untouchability. But as I look back I am filled with gratitude for the seeds of pride in Hindu culture and history which he was the first to plant in my mind.

It was perhaps due to the strong undercurrents of influence exercised by what I learnt at the feet of this Sanskrit savant that I was never able to part company, fully and finally, with the ideals and idols of my earlier days. Marxism made me renounce my faith in God as the Creator and Controller of our Cosmos. But my reverence for Sri Garibdas and the saints and sufis to whom he had introduced me through his great *Granth Saheb* remained intact. I gave up Gandhism but not my veneration for Mahatma Gandhi. His spiritual strength and moral stature continued to cast its spell on me as ever before. And both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda made me bow my head in homage whenever their holy names were mentioned.

This split between my intellectual perceptions and emotive dispositions was also due to my incomplete acceptance of Marxism. I had accepted Marx's historical materialism as an adequate explanation of the processes of human history. I had accepted his Labour Theory of Value as the source of all capital accumulated by human society. I could see clearly that the State was an instrument of class oppression. I could detect naked class interests hiding behind the cloak of social institutions, law codes and conventional morals. And I also came to believe in the inevitability as well as the desirability of the proletarian revolution on an international scale.

But I found it very difficult, almost impossible, to accept Dialectical Materialism as a valid view of the world process. I had read quite a bit of modern Western philosophy to know that while Materialism was deterministic, there was an obvious element of teleology in Dialectics. Materialism and Dialectics could not, therefore, be reconciled. I had referred the matter to my professor of political science whom I thought a very good Marxist. But he confessed that philosophy had never been his domain and that he had never studied Dialectical Materialism. Next I had taken the problem to a professor of philosophy in our college. He confirmed my suspicion that Materialism and Dialectics were logically irreconcilable. I left it at that time. But the ideological gap continued to rankle in my mind.

Meanwhile I had added two more idols to the panorama of saints and sages in my private pantheon—Socrates and Sri Aurobindo. They made a great difference to my intellectual turn-out in the long run.

Plato who made me fall at the feet of Socrates, figuratively speaking, was a prescribed reading for me as a student of Greek political thought. But I did not stop at the *Republic*, the *Laws* and the *Statesman*, though these three Dialogues would have covered my course. I read practically the whole of Plato in order to know more and more about the personality of Socrates whom someone had so aptly described as the first Satyagrahi known to the Western world. He finally rose to his full stature in the three Dialogues centred round the last days of his life—*Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*. His wisdom as well as the nobility of his character left me spellbound. This fascination

for the personality of Socrates led me later on to translate and publish these three Dialogues in Hindi under the title *Satyakama Socrates*.

My encounter with Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, came about almost inadvertently. I had heard his name from my father who extolled him as a great Yogi. My father literally believed that Sri Aurobindo could levitate as much as five feet above ground. But I had never read anything written by Sri Aurobindo nor was he on my list of masters whom I aspired to read some day. The intellectual elite in the college talked a lot about Spengler, Bergson, Marcel Proust, Bernard Shaw and Aldous Huxley. But I had never heard the name of Sri Aurobindo in this exclusive club.

Strange as it may sound, I was led to Sri Aurobindo by my interest in Sigmund Freud, the founder of Psychoanalysis. Psychology was no tiny subject in college. But my philosopher friend had aroused my interest in Western psychology as he had done in Western philosophy. I studied all the six schools of psychology which were known in those days. But I was impressed only by the depth psychology of Freud. Our University library had almost all his published works till that time, including his voluminous case histories. And there were not many readers to take out these tomes. I could, therefore, study them at leisure. I wonder if I derived any intellectual benefit from them. What I remember is that I started seeing all sorts of conflicts and complexes in my mental make-up. It was something like what happens to an immature student of Homeopathy who starts suspecting in his own self the symptoms of all sorts of diseases described in the *Materia Medica*.

My morbid fears made me approach one of our professors who was a well-known psychoanalyst. He gave me a few sessions of free association, the therapeutic method prescribed by Freud. I do not remember that they did me any good. The professor must have soon found out that I was a victim of autosuggestion. But I was surely surprised when one day he suddenly asked me if I believed in God. When I replied in the negative, he further asked me if I believed in a higher consciousness. This I could not deny without repudiating Sri Garibdas and the saints and sufi who always sang of a consciousness full of *noor* and *zahoor*.

I did not know that the professor was a devotee of Sri Aurobindo. He was not in a hurry to reveal himself to me all at the same time. What he told me to start with was that though he had put all his good faith in psychoanalysis for quite a number of years, he had now come to the conclusion that yoga was a more effective method of dealing with mental ailments.

I knew next to nothing about yoga. I was only vaguely aware of the name of Patanjali as an exponent of the yoga system of Indian philosophy. But that was all. I had not studied any Indian philosophy so far nor was I inclined to do so. The professor recommended that I need not bother about the philosophy of yoga. All I needed was to make a start with some simple expositions of practical yoga by Sri Aurobindo. He also promised to lend me some books if I could not find them on my own.

My search for the writings of Sri Aurobindo led me to my old favourite Library

in Chandni Chowk. The College and University libraries had not so far acquired any of his works, perhaps because they had been published only recently. The library in Chandni Chowk, however, had quite a few of Sri Aurobindo's works. One of these was *The Life Divine*. I immediately went for it, forgetting for the time being what the professor had recommended. And that was an intellectual experience which I will never forget. I still remember how I tried to read this great work by the moonlight on the roof when I found that my lantern had run out of kerosene. What impressed me most at that time was Sri Aurobindo's full and very fair exposition of the philosophy of materialism in all its metaphysical and scientific ramifications as well as life meanings. Here was a mind which was as razor sharp as that of Marx but which at the same time covered a larger territory.

As I look back, I can see that the greater part of Sri Aurobindo's vast vision as expounded in *The Life Divine* was beyond my grasp at that time. The heights to which he rose as a witness of the world process and the drama of human destiny left me literally gasping for breath. But this much was clear at the very start that his concept of man had dimensions which were radically different from those I had come across in any other system of thought. He was not dealing with man as a producer and consumer of material goods. He was not dealing with man as a member of a social, political and economic organisation. He was not dealing with man as a rational animal or a moral aspirant or an aesthete. Man was all these according to him. But man was also much more at the same time. He was a soul effulgent with an inherent divinity which alone could sustain and give meaning to the outer manifestations of the human personality.

And the promise made by Sri Aurobindo regarding the ultimate destiny of the human race was far more stupendous than that held out by Marx. The international proletarian revolution anticipated and advocated by Marx was to lead to a stage at which mankind could engage itself in rational, moral and aesthetic endeavours free from the distortions brought about by class interests. But the supramentalisation of the mental, vital and physical nature of man envisaged and recommended by Sri Aurobindo would enable mankind to bridge the gulf between human life as a terrestrial turmoil and human life as a spiritual self-existence.

The conceptual language I am using now to draw the distinction between Marx and Sri Aurobindo was not accessible to me in those days. Most of this clarity is wisdom by hindsight. But howsoever vague and inchoate my vision might have been at that time, I did feel that Sri Aurobindo was talking about fundamentally different dimensions of the universe and human life. The gulf between my mundane interests and the grand aspirations dictated by Sri Aurobindo's vision was very wide and I could hardly muster the care or the courage to cross over. But in the inner recesses of my mind, I did become curious about the nature of the Universe, about man's place in it and about a meaningful goal of human life.

My problem now was to reconcile Sri Aurobindo with Marx. In that order Marx of course came first. He was the exponent par excellence of the social scene

with which I was primarily pre-occupied as well as extremely dissatisfied. Sri Aurobindo had to be accommodated somewhere, somehow in the system of Marx. The reconciliation was achieved by me several years later to my own great satisfaction. I came to the conclusion that while Marx stood for a harmonised social system, Sri Aurobindo held the key to a harmonised individual. The ridiculousness of this reconciliation did not dawn on me even when a well-known exponent of Sri Aurobindo to whom I presented it as a triumphant intellectual feat dismissed it with a benevolent smile. I dismissed the exponent as wise by half because while he had studied Sri Aurobindo, he had most probably not studied Marx, at least not so well as I had done.

*(To be continued)*

SITA RAM GOEL

---

## POEMS

LAST night I lived a poem,  
 But in the morn found I had caught  
 Only bits of one line, end of another,  
 A word here and a phrase there  
 That described You.

I imaged Your face  
 Within and without,  
 And evoked Your Grace  
 To fill the frame.

Sensing Your glance  
 I sought its farthest reach  
 And found my self splitting  
 Into a million bits that traversed  
 Time, matter and space,  
 Some entered as if in a trance  
 Your vision's vast expanse.

And then I felt Your presence  
 When love exceeded all excess  
 And gushed in torrents and streams  
 Bursting all banks and bunds and seams.  
 I became Your poem.

DINKAR



## BONE ANALYSIS: CLUE TO THE HARAPPA CULTURE'S DOWNFALL

FINALLY, the coroner has been called in on the case of the missing Indus Valley Harappans of south Asia. Through modern bone analysis, a long-standing theory about their abrupt disappearance 3,500 years ago is coming under question.

For half a century, it has been believed that the highly sophisticated Harappans were wiped out by advancing Aryan warriors. The group graves, the helter-skelter piles of bones, the fractured skulls, all seemed to point to massacre.

But on reexamining the remains, a forensic anthropologist has concluded that the fractures resulted from normal wearing away of the bone after death. Additional, more subtle skull damage pointed to anemia. This suggested that disease—perhaps a combination of anemia and malaria—is implicated in the mystery.

Kenneth A. R. Kennedy, of Cornell University, and colleagues reached the new conclusions by combining the most modern techniques of bone analysis with the creative intuition of a good detective. “When we examined the so-called fractures,” Kennedy says, “we found them to be erosional in nature, produced over the course of time from natural pressures. They were clearly *not* the result of traumatic lesions, such as those made by a sword.”

Further, Kennedy noticed that much of the skulls’ bone tissue had died during the course of the victims’ lifetimes, resulting in extensive pitting. This and other signs convinced him that he was viewing porotic hyperostosis, a condition characteristic of sickle-cell anemia and thalassemia, both genetic forms of anemia. These diseases reduce the ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen. The body, in response, increases its blood-forming bone marrow, which causes considerable remodeling and expansion of the bone. This in turn leads to pitting.

Kennedy theorizes that the anemias were actually a genetic adaptation to widespread malaria. It’s known that individuals who inherit the harmful gene for sickle-cell anemia or thalassemia from only one parent also receive inborn protection against the ravages of malaria.

The evidence seems to suggest that the overall health of the Harappans was impaired by anemia and malaria, but Kennedy says it may be too soon to state conclusively that the diseases brought down their civilization. Even so, he muses, “One cannot help but wonder to what degree endemic diseases were involved in the Harappan decline and eventual abandonment of ancient Indus cities.”

(With acknowledgement to *Science Digest*, New York, September 1981, p. 103)

## A VISIT TO A MAD POET

IN MEMORIAM: EZRA POUND 1885-1972

IN the spring of 1964 Ezra Pound lived in Venice in a house which, unusual for that city, did not look down upon a canal. It was in a short, quiet, shabby cul-de-sac, an old grey house squeezed in between two old red ones. It was not easy to find yet by the time you got close to it old men and young boys began pointing the way.

We had sent on a letter of introduction but even up to the last moment I was not sure we would take advantage of it. All I really wanted to do was lean on the wall across the street and look and maybe write with a finger some invisible graffiti in homage on his walls. But once there we found ourselves tapping on the door and being welcomed by Olga Rudge, Pound's longtime companion.

Pound himself accepted our hands, shook them, dropped them quickly, nodded. Something tight happened to his mouth as if he were about to say something but the moment slipped by without words passing his lips. At that time he was not speaking to strangers. I knew it before I came and thought I was prepared for it. But I was not. Under the gaze of his steady, clear eyes I fell apart and went into the newcomer's routine, all enthusiasm and superficiality. Silently he watched my foundering, listening with no expression to his face, like a psychiatrist or a priest...

Inside the house the one downstairs room was compact, white, with no paintings on the walls and few books on the shelves. Stairs in the middle of the room went straight and steeply up through the house. The room was arranged round the large fireplace; the fire was always small I came to notice, firewood being expensive, coming from Jugoslavia, and backed up against the centre of the wide chimney where it burnt a narrow black mark. The firewood was stored beneath the two waist-high beds on one of which Ezra Pound now sat while the rest of us huddled on the stone shelf into which the fireplace was built. It was spring in Venice but the evenings were cold and a fire was burning and thick blankets and shawls were everywhere round the room.

That first evening Olga Rudge did all the work. Ezra Pound sat on his bed silent, stubborn, like a small boy, refusing to read to us when she asked him to, refusing to answer when she spoke to him directly, refusing to respond in any way, even refusing to move once he had positioned himself. He had crossed one leg over the other and clasped his hands over the knee. He shook his head to the offer of cushions but Olga Rudge put them against the wall anyway. Slowly, gradually, he began to sink backwards still trying to keep his back stiff and away from the cushions he had shown he did not want. For an hour or more he held himself in what looked like a position of unbalanced discomfort until, sinking imperceptibly, his back finally touched the cushions and he gave in and let himself relax.

He looked, so say my notes, like Conrad in winter, his beard and hair ruffled as if by a storm, his eyes unsmiling, alert, suspicious as if searching from the bridge of

a ship for something that threatened from the dark ahead....

In 1964 Pound was almost 80 with everything behind him, praised—if he was praised at all—for all the wrong reasons. LIFE magazine had just come out with an article on him in which he was depicted as lonely, lost, more than eccentric. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, speaking of Gian-Carlo Menotti's "Two Worlds' Festival" at Spoleto where Pound had broken his long public silence to read his poetry, had given the same impression of the man: vacillating, vulnerable, perhaps senile. Yet to hear him read at Spoleto hundreds of young poets had travelled from all over the world and when he got up on the stage they had given him a thunderous ovation that he was not prepared for. They were honouring perhaps not so much the poet as the man who had remained inviolate for half a century in the eye of the creative storm; the man who had been associated with and respected by almost all the greatest writers of the world; the man who had encouraged the best young writers of his age—Robert Frost, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Earnest Hemingway and many others—when they were unknown and unappreciated; the man who, struggling "resolutely," as he said, "on wringing lilies from the acorn," had almost single-handedly restructured—for better or for worse—English Poetry.

After he had finished his reading at Spoleto Pound had made a statement. According to Ferlinghetti who could barely contain his contempt, he had said: "I was wrong all along."

Wrong all along! What did he mean? Wrong about what? Politics? Poetics? Economics? Ethics? It is the kind of phrase which, when applied to Pound, will evoke a different interpretation in everyone who hears it. A different interpretation but the same response: "Well! I should think so!"

For at that time Pound's name, to the general public, was associated only with irresponsibility, with insanity, and with treason. A poet, yes, but a crazy poet, an obscurantist, a reactionary, a fascist, an anti-semitic, an economic crackpot, a man who during the war had lived with the enemy and made several hundred broadcasts in support of his efforts.

Still, I have the feeling that he was not having doubts about any of his *actions* when he said that he was wrong. I have a feeling he was admitting to something else, something deeper, something finally suggested to him by "the obscure reveries of the inward gaze."

1964: seven years since he had been released from the mental hospital....

Looking back on these times, the emotions forgotten or denied, it is difficult to understand the harshness of our treatment of him. He was sixty years old when he was captured by American soldiers in 1945 and in poor health, yet all our hatred and bitterness and frustration became centred on him. Jeered at, he was thrust into a barbed-wire cage without a roof in the centre of an internment camp, a searchlight trained on him at night so that he could not sleep. After six weeks, during which time it was forbidden that anyone should speak to him, he had a nervous breakdown and was moved to a tent. Here he was allowed to read: he had two books with him—

Confucius and the Bible. Here he was allowed to write and immediately he began his most important work, the Pisan Cantos, in which appear the lines:

“What thou lov’st well shall not be reft from thee.  
What thou lov’st well is thy true heritage.”

During the next six months he was examined by a panel of psychiatrists and at the end of that time he was pronounced “insane and mentally unfit for trial”, and was hospitalized.

A quotation from the medical board’s report is not without interest. “He has long been recognized as eccentric, querulous and egocentric,” it said. “At the present time he exhibits extremely poor judgement as to his situation. He insists that his broadcasts were not reasonable but that all of his radio activities have stemmed from his self-appointed mission to ‘save the Constitution’. He is abnormally grandiose, is expansive and exuberant in manner, exhibiting pressure of speech (*szc*), discursiveness and tractability.”

After reading the report critic G.S. Fraser wondered, “Just how sane, by the verdict of a committee of psychiatrists, any poet is.”

Perhaps, of course, the verdict was a kindness. For such was the moral climate of the times that execution, had he been brought to trial, would have been a foregone conclusion.

His hospitalization was to last for twelve more years, the first three years being spent in an open ward often with violent patients who had to be restrained by straight-jackets. How long this part of his imprisonment would have continued no one can say; had it not been for an event that normally would have received little attention he might have spent all his imprisoned years there. But in 1949 the judges of the prestigious Bollingen prize for poetry—T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, W.H. Auden and Conrad Aiken—honoured Pound with the prize... and the top blew off the cultural pot. Perhaps never has a prize selection been so controversial. There was immediate uproar. Literary, political, moral uproar. Pound’s whole life, his behaviour, his talent, his beliefs were endlessly discussed... and found wanting.

Up until this time his poetry was generally considered egocentric, elitist and exhibitionist. When it was praised it was praised with a detachment that was close to rejection: “Allusive, brilliant, erudite, woven from the scraps of remote literatures.” Now he was attacked as a charlatan. Up until that time he had been judged an eccentric who could not tell right from wrong; now he was categorized as a threat to the American way of life.

Yet, despite the fact that his views, never publically modified, continued to isolate him from many of his contemporaries, more and more people from the intellectual and artistic communities all over the world began to speak up, pleading for his release.

The government was embarrassed but could only refuse. The war was too re-

cently over, the Nuremberg trials too fresh in the minds of the people. He was not to be released for another nine years, not until he was almost 70 years old. But things became a little easier for him after the award. He was moved out of the general ward and into a private cell and he was allowed to receive visitors. He began his translations of Sophocles and the Chinese Book of Odes and continued to work on the *Cantos* ("He has a god in him," he wrote there, "though I do not know which god.")

Opinions as to his state of mind at this time vary. One answer he gave to more than one question, including one about his relationship with Yeats, was: "I can't answer that; the top of my head's not working," which was interpreted to mean different things to different people, from craziness to evasiveness to self-deprecating humour.

Finally, in 1958, thirteen years after his arrest, he was released and was allowed to return to his beloved Italy. He was never again to leave it...

During those few weeks we stayed in Venice we saw Ezra Pound nearly every day. I wish I could say that I acquired a better understanding of his ideas and his work in those weeks, but that is not the case. We did not talk about war or economics, literature or politics. Chinese ideographs were not explained; Fenellosa and the *Nō* drama were not discussed; the poetry of Provence did not come up. All I ever learnt about his companionship with Yeats or his work with T.S. Eliot or the beginnings of the Imagist group or the Vorticist movement came from books and gossip not from him. America, as far as it was ever considered, might never have been discovered. To spend an evening with him you would never learn that he had a wide knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Provençal and Anglo-Saxon as well as a working knowledge of many other languages. Sometimes one wondered whether he knew English. For whatever communication passed between us it seldom passed through speech.

Usually the only way we could tell whether he had heard our question was a slight movement of his eyebrows. Occasionally he would give a monosyllabic reply, sometimes with great effect: "Ezra, don't you think that so-and-so has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that someone or other was the Dark Lady of the Sonnets?" A long pause, pursed lips, a slight dropping of the head, his beard getting tucked between the lapels of his jacket. A trace of a smile, small and secret. Then: "No."

Most evenings he said no more than twenty words. Once however, to his companion's nudging, he used them all up in one go, supplying the punch-line to a well-loved family joke: "But, Signora, of course I lie to you. If I told you the truth you would not believe me."

Sometimes in the lovely long evenings we listened to recordings of other poets reading their work—E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore—and although most of them did not read well he listened with great attention. Sometimes we listened to tapes of his own readings. His voice was strong, very American, somewhat monotonous and yet often effective and moving. Common

words seemed to acquire a new, precise meaning, their place in the structure of the thought becoming important and clear. When the B.B.C. did a radio programme on him they ended it with him reading to his grandson the Tar-Baby story from Uncle Remus. I am sure he read it with the same care and respect that he would show to a portion of the Iliad....

But usually we did not hear much of his voice, recorded or otherwise. We heard his silences. It was his silences that I remember structuring the hours, our own voices finally slowing down as we began to be aware of what was there between the lines.

I do not mean to suggest that he was only interested in the profound, or that we, in his presence, talked only of meaningful things. Everyday adventures he would accept quite gladly. For he was not uninterested in people. He liked company, I'm sure of it. Even if he was upstairs in his study working, when we arrived he would come down as soon as he heard us and settle among the cushions and wait, silently, to hear what we had been up to.

But I must admit that I was never at my best with him, never completely at ease, always a bit of a fraud with him, always a bit afraid of that secret look of his. I remember once I rushed upstairs into his room before he could come down, exuberant with the discoveries of the day, saying something commonplace about the weather as a backdrop to it all. Immediately he came to the window and glanced at the sky to evaluate it, responding with another commonplace. For a moment we were close, happy together, quite eager for all the commonplace things to enrich our time. But then I changed and grabbed at the chance to stammer out some long-suppressed compliment about his work and he straightaway froze into his silent, prepared position, giving me a stern look as if to say: "We are too old for this literary nonsense...." There are surprisingly few excuses, I found out, that you can give to a silent man.

Sometimes, late at night under a hazy moon, we would walk along the canals with their dark lapping waters, passing the yellow courting cats. He used to walk with his head thrust forward, his black caballero's hat eloquently tilted, the high lamps changing his face as he walked under them. He walked vigorously, carrying a cane he did not rely on, as if eager to get to the corner for an important meeting. It gave me pleasure to measure my stride with his....

I do not know why now I have such a warm feeling for him. It has nothing to do with hero-worship: he was never a hero to me. And although I always admired his independence he had never influenced me. In much of his work I could see little beauty.... No. It is the man I remember, not the great poet.

I fully understand that my portrayal of him does not conform with the popular view. (Even the quotations I choose are not, I am well aware, typical of his work.) In fact perhaps it is no view at all but merely a very subjective exercise, a description perhaps only of a place in my special mythology.

But there are things I have looked at long, coming to no understanding, for I cannot put side by side with any sense what I have read about him and what I have experienced. It is clear that he gave his support to things which were representative

of a dark retrogressive force. It is not enough to say that behind his unwise acts was a genuine hatred of war and greed and abuse of power, of commercialization and that cheapening of culture that threatens always to debase an aspiration. It is true. But it is not enough.

Yet... perhaps we forget that at the time of which we speak half the world was mad. Half the world caught in a vast demonic possession, the other half existing merely by reacting to it, possessing no conscience only a late prudence, no honour only an animal instinct for survival, no degree of purity only a desperation to endure. Even to the best, at these times, nobility came only in flashes that gave brief meaning to the sullied endeavour, making them forget for the moment that their lives were, for the most part, ignoble, instinctive, unconscious. And in the moment of victory we tended to over-emphasise our virtue, turning ourselves in our self-righteousness once more into the beast who demands the sacrifice of the beast.

Ezra Pound, following his convictions, acted unwisely in the war and while doing so refused to look at the horror that was being perpetuated in the name of the cause to which he gave his support. But we took too long to forgive him. The man we pilloried—saneer than I, as sane as any—was not all the man who occupied his flesh. Of any man the part we see and praise or blame is only an infinitesimal part of the whole. And it is the part we do not see that decides whether civilization advances or retreats.

G.S. Fraser, the English critic whose response to the psychiatrist's report I have quoted, said that Ezra Pound was "a man in all his personal relationship of the utmost generosity of heart, a poet more splendidly and largely concerned than any other poet of our time with the disparate yet similar essences of human civilisation...."

Perhaps. Pound himself has written: "To have gathered from the air a live tradition, or from a fine old eye the unconquered flame. This is not vanity."

Everyone agrees that he was a man of great contradictions. What makes it difficult for me is that he seemed, at 80, to be a man beyond contradictions. He seemed to me to be a man who had long ago come to terms with his infinite weaknesses, with his few enduring strengths. A man who had finally discovered his priorities, who admitted his errors.

*"I was wrong all along."*

Somehow one always assumed a sense of defeat and disillusionment in a remark like that. But it need not be so. Only if one is totally identified with that arrogant part of one's being which insists it *knows* is there a sense of loss when one is proven wrong. If one's lifelong view is of a dark world then surely it should be with joy that one realizes that the prospect is, after all, bright.... But do not misunderstand me. I do not believe that Ezra Pound's silences were filled with joy. There was still too much struggle for comprehension going on there. No joy perhaps but at least outwardly he was still and waiting, his energies all turned where, at his age, they should be turned. Inwards. I think that what he heard there in his silences fascinated him, and filled him with a sense of awe.

All his life he strove to bring something into the light...

“How have I not laboured  
to bring her soul to birth  
to give these elements a name and a centre!  
She is beautiful as the sunlight, and as fluid.  
She has no name, and no place.  
How have I laboured to bring her soul into separation;  
to give her name and her being.”

... and when it was born in his old age, full-flowered, immaculate, not prepared for, he was forced to acknowledge that he, like all of us, had been wrong all along about the very basis of reality. You think I see too much in his deep looks and his long silences? Maybe. But I think not. His confession I see not as a cry of defeat and disillusionment but a call and a challenge to all who suspect that the self-regarding look must never end until one arrives at the abiding truth.

NAVODITTE



# A FAIRY-TALE DREAM

## Author's Note

*This dream was narrated in an even voice, while I saw it like a film-show and experienced it as actual happenings—all at the same time.*

*Many things, whole experiences I have had to leave out here; some because of their length and others because they are beyond my means of reproduction.*

*I have often dreamt complete stories, but this one is rather more strange than most, and also one of the longest.*

ONCE upon a time there was an old kingdom with a king to rule it. The King was quite young, not very handsome and certainly not very kind-hearted, but he did consider himself very clever and of course all-powerful.

On this particular day there was great commotion in the house of one of the richest merchants of the kingdom. And for good reason. The first child had just been born to the merchant, a boy. People had been invited from throughout the country. There was great revelling and celebrating. So many well-wishers had come, they filled the house and the whole of his very large garden, spilling over the carefully groomed lawns into the rose-gardens and orchid-houses. And they were taking souvenirs liberally, leaving nothing untouched, and the merchant, for once, looked the other way.

Without having been invited, both a Good Fairy and an Evil Witch were also on their way to the merchant's home. The Good Fairy came from the far-off neighbouring country to where she had fled more than three hundred years ago, but she reached first, because her good intentions made her fleet-footed. The witch, though resident quite near the Royal Palace, arrived somewhat later, and that is because she had made a little detour through the Great Royal Park. She knew it was hunting season and she longed to provoke a gory accident, *en passant*, just for her private amusement, while she was on her way to a more important job. And it was this small diversion that made her come late. She only reached the window of the baby's room when she heard the Fairy pronounce the last words of her prophecy: "... and you shall rule over kings!"

The witch knew perfectly well it was useless to ask the guests about the full wording of the prophecy since none of those people had ears to hear fairy-speech. And even the mother, happy and very tired, had eyes and ears only for her beautiful boy-baby, anxious that the midwife should handle him gently. She had noticed neither the Fairy talking to the baby and touching it with her wand, nor the witch peering in through the window. Angry, hoping that time would give her another chance, the witch hissed viciously: "Hah, we'll see if you live that long!" and scuttled off straight to the palace to inform the King of this newly born menace to his own All-Mightiness.

She sped along, avoiding the detour through the Great Royal Park this time, made a bee-line to the Royal Residence and upset only one single carriage on her way. She did not even glance back to see travellers and luggage spilling pell-mell onto the road.

In she hopped through a turret-window of the Palace, which was kept open for her exclusive convenience, whisked round the four corners to the staircase, leaped onto the banisters and came zzzwweeee down all the eight storeys in one swoop. She never bothered to get onto her feet at the bottom of the stairs, but went gliding right to the throne on her backside.

The King frowned at her. He preferred people to approach him with great decorum and reverence,—but in her case he wanted to know first what brought her to him in such a hurry and, maybe, punish her after. Anyway, the witch spurted out her freshly gathered knowledge before the King could as much as clear his throat. He dismissed her with a renewed frown, only snapping his fingers at the Royal Treasurer to indicate that she was to receive the normal payment for informing on a citizen. But the King did, all the same, take careful note of the merchant's name and address, writing it down in big letters on his personal memory-pad with a little cross and a dash which meant: to be eliminated, some time....

And time went on. The witch lost no opportunity to remind the King of this boy,—but he, carefully, though, not to vex her, made it quite clear that he had no intention to be ruled by anyone, nor to be pushed to action by an impatient witch.

It was only when, years later, he heard from his Minister of Education that there was a boy, son of this very merchant, who did amazingly well in school; who seemed to grasp the very essence of a problem long before the teacher could get half way through its presentation, that the King decided it was time for him to do something about it. Carefully he picked the most astute and confidential of his full-time assassins, Mansur by name, gave him the address of this boy and told him to do his job well and with the greatest circumspection, to make it look like an accident, careful to avoid antagonising the merchant. Mansur confidently promised to do an expert's job, and he set about watching the boy's habits and activities, his home and his friends, and he made his plans accordingly.

When he had chosen his day, he stealthily entered the garden from behind the orchid-houses in the far end, wading through the stream towards the rose-garden where he had seen the boy sit by himself and play with a dog. Oh, he was surely an astute assassin. He knew how to get by the most loyal dog and he would make it look as though it had been the dog who had attacked and killed the boy. Mansur was pleased with his cleverness and chuckled to himself, as he cautiously came nearer and nearer.

The boy had no inkling that his end was near. He sat deeply absorbed watching his dog, observing his every movement and wondered what the world might look like, seen by a dog. And he sat very, very still, when suddenly indeed the surroundings subtly changed their aspect. The trees loomed higher than he had ever seen

before and sort-of disappeared into the unknown. The colours were less distinct and had exchanged their importance with smells. A whole new world of smells invaded his senses, where the strong fragrance of the roses vanished into the background as being of very minor interest.

He sniffed, twitching his nose with delight, the strangely exciting odour of field-mice, the exhilarating smell of horses behind the hedge and when the fragrance of a beehive filled his nose, his body instantly responded with a strong apprehension. He noticed that a cat must have sat right next to where he was only a little while ago, leaving behind her something like an invitation to a joyous banter, to which his limbs urged with a new bouncing vitality. His dog gambolled about him, sniffing here and scratching there, he tried to push the boy to a romping game, but just then the wind brought a wealth of fascinating smells from the nearby village, and he sat, concentrating, enjoying the game of distinguishing the significance of the various odours and identifying them.

Mansur had come right up to the rose-garden, ready to deal with the dog and kill the boy,—but there was no boy anywhere in sight. There were only two dogs, one gambolling and the other sitting still. Both dogs had seen him, judged his smell uninteresting and rather unpleasant and took no further notice. Mansur was very puzzled, he searched everywhere, but there was no sign of the boy. There was nothing for him but to retrace his steps and report to the King the vanishing of the boy right in front of his eyes.

The boy, unaware of this man's intentions, had dismissed his intrusion as negligible and gave himself completely to the strange new impressions. He rebuffed the dog's nudgings with a low, friendly growl and watched intently the squirrel doing a tight-rope-walk over a long and very thin creeper, wobbling slightly and regaining its balance, coming nimbly nearer. The boy's ears stood up very straight, saliva gathered in his throat and he really felt like snapping at that squirrel with his mouth! This notion struck him as extremely funny and he laughed merrily,—whereupon all the strangeness and newness vanished suddenly and the surroundings took their proper shape and colours again. He got up from his haunches, patted the dog and laughed full of wonder and happiness about this enchanting experience, which had caused a subtle change in his attitude towards the dog.

The King betrayed neither anger nor surprise at Mansur's report,—there would be other occasions to find and kill that boy, and he treated the matter as of next to no importance. Not so the witch. She wanted to know more and insisted that Mansur should tell her exactly what happened. And Mansur told her fairly truthfully, becoming increasingly vexed, though, by her insistence on hearing more and more precision about the two dogs. Suddenly she shrieked: "I got it!" and wagging her head she added: "The dog, it was the dog sitting absolutely still, that wasn't a dog, that was the boy! You should have wrung his neck on the spot!" Well, it took some convincing, but in the end Mansur promised he would kill the quiet dog, if ever he met him again.

For the boy every day was full of enchanting happenings. He had so much to see and so much to take in,—in fact he found less and less time to play games with the other boys. There were endless wonders in his father's garden alone, and he had not even started to explore the world beyond.

Mansur took his time to prepare himself even more carefully, he made quite sure he could not miss the boy a second time. Since the King did not show any impatience, he let winter pass without making any move. And he found his perfect opportunity when he saw the boy again alone in the garden, this time even without the dog. Confidently he entered the garden, selecting, as he went, a convenient tree under which he would place the dead boy and make it look as if he had climbed and fallen down. It really was too easy a job for someone as expert as he.

And the boy, ignorant of his approaching doom, sat in speechless admiration in front of a wild cherry-tree in full bloom. The first tree to flower in spring, glorious, a riot of white blossoms tinged very slightly with pink, crowding every branch, every smallest twig. A rapturous cry of victory over wintry death. The boy wondered what it would feel like to be a tree, a flowering wild cherry-tree. He stood up, spread his arms and wriggled his toes into the ground like roots, and the whole world around him suddenly changed its aspect. It was the sun that mattered, the space around and above him, the light and warmth. He had to bend somewhat to the south and stretch up higher to place all of himself into the sun. Just stretching and spreading to drink in more light and more sun-rays. It was glorious, it was sheer rapture to open all his countless flowers at once, like opening his heart entirely, unreservedly to the light. He felt the tiny wings of bees make the petals vibrate and the soft tickling of their feet and the eager probing for nectar. He felt a fly lay its eggs into one blossom and a bird alight on a branch, rapidly wipe its beak on the bark and scratch itself. He sensed the delicate grip of its feet and the whirr as it shook its feathers,—and the ever alert ants running and avidly removing the tiny morsels of food,—the bird's idle pecking at the ants when they dared cross right over its toes.

All was joy, right down to his roots in the soil, alive to the nourishing moisture in sudden abundance since the melting of the snow. He remained motionless, responding only to the breeze and the inner surging of sap from the smallest of his roots through his slender trunk right to the centre of every single of his innumerable flowers.

Mansur reached the cherry-tree and the place where he had seen the boy sitting very quietly. But there was no boy anywhere around. He looked up the trees and under the rose-bushes and searched for some hole in the ground into which the boy might have vanished. In vain. There was no trace of the boy, nor of any dog either. There were two cherry-trees where he thought he had only seen one from afar, but the boy had vanished into thin air.

In angry frustration, puzzled more than he liked to admit to himself, he rapidly left the garden to seek out the witch before he had to confess his failure to the King. Again the witch asked him about the most negligible details and suddenly exclaimed: "I got it!" She coughed and added: "It's the second cherry-tree, the one you had

not noticed before, the one whose flowers opened all at once in the sun-light. That wasn't a tree, you blunt-witted dunce, that was the boy! You should have chopped him down with an axe on the spot!" Mansur was certain that the witch was delirious, but then, he had himself no better explanation to offer. Still, he was usually told how clever he was and how skilful. He resented the witch's sneers and began to dislike her altogether.

The boy savoured every detail of his new experience. The new perception of light, the all-predominant importance of light, and the joy to offer himself entirely to its rays. The oneness of his being with all other beings, which was neither a feeling nor a knowledge but just a vast and natural IS.

The bird leisurely inspected the flowers in quest of food, a snail made its slow and laborious way up the trunk and he felt a mole tunnelling under one of his surface-roots, and the very strength of this soft little body surprised and delighted him—he laughed out aloud—and all the new way of experiencing things dropped instantly from the present into his memory. He let his arms sink gradually and lifted his toes out from the soil. Carefully he picked the snail from his leg and placed it on the ground near the wild cherry-tree and sat down next to it, contemplating the tree in the light of his new knowledge.

His eyes were still filled with wonder when the boy slowly made his way home. He loved his parents, and he would have loved to share his happiness with them, but experience taught him to be silent, not to expect others to follow him into his realms, or to understand his tales.

The King admonished Mansur severely and, frowning ungraciously, told him to be more careful not to miss his victim a third time. Mansur knew he would not get off lightly another time, and he vowed to himself to kill any quiet dog he came across and to chop off any suspicious cherry-tree, if he ever failed to find the boy again. But opportunities to kill him and make it look like an accident were few—and the King made him do other jobs too, to keep him in practice and prove his skill. Thus it was summer when Mansur saw that his chance had finally come when the boy entered by himself the Great Royal Park one day. He rushed to get his best killing tools, adding an axe, just in case. The hunting season had not yet begun, but there were other means....

The boy was walking slowly along, alert to all the wonders around him. He enjoyed the far echo of a fox's bark, the swishing of wings in the air and between the leaves, the rustling of small feet on the ground and others hurrying along the branches. He stopped to admire a particularly beautiful group of mushrooms growing at the end of a fallen log and was very surprised to see, looking up, that there was an old woman sitting huddled on the other end of it. The death of this giant tree had left a small clearing, sunny, the ground covered with fresh young green. The old woman did not look up at his approach, and she did not seem to notice either the little bird, a wren, restlessly chirping and fluttering about her. She was totally absorbed in her own musings and she did not look happy at all.

The boy stopped, coughed invitingly and meant to talk to her. In his effort to find the right thing to say, he tried to put himself in tune with her being—and suddenly the world around him dimmed, the contours became hazy—and there was no joy, there was no joy at all. His shoulders sagged with the weight of sorrow and regrets, there was a constant drone in his ears of voices deploring, lamenting and bewailing passed happenings. Tears tried to well up, but his eyes were dry, dried up, empty like his heart. There were pains in his knees and as he moved them he became aware of pains in his back and neck and he was aching all over. A dull sort of ache, that had been there for many years, had been accepted as part of a very painful existence, resigned to suffer and find some shallow satisfaction only in added suffering.

He saw a peahen cautiously surveying the clearing before she decided to lead her brood out of the thicket, clucking reassuringly and eagerly scratching the ground. What she found: grubs, fresh young shoots, beetles, lizard-eggs, not resenting big juicy black ants, she urged her chicks to eat,—and while feeding herself and her chicks she caused no disharmony, she left no regrets. The old woman took no notice. The little wren still twittered impatiently at her, because the old woman's feet were dangerously near its nest, and it hopped about agitatedly. But its efforts failed to penetrate the thick hedge of misery the old woman had permitted to grow between her and the world.

Mansur searched for the boy and he searched in vain, all the while keeping a sharp look-out for dogs and cherry-trees. He had crossed the clearing twice and the sight of these two old women, one gazing at a little bird and the other gazing at nothing at all, made him feel angrier than ever. When he passed again he was so angry he wanted to kill something, anything, if not the boy, and he hit out at one of the peachicks, but missed, and that augmented his rage even more. But he never found the boy. He stamped furiously about, wondering what to invent for an explanation to give to the King. He hit with his axe indiscriminately at anything while passing, inflicting cuts and wounds, until a thorn-bush made the axe rebound so forcefully that it all but broke his leg. Crying out with pain and helpless frustration he limped home to nurse his leg and also to think of some convincing tale to tell the King.

The boy saw himself engulfed deeper and deeper into a dull hopelessness. He lost his keen joy and appreciation, lost the very faculty to see and love and wonder. The sun-rays penetrating the lofty canopy at a slant paled and lost their warmth. He moaned heavily. But where this moan had come from, deep down in his arid being, there still lived a faint longing, too dim, too indistinct to bear a name,—and he clutched at this longing and lifted it in an ardent prayer. The prayer rose powerfully like an eagle out of captivity, soaring, mounting in a steep spiral, taking all sorrow irresistibly in its wake, up and up to heights where no darkness could persist.

And the old woman lifted her head and straightened her back; she sighed deeply and looked about herself, puzzled, like someone waking up in a strange place. Now she noticed the wren, smiled at it and automatically removed her feet from the vic-

nity of its nest. The wren sat for a moment on her knees and the woman felt the touch of the bird's tiny toes. She smiled even happier and forgot about her pains. Now the peahen's ramblings took her nearer to the wren's nest, which made the little bird fly at her in bold defence. It launched its mere 10 grams of concentrated mettle again and again at the peahen's bulk, bothering her like an angry bee, until the hen called her chicks together and abandoned the clearing to the victorious wren.

The temerity of this small bird delighted the boy, and he laughed in admiration. The woman looked fascinated and joined the laughter with her tentative titter. And suddenly the surroundings changed their aspect back to brightness and clarity, and he found himself standing near the old woman, knowing what to say: "How charming, how wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"How wonderful!" echoed the old woman, and added, "how wonderful to be alive!" and she broke off, and listened bewildered to her own words that sounded so strange, yet had come quite natural to her tongue.

Walking home the boy noticed a trail of disturbance in the atmosphere, like faint, odourless smoke, and he saw the random cuts and bruises all along, caused by Mansur's axe. The pain of the plants and trees was clearly perceptible by a dimming of their natural radiance. He stopped to caress some wounds where the thick, golden blood was welling in slow droplets. And he wondered about the cruelty that seemed so much part of this world, yet appeared confined to man and his action. There was no cruelty in the browsing of cattle on fresh young vegetation, and there was no pain perceptible in the plants thus mutilated. There was rather, as he had experienced, an attitude in the plant being fed on, that could be compared to that of a mother giving herself to the eager hands and mouth of her baby. He had found no cruelty in the much-maligned fox, and no suffering in his victim quail. But Mansur's axe had caused suffering.

Mansur had not yet found in himself the courage to face the King. He was lingering at his home, when the witch came to question him. She knew somehow that he had not succeeded and wanted to hear what had happened this time. Mansur began telling her the story prepared to appease the King, but the witch cut him short immediately and insisted on hearing the truth. She listened carefully and sharply destroyed all embellishment with some acid remarks, though she appeared truly interested only when he mentioned the two old women. She asked endless questions over and over again, making him recall details he had not consciously observed. Then suddenly she cried out: "I got it!" and hopping about ludicrously she croaked: "I got it,—the woman who gazed at the bird, that wasn't a woman, that was the boy. You should have strangled her on the spot!" and she frisked off to tell the King.

Mansur was sullenly wondering that he, a professional killer of dissidents and a good one at that,—he, the head-eliminator of all opposition to the present ruler, should now be expected to kill dogs, chop down trees and strangle dodderly old women that were not even witches... and he remembered with bitterness his former job in the Royal Slaughterhouse, where things had been less complicated. He was

not fond of the witch and day-dreamt of hanging her by her untidy pigtail, and setting fire to a pile of wood under her feet. Indulging in such fancies he went to face the King.

In the palace Mansur was most ungraciously received. The King thundered: he could be given one more chance only to get rid of this boy or else his own head would be chopped off. Mansur promised to kill both dogs, chop down both flowering wild cherry-trees and strangulate both the old women on sight, to please the King and save himself.

The witch joined him on his way out of the palace and pulled him by his sleeve. "Hear me, you useless piece of cutlery," she hissed viciously. "I want you to know that I am the single incarnation of all the witches that ever were burnt at the stake in past centuries. I do not care for any more fires lit under my feet!"—and she left him to wonder how she had guessed his thoughts.

Mansur shuddered and mused about the futility to burn any witches at any time, if it was only to meet them again, re-incarnated in a concentrated form.

The boy found a steadily growing delight with his steadily growing knowledge. He found his own joy responding to the radiant joy underlying all existence, shared by things animate and inanimate alike. He had observed it in a baby, crying, longing for its mother, reaching out for her and drinking her in, drinking her life-sustaining love, while suckling her milk, and he saw that it was the love and joy that counted,—the milk was no more than the medium. And he had experienced it in a piece of wood vividly interacting with the skill and consciousness inherent in the cabinet-maker's hands. He had felt it in a seed. It laughed at him in the fruits ripening on the trees, and it spoke to him in the diving and splashing of ducks disporting themselves on the pond. It was there in the wind and the clouds and alive in every single drop of rain. The boy never tired of seeing, loving and responding to this delight with all his senses.

On a particularly beautiful autumn-day he took his home-work out with him to sit by the brook, to dip his toes into the water while doing his lessons.

The ever-watchful Mansur noticed him and hurried to get his professional paraphernalia packed and ready to follow the boy. Mansur was certain he could not possibly miss him this time, and he knew he had to watch out for any possible disguise.

The boy sat down, put his satchel next to him in the grass and left it unopened, while he gazed fascinated into the water. He saw some fishes tug and nibble at lush green water-weeds, and a kingfisher snap up one of the fishes, carry it to a branch, batter it and swallow it head first; and there was no cruelty, no suffering. He saw the reed-warbler's nest torn and the pair of them feeding and whistling with no young ones about, and there was no sorrow. Then his eyes followed the stream and rested on the graceful arch of the bridge. A small, old, high-arched stone-bridge, with its bright quivering reflection underneath. There was moss growing on its lower parts, and a particularly thick growth, with tiny star-like white blossoms in the gap where a stone had come loose. A very charming image. The boy gazed at it dreamily



and he wondered what it would feel like to be a bridge standing, however gracefully, in one place for uncounted years. And suddenly he entered a world of low vibrations, sounds of a nature he had never perceived before. Time took a very different dimension. He was aware of a rhythm that was hundreds of times slower than man's. His body, arched in a stony trance, knew its perfectly harmonious proportions by the sound it emitted. A constant low hum, determined by the size and quality of the stones and their placing to create his perfect form. Each stone remembered being chiselled and shaped, being carefully prepared in the hands of the stone-mason for the unique role it had been destined to play in the unity. The clear-toned low hum was only slightly marred by something like a tooth-ache,—the stone that had come loose caused it, and this hardly perceptible jarring became clearly predominant when human feet passed over his back. He was aware of a flexibility, an articulation in his body and knew it as the very basis of stability.

There were other sounds entering his cognition. An uneven, muffled rumbling, interspersed with occasional ringing twangs and gurglings and drawn-out, sonorous flutings that seemed to seep out from the earth underneath. And an indescribable ringing from the pebbles in the brook, like thousands of voices singing one note, each individual note subtly different from the others, combining to a soft very harmonious sound, sweet and very distinct from the joyous swishing of the water.

Again human feet passed resoundingly over his back and a stick came whacking down on the satchel lying in the grass. A little group of Fallow Deer shied, left off their grazing and vanished into the thicket. There was a ring of dense, black anger in those steps, jarring sharply with the stones' sonority, and the smarting twang of a breaking branch added its painful note. This sudden dissonance in the atmosphere faded gradually with the retreating of the human footsteps. Peace settled once more. Out of the thicket hopped skittishly the smallest of the fawns and was instantly pushed back into safety by its mother. A buck emerged cautiously, sniffing the air and taking in the quality of all sounds, sifting them, so to speak, for any possible danger. Gradually the whole group left the sheltering thicket and resumed their grazing. The small fawn came right down to the brook, bent over the water and got frightened by its own image staring up at him. It turned, jumped, lost its footing and slid with both hind-legs into the water. The splashing and the wetness of its hind-quarters confused it totally and it ran, pranced, hopped with all four legs spread at odd angles, kicking desperately, until it found the safety of its mother and the whole group. Its mother bent to lick it dry and convey her own calm to the shivering fawn.

This charming little episode made the boy laugh heartily, and instantly his ears lost their new faculty, all sounds returned to what we normally hear and the boy got up from his arched position, stretched and shook himself deliciously. Then he sat down to do his homework.

Mansur had been. He had passed over his very back twice and had not found the boy. He was bitter and cursed his fate, and he cursed the boy and the King, his profession and most of all he cursed the witch. He considered fleeing, as he stamped

along, leaving this kingdom altogether. But it was common knowledge that the neighbouring king had no use for killers, professional or amateur,—and killing was the only thing he knew.

The witch, it seemed, had been on the look-out for him and she was by his side well before he could make up his mind to flee, or commit suicide, or confess to the King which came to be the same thing in the end. She literally drilled holes into him with her questions, dragging to the light all that his eyes had seen but his mind had never bothered to register. And she became all the keener, when he mentioned the bridge, a school-satchel lying by its near-side, stepping stones under it and only a little used woodman's track leading to it, missing it from the far side by about two feet, as if continuing with the stepping-stones rather than with the bridge. "I got it!" she wheezed gleefully, "I got it! I knew I could recognise that creature in any of its cunning disguises!—That bridge, that wasn't a bridge, that was the boy! You should have smashed it to pieces stone by stone, you brainless worm, you useless one!"

Mansur was totally disgusted with himself, with life in general, with the witch in particular and very specially with all the little old stone-bridges in the whole world.

Meanwhile the witch flew to the Palace, in through the turret window and came sliding down the banisters again, all the eight storeys and stopped sliding only when she reached the King's elaborately embroidered slippers. She spurted out Mansur's latest failure even before the King could draw his feet away from her touch. The King felt an impotent resentment grow in him against this witch, bolstered by the obscure suspicion that she wielded a power superior to his and to which he himself grew progressively subject. An unavowed fear prevented him from formulating his resentment into clear, worded thoughts.

Mansur, in the knowledge of his certain death, found a new courage: the courage of the condemned. He held his head high as he walked up to the King and spoke out defiantly: "I am good at my job and I have proved my loyalty during many years. This boy, I agree, is too cunning for me. Why, don't you see, he might take up the disguise of Your Majesty himself next!"

The King felt most uncomfortable at this statement, since its probability could not be denied.

Mansur continued: "Yes, he is too cunning. If this witch had her way, why, I would have to kill all the dogs, chop down all the trees, strangle all old women, break all the bridges in your kingdom,—yes, destroy and annihilate all things existing to follow or to prevent his future disguises, for all we know!" One glance at the witch showed that his words were extremely close to the truth. The King was terrified by the irrefutable logic of Mansur's words, though he would never admit it. He needed time to sort things out inside himself. So he told Mansur to resume, as a temporary measure, his old job in the Royal Slaughterhouse, until he, the King, had decided upon his final punishment. Mansur smiled bitterly and left, while the witch stayed behind, and eagerly whispered into the King's ear something very secret, dark

and satisfying. And when the witch left him, the King looked decidedly less gloomy.

When the witch felt her day had come to deal personally with the boy she followed him a mere 5 paces behind on his way home. The boy clearly felt a dark power reach out for him. He prayed while walking on and offered this darkness up in his prayer. Then something made him change direction and he entered the church instead of walking straight home. The witch was furious, because there she could not follow him. But she could wait for him outside, and that is just what she did. Nothing happened for quite some time, and the vesper-bell started ringing. And then a second bell chimed in, nearly like the vesper-bell, only its voice had a rare purity, clearly beyond the quality of the average church-bell in this kingdom. The witch knew in a flash: she also knew she could do nothing about it and decided to wait.

The boy, in fact, experienced delight in a totally new form. He had the perception of harmony in all his dimensions and proportions, and the quality of material similar to that of the bridge, but here it was the artful blending of metals that produced the purity of his voice and its amplitude. He felt the flexibility of his body when the sound-waves travelled powerfully through his entire being, met and crossed over in perfect synchronization, augmenting thus the volume of sound emitted. He felt himself expand, widen and widen, ringing, filling the air with the syllable AUM, repeating this primal prayer again and again, pervading all objects. He made them vibrate in harmony, echo and re-echo the magic sound, pouring himself, all of himself, into the atmosphere. Calling, calling,—and he saw that man had called to God by means of bells ringing AUM, AUM for hundreds of years, and he laughed in the joy of his realisation, a ringing, pealing laughter, and he found himself clutch the beam next to the old church-bell with both hands, laughing and listening to the last echoes coming from the hills beyond.

After this experience the boy found it difficult to climb right down again and walk in the street, when he had only just been filled in every fibre of his being with the most sacred of sounds. He lingered and gazed out of the steeple-window, a small window, too narrow for his shoulders. And he saw what he never tired of watching and admiring. Kites, high up in the sky in the slow stately rounds of their ballet. Majestic, effortless on their immobile wings, masters of the air, controlling their movements with a slight tilt of their tail. Glorious. He wondered what it would feel like to be one of them, up there. But no sooner had he formulated this thought than he felt his body ache and tremble with fear of the heights. He clutched the window-sill with both hands and uttered a weird, thrilling cry. The same cry echoed back from the sky. Two birds detached themselves and came down in a long swooping glide. They alighted on the steeple-hooks each side of the window and took time to fold their big wings tidily. They looked at him with their surprisingly gentle, brown eyes and called invitingly. The boy could only answer with a quivering cry, clutching the wood tightly.

With a sudden decision both birds nudged him and made him lose his hold on the window-sill. He fell out and, falling, opened his own large wings. The two kites

on either side supported him with the tip of their own wings. He felt the air rush past his body in the spiralling flight. Up, higher and higher they guided him. He glanced apprehensively at his friends and at the other kites above and dared not look down. It was wonderful and frightening. Soon he noticed that the air supported him firmly as water supports the swimmer, powerfully as the horse supports the rider, but what he experienced now was incomparable to anything he had ever known before. An indescribable elation expanded his lungs and he cried out the long eerie cry of the kites. He twisted his tail and found himself veering sharply to the right. He noticed his two helpers still in his vicinity, observing him. He felt no more need for their friendship.

The witch had seen the three kites fly up from the steeple to join the lofty dance and she had recognised the middle one as the boy. "Now I'll get you," she rejoiced, "now you are in my power. Just let me get my arrows!" Cackling and croaking in anticipation she hopped to fetch her bow and arrows.

The boy had lost all trace of his initial fear. He disported himself in wild abandon in this new element. He was confidently diving and circling amidst the other kites, perfectly at ease on his wings. Never had he so enjoyed himself. The weightlessness, the total freedom of movement, the retreating of the horizon to apparently limitless space, all contributed to his indescribable exhilaration. He spiralled up and whirled about, flying faster and higher than any of the others, thrilling to life with every cell of his body, all notion of time and restriction left behind.

The sun was setting and the dusk rapidly deepening. The kites one after another went to their roosting places in long leisurely curves. Some of them called to the boy to do like them, but he had lost all sensible attachment to the earth. He let himself be carried higher and even higher and felt no wish to ever come down again.

All other kites had by now regained their homes and the boy was still circling in those dizzy heights. He let himself deliberately be sucked into a thundercloud. Nothing frightened him, nothing warned him either, he was like one intoxicated with pleasure. He was carried up inside the cloud at a stunning speed and lost all orientation. Then lightning struck his left wing and he was washed downward in a torrential rain,—only to be caught again and thrown up in a violent gust, to fall and be hurled up into icy regions again and again until finally released by the cloud to a free fall.

Gradually he regained his senses, tried to control the spinning of his helpless body, gliding as best he could, spreading all his feathers to the maximum and using his tail to full advantage, in a desperate effort to reduce the speed of his fall. And then he crashed into a tree, slid and fell to the ground. His big, strong feathers had protected his body. He was not injured, apart from his seared wing. Warily he lifted his head, scanning his surroundings, and he recognised the place: he found himself in his father's garden.

He took stock of his pathetic situation and compared it with the splendour of his extravagant flight only minutes ago, and he laughed. There was first a melancholy

semblance of the kites' thrilling cry, nostalgic, mellow; but soon the garden resounded with the boy's own ringing laughter. There he stood, still laughing and nursing his seared left hand—when suddenly he felt a dark power invade his environment.

The witch had been to fetch her bow and arrows, she had spotted the boy-kite in the sky, being carried up higher and higher and she had fired a witch's arrow at him. This arrow had hit him up there like a stroke of lightning. Her forces had cruelly played with his maimed body and caused his downfall. And now she came, triumphant, to pick up the remains.

The boy strongly felt the approach and he decided to stay and face it. It was something intense and sinister and he wondered what it could be. Human it was certainly not. It had none of the clearly defined quality inherent in all earth-born things. What could it be?

Suddenly all colour faded from his vision. There were only shades of grey varying down to black. All contours were sharply outlined and more jagged than he had ever seen. His own body felt strangely limitless, yet filled with an irresistible urge to destroy. This was neither a desire, nor a will, nor a perverted pleasure. There was nothing to account for it. It was a vast, unearthly power. A power of which he knew himself a part, he could wield it, use it, yet he felt that it was using him as its instrument, goading him to action, irresistibly. All about him, the whole world was perceived in terms of this power only. Things were recognised as congenial and sympathetic,—or hateful since impenetrable to it. No other discernment was possible nor needed.

He noticed a dagger materialising in his right hand and he knew he would kill the first living creature he met. His hand quivered with the urge to hurt, to cut, to kill. This was his single motive in life.

There came the witch, and the boy concentrated his inhuman power into one single stroke. The witch responded instantaneously and the two daggers met, point on needle-sharp-point, and exploded in a flash of lightning. There was a momentary stalemate. The witch knew herself part of a power immortal, invulnerable to human hands,—never mind how often her material sheath was burnt at the stake. But she also knew that she could destroy herself, could and would destroy herself, if she was to slay that boy in her own image. She rapidly reflected that her only chance against him was to make him revert to his own human form.

The boy, filled with a fury of destruction, surveyed her for her most vulnerable spot. And in a flash he saw her without her drappings, saw that she had no heart, no blood coursed through her body. He saw that she was not made of earthly stuff. And he knew that she was vulnerable to light only. A prayer wrenched itself out from the boy's heart in the witch's guise. A desperate prayer for light, white, radiant light to overcome the witch. All the while the witch was murmuring the most powerful spells she could remember to revert the boy to his own form.

Then a formidable laughter shattered the silvan hush, and annihilated all other sounds, tremendous in its amplitude, devastating in its vast reverberations. It

hollered from the hills, pealed from the woods, boomed from the sky and echoed from the clouds.

The witch stood burning in an unearthly luminosity, and the boy, who had joined in the laughter, was back in his own shape. He noticed gratefully the return of the radiant colours and soft outlines in his surroundings. He saw the witch's silhouette vaguely persisting in the centre of what could only approximately be described as a giant thunderbolt, immobile and of incredible luminosity. He remembered the vast destructive power he had felt in his own being and he prayed. He prayed that never such power should be manifest on this our earth again.

The King waited for the return of the witch. He waited patiently for three days and impatiently thereafter, then he got bored.

In his boredom the King amused himself making all sorts of startling innovations. He abolished flogging in the schools, and soon after he abolished flogging altogether. He had the floggers re-employed in agriculture, in the grain-threshing department, to be precise. He sent out messengers all over the kingdom and beyond to fetch that witch, wherever she might hide. But the witch could not be found anywhere,—in fact the witch was never seen again. A peculiar change came over the King. He began to look quite strained and disgusted at the most amusing routine executions, even forgot to give his orders for new captives to be made. The courtiers looked at one another in shocked surprise, whispered questions among themselves and decided not to remind the King, but to keep quiet and await the further development of his presumed mental illness. They got the shock of their life when they heard that the King had ordered the boy to be brought to the palace—but felt reassured immediately after, seeing the preparations that were made to receive him. The King had the moat cleaned out, deepened and filled to the brim. He tripled his bodyguards and made them stand at arm's length. He had the hinges of the trap-door to the dungeons oiled and he put on a coat of mail underneath his regal robe. Thus properly prepared the King was ready to meet the boy.

Heavily armed Palace Guards ushered him in. A slim boy, still half a child, he stepped forward with disarming simplicity. There was nothing in his countenance that suggested the slightest threat. Silently the King eyed him at the respectful distance the boy had kept. He liked what he saw, frankly admitted it to himself and began to feel rather silly in his coat of mail (lucky it was hidden!). But then he recalled to his mind that this boy had repeatedly foiled the cunning of his best assassin, and he also somehow, subconsciously, connected him with the mysterious disappearance of the witch. He glanced furtively about to make sure his bodyguards were there, at hand and at attention.

The silence persisted unbroken and weighed on the King's nerves. He tried to look more majestic than ever and think of something very impressive to say. But all his usual royal talk, as he turned over one phrase after the other in his mind, just seemed pompous, vain, ridiculous. He gathered his carefully darkened brows to a heavy frown, cleared his throat and tried to breathe in deep and forceful, but the coat of mail

painfully restricted his lungs, and he felt sillier than ever. And the silence persisted.

There was a faint smile on the boy's face. Not enough to be disrespectful but quite sufficient to penetrate the King's heart and kindle there a strange new sensation for which the King had no name, since he had never felt it before. The courtiers became fidgety—and the silence persisted.

Then to his amazement the King saw himself standing in the very place the boy had occupied a second before. He saw himself, his desperate effort to look and sound impressive, knitting his brows, dilating his nostrils and feeling absolutely silly. He saw the mail glint mockingly through his garment and his hand reach out for the protective proximity of his bodyguards.

There was a funny sensation in the back of his throat, a very unwelcome disturbance which he fought down valiantly for a long moment,—until it shook him from deep inside and he leant back and—laughed, shattering the silence with his hearty laughter.

The boy chimed in and became himself again.

In the court there was bewilderment: The King—laughed!!! Never! What next? Then there was panic, everybody apprehending the worst, obviously there was no accounting for the King's strange behaviour, when to crown it all, the King bade the boy come near, and embraced him and asked him to become his personal friend and adviser.

C. NEVILLE