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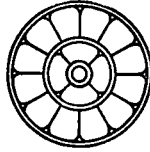
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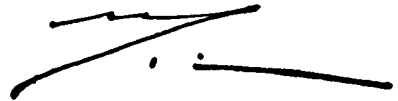


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE—6

EXTRACTS FROM SRI AUROBINDO'S WRITINGS

(Continued from the issue of August 15, 1983)

India's Spiritual Culture

INDIAN culture recognises the spirit as the truth of our being and our life as a growth and evolution of the spirit. It sees the Eternal, the Infinite, the Supreme, the All; it sees this as the secret highest Self of all, this is what it calls God, the Permanent, the Real, and it sees man as a soul and power of this being of God in Nature. The progressive growth of the finite consciousness of man towards this Self, towards God, towards the universal, the eternal, the infinite, in a word his growth into spiritual consciousness by the development of his ordinary ignorant natural being into an illumined divine nature, this is for Indian thinking the significance of life and the aim of human existence. . . . always to India this ideal inspiration or rather this spiritual vision of Self, God, Spirit, this nearness to a cosmic consciousness, a cosmic sense and feeling, a cosmic idea, will, love, delight into which we can release the limited, ignorant suffering ego, this drive towards the transcendental, eternal and infinite, and the moulding of man into a conscious soul and power of that greater Existence have been the engrossing motive of her philosophy, the sustaining force of her religion, the fundamental idea of her civilisation and culture....

[The] greatest movement of the Indian spiritual mind has a double impulse. Its will is to call the community of men and all men each according to his power to live in the greatest light of all and found their whole life on some fully revealed power and grand uplifting truth of the Spirit. But it has had too at times a highest vision which sees the possibility not only of an ascent towards the Eternal but of a descent of the Divine Consciousness and a change of human into divine nature. A perception of the divinity hidden in man has been its crowning force....

[India's] index vision is pointed to a truth that exceeds the human mind and, if at all realised in his members, would turn human life into a divine super-life. And not until this ... largest sweep of the spiritual evolution has come into its own, can Indian civilisation be said to have discharged its mission, to have spoken its last word and be *functus officio*, crowned and complete in its office of mediation between the life of man and the spirit....

The past dealings of Indian religion with life must be judged according to the stages of its progress; each age of its movement must be considered on its own basis. But throughout it consistently held to two perceptions that showed great practical

wisdom and a fine spiritual tact. First, it saw that the approach to the spirit cannot be sudden, simple and immediate for all individuals or for the community of men; it must come ordinarily or at least at first through a gradual culture, training, progress. There must be an enlarging of the natural life accompanied by an uplifting of all its motives; a growing hold upon it of the higher rational, psychic and ethical powers must prepare and lead it towards a higher spiritual law. But the Indian religious mind saw too at the same time that if its greater aim was to be fruitful and the character of its culture imperative, there must be throughout and at every moment some kind of insistence on the spiritual motive. And for the mass of men this means always some kind of religious influence....

Indian culture has worked by two coordinated, mutually stimulating and always interblended operations of which these perceptions are the principle. First, it has laboured to lead upward and enlarge the life of the individual in the community through a natural series of life-stages till it was ready for the spiritual levels. But also it has striven to keep that highest aim before the mind at every stage and throw its influence on each circumstance and action both of man's inner and his outer existence....

Indian culture was founded on a religious conception of life and both the individual and the community drank in at every moment its influence. It was stamped on them by the training and turn of the education; the entire life atmosphere, all the social surroundings were suffused with it; it breathed its power through the whole original form and hieratic character of the culture. Always was felt the near idea of the spiritual existence and its supremacy as the ideal, highest over all others; everywhere there was the pervading pressure of the notion of the universe as a manifestation of divine Powers and a movement full of the presence of the Divine. Man himself was not a mere reasoning animal, but a soul in constant relation with God and with the divine cosmic Powers. The soul's continued existence was a cyclic or upward progress from birth to birth; human life was the summit of an evolution which terminated in the conscious Spirit, every stage of that life a step in a pilgrimage. Every single action of man had its importance of fruit whether in future lives or in the worlds beyond the material existence....

[Indian religion's] persistent effort was to impress the mind at every moment and in each particular with the religious influence. And to do this more effectively by a living and practical adaptation, not asking from anyone what was too much for him or too little, it took as a guiding idea its perception of the varying natural capacity of man, *adhikāra*. It provided in its system means by which each man high or low, wise or ignorant, exceptional or average might feel in the way suitable to his nature and evolutionary stage the call, the pressure, the influence. Avoiding the error of the religions that impose a single dogmatic and inflexible rule on every man

regardless of the possibilities of his nature, it tried rather to draw him gently upward and help him to grow steadily in religious and spiritual experience....

Every part of human nature, every characteristic turn of its action was given a place in the [religious] system; each was suitably surrounded with the spiritual idea and a religious influence, each provided with steps by which it might rise towards its own spiritual possibility and significance. The highest spiritual meaning of life was set on the summits of each evolving power of the human nature. The intelligence was called to a supreme knowledge, the dynamic active and creative powers pointed to openness and unity with an infinite and universal Will, the heart and sense put in contact with a divine love and joy and beauty. But this highest meaning was also put everywhere indicatively or in symbols behind the whole system of living, even in its details, so that its impression might fall in whatever degree on the life, increase in pervasion and in the end take up the entire control. This was the aim and, if we consider the imperfections of our nature and the difficulty of the endeavour, we can say that it achieved an unusual measure of success. It has been said with some truth that for the Indian the whole of life is a religion. True of the ideal of Indian life, it is true to a certain degree and in a certain sense in its fact and practice. No step could be taken in the Indian's inner or outer life without his being reminded of a spiritual existence. Everywhere he felt the closeness or at least saw the sign of something beyond his natural life, beyond the moment in time, beyond his individual ego, something other than the needs and interests of his vital and physical nature. That insistence gave its tone and turn to his thought and action and feeling; it produced that subtler sensitiveness to the spiritual appeal, that greater readiness to turn to the spiritual effort which are even now the distinguishing marks of the Indian temperament. It is that readiness, that sensitiveness which justifies us when we speak of the characteristic spirituality of the Indian people....

All beings are to the Indian mind portions of the Divine, evolving souls, and sure of an eventual salvation and release into the spirit. All must feel, as the good in them grows or, more truly, the godhead in them finds itself and becomes conscious, the ultimate touch and call of their highest self and through that call the attraction to the Eternal and the Divine....

One [of three stages in the growing human consciousness] crude, ill-formed, still outward, still vitally and physically minded can be led only by devices suited to its ignorance.. . In the Vedic times the outward ritual sacrifice and at a later period all the religious forms and notions that clustered visibly around the rites and imagery of temple worship, constant festival and ceremony and daily act of outward devotion were intended to serve this type or this soul-stage. Many of these things may seem to the developed mind to belong to an ignorant or half-awakened religionism; but they have their concealed truth and their psychic value and are indispen-

sable in this stage for the development and difficult awakening of the soul shrouded in the ignorance of material Nature.

The middle stage, the second type starts from these things, but gets behind them; it is capable of understanding more clearly and consciently the psychic truths, the conceptions of the intelligence, the aesthetic indications, the ethical values and all the other mediating directions which Indian religion took care to place behind its symbols. These intermediate truths vivify the outward forms of the system and those who can grasp them can go through these mental indices towards things that are beyond the mind and approach the profounder truths of the spirit. For at this stage there is already something awake that can go inward to a more deeply psycho-religious experience. Already the mind, heart and will have some strength to grapple with the difficulties of the relations between the spirit and life, some urge to satisfy more luminously or more inwardly the rational, aesthetic and ethical nature and lead them upward towards their own highest heights; one can begin to train mind and soul towards a spiritual consciousness and the opening of a spiritual existence. This ascending type of humanity claims for its use all that large and opulent middle region of philosophic, psycho-spiritual, ethical, aesthetic and emotional religious seeking which is the larger and more significant portion of the wealth of Indian culture. At this stage intervene the philosophical systems, the subtle illumining debates and inquiries of the thinkers; here are the nobler or more passionate reaches of devotion, here are held up the higher, ampler or austerer ideals of the Dharma; here break in the psychical suggestions and first definite urgings of the eternal and infinite which draw men by their appeal and promise towards the practice of Yoga.

But these things, great as they were, were not final or supreme: they were openings, steps of ascension towards the luminous grandeurs of spiritual truth and its practice was kept ready and its means of attainment provided for the third and greatest type of human being, the third loftiest stage of the spiritual evolution. The complete light of spiritual knowledge when it emerges from veil and compromise and goes beyond all symbols and middle significances, the absolute and universal divine love, the beauty of the All-beautiful, the noblest Dharma of unity with all beings, universal compassion and benevolence, calm and sweet in the perfect purity of the spirit, the upsurge of the psychical being into the spiritual ecstasy, these divinest things were the heritage of the human being ready for divinity and their way and call were the supreme significances of Indian religion and Yoga. He reached by them the fruits of his perfect spiritual evolution, an identity with the Self and Spirit, a dwelling in or with God, the divine law of his being, a spiritual universality, communion, transcendence.

But distinctions are lines that can always be overpassed in the infinite complexity of man's nature and there was no sharp and unbridgeable division, only a gradation, since the actuality or potentiality of the three powers coexist in all men. Both the middle and the highest significances were near and present and pervaded

the whole system, and the approaches to the highest status were not absolutely denied to any man, in spite of certain prohibitions: but these prohibitions broke down in practice or left a way of escape to the man who felt the call; the call itself was a sign of election. He had only to find the way and the guide.

(Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 14, pp. 155-65)

(To be continued)

SUN-BURST

QUIVERING ecstasies along a shoreless flight
 Forbidding not a sightless, voiceless trance
 Through columned archways of unforbidden peace,
 The Timeless moved with a light-burdened face.

Even in the hours when life stood still
 On the precipice of the New and High and Far
 All the world in an ardent Core
 Held still the formidable time-free Word.

Echoes of Heaven, travellings on earth,
 Borne like the melodies of some great Birth,
 Evening the ruggedness of mountains unwon,
 From the quieted heart burst a time-outvasting Sun.

A. P.

LIFE-FORCE, YOGA, PSYCHIC BEING, SUPERMIND, LOVE

FROM A TALK OF THE MOTHER ON SEPTEMBER 19, 1956

Sweet Mother, I haven't understood this well: "Will, Power, Force are the native substance of the Life-Energy, and herein lies the justification for the refusal of Life to acknowledge the supremacy of Knowledge and Love alone,—for its push towards the satisfaction of something far more unreflecting, headstrong and dangerous that can yet venture too in its own bold and ardent way towards the Divine and Absolute. Love and Wisdom are not the only aspects of the Divine, there is also its aspect of Power."

The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 163-64

WHAT have you not understood?

Sri Aurobindo says that the vital part, the vital being is the greatest obstacle because it is unregenerate, and that there would be a possibility of transforming it if it surrendered entirely to Love and Knowledge; but as its predominant quality is force, energy, power, it does not like to submit to other parts of the being, and this justifies its refusal to submit itself, for those virtues in their essence are as high as the others. That is why it has neither the same power nor the same capacities, for it is not developed, it has not surrendered, and this is what causes the dilemma: it does not submit because it has this power, and this power cannot be utilised because it is not surrendered. So, how to get out of that? The vital, if it were surrendered, would be a very powerful help, extremely useful, it would make the whole process go much more rapidly. But because it feels its own power, it refuses to submit to the others; and because it does not submit, its power cannot be utilised. So, what is to be done? Sri Aurobindo states the problem—he is going to solve it afterwards; if we continue reading, after a while he will tell us how to solve this problem—but he states it first so that we may fully understand the situation.

If the vital were a mediocre being without definite qualities, there would be no difficulty in its surrendering, but it would be altogether useless. But, on the contrary, the vital is a sort of stronghold of energy and power—of all powers. Yet generally this power is diverted; it is no longer at the service of the Divine, it is at the service of the vital itself for its own satisfaction. So, as long as it is like that, it cannot be used.

It should come to understand that this energy and power which it feels within itself cannot become useful unless it enters into perfect harmony with the divine plan of realisation on earth. If it understands that, it becomes quiet and allows itself to be enlisted, so to say, in the totality of the being, and then it takes on its full strength and full importance. But otherwise, it cannot be used. And usually, all its activities are activities which always complicate things and take away their simpli-

city, their purity, often their beauty, and their effectiveness, for its action is blind, ignorant and very egoistic.

Sweet Mother, is the divine plane the plane of the psychic being?

It is a higher plane than that of the psychic being. The psychic being is, so to say, the vehicle of the Divine, it contains the Divine, is the habitation of the Divine, but the Divine is higher than it. For the psychic being is only an aspect of the divine manifestation.

Is not the Supermind also the psychic being?

The Supermind is far higher than the psychic being also.

What Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind is the element or the divine Principle which is now going to come into play in the universe. He calls it the Supermind because it comes after the mind, that is to say, it is a new manifestation of the supreme divine Principle. And it is related to the psychic as the Divine was related to the psychic, that is to say, the psychic is the home, the temple, the vehicle, everything that must outwardly manifest the Divine. But it is divine only in its essence not in its integrality. It is a mode of outer manifestation of the Divine, outer compared with the Divine, that is, terrestrial.

Is that all? Nothing else?

How should we come out of the physical consciousness which keeps us preoccupied all the time and exclusively with physical circumstances?

There is a considerable number of ways.

There are intellectual ways, ways which may be called sentimental, artistic ways and spiritual ways. And generally, it is preferable for each one to take the way that is easiest for him, for if one wants to begin straight away with the most difficult, one comes to nothing at all. And here we always come back to the same thing, to what Sri Aurobindo describes in *The Synthesis of Yoga*: it is the way of knowledge or the way of devotion or the way of works. But the way of works is precisely the one which keeps you in physical life and makes you find your liberation in it; and perhaps this is the most effective way of all but also the most difficult.

For most aspirants the way of meditation, concentration, withdrawal from physical life, rejection of physical activities is certainly easier than the way of action. But they leave the physical consciousness just as it is, without ever changing it, and unless one becomes like a sadhu or an ascetic who leaves behind all active life and remains in constant concentration or meditation, one achieves nothing at all. That is to say, an entire part of the being is never transformed. And for them the solution is not at all to transform it, it is simply to reject it, to get out of their body as quickly

as possible. That is how yoga was conceived of formerly, for, obviously, it is much easier. But this is not what we want.

What we want is the transformation of the physical consciousness, not its rejection.

And so, in this case, what Sri Aurobindo has recommended as the most direct and most total way is surrender to the Divine—a surrender made more and more integral, progressively, comprising the physical consciousness and physical activities. And if one succeeds in this, then the physical, instead of being an obstacle, becomes a help.

What does this sentence mean: "Look life in the face from the soul's inner strength and become master of circumstances"?

That is precisely the opposite of the method which consists in rejecting the whole of the physical consciousness and all physical events. "Look life in the face", this means: don't turn your back on it! It means: face life as it is instead of running away from it and call to your aid the inner psychic force—this is what Sri Aurobindo says: "the soul's inner strength", the inner psychic force—and with the help of this psychic consciousness rise above circumstances and master them. That is to say, instead of submitting to all that comes and suffering all its consequences, one rises above circumstances and lets them pass like things that do not touch you and do not impair your consciousness. That is what it means.

It is said that to become conscious of divine Love all other love has to be abandoned. What is the best way of rejecting the other love which clings so obstinately (laughter) and does not easily leave us?

To go through it. Ah!

To go through, to see what is behind it, not to stop at the appearance, not to be satisfied with the outer form, to look for the principle which is behind this love, and not be content until one has found the *origin* of the feeling in oneself. Then the outer form will crumble of itself and you will be in contact with the divine Love which is behind all things.

That is the best way.

To want to get rid of the one in order to find the other is very difficult. It is almost impossible. For human nature is so limited, so full of contradictions and so exclusive in its movements that if one wants to reject love in its lower form, that is to say, human love as human beings experience it, if one makes an inner effort to reject it, one usually rejects the entire capacity of feeling love and becomes like a stone. And then sometimes one has to wait for years or centuries before there is a reawakening in oneself of the capacity to receive and manifest love.

Therefore, the best way when love comes, in whatever form it may be, is to try

and pierce through its outer appearance and find the divine principle which is behind and which gives it existence. Naturally, it is full of snares and difficulties, but it is more effective. That is to say, instead of ceasing to love because one loves wrongly, one must cease to love wrongly and want to love well.

For instance, love between human beings, in all its forms, the love of parents for children, of children for parents, of brothers and sisters, of friends and lovers, is all tainted with ignorance, selfishness and all the other defects which are man's ordinary drawbacks; so instead of completely ceasing to love—which, besides, is very difficult as Sri Aurobindo says, which would simply dry up the heart and serve no end—one must learn how to love better: to love with devotion, with self-giving, self-abnegation, and to struggle, not against love itself, but against its distorted forms: against all forms of monopolising, of attachment, possessiveness, jealousy, and all the feelings which accompany these main movements. Not to want to possess, to dominate; and not to want to impose one's will, one's whims, one's desires; not to want to take, to receive, but to give; not to insist on the other's response, but be content with one's own love; not to seek one's personal interest and joy and the fulfilment of one's personal desire, but to be satisfied with the giving of one's love and affection; and not to ask for any response. Simply to be happy to love, nothing more.

If you do that, you have taken a great stride forward and can, through this attitude, gradually advance farther in the feeling itself, and realise one day that love is not something personal, that love is a universal divine feeling which manifests through you more or less finely, but which in its essence is something divine.

The first step is to stop being selfish. For everyone it is the same thing, not for those who want to do yoga but also in ordinary life: if one wants to know how to love, one must not love oneself first and above all selfishly; one must give oneself to the object of love without exacting anything in return. This discipline is elementary in order to surmount oneself and lead a life which is not altogether gross.

As for yoga we may add something else: it is as I said in the beginning, the will to pierce through this limited and human form of love and discover the principle of divine Love which is behind it. Then one is sure to get a result. This is better than drying up one's heart. It is perhaps a little more difficult but it is better in every way, for like this, instead of egoistically making others suffer, well, one may leave them quiet in their own movement and only make an effort to transform oneself without imposing one's will on others, which even in ordinary life is a step towards something higher and a little more harmonious.

AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

RECOLLECTIONS BY SAHANA

(Continued from the issue of August 15, 1983)

Sri Aurobindo's Letters

I DO not know why you doubt your experiences—you should accept them as genuine unless we expressly say anything to the contrary. In all the experiences you have sent to me up to now I have never found any that were not perfectly genuine; moreover, your observation of them is quite sound and accurate.

Your first experience was that of the opening of the psychic; you became aware of the psychic being and its aspirations and experiences and of the external being in front, as two separate parts of your consciousness. You were not able to keep this experience because the vital was not purified and pulled you out into the ordinary external consciousness. Afterwards, you got back into the psychic and were at the same time able to see your ordinary vital nature; to become aware of its defects and to work by the power of the psychic for its purification. I wrote to you at the beginning that this was the right way; for if the psychic is awake and in the front, it becomes easy to remain conscious of the things that have to be changed in the external nature and it is comparatively easy too to change them. But if the psychic gets veiled and retires into the background, the outer nature left to itself finds it difficult to remain conscious of its own wrong movements and even with great effort cannot succeed in getting rid of them. You can see yourself, as in the matter of food, that with the psychic active and awake the right attitude comes naturally and whatever difficulty there was soon diminishes or even disappears.

I told you also at that time that there was the third part of the nature, the inner being (inner mind, inner vital, inner physical) of which you were not yet aware, but which must also open in time. It is this that has happened in your last experience. What you felt as a part of you, yourself but not your physical self, rising to meet the higher consciousness above, was this inner being; it was your (inner) higher vital being which rose in that way to join the highest self above—and it was able to do so because the work of purifying the outer vital nature had begun in earnest. Each time there is a purification of the outer nature, it becomes more possible for the inner being to reveal itself, to become free and to open to the higher consciousness above.

When this happens, several other things can happen at the same time. First, one becomes aware of the silent self above—free, wide, without limits, pure, untroubled by the mental, vital and physical movements, empty of ego and limited personality—this is what you have described in your letter. Secondly, the Divine

Power descends through this silence and freedom of the self and begins to work in the sadhak. This is what you felt as a pressure; its coming through the top of the head, the forehead and eyes and nose meant that it was working to open the mental centres—especially the two higher centres of thought and will and vision in the inner mental being. These two centres are called the thousand petalled lotus and the ajna-chakra between the eyebrows—you can ask Nolini to explain to you about them. Thirdly, by this working inner parts of the being are opened and freed; you are liberated from the limitations of the ordinary personal mind, vital, and physical and become aware of a wider consciousness in which you can be more capable of the needed transformation. But that is necessarily a matter of time and long working and you are only taking the first steps on this way.

When one goes into the inner being, the tendency is to go entirely inside and lose consciousness of the outside world—this is what people call samadhi. But it is also necessary to be able to have the same experience (of the self, the workings in the inner consciousness, etc.) in the waking state. The best rule for you will be to allow the entire going inside only when you are alone and not likely to be disturbed, and at other times to accustom yourself to have these experiences with the physical consciousness awake and participating in them or at least aware of them. You did therefore quite right in stopping the complete going inside while you were at M's place. There was no harm in having these experiences there or anywhere, but there should be nothing to draw the attention of others—especially of those who are not in the yoga or in the atmosphere.

5.8.1931

The witness of whom you have become aware is not the psychic but the *inner mental being* which has come to the front as the psychic came before. It is this mental being in you which watches, observes and passes judgement on all that happens in you. The psychic does not watch and observe in this way like a witness, but it feels and knows spontaneously by the very purity of its own nature and the divine instinct within it, and so, whenever it comes to the front it reveals at once what are the right and what the wrong movements. It is evident that the psychic is still active in you, not prominently in front, but shedding its native light on the mental; otherwise the mental being would not be so sure in its observation and judgement but might make mistakes and be misled by the outer vital or clouded by the physical nature.

I have already told you that while the psychic is the inmost part of the being, there is also standing between it and the external surface a triple inner being, the inner mental, the inner vital, the inner (subtle) physical, and that they too had in their turn to come to the front. This is what is now beginning to happen in you.

The being of man is composed of these elements, the psychic behind supporting all, the inner mental, vital and physical, and the outer external nature of mind, life and body which is their instrument of expression. But above all is the central being (Jivatman) which uses them all for its manifestation, it is a portion of the divine self and is hidden from the external man who replaces it by the mental and vital

ego. It is only those who have begun to know themselves that become aware of their true central being; but it is there standing behind the action of mind, life and body and is most directly represented by the psychic which is itself a spark of the Divine. It is by the growth of the psychic element in one's nature that one begins to come into conscious touch with one's own central being. When that happens and the central being uses a conscious will to control and organise the movements of the nature it is then that one has a real, a spiritual self-mastery. But in the meanwhile it can and often does use the inner mental being for the purpose. This is what is happening in you just now and that is why you feel the conscious will coming forward to obey and execute the instructions of the witness. It is the beginning of self-mastery, but, naturally, it cannot be at once complete; you have to go on until all in you opens and you become completely conscious of yourself, and are entirely in all your being the child and instrument of the Divine Mother. 21.9.1931

SOME TIME HENCE

(Seeing the "Service Tree" planted by Prakash at his forestation grounds)

SOME time hence in the wide future
 The labour of the recluse will flower,
 Open will be the gates of heavenly Eden.
 Beauty shall laugh nude and fair
 On the hillside of the being.
 The hostile terrain and the searing winds,
 The rocky heart of the soil
 And the torn dry mud of the pond
 Will yield to trees like young hermits
 Growing aspiringly under the care
 Of the Guru, the Sky, the Supreme.

SHYAM KUMARI

THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the issue of August 15, 1983)

The Mother's Message

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



26

ON New Year's Eve the Mother distributed this Message for 1957:

"A power greater than that of Evil can alone win the victory. It is not a crucified but a glorified body that will save the world."

The Mother explained fully the meaning of the Message in *Questions and Answers* 1957-58 pp. 3, 4, 5.

The last passage is the most striking:

“...It is neither sacrifice nor renunciation nor weakness which can bring the victory. It is only Delight, a delight which is strength, endurance, supreme courage. The delight brought by the supramental force. It is much more difficult than giving up everything and running away, it asks for an infinitely greater heroism—but that is the only means of conquering.”

The Mother sent me on 1st January 1957 a Japanese card in which there was a painting of an attractive landscape on a bamboo sheet. She wished me:

“Bonne Année

To my dear little child
to my sweet Huta

With all my love.”

At 10 a.m. I went to the Ashram and sat in the corridor upstairs near the room of Pavitra¹ with some people to hear the music which the Mother was playing on her old Organ.

The Mother has stated about her music in *Mother India*, May 1960, p. 42:

“This music aims at awakening certain profound feelings. To hear it one should make oneself as silent and passive as possible. And if, in the mental silence, a part of the being can take the attitude of the witness who observes without reacting or participating, then one can take account of the effect which the music produces on the feelings and emotions; and if it produces a state of deep calm and semi-trance, then that is quite good.”

Sri Aurobindo has written about the Mother’s music in the Cent. Ed., Vol. 25, p. 366:

“It is not necessary to have technical knowledge in order to feel what is behind the music. Mother, of course, does not play for the sake of a technical musical effect, but to bring down something from the higher planes and that anyone can receive who is open.”

The Mother’s music reminds me of these lines from *Savitri*:

“Immortal harmonies filled her listening ear;
A great spontaneous utterance of heights

¹ A sadhak.

On Titan wings of rhythmic grandeur borne,
 Poured from some deep spiritual heart of sound
 Strains trembling with the secret of the Gods”

In the afternoon the Mother went into the Prosperity room to give calendars and Sweet Marjoram leaves to people. Sweet Marjoram signifies “New Birth—Birth of the true consciousness, that of the Divine Presence in us.”

The Mother explained in *Mother India*, February 1954, p. 13:

“These leaves are the symbol of a new birth—not material, of body and flesh, but spiritual, of a higher and truer consciousness. This will be given to all and according to each one’s receptivity it will be realised.”

As usual I saw the Mother in her room at the Playground. It was a Tuesday. We had a long quiet meditation. When she opened her eyes, she said dreamily:

“Child, I saw a vision of three big bluish flowers like stars against a rich mauve background. They were pretty.”

I felt that everything was so occult, so sacred—not easy to grasp, comprehend and assimilate. Deep perception, patience and purity were needed to realise such truths.

Two days elapsed. I painted a flower—Amazon Lily—“Light without obscurity—All-powerful in its simplicity.” But unfortunately I still had difficulty in painting.

A card came from the Mother illustrating four enchanting full-bloomed white water-lilies. Her words were:

“These pretty flowers of Mahalakshmi with all my love and blessings along with the constant Presence of the Divine Grace.”

In the evening the Mother and I met before the translation class. She encouraged me both in art and in spirituality.

On the morning that followed she wrote on a card depicting a snowcapped mountain and a landscape which gave a wonderful panoramic view:

“Bonjour
 to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta
 Have faith in the Divine Grace, *in spite of everything*—it will lead you to
 your true goal—the Divine.
 With my love and blessings for ever.”

It was a Friday. Once again I had a peaceful meditation with the Mother. The atmosphere of her room was entrancing. It gave me a sense of sweet safety in her physical warmth. The delicate perfume she wore mingled with the scented flowers.

After the meditation she said with a smile:

“Just now I saw a big sunflower on your heart. Its petals were spread all over, covering your heart. The centre of the flower was completely white like snow.”

Then she took me into her arms and embraced me. My soul was conscious of a new, profound happiness which surpassed all transient happinesses.

The next morning the Mother sent a fine card accompanied by these sentences:

“I am sending you this morning one precious little Dutch vase, white and blue, for painting. It will surely come nicely.”

I painted it on a pale green background and showed it to the Mother in the evening at the Playground. She viewed the painting minutely and said:

“It is good. But you must remember that there should be an intermediary line between the vase and the background, so that the form of it may stand out and look real.”

Then she taught me by means of a sketch how to show the intermediary line between the object and the background.

On the following morning I received from the Mother a card showing lovely red roses, and these words followed:

“Bonjour

To my dear little child

to my sweet Huta

‘À tout à l’heure’

I am going down for blessings this morning at 10 o’clock.

My love and blessings along with the Presence of the Divine Grace are constantly with you.”

That very morning I altered the painting of the vase and I also painted the flowers called deep rose-pink Solitary—“Happy Heart—smiling, peaceful, wide-open, without a shadow.”

The Mother came down adorned with a beautiful sari and an embroidered bandeau around her head which looked like a crown and which held the sari there in place.

My father came at last with Laljibhai accompanied by his Manager. When he

saw me his eyes brimmed with tears. He could not express his feelings, but his silence spoke volumes.

They stayed at Golconde and attended the Mother's distribution of a message on the day known as Epiphany.

My father was limping because he had suffered an accident to his right leg in Africa in 1934 or so. He could not walk without a stick. While we were about to reach the Mother's chair, he was confused as to what to do with his stick. I was just behind him. So I took it from his hand. The Mother saw my gesture and smiled quizzically. My father bowed his head reverently to the Mother. She gazed into my father's eyes for quite some time. I gave him back the stick. The Mother looked at me indulgently while handing me her message.

My father felt dizzy and told me that he wished to sit quietly somewhere. I led him to the right place. Then he told me in moving words: "I saw the Mother's golden face which was brilliant like the sun. I was dazed and overwhelmed. I could not look at her face for long, because it was too bright. It was incredible."

The Message she gave to her disciples read:

"Let the New Light be spread upon earth and change the condition of human life."

This was Epiphany day, celebrating an event in the life of baby Jesus. Three wise men called the "Magi", which is the term used originally for Persian priests, saw a New Star and followed it to Jerusalem. They found the manger in which Jesus was lying and offered to him the gifts they had brought: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

In the traditional Christian interpretation gold points to a King, frankincense to a divinity and myrrh to the Son of Man who was to die. The Mother has given another explanation:

"Gold signifies wealth of the world and supramental knowledge, frankincense purification of the vital and myrrh immortalisation of the body."

The following verses from *Savitri* bring us the word "epiphany" used in a larger symbolic sense, the meaning of the Dawn of the day when Satyavan was to die and Savitri was to fight and conquer death:

"Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed
Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares."

In the evening the Mother saw the altered painting of the vase and, while seeing the other painting, *Happy Heart*, she remarked:

“This painting looks completely flat, as if it was done on a wall. Child, you must show the play of light and shadow. Remember, a shadow too has a shape. Then you will get the depth and vividness of the flower.”

I related to the Mother what my father had experienced in the morning. She went into a trance for a second or two and then said:

“Yes, it is true. He saw my face in gold. You see, your father is very very transparent, frank and open—what is inside him reflects outside. He does not have a double mind and that is very good.”

I was so glad to hear these words. My father left Pondicherry for E. Africa that very day. Before I retired at night, everything brought back echoes of the past. I felt terribly shaken. My eyes became heavy and blind with tears. I kept remembering my father who was very fond of me.

He was well-known in Africa. He worked hard, struggled. He did so much for everybody whom he knew. He passed away on 5th January 1976 in Africa.

I will never forget his generosity and nobility of character.

Laljbhai stayed on to discuss with the Mother about a Sugar Mill.

The next morning a card came from the Mother on which she had written:

“I am sending you a flower to paint as I promised you. It is ‘Nobility of character in the physical’. A white background will look quite nice.”

I painted the Dahlia according to the Mother’s wish. But I was totally exhausted. I felt terribly sick. I could not even go to the Mother’s private Stores. Apart from painting I had been working in the Stores. I also stitched her dresses. I had a vague notion that painting would perhaps be my main vocation. But I found painting a tough job and I was not very serious about it anyway.

In the evening when the time approached to meet the Mother and show her the painting, I collapsed with a severe pain gripping my abdomen. I had unbearable cramps. I could not move. I perspired profusely and felt faint. A hot-water bag was given to me, but the pain still persisted. So I requested Mona Pinto to take the painting to the Mother. She did so, and brought back a lovely scented pink rose given by the Mother for me. The pain subsided gradually.

The following morning the Mother sent me a Japanese painted card with this writing on it:

“I am sending your painting back—it is good.

Hoping you are quite well today.

My love and blessings along with the Presence of the Divine Grace are always with you.”

The Mother inquired after my health when she saw me in her room at the Play-ground. I answered that I had felt much better after receiving the pink rose from her the previous day. She said with a smile:

“I am glad that the pain has gone and hope it will never come back. But in case you are in pain, never use a hot-water bag. It is better to tie gently a silken cloth about your stomach—it will relieve the pain.”

I told her: “Mother, I am completely fagged out after painting. My back aches terribly. I do not really know what to do.”

She went into a trance for a few moments and said:

“If you feel exhausted after your work, you should do some light exercise.”

My eyebrows rose, and I thought: “My God, how is it possible to do exercise after I feel spent?” I was puzzled by this idea.

The Mother resumed:

“Eat something, drink something warm and walk in the open air. Gradually the body will become accustomed to do painting; then you will not feel tired. On the contrary, you will find joy in doing your work. Yes, indeed, painting is a difficult thing, but you must fight against all difficulties. Then you will paint better and better every day.”

That night I wondered endlessly about Nature’s Law, human bodies and so on. I thought that what the Mother had said about exercise was right. Then suddenly my memory flew back to one of her letters, which she had written to me the previous year on 17th March about my menses:

“...About the period, the best way to avoid all pain is to take regular exercise. It helps the circulation.”

Afterwards I took some special exercise, which I did in my room. But as a matter of fact, ever since I received the pink rose from the Mother, the pain has never come back—I never had any complications.

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On the morning of 9th January the Mother wrote on a card:

“I am sending you for painting a silver vase which was prepared for Sri Aurobindo.”

I tried to paint the silver vase several times but could not bring out the correct effect of the silver. The vase always turned out as if made of glass patches and that gave the horrifying impression of modernist art!

Now, while thinking of my masterpiece, I am reminded of a piquant joke:

“The story goes that artist Pablo Picasso once surprised a burglar at work in Picasso’s new Chateau. The intruder got away, but Picasso told the police he could do a rough sketch of what he looked like. On the basis of his drawing, the police were ready to arrest the Minister of Finance, a washing machine and the Eiffel Tower.”

In the evening the Mother saw the painting of the silver vase. She said:

“Before starting a painting, you should always concentrate on an object attentively and carefully to find out how it is to be painted on a canvas board. No doubt, it certainly takes time to have proper concentrated observation and to do perfect work. To be quite true, one must paint in one’s own way with one’s own vision and according to one’s own expression.”

The next morning I received a card from the Mother, which showed a snow-capped mountain and these lines followed:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta.
This peak of pure aspiration rising straight towards the sky.
With my love and blessings and the constant Presence of the Divine Grace.”

Once again I attempted to paint the silver vase and the result was the same. I was really tired and wanted to give up painting.

Since there would be the Mother’s translation class, I did not take my painting to the Playground. Instead I sent it to her apartment in the Ashram Building.

On the following morning the Mother sent a card illustrating a beautiful porcelain vase with red and orange roses in it. Along with the card came some real flowers. Her words on the card were:

“I am sending you three different kinds of flowers for painting, so that you can choose the one you feel most like painting. All three can be done on a *white* background. The Consciousness—Hibiscus—is quite fresh of this morning and can last a few hours without fading even if it is *not* put in water.

“I am keeping your painting of the silver vase and shall take it to the Playground this afternoon. Bring the silver vase itself. So that I can explain to you.”

I did according to Her wish. In the evening I went to see her.

She placed the vase on the ledge of a window and showed me from different angles how it looked in light and shadow.

Then she did a sketch and said:

“You know how to paint glass objects and to show them transparent by giving only the outline and some touches here and there for the shining effect. But for silver things, the technique is quite different from the technique not only for glass things but also for any other thing like wood, ivory and so on.

“There are no gradual steps passing from light to shadow or shadow to light. The shining effect is obtained by a sharp contrast between light and shadow. You have to give a sharp stroke of white colour, while for wood or any other thing the shining effect can be shown by gradual transitions passing little by little from one shade to another.

“Now here, on the silver vase, there is a very dark colour on one side and a very bright colour in the middle or a little sideways along with various reflections of things. When you see a very bright light, give a sudden sharp stroke of pale colour—right at the needed place.

“Remember, in silver things the light never passes gradually to the shadow, but with a sharp contrast.”

I showed her the painting of Hibiscus. She said:

“When you paint the Hibiscus flower, you must not forget that it cannot be painted in a regular tone. You must give touches only by using less of the medium—turpentine—to preserve the brightness of colours.

“But, of course, you can use varnish or any other medium to mix with colour to soften it and make a picture shine. But after some time it becomes dull if you use too much of the medium. Also, you must not keep paintings in very bright sunlight and never in a damp place. These are not good for paintings. You can preserve paintings by varnishing them. But they must be dried completely before you varnish them. Usually, paintings can be varnished after a year or so.”

I now gave up the regularity of writing frequent letters to my family members because time and again one or another of them was visiting the Ashram. They had decided to build a Sugar Mill in Pondicherry.

On 11th January 1957 the Company was registered in Pondicherry State.

The Mother gave Laljibhai an interview and gave some revelatory hints about the world's future. At that time she told him that the situation in East Africa would get worse day by day.

On 12th morning a card came from the Mother showing a view of Fujiyama, a cherry-blossom tree and a lake. She also sent a Japanese image from her precious collections.

She had inscribed on the card:

“I am sending the Goddess of Mercy. Paint it on a white background. Ob-

serve well and you will see that there are not two whites alike—there is bluish white, pinkish white, creamish white etc., etc... and if you copy well you can make a very interesting harmony in whites.”

The image of the Buddhist Goddess Kwan-yin, called Kwannan in Japan, was made out of porcelain. It was milk-white and I was supposed to paint it on a white background! I thought that it was a master idea! I was baffled. I went to the Mother that very morning and asked her: “Mother, how is it possible to paint white on white? It is really difficult.”

First she looked at me intently, then said sharply:

“Nothing is difficult. First of all you must see the image with your open eyes.”

She opened her own eyes wide and said:

“Like this.”

She continued:

“Then you must find out how many colours there are in white—because Nature is full of iris hues. Concentrate properly, and paint by giving different shades of pale colours. If you wish to learn painting perfectly well, you must observe objects minutely and copy them accurately.”

Then she smiled sweetly and gave a kiss on my forehead.

While going back to Golconde I thought: “These types of paintings are certainly not easy. I must give up painting.”

However, I finished the painting according to the Mother’s instructions. I showed it to her in the evening. She looked at it for quite a long time. Then she said with a happy smile:

“This painting is really full of light and vibrations—it is vivid; if you concentrate on the painting, you will surely see the light.”

About her way with paintings the Mother told me:

“I enter into their consciousness and find out their meanings, the truth and beauty behind each work.

“Some paintings are indeed very nice to look at—they have pretty and gorgeous colours, but when there are no living vibrations and deep harmony then obviously the paintings are lifeless and without value. But where there is a combination of the two—outward charm and inner vision—then they are real and can be considered as true art.

“In your paintings I have felt the living vibrations. And that is very good.”

She added:

“A true artist never speaks of what he has done, ‘Oh! I have done a nice painting!’ Instead, he thinks and says. ‘Oh! No, I could not do it nicely, it is not what I wanted to do.’ In fact, he is never satisfied with his work and he continues his effort until he paints masterpieces. An artist puts the full power of his aspiration in his work to reach perfection.”

Not only was the Mother teaching me painting but giving me lessons of life: how to be modest and persistent in my endeavour to reach perfection and develop into a true artist.

On 13th January she wrote:

“I am sending you another white Chrysanthemum in case the others are faded. The same pale green background will look quite nice.”

I painted the flower: Chrysanthemum, “Purified Dynamic Life Energy—Superb, unconquerable, all powerful in its purity.”

In the evening the Mother saw the painting. She laid her left hand on my shoulder and looked at me with her compassionate eyes and said:

“The painting is not only good but has been done with sincerity.”

There was no end to my amazement, because I knew how it had been done. As a matter of fact, I had not followed the light and shadow on the object, but painted it at random. Still, the true inspiration must have worked from behind.

None can beat the Mother’s vision, conception and opinion. A pointer to her being and her ways may be found in *Savitri* Bk. 4, C.I, p. 406:

And from her eyes she cast another look
 On all around her than man’s ignorant view.
 All objects were to her shapes of living selves
 And she perceived a message from her kin
 In each awakening touch of outward things.
 Each was a symbol power, a vivid flash
 In the circuit of infinities half-known;
 Nothing was alien or inanimate,
 Nothing without its meaning or its call,
 For with a greater Nature she was one....

Now it was winter in Pondicherry—a cool phase which lingered for a while. One can hardly utter the word “winter”. Sri Aurobindo’s definition about Pondicherry’s weather was:

“Hot, hotter and hottest.”

The Mother wrote on a card depicting a gorgeous scene of Nature:

“I am sending an ivory elephant for a first attempt at painting ivory, later on after some time I shall send you a figure of Krishna made out of ivory—the elephant is to learn the technique. I am sending back also the colours. Use yellow ochre to mix with the white. I think it will be all right. It is not necessary to copy the design on the pink cloth.”

The Mother used to send me cloths of various colours for the background, so that it might be easy for me to see the light and shadow on the cloth when put behind an object.

Along with the pink cloth, she sent me her own sketch of an elephant in order to show how it could be painted on a board.

I painted the ivory elephant and displayed my work to the Mother in the evening at the Playground.

A glimmer of merriment showed briefly in her eyes when she said:

“My sketch, which I sent you this morning along with the ivory elephant, was not correct. It looked like a hippopotamus.”

And she broke into a deep laugh. Since I had done the painting according to her sketch, I could see that the elephant I had painted resembled a hippopotamus! I laughed to myself.

Then the Mother said:

“Improve your drawing of the elephant on the board and paint again—only the face of the elephant. You should mix a little pink with yellow ochre and white to give the effect of ivory.”

It was the day of the French translation class. We did not meditate. After the class I went into the Mother’s room to take back the painting of the elephant and the flowers she had given me and I made for Golconde.

On the morning that succeeded, the Mother sent me a nice card. She had written on it:

“Here is a French artist, painting a picture of a bridge over the river Seine in Paris. You see, how nicely he is copying.”

The art the Mother had been teaching me was not all roses and ribbons. I found the technique too hard to grasp. I did not have the sense of perspective and colour and scarcely knew how to observe properly. Above all I did not have patience. My fault was: I never looked at objects carefully while painting. It was annoying and irritating to move my head every now and then from the object to the board on which I was painting. I was quite at a loss to understand the meaning of this wonderful teaching. Once again the inferiority complex engulfed me.

I went to the Mother in her apartment in the Ashram and told her: "Mother, I have decided to give up painting. It is beyond my capacity to follow your technique."

She placed her hands on my shoulders and looked at my face and said forcefully:

"I say, will you paint or not?"

I just nodded meekly. She raised my face towards her and regarded my tear-filled eyes. Then she embraced me and said:

"All right, my child."

After this she gave me the flower Hibiscus Mutabilis—"Divine Grace—Thy goodness is infinite. We bow before Thee in gratitude."

The Mother has explained about the Art-discipline in *Words of the Mother*, p. 156:

"The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond, and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga. Why then should not Yogic consciousness be a help to artistic creation?"

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My state of consciousness was not up to the mark. I was exceedingly perturbed by the repeating thought that I could never achieve anything good in my life. My emotions which were out of control were getting too dangerous. Dark notions collected fast in my brain. My nerves were raw and touchy. My whole being was concentrated deep within me in one long nightmare of despair. I did not go to see the Mother, instead I brooded over my miseries.

The following morning a card came from her showing a side-view of the famous Taj Mahal, and these lines followed:

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

An old wise man in China has written:

‘Thought creates for itself its own suffering.’

I add: Those who think falsely will live in falsehood and misery.

Get out of wrong thinking and you will get out of suffering.

My love and blessings and the Presence of the Divine Grace are always with you in spite of your thinking otherwise.”

I went to the Mother in the evening. She received me with all her love. Her eyes had so intense a look that I felt all that I had been going through was a matter of great concern to her. She took my hands into hers and went into a trance for a few seconds. After that she gave me a few flowers and a kiss on my forehead.

I felt a little better.

The next morning I received a pretty card illustrating pink and red roses in a crystal vase. She had written on the card:

“I am sending some flowers for painting—They will look nice on a pale green background.”

I painted the flowers, but nothing seemed to come out right. To crown it all, I had been suffering from a severe backache especially after painting. In the evening I did not go to the Mother. I wrote a letter to her and expressed my feeling.

On the following morning she answered:

“You ask an answer to your letter—but I have already answered several times to what you write. I have always told you that you are *free*, free to do what you think best for yourself. All I want is that you should reach your goal—the Divine—the way to do that does not matter much—and you can be assured that in any case my love, my help and my blessings will always be with you along with the Presence of the Divine Grace.”

In my heart of hearts I was totally aware of the Mother’s wish that I should continue painting. Perhaps that would be the release from all the conflicts.

Once again I laid my hands on brushes and colours and started painting the flowers which the Mother had sent me the previous day. These flowers were *Hippastrum*—“Integral Conversion—Above all conflicts and struggles, in a harmonious blossoming”.

How symbolic! The Mother saw the painting in the evening and said:

“Child, it is good. But whatever object you paint, observe it properly and thoroughly—its shape, colour, play of light and shadow—then you will surely bring out its reality.”

In a second these thoughts flashed into my mind: “O, how I dislike to be realistic. I never wish to be bound by any rules and theories. But I think perhaps this is the real training for me in order to make me more and more observant, precise, scrupulous and attentive.”

When I looked at the Mother, she was smiling. Her blue-grey eyes, large and brilliant, shimmering like ice-crystals, gazed at me. I smiled at her with understanding. For, I knew there was no escape for me in this game of hide-and-seek.

On the morning that followed, a card showing lovely red roses came from the Mother accompanied by these sentences:

“I am sending you the crystal bird and the blue cloth for the background. It will be surely very nice.

“Yes, to know well one must learn—and everything will come in its time.

“My love and blessings along with the Presence of the Divine Grace are constantly with you.”

My backache still persisted. But I did not pay any attention and commenced the painting of the bird. It was not easy to bring out the crystal effect. I was not at all satisfied with my work; neither was the Mother when she saw it. She asked me to paint it again. What I did the second time the Mother found very effective. She exclaimed:

“Oh! it is excellent! the bird in your painting looks like the Bird of Peace coming down with a branch of the olive tree. When the earth was flooded and Noah was in his Ark with animals and birds, he sent a pigeon out of the Ark, and it did not return. Then he sent a dove and it came back with a branch of the olive tree, signifying Peace.

“Your painting truly looks as if the bird was bringing Peace. Really it is very nice.”

I felt greatly relieved. I went to Golconde. I was so exhausted that I did not go to see the movie at the Playground. I informed the Mother about my backache.

The next morning, on a beautiful card indicating a pink rose and two tiny buds she wrote:

“This pain you are feeling now in the back is only a temporary thing. By persisting in your painting work, the body will get accustomed to it and the pain will go. For the moment it is better to take half an hour’s rest after painting,

lying down quietly to straighten your back. And after take a good brisk walk in the open for about half an hour or forty-five minutes to reestablish a circulation and you will see that your health will improve, the pain will go and you will no more feel tired.

“My love and blessings along with the Presence of the Divine Grace are always present with you.”

(To be continued)

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THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE INDIAN SPIRIT

These are extracts from a correspondence between the eminent English poet and critic, Kathleen Raine, and an Indian writer in English, K. D. Sethna, who has published several books both of prose and poetry. The discussion which the extracts are meant to set forth is, strictly speaking, on whether Indians can write genuine poetry in English and it was sparked off by a comment invited by Mr. Sethna on his own work. But, beyond the strict subject and the personal reference, it develops the broad lines of a thesis and antithesis touching on many areas of experience and poetic expression and fraught at a number of points with considerable significance for the literary future of India as well as England. There are sidelights also on some other themes, with either a particular or a general bearing. And it may be mentioned that the correspondence from which the extracts are taken was originally on Blake's Tyger: Mr. Sethna had written a long essay on this poem, which Sir Geoffrey Keynes was kind enough to read and then pass on to Miss Raine for detailed scrutiny. As that essay is still unpublished the lengthy discussion of its contents between her and the author would be out of place here and only a few remarks have been included to serve as a sort of mise en scène.

Miss Raine's letters are published with her permission. On 11.12.1961 she wrote to Mr. Sethna: "I have no objection to your publishing extracts from our exchanges if you think they might be of interest."

From Kathleen Raine

I AM truly sorry for this long silence—perhaps Sir Geoffrey Keynes has told you the reason for which I had to drop everything for two months... Blake had to be laid aside....

I think you have more insight into the poem than any other commentator has ever done, and I hope to see your Essay published soon, with or without the modifications I have suggested—some you may accept, others reject, of course....

Even now I write against time—in half-an-hour's time I am leaving Cambridge... Please write to me

c/o Sherrard, Katounia, Limni, Euboeae, Greece.

I will be there for several months—a little nearer India but not so near as I would like to be. I will write again when I have had the pleasure of reading your poems—that too, like much else, had to be laid aside. (25.7.1961)

From K. D. Sethna

Katounia, Limni, Euboeae, Greece—how these names move me! Ever since I was at school the sense of Greece has been like a glow in my heart. Perhaps you would expect me to say “in my mind”—and indeed I have drawn a lot of joy and strength from Greece’s “foundations” in “thought and its eternity”, but my sense of her has been much more than intellectual. Even to get fully at her thought in its characteristic movement of beauty, shouldn’t we combine the heart with the head? And there is that revealing bit of information that when Aristotle allotted specific functions to bodily organs he made the heart the centre of thought and considered the brain as merely an equaliser of temperature! This would seem to indicate that even to Aristotle, who strikes us as full of “dry light”, thinking came steeped in feeling and was indeed a special kind of feeling—a passionate perception of the shape of truth, as it were. No wonder the Greek thinkers called their speculative activity philosophy—“love of wisdom”. And no wonder there was a balance in them between thought and life. I believe Aristotle too must have felt and loved and lived his thought: not his thought but his language was dry—or perhaps the language looks so because what we have of his works is really a skeleton of notes kept by his pupils and not his own completely expressed and moulded system.

Unfortunately I have never been able to visit Greece. As a six-year old I was taken to England by my father (a doctor) for an operation on my left leg which had been affected by polio. After a couple of months in bed, I went with him (and my mother) to Ireland, France, Switzerland and Italy, and I have as vivid memories of Dublin, Paris, Marseilles, Geneva and Venice as of London (though, of course, restricted by a mere boy’s interests). Greece was too out of the way. And later I never got the occasion to visit the West. I wanted to study at Oxford or Cambridge, but my father had died and my grandfather on whom I was dependent and who was orthodox in his views thought I might bring back an English wife and spoil the pure Parsi blood that had flown in the family from the ancestors who twelve hundred years ago had fled the Arab persecution in Iran and brought the sacred fire safe to India! A little later, when he discovered that I had turned to Yoga he offered to send me to England: even marrying an Englishwoman was preferable to union with the Divine Beloved. But I was afraid of losing time: already at the age of twenty-three I felt I had waited overmuch in the ordinary life and always in my ears was the cry of Augustine: “Sero te amavi...”—“Too late have I loved Thee...” Yes, going places was no longer an attraction. But here in the Ashram at Pondicherry, under Sri Aurobindo’s influence the world-shunning that has been inseparable from spirituality both eastern and western has never been encouraged and all the fine forces of the world’s life past and present have remained alive in me and not the least has been ancient Athens. How could it be otherwise when Sri Aurobindo himself was deep-dyed in Classical culture and was a master of Greek and Latin?

Now, when Yoga is a settled course for me, the world outside Pondicherry does

not seem a power that could alienate me from the light concentrated here, and the idea of going to Greece is not a distraction and, though I doubt whether I would actually take the trouble of travelling so far, the idea starts quite an imaginative thrill.

I owe you a lot of thanks in connection with Blake's *Tyger*: you have helped me see things in a more precise and concrete way and you have said so many kind and encouraging things about my treatment of the poem. I also appreciate very much that you will be reading my poems and writing to me about them. If by any chance *The Secret Splendour* has not gone with you to Greece, please let me know: I shall send you another copy. (2.8.1961)

From Kathleen Raine

I too always wanted to go to Greece, but when I was a child such a possibility seemed unimaginable. But I lived in imagination in Greek mythology (the mythology I knew best, as all children in England did at one time) and the Gods were entirely real to me. Then I became diverted by the idea of becoming a botanist, and at Cambridge studied Natural Sciences. Then strangely Blake brought me back to the Platonic tradition by a road I never expected to discover; and now I am staying with Philip Sherrard, a Byzantine scholar who has done what your parents feared for you, married a Greek wife. They live here and Philip is determined not to return to England. It is not merely the beauty; but the people of Greece are still less corrupted by Westernisation and have not lost all participation in the living Byzantine Christian tradition. We are by the sea and each night see the sun set behind Parnassus, across the sound where the Argonauts sailed, and just a few miles above Chalcis where Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia. India could scarcely be hotter, and the cicadas chirp ceaselessly. But we bathe in the sea about twice a day; and in the evening sit outside under a trellis covered with vine and flowering creepers and eat our meal as Plato describes, communally (the little *Taverna* is kept by the gardener and his wife and two sons), talking until midnight or long after. Sometimes boys dance on the dancing-floor, sometimes people sing. There is a monastery at the end of the valley, where the scent of jasmine and all kinds of fragrant flowers is overwhelming, and cool water flows from a marble lion's mouth into a marble basin....

I began too late to make spiritual progress in this life; but I know where the Way lies, and perhaps in some future life I may follow your own Way. There is time enough in eternity. How literally one is to accept the teaching on reincarnation I do not know, but if in this life I have got as far as Greece, I hope in some future state to reach India. I don't mean just by taking an aeroplane, because one cannot reach places in that way. However, I send you greeting from the country of Pythagoras and Plato—nor do I mean merely the earth and sea of this hot and arcadian island. I was here first two years ago, but this time it seems that I have penetrated farther.

No, your poems were left in England—I had to pay excess on my luggage even so. But you must not send another copy—unless you have one to spare, and can do so conveniently. (12.8.1961)

From K. D. Sethna

The moment I read your account of your days and nights in Katounia with your friends I felt I was there and I got a confirmation of the sense I have always had that the Greece of my youthful dreams, the Greece of golden antiquity, was secretly still alive and Byron's pang about the wonderful isles was not justified:

Eternal summer gilds them yet,
But all except their sun is set.

Certain ancient countries have lived with such a deep or fine intensity that their beings have somehow imparted a subtle substance of culture to physical things and the touch of these things evokes at once to the sensitive mind the presence of the past greatness and beauty. This is so with India and it is so with Greece. What I mean is an experience more "occult" than a stir of the imagination among suggestive ruins. It is as if the very air, the very soil retained and conveyed, in the midst of all modernisation, the chiselled lucidity that was the soul of antique Hellas, the moulded mystery that was the soul of early India.

There is also a converse truth. Just as the air and the soil have been impregnated with the old cultural genius, so too the old culture has subtilised the air and the soil around it and, assimilating them into inner values, can communicate a vibration, a fragrance of their physical reality to the sensitive mind. When one comes into contact with the intense depth of India's intuitive thought or Greek philosophy's intense fineness of felt idea, one participates in a new material life. One does not merely turn the pages of a book: hills and rivers rise from the past, one walks into vanished forests and fields and towns: one breathes the breath and sees the light of the old marvellous world whose stuff went to the making of the hearts and brains that caught transcendental rhythms and visions.

Of course, without those rhythms and visions the heart, the brain and the world-stuff for all their marvellousness would have been but an elaborate futility. But, by a profound paradox, what is transcendental never reveals its final divinity unless caught and conveyed within a three-dimensional context. Nirvana is never so real as in the body of a Gautama and with its infinitude's centre marked by the Bo-Tree. For, I believe that, while beyond the earth are the vast liberating Silence and Absence, there is beyond them the earth again in a supreme sweetness and archetypal glory of the One at play with the Many.

I am afraid I am letting myself go a bit too rhapsodically and with too swift a transition from point to point....

I have sent you another copy of my poems because it has struck me that you will be more able to give your mind to them when you are in Greece, away from the poems of others—unless you have plunged into the endless Kazantsakis!

(27.8.1961)

From Kathleen Raine

Your letter which reached me yesterday makes me realise that to be in Greece is already half way to being in India. In England the soul of the nation is all but dead; while in Greece it is still as green and fragrant as their Basil (I shall enclose you a spray, for this is the scent of Greece—it is grown everywhere, to commemorate the finding of the Holy Cross among a bed of basil, and is used constantly in the churches). Someone always seems to be singing—in the morning the chanting of the Liturgy, in the evening folk-songs; the people are poor, and have few possessions, but they are rich in participating in the still living tradition of this most beautiful and ancient form of Christianity. I read (in English) a book of Plotinus every morning before breakfast, work and bathe in the day, talk through the warm night—as you must in India also, but as one cannot in England!

Yes, I see a little here what you try to convey of the mystery of India, where the silence beyond the earth plays in the manifestation of the Many. Greece is not quite like that—it is almost too beautiful to think of anything but the Many; but every stone, every olive tree and vine and person has a pure identity and a sense of dignity and freedom belongs even—perhaps not “even” but most of all—to the poorest and the oldest men and women. Alas that some form of westernisation will sooner or later enslave these people who retain what most of Europe has already lost....

I have been reading your poems, and everywhere the theme of the Divine Beloved blows through them like a breath. I like best of them all *Each Night*,¹ but in all I find the one theme—the only theme. I am barely on the fringes of it myself, but once we turn our faces that way there is no possibility of return, one can love nothing less. Philip Sherrard here has gone farther than I on the Hesychastic path of prayer; and more and more it becomes impossible to communicate with people who do not share that knowledge, in some degree or form. That is why I hope some day (to use what is perhaps only a metaphor) to be born in India. Only one thing

¹ Dream not with gaze hung low
By love
That earthward calls — but know
The silver spaces move

Within your gaze when sleep
Brings gloom
Then will your hush grow deep
As heaven's lofty room.

And in this chamber strange
With blue
A Love unmarred by change
Shall ever tryst with you.

So, build Her each calm night
A swoon
That bears on outer sight
The padlock of the moon.

(*The Secret Splendour*, Bombay, 1941, p. 79)

troubles me: why do you write in English? You write of the land of India, subtilised, in an almost physical sense, by the quality of life that has been lived there; is not the same thing true of language? Have you not, in using English, exiled your poetic genius from India, to which it must belong, without making it a native of England, for English learned as a foreign language can never nourish the invisible roots of poetry. I feel this even about Tagore, and so did Yeats. I do not believe that we can—or if we could, that we have the right to—write poetry in a language other than our own. (5.8.1961)

From K. D. Sethna

What a delicately delightful surprise—the little spray of Basil enclosed by you! It would be too “theosophical” to say that I instantly had a memory of a Greek incarnation of mine: neophytes in the occult and the spiritual must beware of the subtle fancifulness into which the followers of Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Annie Besant so easily fall. But there was certainly a thrill of strange communion as if by the touch not only of the living earth of Greece today but also of the Greece that can never die.

In this connection I may quote a question and an answer of many years ago when the topic of “past lives” came up between Sri Aurobindo and me in the course of the correspondence we were having almost daily. I wrote: “Certain poets very strongly appeal to me and their minds and characters seem to have strong affinities with mine in different ways. Have you any intuition in the matter of my past lives? The Mother has told me nothing about myself except that she is positive I was an Athenian.”

Sri Aurobindo replied: “A strong influence from one or more poets or all of them together is not sufficient to warrant a conclusion that one has been those poets or any of them in former lives. I have myself no intuition on the subject of your past lives, though from general impressions I would be inclined to wager that you were not only in Athens (that is evident) but in England during the Restoration time or thereabouts, in Renaissance Italy etc.: these, however, are only impressions.”

Going by what, amidst “only impressions”, is “evident” to both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo (confirming my own strong sense), it is not difficult for me to understand why Greece is always like a glow in my heart. Again, depending on what, though only “impressions”, are yet the impressions of a Master Yogi like Sri Aurobindo, who had also a solid, sharp, humbug-proof intellect, I should find it easy to explain why I feel utterly at home in English literature, as if the prose and poetry from Malory and Chaucer to Charles Morgan and Kathleen Raine flowed in my inner being as my own blood flows in my body, a constant, intimate, natural rhythm of sustaining and creative life. And when I try to express myself in English it is to me never as though I were using a language learned by the tongue and acquired by the brain-cells—like my knowledge, for instance, of the terms and turns of ma-

thematics. Six hundred years of England seem to tingle and incandesce in me. Of course, I do not expect others to realise this with any close approach to my own sensation, but perhaps many may feel that I employ the medium of English not by mere choice but by inner compulsion. To me who cannot escape the realisation of my own inmost "drives" and who see something of these "drives" in the light of Sri Aurobindo's certitudes or impressions, the vision of things from the externalities and accidents of place and race is bound to be limited and insufficient.

Even apart from the question of "past lives", there is the whole domain of the inner being which is infinitely wider than the complex of psychophysiology that is the outer self, a domain of freedom and far-reaching response and subtle interchange and even fruitful identification. One who lays hold on a language through the omnipresent luminiferous ether of the inner mind-world can lose the sense of all foreignness and exceed if not expunge the small facts of local habitation and atmosphere. I do not say that it is a facile job to work through this ether, but almost all of us have some touch with it whenever a language and the soul that becomes sound in that language are studied, seized and employed with some passion and pleasure. And occasionally there is much more than mere touch. Then all that nourishes what you call "the invisible roots of poetry" can be felt as one's own. Poetry, no doubt, is written from the sheer soul of a language, and the soul is always difficult of access. But the soul is also unhindered by the divisions that are so rigid-seeming on the surface of life. And if one approaches the soul of a language through one's own soul, through the depths and widths beyond the brain-mind, there is no barrier except lack of intensity in oneself.

So, while I appreciate, from the many failures I see, the rarity of true poetic achievement in English by non-Englishmen, I can hardly agree with your dictum: "I do not believe that we can—or if we could, that we have the right—to write poetry in a language other than our own." Please don't understand me to say that I cocksurely claim genuine success in my own ventures. But if I have failed, it should be because I might not be poet enough: the possibility of an Indian succeeding is ever present and is bound to get actualised some time or other. All the more is this true in view of the way English has been learned in India. Rather, I should say that often it is not learned so much as lived with. People are apt to think that one learns English here as an Englishman sitting in London may study Hindi. You should think of a little England established in our ancient land. For over two hundred years the English mind and spirit have rooted themselves in the Indian consciousness. They are part of this country's soul-soil. From the first moment of our life many of us hear English side by side with the communal tongue. Particularly so is it in a Parsi home. And we have mixed with men and women to whom English is native. English literature is an element in which we are bathed from our earliest years. The situation is somewhat analogous to that in Ireland where too, I believe, English as a common medium is a transplantation going back by a few centuries, though perhaps longer than in India and with greater facilities of reinforcement from the home

country. It is because English is now one of the natural languages in India that the notion entertained by some xenophobiacs of expelling it is futile and artificial. I admit that not all Indians take to English with great ease of expression and that most are more truly articulate in their own dialects or in a semi-*lingua-franca* like Hindi but all educated people here break into English nearly every third minute of the day and some of us find it as apt as our dialects and a few of us are in the strange position of not knowing the dialect with even half as much intimacy as English!

I belong to the last category. You ask me why I write in English. Well, there is no other speech open to me. It is the only language I can use with some confidence: whenever I think a little below the surface it is English that serves spontaneously as the expressive or communicative body of the thought or feeling. You may consider it odd but if I were to give up English as my means of utterance I should be quite "mute, inglorious" even though I might not be "Milton" enough for the world to appreciate the loss. And—believe me—English is a language I find more suited to the deepest movements of the Indian soul than are any of the modern Indian languages. The only rival to it with regard to these movements is ancient Sanskrit which cannot in its full historical form be revived for common use today. I am not flashing out a paradox when I write that, together with the Sanskrit of the Rigveda, the Upanishads and the Gita, the English of Shakespeare, Milton, Vaughan, Donne, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Francis Thompson, Patmore (of *The Unknown Eros*), Whitman, Hopkins, AE and Yeats is the most subtly, intensely, profoundly developed language in the world, and if a new and modern Rigveda or Upanishad or Gita will be written it will be first in English! A further truth with the appearance of a paradox is that, since English is the language most subtly, intensely, profoundly developed and since India is still the country with the greatest spiritual experience, the spiritual fulfilment of English speech along the inward lines indicated or initiated by many English poets themselves will first come—if it already hasn't—through Indians and not Englishmen—Indians who have steeped themselves not only in the deepest culture of their own land by Yogic discipline but also in the finest essence of the English culture that has been diffused here for some centuries. The coming together, rather the love-affair, of India and the English language has on it the stamp of a divine destiny.

If you do not frown, you will perhaps smile sceptically and murmur, "What an incredible whimsy—this Indo-Anglian apocalypse!" But, apocalyptic or no, the Indo-Anglian consciousness is a fact in varied fertile ferment. Of course, it cannot be quite a "native of England", but English is no longer a native of England exclusively—and its very simplicity of basic syntax on the one hand and on the other its composite many-minded many-toned genius, wonderfully flexible and vastly assimilative, marks it out intrinsically for a multiple birth, an international orientation, a cosmopolitan development.

In any case, we are in front of a living and kicking phenomenon of diverse aspects and far-flung interests. Shall we judge its possibilities by doctrinaire considerations?

Many failures on the one side and many prejudices on the other are bound to be there, but I see in the Indo-Anglian consciousness something that cannot be turned back and is fated to enrich both India and England.

Let me turn from all this prophesying to my own little present reality. I am very happy that you have gone through my book. From your remark—"I like best of them all *Each Night*"—I take it that you have read all the poems. I would very much wish you to read all; because though essentially the theme may be one—"the Divine Beloved", as you put it—I have tried to include as great a variety as I could of treatment and technique. If you have picked out *Each Night*, will you do me the favour of telling me why exactly you have done so—what in its vision or style or structure has appealed to you? I should indeed value even a few words of expert appraisal.

I am enclosing for you a spray of the plant which is extremely common in India or rather wide-spread in the religious life here. It is called "Tulsi" and is sacred to the worshipper of Vishnu. It signifies *bhakti*, devotion. Actually it belongs to the same family as Basil: what you have sent me is *Ocimum Basilicum*, what I am sending you is *Ocimum Sanctum*. This spray was fragrant when I got it, but as it had to wait till my letter got finished it has somewhat dried up. But what should remain ever fragrant is the fact that it was taken by me from the Mother's own hands. She smelt it and finding it of good fragrance gave it to me for you. It is now *Ocimum Sanctissimum*! I wish you could keep it with you always. (14.9.1961)

(*To be continued*)

IGNORANCE : ITS ORIGIN, ITS LOGICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL NECESSITY AND ITS PURPOSE

A CRITICAL STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF THE NIRVISHESHA ADWAITA
OF SHANKARA AND THE INTEGRAL ADWAITA OF SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the Issue of August 15, 1983)

Now we turn to the Nirvishesha Adwaita of Shankara and study in detail how it presents the problem of Ignorance, and its necessity and purpose, if any, and critically examine its presentation in the light of the Integral Adwaita of Sri Aurobindo, which is the main theme of the article.

Brahman the Reality is Sat (Existence), Chit (Consciousness) and Ananda (Bliss). It is *nīṣkala* or partless and *nīṣkriya*, actionless or inactive. It is Absolute, that is not contingent on anything else. It is not as if Brahman has Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. According to Adwaita, Brahman is these. It is a triune entity whole and entire. The nature of Brahman is to be known indirectly from the declarations of the Scripture and is a matter of direct experience, which is called *aparokṣajñāna*. In the last resort Brahman is known by realisation, *anubhavaikavedyam*. It is trans-sensuous, *atīndriya*. It is free from all difference, *bhedarahitam*, that is (1) difference from an object of the same class, *saṁtīya*, (2) difference from an object of another class, *vijātīya* and (3) internal difference, *svagata*. There is nothing else than Brahman. Scripture says: Brahman is all this, *sarvam khalvidam brahma*. Brahman is formless, as form implies limitation, since it is all and everywhere. It has no qualities, *nirguna*. Since Brahman cannot have any desire in our sense of the word, there will be no occasion for action. It is perfect and pure, it is pure intelligence and objectless subject. To realise Brahman is being Brahman.

Such a Brahman cannot originate the world of the Many. But the Upanishads say that the Universe is an issue from the Being of Brahman. *Saḥ akāmayata bahusyam prajāyeyeti*. He desired, "May I be many" (Taittiriya Upanishad, 2-6). Again in Chhandogya Upanishad, 6-2-3, *tadankṣata prajāyeyeti*, that saw or deliberated, "May I be many." Brahma sutra 1-1-5, *ikṣaterna aśabdām* means that "on account of looking, it is not based on the Scripture." Commenting on this sutra, Shankara very clearly says and emphasises the origin of the world from a conscious being, refuting the further argument of the Sankhyans that thinking, looking, is used in a secondary sense. But Shankara is significantly silent about the purpose, for Brahman can have no unfulfilled desire in our sense to create. Shankara takes the verb "to look" in the general sense of action, thinking, of a conscious being. But the Nirguna Brahman of Shankara is actionless. So he wriggles out of the difficulty by making the Nirguna Brahman associated with Maya and calling it *saguna* Brahman. This Saguna

Brahman is Ishwara or Lord, the creator of the world. This *māyā* is said to be *anādi*, beginningless, but a better translation would be unbeginning. Maya superimposes, *adhyāroṣita*, the world on Brahman. But it has an end on enlightenment. Cosmic ignorance is called Maya and individual ignorance termed *ajñāna*. But this ignorance is not lack of knowledge; it is not negative but positive, *bhāva rūpa* and it must be something, *yatkñcit*, for on enlightenment ignorance is destroyed and it should be a positive something to be destroyed. When we say that darkness is destroyed by light, it is positive and hence destroyed. One cannot destroy a mare's nest or break a hare's horn. So Ignorance is not lack of knowledge, *jñānābhāva*.

The question of relating Ignorance to Brahman, the locus of it, is a vexed question of *nirviśeṣa* Advaita philosophy. Ignorance exists epistemically but ontologically does not. This world of names and forms, space and time, appears on account of ignorance which has no beginning. If it be asked to whom is this ignorance applicable, well, to you who are putting the question. But if you say it is declared by the Shruti that I am Brahman, then there is none to whom ignorance belongs, if you are thus enlightened. So the question of relation of *avidyā* or *māyā* to Brahman can arise only at the empirical level. One who raises such a question is himself ignorant of the truth and so the question is superfluous at that stage: a child cannot be present at the birth of its mother. Equally superfluous is the question on enlightenment, for there is none to raise that question, because at that level *jīva*, the individual soul, is Brahman. If it is asked how this came about in the All-conscious Brahman, it is said to be Anirvachaniya, indefinable.

There are of course different views among the followers of Shankara regarding the locus of Ignorance. One is headed by Vachaspati Mishra and the other is the Vivarna school represented by Sarvajnatma Muni, Prakashatman and Anandabodhya-charya and others. According to Vachaspati, *jīva* or individual soul is the support of Ignorance, while the other school says that Ignorance has for its substratum Brahman. Sri Aurobindo makes a critical examination of both the views and shows the difficulties inherent in them. It is beside the aim of this article to go into them.

The world then is admitted to be a direct issue from the Being of Brahman, albeit *saguṇa* Brahman, according to Shankara. As a corollary Shankara admits the essential non-difference between the cause, Brahman, and the effect, the world. So commenting on Brahma sutra II-1-14, he says the entire body of effects has no existence apart from Brahman. *Brahma vyatirekena kārya jātasyābhāva iti gamyate*. So the immanence of Brahman is admitted. This admission gives rise to another objection that Brahman must have elements of manifoldness in it, for the world is manifold. To this contention, Shankara answers, *ubhaya satyatām hi katham ekatva jñānena nānātva—jñānamapanudyata iti*. If unity and multiplicity are real, then he who is engrossed in the manifold world cannot be regarded as ignorant. Again, if unity and multiplicity are true, bondage cannot be the result of multiplicity nor release the perception of unity. How can the knowledge of the unity remove the knowledge (ignorance) of the manifoldness, if both are true? asks Shankara. How far

Shankara is correct in his assertion will be seen at the relevant place.

It is in this connection that Shankara's commentary on the Chhandogyopani-shad text, 6-1-4, *vāchārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttikatyeva satyam*, name and form arise out of speech and the clay alone is real, is cited to prove the unreality of the universe, for pot-name and pot-form are superimpositions on the sole reality the (clay) substance of Brahman owing to ignorance, which has no beginning. This may appear to the intellect illogical. Even the great Adwaitins admit the absolute illogicality of this mysterious functioning of Maya and are quite conscious of it. In the words of Padmapada, it is called material, ignorant energy, *jaḍātmikā avidyā śakti*. This could not have been the work of an inconscient energy, as the universe is admitted to be a direct issue from Brahman. So the illogicality is apparent. Sureshvaracharya in *naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, III, 66, says: *seyam bhrānti nirā-lambā sarva nyāya virodhinī, sahate na vichāram sa tamoyadvad dvākaram*. It is a baseless illusion opposed to all reason and cannot stand the test of reason even as darkness cannot stand the sun. Again in the same work at III, III, it is said, *aho, dhaṣṭuryamavidyāyā na kaścidatvartate pramāṇam vastvanādrtya paramātmeva tiṣṭhati*. *Avidyā* cannot be surpassed by anything in shamelessness. It despises all reason and logic and yet it exists like Brahman itself. Can any admission of the utter illogicality of *avidyā* go farther, and that by no less a person than Sureshvaracharya, the foremost disciple of Shankara?

In the teeth of such an admission, it is unnecessary to multiply any more admissions of another Adwaitin. All admit that Ignorance has no beginning and it is indefinable. Vimuktatman (*Iṣṭa-siddhi*, p. 35) gives the quietus to this illogicality saying, *tena sadasatvābhyām anirvachanīyā na punarvāchyati*. *Avidyā* is indescribable only in the sense that it cannot be described either as real or as unreal, and not in the sense that nothing can be said about it.

This formulation of *avidyā* strikes one as the utter helplessness of the Adwaitin, who is not able to say whether *māyā* is real or unreal and escapes by saying that it is neither real nor unreal, which illogicality is buttressed up by saying it is indefinable. All the same this position of *nirviśeṣa* Adwaita is quite sound experientially and hence logically unassailable, although apparently it is illogical. That is why the Adwaitin makes a rejoinder, when the illogicality is pointed out to him, "This is not a question of vraisemblance, nor is it an issue that can be settled by means of logical validation, for this is the ineffable mystery of *māyā* (*anirvachanīyā*), not to be comprehended by reason or mind" (*The Destiny of the Body*, p. 105, 1975 edition, by J. K. Mukherjee, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram). This is the only way to explain the One and the Many with reason and logic as our instruments in dealing with a suprarational mystery. Besides, Shankara is quite right, when he says Ignorance is not mere lack of knowledge, Jnanabhava, but positive, Bhava Rupa and something, Yatkinchit; it is the power of *māyā* or *avidyā* and has a sort of existence as long as it (Ignorance) lasts. Here we see the rare logical force of the immense metaphysical genius that Shankara is, whose blinding, lightning intellect flashes forth so that no

opponent without a wider and higher spiritual realization can ever meet the argument, and that is what has happened until Sri Aurobindo appeared as a star of greater magnitude with his daylight logic based on a wider, higher and deeper spiritual experience.

Hear the Master himself speak on Maya, the mystery: "Undoubtedly it has a sort of existence while it lasts as a dream has, or the long-continued hallucination of a delirious or demented brain, but no more. The One has not become and can never become the Many; the Self has not become and can never become all these existences; Brahman has not manifested and cannot manifest a real world in itself, it is only the mind or some principle of which mind is a result that thrusts names and forms (*adhyāropita*) upon the featureless unity, which is alone real and being essentially featureless cannot manifest real feature and variation; or else, if it manifests these things, then that is a temporal and temporary reality which vanishes and is convicted of unreality by the illumination of true knowledge" (*The Life Divine*, Vol. II, p. 240; *adhyāropita* within brackets is ours). Is there any doubt that it is Shankara talking in English on his formulation of *adhyāsa*, superimposition? I have quoted this as an answer to many a learned pandit or professor who never tires of saying that Sri Aurobindo has not correctly understood Shankara as if he had himself understood both Shankara and Sri Aurobindo well enough to pass that remark. So like the Upanishadic Rishis, we must compare the spiritual experience of Shankara with that of Sri Aurobindo, and that will be decisive, not logical reasoning, because mental logic, however high the plane from which it proceeds, can never solve the supramental mystery or the relation of the One and the Many which has proceeded from the One.

Sri Aurobindo himself speaks of that: "The being of the Self-existence and the world that has appeared in it are, each of them and both together, a supra-rational mystery.... The Self-existence is the infinite and its way of being and of action must be the way of the infinite, but our consciousness is limited, our reason built upon things finite: it is irrational to suppose that a finite consciousness and reason can be a measure of the infinite" (*The Life Divine*, Vol. II pp. 39-40). Again the Master Yogi elaborates: "This, a difficulty of the logical reason, must be met by a larger and more catholic enlightening reason. Or, if it is a difficulty of spiritual experience, it can only be met by a wider resolving experience. It can indeed be met also by a dialectical battle, a logomachy of the logical mind; but that by itself is an artificial method, often a futile combat in the clouds and always inconclusive" (*The Life Divine*, Vol. II, p. 87). The Mahayogi with his daylight vision shows why any disputation on Shankara's philosophy has so far been a signal failure, for, as Vivekananda says, "as there is no instrument beyond the mind—for only the Atman exists there—there the object of knowledge becomes the same as the instrument of knowledge" (Swami, *Complete Works*, Vol. VII, p. 142). "The solution of the matter must rest not upon logic but upon a growing, ever heightening, widening spiritual experience—an experience which must of course include or have passed

through Nirvana and Maya, otherwise it would not be complete and would have no decisive value" (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 152, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1953).

Now it is quite clear that the problem of ignorance can never be solved by the highest dialectical mind conclusively. Shankara's solution is the best at that. So the logical necessity of an instrument higher than mind-consciousness is demonstrated. Then, is there no hope for man except to escape from the vale of tears that the world is and into which he has fallen—he does not know when?—and which is the result of an Ignorance that has no beginning?

Here comes the relevance and urgent necessity of Sri Aurobindo and his solution of the problem of Ignorance, its origin and necessity and purpose. Let us now turn to the Sage-seer's experiential formulation.

(To be continued)

P. KRISHNAMURTY

“INDRA SENJI, I AM NOT IN A HURRY TO REALISE THE DIVINE”

A LONG time back we had at the Ashram in Pondicherry a Sadhak, a very strong, stout, hefty, young man whom we all called ‘Brahmachariji’. He enjoyed being so called and when thus called he visibly felt proud of himself and his evident bodily proportions and strength. He was devoted to his work and was seen quite busy. Once when he was free and quite pleased with himself he said to me, “Indra Senji, I am not in a hurry to realise the Divine. Why should I be? Mother has given me a nice room. I am happy to live in it. Then nice food with milk and fruit and occasional sweets. The work I am expected to do is also to my liking. I am in every way happy. I have a perfect life and I do not seem to miss anything, need anything. Some people seem to be eager to realise the Divine. But I do not understand them. For my part, I am perfectly satisfied and I see no reason to be in a hurry to realise the Divine.”

He was frank, he was honest. The needs of his physical existence were fully met and he felt entirely satisfied. He had no intellectual needs, his mind had no cultivation and it did not know what it is to seek the delight of thought in literature or science or philosophy, or of feeling in music and art, or of will in the pursuit of ideals, social, political or otherwise. And his soul was an unperceived unfelt unrecognised fact so his life was simple and its needs were easily met; still his joy had a deeper quality and was striking. It lent a charm to his life, but yet the physical life was the dominant fact.

It is an interesting study, not easy to make with any thoroughness, why and how an individual comes to the Ashram in Pondicherry and decides to live here even while disclaiming any interest in Yoga or spiritual life, not to speak of the realisation of the Divine. Of course, there are many who come with an avowed spiritual purpose and are yet refused admission. And there are also some who have not such conscious purpose, but find joy in living and working here and they are welcomed. The circumstantial story too of each sadhak, how and why he came is interesting. And many a visitor finds great joy in inquiring from Sadhaks and listening to the stories of their coming here.

But Sri Aurobindo and Mother have seen this phenomenon in their own way and unless we are able to appreciate it, we remain puzzled why so-and-so was accepted and so-and-so refused. To them it is the soul within behind all the appearances of life that matters. If the soul sparkles behind the obscurity of outer denials, bad habits, etc. and seeks a chance here, the individual has all the luck. The Mother has said, regarding the admission of students to the ‘Centre’: “We do not want brilliant students, we want living souls.” Mental, moral and religious merit is one thing, spiritual awakensness is another. A good soul, if given its chance, will of itself clear away the difficulties of the outer nature.

The Brahmachari did not know why he was here. Apparently the physical personality was satisfied with the satisfactions of the physical needs. But the Mother was nursing his soul and waiting for its emergence. And when the hour of the soul arrives, the Divine becomes the need of all needs. The physical needs and their satisfactions all get into the background.

The Brahmachari is no more and we do not know how his soul fares forth. But it is true we all have to work out and work off our outer personality of physical needs, vital desires and mental, moral ideals to get to the hour of the soul when the Divine becomes in itself an imperative need.

INDRA SEN

VAMADEVA HAD IMMORTAL BIRTHS

HE drank the fire that flows from the blazing nipples of heaven,
 And as if it were a dream his second mother gathered his hairs;
 A soul that burns up on its own tail is climbing the Unknown,
 And into the Hollow plunges the chariot of the flame-wheels;
 He clapped his hands as though ensued lightning from the clouds,
 But the birds were young and who would nestle them in such a winter?
 I was told the crevasses were filled by the gold of the season,
 Hence the path of his journeying disappeared into the Nowhere;
 Not from the early sea but from stir of the first sound he jumped,
 And in the belly of laughter moved the gods of medieval fate;
 He delved into the flint and the eye of the telescope was born,
 Yet far there is a darker feature dotting the viewless Infinity;
 These stars are constantly escaping the network of the night,
 But there is a mystery locked in gulf-stream of the sombre vision;
 They waltzed together although they had no reason's gleaming feet,
 And in the things of Death were affixed the horns of the Taurus;
 Riding on wings of a seer-will he reached the truth of his being,
 And from the deepening chasm surged a cry that seemed all sorrow's;
 Under the crown of silence he saw a vast smile illumining the sky,
 And suddenly a hooded power hissed guarding the diamond of the cave;
 He offered his heart like a triple ray of splendour to the Sun,
 And tearing the awesome nudity rose the All-Negation's Form;
 Then indeed Vamadeva had immortal births in the Beatitude,
 Even as would a hawk conquer the hill with talons of his ecstasy.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

SRI AUROBINDO'S SHORT POEM 'PHAETHON': A STUDY

'PHAETHON', written in England in Sri Aurobindo's late teens, runs:

Ye weeping poplars by the shelvy slope
From murmurous lawns down-dropping to the stream
On whom the dusk air like a sombre dream
Broods and a twilight ignorant of hope,
Say what compulsion drear has bid you seam
Your mossy sides with drop on eloquent drop
That in warm rilletts from your eyes elope?

Is it for the too patient sure decay
Pale-gilded Autumn, aesthete of the years,
A gorgeous death, a fading glory wears
That thus along the tufted, downy way
Creep slothfully this ooze of amber tears
And thus with tearful gusts your branches sway
Sighing a requiem to your emerald day?

This early yet excellent short poem displays young Aurobindo's fascination for Greek mythology, though he later on sought for a distinction between Hindu myth and Greek myth and during his Pondicherry period concentrated on Hindu mythology as one of its most brilliant exponents.¹ 'Phaethon' was composed in 1890-92, a part of his Cambridge days. By the time he reached Cambridge from St. Paul's he had become a confirmed scholar in Greek and Latin, for he had bagged a senior classical scholarship by then, and passed the classical Tripos examination in the first division with distinction, and won all the prizes in one year for Greek and Latin verses.²

'Phaethon' deals with the lamentation of poplar trees, which are supposed to be the transformations of Phaethon's sisters, the Heliades, who, as they lamented his fate, turned into poplars on the banks of the great river Eridanus, and their incessant tears became amber as they dropped into the stream.³

The mythical story of Phaethon is an interesting piece of Western mythology.⁴ Phaethon was the son of Phoebus Apollo and the nymph Clymene. One day Epaphus, the son of Jupiter and Io, scoffed at the idea of Phaethon's being the son of a God. Phaethon complained of the insult to his mother, who sent him to Phoebus to ask whether he had not been truly informed concerning his parentage. Phoebus received him most affectionately, owned him for his son and swore by the river Styx that whatever proof he might ask would be granted. Whereupon Phaethon immediately asked to be permitted for one day to drive the Chariot of the Sun. The father now repented of his promise and tried to dissuade the lad by telling him of the perils of the undertaking. However, the youth rejected all admonition and stuck to his demand. And the result was fatal.

In the course of his ride when Phaethon beheld the monstrous Scorpion his courage failed, and the reins holding the horses fell from his hands. The horses, unrestrained, went off into the unknown regions of the sky; and the Chariot was hurled over pathless places. This event played havoc on the earth, the land cracked open, and the sea shrank up. The earth then prayed to Jupiter who, on being compelled to act promptly, launched a lightning bolt against the reckless Charioteer. Consequently Phaethon, with his hair on fire, fell headlong, like a shooting star that marks the heavens with its brightness as it falls. Eridanus, the great river, received him and cooled his burning frame. Thus Phaethon brought death upon himself by presumption. Such is the origin of the tragic Phaethon myth. Let us see now how Sri Aurobindo makes use of this tale.

The poem opens with an address to the bereaved poplars, thus setting the tragic tone that apparently pervades the whole poem. The personification of the poplars and the surrounding elements in nature like 'murmurous lawn', 'dusk air' and 'a twilight ignorant of hope' undoubtedly strengthen the pathetic note. The autumn personified in the second stanza, 'the too patient sure decay', 'fading glory,' 'tearful gusts' that sway the branches of the poplars, and 'sighing a requiem'—all these suitably cover the tragic content of the poem. However, the mention of 'a gorgeous death' abruptly shifts the mood and diverts the tone of the poem to an imposing heroic magnificence. The phrase 'a fading glory' accepts first the presence of the glory of Phaethon's heroic adventurous spirit, his desperate daring, as it recalls the magnificence of nature during spring-time. And 'to your emerald day' in the end-line not only looks forward to the advent of spring but also helps one maintain Sri Aurobindo's different outlook on the Phaethon myth. Is it not quite indistinctly reminiscent of Shelley's typical Romantic vein, 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind?'

Though Phaethon himself is not a God, he is the son of the God Apollo; he is a supernatural being and his actions have been superhuman actions. He suffers a tragic fate owing to his overpowering passion to drive the Sun-Chariot. The story of Phaethon creates a new kind of realistic fantasy that is mythic in essence.⁵ It contains a symbolic meaning. Phaethon destroyed himself by his uncontrollable ambition to imitate the feat which only his father could accomplish. Heedless of his father's admonition, he attempted the dangerous feat, and the result was his death. Thus an overpowering passion for something may result in tragedy.

The mythic image of Phaethon emerges out of the two dominating images of Heliades, Phaethon's bewailing sisters, and of the aesthete, presented through the personifications of the poplar trees and of the season of Autumn. Following Coleridge, we may say the human element of weeping has been effectively transferred to them from the poet's own spirit 'that shoots its being through earth, sea and air'.⁶ Moreover, the audiovisual aspect of the image, enunciated by the neo-classical writers and the Imagists, has been beautifully accomplished here. The powerful imagination of the poet so successfully presents the human-like dismal appearance of the

Heliades that the weeping poplars give the instantaneous vision of the mourning sisters of Phaethon. What F. R. Leavis says about Wordsworth's Sonnet 'Surprised by Joy' can well be applied here: 'The particularity, intensity and emotional sincerity are critical themes that present themselves to the reader in a pretty obvious relation here.'⁷

As said earlier, the image of the aesthete is presented through the personification of the autumn season in the second stanza. The aesthete is a professed appreciator of the beautiful; in Greek, however, the term 'aesthete' means 'One who perceives'. And it is the Greek sense that seems more prominent here, for the aesthete perceives the fading glory of nature as well as of Phaethon; 'a gorgeous death' refers to both in this sense. In the universal sense too the image of the aesthete can be interpreted, though this can be done only in a Keatsian manner—Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty. The key phrases 'a gorgeous death' and 'a fading glory' reveal the duality of interpretation, they add to the spirit of man; and the elements of sight, emotion and vision have been so deftly fused in it that it can be classified both as a visual and as an abstract kind of image as it conveys the sense of vision and makes an appeal to the intellect simultaneously.

Though Western mythology stamps the Phaethon myth as essentially tragic and tragic alone, to Sri Aurobindo it is possibly heroic-tragic. He seems to be yet exploring whether it is barely tragic or heroic-tragic in content. The questionings at the end of each stanza unfailingly point to the indecisive note on which the poem ends. The poem might have been composed after the poet had casually seen the decaying poplars on the banks of a river during autumn; and it has neither any philosophical meaning nor any high mysticism such as marks his later poems. Technically, the 5-foot line of iambs, interspersed with anapaests followed by trochees, has been beautifully accomplished; and even the regularized rhyme scheme a b b a b a a, and c d d c d c c aptly help to point out pauses.

G. S. PAKLE

NOTES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Supplement to Volume 9: The Future Poetry, Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (Pondicherry: Birth Centenary Library, 1972) XXVII, pp. 150-51. According to Sri Aurobindo, Hindu myth is not as warm and passionate as Greek myth, the Hindu mind was too austere and idealistic to be sensitive enough to the rich poetical colouring that is inherent in crime, sin and overpowering passion, as we find in Greek myth. However, Hindu myths possess strength, simplicity and solemn depth of beautiful meaning.

2. Navajata, *Sri Aurobindo* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 1972), pp. 6-7.

3. Charles Mills Gayley, *The Classic Myths: In English Literature and in Art* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1893), p. 98.

4. *Ibid*, pp. 94-98.

5. G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and other Cultures* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 252-285.

6. S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: Everyman, 1906), p. 177.

7. F. R. Leavis, "Imagery and Movement," *Scrutiny*, I (1968), pp. 231-247.

THE RUBAIYAT OF BABA TAHIR:

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL PERSIAN DIALECT

(Continued from the issue of May 1983)

(46)

Thy thorny path is full of trials and tears,
O heart, thy passage is through heaven's spheres,
 Peel off thy very skin if that can make
Lighter the burden which thy body bears.

(47)

It's ever the cruel outrage of the skies
That salts my bruises; and the smoke of sighs
 Mounts endlessly unto the zenith's height,
Heart weeps, tear-water streams chasm-deep from eyes.

(48)

My tender heart is brittle like a glass,
I dread when sighs my love-burnt heart 'alas';
 What wonder if my tears are those of blood?—
A tree am I who roots in blood's morass.

(49)

Because of countless ills my heart doth break.
O that a little less were this deep ache!
 Healer and love-inflicter both stand by,
O that but one were there for Heaven's sake!

(50)

The weeping of my heart is a shrill flute,
Thy separation's pain is death acute,
 I have to burn and melt till Day of Doom,
God knows when comes that Doomsday absolute.

(51)

O spring is come, flowers are in revelry,
 On trees, sing nightingales their melody;
 I tread parterres with utter caution, lest
 Hearts hidden lie there more love-burnt than I.

(52)

Black snakes of hair thy lovely face surround,
 Hyacinth and rose are gathered on one ground,
 As vexest thou thy threads of silken locks,
 Hidden in every thread a heart is found.

(53)

O may thy sun-face turn more brilliant!—
 My heart with the arrows of thy love be rent!
 Know'st thou why mark upon thy face is black?
 Burns black what near the sun has pitched its tent.

(54)

A mutual friendship lasts for evermore,
 One-sided love's a headache and a bore.
 If Majnun's heart was restless all in love,
 Then burnt in the same fire was Leila's core...

(55)

O Love, thou dost my heart and life possess,
 To being's In and Out hast close access,
 I suffer from this ache, I know not why,
 But this I know thou hold'st my sole redress.

(56)

Nor tulip-flowers bloom on a mountain-peak,
 Nor violets on stream-banks more than a week;
 By beat of drum I'll make known all around:
 A week lasts faithfulness of rosy cheek.

HAR KRISHAN SINGH

(To be continued)

A SURPRISING MONUMENT IN PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY! The very name brings before our mind's eye the tranquil Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the lovely Botanical Gardens, the enchanting seashore with the shady park nearby and, half-in half-out, the cosmopolitan Auroville: these are only a few of the many attractions of this historically renowned place.

In front of the Government House is the "Park". At the centre of the Park, formerly *Le Jardin du Roi* (*The Royal Garden*), later *Charles de Gaulle Square* and now known as Government Square, stands a small surprise. For there is a monument built not in honour of a queen or of an empress but of a courtesan. The fact that Napoleon III, Emperor of France, who reigned during the later half of the 19th century, was responsible for erecting this building to commemorate a 16th-century public woman adds to our curiosity. The *femme de joie* belonged to Pondicherry.

Ever since the French traders had established themselves as rulers having their headquarters at Puducherry (earlier name of Pondicherry) potable water was much in demand. It became an insoluble problem. Wells were dug but they offered only salt water as the sea was too close. And the various attempts to bring drinking water from the neighbouring villages through canals proved in one way or another futile. The Frenchmen known as White-town-dwellers found it a hazardous affair to quench their thirst. Emperor Napoleon III came to hear of the plight of his subjects stationed at Puducherry. The understanding monarch immediately shipped Monsieur Lamairesse, the Chief Engineer, to Puducherry with orders for Monsieur Bontemps, the then French Governor of Puducherry, to utilize the engineering skills of Lamairesse and by hook or by crook to quench the thirst of the Frenchmen.

On reaching his destination, Lamairesse made a thorough study of the tanks and rivers found in the surrounding villages, and analysed the advantages and drawbacks of laying long canals. Finally his choice fell on Aayikulam (a tank named after Aayi, the courtesan) at Muththirayar Palayam, a 5 km. distance west of Pondicherry. He succeeded in laying a long canal starting from the bank of Aayikulam and reaching the place where the monument built later stands. At last the Frenchmen had enough water to drink.

Emperor Napoleon, while commending the success of the chief Engineer, wished to know why the tank was named after Aayi, the courtesan. He was told what had happened 300 years earlier.

The story of Aayi takes us back to the reign of King Krishna Deva Raya (A.D. 1509-1530) of Vijayanagar. When this physically strong and striking personality came to power, all Southern India comprising the whole of the modern Madras presidency, the native states included, was under his sway and several quasi-independent chiefs were his vassals. Having his headquarters at Vijayanagar, King Krishna Deva Raya loved to inspect the Southern States as and when time permitted.

During one such visit, the King accompanied by his able minister Appaji started from Vellore only to sojourn at Villianur, 8 kms. west of Pondicherry, where he heard

of a wealthy agriculturist living at Ozhukarai, 4 kms. west of Pondicherry. He had a physiological peculiarity—a thick growth of hair on his soles—and wore sandals made of gold. His name was Uiyyakunda Viswaraya Mudaliar.

Curiosity surged in the heart of the king. He resolved that the stranger was worth a visit.

It was dusk when the king and his retinue bade goodbye to Viswaraya Mudaliar. On their way back to Villianur, they passed through Muththirayar Palayam.

Sandal-scented, fragrance-laden Southern breezes welcomed the king and his men. They soon found themselves standing in front of a house, fully illuminated with clay oil-lamps. The well-polished entrance of the house was kept wide open and the stairs that led to the entrance were strewn with flower petals. Speechless they stood for a moment, contemplating the beauty of the house.

The next moment the king's men found their lord and his minister Appaji doing obeisance to the house, taking it for a temple. They followed suit.

A passerby who noticed their action mustered all his courage and told the king in all humility that the place was not a temple but the abode of a woman of easy virtue named Aayi.

Words cannot describe the wrath of the king. In his fury he shouted at his men to demolish the house of the harlot and in its place dig a well and a tank as penance for the sin he had brought on himself.

Aayi heard the commandment of the king and came rushing out of her house. She went down on her knees to the king and cried for mercy. The king was adamant. Her pleadings failed to soothe the king's anger. Finally the harlot implored the king to allow her to demolish her house and build in its place the tank and the well at her own expense.

King Krishna Deva Raya, 'a man of much gentleness and generosity of character', cooled down and granted her request.

Aayi did what she had promised and thereby gained immortality. The tank she built was named after her.

Emperor Napoleon III was moved by the story.

The Governor of Puducherry wrote to him: "My lord! We are all grateful to you for sending here Monsieur Lamaresse, who gave us water. He deserves a reward."

The Emperor replied: "Be grateful to Aayi. She deserves a monument."

(Courtesy: *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 10, 1983)

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Fifty Poems of Nirodbaran, with Corrections and Comments by Sri Aurobindo (Aurobooks, Calcutta—64, 1983, Rs. 50).

AFTER intense schooling in Medicine in the United Kingdom, Nirodbaran returned to India in the early thirties, only to make a bee-line to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, and offer his all to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He became, as was natural, a healer of the human body exemplifying the Gita's definition *Yogah karmasu kausalam* ("yoga is skill in work"). Soon, however, he was drawn to another field, for under the Aurobindonian dispensation *all* life was Yoga. In the 1930's, the Ashram at Pondicherry was not only a haven for Yogins and neophytes, but also a nest for song-birds, flying-birds and fledgelings learning to fly. Sethna (Amal), Chadwick (Arjava), Harindranath, Amrita were among those that essayed English verse. Nolini and Dilip wrote in both Bengali and English, Nishikanta, Sahana and Jyotirmoyee in Bengali, Sundaram and Pujalal in Gujarati, and Suddhananda Bharati in Tamil. Nirod was agreeably surprised to find that poetry also could be a form of sadhana and lead to siddhi, and so he started lispng in numbers in his mother tongue Bengali as well as in English. There was a nipping quality in the atmosphere, certainly, and besides the Sun was pouring his rays and giving light and life. Like some of the other Ashram poets (Amal and Dilip, for example), Nirod started sending his poems in manuscript to the withdrawn Sri Aurobindo, and the electric link was to work wonders. He read and commented on the drafts, touched them up when necessary, and returned them with the seal of his approval, and always the journey to Sri Aurobindo's sanctum and back was for the poems a pilgrimage to Light and the baptism of rebirth. Between February 1936 and November 1938, Nirod may have composed nearly 1000 poems (averaging one per day), almost all of which made the journey and returned significantly changed or transformed. In 1947, Nirod published 99 of the poems as *Sun-Blossoms*, which was warmly received by an audience rather of the elect. Since then Nirod has placed us under a colossal debt to him with his *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, *Sri Aurobindo's Humour*, and the two invaluable books of reminiscence, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* and *The Mother—Sweetness and Light*.

The visitor to Sri Aurobindo Ashram today can see Nirod in his room facing the Samadhi under the Service tree; or, perhaps, walking with light sure steps, and always with a distant look, for he has no eyes for any except Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; or, more rarely, giving a talk on his life in the Ashram, and his chosen role is to mediate Paraclete-like between his audience and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Although I knew (and everybody knew) that Sri Aurobindo had had a hand in the shaping of Nirod's English poems, from the finished pieces in *Sun-Blossoms* it was not possible to gauge the nature and extent of Sri Aurobindo's revision or transformation of individual pieces. Now at last the alchemic process or the secret of

transfiguration stands fully revealed before us. Fifty of the poems are reprinted, in their original form as Nirod had penned them and also in the final form after Sri Aurobindo had with his magic touch shaped them anew. Of almost equal importance, Sri Aurobindo's corrections, substitutions, comments, exclamations, elucidations, justifications, *obiter dicta*, all are here along with Nirod's queries, proddings, provocations, pleadings and self-abasements that elicited the Master's varied reactions. In the result, here is a book perhaps without a parallel, a bunch of poems in the raw as well as in the finished stage, and exposing to our eyes even the process, the mechanics, the reactor-operations of the change and the transformation.

The earliest of the poems included in the present collection is dated 16.2.1936 and the last 22.11.38, a day before Sri Aurobindo sustained a fall and a fracture, a portentous event that was to put an end to this particular phase of collaboration between Master and Disciple. "Our joint venture," says Nirod in his Preface; and there is corroboration when Sri Aurobindo writes: "It seems to me that between us we have produced something remarkable" (p. 101). Nirod has instructively included "poems of various levels of inspiration", and we are enabled to see how, with the passage of time, the corrections and emendations become fewer, and the vertical lines—one, two, three, occasionally even four—signifying degrees of approbation or appreciation more and more frequent. But, then, what infinite pains, what infinite love, to turn "a medical man by profession and a vital-physical man by nature" into an authentic poet, and one not seldom drawing inspiration unawares from the 'overhead' regions! A poem is a fusion of substance and feeling, the right diction, metre and form, and the needful (overhead or other) inspiration. At the early stage of the collaboration, Sri Aurobindo comments on a piece: "good poetic substance and feeling, but needs more perfection of form" (p. 4). Awkward constructions, tame epithets, metrical chaos, all have to be avoided. The conventionally overworked expressions should be "deconventionalised". And the words have to team themselves into spans of thought coalescing with feet of sound, and the totality needs to be held together and charged with significance by the 'form' (say, the sonnet). At the very outset Nirod is warned: Make up your mind whether it is to be 'you' or 'thou'; and no inversions please:

"look here, sir—I bar, damn and completely reject and repudiate your 'freedom bold'. This kind of inversion is cheap bric-a-brac and to be resolutely avoided. Kindly kick it out" (p. 20).

As for poetic 'style', when Nirod asks why Sri Aurobindo prefers 'mirroring a strange Beauty' to 'And mirror a strange Beauty', the answer is magnificent:

"These are matters of poetic style, to be felt—can't explain them intellectually. I can only say this gives a subtler rhythm and a more suggestive turn of significant sound and expression..." (p. 81).

Metre, of course, is Nirod's bugbear, and Sri Aurobindo doesn't mince matters: "... the metre of some of your lines is enough to make the hair of a prosodist stand on end in horror!" (p. 12). But being incarnate patience and compassion and sovereign understanding, Sri Aurobindo admonishes, argues, corrects, turns brick into marble, copper into gold, the good into the better, and occasionally the excellent into the sublime. And whenever Nirod is diffident, apologetic or depressed, he receives a shot in the arm, and he is firmly pulled out of the slough of despond and set on the pedestal again. When Nirod asks whether Sri Aurobindo isn't wasting his time correcting so much "un-English" stuff, the answer comes: "You have got the inspiration, but the mental mixture rises from time to time; this has to be got rid of, so I am taking trouble. I wouldn't if it were not worth while" (p. 23). On another occasion, Sri Aurobindo links Nirod's with Jyotirmoyee's diffidence: "She writes fine epic verse and says she is unable to do anything worthwhile—you write a fine sonnet and decide that your inspiration is exhausted" (p. 26). Again, when Nirod wails about his "run-down" condition, Sri Aurobindo retorts:

"Well, if a run-down store can produce a poem like that, it is a miraculous run-down store" (p. 39).

When Nirod calls one of his efforts "a sprat", Sri Aurobindo writes back: "It is not a sprat, sir; it is a goldfish. You seem to be weak in poetical zoology" (p. 50). Then, six months later:

"What the deuce are you complaining about? You are writing very beautiful poetry with apparent ease and one a day of this kind is a feat ... You are gaining command over your medium and that is the main thing" (p. 93).

On yet another occasion when Nirod moans that there is nothing "flashing" in his poem ("I feel encircled by a flood of light"), pat the answer comes: "It may not flash but it gleams all right" (p. 116). And, finally, about the whole sadhana of poetic composition: "The idea of these poems is the same as before, but in expression the poetry is becoming more and more authentic, more 'seen' than before and that after all is the main thing" (p. 84).

In many a lyric in the present collection, while Nirod is the author, the voice of his poetry seems to come from far regions, and he is more the uncanny tape-recorder than the singer with a conscious meaning or message, and it is left to Sri Aurobindo to elucidate the lines. Why is the line "A fathomless beauty in a sphere of pain" deemed hauntingly beautiful? The stanza of which the line is the climax reads:

Thus all things born pass into a divine
 Nothingness and reach that single Bliss
 Whence they sprang like stars on a nebulous sky-line,
 A fathomless beauty in a sphere of pain...

And Sri Aurobindo comments on the last line: "Coming after the striking and significant image of the stars on the skyline and the single Bliss that is the source of all, it expresses with a great force of poetic vision and emotion the sense of the original Delight in an unseizable beauty of things" (p. 90). It sounds almost like the anti-thesis of "A fathomless zero occupied the world"! Elsewhere, when asked whether he wasn't reading too much in a poem ("Out of a burning row of candle-stars"), Sri Aurobindo writes on 22.11.38: "You asked what was the meaning and I gave you what I gathered from it or, if you like, what it would have meant if I had written it" (p. 121). And of another poem, Sri Aurobindo said simply: "It means more than can be said. The sombre wave is the Ignorance and Inconscience on which earth-life is founded" (p. 64).

And not the least of the blessings vouchsafed by Sri Aurobindo's replies to Nirod is the spray of humour that humanises everything and seeds it with delight. Between Disciple and Guru there is so much innocent and lively sparring that the reader cannot but lap it up for the sheerest honey:

"Q: Please give an all-round poking, will you?"

A: All right—I shall try to give the all-round poke" (p. 39).

"Q: Do you find any meaning in 3rd and 4th stanzas?"

A: Yes, except that the dots have too much meaning" (p. 57).

"Q: This again is a riddle...."

A: Not very cogent... But see how with a few alterations I have caged it. (Excuse the word, it is surrealistic 'it')..." (p. 66).

"Q: Guru, I fear you will find the poem suffering from the first signs of flu!"

A: Well, sir, your flu has made you fluid and fluent, and the hammering headache has hammered out a fine poem. Wa Allah!" (p. 98).

"Q: This time, Sir, the poem looks to me damn fine...."

A: Very fine, yes, and perfect in expression; but I don't know about damn fine, for that is a tremendous superlative. Such a solemn phrase should only be used when you write something equalling Shakespeare at his best" (p. 113).

Isn't all this akin to divine laughter?

And, in short, here in this beautifully and flawlessly produced volume we have a body of poetry of the richest vein,—a "variety of Surrealism", says Amal in the Foreword, that does not "hail from the common dream-plane but rather through it", its real origin being "a subtle shimmering mystery" that is part of the inner Yogic consciousness,—and there is exposed to us the whole anatomy of the poetry as well.

Sri Aurobindo was mentor, comrade, collaborator, *sahṛdaya* and interpreter all at once, and the roles tantalisingly interpenetrate and defy isolation. But like unto the recordation of one's experiences in verse form and their eventual transformation in the creative forge into poetry, like unto this labour and discipline and articulation of poetry is the adventure of consciousness, the discipline of Purna Yoga, and the crown of siddhi. *Fifty Poems of Nirodbaran*, along with Sri Aurobindo's Corrections and Comments, thus comes to us as a Manual of Overhead Poetry and as a Guide to Integral Yoga.

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