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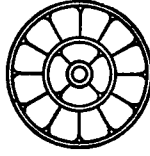
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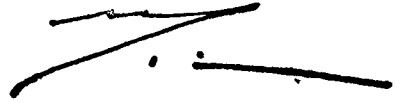
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXVII

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail.”

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KARPĀSA IN PREHISTORIC INDIA

A Chronological and Cultural Clue

by K. D. SETHNA

WITH AN INTRODUCTION by DR. H. D. SANKALIA

Pp. 200+ ×. Cloth: Rs. 70.

THIS book is a companion volume to the author's first venture in the historical field: *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, published in 1980. It converges on the same goal but by different routes and thus adds strength to the central thesis.

What is attempted is a general revision of ancient Indian history. Taking the aid of archaeological discovery, documentary material and linguistic study, the book seeks to bring about a radical change in (1) comparative chronology, (2) the sequence of cultures and (3) the cultural character of several phases of India's career in antiquity.

By a close investigation of the term *karpāsa* for cotton in Sanskrit literature and by an alignment of its first occurrence with the first ascertained cultivator of the cotton-plant in our country, the body of Indian writing called Sūtras is shown to be in its early stage contemporary with the Harappā Culture, the Indus Valley Civilization, of c. 2500-1500 B.C. The natural consequences are a new date for the R̥gveda which is commonly held to have started in c. 1500 B.C. a thousand years before the Sūtras, and a new understanding of the Indus Valley Civilization as at once a derivative, a development and a deviation from the R̥gveda a millennium after this scripture's beginning in c. 3500 B.C.

However, the argument from *karpāsa* does not stand alone. Its import is buttressed from several other directions. Pointers from India are rendered sharper by significant suggestions caught from the Mesopotamian region with which the Indus Valley had commercial and cultural contacts. In agreement with several scholars but with an eye to more particulars, a name for this Civilization is discerned in the Sumerian records: Meluhha (pronounced Melukhka). It is then matched—again with a closer scrutiny than given before by like-minded scholars—with a name applied from more inland India to people of the Indus Valley for the first time in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa which just precedes the earliest Sūtras and would thus synchronize by the new chronology most appropriately with the initial development of the Harappā Culture. The name is Mlechcha which becomes Melakha or Milakha in Prākṛit.

The riddle of the Indus script is also confronted and a fairly long debate is held on the claims of Proto-Tamil and Proto-Prākṛit for the language embodied in it. The latter is adjudged more likely to be the base though other elements as part of the superstructure are not brushed aside.

At the end, as a key-insight, the vocable *karpāsa* itself is disclosed as functioning under a transparent veil in several lists of Sumero-Akkadian words which are connected with the trade between the Harappā Culture and Sumer.

The above résumé hints at only a few examples of the manifold research pursued along new lines with a sustained thoroughness. Here is a book opening up vista on novel vista for the Indologist without sacrificing any of the scientific rigour with which honest investigation of the past is to be carried on.

Dr. Sankalia of international repute in archaeology writes, among other matters: "There is no doubt that Shri Sethna has made a very intelligent use of his deep knowledge of archaeology and Sanskrit literature." Apropos of the relationship between the R̥gveda and the Harappā Culture, he ends his Introduction: "Shri Sethna's views deserve careful consideration, and should stimulate further research in this vexed problem."

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SRI AUROBINDO'S CALL TO INDIA

INDIA, the heart of the Orient, has to change as the whole West and the whole East are changing, and it cannot avoid changing in the sense of the problems forced upon it by Europe. The new Orient must necessarily be the result either of some balance and fusion or of some ardent struggle between progressive and conservative ideals and tendencies. If, therefore, the conservative mind in this country opens itself sufficiently to the necessity of transformation, the resulting culture born of a resurgent India may well bring about a profound modification in the future civilisation of the world. But if it remains shut up in dead fictions, or tries to meet the new needs with the mind of the school-man and the sophist dealing with words and ideas in the air rather than actual fact and truth and potentiality, or struggles merely to avoid all but a scanty minimum of change, then, since the new ideas cannot fail to realise themselves, the future India will be formed in the crude mould of the westernised social and political reformer whose mind, barren of original thought and unenlightened by vital experience, can do nothing but reproduce the forms and ideas of Europe and will turn us all into halting apes of the West. Or else, and that perhaps is the best thing that can happen, a new spiritual awakening must arise from the depths of this vast life that shall this time more successfully include in its scope the great problems of earthly life as well as those of the soul and its transmudane destinies, an awakening that shall ally itself closely with the renascent spiritual seeking of the West and with its yearning for the perfection of the human race. This third and as yet unknown quantity is indeed the force needed throughout the East. For at present we have only two extremes of a conservative immobility and incompetence imprisoned in the shell of past conventions and a progressive force hardly less blind and ineffectual because second-hand and merely imitative of nineteenth-century Europe, with a vague floating mass of uncertainty between. The result is a continual fiasco and inability to evolve anything large, powerful, sure and vital,—a drifting in the stream of circumstance, a constant grasping at details and unessentials and failure to reach the heart of the great problems of life which the age is bringing to our doors. Something is needed which tries to be born; but as yet, in the phrase of the Veda, the Mother holds herself compressed in smallness, keeps the Birth concealed within her being and will not give it forth to the Father. When she becomes great in impulse and conception, then we shall see it born.¹

*

Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world,—not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India's future ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a

¹ Centenary Ed., 16, pp. 327-28.

completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to a whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity. This ideal can be as yet only a little seed and the life that embodies it a small nucleus, but it is our fixed hope that the seed will grow into a great tree and the nucleus be the heart of an ever-extending formation. It is with a confident trust in the spirit that inspires us that we take our place among the standard-bearers of the new humanity that is struggling to be born amidst the chaos of a world in dissolution, and of the future India, the greater India of the rebirth that is to rejuvenate the mighty outworn body of the ancient Mother.¹

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

DEEP PLACES

I'M in no mood for mountains.
 Too near down-pressing sky,
 Too barren, bright, unmysteried they lie.
 So, climbing to some bald white peak
 I stopped, knee-deep in grass and flowers.

Better by far the lower forests,
 Where water gurgles out of sight,
 And calling, chuckling, birds unseen
 Flit from green to deeper green;
 There suddenly a single bloom
 Strikes to the heart's enchanted depths
 With its clear bell-note of deep blue.
 Or let me swim, far from all shallows,
 In the still waters where the kraken sleeps,
 Where whales slide singing through the shadowy deeps;
 There let me dive and drown
 All littleness and all fatigue.

But best of all, in deep embracing interstellar spaces
 Beyond the sky-lid, free of every limit,
 To float forever marvelling
 Through endless symphonies of stars!

SHRADDHAVAN

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON FEBRUARY 24, 1954

This talk is based upon Mother's essay
"Psychic Education and Spiritual Education".

Sweet Mother, here you have said: "From beyond the frontiers of form a new force can be evoked, a power of consciousness which is as yet unexpressed and which, by its emergence, will be able to change the course of things and give birth to a new world." Is the force you are speaking about the Divine?

WHAT do you call the Divine? Give me your definition of the Divine. We have already dealt with this here once.

All that is upon earth is the expression of the Divine?

No, I am asking you what you call the Divine. You have an idea of the Divine, haven't you? You say "the Divine", what do you mean by that?

The Creator.

That's but a word. The Creator!!!

Where have I said it was necessary to be identified with the Divine in us?—In the *Bulletin*, I think. Don't you remember?

In any case, I have already told you many a time that the manifestation was progressive and will always be progressive and that what manifests in a certain period is only the beginning of something that will be manifested in the following age. Therefore, if one reaches the summit of creation, one must come upon something which has not yet manifested but will manifest since there are always new elements which manifest. This is exactly what I have said. I have said that if one attained the summit of consciousness and passed beyond the forms at present manifested, one would enter into contact with a force, a reality which is not yet manifested but will manifest. And this summit of consciousness is never the last, for what has been attained one day, what seemed to be the final consciousness will be only a step so that the next day, in the next period, the next age, there may manifest something which was beyond and not then ready to manifest, not on the point of being manifested.

How can depressions be controlled?

Oh! there's a very simple way. Depression occurs generally in the vital, and one is

overpowered by depression only when one keeps the consciousness in the vital, when one remains there. The only thing to do is to get out of the vital and enter a deeper consciousness. Even the higher mind, the luminous, higher mind, the most lofty thoughts have the power to drive away depression. Even when one reaches just the highest domains of thought, usually the depression disappears. But in any case, if one seeks shelter in the psychic, then there is no longer any room for depression.

Depression may come from two causes: either from a want of vital satisfaction or from a considerable nervous fatigue in the body. Depression arising from physical fatigue is set right fairly easily: one has but to take rest. One goes to bed and sleeps until one feels well again, or else one rests, dreams, lies down. The want of vital satisfaction is pretty easily produced and usually one must face it with one's reason, must ferret out the cause of depression, what has brought about the lack of satisfaction in the vital; and then one looks at it straight in the face and asks oneself whether that indeed has anything to do with an inner aspiration or whether it is simply quite an ordinary movement. Generally one discovers that it has nothing to do with the inner aspiration and one can quite easily overcome it and resume one's normal movement. If that does not suffice, then one must go deeper and deeper until one touches the psychic reality. Then one has only to put this psychic reality in contact with the movement of depression, and instantaneously it will vanish into thin air.

As for fighting in the vital domain itself—well, some people are good fighters and love to struggle with their vital—but to tell you the truth, that is much more difficult.

Once the psychic has come to the front, can it withdraw again?

Yes, generally one has a series of experiences of identification, very intense at first, which later gradually diminish, and then one day you find that they have disappeared. Still you must not be disturbed, for it is quite a common phenomenon. But next time—the second time—the contact is more easily obtained. And then comes a moment, which is not very far off, when as soon as one concentrates and aspires, one gets a contact. One may not have the power of keeping it all the time, but can get it at will. Then, from that moment things become very easy. When one feels a difficulty or there is a problem to be solved, when one wants to make progress or there is just a depression to conquer or an obstacle to be overcome or else simply for the joy of identification (for it is an experience that gives a very concrete joy: at the moment of identification one truly feels a very, very great joy), then, at any moment whatever, one may pause, concentrate for a while and aspire, and quite naturally the contact is established and all problems which were to be solved are solved. Simply to concentrate—to sit down and concentrate—to aspire in this way, and the contact is made, so to say, instantaneously.

There comes a time, as I said, when this does not leave you, that is, it is in the

depths of the consciousness and supports all that you do, and you never lose the contact. Then many things disappear. For, instance, depression is one of these things, discontentment, revolt, fatigue, depression, all these difficulties. And if one makes it a habit to step back, as we say, in one's consciousness and see on the screen of one's psychic consciousness—see all the circumstances, all the events, all the ideas, all the knowledge, everything—at that moment one sees that and has an altogether sure guide for everything that one may do. But this, perforce, takes a very long time to come.

To escape from the life and become identified with the Unmanifest, isn't it necessary not only to be free from all egoism but also not to have the ego any longer?

Naturally.

But this very attitude of wanting to become identified with the Unmanifest and letting the world suffer, isn't this selfishness?

Yes. And so what happens is very remarkable, the result is always the same: those who have done that, at the last minute, have received a sort of intimation that they had to return to the world and do their work. It is as though they reached the door and—"Ah! no, no, not yet—go back and work, when the world is ready, then this will be all right."

Indeed this attitude of flight in the face of difficulty is a supreme selfishness. You are told, "Do this, and then, when all the others have done it, all will be well with the whole world", but it is only a very small élite among men who are ready to be able to do it. And these precisely are those who can be the most useful to the earth, for they know more about things than others, they have overcome many difficulties and can be of help to others just where those others can't. But the whole human mass, the immense human mass... For when some have succeeded—even a few hundred—one may tend to think it is "humanity", but truly speaking it is only a kind of élite of humanity, it is a selection. The immense mass, all the people living all over the earth—merely in India, the immense population—formidable—which lives in the villages, the countryside, there is no question of their making an effort for liberation, to come out of the world in order to live the spiritual life. They don't even have the time to become aware of themselves! They are just there, attached to their work like a horse to the plough. They move in a rut from which, generally, they can't get out. So they can't be told, "Do as I do and all will be well." Because "Do as I do" means nothing at all. There are perhaps a few hundred who can do the same thing, not more!

Why does the body get tired? We have more or less regular activities, but one day we are full of energy and the next day we are quite tired.

Generally this comes from a kind of inner disequilibrium. There may be many reasons for it, but it all comes to this: a sort of disequilibrium between the different parts of the being. Now, it is also possible that the day one had the energy, one spent it too much, though this is not the case with children; children spend it until they can no longer do so. One sees a child active till the moment he suddenly falls fast asleep. He was there, moving, running; and then, all of a sudden, pluff! finished, he is asleep. And it is in this way that he grows up, becomes stronger and stronger. Consequently, it is not the spending that harms you. The expenditure is made up by the necessary rest—that is set right very well. No, it is a disequilibrium; the harmony between the different parts of the being is no longer sufficient.

People think they have only to continue doing for ever what they were doing or at least remain in the same state of consciousness, day after day do their little work, and all will go well. But it is not like that. Suddenly, for some reason or other, one part of the being—either your feelings or your thoughts or your vital—makes progress, has discovered something, received a light, progressed. It takes a leap in progress. All the rest remains behind. This brings about a disequilibrium. That is enough to make you very tired. But in fact, it is not tiredness: it is something which makes you want to keep quiet, to concentrate, remain within yourself, be like that, and build up slowly a new harmony among the different parts of the being. And it is very necessary to have, at a given moment, a sort of rest, for an assimilation of what one has learnt and a harmonisation of the different parts of the being.

Now, as you know, from the physical point of view human beings live in frightful ignorance. They cannot even say exactly... For instance, would you be able to tell exactly, at every meal, the amount of food and the kind of food your body needs?—simply that, nothing more than that: how much should be taken and when it should be taken.... You know nothing about it, there's just a vague idea of it, a sort of imagination or guess-work or deduction or... all sorts of things which have nothing to do with knowledge. But that exact knowledge: "This is what I must eat, I must eat this much"—and then it is finished. "This is what my body needs." Well, that can be done. There's a time when one knows it very well. But it asks for years of labour, and above all years of work almost without any mental control, just with a consciousness that's subtle enough to establish a connection with the elements of transformation and progress. And to know also how to determine for one's body, exactly, the amount of physical effort, of material activity, of expenditure and recuperation of energy, the proportion between what is received and what is given, the utilisation of energies to establish a state of equilibrium which has been broken, to make the cells which are lagging behind progress, to build conditions for the possibility of higher progress, etc... it is a formidable task. And yet, it is that which must be done if one hopes to transform one's body. First it must be put completely in harmony with the inner consciousness. And to do that, it is a work in each cell, so to say, in each little activity, in every movement of the organs. With this alone one could be busy day and night without having to do anything else.... One does not keep

up the effort and, above all, the concentration, nor the inner vision.

I have put to you quite a superficial question: it seems astonishing to you that one can know the exact amount of what one should eat, and what should be eaten at a certain time, and at what time one should take one's meal, and when one is ready for another! Well, that is an altogether superficial part of the problem, yet if you enter into the combination of the cells and the inner organisation in order that all this may be ready to respond to the descending Force... First, are you conscious of your physical cells and their different characteristics, their activity, the degree of their receptivity, of what is in a healthy condition and what is not? Can you say with certainty when you are tired, why you are tired? When there's something wrong somewhere, can you say, "It is because of this that I am suffering"?... Why do people rush to the doctor? Because they are under the illusion that the doctor knows better than they how to look inside their body and find out what's going on there—which is not very reasonable, but still that's the habit. But for oneself who can look inside himself quite positively and precisely and know exactly what is out of order, why it is disturbed, how it has been disturbed? And all this is simply a work of observation; afterwards one must do what is necessary to put it back into order again, and that is still more difficult.

Well, this is the ABC of the transformation of the body. *Voilà*.

(Questions and Answers 1954, pp 34-37)

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of January 1985)

(These talks are from the notebooks of Dr. Nirodbaran who used to record most of the conversations which Sri Aurobindo had with his attendants and a few others, after the accident to his right leg in November 1938. Besides the recorder, the attendants were: Dr. Mamlal, Dr. Becharlal, Purani, Champaklal, Dr. Satyendra and Mulshankar. As the notes were not seen by Sri Aurobindo himself, the responsibility for the Master's words rests entirely with Nirodbaran. He does not vouch for absolute accuracy, but he has tried his best to reproduce them faithfully. He has made the same attempt for the speeches of the others.)

September 19, 1940

P: It seems the Pétain government is resisting the German demands and there is a possibility of Pétain resigning. Weygand is also dissatisfied with the ways of the government. He intends to fly to Morocco, set up an independent government and declare for De Gaulle.

SRI AUROBINDO: Oh!

P: And there have been clashes in Morocco between De Gaullites and Pétainites.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who won?

P: That is not said.

SRI AUROBINDO: Where did you get all this?

P: *The Indian Express*. (Laughter)

SRI AUROBINDO: You will always keep the name out.

P: But it must be in the *Hindu* also.

SRI AUROBINDO: Baron says that the Germans are trying to use the French navy and submarines. The sinking of a British ship by a French submarine near Indochina was done by Germany, he says. And that is why Darlan has ordered those two French destroyers to proceed to Dakar.

P: Something like that must be true. Otherwise they would not have escaped the British. If the French take the British side, they will be able to keep out Italy.

S: The British are offering no resistance in Egypt to the Italians. They don't seem to have enough force there.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. They say they have transferred some thousands there. But it is not a question of thousands. They have one and a half million. Why can't they send 100,000? These news correspondents are talking in terms of the old warfare. They say there are stretches of desert to cross.

S: What are deserts nowadays to tanks and cars?

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

P: Hitler seems to be putting pressure on Sumer, trying to displace the French.

SRI AUROBINDO: He doesn't require pressure. He has been always pro-Axis. He is a phalangist.¹

P: The British kept Spain neutral by offering joint control of Gibraltar after the war as well as now.

SRI AUROBINDO: If Hitler gets Spain, it will be only one point controlled.

Evening

(Radio declared that Sri Aurobindo had contributed Rs. 500 to the Madras War Fund as a token of entire support to the British in their struggle for freedom. All of us were taken by surprise by this sudden disclosure though, of course, we knew Sri Aurobindo's opinion.)

N: This has come as a counterblast to Gandhi's non-participation.

(Laughter)

SRI AUROBINDO: It was not meant to be. For the money was sent some time back, before Gandhi's blast...

P: The Italians have penetrated 60 miles into Egypt. The British are not offering any resistance, it seems.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, they say it is still the desert the Italians are occupying. The whole of Egypt seems a desert, except for a small strip along the Nile. *(Laughter)* The English don't seem to have any forces there. They say they are waiting to come in contact with Italian forces. Don't understand their strategy. They talk of a blockade. But if Egypt and Alexandria are lost, then what effect would the blockade have in spite of their control of the Mediterranean? And I don't see either how they will keep that control.

S: They seem to have concentrated all on home defence.

SRI AUROBINDO: That must be the fact.

S: They think that if they can prevent Germany from occupying England, it will be all right.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not enough. They will have to take back all these territories...

P: Joad has written an article describing how and why he has turned from a pacifist into a supporter of the war. It is not only a war for defence, he says, but for civilisation.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is my standpoint also. They talk of independence; nobody will remain independent if Hitler wins.

P: Dr. André was asked by the Pharmacist what he would do if Germany came to India. André was telling me it was a far-off thing yet.

SRI AUROBINDO: All the same, it is a pertinent question.

September 21, 1940

(Today's Hindu has published Sri Aurobindo's contribution and quoted his letter

to the Madras Governor, in which Sri Aurobindo has said that we give our entire support to the British in their struggle. It is not only a war for self-defence, defence of nations threatened with world domination by Hitler, but also a war for preserving civilisation, etc.)

SRI AUROBINDO (*looking at P*): So?

P: It will be published in all the papers. Gandhi will see it.

N: He may find some light in his groping. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not in his line. They call me a *savant*.

P: Yes.

N: No other *savant* has contributed anything yet.

S: The letter has come out at an opportune time.

SRI AUROBINDO: Schomberg can't say any more that the Ashram is a nest of Nazis.

S: This is your first public pronouncement after your retirement.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, indirect and not given as a pronouncement.

S: No, but it was meant to be.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

S: But as regards India, the British are not very lovable.

SRI AUROBINDO: Lovable? Nobody said they were lovable. They never were. But the question is to love Hitler less. (*Laughter*)

P: Some American correspondent has said the British forces are waiting in Egypt for the Italians to come out like tortoise heads, and then they will chop them off.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course if the British can face them, the Italians will have the disadvantage of having deserts at their back.

S: Egypt may declare war now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why?

S: The marriage of some prince of theirs is over. (*Laughter*)

P: Oh, the brother of the Hyderabad princess, heir to the Sultan. He would have been the Sultan if he had been in Turkey.

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

P: I see; he would have been killed!

SRI AUROBINDO: This Egyptian ministry can't raise popular enthusiasm. Nahash Pasha could have.

Evening

SRI AUROBINDO: So New Caledonia has revolted against the Pétain government?

P: Yes.

S: Where is New Caledonia?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a small place near Australia.

P: There are some volunteers here who want to join De Gaulle.

SRI AUROBINDO: Have they declared themselves? They have to do that first.

But do they know that they are to be shot by the Pétain government? You have heard the story of the French Consul in Bombay? It seems somebody painted the Croix de Lorraine on his door at night. Most Frenchmen in Bombay are for De Gaulle, while he is for Pétain. He wanted to report to Pétain against some of these sympathisers, but as he could not do it from Bombay, he went to Kabul and telegraphed from there. The reply came that they are to be shot. Now after his arrival in Bombay, somebody phones him every morning saying, "Ulysse, are you still proving a traitor to your country?" (*Laughter*)

P: But the condition in France is none too happy.

SRI AUROBINDO: No. Hitler is putting pressure on Pétain. The Germans are plundering whatever they can in the non-occupied territories and withholding payment from the banks. They have released French prisoners from Germany and are sending them to Pétain to avoid shortage of food in Germany. Pétain is only being tolerated for the sake of the Colonies. It seems the Germans and Italians have already divided the Colonies between themselves. Italy is to have Tunis, Corsica, Morocco, while Germany will have West Africa....

(After some time P spoke about Tagore's new interpretation of Ancient Indian history of the Ramayana period—*Itihasar Dhara*. Tagore seems to hold that: 1) Rama, Vishwamitra and Janaka are the three forces combined into one that moulded the then social life; 2) The fact of Sita being found on cultivated ground was interpreted as the symbol of agriculture; 3) The Kshatriyas were really responsible for the growth of culture and civilisation while the Brahmins were only preservers.)

SRI AUROBINDO: All these are old European ideas. He is not even being original. They are as old as the hills.

(*To be continued*)

NIRODBARAN

THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the issue of January 1985)

The Mother's Message

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



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1ST November 1957. It was a pleasant morning. The Mother sent me a beautiful card showing Durga with eight hands holding different kinds of weapons. Here she was represented as the manifold emanation of the Supreme Mother. Her central power was sitting majestically on a lion. On either side were the four subordinate emanations holding swords and shields.

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This was the script underneath the picture:

सर्वशक्तिमहामाये दिव्यज्ञानस्वरूपिणि ।
नवदुर्गे जगन्मातः प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः ॥

“O All-Powerful Supreme Consciousness of the Divine, having the nature and form of Divine Knowledge, O Nine Emanations, O Mother of the Universe, I bow down to Thee over and over again.”

The Mother had written on the card:

“À ma chère petite enfant Huta
bonne fête!”

The Sloka of Durga reminds me of this enchanting one:

ॐ नवदुर्गा महाकालीं ब्रह्म-विष्णु-शिवात्मिकाम् ।
त्रिकालज्ञानसंपन्नां नमामि भुवनेश्वरीम् ॥

“I bow down to the Supreme Goddess of the Universe, Durga, the nine emanations, Mahakali, comprising Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and possessed of the Knowledge of the past, present and future.”

Yes, it was my spiritual birthday and the Mother met me in the Meditation Hall upstairs and wished me “Happy Birthday” once again with one of her charming smiles. We had a quiet meditation for fifteen minutes or so. During that time I felt unusually peaceful. Gradually the Mother opened her eyes and looked at me fondly. Then she gave me an elaborate bouquet along with a tiny pretty silken white bag, with roses and other flowers painted on it. She said with a soft laugh, while holding the bag:

“Ah! today you are three years old. So there are three toffees in this bag!”

I thanked her. She closed her eyes for a second or two, leaned forward from her chair and kissed my forehead.

I came back to my room with a happy heart. At midday the Mother sent me a variety of Prasad and extra sweets. Mona Pinto, with her ever-smiling face, brought them from the Mother. The Mother also sent an extraordinary hand-painted card depicting white flowers—Zephyr: “Integral Prayer—The whole being is concentrated in a single prayer to the Divine.” She had written on it in red ink:

I-II-57

“Your prayers for realisation—granted.”

I was astounded. Surely it was not my physical being who had prayed but it was my soul.

I had started my third year in the spiritual sphere.

I admired all the cards and the bag. I knew who had painted the card and the bag: Tehmi Masalawala. She has a graceful hand in painting. I have many beautiful cards painted by her and sent by the Mother.

I was so excited I did not take my nap but painted the bouquet the Mother had given me.

As far as I recall, the Mother wore the dress I had stitched for her when I saw her in the afternoon at the Prosperity Room. She distributed flowers to people as on every 1st of the month.

In the evening she saw my painting and with gratification she commented:

“Child, this painting has been done with full power and force. Whenever you paint with full concentration and spontaneity, things always come out nicely.

“By the growth of consciousness, paintings become more expressive.”

At night once again I regarded the gifts the Mother had given me and my eyes filled with tears of gratitude. The card illustrating Durga was mysterious.

Sri Aurobindo has written about Durga and her lion in the Cent. Ed., Vol. 25, p. 75:

“Durga is the Mother’s power of Protection.

The lion with Durga on it is the symbol of the Divine Consciousness acting through a divinised physical-vital and vital-emotional force.”

Then suddenly I remembered that I had forgotten to eat the three toffees which were in the bag. So I ate them with joy.

The succeeding morning I painted a vase with a stalk of white Bougainvillea—“Integral Protection—that which can be given only by the Divine.”

The Mother liked the painting. But I was not satisfied. For, I could not bring out enough subtlety and vividness.

Since I had finished the major work in the Mother’s Stores, I had enough time to draw and paint.

I was inspired to paint a Water-lily—“Wealth—true wealth is that which one offers to the Divine.”

The Mother remarked after looking at my work:

“Whenever you have sudden inspiration, never suppress it. You must always act like this.”

On Friday the 4th, early in the morning, Champaklal brought white roses and a card from the Mother.

The card bore the grand figure of a Goddess who stood sovereignly beside a powerful lion. There were various weapons in her arms. Underneath the card the Mother had inscribed:

“Maheshwari”

“To my dear little child Huta

With all my love, quiet strength and sweet compassion full of wisdom.”

Sri Aurobindo states:

“Durga combines the characteristics of Maheshwari and Mahakali to a certain extent,—there is not much connection with Mahalakshmi....”

Once more a card came displaying Durga with her eighteen hands; holding various kinds of symbolic objects. With a trident in one of her right hands she is piercing the chest of a demon who is sitting on a buffalo and holding a short broad sword. The lion is digging its nails into his chest.

The legend goes that the buffalo opposing Durga tried to kill her. But, when Durga cut off its head, the real being who had taken the form of the buffalo emerged. The being was an Asura and was called Mahisasura.

To Durga’s left is another demon whose dagger-holding hand the Goddess is thrusting back with another of her hands.

The whole picture was full of significance and strength.

The Mother had written on the card:

“Durga—she will fight until there are no more anti-divine forces upon earth.”

On the same card she continued:

“To my dear little child Huta

With all my love, conquering strength and wise compassion and sweetness.”

In the evening the Mother asked me whether I liked the picture of Durga. I answered that I did, and that it was very impressive. She smiled and entered into a profound trance. She awoke and said solemnly:

“People should have the sincere and persistent will to conquer all obstacles.

“You see, every year Mother Durga fights the devil and dominates him. But unhappily he rises over and over again because people give a response to him.

Otherwise, if the devil had no place in this world, he would be no more here to harass human beings. People must have a strong will to conquer the evil forces and overthrow the devil's plot. Then there will be peace."

It was exceedingly hard to swallow this truth, because of the harsh reality of the concrete psychological struggle within me—changing emotions and rambling thoughts jostling against each other in my being. The divine splendour of Bliss, Joy and Peace were nowhere to be found and felt.

The following morning a card showing the picture "Trimurti" came from the Mother along with these words:

"To my dear little child Huta
With all my love, quiet strength and endless compassion and sweetness."

True, there were "endless compassion and sweetness" but my little mind refused to be convinced. It was in a whirl of frightening conceptions which, even as they settled into place, formed a picture that terrified me even more. The strife between the two beings, outer and inner, was incessant.

On the 8th, a Tuesday, the rain was pelting down and rivers of water were streaming along the side of the lanes.

The rain abated a little in the evening. I went to the Mother. I found her room full of warmth and soothing vibrations which were accentuated by the fragrance of the flowers.

The Mother and I meditated for quite some time. During the meditation I had observed that she had opened her shining eyes again and again. Her happy smile brightened her face. Now she closed her eyes and plunged into a deep contemplation.

She awoke and dreamily wrote something on a piece of paper. A cheerful and contented smile hovered on her lips when she said:

"You are a lucky girl to be here. You know, Mother Nature came to me just now to give her full consent to collaborate with spirituality."

Instantly the whole picture of the Mother's gestures during her meditation came into the frame of my mind, and I understood why she felt happy.

Then she showed me her writing and said:

"This will be the Message of the New Year.
Child, do not tell anybody."

I assured her that I would not breathe a word to anyone.
The Message was:

“O Nature, material Mother,
Thou hast said that thou wilt collaborate,
and there is no limit to the splendour of
this collaboration.”

Then the Mother gave me a short explanation. After it, she clasped my hands and looked deeply into my eyes. Then she embraced me tenderly. After receiving flowers I made my way to Golconde.

The next morning the Mother sent me a huge card illustrating Shiva and Shakti. She had written on it:

“This can be taken as one aspect of the collaboration between the Spiritual Power and the Material Nature.”

I sent her the report of what she had said the previous evening. It ran:

“Nature is always going on her own ways. Spiritual things also are going on their own ways. Nature and Spirituality do not go together. There has been no collaboration so far between them but always hostility towards each other.

“When the New Year begins there will be an endless collaboration between them. There will be plenitude, joy, glory and magnificence. There will be the promise of the New World, because Mother Nature—the Material Mother—has said that she would collaborate. So everyone should love her.”

She wrote under my report:

“Yes, it is the essence of what I told you yesterday.
With my blessings.”

I have kept silent about the whole incident all these years.

(To be continued)

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PRADYOT

THE EVOLUTION OF A SOUL

"I need you as my instrument."—The Mother

TRUE friendship is an act of Divine Grace. I had such a friendship with Pradyot. Everyone in the Ashram was aware of it, but few knew about its nature, depth and duration. Some remarked that ours was a strange relation, for we hardly expressed any emotion, met very rarely, exchanged very few words. Nobody could realise that we were so close together.

Well, our friendship was about seventy years old. Passing boyhood, youth, adult state, it had arrived at a mature old age, when he suddenly took his leave. In this fashion a number of Ashram friends have gone, one by one, but Pradyot's going was a deep unkind cut, perhaps because of a long tie.

The tale of this tie cannot be told and finished within two words. Its romantic background and classical development demand a story with a deeper meaning. I shall portray only the classical picture, in short the period of our combined Ashram-life. One must remember, however, that his life was the consequential development of his previous growth. I have seen him and known him as a young boy of character, endowed with a fine brain calm and collected; at a later stage, as a courageous, kind, liberal, unpretentious and active lover of work. Concealed behind all these attributes, was the soul of a child who had love and good will for all, capable of sacrifice for a cause. He had drawn the far and remote near by his magical charm. In one word his life was the history of a progressive unfoldment and its last step was spiritual.

For the spiritual, I had a small part to play. After our return from Scotland, we were posted at far-away places, but very soon I became a member of the Ashram. Naturally, my gravitational pull tried to draw him towards the Ashram from the Jamshedpur Tata factory where he was serving as an electrical engineer. He answered and came only for a short stay. The pull did not appear to be very strong. I told him only one thing, that he should try to send some regular offering, however small it might be. He responded, but evinced no further interest. I thought that perhaps he had come to meet me and Jyotirmoyee whom he had known in Scotland and used to call didi. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo, "Pradyot does not show any interest. Is there any use communicating with him?" He replied, "I don't know. Some people say that everything one does in this world is of some use or other, known or unknown. Otherwise it wouldn't be done. But it is doubtful...." Pradyot seems to have said afterwards that when he had appeared at Sri Aurobindo's darshan he could not move. Sri Aurobindo had to make a sign.

After Sri Aurobindo's reply, his interest revived and he even sent a long poem in Bengali for his perusal. "It has a Tagorean influence," Sri Aurobindo remarked, "but otherwise quite good." His poetic venture ceased after this, for by nature he

was a man of practical imagination, though as a student he had known English and Bengali very well indeed. Perhaps he composed the poem because I used to send him my poems and they may have made him try his own hand.

Meanwhile he suddenly got married to a Bengali Christian lady, who was a School Inspectress and whom he had known through Jyotirmayee and me in England. He informed Sri Aurobindo about his marriage. Slowly his interest in the Ashram began to take shape and he formed a centre in Jamshedpur with the local Bengalis. He earned their love and respect because of his position and loving nature. In his job too his worth began to be recognised and he rose to the position of a Superintendent and even acted for the Chief Engineer in his absence. Here a house was taken on lease and named Jamshedpur House for the visitors from the centre. I was very happy to see his growing interest and he surprised me once by asking if he could get a used pen of Sri Aurobindo's in exchange for his new Sheaffer pen. The Mother told Sri Aurobindo about it in my presence and had the wish granted.

Now he was paying occasional short visits, but not during the Darshan times. I could meet him only in the evening, since I was serving Sri Aurobindo. Then he, Sisir Mitra and I would spend some hours together, and after his dinner with me we would part. For the rest of the day, we did not see each other. I observed that his meal was restricted and very sparing, for he was suffering from gastric trouble about which he had already written to Sri Aurobindo. Once at Jamshedpur he had an acute pain. He dreamt that Mother Kali had taken him on her lap and was rocking him like a baby. He used to come in European dress; I supplied my dhoti and shirt with which he used to go and see the Mother. I had no farther contact with him during the day. His wife also came twice or thrice and stayed for some time. They were financially well off, for both of them were in service. Once the Mother lodged her in the Sri Aurobindo Society's present centre and I used to be invited there from time to time. She was a very fine lady, motherly, quiet and generous. I used to call her Rani-di. She loved Pradyot very much and was proud of his high abilities and name in Jamshedpur. While there, his father wired to him to come to his native place, Chittagong, and accompany him to Benares. There were other brothers too, but he wanted Pradyot specially, for he was the father's darling. Reaching there they entered the temple for the Goddess's darshan and puja, but Pradyot would not. He was averse to public shows. He sat outside the temple in the courtyard, reading a newspaper. Suddenly an elderly woman in a sari accosted him and said, "My son, I want to have the Mother's darshan. Will you come with me?" He was astonished but could not refuse. He obeyed her, but when they came out, he lost trace of the lady: she had vanished. Long afterwards, he got the truth of the matter, that it was the Mother-Goddess herself who had appeared before him. There was a traditional belief that none could return without having the darshan of the Mother.

Now Pradyot's intimacy with the Ashram Mother began to grow. He wanted to leave Tata and take up a government job at Calcutta which had fallen vacant. The reason was that the authorities at Tata were not willing to consider his just claim, for

though he first officiated as Chief Engineer and then held that post he was not given the salary assigned to it. The Mother, on hearing about it, asked Pradyot to give them an ultimatum. It had no effect. Perhaps the authorities were not very pleased with him for his being too popular with the workers whose fair demands met with his sympathy. Once there was a big strike in the factory over the pay. Violence broke out causing injuries and bloodshed. Pradyot rushed to the scene; the workers came forward and cried, "Babu, don't come here, don't come here." They simply lifted him bodily, put him into a car and sent him away. When later Pradyot narrated the incident to the Mother, she remarked, "They love you." He replied, "Mother, they love me today but they will hate me tomorrow." The Mother smiled and added, "Yes, that is true."

As the ultimatum had failed, Pradyot applied for the Calcutta job. On the interview day, he saw that many candidates were his own assistants. So he kept apart and was pacing in the corridor. When his turn came, the interview passed off splendidly. He was certified as being of outstanding merit. It so happened that on the eve of the interview he found a book on Electricity on his table, but he did not know how it had come or who had placed it there. He began, however, to peruse it. After the interview he realised that all the questions he had been asked had been fully answered in that book and so it had been an easy ride for him. When he returned home from the interview, the book had vanished! He had also some qualms about his health. But all barriers fell down before the unseen Power that acted. Afterwards he was given the job of the Chief Engineer in Damodar Valley. It was a new project. It seemed that all the officers of the Damodar Valley wanted Pradyot to be appointed as their chief. His fame had gone abroad. They had already heard of his ability and efficiency.

Calcutta

After he had settled in Calcutta with his wife who had now retired from service, he came in contact with Ashram disciples and was made Chairman of the Pathamandir some years later. He came to know Dr. Sanyal as well. A special feature of his chairmanship was that the members of the Pathamandir often used to be invited to his house and the deliberations ended with light refreshments. Pradyot was fond of having a circle of friends and enjoying diversion with them. Otherwise he avoided so-called socials as far as possible. I had marked this trait in him in Glasgow and of course here in the Ashram his evening entertainments were a well-known feature. His birthday was a festive occasion when even the workers of his departments were treated liberally. In his household the servants used to receive special treatment on that day.

In 1950, when he heard the news of Sri Aurobindo's passing, he, Himanshu and Navajata flew to Pondicherry in a chartered plane. On hearing about it, the Mother seems to have said, "My three faithful ones are coming. What shall I give them?" Three gold pins with Sri Aurobindo's symbol attached were the reward.

Damodar Valley Project

I have heard that the Bokharo Power House was constructed according to Pradyot's plan and he was in entire charge of it. Once Pandit Nehru visited the Plant and was very pleased with the whole organisation. Pradyot was always in contact with the Mother and sought her advice in various matters. One such example is still imprinted on my mind. Pradyot had come for an urgent consultation. The Mother said to me, "My programme has all been fixed beforehand. Do one thing. Bring him to the Tennis Ground. After the game, I shall see him there." I did as I had been directed. Pradyot was in his suit and with his valise. The Mother selected a place a little away from the base-line of the court though there was enough room at the corner, and sat for consultation. Both of them started their deliberations while we went on with our tennis. But I was terribly nervous lest a ball should strike her. I had therefore to abandon the play and like a good boy take my seat by their side to listen to their jargon. And this was precisely what the Mother had wanted and the way she did it was typically hers. She could be very naughty at times. The interview over, we returned. The next day, I believe, she arranged a talk to be given by him from the Projector Room in the Playground on his own subject. The Mother was herself present. Pradyot spoke on the construction, management, etc. of the Power House. The Mother was very much impressed and said that it was a fine delivery, clear, lucid, distinct, always to the point and never too much.

Once, it seems, Pradyot had a confrontation with the Central Government regarding the extension of their line at some place. The Committee at Delhi made a strong objection saying that Bengal had been given sufficient advantage. The Governing Body was called to Delhi. They wanted Pradyot to accompany them; he was not very willing. At last he said, "Then let me go to see the Mother first." He came to Pondicherry; the Mother heard him and said, "Play for time." Well-prepared and armoured, the party went to face the big guns; Deshmukh was at that time the Finance Minister. The officials simply would not hear the arguments and raised technical counter-points about some grades to which the opponents found no effective reply. They waited for Pradyot and egged him on to reply. Pradyot quietly asked, "What are these grades you are talking about?" Poor big members, they were non-plussed and felt small. The petition was granted. That was Pradyot. He was really excellent in deliberations and people used to be afraid of him and confess their failure to meet his points.

There was a talk of his going to France. The Mother remarked, "Oh, he wants to go to France?" Hearing her comment, he came to see her. She kept some papers and files ready for him, but he said at once, "Mother, I am not going." He had felt in the Mother's question vibrations of her disapproval. "All right," she said, and in an interview at the Playground she explained at length why she disapproved: she said that in such instances it entailed for her a lot of inner work, for she had to guard and protect the person all the while against the subtle influences of various

dark forces of which the person is not aware. One loses much that one has received of spiritual refinement.

Thus Pradyot had to beat a retreat and go back to his work. But he began to feel that he should retire and settle in the Ashram. He could not do that either, so long as his wife was not inclined to take the plunge. He wrote to the Mother about his intention to engage himself in the Mother's work in the Ashram. She sent a sharp reply, saying, "But who says that you are not doing my work?" The Mother told some of us of his intention and observed, "What work can I give him here befitting his position? Here there is hardly any scope for his talent." It took, however, a few years before the Mother herself finally called both Dr. Sanyal and Pradyot. Perhaps the inner field was ready. Sanyal preceded Pradyot. Thus two distinguished and well-known professional experts left Calcutta, leaving their respective circles of friends and admirers in complete bewilderment. It seems Dr. Bidhan Roy, who was the Chief Minister, had to meet a barrage of questions in the Assembly over Pradyot's resignation and he was in a way made responsible for losing the service of such a competent and honest engineer. Dr. Roy had a hard time convincing the members that if Pradyot was going to Pondicherry to serve the Mother very little could be done by Dr. Roy and there was no way to prevent it.

Now that the merger had taken place, the Mother had envisaged the possibility of the Ashram technicians taking part in the Pondicherry administration. Pradyot, Sanyal, M. André (the Mother's son) would be very useful in their own fields. Already Pavitra's service had been requested for planning the Pondicherry Park. Pradyot came in 1955 and stayed for two years in a house by the sea-side till his present "Consul House" was made ready. The house was so called because the British Consul in the old days used to stay there. Now it was fully renovated and the upstairs was allotted to Pradyot, a lovely spacious apartment with a big room to serve as his office. Sanyal was settled in another palatial building overlooking the sea. The Mother knew how to give due consideration to people according to their status and their past.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

THE INSPIRATION OF *PARADISE LOST*

(Continued from the issue of January 1985)

7

Milton's Art—His "Plane" of Inspiration and Shakespeare's

Now we may note a few examples of Milton's art. On the more obvious yet none the less genuinely expressive level we have the four rivers of Hell, each conjured up by the appropriate phrase elaborating the etymological connotation of the river's Greek name and running in the right psychologically effective rhythm of vowels and consonants:

Abhorred Styx, the flood of deadly hate;
Sad Acheron of sorrow, black and deep;
Cocytus, named of lamentation loud
Heard on the rueful stream; fierce Phlegeton,
Whose waves of torrent fire inflame with rage.
Far off from these, a slow and silent stream,
Lethe, the river of oblivion, rolls
Her watery labyrinth...¹

A less varied phonetic response to a situation but a more massive rush of accurate sonority gathering strength on strength as it goes on and yet collecting itself into one faultless whole, is the famous fall of Satan from Heaven:

Him the Almighty Power
Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamant chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.²

Words have never been used with such fiercely combined assaults on the ear, terribly accumulating impacts on the eye, dreadfully swelling intensities of significance, powerfully diversified measurings out of movement. It may be worth our while to attend to a few details. The very first foot is a trochee, a metrical inversion in the iambic line, and the opening phrase is a grammatical inversion: both suggest at the same time the hurling violence on the part of the Almighty Power and a posture preparing the fate of being hurled headlong, upside down. Also, if "Him" did not

¹ Bk. II, 577-84

² Bk. I, 44-9.

stand clearly and emphatically at the start we would not remember it enough to connect up with it without surprise the final: "Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms." And this connecting up, after the spacious suspense of four intervening lines, knits the passage together so as to make us see the beginning and the end as applying to the same being and completing the prolonged process of his fall—the same rebel Archangel who was thrown from Heaven's height is seen reaching Hell's depth. The different positioning of the pause everywhere is expressive—the most memorably so is the one in the middle of the last foot in the third line, allowing the next phrase to commence at the line's utter end with the long stressed monosyllable "down" immediately after the polysyllabic "combustion". The art of controlled vehemence could go no further than in this whole passage.

Parts of the passage, lines 3-5, figure in a discussion by Sri Aurobindo of the use of epithets. "According to certain canons, epithets should be used sparingly, free use of them is rhetorical, an 'obvious' device, a crowding of images is bad taste, there should be subtlety of art not displayed but severely concealed—*Summa ars est celare artem*. Very good for a certain standard of poetry, not so good or not good at all for others. Shakespeare kicks over these traces at every step, Aeschylus freely and frequently, Milton whenever he chooses."¹ Quoting from Milton as well as Shakespeare, Sri Aurobindo says: "Such lines...are not subtle or restrained, or careful to conceal their elements of powerful technique, they show rather a vivid richness or vehemence, forcing language to its utmost power of expression."² When a critic remarked that Sri Aurobindo showed small judgment in choosing his citations as examples of a wealth-burdened movement, Sri Aurobindo replied: "He says that Milton's astounding effect is due only to the sound and not to the words. That does not seem to me quite true: the sound, the rhythmic resonance, the rhythmic significance is undoubtedly the predominant factor; it makes us hear and feel the crash and clamour and clangour of the downfall of the rebel angels: but that is not all, we do not merely hear as if one were listening to the roar of ruin of a collapsing bomb-shattered house, but saw nothing, we have the vision and the full psychological commotion of the 'hideous' and flaming ruin of the downfall, and it is the tremendous force of the words that makes us see as well as hear."³

But what is most notable about Milton is not only his capacity for such art: it is also his capacity to meet a similar situation with an art equally controlled at the opposite of vehement. We can imagine him producing a delicate effect in a different kind of scene, but we are quite unprepared to find not long after the picture of Satan's fall the picture of the fall of a comrade of his, who built Satan's palace in Hell and who, according to Milton, was the same spirit that in Greek mythology was known as having offended Zeus and been flung earthwards from Olympus. Milton, relating that he was not unheard and unadored in ancient Greece and that "in Ausonian land/Men called him Mulciber", writes:

¹ *Savitri*—Letters, pp. 852-3. ² *Ibid.*, p. 853.

³ *Life-Literature-Yoga* (Revised and Enlarged Edition, Pondicherry, 1967), p. 93.

and how he fell
 From Heaven they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
 Sheer o'er the crystal battlements: from morn
 To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
 A summer's day, and with the setting sun
 Dropt from the zenith, like a falling star,
 On Lemnos, the Aegean isle.¹

This is pure melody, though still with a massiveness in it, and the huge prolonged fall is like an exquisite cadence modulated so as to give again and again the sense of helpless plunging across space and time but still with a felicity in the movement, the changeful lights of "a summer's day" playing upon it and, before their disappearance, the falling object itself catching fire, as it were, for a moment in which its own celestial nature shows out and then fades away. We may wonder why Milton made his picture a strange and remote beauty. Perhaps the whole artistry was set off by his recollection of ancient Greece and of the land of the Italians who were known as Ausonians, and it was further influenced by his employment of the word "fabled": his imagination passed into an atmosphere of bright serene ideality and built up the picture. The disaster that overtook Satan was to Milton a terrific religious truth and could not in any way be recollected in tranquillity or mythically romanticised: it had to be expressed in all its stark elemental reality. However, there is a brief phrase in Book VI where the poet seems to combine the two moods and, by a certain effect of repeated word and re-echoed rhythm, add a magic touch to the depiction of a cosmic catastrophe. After saying that Satan and his companions, driven by God's Son, threw themselves down through a spacious gap disclosed by an opening in the crystal wall of Heaven, and after saying that eternal wrath burnt after them to the bottomless pit, Milton has the words:

Hell heard the unsufferable noise, Hell saw
 Heaven ruining from Heaven...²

In these two statements, the first is splendidly powerful, the second splendidly subtle—the one foams and hisses with a mighty terror, the other rolls and rings with a profound beauty.

Perhaps Milton's art is at its most beautiful in those lines, the appreciation of whose rhythmic quality Matthew Arnold initiated with an ear for technique—the lines about "Proserpin", occurring in the midst of the long passage on the Garden of Eden. In that passage Milton employs first a positive, then a negative method; the latter throws into relief in the imagination what Eden must have been by telling us what wonderful fields or gardens known to song or story must not be identified

¹ Bk. I, 740-6.

² Bk. VI, 867-8.

with it. Milton the scholar is here at work with Milton the artist-poet. He sees to it that reference is made to every relevant place made memorable by books. The outcome, however, is not pedantic at all: rather a living profusion of ornate richness overwhelms us. And this profusion starts off with the famous phrases:

Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered—which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world...¹

We begin with four emphatic words—"Not that fair field"—all with stresses, the last two with heavy ones: the mind is thus briefly fixed upon the broad general scene. Then comes a lighter and livelier movement and we pass over a particular picture of happy activity going on—but not completed: on the contrary we are led to pause over the very centre of it, Proserpin, who is brought delicately into delightful focus by being called a fairer flower than any in the fair field, and then a deep shadow is swiftly conjured up with "gloomy Dis"—the epithet quantitatively long in the first syllable and unobtrusively joining up, by its second unaccented syllable's quantitative shortness of *i*-sound, with the quantitatively short but emphasised name "Dis" in which the same sound occurs. There is a momentary suspense at the line's end where the name stands, but the syntactical form presses us onward to a revelation of what the Lord of the Underworld did with Proserpin. And this revelation's surprise is rendered at the same time an inevitability by a certain play of repeated sounds. The preparation of the inevitability is in the fair flowery nature of the gatherer of flowery fairness. The clinching of the inevitability comes not only with the word "gathered" in connection with what Dis does, thus harking back to the earlier "gathering" connected with Proserpin: it comes also with the word "gloomy" alliterating with them and thereby suggesting that one who carries gloom would most naturally gather a flower-gatherer. Thus the imaginative art is made to wield a subtle logic which persuades without any obvious intention upon our minds, without breaking the mythological spell. And the scheme of repeated sounds helps also to mount up our emotion and intensify the tragic sense of the situation, with the result that we are in the right receptive state for the explicit expression of the consequence of the tragedy—the long and lonely heart-break of Proserpin's mother, Ceres. But Milton is not content with simply rendering us receptive: he reaches the utter acme of living art in what he says here. The run of eleven monosyllables, bearing with them the single dissyllabic proper name "Ceres", creates a pathos that is unforgettable both in individual import and in what we may term world-significance. The dissyllabic "Ceres" keeps up connection with the preceding lines which have a lot of dissyllables and a few trisyllables, several of them con-

¹ Bk. IV, 268-72.

taining the *r* of this proper name. The immediate connection is, of course, with the past participle passive "gathered" in the same line. Not only do we have the common *r* in it: we perceive there in addition the hints of a packed disaster and of a snatching away from sight, hints that prepare us for, as it were, the continuous unfoldment of the disaster's effect and the drawn-out movement of empty earth-wide search. But the supreme artistry comes in the deep and universal feeling evoked by those twelve closing words themselves:

\ / / / / / / /
 ...which/ cost Ce/res all/ that pain/
 / / / /
 To seek/ her through/ the world.

Spondees and long vowels and a slow exquisitely limping movement of stressed single syllables reinforce by inspired technical means the piercing significance. One mother-heart's anguish over a length of time is caught with such a profound vision and on so broad a plane that it becomes the anguish of the entire race. This transmutation is helped by the use of the words "all" and "world", as well as by the long-vowelled "pain" put at the end of a line where it acquires a special emphasis and a self-sufficient prominence disengaged from the particular occasion and particular statement.

To my mind, only three times in European literature before Milton a world-cry has emerged with an equal penetration from the picture of a limited and local situation. There is the sublime phrase in Homer's *Odyssey*:

Zenos men pais ea Kronionos autar oixun
 Eikhon apeiresien...

This may be hexametricised in English:

Son of Saturnine Zeus was I, yet have I suffered
 Infinite pain...

Then there is the poignant phrase in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.

Again a hexametrical version would be:

Forth did they stretch their hands with love of the shore beyond them.

Perhaps the poignancy comes out better in English by the pentameter-translation of Flecker's:

They stretched their hands for love of the other shore.

The third example I have in mind is the heroic phrase in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

Perhaps the Shakespeare-line is the nearest to Milton in expression as well as technique. Here too we have spondees and long vowels and a slow obstructed motion: here too we have both the words "pain" and "world", the former in just the same metrical position as in Milton. The sole psychological difference is that Shakespeare has a certain controlled vehemence most suitable to Hamlet's dying gasp about the difficult burdened life-continuation he was requesting from Horatio; Milton brings a tenderer and more tremulous rhythm, an intenser simplicity perfectly appropriate to a mother's travail of heart over a lost and ravished daughter.

It would be interesting to speculate why Milton has filled this phrase about Ceres, the Earth-goddess, a figure of Classical mythology, with such a world-cry. It would seem that the very depths of Milton's soul were stirred in this whole passage because Proserpin got merged with Eve in his imagination, gloomy Dis was identified with Satan who "gathered" Eve into his dark design, and the sorrow of Ceres grew the anguish of the whole earth for loss of Paradise. Have we not here the same accent of emotion and attitude as in the less beautiful but no less living lines that begin *Paradise Lost*—

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the World, and all our woe—

or in those deeply simple ones in Book IX where Eve's unfortunate disobedient act, loaded with cosmic consequences, is done—

So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
Forth-reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat.
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe
That all was lost—¹

or, again, in the finely intense exclamation of Adam when Eve tells him of her deed—

How art thou lost! how on a sudden lost,
Defaced, deflowered, and now to death devote!²

¹ Bk. IX, 781-4.

²Bk. IX, 900-1.

or, finally, in the vision which Michael gives Adam of lost humanity at last reaching home with the help of "Joshua whom the Gentiles Jesus call" and

who shall quell
The adversary Serpent, and bring back
Through the world's wilderness long-wandered Man
Safe to eternal Paradise of rest.¹

The proof, that Proserpin and Eve were fused in Milton's imagination and their far-reaching fates felt as if one, may be offered by spotlighting the lines preparatory to the account of Eve's fall. Milton starts finding Classical similitudes for her when she left Adam and "betook her to the groves". Just as the list of places which Eden was not, and which it surpassed, began with the Enna of Ceres and Proserpin, so now the list of comparisons, beginning with Oread, Dryad, Diana's attendant and Palès and Pomona, ends with a comparison

to Ceres in her prime,
Yet virgin of Proserpina from Jove.²

Nor does the clear association of Ceres and of her still unborn daughter with Eve the future "Mother of all Mankind", as she is called in Book XI,³ stop with the mere comparison. The mention of "Proserpina" slips Milton's mind at once from Ceres to her and we get the poet's own address to Eve:

O much deceived, much failing, hapless Eve,
Of thy presumed return! event perverse!
Thou never from that hour in Paradise
Found'st either sweet repast or sound repose;
Such ambush, hid among sweet flowers and shades,
Waited with hellish rancour imminent,
To intercept thy way, or send thee back
Spoiled of innocence, of faith, of bliss.⁴

Here something of the pain in store for Ceres and something of the misfortune awaiting Proserpina are mixed together, but the central suggestion of Hell's ambush for the unsuspecting maiden "among sweet flowers and shades" harks back definitely to "that fair field of Enna". A few lines further we have a touch answering to the wideness of Ceres's pain, for the "Fiend" who had invaded the Paradise of Adam and Eve was on his quest

¹ Bk. XII, 311-14.

² Bk. IX, 495-6.

³ Bk. XI, 159. ⁴ Bk. IX, 504-11.

Where likeliest he might find
The only two of mankind, but in them
The whole included race, his purposed prey.¹

And soon after this we have even more direct analogues to the "fairer flower" that Proserpin was. Satan spies Eve among Eden's roses, unaccompanied by Adam and "oft stooping to support/Each flower of tender stalk":

Then she upstays
Gently with myrtle band, mindless the while
Herself, though fairest unsupported flower,
From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh.²

Perhaps we should add a motive of purely personal psychology to that of the whole earth's longing for the paradise that was lost. Both the artistic and the moral aspirations of Milton were mixed with the Ceres-legend long before he chose the subject of his epic. Who knows he may have been led to make his choice by the coincidence of those aspirations with the deep religious anguish he felt within the sense of Eve's fault and its universal consequence, the anguish for the divine state forfeited by humanity? In a letter to his friend Charles Diodati on September 23, 1637—more than twenty years before he started *Paradise Lost*—he wrote: "...for whatever the Deity may have bestowed upon me in other respects, he has certainly inspired me, if any ever were inspired, with a passion for the good and fair. Nor did Ceres, according to the fable, ever seek her daughter Proserpine with such unceasing solicitude, as I have sought this perfect model of the beautiful in all the forms and appearances of things (for many are the forms of the divinities). I am wont day and night to continue my search..."³

Whatever the psychological motives behind the lines about Proserpin and Ceres in *Paradise Lost*, they are perhaps Milton's art-peak of austere poignancy. What shall we put up as his art-summit of austere sublimity? In my opinion it is a passage in the devil Belial's speech during the debate in Hell. Moloch has said: "My sentence is for open war." And he has argued that at the worst God would either abolish the very existence of the rebel angels, which would be far happier than having everlasting misery, or, if their substance is divine and immortal, they would be merely defeated but they would have disturbed Heaven and at least taken revenge. Belial questions the sense of such revenge, for it would bring greater punishments: he advises cessation of further activity so that God may relent or at least they themselves may get injured by the help of their purer essence to whatever Hell at the moment holds of torture. As for the idea of being destroyed by God,

¹ Bk. IX, 514-16.

² Bk. IX, 530-33.

³ *A Milton Handbook* p. 26.

it is not likely that God could or would let them be annihilated. But if they are sure to be defeated and further punished, it should be the most logical thing to want annihilation, and yet would the logical be also the enjoyable? This problem is thus stated by Belial:

Our final hope

Is flat despair: we must exasperate
The Almighty Victor to spend all his rage;
And that must end us; that must be our cure—
To be no more. Sad cure! for who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through Eternity,
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated Night,
Devoid of sense or motion?¹

Here, as in the Proserpin-passage, is also a profound suggestion of sorrow and loss, there is even the phrase “full of pain” matching “all that pain”. But everything is pitched high in place of exquisite, and that phrase which I have already quoted separately and praised—

Those thoughts that wander through Eternity—

has a verbal turn and a cast of rhythm which Sri Aurobindo has distinguished as the Mantra, the rare type of utterance we often meet with only in the Vedas and the Upanishads. “Its characteristics,” says Sri Aurobindo, “are a language that says infinitely more than the mere sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the Infinite and disappears into the Infinite and the power to convey not merely some mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing it speaks of, but its value and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind them all.”² Technique in the Mantra, more than technique in any other kind of poetry, is submerged in what is heard beyond the actual sounds, the intonation to which we listen in a bespelled and illumined inwardness—in, as the Upanishads put it, *śrotrasya śrotram*, “the Ear behind the ear”. But, more than technique elsewhere, technique here has to be the very embodiment of the significance-soul. Nothing can be altered in the least. For, though the poetry may still remain fine, the specific accent which makes the Mantra would disappear. Not only is it impossible to replace “those” by “these” or “the”, or “Eternity” by “Infinity”: it is also impossible to change “wander”. If we substitute “voyage” or “travel”, the meaning will persist in addition to the note of grandeur, but the rhythmic undertones and overtones that are the

¹ Bk. II, 142-51.

² *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* (Third Series), p. 97.

soul of the Mantra will not be the same: the needed significant resonance, the required suggestive plungingness and spreadingness will not be present any more. The inexpressibly spiritual will be missed.

I should explain here that the Mantra which Milton attains by the austere sublime is not a monopoly of poetic austerity. It can manifest in a style whose temper is one of vibrant exuberance, the style of Shakespeare. Shakespeare too captures the Mantric music on a few occasions: we listen to it, according to Sri Aurobindo, when we get:

In the dark backward and abysm of Time.

We may add:

the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

What differentiates for our present purpose these acmes of sublimity from that line of Milton's is a certain leap in their very temper, an urge of overflow in their essential spirit. The severity and serenity behind the outer form are absent. However, we must take care to set apart the Shakespearean spirit of overflow from that of a poet like Chapman. Both have the Romantic passion and not the Classic self-possession; but, while Chapman in his best lines like those in his translation or rather transposition of Homer—

When the unmeasured firmament bursts to disclose her light,

or,

The splendour of the burning ships might satiate his eyes—

has an explosive effort, a muscular or nervous wrestling, in order to break out into poetic brilliance, both Homer in ancient Greek and Shakespeare in Elizabethan English achieve their tremendous effects with a godlike ease. Homer, like Milton, is self-gathered behind all his surge of "many-rumoured ocean". Shakespeare passions forth, yet with no gesticulation, no furious shouting: always a mighty naturalness he brings at his greatest, he bursts as if by innate right to disclose his lustre: limits fall before him with the very breath of his poetic power, he does not have to hammer at them in order to flow over.

To feel better how the austerity *au fond* varies from the inner exuberance we may take up more than single lines and pit against that whole passage from Milton two from Shakespeare which have a motive not far removed. "To be no more" is the theme of Belial's speech. Here is Hamlet on the same subject:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:...
...To die, to sleep;

To sleep; perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub:
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause. There's the respect,
 That makes calamity of so long life...
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of!
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought...

A vivid speech on death and after-life occurs also in another play: a character named Claudio is speaking:

Ay, but to die and go we know not where!
 To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
 This sensible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
 To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
 To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendant world.

Now recollect Milton. To get the full edge of the contrast let us add to the passage its full sequel:

And who knows,
 Let this be good, whether our angry Foe
 Can give it, or will ever? How he can
 Is doubtful; that he never will is sure.
 Will he, so wise, let loose at once his ire,
 Belike through impotence or unaware,
 To give his enemies their wish, and end
 Them in his anger whom his anger saves
 To punish endless? 'Wherefore cease we, then?'
 Say they who counsel war; 'we are decreed,
 Reserved and destined to eternal woe;
 Whatever doing, what can we suffer more,
 What can we suffer worse?' Is this, then, worst—
 Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in arms?

What when we fled amain, pursued and struck
 With Heaven's afflicting thunder, and besought
 The Deep to shelter us? This Hell then seemed
 A refuge from those wounds. Or when we lay
 Chained on the burning lake? That sure was worse.
 What if the breath that kindled those grim fires,
 Awaked, should blow them into sevenfold rage,
 And plunge us in the flames; or from above
 Should intermitted vengeance arm again
 His red right hand to plague us? What if all
 Her stores were opened, and this firmament
 Of Hell should spout her cataracts of fire,
 Impendent horrors, threatening hideous fall
 One day upon our heads; while we perhaps
 Designing or exhorting glorious war,
 Caught in a fiery tempest, shall be hurled,
 Each on his rock transfixed, the sport and prey
 Of racking whirlwinds, or for ever sunk
 Under yon boiling ocean, wrapt in chains,
 There to converse with everlasting groans,
 Unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved,
 Ages of hopeless end? This would be worse.

Our lengthy quotation, with several parts bearing a resemblance—in particular verbal turns as well as in general expressive eloquence—to portions in the speeches of Hamlet and Claudio, is sufficient to demonstrate our point about Milton's underlying restraint and Shakespeare's basic leapingness. But it will help also to bring out another difference between Milton and Shakespeare—the difference of “plane” of inspiration over and above “style” of inspiration. Sri Aurobindo has characterised Shakespeare's plane as that of the Life Force, Milton's as that of the Mind. Not that Shakespeare always feels or senses and never thinks or that Milton does the opposite. Milton could not be the poet he is if he never felt or sensed; but what separates him from Shakespeare and puts him with poets like Lucretius and Dante and Wordsworth and even Shelley whose style differs so much from his own is that the mind of thought works directly in him. He is a poet who puts into his poetry the passion of thought. He is an intellectual who is also an intense poet because in him thought is passionate. In Shakespeare, on the other hand, passion is thinking. He seems time and again to set going a fireworks of ideas, but actually we have ideas thrown up by a seethe of sensation and emotion. Sri Aurobindo has well observed: “While he has given a wonderful language to poetic thought, he yet does not think for the sake of thought, but for the sake of life; his way indeed is not so much the poet himself thinking about life, as life thinking itself out in him through many

mouths, in many moods and moments, with a rich throng of fine thought-effects, but not for any clear sum of intellectual vision or to any high power of either ideal or spiritual result."¹ Hamlet who is Shakespeare's closest vision of the thinking mind is yet all the time a-quiver with the *élan vital*. We may not perceive this when he is insufficiently worked up, but the moment his expression gets intense as in

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

or,

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

we feel the grey cells vibrating in tune with the guts rather than *vice versa*. In Belial's speech there is nothing of this phenomenon of getting into the entrails, as it were, of an experience: the grey cells find their own voice in that speech and with it the emotional and sensational being is stirred. Or take the words of Adam after his condemnation, words which join up from afar with both Hamlet and Claudio in their general drift:

Why do I overlive?

Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out
To deathless pain? How gladly would I meet
Mortality, my sentence, and be earth
Insensible?²

A little later Adam has the phrases:

O Conscience! into what abyss of fears
And horrors hast thou driven me; out of which
I find no way, from deep to deeper plunged!³

Surely, Adam is not talking in abstractions, but he is worlds away from Hamlet's and Claudio's thrilled vitalism.

(By the way, "conscience" here and in the Hamlet-soliloquy have different shades. Hamlet's "conscience" means "consciousness", "awareness", and not the supposed moral instinct telling right from wrong. I may also remark in passing that Hamlet's "mortal coil" is not, as commonly believed, the body serving as a shell for the soul, but the turmoil and commotion of physical life. It is surprising how the word could be understood as "shell". The Dictionary affords no ground. It gives us a choice between the archaic sense of "disturbance, much ado, noise" or the com-

¹ *The Future Poetry*, p. 100.

² Bk. X, 773-7.

³ Bk. X, 842-4.

mon one which may be summed up as: "a ring, or a series of rings, winding rope, wire, pipe, etc." Perhaps a snake which can turn itself into a ring or a series of rings can be said, with the ordinary meaning in mind, to shuffle off its mortal coil. But it beats me how creatures with shapes like Hamlet and ourselves can be spoken of as doing so. The sole exception may be somebody like Hamlet's uncle who had killed the old King, Hamlet's father, and usurped his throne. By a snakelike twist of metaphorical ingenuity which would be not untypical of Shakespeare's sinuous imagination we may describe that uncle as shuffling off his mortal coil in the ordinary meaning of the word, because the old King's ghost, apropos of the canard spread by the murderer that he had been stung to death while sleeping, declares to Hamlet:

The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.)

(To be continued)

K. D. SETHNA

GRANT

My eyes unblinded when the Divine appears,
My ears unsealed unto the Call Supreme,
My being unassailed by sleep or dream,
My doors wide open to receive the Light
And welcome the Beloved, my soul's delight
With face all smiles, with speech unending cheers.

BHANUSHANKAR BHATT

HOW TO READ SRI AUROBINDO?

THE following is an excerpt from a letter by a reader of *Mother India*, written after having perused the article "Why Should I Read Sri Aurobindo?" published in its October 1984 issue:

"....I am fully in agreement with what you indicated. I also admit that the time has indeed come when Sri Aurobindo has to be properly studied and realised. But to read Sri Aurobindo is not an easy task. Sri Aurobindo is too difficult to be clearly understood especially by ordinary readers like my poor self. I attempted studying him several times but frankly speaking could not finish a single chapter. After reading a few sentences I felt tired. His sentences are so long and complex that I failed to follow their sequences. Besides, in many a case it has been proved that the dictionary is of no help. So, I had to abandon the idea of studying his original works; instead I started studying the translations (Bengali), which were then available. I had thought that it would be possible for me to grasp him through the translations. But, to my utter dismay, I discovered that translations were so faithfully done that they became as difficult and incomprehensible as the original.

"So, for sometime past I have been thinking that it would be of no use studying the translations because, firstly it seems to me that they are not always happy in their choice of terms; secondly, I sincerely believe that some *light* and *power* of Sri Aurobindo lie latent in his original works and one may have their blissful touch if one contemplates on them. So now once again I feel like studying his original works and not the translations. And therefore I humbly request you kindly to throw some light on the issue—How to Read and Comprehend Sri Aurobindo?"

The very language of the letter and the tone of representation of certain facts justify the sense that the question put by the reader is not altogether his personal one. The same may have disturbed other minds, who somehow could not put it as the present reader did. It was therefore felt that the reply should not be personal but reach all such minds by its appearance in *Mother India*. Of course we have no comment on his views on translations (Bengali), because they do not pertain to the main issue raised.

Though the issue is not at all ambiguous, yet to deal with it some data seem to be necessary. First, we must know why the reader intends to read Sri Aurobindo—that is to say, what is the purpose of his study? Does he intend to submit a 'thesis' on Sri Aurobindo for a doctorate? Does he like to store some academic information relating to the life and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo? Does he aim to acquire some knowledge about his poetic and literary genius or his vision of the future of humanity?

It is true that by studying books knowledge can be acquired. And if one studies Sri Aurobindo for that purpose one may have many new thoughts about our terrestrial existence and then one's erudite explanation and logical analysis of those new thoughts and intelligent comments on them may enable one to achieve one's cherished doctorate. Yet Sri Aurobindo may remain still far off from the Doctor. For the purpose of the study was not to know and realise him but to achieve something else.

Secondly, if the reader sincerely wishes to know and realise him, then we must ascertain whether the reader's mind is made free from all preconceived ideas. For, whether we admit it or not, the knowledge we have gathered so far is not the knowledge of the whole but of a part. Our knowledge pertains to this world only and not the beyond, and this world is not the whole of the creation but a part of it; and the instrument—that is to say, our mind—has no capacity to explore the beyond. Since no being in the cosmos is isolated but all are interdependent, the knowledge of the whole is necessary for the right knowledge of the part. So there is always an element of error in all our knowledge. Hence the necessity of freeing the mind from all preconceived ideas based on such erroneous knowledge. Or else, when those ideas are proved to be not fully correct by any author, then naturally the reader may feel annoyed and at once set the author aside and relax. This unfortunate mental plight may develop while studying Sri Aurobindo, for in his works there are lots of new thoughts which may seem to be contradictory to the traditional beliefs, as also to certain doctrines which have resulted from a materialistic philosophy based on physical science. Consequently, when we go through them we may feel exhausted and cannot proceed further.

It may be pointed out in this context that Sri Aurobindo knew very well that many aspects of his propositions might not be readily acceptable to physical scientists or some philosophers because the basis of those aspects lay deep with the supraphysical elements of creation which were beyond the grasp of human intellect. So he had to take up a good number of pages to dwell upon subjects like Matter, Evolution, Teleology, Rebirth, Karma, Monism, Dualism, etc. as they are generally termed in philosophy. He also knew what would be the points of their objection. So in the treatise he himself raised those points and sought to answer them in such a way that out of the discourses the truth divulged itself spontaneously with its luminosity—convincing all concerned that it was for the manifestation of this Truth of existence that the soul of man had been striving since its first emergence on earth, because this manifestation was 'man's earliest preoccupation'.

Though the present reader has not said anything about what we come to know from other sources and that is—'to read Sri Aurobindo means to practise very severe mental exercises'—we feel that this point may also be discussed in this context. Obviously the comment is made sarcastically, still we believe that there is some point in the statement. It is undoubtedly not an easy task to make the mind free from pedantic pride, nor is it so to unload the accumulations of learning from the

storage of the brain. To unlearn, that is to say, make the mind a clean slate, is no doubt more difficult than to learn and accumulate knowledge. It indeed requires a good deal of mental labour for an elder to become as simple as a child. So one is expected to practise mental exercise, nay, austerity before one endeavours to study Sri Aurobindo.

We are sure that if one takes the trouble to make one's mind as vacant as possible—free from all preconceived ideas and ideologies whatsoever—and then tries to enter into the domain of Sri Aurobindo's thought, one will be able to taste the nectar—the blissful *Rasa*—of his long and complex sentences, with the help of one's own intellect—because one's mind having been made vacant to the best of one's ability becomes more receptive; besides, one's endeavour will then be guided by Sri Aurobindo. Or, in other words, one's own inner being will guide one to realise Sri Aurobindo.

It is true that Sri Aurobindo's *light* and *power* are there latent in his writings as indicated by the reader. And that *light* and *power* may act as a *mantra* in the reader's consciousness if he prepares himself mentally before he starts reading Sri Aurobindo.

Now the question is, how to prepare our mind?

It is needless to mention that Sri Aurobindo is neither fiction nor belles-lettres, nor mythological drama, nor even theosophy that can be gone through and understood as and when a reader so wishes. Even our reasoning power as such may not be able to seize the essence of his ideas. So prior preparation of the mind is a necessity. For this purpose we believe that the reader must know who Sri Aurobindo is, what is his mission to fulfil and how he dwelt on so many varied subjects simultaneously and continually in the *Arya* for nearly seven years (1914-21) wherein all his major works (excepting *Savitri*) were first published.

To realise who Sri Aurobindo is and what is his mission the reader may attend to the following words of the Mother:

“What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme.”

In these two sentences the Mother explained who Sri Aurobindo is and what is his mission. It is also clear from them that, since all his activities represent a decisive action direct from the Supreme, his pen was not a personal instrument but was used to fulfil the divine Will.

We may have the answer from Sri Aurobindo himself to our second query. He indicated it in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, dated 23.8.35:

“...Out of absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for 4 months and wrote 6 volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc. I have written since...”

It may be pointed out here that in January 1908 Sri Aurobindo attained 'Nirvana Siddhi' on which he later commented: "My mind became full of eternal silence,—it is still there...." On another occasion he wrote to one of his disciples: "Since 1908, when I got the silence, I never think with my head or brain,—it is always in the wideness generally above the head that the thought occurs" (letter dated 17.10.33).

If the reader becomes aware of these facts as indicated by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, then he may realise that whatever Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Arya* was not his mental ideas. Though written in a very logical way, his thinking mind had no role to play there. And, therefore, none of his ideals—political, social, educational or otherwise—can be termed an "ism" in the usual sense; on the contrary they contain the truths that were poured down from above incessantly and his pen (or sometimes typewriter) was instrumental to express them in such a way as can be grasped by the human mind. Now perhaps it will not be difficult for the reader to realise that to judge him with the help of one's accumulated knowledge and/or preconceived ideas means to create a stumbling block on the way to comprehend him.

Besides, when the reader's mind is thus prepared by realising the inherent truth of the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, then to read Sri Aurobindo does not mean only to acquire knowledge but also to live that Knowledge—to become something else—that is to say, to rise above one's own state of consciousness.

If we may adapt an aphorism of the Mother: To know something by reading books is no doubt good; but to live that knowledge is better and to become that something is surely the best. If we cannot become what we learn, all our endeavour to acquire knowledge remains partly unfulfilled. To become something else or something more than what we are in the present state of our consciousness is the purpose of studying Sri Aurobindo. To kindle this strong will in the mind is what we call mental preparation. If one affirms this truth and gets inspired, it may be said that one is mentally prepared. And when this will to become something else starts working within, one may realise how insignificant is the knowledge that one has been accumulating (by reading many books) and preserving with pride and glory for many years. Then it will not be very difficult to brush aside all those petty and trivial accumulations from the mind to make it clean and empty—a sanctified receptacle of the all-pervasive truth that Sri Aurobindo envisages. Then Sri Aurobindo is no longer difficult but felicitous and enjoyable; his language is no more stiff but a moving vehicle of splendid thoughts that are proved to be the living guide to show us how to cross the bridge between what is and what is to be. And the meaning of his words is not puzzling any longer but radiating directives of new ways of thinking, feeling and willing to achieve our splendid destiny.

Now we should like to draw the devoted attention of the reader to the memorable words of Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*:

“How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind
Around your little self and petty things?
But not for a changeless littleness were you meant,
Not for vain repetition were you built;
Out of the immortal’s substance you were made;

...

A greater destiny waits you in your front...” (Book IV, Canto III)

SAMAR BASU

DOUCE MÈRE—OUR SWEET PROFESSOR

THE Mother used to take classes with the inmates of the Ashram. Her methods were new. Imparting knowledge was an interesting occupation for Her and for us utter joy and light. After the Marching, She would take the tiny tots to the courtyard of the house known as "Guest House". A very auspicious place, no doubt, for Sri Aurobindo once lived in two of the rooms in this house and his long hours of walking had dug a winding path on the floor. Although cemented over for convenience's sake, it could still have been one of the most sacred sights for pilgrims, but some unthinking overseer, not satisfied with this cementing, re-did the whole floor with smart-looking red-coloured cement and completely obliterated the historic landmark.

Then there was the class in the little room near the road and only a few select persons, those that the Mother actually had invited to come, attended this class. She asked us to join it as soon as we joined the Ashram. At that time She read from famous French literature. She was reading a book of Lao-tse and Her reading the phrase *écrit ton nom* repeated again and again still rings delightfully in my ears. A lamp was placed on the small table where She laid Her book and under its light Her face was a heavenly picture to see. Those few moments made "Life beatitude's kiss". We sometimes wondered: "Is She real or are we seeing the apparition of a goddess from some other world?" Pranab used to garland the Mother every evening, but that was rather at a late hour. During the class the garland was not there but, when at last we went home from the Playground, the vision lingered in our memory and the mind remembered a passage from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* (1954 Edition, p. 464):

Her rapid fingers taught a flower song,
The stanzaed movement of a marriage hymn.
Profound in perfume and immersed in hue
They mixed their yearning's coloured signs and made
The bloom of their purity and passion one.
A sacrament of joy in treasuring palms
She brought, flower-symbol of her offered life,
Then with raised hands that trembled a little now
At the very closeness that her soul desired,
This bond of sweetness, their bright union's sign,
She laid on the bosom coveted by her love,
As if inclined before some gracious god
Who has out of his mist of greatness shone
To fill with beauty his adorer's hours.

As for garlands I would like to write about another incident that took place long ago. In those days when Sri Aurobindo was there all inmates and visitors took

garlands with them to offer at Darshan-time. There was a special box and we were instructed to put the garlands in it. Next morning the Mother distributed them. We all got our garlands. The Mother placed them in our hands. It was the next best thing to being garlanded by Her.

Now about the class. A few years later it was transferred to a bigger room as our number increased and perhaps the Mother had sensed some difficulty in our sitting on the floor. There were long benches and tables (school type) in this room and we were all very comfortable. One day a very amusing thing happened. Most of us have some sort of repulsion for rats or wall lizards or cockroaches. To allay our idiotic reflex actions the Mother most probably invited a wall lizard to Her table cloth. A whole lot of us cried, "Oh! Ah!" and raised in fact a great hullabaloo. The Mother calmly surveyed the commotion, then asked what it was all about. "Un éléphant?" She enquired with an astonished expression. We laughed, no doubt, but realised how foolish we had been and how weak our reflexes. A tiny creature could upset us. And men go tiger-shooting (women sometimes accompany them) and rhinoceros-hunting, yet we scream to see a rat or a lizard. The Mother translated Sri Aurobindo's books in this class and Pavitra sat near Her with a big fat French-English Dictionary to help Her if She ever needed help. She rarely did, so wonderful was Her power over her own language and its usages.

On Wednesday evenings the Mother took another class. On these occasions She sat with the Playground wall-map of Undivided India behind Her, and anyone who wanted to hear Her or be near Her was welcome. Under the vast sky so many persons assembled to see a tiny figure (so She looked) talking and to see Her was a summons to adore.

How shall I rest content with mortal days
 And the dull measure of terrestrial things,
 I who have seen behind the cosmic mask
 The glory and the beauty of thy face?
 Hard is the doom to which thou bidst thy sons.
 How long shall our spirits battle with the Night
 And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,
 We who are vessels of a deathless Force?

(*Savitri*, p. 386)

The Mother encouraged people to ask questions and questions were asked on varied subjects. She would either answer them or sometimes stray to other subjects that She thought we must know about. One evening Her talk turned on Yoga and occultism. Very few perhaps had a clear idea whether the two were the same or not. The Mother categorically said that Yoga and occultism were two different things. Yoga is longing for and union with the Divine, and the effort we make on the path to accomplish it. This effort for union might bring to the person many powers and even knowledge of occultism if he were so inclined. But Yoga is not occultism.

Occultism is a science, concerned with the innumerable invisible forces and entities that are there on hidden planes of being. It has to be studied, its rules learnt and, if possible, one must acquire the power to control the forces and entities. From Théon in North Africa our Mother learnt—or shall I say, improved—Her knowledge of occultism.

Once She remarked that Théon's wife was even more versatile. The Mother when She was living with them at Tlemcen used to go out for long walks. She locked Her room when going out. But on Her return She would often find a bouquet of flowers on Her bed. Madame Théon admitted that it was she who had put it there. Sometimes she felt very tired. On such occasions she would go out into the garden and bring in a grape-fruit. She lay down on her bed putting the grape-fruit on her chest. After an hour it was thrown away limp, with all its plumpness gone. Madame had pulled out all energy from it. The Mother Herself could go out of Her body and then out of Her subtle body and so on twelve times. Her consciousness stayed intact and She was master of the situation. Explaining the phenomenon, She elucidated everything but did not employ the pronoun "I". From the way she dealt with the theme we could easily guess who she was speaking of. For no one can talk on a subject so profoundly unless one actually has the experience. She also explained that it was possible to go out of one's body to save or help others. Elucidating Her point She narrated many anecdotes. Here I may write my own experience. I once fell down from a running tonga (a kind of horse-cart common in north India). I was very conscious when I was about to fall. I thought, "Now I am going to have a major accident". No doubt, I bruised myself here and there but just as my head was about to bang on the hard cement floor of the pavement a beautiful hand appeared to hold it and gently lay it on the floor. It was the Mother. People around me made a lot of fuss. "She must be taken to the hospital," said one. I said, "No fuss, please, the Mother was there. Nothing could happen to me." And the only aftermath of the accident was a slight bump at the back of the head. I did not even have a headache.

Fear is a thing one must completely eradicate from one's being and nature. This is a point the Mother stressed again and again. "You must be a courageous and relentless fighter," She once added. I have had many occult experiences. In a dream I wandered to a place that was beautiful, with everything golden. But the beings are so jealous that you cannot touch anything there. When I woke up, my fingers were still tingling with the funny sensation of having touched something.

Of course, fear is not to be confused with the awe one feels before a great personality. I was used to meeting eminent people but the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were unique. Bold as we might be with having known famous authors and Maharajas and even top officers of the British Government, including Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, we had not expected the Divine to be on earth, facing us in the form of two human beings.

CHAUNDONA, S. BANERJI

ON THE HOLOCAUST

INDIRA, our beloved Indira has made her supreme sacrifice by fearlessly giving away her life for the good of India, for the good of the world, for the good of humanity. Nolinida once said about her: "She is one of the Mother's children as we are. The Mother's force is working through her in the most vicious and dirty field, *i.e.* politics." On another occasion, after her fall in the 1977 general elections while she was almost down-trodden and seemed "to pass on the wings of the wind" to oblivion, Nolinida in a prophetic tone said, or rather quoted: "...Even though he fall, he shall rise again; even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return."¹ And when the calamity of the Janata rule imposed too early the next elections in January, 1980 and Nolinida was asked whom to vote for, quick and precise came the grave reply: "We do not waver in our love." Indira's inner being, freed from the bondage of the material cloak, is surely soaring towards high heavens on the white wings of peace because "...there are only two deaths which are really great and carry a soul to the highest heaven, to die in self-forgetting action, in battle, by assassination, on the scaffold for others, for one's own country or for the right, and to die as the Yogin dies, by his own will..."²

She was loved by the Mother and both she and her father had free access to Her. When she visited the Ashram for the first time, her father introduced his dear "Indu" to the Mother and sought Her blessings. She was then the President of the Congress. After the passing of her father, when the great question puzzled the then leaders of India: "After Nehru, who?" and Lalbahadur Shastri came as a stop-gap, it was in Indira actually that the puzzling question met the right answer. In fact, the Mother once commented: "India should be proud of her leadership". Indira gave India the needed lead and dominated the world forum by her captivating personality and sincere approach to tackle the problems facing India and the world as a whole. Her intervention was solicited by the leaders of other countries of the world on many critical issues and it helped to avert the crises.

One may question here the usefulness of her interventions in world-affairs when India, her own country, was faced with a thousand and one problems which still remain unsolved. But, then, one should realise that she tried her level best till the last to solve them also—in spite of very few trusted and sincere collaborators and lieutenants to help her—and undaunted she moved to sacrifice her life, so precious to the whole world and to India, breasting the treacherous bullets of her own bodyguards.

Some foreign dignitaries are said to have asked her: "Should you keep Sikh bodyguards even after this Amritsar incident?" She is said to have unhesitatingly replied: "Why not, when I have such Sikhs?" This is Indira! She rejected forthwith the suggestions of the IB also in this regard. What compassion! What courage!

¹ *The Hour of God*—Sri Aurobindo, Cent. Vol. 17, p. 1.

² *Karmayogin*—Sri Aurobindo, Cent. Vol. 2, p. 258.

She had her shortcomings, one may point out. Then, after all she was human and she did not attain perfection in all the fields of life and mind with their complexities. But there is no doubt that she uplifted the banner of India to a great height in the assembly of nations, that she was the sole personality to represent India with proper dignity in the world-forum, that there is no other figure, not even one, to fill the void created by her passing at the present moment. Here, I hope, it would be relevant to say that Napoleon (about whom Sri Aurobindo has said: "One called Napoleon a tyrant and imperial cut-throat; but I saw God armed striding through Europe."¹ is once said to have remarked: "If France is to profit by my genius, she must bear my weaknesses also."

Indira was outspoken. During her official visit to the United States probably sometime in 1982, she told the Press: "The difficulty with America is this: America says that the world belongs to her. But I say that the world belongs to all."

That she cherished a sincere desire to make this world better, probably in her own modest way, and that she belonged to a "superior mentality"² was revealed in the inspiring words with which she addressed the Ashram children at the Sports Ground on 19.4.75:

"I am happy to have this opportunity of seeing the young and the old or perhaps all the young in heart who are here, who have marched and sung so beautifully in front of us. It was inspiring for me to hear the Mother's words and I can well imagine what it must mean to you to be living here, and to feel her presence.

"I know what great importance she gave to physical education, in fact the very first time I visited Pondicherry, I think we saw a physical demonstration and she herself was with us then.

"We in India, as perhaps people all over the world, have a very great responsibility in trying to make this a better world in trying to create a new type of human being. There are many paths and many truths, and perhaps each one of us has to find the path and the truth for ourselves and to seek for strength not from outside but from within ourselves.

"Many times when we see what is happening in the world we are discouraged, but there is no cause for discouragement and specially here, in India the people have always risen to the occasion, they have always been able to face hardship and danger with courage, with faith and determination. So I give you all my good wishes for the

¹ *The Hour of God*—Sri Aurobindo, Cent. Vol. 17, p. 82.

² This has a reference to the following message given by the Mother for Shri V. V. Giri, President of India, who visited the Ashram:

"It is only India's soul who can unify the country.

"Externally the provinces of India are very different in character, tendencies, culture, as well as in language, and any attempt to unify them artificially could only have disastrous results.

"But her soul is one, intense in her aspiration towards the spiritual truth, the essential unity of the creation and the divine origin of life, and by uniting with this aspiration the whole country can recover a unity that has never ceased to exist for the superior mentality." 7 July, 1968

future. I know that you have a role to play and that you will rise to the occasion magnificently”.

Her inner being seemed to have had an indication of this attempt on her life and, as a consequence, of leaving the physical body. While addressing a mammoth public meeting in Orissa just the day before, she in an emotional tone said: “Even if I die in the service of the nation, I shall be proud of it. Every drop of my blood, I am sure, will contribute to the growth of this nation and to make it strong and dynamic.” And while leaving Orissa for Delhi she told the Governor who came to see her off at the Bhubaneswar airport: “Attempts are being made to eliminate me, but I will preserve the unity and integrity of the country till the last drop of my blood.”

We shall have to gather ourselves with a lot of patience and courage to find one like her in the near, if not even a too distant, future. In the meantime, let Mother India rise in a volcanic explosion of her intense inner feelings, tinged with Indira’s heart’s blood, from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and impel the sons of her soil to rise above all barbarism, brutality, treachery and hypocrisy, so that they may profit by this supreme sacrifice on the part of Indira and stand as ONE against all the forces of division and disharmony, all the forces of darkness and evil.

In one of his aphorisms Sri Aurobindo says: “...Christ from his cross humanised Europe”¹. Let each drop of Indira’s blood, each atom of her last breath, in the same way set aflame an urge in every soul to take a step in the ascending ladder of consciousness, to be fearless like her, to be ready to sacrifice all for the good of the country and for the good of humanity as a whole. Let her last anguish insistently ring to the deep hearing of every heart: “Arise! Awake! O my countrymen. Arise! Awake! O my brothers and sisters of the world.”

SATADAL

¹ *The Hour of God*—Sri Aurobindo, Cent. Vol. 17, p. 83.

DOCTOR BABU—MY GRANDFATHER

(Concluded from the issue of January 1985)

II

(At this point, I would like to draw the attention of my readers in general, and that of young readers in particular, to certain details, lest there should be any misunderstanding. In those days Sri Aurobindo was not known as Sri Aurobindo; he was Aurobindo Ghosh and most of the time was referred to by his initials, A.G. Barindra, however, used to address his brother as Sejda. Even so, in these pages I shall always refer to him as Sri Aurobindo. Likewise the Mother was not known as the Mother, but as Mirra; her full name was Mirra Alfassa. But for me She will always be the Mother and I shall call her so. Nor was there any 'Ashram' in those days, but for convenience I shall use the word freely. Also I would ask the readers to remind themselves that we are far back in the chronicle of time—in the mid-1920s, almost sixty years ago, a time when the streets were deserted, the houses few, and the population very small. In fact, in 1910 when Sri Aurobindo arrived, it was, in his words, a 'dead city'. And in 1925, even if it was not fully dead, it was not much more than half dead. The readers should also remember that at this time the science of medicine was not so developed as now—modern sophisticated facilities were not yet provided, not yet even heard of. This town, in short, had very little. It is against this backdrop of such elementary conditions that the reader must picture this story.)

WHEN the train drew into the railway station of Pondicherry two days or so later, my grandfather put his head out of the window of his compartment. He saw the whole length and breadth of the platform completely deserted, but for one man. It was Sri Aurobindo's brother, Barindra Kumar Ghosh. Barin looked young and energetic. He was neatly dressed. His face was serious, his disposition grave. At the sight of his stern face, my grandfather melted into thin air and disappeared: in his place a doctor appeared, a doctor not yet heard of, not yet reputable, and yet a doctor on whom none other than Sri Aurobindo was to pin his last hope. And this doctor's experienced eyes told him that day on the platform: "Here is a messenger from the house of a patient where things are not happy." They did not shake hands, they did not smile at each other, they did not even exchange a word of greeting. Barindra simply said, "Shall we move?" And the doctor replied, "Yes." His greatest journey as a man of medical science was on.

An army attacking a foe and a doctor attacking an illness have one thing in common—both seek early information about their enemy; this helps them to plan their strategy better. My grandfather was no exception to this rule. As soon as he and Barin were seated in one of those antique three-wheeled rickshaws called

“Push-push” because they were pushed from behind and directed with a rod by the occupant, my grandfather enquired about the Mother’s illness. I shall try to relate as accurately as possible the gripping account which Barin gave to my grandfather and which my grandfather later reported to me.

Barin said:

“The French lady named Mirra first met Sri Aurobindo in 1914, when I was not here. Then in 1920, She came back and settled here, and we have all been doing Sadhana. Recently, however, She fell ill. One peculiarity of Her nature is that even though She is endowed with remarkable occult powers, She will help everyone else, but will do nothing for Her own body. She has had a fever for several days; it increased till it reached 106 degrees, even with an ice-bag on her forehead! She has a severe pain in the chest, and a hammering pulsation in her head. She has not taken food for several days. We have tried everything possible. We tried a local Indian doctor. We tried also a French doctor. But all in vain. The fever just wouldn’t go down. Finally, Sri Aurobindo asked us to call the most well-known doctor in Madras. Though we could ill-afford it, we called him and paid not only his visiting charges but his car-fare up and down. This doctor diagnosed a ‘serious condition of the heart’ and advised immediate hospitalisation. Sri Aurobindo is putting all his yogic force upon Her, but without any apparent result. The air is thick with misgivings and I have never seen my brother in such a mood as he is in now. He has stopped seeing people and almost stopped talking to us. He is seen pacing up and down the verandah most of the time. I don’t know what will happen.”

Thus ended Barin’s narration. There was no further talk, and my grandfather fell to musing.

Usually, any fever falls below 106 degrees within a few hours after applying an ice-bag. It was quite strange that this one did not. My grandfather suspected meningitis, but kept his private conjecture to himself and did not speak a word. One thing, however, continued to puzzle him: Sri Aurobindo also had great occult powers. Why then was he not able to cure Her by His yogic force? “What is so amiss, what is so amiss?” my grandfather kept asking himself.

His private guesses about the nature of the Mother’s malady, his quandary over the ineffectivity of Sri Aurobindo’s powers, his worry about the seriousness of the illness itself—all weighed so heavily upon him that when the “push-push” reached the Ashram gate, my grandfather was an embodiment of concentration.

At the entrance of the Ashram there were no “Silence” creepers as there are today, nor was the Mother’s symbol atop the gate, and the gate itself was only a small door—so the view from the first-floor verandah down to the road was clear. It is my opinion that from the very moment the doctor was in sight, Sri Aurobindo was keenly watching him from the verandah and taking thorough measure of the depth of this young man. At the same time, I believe, He was pouring down on him His infinite grace and opening up that absolute power of intuition which would prove to be infallible in his diagnosis of the Mother’s illness a few minutes hence.

I once asked my grandfather: "How did you feel when you entered the Ashram?" He answered in a serious tone:

"The atmosphere was tense. In fact, it was so tense that it almost hit me physically. I have been to the homes of many patients, but never have I felt such a gripping tension."

Just inside the gate, on the ground-floor verandah, there were a few chairs and benches kept exactly as they are kept today; on them were seated Nolini Kanta Gupta, A. B. Purani and a couple of others. None of them spoke, none of them smiled, none of them greeted him. My grandfather neither expected it nor did he care. He was too deeply imbued with a sense of responsibility, too deeply absorbed to bother about social formalities. Barindra Kumar took him near the chairs and quietly pointed out the staircase to their left—the same by which we go upstairs every year on the 1st of January to get our calendars. From the gestures Barindra made, it was clear to my grandfather that neither Barindra nor anyone else had permission to go upstairs. The doctor knew that from here on he was alone. But was he really alone? I doubt it.

I have never seen my grandfather become nervous, so I am sure that he was not the least nervous as he went up the staircase, step by step. But with each step he climbed, he knew and he told himself that on this day he was appearing for the toughest "exam" of his medical career, a day on which all his knowledge and all his experience would be put to the ultimate test. Holding his attaché case in his left hand and supporting himself on the railing with the right, he steadily looked up as he climbed. He held his breath, not knowing what the Yogi would look like; what he would say, not knowing either how the patient, Mirra, would behave! The atmosphere grew more and more quiet, more and more penetrating. Then suddenly, after the first twist of the staircase he saw Sri Aurobindo standing up there, looking at him. Just that one look, and this humble doctor knew from deep in his heart that he had passed his "exam"—from here on, it was a mere walk-over. He knew that the patient was cured and knew too that he was only an instrument. The Supreme Doctor was the—One who stood in front of him, with a stature of Himalayan strength and mighty poise. A grateful man fell at His feet. Sri Aurobindo touched his head and blessed him.

When he stood up, Sri Aurobindo had turned his gaze and was looking off towards what is now the girls' boarding. Sri Aurobindo remained silent for a while, letting my grandfather recover his poise, and then spoke:

"The diagnosis given to me by the doctor from Madras is suspect. I want an exact diagnosis."

In the meantime an English lady, Miss Dorothy Hodgson, perhaps the first European to come to the Ashram and stay for good, had come to the doorway of the room behind the verandah. The Mother had named her Dutta, "The offered one", and made her Her personal assistant. Dutta led my grandfather into the Mother's chamber.

The Mother lay limp on Her back with a big icebag tied to Her forehead with a red muslin scarf. Her eyes were closed. As soon as my grandfather entered, his tiger eyes were quick to observe things that Barin had not told him about. He noticed that the colour of the Mother's left foot was perceptibly darker than of the right—a clear sign of thickening and poisoning of the blood. He did not draw any conclusions yet, but he knew, with his impeccable acumen, which way to guide his diagnostic probe.

Contrary to what one would expect, my grandfather did not go near the bed, but actually moved away from it—he went and stood at the far corner of the room. This, however, was not a tactical move, but a precautionary step: he wanted to dust his leather case in order to make sure that none of the cinders gathered during the railway journey would reach the Mother. All this time, Dutta, clad in a sparkling white sari, her head bowed slightly down in true Indian style, stood at a respectful distance; but through every limb of her woman's body she expressed that she was ready to carry out the slightest command of the doctor. With her help, the attaché case was cleaned. A chair was brought and placed near the head of the Mother.

From the moment my grandfather had entered the room, he had been possessed of the queer notion that the Mother was constantly watching him even though Her eyes were closed. Of course, he had been already told by Barin of Her remarkable powers; but could they still be active even in Her illness? The seriousness of Her condition was evident at the first sight of Her body. Her face was so heavily flushed that any experienced doctor would know that the fever was high. Added to this was the severe pain in the chest, the hammering sensation in Her head, the lack of food for several days, plus something more serious that had not yet been detected. Could Her occult powers still be active with all this physical agony? My grandfather did not doubt his feeling; but how was it possible? And now his confusion was worse confounded when the Mother opened Her mouth unasked just at the moment when my grandfather brought the thermometer near Her face. I can only imagine that he was the most nonplussed doctor on earth that day.

For such a serious case, the doctor did not trust his sense of time. Taking his watch, he let a full minute pass before removing the thermometer from the Mother's mouth. Barindra Kumar had been right. The thermometer read 106 degrees! He felt the icebag with his fingers; it was fairly full. Then from his leather case he withdrew his greatest weapon—the stethoscope, fixed it to his ears and leaned forward.

How he had proceeded at that point in his examination he never told me, and I never felt like asking him. Thus it remains anybody's guess and will remain so for ever. I will hazard none. Let that which neither he nor the Mother ever told me remain unknown for ever.

Next, my grandfather took a writing pad from Dutta on which he wrote the details of his findings—details that would completely change Sri Aurobindo's course of occult working.

First he wrote the Mother's name at the top left and at top right the date. Just

below it, he wrote: "Fever 106 degrees by my thermometer." And below that, a startling entry: "The heart is all right. It is healthy and normal and is working perfectly well." If the above statement was startling, what he wrote next would have to be called daring and astounding: "The real cause of the malady does not lie in the chest region, but below the knee of the left leg. It is an acute form of gout. I have never seen such severe swelling before." And beneath this, he wrote the time and signed his name: Upendra Nath Banerjee.

When my grandfather went back to the verandah Sri Aurobindo was still standing exactly where he had left Him. The doctor was a bit surprised. For often, during his diagnosis, he had felt that Sri Aurobindo was standing behind him. My grandfather handed his report to Sri Aurobindo.

Once I asked my grandfather why he hadn't suggested any treatment below his diagnosis, as is the usual practice with doctors. He told me, "I had full faith in Sri Aurobindo's powers. I knew He would cure Her."

The room assigned to my grandfather was in the corner house that is part of the embroidery building; it is opposite our present Post Office. A few minutes after his entrance into the room, there was a gentle tap on the door. It was Dutta. A Dutta almost completely hidden behind a host of towels, linen, dhotis, punjabis, bags—everything that this empty-handed doctor needed for survival, indeed for decent living. If I am permitted to guess, I would say that these things were brought under the Mother's instruction, if not under Her own inspection. For they were so precise in detail that I do not see how it could be otherwise. Not only was there a bedsheet and a pillow cover with which Dutta made the bed ready, and a white linen cloth that she spread neatly on the table, but other small items such as a toothpick and a little container with tooth-powder! In my opinion the Mother must have noticed how impeccable the doctor was in his work and, as his host, She was not to be outdone. Dutta then left; but in a short while she was back, this time as a stewardess with a simple but class cuisine. Did not the Mother supervise these arrangements? I refuse to believe She did not, bed-ridden though She was.

It is not given to any man, however bright he may be, to measure the personality of Sri Aurobindo. But still we can form some idea from the following account of what tremendous occult powers he had command of and with what lightning speed he could use them.

Dutta left my grandfather's room with the bowls, plates and spoons (she would not let him wash them, murmuring such apologies as, "No, no, no, please—please let me do it"). Grandfather went to bed to take some rest, though he did not expect to get any sleep. I suppose no doctor does when his patient's condition is critical. But this time the goddess of sleep had other notions, and he dozed off.

Suddenly he was jarred awake by shouts of joy and exuberance. The shouts were so sudden and loud that for a second or two he lost his bearings. He thought he was in Mirzapur. But, no, it was Barindra Kumar who was shouting. He was accompanied by A. B. Purani, a young and extremely energetic-looking man. My

grandfather dashed to the window. On seeing him, Barin threw up his hands in the air as would a boy at a cricket match rooting for LBW! And Purani was full of smiles. Barindra Kumar shouted, "Doctor Babu, Mother's fever has gone down to 104 degrees. Just now Dutta reported it to us. It's fantastic, fantastic!"

Sri Aurobindo had done it. The gloom of the morning had passed and the air, which just an hour ago had been thick with doubt, was now gay. Everyone was jubilant. And though he had never told me so, I am sure my grandfather's heart was also vibrant with joy. The tip of the balance had tilted. Did some gods shower flowers from heaven and the devil claw his own cheeks? I can't say.

Late that afternoon, someone told my grandfather that Sri Aurobindo wanted to see him. This time when he entered the Ashram, the atmosphere was markedly different. The tension of the morning no longer existed and the people sitting on those chairs were relaxed and smiling. The doctor also noted another change in their demeanour: the moment he entered, everyone stood up. But this show of respect did not make him proud, for his psychological make-up was of another dimension. This mark of respect simply redoubled his assurance that the Mother was getting better.

Once again he went up by the staircase and once again was surprised to find Sri Aurobindo standing at the same place in the same way. Sri Aurobindo smiled and then spoke a sentence that speaks volumes about the humility of the Great. He said: "Upen, your patient seems to be doing well; I think you have done it."

My grandfather, of course, didn't fall for that line. He knew too well who was whose patient and who was whose doctor. He remained silent.

Dutta too was standing there, at the same place as in the morning. She led him to the Mother's chamber. The Mother was lying just as in the morning. At the very sight of Her, my grandfather knew that She was out of danger. Her face was less flushed, Her foot less dark; and the overall atmosphere was lighter. After a check-up, he wrote:

"Fever 103 degrees.

"The swelling has lessened, the foot is much shrunken. There is a marked improvement in the blood circulation.

"The ice-bag can be removed."

I have rarely seen my grandfather exuberant—his was a quiet disposition. With his venerable appearance, with his long silver hair and his neatly combed beard reaching down to the big bulge of his heavily built body, he often reminded me of the fabulous Wise Men of the East; but the like of him I have never seen before or since. From such a person, exuberance is never expected. But in this case, there was an exception, an exception that, in my presence at least, he made once and once only—it was when he told me how he found the Mother the next morning. As he described the scene, how loudly he laughed, like a boy! His whole body shook, his abdomen bobbed up and down, and the part of his cheeks that were visible above his beard formed into round little dimples. Well, all this makes me say that he was not just exuberant, but over-exuberant.

Grandfather spoke in Bengali, and it is always a tricky job to translate the wonderful eloquence of one language into another, but I will try my best.

"O my boy, my boy!" he exclaimed, "when I entered the room the next morning She was sitting bolt upright on Her bed. Yes, yes—bolt upright! And before I could believe my eyes, She said, 'Come in, doctor.' And as She looked at me, She was smiling too. Ho! The illness and the fever and the devil and his brood, all, all had flown quite out of the room. Ho—yes! She was absolutely all right!"

As he spoke to me, my grand-dad was a boy full of mirth and laughter.

From that day he came to be known as Doctor Babu, and ever afterwards the Ashramites knew him as their beloved Doctor Babu. Soon he had to leave, but within six months or so he was back, this time accompanied by his elder sister—another dynamic personality—and stayed on through almost the whole of 1926. After Sri Aurobindo withdrew on the 24th of November that year, he went back to Mirzapur; but he returned to the Ashram off and on, whenever he could, and always he was known to Sri Aurobindo as "the Mother's doctor" and referred to by the Mother as "my doctor". And then later, many years later, when my brother and I came to the Ashram and called him Dadu, the Bengali word for grandfather, he was known to my generation as Dadu, one of the most honoured and loved persons to live in the Ashram.

Many are the adventures he had with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the sadhaks of the Ashram, both as a doctor and as a sadhak, the account of which would make yet another chapter of the unrecorded history of our Ashram, but none, I should say, as momentous as the one told above.

Many questions of our life remain unanswered, many problems remain unsolved. The problem of death, for instance, and the problem of suffering are a mystery to us. We can at most hazard guesses or answer them philosophically or quote our Gurus, but to our own experience they remain unanswered, and will remain so for a long time to come. If this is true, then is it not even more true that the mysteries of the spiritual life are ten times more mysterious and ten times more insoluble? Why, in this case, did so many doctors fail to diagnose the cause of the Mother's fever? Why did even Sri Aurobindo fail to cure Her? Why, for an acute form of gout, did the Mother feel pain in Her chest and none in Her leg? And why out of a hundred and one doctors, did my grandfather have to travel thousands of kilometers to cure Her? And then, how did Sri Aurobindo work to cure the Mother? How was He able to cure Her so completely in just one day? Who can probe these problems and give us the last word?

As I have said, we can only hazard guesses—nothing more. Could it be that the Devil was waging a last-ditch battle and successfully misleading the doctors? Could it be that the Devil knew that the only way to pull Sri Aurobindo down was to remove the Divine Mother? Could it be that the other doctors were misled just so that the Mother's own child could arrive? Did all this happen only so that She might hear from Her son that mysterious voice of the deep: "Wake up, mother,

wake up. I have come. Never shall I leave thee”—words that only a son knows how to speak and only a mother knows how to understand?

Once again I see my grandfather as he spoke to me that day. He is seated on a big, sparkingly white divan, surrounded by a rarefied air, the lower part of his body clad in a shining dhoti, his upper part bare and glowing with an ethereal luminosity. I see the same smiling face, the same silver beard, the same silver hair, the same dignity and poise—and I say to him:

“Dadu, it is for you that the Mother fell ill and survived and it is because of you that we could all come here.”

But I see him shaking his head gently from side to side, and saying:

“Not at all, not at all. I was only an instrument... only an instrument.”

(Concluded)

TARUN BANERJEE

OF DUNG-HEAPS, DIAMONDS, AND OURSELVES

SOME readers may be annoyed, or even outraged, in the course of reading this essay. It is therefore prudent to begin with a few pre-emptive caveats.

Do I abhor the vast social, economic and cultural dung-heaps which constitute so many areas of the so-called Third World today? Indeed I do—the blue-bottles which buzz over them included!

Am I in the company of Western critics of these dung-heaps, and of gentlemen like Mr. V. S. Naipaul, who see India as “An Area of Darkness”? I am not. I have discovered that it is possible to derive deep and calm satisfaction from tearing these gentlemen to pieces, not in anger, but in entire sobriety.

Am I anti-Western? Good Lord, No! How can one possibly be against the glories of ancient Hellas and Rome, and against the great literary, cultural and artistic heritage of the Western world? And one has to be out of one’s mind to despise modern science and technology.

Do I believe that the dung-heaps of the Third World have always been dung-heaps, and will always remain so? I don’t. There were times in the past when diamonds exceeded dung-heaps in the great traditional civilisations of India, China and the Middle East.

Do I therefore suggest a return to the past as the panacea for the ills of the Third World? No, for that would be stupid, and indeed impossible.

Do I believe that the Third World dung-heaps will always remain dung-heaps? I would not have embarked on this essay if I did. Which is why I hope I have hit on a suggestive title for this essay. For there are diamonds hidden in these dung-heaps, and in ourselves.

You might ask, what and where are these diamonds? Here one might recount a highly charged remark once made by Vivekananda. On the eve of his departure for India after his first visit to the West, an English friend had asked of him, “Swami, how do you like now your motherland after four years’ experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?” His significant reply: “India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy, it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the TIRTHA!”

It was precisely this deep feeling for what India really stood for that caused him to castigate his countrymen so mercilessly, on his return, for all their foibles, failings, superstitions and stupidities. Lions like Vivekananda seem to be rarities in the India of today. It is the rabbits who seem to preponderate and proliferate. And there is nothing more sickening than listening to squeaking rabbits pretending to pontificate, whether in India or elsewhere in the Third World.

It is these diamonds which Vivekananda referred to, which luminaries like Sri Aurobindo also identified and picked up for further polishing, which need to be once again unearthed (or un-dunged!) from the dung-heap, if a nation like India is to rediscover itself and launch the great renaissance of the future. And the same

goes for other Third World countries.

My final caveat is that politically I am not Indian. I am Singaporean, and extremely proud of being one. My country is tiny, only about 238.65 square miles (at low tide!), but it is not a dung-heap! We have quite a few diamonds too, but none of them indigenous. The standards, values and beliefs we live by originated in China, India, South-East Asia and the West.

Singaporeans are not ashamed of their cultural and spiritual roots being elsewhere. I do not feel in the least apologetic because the Indian spiritual and cultural ethos is part of my own make-up. I decline, however, to be encapsuled in any tradition. The whole world is my heritage.

As a political Singaporean, I have no business to prescribe political nostrums for India or for any other country. What I write is therefore intended as a cultural essay, not a political one. At any rate, it is an entirely personal approach.

This somewhat longish preamble was a necessary pre-emptive exercise, to ensure that I am not misunderstood by my readers. I may now begin the essay proper.

The great books which capture the spirit and the soul of cultures and civilisations, and reveal the secret springs of human conduct, motivations and aspirations belong, it seems, irretrievably to the past. They are rarities in the modern world.

Much of modern journalism, both western and eastern, deals with the banal and the vulgar. Clever and brilliant though modern reporting often is, one yet wonders about the subjective or objective value of dealing brilliantly with trivia.

There is all the difference in the world between brilliant drain inspectors and brilliant sky watchers. For the brilliant sky watchers cannot peer into the heavens unless their giant telescopes are concretised on solid earth. But the drain and sewer inspectors are oblivious of sky and stars. They can only see drains, sewers and dung.

V. S. Naipaul is an absolutely brilliant sewage inspector. He excels in this genre of reporting. And who knows, he might even win the Nobel Prize one day. He has no compeer when it comes to sniffing out drains, sewage and dung outside the boundaries of his Anglo-Saxon world. Indeed, reading Naipaul, one would think that in the Anglo-Saxon world there are no alimentary systems, colons, rectums, the smell of urine, and things like that.

For V. S. Naipaul, the Middle East, India and Africa are all "areas of darkness". As indeed they are—visible, palpable, malodorous, horrendous! Let us please not denounce him for showing us the obvious. One begins to get dubious about Mr. Naipaul only when he makes it clear that the areas of darkness outside the Anglo-Saxon world are totally devoid of light of any kind. But one only has to visit Britain, Mr. Naipaul's centre of civilisation and culture, to realise that there is a great and growing internal darkness which is the chief blight of the Anglo-Saxon world. The dung is not absent either.

A good number of economic and sociological pundits in the West, including honest British ones, are convinced that if the seemingly inexorable downward trends

in that country continue, Britain may well become, before the turn of the century, the newest member of the Third World—in the undistinguished company of Mr. Naipaul's "areas of darkness".

But nobody in his senses would care to assert that it would be a totally unmitigated and Cimmerian darkness which is likely to plague Mr. Naipaul's own world. After all, there is the heritage of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and all the giants of English literature and arts, not to speak of clever and self-righteous sewer-sniffers like Mr. Naipaul himself.

To look down a snooty Anglo-Saxon nose (of Indian origin!) at the non-Anglo-Saxon world, India included, as being totally undeserving of any sympathy or understanding displays a deplorable want of comprehension. It would be discourteous, but not dishonest, to call it stupid.

There are any number of intelligent men and women, in India as elsewhere, who are not in the least enthusiastic about the gloomy political, social, economic, religious and cultural chaos which constitute the less developed countries. It would be invidious for me to comment on modern Indian politics. But unlike Mr. Naipaul, and like my fellow Singaporeans, I do not deny my cultural roots.

Singaporeans are fortunate. We study English, for the good reason that it gives us entry into the world of modern science and technology. It also provides a most welcome window on the undeniably great cultural, literary and artistic heritage of the English-speaking world. Alas, we also witness some unwelcome and unsavoury phenomena through the English window, in the shape of the mindless and debasing punk culture which has emerged in the modern West. We therefore take care to be immunized against the "virus Anglophicus"—if I may be permitted to coin a new name for a familiar infection. It is a virus which makes one singularly unreceptive to the history, values, perceptions and potentials of the great traditional civilisations of the East. Our mother tongues, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are therefore compulsory second languages in our schools.

Singaporeans are neither Anglophiles nor Anglophobes. The statue of Sir Stamford Raffles still stands proudly at Singapore's Empress Place, public witness to our undeniable British heritage. But the Anglo-Saxon strain in our make-up, in my own psychological and cultural make-up, is one which mingles with other strains from Malaysia, India and China. I think we are the richer for this, just as Mr. Naipaul is certainly the poorer for his aversion to the inclusion of non-Anglo-Saxon strains in his own psychological and cultural make-up.

I have already made it clear that I do not pretend to continental dimensions for tiny Singapore. We can boast little history or indigenous culture. But this does not mean that we live in the Stone Age of culture or of technology. Why should we, when we have inherited Western technology and cultures, as well as the traditional values and spiritual riches of China, India and South-East Asia?

We are eclectic. To freely partake of the best that the world has to offer does not lead to nervous breakdowns, but to an energetic new creation. It is clinging to

discredited, disproved and clearly unworkable practices and values which is disastrous. Any tradition immune to the demands of internal and external adjustments to change is destined for stagnation, decadence and death.

The Japanese did not Americanise or Anglicise themselves, lock, stock and barrel in V. S. Naipaul fashion. But they did adjust to the requirements of economic and technological modernisation, while remaining essentially Japanese. Singapore has taken a leaf from the Japanese book. We are preparing for the future *à la* Sri Aurobindo: "The future is full of possibilities for those who know how to prepare themselves for it."

There is no gainsaying the fact that much of the darkness Mr. Naipaul sees in India and elsewhere in the Third World is terribly real. A total defence of modern India, for instance, as being an area of light would be as blatantly dishonest and absurd as a blanket claim that the Western world has not made great and significant contributions to human progress, or to pretend that economic miracles like Japan or tiny Singapore are models for development everywhere else.

But dung-heaps must be recognised for what they are—dung-heaps! It would be hypocrisy to pretend that far too many developing countries do not suffer from pervasive corruption in public life and morals, wastage, gross inequalities, sprawling squalor and dreadful poverty.

Debasement of tastes in literature, art and music are also equally pervasive. The heights of culture, as in India, appear to have been abandoned for the depths by too many Indians. Even the realm of the spirit has not been spared. Ghouls masquerade as gurus, and spirituality itself has become a commercially-packaged export commodity to an expanding global market, servicing the needs of the gullible.

There are moments when one wonders whether the abyss of human depravity has not already been plumbed to the ultimate depths. Surely something must give somewhen, somewhere. And something indeed will give, somewhen and somewhere.

Many Third World intellectuals tend to adopt a defeatist attitude in the face of what appear to be quite insuperable problems. They accept the conclusion of many Western scholars that venality and corruption in public life are part of the natural landscape of oriental societies. This is simply not true. All that we need do is to recollect that Zoroaster, Confucius, Lao Tze, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and Guru Nanak did not have blue eyes. All the great ethical systems of the world, including those which operate in the modern West, had their origins in the Middle East and the Orient. It is not our traditions which failed us. It is we who failed our traditions.

Partial and simplistic explanations abound for the appalling material and moral conditions of so many Third World countries. But, in truth, it is all part of a common global crisis. Arnold Toynbee rightly suspected that it was a civilisational crisis, and not merely a social, political or economic one.

East and West, North and South, are all ensnared. The coruscating lights of modern technology and of electronic gadgetry in Western Europe and North America,

the intellectual swagger and glib cleverness of the most representative modern writers, screen from outward view a deepening internal darkness and despair. These areas of darkness the V. S. Naipauls do not probe, for the good reason that they are themselves denizens of that darkness.

It is easy to denounce material darkness. But the terrors of the darkness of the spirit require greater and more intrepid explorers. We need to have recourse to such explorers, and they are of the East. To be precise, they come from Mr Naipaul's "Area of Darkness". For even the greatest diamonds in this dung-heap, let alone the lesser ones, escape his attention. But of that, later!

(To be continued)

C. V. DEVAN NAIR

THE KISS THAT EVER SATES

It is evoked by an immense need
That has searched
Through lives and found and created and precipitated
Events that had to occur
In a special sequence so as to offer
A crucial choice
Which if correctly made, as urged by the inner guide,
Completes the sacrifice—
The flames rise high and disappear in the beyond,
Rituals continue.

Tender touches and gentle explorations
Open and heighten
Perceptions of unknown realms of self,
Consciousness widens
While the cosmos within awaits
Recognition.

In the pause between two breaths
A total giving
Takes place and everything softens, melting,
Yielding absorption,
A mutual ongoing lustless devouring
Becomes a caress
By million hands of million selves
Gathered
To give and to love and to dissolve.

Time spans
And space fills the width between lip-shores
While the kiss
Continues with star-teeth and thought-tongues
That search
For the Eternal in the finite earthling's breast
Until revealed;

Then infinity blazes and bursts
All bonds
Illuminating every fence of the finite's resources

So the mind
 Can reach beyond its restraining forces
 And transform
 All pains and thrills and aches and fates
 Into the kiss
 That never ends, that ever sates.

DINKAR PALANDE

MAN AND THE DIVINE

THE atoms of the universe
 conceal Thy Face!
 Still Thy Image arises
 in the heart of our race.

The lone mission of my life
 is to worship Thee.
 The action of Thy Force
 is to up-flower me!

The light of my love
 is a spark of Thy Boon;
 The Glory of Thy Being
 overrules sun and moon!

The field of my formation
 is limited and nigh;
 The plane of Thy Creation
 is the infinite sky.

I am weak and ignorant,
 a mortal child of earth.
 Thou art omnipotent beyond
 the bonds of death and birth!

So offering my littleness
 I take refuge in Thy Light.
 Break all limitations
 and liberate me to Thy Height!

O King of kings, Thou art
 my sole destiny and goal.
 Resolving the riddle of existence,
 make me Thy perfect whole.

CHUNILAL CHAUDHURY

THE DUST

In the hushed temple, lined by moonbeams,
White hair haloing his splendid face,
The venerable sage looked with love at the enthusiastic youth
Who swept and scrubbed and scrupulously brushed away particles of dust,
Pieces of fluff and specks of mud brought in by pilgrim feet.
He laboured incessantly from morn to eve
Till every pillar and niche and the image and the altar
Became sun-bright.
His whole soul absorbed in the work, he did not hear
Those august footfalls near
Till a soft voice awakened his mind: "My son, it is time
To leave the temple and lock the doors for the night.
This sacred reverie is a glad witness to your tireless delight
In serving the Lord."
A sudden pride vitiated the youth's heart:
"If I did not clean so often, the Lord's image
Will not look so bright."
With this thought, stepped out after the priest
The self-satisfied eager youth,
Throwing a backward glance at the immaculate temple-hall.
Reading his mind, the omniscient Lord smiled;
In His beloved child, even a tiny trace of ego was not justified.
That night neither a storm nor a quake troubled the temple—
Yet at dawn,
Entering with eager steps and flower-loaded hands
The youth stood aghast at the desecration complete
By a thick layer of dust covering the altar and image.
Anguish clouded his brow and his pain-racked heart cried:
"O Lord! pardon my oversight. I left the windows wide open,
And thus on the wings of wind this impertinent dust
Has wandered in."
Innocent anger agitated him, as he wiped
With caressing feather-touches Lord Shiva's mighty visage.
He muttered: "O dust! How did you dare to enter the holy shrine—
You who belong under the feet, on the ground?"
His labours were startled by the sound of a chuckle.
And he heard a great far-off voice say,
"I wear flowers and ashes with the same delight,
Both being equal in my sight."

SHYAM KUMARI

THE REWARD OF WIT

A STORY FOR CHILDREN

A POOR farmer's wife once ran short of rice. She told her husband: "We are left with less than a measure of rice. Go to the landlord and request him for a big bag of rice. We can give it back as soon as the harvest is done."

"The landlord will certainly help me. Now all that you have to do is to catch a chicken from our yard and roast it," the farmer said and continued, "To avoid coming empty-handed I should avoid going empty-handed."

In an hour or so, the farmer met the landlord who happily accepted the roasted chicken. The farmer then explained the purpose of his visit.

"A bag of rice! Just a bag of rice. You can take even two if you need and return them at your convenience," said the landlord.

The happy farmer thanked him. When he was about to take his leave, the landlord stopped him and said, "Wait a minute... You know that I have a wife, two sons and two daughters. I don't know how we are going to divide the chicken you have given us. My grown-up children will take it as an insult if they do not get the proper share. Suggest to me a way to divide the chicken without offending anyone."

"Oh, that's simple, Sir. I'll do that for you." So saying, the farmer took up a knife and cut off the chicken's head. "This is for you, Sir," he said, "You are the head of the family and so you deserve the head."

Secondly he cut off the tail. Giving it to the landlord's wife, he said, "This goes to you, Madam. Since you stay behind looking after the household."

Next he cut off the legs, "You will have them, boys," he said, "when your father is old enough to retire, is it not your duty to stand like pillars and give your support to maintain the house and land?"

Finally he gave the two wings to the two daughters and said: "These are for you... You'll soon be flying away from your home."

Then he smiled looking at what was left out in his hand: He commented, "Oh, this empty stomach. It goes to me for I am also empty-stomached."

The landlord praised the farmer and gave him two bags of rice and some money to honour his wit.

A jealous neighbour happened to hear of the poor farmer's fortune. "What!" he exclaimed and said in astonishment, "If the landlord is pleased with just one roasted chicken to give the poor fellow two bags of rice, I can't even imagine the reward that awaits me when I go with five roasted chickens!"

A couple of days later he went to meet the landlord.

"Here are five chickens, Sir, deliciously roasted to serve your entire family," said the rich farmer to the landlord.

"How nice it is of you to bring five roasted chickens," complimented the land-

lord. Seconds later he asked bluntly, "What do you expect in return for your five chickens?"

"Whatever I deserve, Sir!" replied the rich farmer in all humility.

"I'll give you what you really deserve.... You know, I have a wife, two sons and two daughters. And we are altogether six in the family. Tell me how am I to divide these five roasted chickens equally without offending anyone in the family?" asked the landlord.

The rich farmer did not expect such a question. Had he known the exact number of people in the landlord's family, he would have roasted six chickens. But now he thought and thought but could not figure out a way. Finally he said, "In another hour I'll bring one more roasted chicken." He was about to leave.

But the landlord prevented him from going. He then sent a servant to fetch the poor farmer.

No sooner did he come than the landlord asked him to divide the five chickens so that no one would be offended.

The poor farmer thought awhile. His wit was at work. He requested the landlord and his wife to stand together. The two daughters were also made to stand together a little distance away from the parents. At an arms's length from the sisters stood the brothers together.

He then took a roasted chicken. Handing it to the landlord and his wife, he said: "That makes three of you."

Giving one to the two daughters he said: "That makes three of you." He gave one to the two sons and said, "And that makes three of you."

Finally he took the remaining two chickens for himself. Holding them in both his hands, he said: "And three of us. Now we are all even." And as an afterthought he pointed his finger to the rich farmer and asked with a mischievous smile, "And what has he to do here when we are going to dine upon the roasted chickens?"

The landlord laughed and laughed. While he made fun of the rich farmer before he drove him out, he gave enough money and two more bags of rice to the poor farmer who was very rich in his wit.

P. RAJA

STORIES FROM TAMIL LITERATURE

(Continued from the issue of January 1985)

7. KANAİKAL IRUMPORAI OF THE RACE OF WARRIORS

FROM very early times the chief evil among the Tamil kings and princes was fighting. They fought to display their valour and heroism. It was glorious to win and, if victory was not in sight, still it was a great honour to die fighting. If occasionally a king was defeated without being killed by the enemy he killed himself before falling into the hands of his conqueror. The warrior clans considered it beneath their dignity to die in any other way than with a battle-wound on the body. They became so much obsessed with the idea that even if anyone died a natural death a deep sword-wound was inflicted on the body before it was disposed of. Even a still born child was slashed with a sword like that. It helped to keep up the honour of the warrior community.

Kanaikal Irumporai, the Chera king, belonged to that proud race of warriors. He fought fierce battles and had many victories to his credit. But at last in a battle with Killi, the Chola king, he was defeated, captured and was thrown in prison.

Irumporai had been severely wounded in battle. A terrible fatigue was coming upon him. His tongue was parched and his lips were cracking. He looked around for water but there was no water in the prison cell. He gritted his teeth and tried to get over his thirst. But in his wounded state the need for a drink was overwhelming. He noticed the prison guards and asked them for a jug of water. The guards were insolent fellows. Their prisoner had been a great king, enjoying all the luxuries of life, ordering people about. Now he was in captivity and they took pleasure in having him under their power. So they threw an ugly word at him and refused to give him water. The king felt terribly humiliated. He seethed with anger, but what could he do, captured and chained within that narrow cell? His anger gave way to remorse. He sat in shame and shed silent tears.

After some time the surly voice of a guard aroused him and he was offered a mug of water. Without knowing what he was doing he stood up and grabbed at the mug. The next moment he remembered the insult and his body shook in shame.

He looked at the mug in his hand with great disgust. It was better to die than drink that water. Vehemently he threw the mug to the floor and sat down burying his face in his hands. After a few minutes he lifted his head. He saw the broken pieces of the mug lying around him. He took a small sharp piece in his hand and pricked one of his fingers with it. With the blood that oozed out he wrote something on the prison wall. It was a poem that described the honourable practice in the family of dying with a battle-wound and his present humiliation. He condemned himself most severely for accepting water from the guards and called himself the most shameless man in the world.

Finishing the poem, King Irumporai squatted on the floor, closed his eyes and drew a deep breath and held it in. He never breathed again. It was a trick the Tamil people knew to end their lives when they felt they were no longer useful.

8. ILAVELIMAN AND THE GREAT POET

VELIMAN was the head of a small principality within the Chola kingdom. He was generous to a fault and gave away the wealth of the palace to all those who sought his help. Veliman had a younger brother called Ilaveliman who was just the opposite of Veliman in everything. He had a stingy heart and did not like his brother's liberality to the poets. He hated the poets from the bottom of his heart and whenever his brother opened the treasury doors for them his heart burnt.

Veliman died suddenly and Ilaveliman became the ruler. The first thing he did was to close the doors of the palace to the poets and minstrels.

Perunchithiran was one of the great Tamil poets of the day. He had been a friend of Veliman's and had enjoyed his hospitality and patronage a number of times. He lived in a far-away place and the news of Veliman's sudden death did not reach him. Great was his sorrow when he visited Veliman's palace and found Ilaveliman there. When he stood before the new ruler, he was met with a cold reception. Ilaveliman knew that the poet had been a good friend of his brother's but that was nothing to him. He eyed the poet with contempt and just waved him to a side-seat. When after some time the poet wanted to leave, Ilaveliman went inside and bade a servant send the poet away with a few gold coins. The servant accordingly took a few gold coins and offered them to the poet in a nonchalant manner. The poet became highly offended at this ill-mannered treatment meted out to him by Ilaveliman. However, he controlled his seething anger and without touching the coins he rose and left the court abruptly.

From there the poet went to Kumanan, another great giver and patron of poets. Kumanan welcomed him with open arms and made him his guest for a number of days. The poet delighted the king with his fine poems. After a few days, the poet thought of leaving and Kumanan showered him with riches and gifts. The bags of gold and the gifts were so many that they had to be loaded upon the backs of two elephants. Elated and proud, the poet rode on one of the elephants, while the other elephant accompanied him.

On the way back lay the little principality of Ilaveliman. Perunchithiran who was still nursing his insult from Ilaveliman wanted to have his revenge.

In those days every king had a sacred tree as one of his insignia. The tree stood on an open field and was guarded by soldiers. If an enemy could get past the guards and cause damage to the tree it was considered a great humiliation to the king. It was actually a way of throwing a challenge to the king and none but enemies who wanted a war did it. So the guards never dreamed of any insult when Perunchithiran, the friend of the former ruler, rode past them towards the tree. In a flash the poet

jumped from his elephant and, before the guards could notice, tethered the elephant to the tree with the bags of gold and gifts still on its back. Then he mounted the other elephant and rode proudly towards the palace and demanded to see Ilaveliman. When a surprised Ilaveliman came out the poet addressed him in bold and clear tones. The words flowed out in the form of a poem which said:

“O king, you were stingy and impudent and failed to honour me properly. Do you think that without the kinds of you we poets would die? There are many worthy patrons in this land who know how to honour a poet. One such king has showered wonderful gifts upon me. He has loaded them on elephants and I have decided to give you one of them with all the gifts and gold on its back. Being niggardly with your wealth I am sure you will be pleased to have them. And I have left the elephant tethered to the trunk of your sacred tree. Go and get it and be stingy no more.”

With these words the poet turned and rode away proudly. Ilaveliman felt the insult and hung his head in shame.

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