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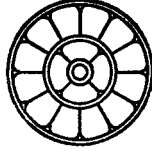
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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CONQUEST OF THE ASURA ON A MAHASAMADHI ANNIVERSARY DAY: DECEMBER 9, 1979

A VISION AS RELATED BY CHAMPAKLAL

ON 9th December, 1979, one of our unique, elevating and auspicious days, I saw the Samadhı courtyard a little bigger than what it is to the physical eye. The Rosary House (the building on the southern side of the Samadhı) was not there. I remember The Mother telling me once, 'We shall build a big Meditation Hall there.' Incidentally, the present main building of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram actually consists of four houses. It is interesting and very symbolic as The Mother has given the significance of number 4 as 'Manifestation'.

People were meditating in the Samadhı courtyard. Our dear little children were also sitting there on one side. I noticed that some children were getting up and moving very quietly to change their places. They walked in such a way as if they were guided by some unseen Force. There was no disturbance at all due to their movements. The atmosphere was extremely peaceful.

A little later I saw that our beloved Service Tree was standing just in front of the western side of the Samadhı. It moved very gradually all round the Samadhı. Its movement was so slow that one could hardly notice that the tree was moving. After making one Pradakshina (Round) of the Samadhı, it went back to its present place on the northern side of the Samadhı. It then started growing higher and higher and its branches began to extend far and very far and wide on all the sides until they covered the whole universe. Yes, the whole universe! I saw it with my own eyes. I could see that the branches had extended but could not perceive how; the movement of extension was not visible. Then the tree was fully studded with huge, luminous, transparent golden Service flowers. I could not see the branches or leaves or trunk but only flowers and flowers. It was a wonderful, magnificent and unimaginable sight which gave me inexpressible joy and Ananda. A little later, the tree gradually assumed its original form and size. This time also its movement of contraction was not at all discernible.

All the people who were meditating were seen sitting upon luminous Service Tree flowers as on a royal golden velvet carpet. But the tree was also full of those magnificent flowers as before; the quantity of flowers had not diminished at all!

Then a unique sight was perceived. I saw fire coming out from each person sitting there. In some cases, it emerged from their foreheads, in some from their hearts, in some others from their navels and so on. Each fire was of a different colour—some were milky white, some snow white, some red, green, yellow, blue, silver, pink, golden, and some of mixed colours and some, in very few cases, even of ash colour. These fires appeared like a Yagnavedi (Sacrificial Fire) in front of each and every one. The flames of these fires were rising up. Some

mounted very high—each one had a different height. This also was a marvelous sight to see.

All of a sudden, I saw in the middle of the Samadhi courtyard, in the air a very tall Asura. His colour was brown but slowly he began to change his colour which became very dark and turned into black like coal-tar. It was shining. His eye-balls were big and round and frightful. His very long nose was pointed and from that front part he was blowing some ash-coloured substance which spread everywhere. He had no ears but two big and deep hollows. His mouth was very big and round and unshapely and something was jutting out of it too. His whole form was hideous, horrid and terrible. He began to dance in a most ugly manner and started flinging his legs up and down with tremendous force in all directions. Gradually he expanded his body and became very fat like a big balloon and of a gigantic stature. He began to laugh in a horrible way, looking on all the sides; his laughter resounded in a terrifying echo. His ferocious eyes turned red like fire-flames. He clasped both his hands and made some vigorous motions in all directions in terrific anger, as if he was throwing something in space. Just then I saw innumerable tiny queer creatures in space, moving about here and there and everywhere. They were very ugly and had no ears, no noses and some of them had no eyes and no hands even. The ones with eyes looked very cruel. They all rushed in a cyclonic motion and turned to the Yagnavedi in front of each person and started destroying the sacrificial fires. Some fires were extinguished while some could not be blown out.

This Asura turned his ferocious gaze all around and looked horrible. At this time, the atmosphere became very gloomy and disturbed. But none of the persons stirred from their places, not even our little children; they all continued their meditation. The Asura was feasting his eyes on the tiny queer creatures and was evidently very happy with their work of destruction. He laughed aloud in a hideous way and rushed towards the Samadhi. Instantaneously, brilliant, snow-white Light descended with great velocity and filled the whole courtyard, with the result that the Asura was stuck then and there and could not even budge from the place where he was standing.

I saw him struggling very hard to move but he could not go to the Samadhi. Perhaps he wanted to destroy it. It appeared like that from his look. As the light descended, the Asura's body became milky white down to his chest. The rest of his body remained brown. The tiny innumerable creatures were no more there—they were all dissolved in the white Light.

When my eyes glanced up, they met with an indescribable and magnificent sight. I saw descending slowly, from high above, a two-in-one majestic, captivating, transparent, luminous and scintillating golden Body radiating brilliant golden Light in all directions. It paused in the air just a little above the ground. Its lustrous eyes shone with a sweet, magnetic and beatific smile. In Its compassionate gaze, It held each and every single person meditating there

and with Its beautiful lotus-like hands in a Mudra-gesture of Blessings showered Grace on all.

Each one was meditating in refulgent golden Light. Now, in front of them, their sacrificial fires were seen as before. They were mounting higher and higher with great intensity; some of them soared very high above. The atmosphere became very calm, peaceful and elevating. It was a marvellous, enchanting and unparalleled sight to see! The Asura was no more there!

HIS DISCOVERIES

HE moved through regions of a deepening calm,
And saw the star-birds flying on wings of fire,
And perceived subtle rhythms in the shadowed ideal;
In the sleep of night a moon-lustrous ignorance
Showed him the dream-possibility of delight.
Even as a song soars to brightnesses of the morn,
He heard strange mystic chants that break from sight.
World after world climbed to the secret sound
And in measures of trance breathed luminosities.
Then all the seas flowed from a single roar
And Infinity inundated Matter's Mind.
A spiritual cry that hoped to reach the Blue
Awoke to need of Truth on Time's terrored ways.
His will was a flame of the All-Puissant
And brought to earth-substance embodied light
And made joy divine and all life a joy.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

5th DECEMBER 1950

LEST WE FORGET

1.26 a.m., DECEMBER 5, 1950 is a crucial moment in the history of earthly evolution. To the attendants who had watched and observed Sri Aurobindo for over a decade, all human history was coming to a cryptic climax.

Since arriving at Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo had undertaken to bring into our world the Divine Power which not only creates but can also transform everything and which he called the Truth-Consciousness, the Supermind or the Supramental. Dilip Kumar Roy had asked him on 4th February 1943:

“Is your real work this invocation of the Supramental?” Sri Aurobindo had answered: “Yes, I have come for that.”¹

Then the question arises: Why did Sri Aurobindo give away the supreme final triumph? When he left his body, the Mother declared: “Our Lord has sacrificed himself totally for us.... He was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality...”²

What was the sacrifice?

The doctors who were his attendants recognised the body which they treated to be a vehicle of supramental light. According to their expectation such a body could live securely till the final result of the supramental manifestation. But this body was allowed to suffer uraemia.

Dr. Nirodbaran relates: “We boldly asked him, ‘Are you not using your force to cure yourself?’ ‘No,’ came the stunning reply. We repeated the question. No mistake! Then we asked, ‘Why not? How is the disease going to be cured otherwise?’ ‘Can’t explain; you won’t understand,’ was the curt reply.”³

Sri Aurobindo left his body due, clinically speaking, to uraemia, though he could heal others within a few seconds. In the days preceding the final plunge the Mother remarked: “Each time I entered his room I saw him pulling down the Supramental Light.”⁴

Dr. Sanyal reports:

“The Mother said: ‘People do not know what a tremendous sacrifice He has made for the world.’

“I entered Sri Aurobindo’s room before dawn on 6th December. Mother and I had a look at Him; how wonderful, how beautiful He looked, with a golden hue. There were no signs of death as science had taught me, no evidence of the slightest discoloration or decomposition. The Mother whispered, ‘As long as the supramental light does not pass away, the body will not show any sign of decomposition, and it may be a day or it may take many more days.’ I whispered to Her, ‘Where is the light you speak of—can I not see it?’ I was then

kneeling by Sri Aurobindo's bed, by the Mother's feet. She smiled at me and with infinite compassion put her hand on my head. There He was—with a luminous mantle of bluish golden hue around Him.”⁵

Arrangements were made for the burial on the 6th evening. But the following message was issued by the Mother: “The funeral of Sri Aurobindo has not taken place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of supramental light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be kept lying on his bed as long as it remains intact.”⁶

Later she announced :

“Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary.

“When I asked him to resuscitate he clearly answered : ‘I have left this body purposely. I will not take it back. I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in the supramental way.’ ”⁷

The query comes to our minds: “What exactly got realised and up to what point had the descending supermind worked in his body?” The answer is to be found in a pronouncement made by the Mother to the Editor of *Mother India*, K. D. Sethna:

“As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he had called the Mind of Light got realised here.*

“The Supermind had descended long ago—very long ago—in the mind and even in the vital: it was working in the physical also indirectly through these intermediaries. The question now was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. The physical mind receiving the supramental light, Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light.”⁸

Now we have to understand the connotation of the terms “Physical Mind” and “Mind of Light” in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. We have to dip into the two philosophical works, *The Life Divine* and *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. They will provide us with clues enabling us to link his revelations about the Mind of Light with the Mother's pronouncement.

What the physical mind is may be gathered from the chapter “Mind and Supermind” in *The Life Divine*. There Sri Aurobindo writes: “To us Mind seems to be determined by the body, because it is preoccupied with that and devoted to the physical workings which it used for its conscious superficial action in this gross material world. Employing constantly that operation of the brain

* Editor's Note: The word “here” was used because the Mother never liked personal references. Its proper meaning is “in me”.

and nerves which it has developed in the course of its own development in the body, it is too absorbed in observing what this physical machinery gives to it to get back from it to its own pure workings; those are to it mostly subconscious... This corporeal mentality is merely our surface of mind, merely the front which it presents to physical experience. Behind, even in our terrestrial being, there is this other, subconscious or subliminal to us, which knows itself as more than the body and is capable of a less materialised action."⁹

Sethna in his essay "The Descent of the Supermind and the Mind of Light" writes after a wide analysis of mental phenomena as surveyed by Sri Aurobindo: "The waking human mental in its totality, the whole of embodied Mind whether in its strictly physical or in its subtler and higher yet generally brain-dependent or at least brain-influenced workings is... what Sri Aurobindo terms surface mind or physical mind."¹⁰

In the book, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, we have the series of articles Sri Aurobindo contributed to the *Bulletin* during the year 1949-50 on the Mind of Light. He tells us that man's mind can be converted into the Mind of Light. Then it can be utilised for the supramentalisation of bodily vitality and bodily matter.

Take the following passage from the book: "In place of the human mind as it now is, a mind limited, imperfect, open at every moment to all kinds of deviation from the truth or missing of the truth, all kinds of error and openness even to the persuasions of a complete falsehood and perversion of the nature, a mind blinded and pulled down towards inconscience and ignorance, hardly arriving at knowledge, an intellect prone to interpret the higher knowledge in abstractions and indirect figures, seizing and holding even the messages of the higher intuition with an uncertain and disputed grasp, there could emerge a true mind liberated and capable of the free and utmost perfection of itself and its instruments, a life governed by the free and illumined mind, a body responsive to the light and able to carry out all that the free mind and will could demand of it."¹¹

As Sri Aurobindo puts it. "There would be a new mental being, a liberated mind... aware of its affiliation to supermind, a natural agent of supermind and capable of bringing down the supramental influence into the lower reaches of being... aspiring to release the secret divinity into self-finding, self-fulfilment, and self-poise aspiring towards the ascension to the divine consciousness, able to receive and bear the descent of the divine light and power, fitting itself to be a vessel of the divine life."¹²

The Mind of Light realised on 5th December is a help towards a progressive unfolding of total supramental action. Thus Sri Aurobindo's sacrifice is a stupendous gift to humanity.

A poem entitled "Mind of Light" was composed by Sethna on 4.4.1954, and shown to the Mother. The first two lines of it ran:

“The core of a deathless sun is now the brain,
And each grey cell bursts to omniscient gold.”

Sethna has recounted: “When the Mother read this poem she was extremely struck with the two opening lines. She remarked that they were sheer revelation, expressing exactly what had happened when the Mind of Light had been realised.”¹³

NILIMA DAS

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THE MOTHER'S COMMENTARIES ON SRI AUROBINDO'S *THOUGHTS AND GLIMPSES*

COMPILED FROM HER TALKS TO THE ASHRAM
CHILDREN, 1956-1957, IN A NEW TRANSLATION BY SHRADDHAVAN

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1987)

• Chapter 16: THE CHAIN, Part Four

The restlessness and early exhaustion of our active being and its instruments are Nature's sign that calm is our true foundation and excitement a disease of the soul; the sterility and monotony of mere calm is her hint that play of the activities on that firm foundation is what she requires of us. God plays for ever and is not troubled.

The limitations of the body are a mould: soul and mind have to pour themselves into them, break them and constantly remould them in wider limits till the formula of agreement is found between this finite and their own infinity.

*

Sweet Mother, how should we understand 'the limitations of the body are a mould'?

IF you didn't have a body with a precise form, unless you were a fully-formed individuality, entirely conscious and with its own qualities, you would all be merged into each other and it would be very difficult to tell you apart.

Even if we go only a little way within, into the most material vital, there is such a mixture between the vibrations of different people that it is very difficult to distinguish one from another. And if you had no bodies, it would be a sort of... an inextricable pulp. So it is this form, this apparently precise and rigid form of the body which distinguishes you from one another. So this form is used as a mould.

Do you know what a mould is? We pour something into it in a liquid or semi-liquid state and when that gets cold we can break the mould and get an object with a precise shape. Well, this form of the body serves as a mould so that the vital and mental forces take on a precise shape in it, so that you become an individuality that is distinct from others.

It is only little by little, very gradually, through the movements of your life and an education that is more or less conscious and methodical, that you begin to have feelings that are your own, emotions that are your own, and

ideas that are your own. An individualised mind is something extremely rare, and appears only after a long education. Otherwise only a kind of thought-current passes through the brain and then through someone else's brain and through a multitude of brains and it is all in perpetual movement... there is no individuality. You think what other people think, other people think what yet others think, and everyone thinks like that in a hotch-potch, because it is only thought-currents, thought-vibrations passing from one to another.

If you observe yourself closely, you will very soon notice that there are very few thoughts within you that are your own. Where do you get them from? From what you have heard, from what you have read, from what you have been taught. And how many of them are the outcome of your own experience, your own reflection, your purely personal observation? Not many. Only people who have an intense intellectual life, who are in the habit of reflecting, observing, of bringing ideas together, gradually develop some mental individuality.

Most people—and not only uncultured people, even well-read people—are able to hold the most contradictory ideas, the most opposite ideas in their heads, without even noticing any contradiction. I have seen many examples like that, of people who cherished ideas and even held opinions about politics, society, religion, about all the so-called higher domains of the human intellect, but who had absolutely opposite ideas about the same topic and didn't even notice it. And if you observe yourself, you will see that you have lots of ideas which would need to be linked by a sequence of intermediary ideas resulting from a considerable widening of your thought, but which are quite absurd when they lie side by side.

So before an individual being becomes truly individualised and has its own qualities, it has to be contained in a vessel; otherwise it would spread like water and no longer have any form at all.

Some people, at a rather low level of development, know themselves only by the name they bear. They can only distinguish themselves from their fellows by name. You ask them, "Who are you?" "My name is such and such." A little later, people will tell you the name of their occupation or of their main quality. If you ask them, "Who are you?"—"I am a painter." But at a certain level the only reply is a name.

And what is a name? It's only a word, isn't it? And what is behind it? Nothing. A lot of undefined things which don't at all represent a person who is distinct from his fellows. He is only distinct in that he has a different name. If we all had the same name, we would find it very difficult to tell one another apart!

People live by a sort of habit that is hardly even semi-conscious. They live, they don't even objectify what they do, why they do it, how they do it. They do it just out of habit. Everyone who is born in a particular environment, a particular country, automatically picks up the habits of that environment; not

only the physical habits, but also the habits of thought, of feeling, and behaviour. They do it without noticing themselves doing it, quite naturally. And if you point it out to them, they are surprised. In fact we are in the habit of sleeping, of talking, of eating, of moving around; and we do it as something completely natural, without being surprised at the why or how of it. And many other things too. All the time, we are doing things automatically, out of habit, and we don't notice ourselves doing them. So when you live in a particular society, you automatically do what people in that society usually do. And if anyone starts to observe what he is doing, watches himself thinking and feeling, he seems like some kind of freak compared with the society he lives in.

So individuality is not at all the rule: it is an exception. And if you didn't have this kind of bag with its special shape that is your outer body and appearance, it would be almost impossible to tell you all apart.

Individuality is a conquest. And, as Sri Aurobindo says here, this first conquest is only the first stage; once you have achieved something like a being that is independent and personally conscious, then what you have to do next is to break the form and go further. For example, if you want to progress mentally, you have to break all your mental moulds, all your mental constructions, in order to be able to make new ones.

So, first of all, a tremendous labour is required to become an individual; and afterwards you have to demolish all you have done in order to be able to progress further. But as you don't notice what you are doing, and because it is the custom (of course not everywhere, but here) to work, to read, to develop oneself, to try to do something, in fact to build oneself up a little, you do it quite naturally, and even, as I said, without noticing that you are doing it.

It is only when these outer forms come into friction with each other that you begin to feel that you are different from other people. Otherwise you are this one or that one, depending on what your name is. It is only when there is some friction, when something goes wrong, that you notice that there is any difference; then you see that you are different from each other; otherwise you don't notice it, and you aren't. In fact, there are very, very few differences between you.

How many things in your lives are done, essentially, in just the same way as other people! For example, sleeping, moving, eating, and all sorts of things like that. You have never ever wondered why you do it that way and not otherwise. You couldn't say. If I asked you, "Why do you do it like that and not like this?" you wouldn't be able to tell me. But it is very simply because you were born into certain conditions and because it is the habit, in those conditions, to be like that. Otherwise, if you had been born in a different time and under other conditions, you would behave completely differently without even noticing the difference—it would seem perfectly natural to you.

For example, a very, very small example: in most Western countries, and

even in some Eastern countries, people sew like this, from right to left. In Japan, people sew like this, from left to right. Well, to you it seems quite natural to sew from right to left, doesn't it? You were taught like that and so you don't think about it, you sew like that. You arrive in Japan, and people see you sewing and it makes them laugh, because they are in the habit of sewing differently. It is the same thing with writing: you write like this from left to right; but there are people who write from top to bottom, others write from right to left and they do it quite naturally. I don't mean people who have studied, thought about it, compared different ways of writing, I don't mean more or less learned people; no, I mean quite ordinary people, and especially children who do as the people around them do, quite spontaneously and without questioning it. But then, when through some chance of circumstances they come across some other way, it is a tremendous revelation to them that a thing can be done differently from the way they do it.

And these are rather simple things, I mean striking ones; but this extends to the smallest details. You behave in this way because the place and the society you live in do it like that. And you don't notice yourself doing it.

After all, the origin was One... and the creation was to be many; that must have been quite a considerable task: to make this multiplicity conscious of being multiple. And if we look very closely, it may be that if the creation had kept the remembrance of its origin, it might never have become a diverse multiplicity. At the heart of each being there would have been a sense of the perfect oneness, and the diversity would—maybe—never have got expressed.

With the loss of that remembrance of unity, there came the possibility of becoming aware of difference. And when one goes into the Inconscient, the opposite pole, one falls back again into a kind of oneness that is unconscious of itself, in which difference is as unexpressed as in the origin.

At both poles there is the same absence of difference. In the first case it is a supreme consciousness of Oneness; in the other, a perfect unconsciousness of oneness.

Fixity of form is the method by which individuality can be developed.

20.2.1957

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 26 DECEMBER 1956

Mother, how to change one's consciousness?

NATURALLY, there are many ways, but each person must do it by the means accessible to him; and the indication of the way usually comes spontaneously, through something like an unexpected experience. And for each one, it appears a little differently.

For instance, one may have the perception of the ordinary consciousness which is extended on the surface, horizontally, and works on a plane which is simultaneously the surface of things and has a contact with the superficial outer side of things, people, circumstances; and then, suddenly, for some reason or other—as I say for each one it is different—there is a shifting upwards, and instead of seeing things horizontally, of being at the same level as they are, you suddenly dominate them and see them from above, in their totality, instead of seeing a small number of things immediately next to yourself; it is as though something were drawing you above and making you see as from a mountain-top or an aeroplane. And instead of seeing each detail and seeing it on its own level, you see the whole as one unity, and from far above.

There are many ways of having this experience, but it usually comes to you as if by chance, one fine day.

Or else, one may have an experience which is almost its very opposite but which comes to the same thing. Suddenly one plunges into a depth, one moves away from the thing one perceived, it seems distant, superficial, unimportant; one enters an inner silence or an inner calm or an inward vision of things, a profound feeling, a more intimate perception of circumstances and things, in which all values change. And one becomes aware of a sort of unity, a deep identity which is one in spite of the diverse appearances.

Or else, suddenly also, the sense of limitation disappears and one enters the perception of a kind of indefinite duration beginningless and endless, of something which has always been and always will be.

These experiences come to you suddenly in a flash, for a second, a moment in your life, you don't know why or how.... There are other ways, other experiences—they are innumerable, they vary according to people; but with this, with one minute, one second of such an existence, one catches the tail of the thing. So one must remember that, try to relive it, go to the depths of the experience, recall it, aspire, concentrate. This is the starting point, the end of the guiding thread, the clue. For all those who are destined to find their inner being, the truth of their being, there is always at least one moment in life when they were no longer the same, perhaps just like a lightning-flash—but that is enough.

It indicates the road one should take, it is the door that opens on this path. And so you must pass through the door, and with perseverance and an unflinching steadiness seek to renew the state which will lead you to something more real and more total.

Many ways have always been given, but a way you have been taught, a way you have read about in books or heard from a teacher, does not have the effective value of a spontaneous experience which has come without any apparent reason, and which is simply the blossoming of the soul's awakening, one second of contact with your psychic being which shows you the best way for you, the one most within your reach, which you will then have to follow with perseverance to reach the goal—one second which shows you how to start, the beginning.... Some have this in dreams at night; some have it at any odd time: something one sees which awakens in one this new consciousness, something one hears, a beautiful landscape, beautiful music, or else simply a few words one reads, or else the intensity of concentration in some effort—anything at all, there are a thousand reasons and thousands of ways of having it. But, I repeat, all those who are destined to realise have had this at least once in their life. It may be very fleeting, it may have come when they were very young, but always at least once in one's life one has the experience of what true consciousness is. Well, that is the best indication of the path to be followed.

One may seek within oneself, one may remember, may observe; one must notice what is going on, one must pay attention, that's all. Sometimes, when one sees a generous act, hears of something exceptional, when one witnesses heroism or generosity or greatness of soul, meets someone who shows a special talent or acts in an exceptional and beautiful way, there is a kind of enthusiasm or admiration or gratitude which suddenly awakens in the being and opens the door to a state, a new state of consciousness, a light, a warmth, a joy one did not know before. That too is a way of catching the guiding thread. There are a thousand ways, one has only to be awake and to watch.

First of all, you must feel the necessity for this change of consciousness, accept the idea that it is this, the path which must lead to the goal; and once you admit the principle, you must be watchful. And you will find, you do find it. And once you have found it, you must start walking without any hesitation.

Indeed, the starting-point is to observe oneself, not to live in a perpetual nonchalance, a perpetual apathy; one must be attentive.

Is that all?

(Silence)

Here is a question I have been asked—it seems many people are asking themselves the same thing! I am going to read to you what is written, then I shall speak to you afterwards. It looks so convincing, this question!

“How should we understand ‘not to have preferences’? Shouldn’t we prefer order to disorder, cleanliness to dirt, etc.? Not to have preferences—does it mean treating everybody in the same way?”

Now, here is my answer: this is playing on words! What you call preference, I call choice. You must be in a perpetual state of choice; at every minute of your life you must make a choice between what drags you down and what draws you up, between what makes you progress and what makes you go backwards; but I do not call this having preferences, I call this making a choice—making a choice, choosing. At every minute one has to choose, this is indispensable, and infinitely more so than choosing once for all between cleanliness and dirt, whether moral or physical. The choice: at every second the choice is before you, and you may take a step downward or a step upward, take a step backward or a step forward; and this state of choice must be constant, perpetual, you must never fall asleep. But this is not what I call having preferences. Preferences—this means precisely not choosing. There is something for which you feel sympathy or antipathy, repulsion or attraction, and blindly, without any reason, you become attached to this thing; or else, when you have a problem to solve, you prefer the solution of this problem or this difficulty to be of one particular kind or another. But that is not at all choosing—don’t you see, what the truest thing is doesn’t come into question, it is a matter of having a preference. For me the meaning of the word is very clear: a preference is something blind, an impulse, an attachment, an unconscious movement which is usually terribly obstinate.

You are placed in certain circumstances; one thing or another may happen, and you yourself have an aspiration, you ask to be guided, but within you there is something which prefers the answer to be of a certain kind, the indication to be a particular one, or the event to come about in one way rather than another; but all this is not a question of choice, it is a preference. And when the answer to your aspiration or prayer is not in accord with your desire, this preference makes you feel unhappy, you find it difficult to accept the answer, you must fight to accept it; whereas if you had no preferences, whatever the answer to your aspiration, when it comes, you cling to it joyfully, spontaneously with a sincere *élan*. Otherwise you are compelled to make an effort to accept what comes, the decision which comes in answer to your aspiration; you wish, desire, prefer things to be like this and not like that. But that, indeed, is not a choice. The choice is there at every minute; every minute you are faced with a choice: the choice to climb up or go down, the choice to progress or go backwards. But this choice does not imply that you prefer things to be like this or like that; it is a fact of every moment, an *attitude* you take.

Choice means a decision and an action. Preference is a desire.

A choice is made and *ought* to be made, and if it is truly a choice, it is made

without care for the consequences, without expecting any result. You choose; you choose according to your inner truth, your highest consciousness; whatever happens does not touch you, you have made your choice, the true choice, and what comes about is not your concern. While, on the contrary, if you have preferences, you will choose through preference in one way or another, your preference will distort your choice: it will be calculation, bargaining, you will act with the idea that a particular thing must happen because this is what you prefer and not because that is the truth, the right thing to do. Preference is attached to the result, acts with a view to the result, wishes things to be in a particular way and acts to bring about its wish; and so this opens the door to all kinds of things. Choice is independent of the result. And certainly, at every minute you can choose, you are faced with the necessity of choosing at every second. And you do not choose really well, in all sincerity, unless it is the truth of the choice which interests you, and not the result of your choice. If you choose with the result in view, that falsifies your choice.

So I say it is playing on words, it is mixing up two different things; and so you ask questions which seem insoluble, for it is a mixture. There is a confusion in the question.

As for treating everybody in the same way, it is a worse confusion still! It is the kind of confusion one makes when one says that the Divine must treat everybody in the same way. So it would not be worth the trouble to have diversity in the world, not worth the trouble of not having two identical individuals; for this contradicts the very principle of diversity.

You may—or you ought to if you can't—aspire to have the same deep attitude of understanding, unity, love, perfect compassion for all that is in the universe; but this very attitude will be applied to each case in a different way, according to the truth of that case and its necessity. What could be called the motive or rather the origin of the action is the same, but the action may even be totally and diametrically opposite in accordance with the case and the deeper truth of each case. But for that, precisely, one must have the highest attitude, the most profound, the most essentially true, that which is free from all outer contingencies. Then one can see at every minute not only the essential truth but also the truth of the action; and in each case it is different. And yet, what we may call “feeling”—though this is an inadequate word—or the state of consciousness in which one acts, is essentially the same.

But this cannot be understood unless one enters the essential depth of things and sees them from the highest summits. And then it is like a centre of light and consciousness high enough or deep enough to be able to see all things at the same time, not only in their essence but in their manifestation; and although the centre of consciousness is one, the action will be as diverse as the manifestation is diverse: it is the realisation of the divine Truth in its manifestation. Otherwise it would be doing away with all the diversity of the world and bringing

it back to the essential unmanifest Oneness, for it is only in the non-manifestation that the One is manifested as the One. But as soon as one enters the manifestation, the One manifests as the multiplicity, and multiplicity implies a multitude of actions and ways.

So, to sum up: the choice must be made without care for the consequences, and the action must be performed in accordance with the truth of the multiplicity in the manifestation.

There we are.

(Question and Answers, 1956, pp. 402-08)

MIND IN TURMOIL

THE gate of my heart—the passage to my Soul—
 Was bolted tight to exclude in disgust the gushing,
 Floundering and thundering onslaughts
 Of the scriptures and putrid preachings of pseudo-seers.
 Pity, it also pushed out the beauties
 Of nature offered unsolicited;—
 Songs heard faded into unheard oblivion.
 An acute sense of destruction boiled up inside me.
 Had I the power I would have eradicated the entire creation—
 The jeering mockery of it pointing at me all the time.
 In desperation I rushed to the marble-clad bed of yours,
 Knelt and touched my fevered brow
 On the stone cooled by your divine closeness—
 The soothing source of solace to many stricken souls.
 I crouched unordained. The prodigal mind repulsed
 All the pressures of prodding and persuasion.
 I wanted to leave, I wanted to flee—the vitals froze
 Into a lifeless snow-doll; melted ice chilled in the veins.
 Then a voice arose—faint to louder—revived the vitals.
 Lost to the world I plunged into the hum of hope.
 Distinct and clear in soothing sweetness it resounded
 “Patience: thou shalt have it”—and I had it.

DEBANSHU

VIGNETTES OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1987)

SRI AUROBINDO'S AND THE MOTHER'S PASSING

Three Experiences

X had never had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. For years he had been aspiring to come to Pondicherry but could not succeed. On the night of 5th December 1950 he had a strange vision.

He saw a vast ocean—the Inconscient. Sri Aurobindo emerged out of that immensity in a form of light. X was overwhelmed by this Divine Darshan.

In the morning papers he read of the passing of Sri Aurobindo.

*

X was a young B.A. student. On 6th December 1950 suddenly all classes were cancelled. Instead a condolence meeting was arranged where speakers offered their homage to Sri Aurobindo who had left his body in the early hours of the previous day.

Coming out of the hall X saw a flowering hedge on which flitted many tiny white butterflies, glowing with an unearthly light. He felt there was a new light in the sunlight that morning.

He could not make head or tail of the strange phenomenon. Years passed but that scene remained vivid and alive in his memory. Much later when he came to the Ashram he could understand its significance, for the Mother had declared to Amal Kiran: "The moment Sri Aurobindo left his body the Mind of Light was realised here."

*

During the later part of 1973 Amal Kiran, who was then in Bombay, was meeting the Mother very often at night in his dream-experiences. On the night of 17th November in a vivid dream-vision the Mother gave him a heap of red roses, asking him to put them on his head. It left a deep imprint on Amal's consciousness. He understood the Mother to have symbolically asked him to surrender his mind to the Divine.

In the morning he had a phone call from his flat in Pondicherry informing him of the Mother's passing. He has kept that last message vividly in his memory as a guide to the future.

Compiled by S

MRINALINI DEVI

A TALK

THE title of my talk today may have sprung upon you a pleasant surprise. You may have heard her name as if in a dream and forgotten it as something of no consequence. A few eminent people have even asked me, 'Is there anything really to say about her?' It is always the man who counts with us and the woman who helps the man from behind passes into oblivion. Moreover, the spell of Sri Aurobindo's supramental consciousness under which we had been living led us to forget that before he became the superman he had come on earth a human being like us and had a wife whose name was Mrinalini. We have been dealing with his vast multifaceted personality since 1950. Let us to-day unearth this buried part of his life, his human side which people so dearly seek for and has a strong appeal to them.

By a strange luminous chance, in this year falls Mrinalini's birth centenary and a few papers and a booklet on Mrinalini's life came into my hands. Poring over them I was stirred to my depths and struck as by a veritable spiritual treasure waiting to be discovered. At the same time I could not but be moved profoundly by its sublime pathos. To Sarada Mata she was a heavenly being. To talk of her is to be inspired with noble feelings of love and self-giving and to be lifted into a higher consciousness permeated with beauty, purity and love. Mrinalini who was born a hundred years ago and brought up in the natural surroundings of Shillong, exquisitely matched to her name, was married to a Virat Purusha ("world-wide being") whose name had the same meaning as hers: "the lotus."

Belonging to a respectable Hindu family, she was 14 years younger than Sri Aurobindo. Her father, one of the early batches of England-returned Bengalis, held a high Government post in the Shillong Agricultural Department. He was a very fine gentleman. He once met Sri Aurobindo's father. Mrinalini was the eldest of his children. She was of a fair complexion, a rosy hue seemed to be reflected from it. Her graceful face was framed by a rich crop of dark curls. The palms of her hands and the soles of her feet had a ruddy tint like those of new-born children as if she had smeared *āltā*. In her early days her friends used to tell her that her hands were stuffed with cotton. Feeling hurt at such odd remarks, she would complain to her uncle, "Do buy me a good pair of hands." So simple she was. Sri Aurobindo's hands too were soft and warm like the downy feathers of birds. She was sent to a Calcutta Brahma Girls' School for studies and there contracted a life-long friendship with one Sudhira Bose whose brother belonged to Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary party and later joined the Ramakrishna Mission as a sannyasi. Girish Chandra Bose, a very intimate friend of Mrinalini's father, almost like an elder brother, used to look

after Mrinalini in Calcutta. He was the Principal of a famous college there. It was he who arranged the marriage of Mrinalini with Sri Aurobindo. The marriage took place in a most unorthodox manner.

Sri Aurobindo, as you know, had returned to India and taken up a job in Baroda. When, after about seven years of service, he had become the Vice Principal of the college in that city, he decided to marry. He was then 29 years of age. He had put an advertisement in a Calcutta paper that he would marry a girl of a Hindu family according to Hindu rites. He had already become a name in Calcutta.

Sri Aurobindo's insistence on marrying a Hindu girl according to Hindu rites is worth noting. I believe that Bankim's novels which he had read soon after returning from England gave him an insight into the character of Hindu women in Bengal. For, till then he had had no opportunity to come into close contact with them. A fervent admirer of Bankim, he wrote in his essays on Bankim one year after his arrival in India: "The social reformer, gazing, of course, through that admirable pair of spectacles given to him by the Calcutta University, can find nothing excellent in Hindu life, except its cheapness, or in Hindu woman, except her subserviency. Beyond this he sees only its narrowness and her ignorance. But Bankim had the eye of a poet and saw much deeper than this. He saw what was beautiful and sweet and gracious in Hindu life, and what was lovely and noble in Hindu woman, her deep heart of emotion, her steadfastness, tenderness and loveliness, in fact, in her woman's soul; and all this we find burning in his pages and made diviner by the touch of a poet and an artist."

The advertisement caught the attention of Girish Bose. He found that the conditions stipulated would suit Mrinalini admirably. He at once negotiated the marriage. Sri Aurobindo came to see the prospective bride and at one single glance made his choice, though there were a number of high-born maidens on the waiting list eager for the coveted prize. The marriage ceremony took place according to Hindu rites and was attended by eminent persons like J.C. Bose, Lord Sinha, etc. but none from Sri Aurobindo's paternal or maternal side. His maternal relations were of Brahma society.

Mrinalini, at fourteen, was married like Sati to Shiva, but had no idea about it. Her entire married life of 18 years was practically passed alone. Her husband was plunged in political work, later in deep meditation on the Supreme in the far South while the wife exiled from him in the North-East lived meditating on him, her single thought dwelling upon her Shiva who had made her his companion, but who could not give her company nor any safe refuge of her own. Her husband had heard the call of the Supermind and was to bring it down on earth, while she for 8 long years passed her days of lonely sorrow in the hope that one day she would be called to his side.

At last that day arrived and Shiva sent her the call saying, "My tapasya is

fulfilled, I have attained Siddhi.¹ Come, be a help in my vast work.” Then in great joy and hope she prepared to meet her Lord. But destiny willed otherwise. At that very time, her life’s thread was snapped.

This in short is the tragic saga of Mrinalini’s life. Let us go back and trace the chequered course of her earthly existence. Mark that Sri Aurobindo was very particular to marry a Hindu girl in the Hindu way quite contrary to what his father had done. Sri Aurobindo after his return from England studied the Hindu religion and culture and must have found profound truths which must have influenced him in his choice. Besides, in Bengal the reformist Brahma Samaj was at that time much in fashion and educated people were attracted by the modes and manners of that society. Sri Aurobindo, I am afraid, did not have much sympathy with it though his own maternal grandfather was a leading Brahma, as well as a great nationalist. He was known as Rishi Raj Narayan Bose. Sri Aurobindo has written a fine sonnet on him in English.

After the marriage Sri Aurobindo left for his maternal uncle’s place at Deoghar with his wife and then for Baroda via Nainital, taking his sister Sarojini with them. The Maharaja of Baroda was vacationing at Nainital, during that time. Mrinalini lived for a full first year with Sri Aurobindo. After that reports vary. Whatever the truth, I believe this period was the spring-time of her married life and filled with a happiness which would be denied to her for the rest of her days. She must have now come to know that Sri Aurobindo was not at all like any other person she had known. He on his side had ample opportunity to minister to the needs of her soul and turn her young mind to the high ideals cherished by him. At least he must have sown the seeds which would sprout and bear rich fruit in the future.

After a year Mrinalini had to go back to her father’s home and could not return soon to Baroda, however much she wanted. Occasionally she revisited it. Now she was living either with her parents at Shillong or in Deoghar, the home of Sri Aurobindo’s maternal uncle. Sri Aurobindo wished very much that she should live amicably with his relatives. He had begun to visit Calcutta for his secret political work but meeting with Mrinalini was not always possible either because she was away in Shillong or because he was too busy. Besides, he had no permanent home of his own at Calcutta. Calcutta was also passing through a violent political ferment. From Baroda he used to write letters to Mrinalini. Three of them have been luckily preserved. In the famous letter written in 1905 where he speaks of his three madnnesses, he tells of his inner change and, defining Mrinalini’s role as a true Hindu wife, he writes,

“You have by now found out that the man with whom your fate is linked is of a strange character... in every respect different from the present day people and out of the ordinary.

¹ The word “Siddhi” (“Goal”) has to be understood in a special sense here. It will be elucidated at the end of our narrative.

“The founders of the Hindu religion... loved extraordinary characters, extraordinary endeavours, extraordinary ambitions. Madman or genius, they respected the extraordinary man. But all this means a terrible plight for the wife, and how could the difficulty be solved? The sages fixed upon this solution; they told the woman—‘Know that the only mantra for womankind is this: the husband is the supreme guru, the wife shares the dharma (law of conduct) of her husband. She must help him, counsel him, encourage him in whatever work he accepts as his dharma. She should regard him as her god, take joy in his joy, and feel sorrow in his unhappiness. It is for the man to choose his work; the woman’s part is to give help and encouragement.

“Now the question is: are you going to follow the way of the Hindu religion or the way of the new-fangled Reformist religion? You are a daughter of a Hindu family... I have no doubt that you will follow the former way.

“You may say that you are an ordinary girl, you have no strength of mind, no intelligence; you fear even to think of them. Well, there is an easy way; take refuge in God, enter into the path of God, He will fill up all your wants. Or if you have faith in me, I shall impart my strength to you which, instead of reducing my strength, will increase it.

“The wife is the Shakti, the strength of her husband. This means that the husband’s strength is redoubled when he sees his own image in his wife and hears an echo in her of his own high aspiration...”

This was the ideal Sri Aurobindo set before Mrinalini, a girl of eighteen years at that time. Today this ideal has undergone a tremendous change, has turned a somersault, so to say. Woman demands equality with man. This is the Yuga-dharma. Of course, Sri Aurobindo does not mean that any and every husband has to be accepted as a god. He has also spoken of woman being subjected to the yoke of man’s tyranny. We shall see that he has even asked his wife’s forgiveness for failing in duty to fulfil her rightful demands. In the last letter dated 1906, Sri Aurobindo wrote that he was about to leave Baroda for ever, but he did not know where he would put up. He had given up meat and fish for good, had to devote much time to yogic practice. So he needed a place of his own. Mrinalini was then in Shillong; he would try to visit her. But once in Calcutta a huge heap of work fell upon his hands and people flocked in numbers to see him.

If Mrinalini was hoping that since Sri Aurobindo would be living in Calcutta she would have his company, it was a vain hope. In fact, her father wrote that he knew next to nothing about the married life of Mrinalini in Baroda. After Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal and during the stormy years that followed, Mrinalini had little or no opportunity of living a housewife’s life in the quiet company of her husband. Her life during this period was one of continuous strain and suffering. She spent the greater part of her time either with Sri Aurobindo’s maternal relatives at Deoghar or with her parents at Shillong.

She was present with her husband at the time of his arrest in May in 1908 and received a frightful mental shock of which a most painful evidence was seen in the delirium of her last illness ten years later. I do not know how far Mrinalini assisted Sri Aurobindo in his political work, but this much is true that she never stood in his way. Sri Aurobindo had a quiet sincere love for her and she had towards her husband an unquestioning obedience. The wife was undoubtedly an unhappy person. As rightly said by Tolstoy, "It is not so easy to be married to an exceptional genius. It is like living by the bank of a great river, it can overflow the bank."

However, there were a few short interludes of sweetness like oases in a desert. We shall speak about them later on.

At last Sri Aurobindo came away to Calcutta in 1906, as the Principal of the National College on a salary of Rs. 150, leaving his job of the Vice-Principal with a handsome pay of Rs. 600 per month. He had rented a house and, though Mrinalini was living with him, Sri Aurobindo became so preoccupied with various activities that he could hardly spare much time to give her company. He wrote in 1907 to her at Deoghar, "Here I do not have a moment to spare. I am in charge of writing for 'Bande Mataram', I am in charge of the Congress work", etc., etc. Then again: "This is a time of great anxiety for me. If at this time you get restless, it can only increase my worry and anxiety. But if you write encouraging and comforting letters, that will give me great strength. As you have married me, this kind of sorrow (separation) is inevitable for you. Occasional separations cannot be avoided; for unlike the ordinary Bengali, I cannot make the happiness of the family and relatives my primary aim in life." Then in 1907 came his arrest and release. Mrinalini was at that time in Shillong living with her parents. In 1908, he writes from Calcutta:

"I have not written to you for a long time. This is my eternal failing. If you do not pardon me out of your goodness, what shall I do?"

"From now on I no longer am the master of my will. Like a puppet I must go wherever God takes me. It will be difficult for you to grasp the meaning of these words just now. But it is necessary to keep you informed, otherwise my movements may cause you sorrow and regret... Already I have done you many wrongs and it is but natural that this should have displeased you."

This sufficiently confirms what Bhupalbabu has said about Mrinalini's life. Of course everything was not so bleak and dismal. There were some bright spots. For instance, when Sri Aurobindo had once returned to Calcutta from political tours in the mofossils with a virulent attack of malaria he stayed with Bhupalbabu and was nursed by Mrinalini. Here is what her cousin says about it:

"Nursing and service of the sick was Mrinalini's forte. She poured all her heart into it and those who were blessed with her ministrations could never forget the care and solicitude she had bestowed upon them.

"I remember how Mrinalini served him during his illness—sitting by his

bed-side, she would fan him, gently massage his head and feet. She would herself prepare his diet. At other times, when he was absorbed in writing, Mrinalini would wait till he had finished his work. She would attend to his ablutions, serve his meals or tea at the appointed time. Her father would procure cauliflowers and other vegetables of Sri Aurobindo's preference, from special markets and her mother herself would cook dishes for him. Sri Aurobindo would relish every bit of the various dishes. It pleased Bhupalbabu immensely to see him enjoying the meal to the last morsel and remark that it was a matter of great joy to feed such people."

Poor Sri Aurobindo! During his long stay in Baroda he was utterly deprived of good cooking. He once remarked that his Mahratta servant knew only how to cook meat. In England, of course, cooking could not have been better either. Only when he visited Bengal he had the chance of enjoying good cooking, especially at Bhupalbabu's residence. There was another entertaining feature which was a completely new experience to Sri Aurobindo. During meal-time, he used to be surrounded by Mrinalini's relatives from the oldest to the youngest as was the custom in Bengal. While the old ladies would pester him with their entreaties to partake of a big measure of their rich preparations, the young girls would tease him with gibes, taunts and pleasantries in their colloquial tongue—it was their special privilege. Sri Aurobindo enjoyed these sweet banterings but could not, alas, make any retort since he was not familiar with the language. Mrinalini and others would come to his rescue. He used to regret his inability to understand his mother-tongue fully.

There was another humorous episode narrated by Sri Aurobindo's friend Charu Datta which brings out a typical aspect of Sri Aurobindo's nature. He writes, "When in 1907 Sri Aurobindo was arrested and released, Bhupalbabu came down to Calcutta from Shillong with Mrinalini to meet Sri Aurobindo. He had hired a house. One evening he came to our house in Wellington Square. Sri Aurobindo had not yet returned from the college. He told us, 'I have come to invite Arabinda to have dinner with us. My daughter has come to meet him. He will spend the night with us and return in the morning. Do send him, please.' At 5 Arabinda returned, he understood at once that some mischief was a-foot. All of us in a chorus started talking. Arabinda smiling said, 'Why not speak one at a time?' I replied, 'Look, such a gala day comes once in a while. Arabinda is going to meet his wife tonight.' He, seemingly grave, replied, 'Go on!' 'Bhupalbabu came here to invite you to his place and pass the night over there.' Arabinda added, 'Yes, what next?' Now it was my wife's turn, 'Please be ready in time, we have sorted out new clothes for you to wear. And we have made two garlands, one is yours, the other for Mrinalini-di.' Sri Aurobindo quietly heard and entered the bathroom to dress himself. He was looking fine, a shy smile lining his face. My wife came forward, gave the garlands and said, 'This one is for you and the other for Mrinalini-di, don't forget.' 'Yes, yes, I'll

do exactly as you say.' 'But don't return before morning,' we shouted. The servant was asked to lock the gate.

"Next morning, a servant came up and said, 'Sir, Mr. Ghosh wants to know when you will come down for tea.' 'What? He has returned so early?' 'Sir, he returned at night.' We went down and found him smiling to himself, sitting in a chair. We began to shower him with questions. After a while he answered quietly 'Now listen. I had my sumptuous dinner and did exactly your bidding!' 'But why have you come away?' His reply, 'I've explained to her everything. With her permission I have come away.'"

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

PHYSICS/METAPHYSICS

O LIGHT! Thou tortoise, slug, thou inching snail:
 Thy speed's a ponderous adagio;
 Thy creeping through the stars, thy labored trail
 Among the planets... How to tell so slow
 A progress? Think to thine embarrassment
 Upon a Present's tick between a Past
 That's gone and a Future unarrived: it's spent
 All indivisibly; we stand aghast
 At a false invented non-existent Now,
 A Hereness dead before its birth. Where live
 We then if every tense would disallow
 Itself? We aged souls no substantive
 Can cozen praise eternity's sublime
 Invention: Time delivers us from time.

WILLIAM JONES

“THE ARYAN QUESTION” AGAIN

1

LATELY there has been a marked shift of opinion on the role of the Rigvedic Aryans in the destruction of the Indus Valley Civilisation, known also as the Harappa Culture. On a TV programme from London, two eminent historians, Colin Renfrew and F. R. Allchin, dissociated themselves from the view which mainly Sir Mortimer Wheeler¹ had popularised, invoking the name of the Rigvedic Aryans' god-leader, often called *purañdara*, “fort-destroyer”: “On circumstantial evidence Indra stands accused.” Thus they have come over to the side of G. F. Dales² who, as far back as 1964, examined critically whatever evidence from excavations Wheeler had adduced. Finding it most indecisive, Dales depended on the alternative theory of floods, etc. and concluded: “The enemy of the Harappans was Nature... Indra and the barbarian hordes are exonerated.” K.M. Srivastava³ is the latest and most vociferous of the exonerators.

However, none of the defenders of Indra has taken the radical stand that the Rigvedic Aryans could not have destroyed the Harappa Culture because they did not invade India anywhere near the time when this culture can be shown to have ended. A still more radical position would be that there was no invasion at all at any historically postulable time. A negative argument in favour of it is the uncertainty of fixing the epoch of the alleged invasion. Wheeler⁴ has noted: “the middle of the [second] millennium B.C. has been suggested, without serious support...” In view of an earlier dating than 1500 B.C. for the end of the Indus civilisation, proposed on the basis of new C-14 tests, Wheeler⁵ opts for a provisional bracket 2500-1700 B.C. or slightly earlier for this civilisation in the Punjab and Sind and feels no hesitation in supposing⁶ “that the Harappans of the Indus valley in their decadence, in or about the seventeenth century B.C., fell before the advancing Aryans...” H. Possehl,⁷ following such tests, asserts that whereas the terminal date of the Indus Civilisation, at least of the Urban Phase during which the cities were fully occupied, cannot be projected beyond 1800 B.C. it is widely agreed that the Vedic literature from which the hypothesis of the Aryan destruction of these cities is drawn was compiled sometime between 1200 and 800 B.C. An invasion in the chronological gap of between 600 and 1000 years seems hardly reasonable to him. This implies that it could not have been much earlier than 1200 B.C. Long ago Dales, in his article, “The Decline of the Harappans”,⁸ had declared: “No one has any exact knowledge of the date when the Aryans first entered the Indus valley area.”

A very odd situation facing those who are so positive about the invasion! What makes it worse is the honest admission even by Wheeler⁹ that the association sought to be made of various materials unearthed in the Gangetic basin or northern Baluchistan or elsewhere “with early bearers of the Aryan tongue

is without warrant". Archaeologically we draw an absolute blank and Dales's words after those we have quoted above still hold true—that the supposed Aryan invaders "have not yet been identified archaeologically." When on top of the complete chronological haze and this negative result, we get a "No" to the query whether any reliable documentary evidence exists of Aryan foreigners hailing from outside India, we start wondering why historians who claim to be scientific-minded persist in raising "the Aryan Question" in any sense.

The obsession, however, dies hard and in this very year—1987—we have one more attempt to raise it. In Lecture III of the series "Religion and Society" delivered at Calcutta University by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya¹⁰ a spirited front is put up against the plea of Dales and Srivastava to exonerate Indra. Chattopadhyaya begins with a glance at Wheeler's old pointer to the skeletons found in a confused unburied state in what he considered the top layer of Mohenjo-daro. Chattopadhyaya takes note of Dales's demonstration that not the slightest sign can be traced of a "massacre" by conquerors as the cause of this scatter of skeletons. Chattopadhyaya also notes: "As P.V. Kane and others have shown, the presence of the scattered skeletons at Mohenjo-daro can be explained by other hypotheses." We may add B.B. Lal's opinion¹¹ that the skeletons are not proved to belong to the top layer or even to one and the same layer: so it is arbitrary to posit a final *coup de grâce* to an already degenerating city. Besides, the paper by the physical anthropologist K.A.R. Kennedy, "Trauma and Disease in the Ancient Harappans", as summed up by Lal¹² in the 1986 publication *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, informs us that as a result of his examination of these skeletons in detail he has come to the conclusion that the persons concerned died owing to some water-borne diseases and malaria rather than at the hands of an enemy. So the massacre-theory, the only one even distantly likely to suggest a possible Aryan invasion, fizzles out. Does anything remain?

Chattopadhyaya mentions the views of archaeologists that floods arising from climatic and tectonic or what Wheeler terms geomorphological changes were an important cause of the decline of the Indus Civilisation. He agrees, but later cites D.D. Kosambi in an attempt to prove from the Rigveda that the Aryans demolished dams to inundate Harappan cities. This whole attempt is fanciful, as can be demonstrated by a straight look at the doings of the Rigvedic demon Vritra. Chattopadhyaya¹³ writes: "'Vritra' literally means the Obstructor, and is also described as *ahi*, literally 'serpent'." Then some Vedic texts are quoted telling what Indra did with Vritra: *e.g.*, "He smote Vritra who encompassed the waters (vi. 20.2)"—"He slew the dragon hidden in the waters and obstructing the waters and the sky (ii.11.5)"—"When he laid open the great mountain, he let loose the torrents and slew the Danava, he set free the pent-up springs, the udder of the mountain (v. 32.1-2)"—"He releases the streams which are imprisoned cows (i.61.10), or which, like lowing cows, flow to the ocean (i.32.2)"

—“He won the cows and Soma and made the seven rivers flow (i.32.12; ii.12.12)”. It should be clear that Indra is winning for his worshippers some boon for their own lives, some boon of light and happiness obstructed by the demonic Vritra. Here even the “sky” is involved and a “mountain” comes into the picture and the released waters go towards some “ocean”. How can such verses be twisted *à la* Kosambi to signify that the invading Aryans broke up dams which had been made by the pre-Aryan Harappan Civilisation for its agricultural needs and that they thus ruined the agriculture of the region and the possibility of continuing city life for long, or of maintaining the urban population? Vritra the demon is the enemy, not any Indus Civilisation, and the freeing of the waters is for the Aryans’ own benefit, whatever that may be—physical or spiritual—and bespeaks no ulterior motive of harming anybody.

If the benefit is physical, the best explanation is to postulate a nature-myth as in the days of Max Müller: we have to see here a poetic representation of the rain-god letting pent-up waters loose from imprisoning clouds. A spiritual outlook would send us to Sri Aurobindo’s *Secret of the Veda*. By no means can we be justified in making much of a few descriptions¹⁴ like RV. 4.19.4-8; 2.15.3, in which, as Kosambi points out, the so-called demon Vritra “lay like a dark snake across the slopes. The rivers were brought to a standstill (*tasta-bhānāh*); when the demon was struck by Indra’s shattering weapon (*vajra*) the ground buckled, the stones rolled away like chariot wheels, the pent-up waters flowed over the demon’s recumbent body”. Even such verses are quite consonant with a symbolic reading such as various other verses suggest. Chattopadhyaya, in backing Kosambi’s hypothesis, thinks that it joins up with the “flood theory” which is receiving increasing emphasis among a section of archaeologists, but he quite forgets that this theory ascribes the floods to natural causes and that floods occurred several times antedating the supposed Aryan advent. Apropos of Mohenjo-daro he¹⁵ himself writes: “At least one of the factors that contributed to the decline of this city was repeated flooding of it... It is true that the Harappans could and did rebuild or repair the city repeatedly after the devastating floods; but that must have sapped much of their energy and vitality, and hence also caused deviation from their main preoccupations.” The “flood-theory” has scarcely any room for the shattering of dams by invading barbarians. In fact it is one of the reasons why the Aryan-invasion theory as a reason for the end of the Indus Civilisation is sought to be given up.

Here a word of warning is necessary to counteract Chattopadhyaya’s making capital out of the actual presence of “prehistoric dams, now called *Gebr-bands*”, which, he¹⁶ claims, “are still to be found on many water-courses in the western parts of the region under consideration”. And he criticises Stuart Piggott for wrong thinking about what were broken up by Indra. He insists that these were “dams (not embankments as Piggott would have it)” and then he points at “*Gebr-bands*”. When we turn to Piggott for further information we are surprised by

our discovery. He¹⁷ writes in relation to the problems of climate and population in prehistoric times:

“In his explorations in Baluchistan these problems... were, of course, much before Sir Aurel Stein’s eyes, and he was able to identify a large series of artificial stone-built dams and terraces, known locally as *gabarbands*, clearly designed to aid the irrigation of fields... Even though the age and culture of these works are still unknown, their presence is important in indicating greater rainfall in antiquity, and it is by no means improbable that they do, in fact, date back to the prehistoric occupation of the Baluchi Hills.”

Plainly, Chattopadhyaya’s “western parts of the region under consideration” are not the Indus Valley with which we are concerned but the Baluchi Hills. In fact, Piggott¹⁸ is at some pains to differentiate conditions in the latter area from those in Sind. In Sind the irrigation works were connected with the river Indus whose flow would be increased in spring by “the melting of the winter snows in the Himalayas, where the river rises”. Piggott goes on to say: “This would have caused an annual inundation in primitive conditions... And ...it is important to remember that there are only two really fixed points in the course of the river in Sind—at Sukkur and at Kotri—where it cuts through hard limestone instead of soft soils. Between these points, where the channel cannot vary its position, the Indus would under natural conditions, without man-made embankments, tend to alter its course yearly, after every successive inundation. There is indeed abundant evidence from the sites of the Harappa Culture that such alterations of course, with consequent disastrous floods, was not uncommon in ancient times.” From all this we can infer that there were no *Gebr-bands* or man-made dams in the Sind of Mohenjo-daro for Indra to break.

The idea of a dam becomes relevant to Sind in one sole context which can have nothing to do with the Kosambi-Chattopadhyaya conjectures. Drillings during the winter of 1964-1965 carried out jointly at Mohenjo-daro by the University of Pennsylvania and the Pakistan Government Department of Archaeology penetrated through the ground water which, standing 15 feet below the surface of the plain, had prevented earlier workers from determining the total depth of the site’s human occupation. Silt deposits, such as had been found even as high as 30 feet above ground level, were discovered to exist repeatedly below the plain’s surface. Altogether they spanned a vertical distance of 70 feet, lying sandwiched between the city’s successive occupations. Here lies hidden a long-term story of destruction by water again and again, which covered a period of several centuries far earlier than any epoch of Aryan invasion conceivable in the second millennium B.C. And this story can be connected with a dam-phenomenon quite unrelated either to the constructive skill of the Mohenjodarians or to the destructive ill-will of any invaders.

Dales has dwelt on this phenomenon in his “Decline of the Harappans”. The multilevel accumulations of silt in the Mohenjo-daro area as well as at

smaller neighbouring sites provoked the query: “Could major changes caused in the structure of all these places by deformation have blocked the Indus River from time to time and gradually formed a huge upstream lake submerging the human settlements?” In 1940 the Indian palaeontologist M. R. Sahni, noticing silt deposits perched many feet above the level of the Indus plain near the city of Hyderabad in Sind, had suggested an affirmative answer. In 1960 the field-workers sent by Pennsylvania University, examining Harappan settlements along Pakistan’s Arabian Sea coast, could not help concluding that the coast-line had risen considerably in the past 4000 years and the initial rise appeared to have occurred during the period of the Indus Valley Civilisation itself. In 1960 the American hydrologist Robert L. Raikes was also conducting extensive surveys in Southern Baluchistan and the lower Indus Valley. His keen antiquarian interests led him to join forces with the Mohenjo-daro expedition. And his preliminary research compelled him to revive Sahni’s dam-and-lake theory. Guided by it, he was able to single out an area near Sehwan, about 90 miles downstream from Mohenjo-daro, as the most likely seat of tectonic disturbances affecting the city.

Here the large-scale rock-faulting, accompanied by massive extrusions of mud that were aided by the pressure of accumulated underground gases, could easily have raised a natural barrier turning the upstream portion of the Indus into a slow-filling reservoir. With the spread of the rising waters small towns and villages would be submerged, the silt completely obliterating them. An empire’s capital like Mohenjo-daro would undertake substantial community projects to protect itself. We actually see massive mud-brick platforms raised and faced with fire-brick to keep the level of the city above the damaging inundation. When the waters dammed up on the Indus managed to spill over and cut away the barrier, normal life was resumed with the erection of new buildings on top of the older foundations and walls. Five times the lake seems to have intruded and withdrawn, lasting on each occasion for a number of decades, even up to 100 years. No invading Aryans can be conjured up for the natural breaking of a dam which had itself been built by natural forces and not by the Mohenjo-darians.

2

No doubt, Chattopadhyaya is not bound down to his vision of *Gebr-bands*, important though it is for his general position. He has more than one string to his bow. If this vision is shown to be insufficient and needing to be replaced by Piggott’s view of the Indus’s altered course and by Dales’s Sahni-Raikes picture of the Sehwan area, he will not feel frustrated. There is another line of defence which we have to breach.

He is in sympathy with the notion that *pur* and *pura* in the *Rgveda* connoted *nagara*, “city”, “town”. He¹⁹ argues: “...the *Rgveda* speaks of a considerable

number of cities in the Land of the Seven Seas and of the ransacking of these by Aryans under the leadership of the war-god Indra. The whole thing cannot be brushed aside as a mere figment of imagination of the Vedic poets for the simple reason that those who have never seen any city cannot refer to these: the Vedic peoples themselves could by no stretch of imagination be city-dwellers, it being overwhelmingly obvious from the internal evidence of the *Rgveda* that they were pastoral nomads after all. Therefore, before the discovery of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa—soon followed by the discovery of many other cities within the Harappan cultural zone—there could at best be some speculations about these *pur*-s or cities and of Indra's role as *purandara* or the sacker of cities in the *Rgveda*—speculations, some specimens of which are to be found in the *Vedic Index* by Macdonell and Keith. With the discovery of ruined cities in the Harappa cultural zone by the archaeologists the Vedic scholars are relieved of the obligation of indulging in such speculations..." Chattopadhyaya is positive in denying to the Rigvedic Aryans any puras of their own. But R.P. Chanda who was the first in 1926 to hold Indra responsible for the destruction of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa and who, according to Chattopadhyaya, first brought up the subject of puras and whom Chattopadhyaya²⁰ quotes at some length says: "In the *Rgveda*, Pura is much oftener connected with the enemies of the Aryas than with the Arya *Ṛsis* and warriors." Mark the comparative "oftener". So, if *pur* meant city or town, the Vedic peoples have to be thought of as living in at least some cities or towns of their own and not being absolutely pastoral and nomadic. Surely, here is an anomaly—and a gigantic one too. For, as Chanda writes: "In one stanza (7.15.4), an extensive (*śatabhuji*) Pur made of copper or iron (*ayas*) is referred to. In another stanza (1.58.8) prayer is offered to Agni to protect the worshipper with Purs of *ayas*." The Rigvedics must have been dwellers in mighty cities—essentially just like the Harappans! However, all discrepancies and historical vagaries would be avoided if the *pur* were no actual city like Mohenjo-daro or Harappa but a symbolic picture of inner experience—a stronghold of the soul in which spiritual light was defended or a stronghold of demon-forces of the in-world in which preternatural darkness was established.

The basic trouble with Chattopadhyaya and his ilk is that they are abysmally ignorant of Sri Aurobindo, who long ago saw that to take the Rigveda in a naturalistic or historical sense is to court disaster: on the one hand we shall commit howlers about the historical past and on the other reduce this scripture to a jumble, a tale of exaggerative episodes and a string of impossible imagery. Unless an esoteric key is laid hold of, it is of no use to us.

In addition to the fiasco about Vritra and the puras, we have an inconclusive discussion of the strange character named Pani by the Rigvedics. Chattopadhyaya²¹ makes a long quotation from Chanda, evidently with approval:

"It appears to me that the aboriginal town-folk with whom the Aryas came

into collision in the Indus Valley were called Panis in hymns of all the books of the *Rgveda*. Yaska (*Nirukta* 6.27) in his comment on *Rgveda* 8.66.10 says, ‘The Panis are merchants’, and in his comment on R.V. 10.108.1 (*Nirukta* 11.25) he calls the Panis demons. The distinction between the human and the super-human Panı is also recognised by Sayana, the author of the commentary on the *Rgveda*, and the context justifies the distinction. The word Pani is evidently derived from *Pana*, ‘Price’. As trade finds no place in the list of professions and crafts practised by the Rigvedics, the conclusion that the much maligned Panis were the representatives of an earlier commercial civilisation seems irresistible”. Chanda continues: “Among the antiquities unearthed at Mohenjodaro are coins with pictographic legends that indicate the very early development of commercial life in the Indus Valley. The Panis probably represented this prehistoric civilization of the Indus Valley in its last phase when it came into contact with the invading Arya civilisation.”

Now let us see some of the things Sri Aurobindo²² says: “It is either an uncritical or a disingenuous method to take isolated passages and give them a particular sense which will do well enough there only while ignoring the numerous other passages in which that sense is patently inapplicable. We must take as a whole all the references in the Veda to the Panis, their wealth, their characteristics, the victory of the Gods, the seers and the Aryans over them and adopt uniformly that conclusion which arises from all the passages thus taken together. When we follow this method we find that in many of these passages the idea of the Panis as human beings is absolutely impossible and that they are powers either of physical or of spiritual darkness; in others that they cannot at all be powers of physical darkness, but may well be either human enemies of the god-seekers and sacrificers or else enemies of the spiritual Light; in yet others that they cannot be either human enemies or enemies of the physical Light, but are certainly the enemies of the spiritual Light, the Truth and the Thought. From these data there can be only one conclusion, that they are always and only enemies of the spiritual Light.”

The Panis, says Sri Aurobindo²³, are constantly spoken of as Dasyus and Dasas, and he adds: “We may take as the master-clue to the general character of these Dasyus the Rik V.14.4. ‘Agni born shone out slaying the Dasyus, the darkness by the Light: he found the Cows, the Waters, Swar’, *agnir jāto aro-cata, ghnan dasyūn jyotiṣā tamaḥ avindad gā āpaḥ svaḥ*. There are two great divisions of the Dasyus, the Panis who intercept both the cows and the waters but are especially associated with the refusal of the cows, the Vritras who intercept the waters and the light, but are especially associated with the withholding of the waters; all Dasyus without exception stand in the way of the ascent to Swar, and oppose the acquisition of the wealth by the Aryan seers. The refusal of the light is their opposition to the vision, of Swar, *svardrś*, and the vision of the sun, to the supreme vision of knowledge

upamā ketuh (V. 34.9); the refusal of the waters is their opposition to the abundant movement of Swar, *svarvatīr apah*, the movement or streamings of the Truth, *ṛtasya presā, ṛtasya dhārāh*; the opposition to the wealth-acquisition is their refusal of the abundant substance of Swar, *vasu, dhana, vāja, hiranya*, that great wealth which is found in the sun and in the waters, *apsu sūrye mahad dhanam* (VIII.68.9). Still since the whole struggle is between the Light and the Darkness, the Truth and the Falsehood, the divine Maya and the undivine, all the Dasyus alike are here identified with the Darkness; and it is by the birth and shining of Agni that the Light is created with which he slays the Dasyus and the Darkness. The historical interpretation will not do at all here, though the naturalistic may pass if we isolate the passage and suppose the lighting of the sacrificial fire to be the cause of the daily sunrise; but we have to judge from a comparative study of the Veda and not on the strength of isolated passages."

Another eye-opener in this context is ŚRĪ Aurobindo's statement²⁴: "It is not with physical weapons but with words that Indra fights the Panis (VI. 39.2), *pañin vacobhir abhi yodhad indrah*". Also in connection with another enemy of the Aryans, Vala who is the "coverer" as Vritra is the "obstructor", Indra uses no weapon. His martial achievement is related to the term *brahman* in the neuter gender, which, according to Macdonell²⁵, signifies in the Rigveda nothing more than "prayer" or "devotion". Sri Aurobindo²⁶ explains the term more elaborately along the same lines: "*Brahman* in the Veda signifies ordinarily the Vedic Word or Mantra in its profoundest aspect as the expression of the intuition arising out of the depth of the soul or being." Thus the Rigveda II.24.3 in its closing portion tells us of divine action: "... the firm places were cast down, the fortified places were made weak; up Brihaspati drove the cows, by the hymn (*brahmana*) he broke Vala, he concealed the darkness, he made Swar visible."²⁷ Here the story is linked with Indra no less than Brihaspati, for the Rishi addresses them jointly. And we may observe that "fortified places" which are the puras that Indra is elsewhere said to destroy are on the scene here. Even when Indra's thunderbolt (*vajra*) comes in (I.33.10) and his "bow" is mentioned in the same hymn, we soon learn both the nature of the power his weapons really deploy and the way in which he works through his devotees: "O Indra, by the speakers of the word (*brahmabhih*) thou didst cast down the Dasyu, attacking those who can think not (the Truth) by those who think (*amanyamānān abhi manyamānaih*)."²⁸ As I say on pp. 115-16 of my book *The Problem of Aryan Origins*:²⁹ "To ascribe to the Rigvedic Indra and to his fellow-deities or even to his thinker-protégés physical means of slaughter at any place is to strain the text impermissibly. Whatever weapons are named are symbolic and whatever material-looking objects they demolish are equally symbolisations. From this we see not only the lack of relation between the Indra-led Aryans and the fall that Wheeler and company attribute to them of the Harappan cities

but also the inappropriateness of attributing to them at any time an actual invasion, attack and conquest.”

3

So far as “the Aryan Question” is concerned, Chattopadhyaya’s lecture is altogether on the wrong tack and his invocation of “authorities” like Chanda and Kosambi does not bring him the slightest help. Srivastava is far from the Aurobindonian vision but his summing up in the matter of the Rigvedics and the Indus Civilisation is not in the least, as Chattopadhyaya³⁰ puts it, “just Aryan chauvinism.” It is the plain truth. Where Srivastava also errs, like Chattopadhyaya, is in thinking that an Aryan invasion of India did take place at some time in the second half of the second millennium B.C. Every piece of evidence militates against the belief—whether in connection with the end of the Indus civilisation or in any other context—that the Rigvedics came from abroad as invaders of India or even that they were physically on the war-path against human Dasas and Dasyus.

The last point has some importance. What led Wheeler to assume the guilt of Indra was not merely the scatter of unburied skeletons at Mohenjo-daro. He³¹ marshalled an impressive argument when he wrote: “If we reject the identification of the fortified citadels of the Harappans with those which the Vedic Aryans destroyed, we have to assume that, in the short interval which can, at the most, have intervened between the end of the Indus civilization and the first Aryan invasions, an unidentified but formidable civilization arose in the same region and presented an extensive fortified front to the invaders.” Wheeler, never doubting the “invasions”, naturally preferred to accept the identification. Those who seek to exonerate Indra and yet credit the theory that foreign Aryans came to India in the second millennium B.C. and fought human Dasas and Dasyus should be hard put to it to answer Wheeler. For, indeed, no extensive formidable civilisation came up in the wake of the Harappa Culture. Indra-exonerators can face Wheeler’s poser only by retorting that even if Aryan foreigners invaded the subcontinent the Rigveda’s account of destroying puras never referred in the physical sense to “fortified citadels” such as the Harappans owned: in other words, they have either to go back to the view Macdonell and Keith took of the puras as primitive stockades poetically converted into mighty forts or else subscribe to Sri Aurobindo’s symbolic vision and spiritual interpretation of the whole record of war and conquest in the Rigveda.

Extra inducements to this vision are three facts. One we have already touched upon—namely, that the Rigvedics ascribe mighty forts not only to their enemies but also now and then to themselves and thus spoil the picture of pastoral nomads pitted against great city-builders. The second fact is that the puras they speak of go far beyond anything we can find of human city-building at the

time, whether Harappan or any other. They³² do not stop even with calling the puras *prithivī* (“broad”) and *urvī* (“wide”); they proceed to designate them *aśmayī* (“made of stone”). *āyasī* (commonly rendered “made of iron”) or *śatabhujī* (“with a hundred walls”) and, as such, variously number them ninety, ninety-nine and a hundred. Can any fortified civilisation known to our historians match these puras in magnitude, strength and multiplicity?

The third fact is a complex one with several strands. Dales has touched on some of them. He³³ writes: “A series of carbon-14 dates from Harappan sites along the coast of India...shows that many of these southernly towns and trading posts had continued to be occupied much later than sites in the Indus valley. This and other bits of unexplained evidence have raised doubts concerning a fundamental hypothesis about the Harappan civilization: that Harappa and Mohenjo-daro had been sacked, and the Harappan civilization liquidated or absorbed, by the Aryan invaders...” Dales himself has not gone into the details of what he mentions as “other bits of unexplained evidence”. Only to one bit he refers when he³⁴ remarks: “The northern Indus cities show no evidence of a decline in material prosperity before the abandonment but quite the opposite is true of Mohenjo-daro and other southern sites. What does this contrast signify?” The contrast pulls us entirely away from the universe of discourse relevant to the invasion theory, just as much as it disposes of the suspicion that the decline, by about 1750 B.C. or so, was inherent in the character of the civilisation developed. Aryan invaders, believed to be pressing into the country from the north-west, would, affect the northern sites foremost. Both the morale and the material state of these sites should manifest a decline.

Nor can we plead that they were suddenly attacked and therefore abruptly left by their inhabitants. For, there is the further bit of “unexplained evidence” confronting the exponents of Indra’s city-sacking: not the northern sites but the southern Mohenjo-daro shows signs of a possible violent end. The northern capital, Harappa, is indeed occupied after its desertion but with quite a time-lag: the desertion and occupation have no conceivable link, as Lal and others have amply proved. And here comes in still another bit: unlike Harappa, Mohenjo-daro has no settlement at all on its ruins, none even of a late order as at Harappa—an absolute paradox if its violent termination was caused by Aryan invaders.

If neither of the capital cities can be connected in the least with them, we should be wary of pointing to them from whatever indications of foreign entry we may feel at smaller places like Chanhu-daro. Chanhu-daro itself, we may observe, is a southern site and, before we yield it up to the Aryan-invasion hypothesis, we must take stock of the South’s general contrast to the undisturbed northern towns. Besides, Chanhu-daro gives, as Dales³⁵ notes, “abundant evidence of flooding.”

Everything urges us to separate the end of the Indus Civilisation from any

warfare by the Rigvedic Aryans and to accept Sri Aurobindo's explanation of India's oldest scripture. In the light of this explanation all features of the situation fall into their proper places and we have the temptation neither to accuse nor to exonerate Indra. For we cut ourselves off from the structure of the invasion-hypothesis at any conceivable time—a hypothesis vainly trying to survive against the overwhelming lack of both aspects of scientific historical testimony: the archaeological and the documentary.

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35. *Ibid*, p. 95.

WORDSWORTH THE *KAVI* AND HIS RELEVANCE TODAY

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1987)

THE question naturally arises as to what the process was by which Wordsworth came to experience his mystic insights. The indications of the process which we discover from his poetry are exactly analogous to those described by our ancient *rishis*. According to the Hindu philosophers, there is a sixth sense, a master-sense, the *manas*,²⁴ which generally uses the sense-organs for gaining experiences, yet is capable of going beyond them for a direct perception when the sense-organs are silenced. This intuitive grasp of knowledge is the result of identification with the object of perception. The consciousness is said to possess a dual power: the power of apprehension (*prajnana*) and the power of comprehension (*vijnana*).²⁵ Prajnana sets the object of apprehension away, separate from itself, grasping only the surface reality because the mind is capable only of this. Vijnana, on the other hand, embraces the object within itself, penetrating to its very essence by wholly identifying itself with it, thus becoming it, living it, loving it. That is why the mystic's knowledge is part of his very being, not a knowledge abstract and remote, but living, intimate and concrete, pulsating with a "bliss ineffable":

high the transport, great the joy I felt,
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
With every form of creature, as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love.²⁶

These are the moments when the *kavi*'s soul visits

moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless Bliss...

and meets the ecstasy of the Godhead's touch
In golden privacies of immortal fire.²⁷

It is a state which the Gita describes as "That in which the soul knows its own true and exceeding bliss, which is perceived by the intelligence (i.e. not the intellect but the *manas*) and is beyond the sense, wherein established, it can no longer fall away from the spiritual truth of its being" (VI.21).

If we go through Wordsworth's "There was a Boy" and De Quincey's description of the Dunmail Raise episode²⁸, the process by which Wordsworth came to have these experiences becomes clear. De Quincey tells us that on Dunmail Raise, Wordsworth frequently put his ear to the ground to catch the rum-

bling of wheels far off. Once, as he was rising from the ground, he suddenly saw a bright star, and for several moments stood looking at it intently, and then observed: "I have remarked, from my earliest days, that if under any circumstances the attention, which is energetically braced up to an act of steady observation, should suddenly relax, at that moment any beautiful, any impressive visual object, or collection of objects, falling upon the eye, is carried to the heart with a power not known under other circumstances...the bright star...fell suddenly upon my eye and penetrated my capacity of apprehension with a pathos and a sense of the infinite, that would not have arrested me under other circumstances." Similarly, the boy, mimicking the hoots of owls, waits anxiously for the riotous response:

Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

What is happening here is, that at first the *manas* makes contact, as usual, through the external senses and then takes over for a direct comprehension of the inner truth of things by using the inner senses (*sukshma-ındriya*). Such direct cognisance is usually impossible when the external senses are functioning and has to be brought about by "throwing the waking mind into a state of sleep which liberates the true or subliminal mind."²⁹ In the instances described above, the sudden shock of surprise induces a certain break in the normal functioning of Wordsworth's external senses:

the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world.³⁰

At such moments all creation seems to be singing its adoration of the Divine:

One song they sang, and it was audible,
Most audible then when the fleshly ear
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed.³¹

And thus he perceives that invisible mystic reality which

lost beyond the reach of thought
 And human knowledge, to the human eye
 Invisible, yet liveth to the heart.³²

The intellect itself is stilled at such moments:

in such high hour
 Of visitation from the Living God,
 Thought was not.³³

The most detailed description of such experiences is given in "Tintern Abbey":

that blessed mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,—
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.

The validity of such a *samadhi* state can be easily tested by comparing Wordsworth's account of his experiences with what Hindu philosophy has to say about such a phenomenon. Sankaracharya, commenting on the *Gita*, VI, 20, says: "When the confusing play of ideas and emotions has come to rest, and he thus through himself (without the senses) through the purified 'inner organ' (*the manas*) apprehends the Highest, which is wholly spirit, essentially light, then he wins through to joy."³⁴ The *Gita* itself is even clearer in VIII. 12-13: "All the doors of the senses closed, the mind shut in into the heart, the life-force taken up out of its diffused movement into the head, the intelligence concentrated in the utterance of the sacred syllable OM and its conceptive thought in the remembrance of the supreme Godhead, he who goes forth, abandoning the body, he attains to the highest status."

Wordsworth's experiences become yet more convincing and more intelligible when we see what India's greatest seer-poet writes in his epic *Savitri*. Like Wordsworth, Sri Aurobindo too asserts that this apparently "unintelligible world" does have a definite meaning and a clearly defined purpose,

But all is screened, subliminal, mystical;
 It needs the intuitive heart, the inward turn,
 It needs the power of a spiritual gaze.
 Else to our waking mind's small moment look
 A goalless voyage seems our dubious course...³⁵

And he tells us, like Wordsworth, how this "spiritual gaze" works, and what it sees, in almost identical terms:

In the dead wall closing us from wider self,
Into a secrecy of apparent sleep,
 The mystic tract beyond our waking thoughts,
 A door parted, built in by Matter's force,
Releasing things unseized by earthly sense
 A world unseen, unknown by outward mind
 Appeared in the silent spaces of the soul.³⁶ (italics mine)

And

in some deep internal solitude
 Witnessed by a *strange immaterial sense,*
 The signals of eternity appear.
 The truth mind could not know unveils its face,
 We hear what mortal ears have never heard,
 We feel what earthly sense has never felt,
 We love what common hearts repel and dread;
 Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient;
 A Voice calls from the chambers of the Soul.³⁷

Again, like Wordsworth, Sri Aurobindo states that such truths, are visible only when the intellect has stopped functioning:

A soul not wrapped into its cloak of mind
 Could glimpse the true sense of a world of forms;
 Illumined by a vision in the thought,
 Upbuoyed by the heart's understanding flame,
 It could hold in the conscious ether of the spirit
 The divinity of a symbol universe...³⁸
 All Nature was a conscious front of God:³⁹

Wordsworth, too, sees the entire natural world as a symbol of the Divine: the waterfalls, the woods, the forests, the torrents, the rocks and crags and raging streams, the unfettered clouds, night and day, all are to him

Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.⁴⁰

And again he speaks of

Nature's self, which is the breath of God,
Or His pure Word, by miracle revealed...⁴¹

But these insights come only when unsought and cannot be arrived at by any conscious intellectual effort, as both the *kavis* assert firmly:

...that happy stillness of mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought.⁴²
This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind's silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.⁴³

It is because Wordsworth discovers behind the object something more than what it appears to be, because he contacts the Supreme Harmony underlying all creation, that he contends that even the lowliest of things, even the ass, the idiot boy, the leech-gatherer or the beggar can be subject-matter for the poet; for in all he can discover and reveal the Beauty that is truly everywhere:

There saw into the depth of human souls,
Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To careless eyes.⁴⁴

This insight into the Divine Beauty in all things has been brilliantly expressed by Sri Aurobindo in the form of aphorisms:⁴⁵ "God had opened my eyes; for I saw the nobility of the vulgar, the attractiveness of the repellent, the perfection of the maimed and the beauty of the hideous. When the divine Reality is seen behind external deformations, it appears so powerfully that it succeeds in effacing what generally veils it to the ordinary mind... *When I had the dividing Reason I shrank from many things*; after I had lost it in sight, I hunted through the world for the ugly and the repellent but I could no longer find them." This mystic perception, along with the solitude, stark majesty and utter simplicity which characterised his spiritual experiences, lie behind Wordsworth's revolutionary decision to choose the rude, simple rustics as the subject of his poems, and to use their bare yet pregnant language as the vehicle of his ideas and emotions.

It is, indeed, highly significant that almost all of Wordsworth's mystic experiences are connected with mountain-scenery. The *Prelude* teems with such

instances, and, in general, mountains appear in the background and setting of the best of his poetry, as in "Nutting", "The Highland Reaper", "Daffodils", "To the Cuckoo", and so on. The reason for this lies partly in the solemn spell cast by the grand solitude and stark, chaste majesty of the mountains. Arnold's remark that Wordsworth's poetry "is bald as the bare mountain tops are bald, with a baldness which is full of grandeur",⁴⁶ is a remarkably perceptive comment indeed. However, beyond this obvious fact, there is also a symbolic significance of the mountain which is probably the real cause of its ubiquitous presence in Wordsworth's inspired poetry. The mountain's soaring pyramidal height, reaching up to the sky, is a mystic symbol of the human consciousness aspiring towards the Divine Consciousness, all human faculties concentrating and rising to that single intense peak of single-minded aspiration. This is by no means as fanciful an interpretation as it might seem to be at first. It is supported by a spiritual seer of the stature of Sri Aurobindo who adopted as part of his symbol this very pyramidal structure reaching upwards in a straining for the Infinite. And it is while climbing up a mountain-side that Wordsworth has one of his most memorable experiences, set-off by the sudden sight of

The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without a cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist...
There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity...⁴⁷

In harmony with this background of mountain-scenery, Wordsworth sets his figures in solitude and silence, as, for instance, the solitary reaper, Lucy who "dwelt among the untrodden ways", the leech-gatherer, Michael, Wordsworth himself, wandering "lonely as a cloud", fascinated by solitary cliffs and "Souls of lonely places"⁴⁸ and by scenes

When vapours rolling down the valley made
A lonely scene more lonesome.⁴⁹

And his projected *magnum opus* had as its theme Wordsworth

On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life
Musing in solitude...⁵⁰

Along with solitary surroundings goes the insistence on simplicity. Wordsworth chooses rustic life for his theme because there the elemental passions "co-exist in a state of greater simplicity" and speak "a plainer and more emphatic language", as he writes in his *Preface*. The emphasis on simplicity is

rubbed home through the iteration of the word “naked” in his poetry. To contact the Divine Reality, the mind must be stripped bare of all non-essentials:

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked as in the presence of her God.⁵¹

A mystic vision is inspired by the sight of the moon as it “hung naked in a firmament”. It seems Wordsworth perceived the still mind as “naked” of its normal movements, thus enabling a direct comprehension of the object’s essence by his soul. Besides this, he speaks of naked huts, naked pools, naked valleys, a naked crag, the naked top of a headland, and so on, using the word nearly a hundred times—at a random count—in the *Prelude* itself.

We may now proceed to discuss the two possible paths to mystic experiences mentioned in Hindu philosophy:⁵² the inward or introspective vision (soul-mysticism) and the outward way of unifying vision (*Brahman*-mysticism). Often the two ways can merge into one as it is realised that the *Ekam-Brahman* in and behind the creation is also the inner psychic being, the *atman* (*sa atma; tat tvam asi*;—“That is the self; That art thou”). This realization finds expression in the Yajnavalkya-Maitrayee discourse in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, as also in the *Gita*, XIII. 16: “That which is in us is he and all that we experience outside ourselves is he. The inward and the outward, the far and the near, the moving and the unmoving, all this he is at once. He is the subtlety of the subtle which is beyond our (intellectual) knowledge.” Wordsworth expresses the same fusion of the two visions in this fragment retrieved by Mr H. de Sélincourt⁵³

One interior life
In which all beings live with God, themselves
Are God, existing in the mighty whole,
As undistinguishable as the cloudless east
At noon is from the cloudless west, when all
The hemisphere is one cerulean blue.

In our Indian *Kavi*, we find the same fusion:—

The Supreme’s gaze looked out through human eyes
And saw all things and creatures as itself
And knew all thought and word as its own voice.^{53a}

In the first way, the introspective way, one sinks inward in order to find the true self, the *atman*, which leads to contacting the Divine Reality (*atmani atmanam atmana*). For this experience, one withdraws oneself from all sense-

impressions and thought activity, as Wordsworth and Sri Aurobindo describe:

turning the mind in upon herself...felt
Incumbencies more awful, visitings
Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul
That tolerates the indignities of Time,
And, from the centre of Eternity
All finite motions overruling, lives
In glory immutable.⁵⁴

And sometimes, when our sight is turned within,
Earth's ignorant veil is lifted from our eyes...
A stillness falls upon the instruments...
Knowledge breaks through trailing its radiant seas...
In moments when the inner lamps are lit
And the life's cherished guests are left outside,
Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gulfs...
Invading from spiritual silences
A ray of the timeless Glory stoops awhile
To commune with our seized illumined clay
And leaves its huge white stamp upon our lives...
It leaves us one with Nature and with God.⁵⁵

The other way, that of the unifying vision (*ekata-drishti*), sees the whole universe as the One. In the words of the *Gita*: "His hands and feet are on every side of us, his heads and eyes and faces are those innumerable visages which we see wherever we turn, his ear is everywhere, he immeasurably fills and surrounds all this world with himself, he is the universal Being in whose embrace we live" (XIII, 14). And again in X, 39: "And whatsoever is the seed of all existences, that am I, O Arjuna; nothing moving or unmoving, animate or inanimate in the world can be without Me." Wordsworth expresses this in "Tintern Abbey" as:

a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

The next stage in this outward way is the identification of the perceiver with

the perceived, seeing all things in himself, or, more precisely, as himself (*anyad na pasyati*: 'he perceives no other'):

Oft in these moments such a holy calm
 Would overspread my soul that bodily eyes
 Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
 Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
 A prospect in the mind.⁵⁶

Wordsworth repeats this in his introductory note to the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality": "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality." The last sentence is very significant. It is this reluctance to commit himself whole-heartedly to his mystic experiences, this constant effort to return to sensory and rational reality, which was to prove the bane of Wordsworth's poetry. As he grew older, the dependence on reason increased, the intellectuality gradually obfuscated his intuitive mystic vision more and more till the 'visionary gleam' died away in a desert of moralising and dry, sterile ideas.

The third stage reached through the Unifying vision is to see the One not just as the essence of many, as in the first stage, but also as the great supporting principle of the universe. The many are its various facets while it remains the eternal unchanging foundation: "I am here in this world and everywhere, I support this entire universe," says the *Gita*, X.42. Or, as the *Isha Upanishad* says at the very beginning "The world is a garment, or dwelling-place, for the informing and governing Spirit." Wordsworth describes it as:

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
 Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought,
 That givest to forms and images a breath
 And everlasting motion...⁵⁷

What is interesting about Wordsworth, however, is that, unlike Sankaracharya, he did not proceed from this step to the final negative stage of asserting that the One cannot be the many, and that hence all creation is *maya*, an illusion. It is Wordsworth's great contribution that he reconciles the spiritual and the sensory worlds. It is through the mighty world of eye and ear—the light of setting suns, the round ocean, the living air, the blue sky and the mind of man—that he contacts the Divine Reality, not independently of them. He is, like his own skylark, "True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home". Though he never soars, like Shelley, out of touch with the sensory world, he does not

make the mistake of limiting his concept of reality purely to that which the senses and intellect apprehend. It is this admirable sense of balance which makes him so relevant to all times, and so akin to an Oriental seer like Sri Aurobindo who does not believe in an ascetic withdrawal from the world, but aims at divinising this human life.

In the world of today we find the West getting more and more disillusioned with purely materialistic existence, searching blindly for something beyond the sense-world which will give meaning, give some sense of order to the welter of chaos which is life. I quote from a recent article by a contemporary American journalist: "The '70s are seeing the American launched on a curiously un-American quest. He has order—the order of the machine and the punch card, the order he once thought he wanted—and he is sick to death of all the well-oiled predestination. He is off and hunting for a richer order than technology can provide, a more organic sense of meaning. Confusedly, belatedly, he is searching for something very like his soul."⁵⁸ Paradoxically, an inordinate stress on what is external has brought about a recoil and disgust for it. Again, in its wide and eager curiosity, the modern age has neglected the inner movement which leads to what lies behind the material reality, and is consequently marred by a superficial and, at best, a sophisticated intellection. A peculiar aridity seems to permeate the modern consciousness: the *joie de vivre*, that which made life fresh, green and happy, seems to be lost. "Cut away from the soul, from the central fount of its being, the human consciousness has been, as it were, desiccated and pulverized; it has been thrown wholly upon its multifarious external movements and bears the appearance of a thirsty shifting expanse of desert sands."⁵⁹

In the phenomenon of the "flower-people" we see an effort to recapture man's pristine intimate contact with nature, without which he has become a bundle of nerves and frustrations, harassed (as Wordsworth was, long back) by the incessant din and tension of a technological civilization. The Western youth searches for a way out with the help of drugs, trying to forget the body and the mind in a world of hallucinatory visions, which only leave behind an intense depression and a vital craving for more sensation, without giving anything permanent to hold on to. What, then, is the solution? The only lasting remedy, as our ancient philosopher-seers well knew, can come from within us. As Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta writes in his profound essay, "The Malady of the Century": "To relieve life of this mingled strain and tension, to lift it out of this ambiguity and uncertainty, to free it from this gravitational force that drives it towards what is superficial and external—to endow it with its real worth, we must find and possess life at a higher level, at its unspoilt source; we must first draw back and re-establish, this time consciously and integrally, the lost connection with our soul, the Divine in our being"^{59a} And the great Indian seer says the same things:

The outward and the immediate are our field,
 The dead past is our background and support;
 Mind keeps the soul prisoner, we are slaves to our acts;
 We cannot free our gaze to reach wisdom's sun...
 Absorbed in a routine of daily acts,
 Our eyes are fixed on an external scene...
 Thus is the meaning of creation veiled;
 For without context reads the cosmic page:
 Its signs stare at us like an unknown script...
 It wears to the perishable creature's eyes
 The grandeur of a useless miracle...
 Yet a foreseeing knowledge might be ours,
 If we could take our spirit's stand within,
 If we could hear the muffled daemon voice...
 We must fill the immense lacuna we have made,
 Re-wed the closed finite's lonely consonant
 With the open vowels of Infinity.
 A hyphen must connect Matter and Mind,
 The narrow isthmus of the ascending soul.⁶⁰

Wordsworth, in his own way, brings to the West this mystic message of the East, backing up ancient truths with the validity of his personal experiences: once the soul knows itself, it establishes a state of bliss which nothing can destroy.⁶¹ Wordsworth has shown that this contact with the soul can be achieved through the means of constant receptivity to the beauty and grandeur of natural scenery, which can induce mystic trances in which one comprehends:

truths that wake
 To perish never:
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
 Nor Man nor Boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
 Can utterly abolish or destroy!⁶²

In this union of Nature's soul and Man's mind and the Spirit which has its dwelling in the light of setting suns and in the mind of man, there is solace even for the acute existentialist *angst* of modern times. The solution offered by Wordsworth the *kavi* does not depend on external means, but on an inner change. It is a concept re-iterated innumerable times in Hindu philosophy and reasserted memorably in our own age by Sri Aurobindo. And it is because of his concrete spiritual experiences that Wordsworth can state so confidently his firm belief that the man

Who, in this spirit, communes with the Forms
 Of nature, who with understanding heart
 Both knows and loves such objects as excite
 No morbid passions, and no hatred—needs must feel
 The joy of that pure principle of love
 So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
 Less pure and exquisite, he cannot choose
 But seek for objects of a kindred love
 In fellow-natures and a kindred joy.
 Accordingly he by degrees perceives
 His feelings of aversion softened down;
 A holy tenderness pervade his frame...

he looks round

And seeks for good; and finds the good he seeks:
 Until abhorrence and contempt are things
 He only knows by name...

and has no thought,

No feeling, which can overcome his love...

That change shall clothe

The naked spirit, ceasing to deplore

The burthen of existence...

So build we up the Being that we are;

Thus deeply drinking-in the soul of things,

We shall be wise perforce...

Whate'er we see,

Or feel, shall tend to quicken and refine;

Shall fix, in calmer seats of moral strength,

Earthly desires; and raise, to loftier heights

Of divine love, our intellectual soul.⁶³

(Concluded)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

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THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1987)

The Mother's Message

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



Volume Three: 1959

12

It was a fine sunny day, 2nd September 1959. Arabinda Basu, his son Suddipta (Babi) and I left London for Durham. We started from King's Cross station. In the compartment of the train there were four comfortable seats—two on opposite sides with a table in between. We occupied three of them and on the fourth an English gentleman hid his face behind a copy of the *Times*.

I felt very sleepy, but was reluctant to miss the verdant scenery. There were luxuriant green fields where cattle grazed contentedly. My memory slipped back to 1952. In that year I travelled with my brother and his wife throughout the continent. When we passed through Germany, we stopped the car near a field where a German farmer was milking a cow. We felt hungry so we asked for some milk. The farmer gave it gladly. When my brother offered him money, he only gestured with his hand that he wanted cigarettes. My brother gave them to him. His beautiful blue eyes danced with glee.

I thought that hand-milking was an almost forgotten art in the days of the machine. I was amazed to see the stream of milk being extracted by the gnarled fingers, and hear the rhythmical sound it made within the pail.

My mind was still dwelling on our travels, when my eyes closed. I did not realise the time till the train stopped at Durham station. It took almost five hours. The journey was rather longer and much more tiring than I had anticipated.

I was accommodated in Three Tuns Hotel, New Elvet. I liked it. But I was hardly there, because from morning till evening I was with Arabinda and Babi.

It was a pleasure to ride on a bus to reach their house, Lydstep, North End. To grasp the English which was spoken between the passengers and the bus conductor was difficult for me, because their accent was of a special dialect of North-Eastern England. They said: "Aye, hey, who'ad left their car'ere with light on? A a cupp'tea, this is 'atween us, lass," and so on.

Arabinda and Babi took me round. What I learnt about Durham was as follows:

The Bishop of Durham used to be Prince Bishop, because he was responsible both for political, military and religious affairs of the County Palatinate. Durham used to be a stronghold of the English against the invading Scottish. It is two and a half hours from Edinburgh. The Bishop had a castle in the city which is the capital of County Durham. His See is the third most important in the church of England—that is, after the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York. His castle has been given over to the University of Durham, which is now named University College. He has now a castle which is his residence in Bishop Auckland which is about twenty miles from Durham.

Durham University is the third oldest in England after Oxford and Cambridge, and like them it is residential. As is to be expected, this University has a very good and strong School of Theology.

The University of Durham at the time I visited it in September 1959 had two branches—one in Durham and the other in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. In fact, the Durham division was called the Durham College. Both divisions were autonomous and the head of one was called Warden and the head of the other Provost. They became Vice-Chancellor by rotation. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne is now a separate University.

The then Warden of the Durham section which was called the Durham Colleges, Sir James Duff, a very well-known educationist in Great Britain, was a member of the University Education Commission appointed by the Government of India, of which Prof. S. Radhakrishnan was the Chairman.

Arabinda Basu was already there from 1953 as Spalding Lecturer in Indian Philosophy and Religion in the School of Oriental Studies in the Durham Colleges. He organised the Section of Indian Studies there. He had gone there with the Mother's approval and blessings.

Much later he told me a very interesting incident. He used to ask the Mother every year during his stay in Durham whether he could come back to India. The Mother's answer was always negative till 1967. That year in January he came to India and stayed in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram till June. One day he had an interview with the Mother, and asked her whether he could return to India for good. To his utter and very pleasant surprise she nodded her head in assent, smiled and said: "Yes." He could not believe his good fortune. He went to Golconde and wrote to the Mother a brief note saying that he would return to India if the Mother accepted him in the Ashram. The Mother's answer was:

"If you decide to come, you will be very welcome in the Ashram."

Arabinda was surprised that he would have to make the decision. He sent another note to her asking: "Who decides?" The Mother's reply was exactly the same as before.

He went back to Durham and gave the University a three-month's notice, got the students to agree to attend the additional lectures so that the syllabus could be finished before he left his post.

He asked the Mother when he should come. Her answer was:

"Preferably next year."

He, like a child, wanted to play a little game with the Mother and tried hard to reach Pondicherry on 31 December 1967. He failed to get a car from Madras and no seat was available for him in a bus. So he left Madras by the night train and arrived in Pondicherry on 1 January 1968!

*

While I was visiting the School of Oriental Studies in Durham, Arabinda took me to the Indian Section of the Library in the School, showed me around and pointed out many valuable and rare Sanskrit books including the first printed Edition of the Rigveda published by Max Müller. The Indian Section was quite well equipped and was expanding, I was fascinated to see the books in

the Section of Egyptology—some of them were so huge that they could only be lifted by four persons!

Babi took me to several places. The most striking were the Castle and the Cathedral.

In the basement of the Castle I saw a small chapel (late 11th Century) which most probably was pre-Christian and was still used for worship. I felt the atmosphere exceedingly peaceful and tranquil. I found the secret passage so mysterious. It had served in ancient days for escape in time of crisis. The Castle was so familiar to me that I remember to have passed the remark: "Oh! I know this place, I was here...." Babi looked at me with sheer perplexity.

Then Babi led me to the Norman Cathedral. There was a big "Sanctuary" knocker on the main door of it. Anybody who came and touched the knocker was beyond the arm of the Law and under the protection of the church. Now it is not the case any more.

It is the Cathedral Church of Christ and Blessed Mary the Virgin. It was begun in 1093.

There is normal work in the nave transepts and Choir, but early English work in the eastern end of the Choir.

The Bishop's throne, built by Bishop Hatfield, is said to be the highest in Christendom.

Much of the wood-work was destroyed during the Civil War and redone during 1660-1672. The Chapter House, once a fine Norman building, was destroyed in 1796 and rebuilt in the original style in 1895.

The Cathedral stands on the bank of the river Weir. It was so large that every day the authorities spent £66 to repair one thing or another.

At the rear of the Cathedral there was a lawn, on the four sides of which were long corridors. Monks used to walk along them while praying and meditating.

People from all over the world visit this marvellous Cathedral.

Babi and I climbed the spiral stairs to reach the top of it. We saw the whole panoramic view of Durham which was astonishing.

Durham still retained much of the character of a Medieval city. The road leading to the Castle and the Cathedral was still of cobblestone and was lit up in the evening with gas lamps.

We were tired and sat on a bench near the river.

The Cathedral spire rose into a mauve sky still tinged with a glow of sunset. Lights were lit in the town streets. Everything was strangely quiet. Even the sounds of birds were hushed in the rapt silence. Only the gentle ripple of the river was faintly heard. I felt a delightful tingling sensation of invigorating coolness as the gentle breeze came across the river.

Practically every day Babi and I walked a lot. Sometimes Arabinda accompanied us. Thus I had an opportunity to observe closely the clean countryside,

which had kept its fairy-tale emerald glory. There were velvety soft green shades of tall trees, attractive houses with riotous-coloured flowers in their lovely gardens. Here everything was serene. It was unlike the boom and throb of London.

Recalling the scene, I now remember these verses from *Savitri*:

“That rapture’s smile is secret everywhere;
It flows in the wind’s breath, in the tree’s sap,
Its hued magnificence blooms in leaves and flowers.”

*

At night in my hotel I mentally surveyed my expedition and centred my attention on the Universities. Suddenly my thought winged back to the year 1952 when I went to England with my brother and his wife. Some friends of ours, who were studying at Cambridge University, took us there by car. At that time there was the summer vacation, so everything was in a lull, languid.

Cambridge University was hundreds of years old. It had thirty colleges, many towers, domes and steeples. From the architectural point of view their construction was remarkable.

Even today the aristocratic atmosphere and old tradition are cherished.

Ibbu Ibrahim who studied Law there told us that there was neither hum-drum nor hullabaloo in that place. Everyone followed a happy-go-lucky life and everybody was in a relaxed mood. He also told us all about the students’ adventures—“The Night Climbers”, “The Poppy-day Rag”, the boat races, all sorts of challenges—he spoke of one of them: There were barrels of beer and they betted that anybody who took fifty tankards would win the prize.

Then we were ushered into a big hall which was an examination hall. There were stools with three legs. They were called “Tripods”. The students sat on them and took their examinations. So a saying was current—that when they were nervous they were sitting on tripods.

*

King’s College where Sri Aurobindo studied has a chapel large enough to be called a Cathedral. It is considered to be an architectural wonder. It was the finest building in Cambridge.

Sri Aurobindo gave an eloquent speech to his students at Baroda College, which has appeared in his *Cent.* Vol. 3, pp. 130-31:

“...I think it will not be out of place, if in dwelling on this I revert to the great Universities of Oxford and Cambridge which are our famous exemplars, and point out a few differences between those Universities and our

own and the thoughts those differences may well suggest.

“I think there is no student of Oxford or Cambridge who does not look back in after days on the few years of his undergraduate life as, of all the scenes he has moved in, that which calls up the happiest memories, and it is not surprising that this should be so, when we remember what that life must have meant to him. He goes up from the restricted life of his home and school and finds himself in surroundings which with astonishing rapidity expand his intellect, strengthen his character, develop his social faculties, force out all his abilities and turn him in three years from a boy into a man. His mind ripens in the contact with minds which meet from all parts of the country and have been brought up in many various kinds of trainings, his unwholesome eccentricities wear away and the unsocial, egoistic elements of character are to a large extent discouraged. He moves among ancient and venerable buildings, the mere age and beauty of which are in themselves an education. He has the Union which has trained so many great orators and debaters, has been the first trial ground of so many renowned intellects. He has, too, the athletics clubs organised with a perfection unparalleled elsewhere, in which, if he has the physique and the desire for them, he may find pursuits which are also in themselves an education. The result is that he who entered the university a raw student, comes out of it a man and a gentleman, accustomed to think of great affairs and fit to move in cultivated society, and he remembers his College and University with affection, and in after days if he meets with those who have studied with him he feels attracted towards them as to men with whom he has a natural brotherhood....”

*

On 9 September I paid the bill in my hotel and went to Arabinda's house in a taxi. Afterwards he and his son saw me off at the station. I really enjoyed my stay in Durham. I thanked them for their hospitality and much good will. I bade them *au revoir* and started my journey back to London.

I was all alone in my carriage. Once again I watched the splendour of the landscape which soothed my eyes. It was a bright breezy morning with snowy cotton-wool clouds scudding across a sky as blue as a periwinkle. I slid into a profound memory of childhood, girlhood and early womanhood—my failures and successes, my dolorous moods and delightful moments, my close relationship with the Mother—and slowly my eyes shut. I forgot time, space and my existence till the train stopped at King's Cross station. I stepped down from the compartment with my suitcase and saw to my dismay a struggling mass of humanity and fought a battle against the tide which threatened to sweep me on to the wrong platform. For I had to take the Metropolitan line, then change at Baker Street, take the Bakerloo line to reach Swiss Cottage. Hundreds of people

seemed jostling their way on. I got a cracking headache. But at last I was at home!

I entered my room, opened the window and cooled my hot, aching head with the September breeze.

(To be continued)

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LET THY HANDS

LET Thy hands linger in mine,
Spill not, O love, adoration's wine,
Wake me not from this nearness' delight.
If Fate sunders our mystic tie,
A leaf parted from its stem,
I may be tossed to wither and die.
Keep me ever within Thy sight
Till Thy glance goldens my agelong night.

SHYAM KUMARI

HUMOUR IN THE PLAYS OF SRI AUROBINDO

PART 2: *THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA*

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1987)

IN the IV scene the curtain rises on the same Pavilion of Pleasure. Sri Aurobindo has not yet finished with Shaikh Ibrahim who is now verily, verily, verily and roaringly drunk and cares not who knows it. He is mixing up his similes in a merry way—

“Ah, my sweet lovely young father! Ah, my pious learned white-bearded mother!”¹ He is at the stage where speech is slurred and thoughts are like the shadows of flitting butterflies. Just then the Caliph enters disguised as a fisherman. The scene opens on a fishy note—

Anice-Aljalice:

What fish have you, good fisherman?

Haroun Al Rasheed:

I have very honest good fish, my sweet lady, and I have fried them for you with my own hands. These fish,—why, all I can say of them is, they are fish. But they are well fried.²

On being paid generously he blesses Nureddene thus—

“Now Allah give thee a beard! for thou art a generous youth.”³

Quick is the humorous rejoinder of Anice—

Fie, fisherman, what a losing blessing is this, to kill the thing for which thou blessed him! If Allah give him a beard, he will be no longer a youth and for the generosity, it will be Allah’s.”⁴

Shaikh Ibrahim now waxes eloquent in a drunkard’s pride setting alight sparklers of laughter—

Ibrahim:

Who talks of the Caliph? Dost thou speak of the Caliph Haroun or the Caliph Ibrahim?

Haroun Al Rasheed: I speak of the Caliph, Haroun the Just, the great and only Caliph.

Ibrahim:

Oh, Haroun? He is fit only to be a gardener—a poor witless fellow

¹ *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, p 694

² *Ibid*, p. 695 ³ *Ibid* ⁴ *Ibid*

without brains to dress himself with, yet Allah hath made him Caliph. While there are others—but 'tis no use talking. A very profligate tyrant, this Haroun! He has debauched half the women in Bagdad and will debauch the other half, if they let him live. Besides, he cuts off a man's head when the nose on it does not please him. A very pestilence of a tyrant!

Haroun Al Rasheed:

Now Allah save him!

Ibrahim:

Nay, let Allah save his soul if He will and if 'tis worth saving, but I fear me 'twill be a tough job for Allah. If it were not for my constant rebukes and admonitions and predications and pestrigiddi—prestigidgide—what the plague! prestidigitations, and some slaps and cuffs of which I pray you speak very low, he would be worse even than he is. Well, well, even Allah blunders; verily, verily!"¹

One laughs till one can laugh no more. Ibrahim further proposes to make Anice his Zobeidah and as for Haroun he has a novel plan.

Ibrahim:

"I will be generous and make him my under-kitchen-gardener's second vice-sub-under-assistant. I would gladly give him a higher post, but, verily, he is not fit."²

Then he sings a song spelling out his philosophy about life and its present woes—

“When I was a young man,
I'd a very good plan;
Every maid that I met,
In my lap I would set,
What mattered her age or her colour?
But now I am old
And the girls they grow cold
And my heart strings, they ache
At the faces they make,
And my dancing is turned into dolour.”³

The tippler wanders into some Shelleyan philosophy—barring the anachronism—

“A very sweet song! a very sad song! Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought. 'Tis just, 'tis just. Ah me! well-a-day! verily, verily!”⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, p 696

² *Ibid.*, p 697

³ *Ibid.*, p 698

⁴ *Ibid.*

He is so besotted that his eyes do not focus properly, and his tongue carries him away towards droll imaginations.

Ibrahim:

“Indeed thou art a sweet fish, but somewhat overdone. Thou hast four lovely eyes and two noses wonderfully fine with just the right little curve at the end; ’tis a hook to hang my heart upon. But verily there are two of them and I know not what to do with the other. I have only one heart, beauty. O, Allah, Thou hast darkened my brain with wine, and wilt Thou damn me afterwards?...”

Anice-Aljalice:

Nay, if thou wilt misuse my nose for a peg I have done with thee”¹

In the meanwhile the Caliph nails Nurredene to giving him his Anice who had casually given his word to allow the boon the fisherman wanted. The drunken, half stupefied brain of Ibrahim perceives that Kareem the fisherman will take away his Anice. He sets up a loud denunciation—

“Kareem, thou evil fisherman, thou unjust seller, thou dishonest dicer, thou beastly womanizer! hast thou given me stinking fish not worth a dirham and thinkest to take away my slave-girl? Verily, I will tug thy beard for her.”²

The Caliph calls in Jaafar to his aid. Now Shaikh Ibrahim recognises the Vizier, but the fumes of wine being still thick he says:

“O Satan, Satan, dost thou come to me in the guise of Jaafar, the Persian, the Shiah, the accursed favourer of Gnosticisim and heresies, the evil and bibulous Vizier? Avaunt, and return not save with a less damnable face, O thou inconsiderate fiend!”³

Here stops the old humbug, for now he stands face to face with the Caliph dressed in his own robes of state and at last recognises him. The Caliph metes out a punishment to Ibrahim which is worthy of a Haroun Al Rasheed and fit for a Shaikh Ibrahim:

“Verily, thou hast told the truth, twice, and it is a wonder. But verily, verily, verily, thou shalt be punished.... Jaafar, have a man with him constantly and wine before his eyes; but if he drink so much as a thimbleful, let it be poured by gallons in his stomach. Have in beautiful women constantly before him and if he once raise his eyes above their anklets, shave him clean and sell him into the most severe and Puritan house in Bagdad. Nay, I will reform thee, old sinner.”⁴

One spontaneous lie, one careless boast of Shaikh Ibrahim becomes the core around which the author weaves this web of enchanting humour, patterned with jests and gags; buffoonery, and merriment. Life does need creatures like Shaikh Ibrahim to lighten its troublesome load. The gay disposition of Anice and

¹ *Ibid*, p 699-700

² *Ibid*, p 704.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 705

Nurredene, their peerless beauty and *joi de vivre* are so infectious that the very night seems to smile and its shadows are lightened. Everyone catches the contagion of happy youth. Even the mighty Caliph and his world-renowned Vizier enter into the spirit of the play. The spirit of innocent mischief reigns on that strange night in the Caliph's garden. A thieving fisherman becomes bold enough to break wordy lances with his ruler, a lowly gardener sits and drinks in his Pavilion of Pleasure. Nothing and nobody are sacrosanct. The events seem natural and inevitable, spontaneously flowing out with one thing leading to another. Herein lies the supreme craft of the author, this simple inevitability. When youth, beauty and nobility are fused with gaiety, good fortune unveils its face and reluctant gods relent.

We have not heard of Doonya for so many pages. It seems strange. In the IV Scene we meet her again, a subdued Doonya—whose world is collapsing around her. Condemned and hounded she lives in hiding with her aunt, always in fear on the grey rim of annihilation.

Then her family's fortunes suddenly change. A Fairy-Fate showers her myriad boons on the faithful. Her family's fortune touches its apex. Ablaze with glory, they become the pride of all Bassora. And before we part we see Doonya sparkle at her brightest. Her laughter is most melodious with pun and parody as she says to Anice—flying high on the wings of words—

“You've got a King,
You lucky child! But I have only a Turk,
A blustering, bold and Caliph-murdering Turk
Who writes me silly letters, stabs my lovers
When they would run away with me, and makes
A General Turkish nuisance of himself.
'Tis hard, Sultan of Bassora, great Sultan,
Grave high and mighty Nurredene! thy sister
And subject

Nureddene:

Doonya, it is not Faeryland.

Doonya:

It is, it is, and Anice here its queen.
A faery king of faery Bassora,
Do make a General of my general nuisance.
I long to be my lady Generaless
Of Faeryland, and ride about and charge
At thorns and thistles with a charming-stick,
With Balkis and Mymoona for my Captains—
They're very martial, King, bold swashing fighters!—¹

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 732-733.

In the words of Dr. Iyengar,

“...For the rest, it is not necessary to discover in the play any deep ‘purpose’ except that youth, beauty, love, charity, poetry, wit, humour are amongst the great blessings of life, and to foster them—not misuse them—is the way of wisdom.... The blank verse is full of lightness and grace, the prose has wit and sparkle and the savour of earthiness. And as for the songs that Ahice-Aljalice sings in the Pavilion of Pleasure, they breathe the spirit of Illyria and the Forest of Arden.”¹

With a sweet surcease the reader bows to the author of this fountain of laughter and feels like saying with Ibn Sawy:

“Nay, God is kind; this world
Most leniently ruled.”²

(Concluded)

SHYAM KUMARI

Editor's Note

The manuscript of *The Viziers of Bassora* was lost during the political turmoil of Sri Aurobindo's early days. From his references to it in the Pondicherry period, it seems to have been a favourite of his. Suddenly a trunk—evidently confiscated by the British Government—was returned to Sri Aurobindo by the Calcutta police after Independence. It contained many papers—among them was the long-lost manuscript.

A typed copy was sent to me in 1949 when I was editing *Mother India* in Bombay. Its free presentation of a certain type of the Muslim “vital” in one of the characters was considered by me not quite appropriate to feature in *Mother India* when it had been so recently launched. So I kept the typescript unpublished. Years later, when I had returned to Pondicherry, there was a search for it for inclusion in a collection of Sri Aurobindo's plays which was to be brought out in book-form. Everyone had forgotten that Nolani had sent it to me. I was asked if I knew anything about it. I produced it from my stock.

K. D. S.

¹ *Sri Aurobindo*, K R. Srinivasa Iyengar, pp 222-224

² *S.A.B.C.L.*, Vol 7, p 731

“THE GREATEST MATHEMATICIAN OF THE CENTURY”

These words of Dr. Julian Huxley bring our mind sharply to December 22 this year, which marks the birth-centenary of Srinivasa Ramanujan who has raised the name of India to the highest level in the world of Mathematics. It has been said that he can only be compared with Euler and Jacobi, names shining out from the past. We have pleasure in reproducing with grateful acknowledgment an article by Gina Kolata which appeared in that valuable periodical Science of June 19 under the general heading “Research News” and the particular title “Remembering a Magical Genius.”

If ever there were an exemplar of inborn mathematical ability it would be Srinivasa Ramanujan, a poor, uneducated Indian, born 100 years ago, who was one of the greatest and most unusual mathematical geniuses who ever lived. Although he died young—at age 32—Ramanujan left behind a collection of results that are only now beginning to be appreciated.

Ramanujan’s story is one of the great romantic tales of mathematics, made all the more haunting because of the mystery surrounding the man. No one, no matter how much they try, has ever been able to understand the workings of Ramanujan’s mind, how he came to think of his results, or the source of this incredible outpouring of mathematics.

On 1 to 5 June, mathematicians gathered at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to celebrate the centenary of Ramanujan’s birth and to try to place his work in the context of modern mathematics. It was no surprise that Ramanujan’s work is meaningful to mathematicians today—he touched on some very fundamental problems in number theory and analysis. But it was somewhat unexpected that his results are so relevant to problems he could have known nothing about—string theory in physics, for example, and fast algorithms in computer science. It also was surprising to see how many people were touched throughout their professional lives by Ramanujan—everyone from theoretical physicist Freeman Dyson of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton to number-theorist Paul Erdos of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Ramanujan, wrote mathematician G.H. Hardy of Cambridge University, was “a man whose career seems full of paradoxes and contradictions, who defies almost all the canons by which we are accustomed to judge one another, and about whom all of us will probably agree in one judgment only, that he was in some sense a very great mathematician.”

He also was what the late Mark Kac called a “magical genius”. Kac, says George Andrews of Pennsylvania State University, classified geniuses as “ordinary” or “magical.” An ordinary genius is one of whom you might say, “Oh yes, I would have thought of that if I were 100 times smarter.” A magical genius,

on the other hand, is one who would lead you to say, "I have no idea where those results came from."

Ramanujan was born in 1887 in the town of Erode, in southern India, and grew up in the nearby town of Kumbakonam, where his father was an accountant for a cloth merchant. Although his family was of the middle class, he was actually very poor. Ramanujan, his brother, and his parents lived in a one-room adobe home. His entire mathematical education seems to have been gleaned from only two books, and these were books that mathematicians would not even give to students today because they are not particularly good. In fact, says Robert Rankin of Glasgow University, the books were not even good in Ramanujan's day.

When he was 12, Ramanujan borrowed the first of these math books, S.L. Linney's *Plane Trigonometry*, from an older student and read it straight through. The book, according to Ramanujan scholar and mathematician Bruce Berndt of the University of Illinois at Champaign, contained more advanced math than its title would indicate. It included, for example, logarithms of complex numbers, infinite products, and infinite series.

At age 15, Ramanujan went to a government library and borrowed the second book—one by G. S. Carr called *Synopsis of Elementary Results in Pure Mathematics*. It was an unusual book and one that gave Ramanujan his unorthodox ideas of how to present mathematical results. Carr was a tutor at Cambridge University in England, and his book was essentially a list of results that he went through with his students. As many as 6000 mathematical theorems were stated, but almost never proved. Carr did give an extensive list of references, but these "would have been useless to Ramanujan because he had no access to a library that contained them," says Richard Askey of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The lack of proof apparently did not bother Ramanujan. He simply worked through the book, presumably supplying the proofs on his own.

Ramanujan completed high school and tried twice to obtain a college education. But he failed both times because he was so obsessed by mathematics that he simply could not bring himself to spend any time on other subjects. In 1909, when he was 22, he married 9-year old Srimathi Janki and took a clerical position in the Madras Port Trust Office to support her and his mother, who lived with the young couple. While he worked as a clerk, Ramanujan continued to pour out math results, using excess wrapping paper from the office to scribble down his formulas. He was so obsessed with his mathematics, in fact, that he did not want to stop even to eat. His wife, who is still alive, told Berndt that she and Ramanujan's mother used to feed Ramanujan at mealtimes so that he would be free to continue writing while he ate.

Fortunately for Ramanujan, both the chairman and the manager of the office where he worked were engineers who recognized that he seemed to have extraordinary mathematical talent. The chairman, Sir Francis Spring, was

English and the manager, S.N. Aigar, was educated in England. Both urged Ramanujan to send some of his results to English mathematicians, who might be able to evaluate them.

So Ramanujan wrote to mathematicians H. F. Baker and E. W. Hobson of Cambridge University. Both returned his letters without comment. Then, on 16 June 1913, he wrote to G. H. Hardy of Cambridge University—a letter that was to change his life and the life of Hardy.

Hardy opened Ramanujan's letter, read it, and put it aside, not certain what to make of it. It was crammed with as many as 60 mathematical theorems and formulas, stated without any proofs. That evening, Hardy went with his colleague John E. Littlewood to the chess room at Trinity College of Cambridge University. Hardy showed Littlewood the strange letter he had received from Ramanujan and said that he could not decide whether Ramanujan was a crank or a genius. Two-and-a-half hours later, Hardy and Littlewood emerged from the chess room. Ramanujan, they decided, was a genius. Hardy declared that Ramanujan's results must be true, because "if they were not true, no one would have had the imagination to invent them."

So Hardy wrote to Ramanujan and invited him to come to England to study with him. Ramanujan accepted and arrived at Trinity College in April of 1914. For the next 3 years he "pitted his brains against the accumulated wisdom of Europe," Hardy said. And Ramanujan was successful. At Cambridge, he derived outstanding results in number theory in particular. Littlewood, in describing Ramanujan's work, wrote, "There is hardly a field of formulae, except that of classical number theory, that he has not enriched, and in which he has not revealed unsuspected possibilities. The beauty and singularity of his results is entirely uncanny."

But life in England was not easy for Ramanujan. He left his wife behind in India and had no one with him to be sure he ate or slept regularly. Because he cared more for mathematics than for eating and sleeping, Ramanujan reportedly would work for long stretches—24 or 36 hours—and then would collapse and sleep for 12 or more hours at a time. He was a vegetarian, which presented additional difficulties. "This was during World War I and it was difficult to get vegetarian food in England," says Rankin. "Ramanujan would have boxes of rice sent from India, and he would fry rice powder in ghee."

In May of 1917, Ramanujan came down with a mysterious illness that may well have been a vitamin B-12 deficiency, caused by his poor diet while in England. Ramanujan was so weakened and incapacitated by his illness that he returned in 1919 to India, where he died a year later.

When he died, Ramanujan left behind three notebooks, which he wrote before coming to England and which are filled with as many as 4000 results, stated without proofs. He also left behind the papers he published in England, many of which were written in collaboration with Hardy. And he left behind

results he discovered during the last year of his life. He mailed many of these results to Hardy, but the papers were never published. George Andrews of Pennsylvania State University discovered them about a decade ago in the library at Trinity College, where they were uncataloged. Andrews calls these papers Ramanujan's "lost notebook"—a phrase that annoys the Trinity College librarian, who points out that they are neither a notebook nor lost.

Berndt was told by Ramanujan's widow that during the last year of his life, when he was dying, Ramanujan filled a trunk with papers on which he scribbled his results. Berndt notes that, if this is so, many Ramanujan papers are still unaccounted for. Ramanujan's widow told Berndt that while Ramanujan's funeral was going on, Ramanujan's college mathematics teacher from the University of Madras came to his house and took all of his papers. "Many more papers existed after Ramanujan's death than came down to us," Berndt says. He suspects that at least some of these papers are hidden in dusty, uncataloged piles at the University of Madras library, but the librarian states that, as far as he understands, there are no Ramanujan papers there.

But even if the Ramanujan collection is incomplete, it has given researchers more than enough to work on. Berndt, as a labor of love, is going through the first three Ramanujan notebooks and attempting to prove the theorems.

"For 10 years," Berndt says, "I have done only this. My research has been directed by Ramanujan." The notebooks are spellbinding, according to Berndt. He feels, he says, somewhat the way mathematician George Polya did in 1925 when he came to England to visit Hardy. Polya asked Hardy if he could see Ramanujan's first notebook, and Hardy loaned it to him. "A day or so later, Polya returned the notebook in a state of panic," Berndt says. "He said that as long as he held onto the notebook, he would continue to try to prove the formulas in it. The notebooks were so fascinating that Polya was afraid that if he kept them, he would never again prove any result of his own."

About a month ago, with the occasional help of other mathematicians, Berndt reached a milestone. "Everything I can make sense of in the 21 chapters of the second notebook is now proved," he says. The results, Berndt says, are important to mathematicians, but his proofs, unfortunately, do not reveal what led Ramanujan to these results in the first place. Too often, says Berndt, the proofs are verifications. Nonetheless, Berndt is continually amazed by what the notebooks contain. For example, in 1979, the French mathematician R. Apéry of the University of Caen solved a famous problem about a quantity known as $Z(3)$. The quantity is represented by an infinite series, and the question that nagged at mathematicians was whether the number the series converges to is rational or irrational. Apéry proved that $Z(3)$ is irrational, using "two beautiful new ideas," according to Berndt. But, Berndt continues, "one of the ideas had to do with a continued fraction representation of $Z(3)$ and it turns out that this continued fraction representation is a special case of a very general conti-

nued fraction in Ramanujan's notebook."

More and more often, said the conference participants, mathematicians are finding that their clever new ideas were discovered first by Ramanujan. In fact, William Gosper of Symbolics, Inc, in Palo Alto, California, called his talk "Ramanujan as Nemesis." "How can we all love this man if he is forever reaching out from the grave and snatching our neatest results?" Gosper asked. Gosper recently devised a new computer algorithm to calculate the number pi to 17.5 million digits. But over and over again, he found that his best ideas were already discovered by Ramanujan. "If Ramanujan were still alive, what I would do is show him my computer and hope to seduce and distract him," Gosper said.

This rediscovery of Ramanujan's work is particularly unexpected because, in his day, Ramanujan was thought to be a genius whose work had been misdirected because of his lack of a formal education in mathematics. "Hardy said that Ramanujan's work would have been greater if it weren't so strange," says Andrews. "We're coming to appreciate it more." For example, R.J. Baxter of the Australian National University found that some of Ramanujan's work was exactly what he needed to solve the hard hexagon model in statistical mechanics. Carlos Moreno of the City University of New York says that Ramanujan's work in the area of number theory known as modular forms is exactly what physicists need when they work on the 26-dimensional mathematical models of string theory.

Some researchers, however, say that they never had to rediscover Ramanujan because he has been a stimulus to them for years. For example, Freeman Dyson says, "many of the things I've been doing over the years, right up to the present, come out of Ramanujan's work." Dyson was introduced to Ramanujan early, when he was still in high school in England. He won a math prize and was awarded a copy of Ramanujan's collected works. "It was such beautiful stuff. I fell in love with it right away," Dyson says.

Since Ramanujan was so poorly educated, mathematicians throughout the years have wondered what he might have become if he had been brought up in different circumstances. There is no answer, of course, but it can at least be argued that, for Ramanujan, a formal education was almost beside the point "It is nice to say that if Ramanujan had had more education, he would have done more," says Andrews. "But we can't run a controlled experiment on geniuses that occur uniquely in history. It is at least plausible to say that more education would have ruined Ramanujan."

Although Ramanujan was unique in mathematics, some researchers say they never give up hope that a new Ramanujan will appear. "Of course, we're always hoping," says Dyson. "That's one reason why I always read letters that come in from obscure places and are written in an illegible scrawl. I always hope that it might be from another Ramanujan."

HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND MEERABAI

THE inspiring songs of Meerabai and her efforts to attain salvation will ever remain in man's memory.

She was not a recluse living in an ivory tower but a great lover of God and humanity.

She dedicated her whole life to the quest of Lord Krishna popularly known as Giridharilal.

From the huts of the poor to the palaces of the rich rise the strains of the songs of Meerabai. They have a devotional appeal.

According to Colonel Tod and some historians, Rana Kumbha was the husband of Meerabai. Tod wrote that "Kumbha married a daughter of the Rathore of Maitra, the first clan of Mewar." Meerabai was celebrated both for her beauty and love for romantic poetry.

Besides Tod, historians, like Kartick Prasadji and Gobordhan Ram Madav Ram Tripathi of Gujarat, have accepted Rana Kumbha as the husband of Meerabai.

But recent researches are contrary to this, and proclaim that Rana Kumbha could not be the husband of Meerabai as he died at least 30 years before Meerabai was born.

Rana Kumbha had four wives, namely, Pyer Kunnar, Aparmodey, Har-kunar and Harangde; but no records so far available speak of Meerabai as one of his wives.

Rana Kumbha was famous for his valour. He was also gifted with poetic talent with a devotional streak in it. He constructed a few temples, and there he installed the idol of Lord Krishna. Rana Kumbha died in 1468, while Meerabai was born in 1504.

It has now been historically established that Meerabai was the daughter of Ratna Singha, a Rathore chieftain of Maitra. He fought in the army of Rana Sangram Singha and died in the battle of Khanua.

Meera was born in the village of Kurki and lost her mother at an early age. She was brought up with care and much affection by her grandfather, Rao Dudhaji. Her devotion to Lord Krishna developed at an early age.

One day while a marriage procession was passing, she with childish inquisitiveness asked her mother, who her (Meerabai's) spouse was. The mother smilingly pointed at their family deity, Giridharilal. Since that time Meera accepted the Lord as her spouse.

In one of her verses, she said, "None except Giridharilal is my husband. He has a crown adorned with peacock's plumes over his head. He has a flute in his hand. In my sleep and dreams and even on awakening he is my constant companion."

Meerabai married Prince Bhojraj, the eldest son of Rana Sangram Singha

of Mewar, in the year 1516. As a bride she went with her husband to Mewar and was cordially received by the royal family.

Though she was dedicated to Giridharilal and used to spend most of her time in worship, she was a good wife.

Prince Bhojraj deeply loved Meerabai and encouraged her spiritual bent. Unfortunately, the prince was shortlived, and he expired perhaps in 1523, before he could be crowned. The oppression she suffered perhaps was from Rana Bikramjit Singha, the step-brother of Prince Bhojraj, who was crowned in Mewar, after the demise of Rana Sangram Singha.

Rana Bikramjit was captivated by the physical beauty of Meerabai, but the princess, after the death of her husband, was wholly engrossed in prayer.

Meanwhile, Meera met Ruhidas, a great spiritual leader. As a result of this association, her spiritual inclinations became stronger. As Ruhidas came from a cobbler's family, her friendship with him was frowned on by her family.

Conspiracies to kill her by administering poison and offering her an impaled bed were made on several occasions.

Singing her devotional songs in quest of Lord Krishna, she crossed deserts, mountainous ranges and many rivers. She visited places of pilgrimage and offered worship to the Lord. Meerabai felt the existence of Lord Krishna in every animate and inanimate object.

She is also said to have met and exchanged thoughts with Srijib Goswami, one of the closest associates of Sri Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Brindaban Dham. Meerabai is also said to have communicated with Tulsidas.

Meanwhile, Mewar was invaded by Muslim rulers of the adjacent States, and suffered defeat. Epidemics, famines and other natural calamities followed. Rana Bikramjit met with a tragic end. The people rose against their rulers.

To appease the people, a mission headed by a member of the royal family, went to Brindaban Dham to bring back the holy lady of Chitore. On repeated appeals, Meera promised to return to Chitore after completion of a pilgrimage to Dwaraka.

In the temple of Ranchhorji, symbolic idol of Lord Krishna, she fell in a state of ecstasy. She wept, sang and spoke to Ranchhorji.

She played on her harp and sang. "Oh my Lord, come to me to grace my thirsty soul. As the lilies blossom when the moon rises, my soul also knows divine joy when you favour me with your presence. I have none except you, my Lord Giridharilal, my beloved spouse, do not forget me."

All was still when in the temple Meera was offering her worship and playing on her harp. The song was over. The holy lady had joined Ranchhorji forever.

VIJAYA PRAHLAD

(With acknowledgments to an old issue of "The Sunday Standard")

FOR YOUR EARS ONLY

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1987)

11. LESSONS AT NO EXTRA COST

EXACTLY a year ago I was hospitalized. It was a week's stay. It was for the second time in my life. My first stay was thirty-five years ago. I was born there.

The doctor diagnosed that I am allergic to dust and that I should stay away from it.

"How can I be away from dust when I am part and parcel of it? How can I stay away from it when I constantly see my books clothed in dust? How can I ever abstain from inhaling dust when I am dust and dust itself?"

The doctor listened to me with rapt attention. He then heaved a sigh. Seconds later, his verdict ran thus:

"You will stay here for about a week till you breathe without any effort. Pills and injections shall be your food. Smell of lavatory and stale bread shall be your constant companions. Patients off their chump will be your guardians."

I was thrown into the cardiac ward.

Finding nothing else to do, I began jotting down carefully my experiences in and impressions of the hospital on bits of paper used for packing tablets. They were provided by a young and beautiful nurse who wanted to keep me engaged in any activity other than gazing at her.

I faithfully numbered all the bits and safeguarded them in an envelope. By the time the doctor found me unfit to continue my studies in the hospital and issued me a discharge slip, the envelope resembled a Chettiyar's tummy.

It accompanied me home as if it was a dowry from the hospital. But it got lost in my library and I forgot all about it.

A few days back I dusted one of the cupboards in which I keep clippings on writers and their works. In the process out emerged the envelope perhaps to caution me that I am allergic to dust and to remind me that a year ago I was hospitalized for that reason.

I was overjoyed to find the envelope again and I devoted a full day to going through the bits that recollected for me my days at the government hospital.

Two incidents still haunt my memory for they are mystifying. Wherein lies the mystery? I do not know. It is up to you to infer.

It was late in the night and I was struggling in vain to hug sleep. But the torturing asthmatic wheeze, yet to be controlled by a Deriphylline stab, kept me away from sleep. The nurse was yet to prepare the injection.

I was coughing like hell, envying the co-patients in the ward who were already snoring. But from one corner of the ward two sympathetic eyes looked at me.

He began moving towards me. I was a little worried. If he was going to involve me in a conversation, I felt that I would be doomed. How can I talk when I was gasping for breath?

“What is your name, Sir?” he asked.

“Raja.”

“Must be a Christian?”

“No. I am a Hindu.”

“Doesn’t matter, Sir... Do you believe in prayer and gods?”

“No. Not much... But I don’t wound the religious feelings of others.”

“That itself shows what a nice man you are. Anyhow I want to pray for you. Will you please allow me to keep my hand on your head and say the prayer?” he asked.

Without waiting for my reply, he placed his right palm on my head and began praying loudly.

I listened to his prayer. The prayer went on for more than ten minutes.

The wheezing and coughing disappeared. It may be because I was concentrating on the meaning of his prayer. After he prayed, he asked me to lie down. I obeyed. He covered me up to my neck with a bed-cover.

“Good night, Sir,” he said, “Thank you for listening to my prayer.”

He moved to the corner where he sat attending to his sick brother admitted in the ward.

Sleep hugged me. Was it because I had listened to his prayer? Or was it because the Lord had listened to it? Even now I do not know.

Three days later, at about 2 o’clock in the night, I woke up to answer the call of nature. I saw a middle-aged man sitting on his bed possibly without sleep. When I returned from the lavatory he smiled at me. I reciprocated.

“Are you a Mudaliar?” he asked me with a grin.

“Oh, how do you know that?” I responded, though I don’t belong to that caste.

“I can easily tell the caste of any fellow by simply looking at his face,” he boasted.

“Very fine,” I congratulated.

“Are you married?” he asked me.

The way he uttered those words made it quite clear to me that he must be either a marriage-broker or a father of prospective brides. Just to keep the conversation moving and simply for the heck of it, I bluffed: “Not yet.”

“Are you employed in the government service?”

“Yes. I am a government officer.”

“That’s good,” he beamed with joy and quoted a Tamil proverb which means even if the wages are too low, better go in for government service.”

I smiled and asked, “Don’t you feel sleepy?”

“I haven’t slept for months together,” he said. “I am a heart patient...”

Twenty-five days have passed since I was admitted in the hospital. These drugs and sedatives and sleeping pills fail to get me back the sleep which I have lost." He paused and then asked, "Shall we go out and sit for a while on the verandah?"

I was about to interrupt, "I feel sleepy." But his voice was a pleading whine and his words meant only "Please give me company."

I moved out rather reluctantly with him to the verandah. He sat on the bench for visitors and motioned me to sit. I was sure that he was preparing himself to bore me with a story about himself and his unmarried daughters and finally whether I can think of marrying one of them.

"What is your native place?" he broke the silence.

"I am a son of this divine soil... I belong to Pondicherry."

"Oh! Good. I belong to Tindivanam...Why are you not yet married?" He was coming back to his topic.

"I don't know. Perhaps I have not yet given a thought to it."

"What is your salary?"

"Round about Rs. 3000 per month." I looked askance at him.

"Fine... fine... very fine," he was overjoyed.

"How many sisters and brothers have you?"

"I have only one sister... She is married to a professor. They have a son."

"Fine... Your path is very clear now... How about your parents?"

"Both are alive and very well."

"Ah! Now I understand why you have not given a thought to your marriage. But parents are not everything in one's life." He began his sermon.

"I understand... My mother used to tell me that only a married man becomes a full man."

"That's true... But no woman respects the feelings of another woman," he said in a sad tone.

"Are you referring to the family bickerings between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law?"

"Yes. But how did you guess? You speak as if out of experience."

"No. Not out of experience," I said. "I have read in newspapers and I have listened to the complaints of my married friends."

He remained silent. I looked at him inquisitively. I saw tears gushing from his eyes.

"Oh, what has happened?" I was taken aback. "What are these tears for?"

"Don't marry, my boy," he said. "Never get married. Before I got married I was hale and healthy. But after marriage I became a heart patient. There is no medicine to heal the wound made by poisonous words... Never get married." He paused. Wiping his trickling tears with the back of his hand he said: "Well! I have disturbed your sleep. But I feel as if I have given good advice to someone who belongs to my caste."

He stood up. Without a word he started moving towards his bed.

At that hour, I had second thoughts about disturbing him further. I followed him. He climbed up onto his cot, stretched himself and pulled the bed-cover over him.

I wished him good night.

“Thank you,” he said. “Remember my advice.”

I went to sleep thinking of the morning when I could dig into his life-story.

The sun rose. I woke up. But not the good counsellor.

I heard from the nurse that he had died of cardiac arrest just an hour before dawn.

P. RAJA

Painter Rain

WATCHING rain
is a lovely pastime,
when you have nothing else to do.

The rain by itself
is no beautiful sight.
It's just a spray painter. That's all.

But one should have a thousand eyes
to see the scenes the painter creates.
Bat-eyed men are the losers.

Dust-laden leaves
slough off their dirty coats
to swing in their true colours.

Silver cascades like the many tributaries
of a perennial river pour from tiled roofs
washed clean free of charge.

Unsheltered crows shower-bathe
huddling close to one another,
towelling their wet feathers with beaks.

Millipedes in their ungainly hurry,
snails shouldering their fragile burdens
wheel their way to Erewhon.

Yama's vehicle gallops in glee
followed by naked urchins fed up
with sinking paper boats.

Dutiful hen shelters its new brood
under its puffed-out wings, while
the cock proud of his progeny stands sentinel.

And I, imprisoned in my study,
move from windows East to West
to frame in words the scenes the rain painted.

P. RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1987)

SIXTY-SECOND SEMINAR

26 April 1987

WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY FOR INDIA TO DEAL WITH THE INVASION OF THE INFLUENCES OF MODERN EUROPEAN CULTURE?

Speech read by Ila Joshi

IN Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's vision of the future, India occupies a very significant place. Their vision is of the advent of a New Age in the history of the earth's evolution. It will be created by the manifestation of the supramental Truth which will transform our present human life and create a new race of supramental beings living a divine life upon earth.

This vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, for the realisation of which they worked during their entire lives and with which they are still preoccupied even after their apparent departure, embraces the whole of humanity. But they have repeatedly emphasised the point that in the actual realisation of this vision, India has a very special role to play because, according to them, India is the destined leader of the world in its march towards its glorious future. Even though India has suffered a temporary decline in her long history of great and splendid achievements, her mighty spiritual Shakti is still alive, and is bound to re-arise with renewed strength. This re-arising will not only lift her out of the torpor and morass into which she has sunk for a while and create a new dynamic and luminous life for herself, but will help all the other nations of the world to solve their present acute problems and show them the sure way towards a true life of the spirit which will bring them the fulfilment of their long-cherished but ever-eluding dreams of perfection.

But though Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have pointed out this great mission of India as the leader of humanity, they have also repeatedly warned against a possible danger which may prevent her from fulfilling it if she does not meet that danger effectively and in the right manner. That danger arises from the fact that of late India has been very powerfully invaded by the influences of modern European culture which are entirely foreign to her own characteristic spirit.

If not properly dealt with in time, they might not only gravely endanger her soul and make her incapable of rising to a greater spiritual height in the future, but also render her incompetent to fulfil her destined role to be the leader of humanity in its future evolution. It is not impossible that by following the false lure of the materialistic culture of Europe she may become great in her external life, but in doing so she may lose her spirituality, and if that is lost she will both ruin herself and frustrate her mission of helping the human race to take its next evolutionary step.

This is the issue for consideration before this Seminar. My friends who have spoken before me have tried to answer this question basing their ideas mostly on Sri Aurobindo's writings on the subject. What I propose to do is something simpler.

Over nearly 40 years after India had attained independence, the Mother gave a number of short messages, statements, answers to questions, etc., relating to India's great mission and role to which I have just alluded, and she also gave warnings about the grave danger posed to the country by the invasion of foreign European influences. I have selected from these short writings of the Mother a few directly bearing on the subject before us. I will read them out to you to focus your special attention on them because, even though they are short, they are full of profound significance. In the case of some of these which are given as answers to questions, I shall read both the questions and the answers.

The Mother on India's True Destiny

"It is India that can bring Truth in the world. By manifestation of the Divine Will and Power alone, India can preach her message to the world and not by imitating the materialism of the West."¹

February 1954

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"The future of India is very clear. India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India. India is the living soul. India is incarnating the spiritual knowledge in the world. The Government of India ought to recognise the significance of India in this sphere and plan accordingly."²

February 1954

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Q: "One sees that the world in general is at present in a sort of disequilibrium and chaos. Does it mean that it is preparing itself for the manifestation of a new force, for the descent of the Truth? Or is this the result of the action

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.) Vol 13, p. 361.

² *Ibid.*

of hostile forces in revolt against this descent? And what place does India occupy in all this?"

A: "It is both at the same time. It is a chaotic means of preparation. India should be the spiritual guide explaining what is happening and helping to shorten the movement. But, unfortunately in her blind ambition to imitate the West, she has become materialistic and neglected her soul."¹

13.10.1965

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"India *ought to be* the spiritual leader of the world. Inside she has the capacity, but outside... for the moment there is still much to do for her to become actually the spiritual leader of the world.

"There is such a wonderful opportunity just now! but..."²

8.6.1967

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"India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind.

"India will be the land of its resurrection—the resurrection to a higher and truer life."³

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"India is the country where the psychic law *can and must rule* and the time has come for that *here*. Besides, it is the only possible salvation for this country whose consciousness has unfortunately been distorted by the influence and domination of a foreign nation, but which, in spite of everything, possesses a unique spiritual heritage."⁴

2.8.1970

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"The future of India is luminous in spite of its present gloom."⁵

1957

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"India shall take her true place in the world only when she will become integrally the messenger of the Divine Life."⁶

24.4.1972

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¹ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

² *Ibid.*, p. 376.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

“India must rise to the height of her mission and proclaim the Truth to the world.”¹

15.11.1955

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Q: “If you were asked to sum up, just in one sentence, your vision of India, what would be your answer?”

A: “India’s true destiny is to be the Guru of the world.”

Q: “Similarly, if you were asked to comment on the reality as you see it, how would you do so in one sentence?”

A: “The present reality is a big falsehood—hiding an eternal truth.”

Q: “What, according to you, are the three main barriers that stand between the vision and the reality?”

A: “(a) Ignorance; (b) fear; (c) falsehood.”

Q: “Are you satisfied with the over-all progress India has made since Independence?”

A: “No.”

Q: “What is our most outstanding achievement in recent times? Why do you consider it so important?”

A: “Waking up of the yearning for Truth. Because without Truth there is no reality.”

Q: “Likewise, can you name our saddest failure? On what grounds do you regard it as so tragic?”

A: “Insincerity. Because insincerity leads to ruin.”²

Published 26.1.1964

¹ *Ibid*, p. 363.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 366-67.