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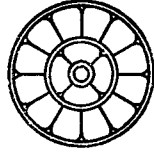
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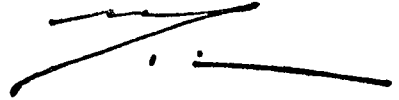


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute.

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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AN ESTIMATE FROM THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

UNPUBLISHED REPLIES TO A SADHAK'S QUESTIONS

Mother,

I am herewith sending the photographs of a friend. He is well known to us yet still enigmatical. What he says of himself, suggesting the heights of spiritual realisation he has attained, seems preposterous to me. A true statement of his present position which I took down almost verbatim a few days before my departure for Pondicherry will give you an exact idea of what he thinks of himself. He refuses to be shaken in the least from this belief. Yet he has given ample evidence to us of a sincere aspiration, profound devotion, a steadfast dedication to the cause. Will you please let me know your opinion about him and permit me to inform him about it? He may then be certain of his real position as it is only in Sri Aurobindo that he has the truest confidence. He, of course, does not hold himself to belong to this path though he admits that his Yoga started with Sri Aurobindo's guidance but now he gets direct guidance from the Divine.

4.2.1935

The Mother's Reply

THE man is suffering from an incurable disease—*vanity*.

Sri Aurobindo's Reply

So it is no use sending him my opinion as the disease is incurable. It is possible that he has experiences for he has probably some mental force and through that can build up mental realisations of what he reads, but he lives in the vital and whatever he experiences or receives the vital takes it and makes it a hundred times bigger in its own estimation than it really is. His claims *are* preposterous. It is evident that like most people he has no idea what the supramental is or he would never talk like that. People who live in the vital and have much vanity (there have been several examples here too) easily get the idea that they have attained everything, are without ego, all they receive is from the Divine (even when a magnified ego is driving them) etc. etc., for the vital ego is eager to assert, to be big, to be siddha, and it persuades itself very easily that it is all these things. Let him however go on his own way; it is no use disturbing his self-content, as probably it is the only kind of self-expansion he can do.

Supplement

SRI AUROBINDO has repeatedly warned against delusions of grandeur in the spiritual life, as when he wrote: "People talk very lightly of the overmind and supermind as if it were quite easy to enter into them, and mistake inferior movements for the overmental or supramental, thereby confusing the progress of the sadhana."

This malady crops up now and then. A friend felt so dazzled by a sadhak of another Ashram that she believed he had attained the Supermind. I pleaded with Nolini-da for guidance. He gave his answer in the letter reproduced below.

SHYAM KUMARI

The Supramental belongs to Sri Aurobindo and to Him alone. There are radiations from it secondary and tertiary and so on, and of various diminishing degrees and values. They may have some sort of contact with the primary one but it is not the real reality.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram was meant as an attempt to embody the real manifestation of the Supreme. Other ashrams may be imitations and echoes but that was not meant to be in this place.

All attempts at the spiritual light are for the uplift of humanity. But each is different in its own type and fulfilment. It is not useful to mix them together.

To love the Divine is the core of spirituality and is enough if one concentrates on that alone.

13.9.82

NOLINI-DA

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 joint issue of January-February 1987)

Chapter 3: THE GOAL, Part Two

When we have passed beyond enjoyings, then we shall have Bliss. Desire was the helper; Desire is the bar.

When we have passed beyond individualising, then we shall be real Persons. Ego was the helper; Ego is the bar.

When we have passed beyond humanity, then we shall be the Man. The Animal was the helper; the Animal is the bar.

THE same principle as before is applied to all the activities or aspects of the being.

It is obvious that in order to emerge from the original state of inconscience, desire was indispensable; for without desire there would have been no awakening of activity. But once you have been *born* into consciousness, this same desire, which helped you to emerge from the inconscient, prevents you from freeing yourself from the bonds of matter and rising to a higher consciousness.

It is the same for the ego, the self. Before you can move on to a higher plane, you must first exist, to exist, you have to become a conscious, distinct individual. And in order to become a distinct, conscious individual, the ego is indispensable—otherwise we would still be mingled with all that surrounds us. But once the individuality has been formed, if we want to rise to a higher level and have a spiritual life, even if we only want to belong to a higher humanity, the limitations of the ego are the worst of hindrances, and we have to go beyond the ego and enter into the true consciousness.

And lastly, for the basic ordinary human life, all the animal qualities, especially those of the body, were indispensable—otherwise man would never have existed. But when man has become a conscious mental being, everything that ties him down to his animal origin necessarily becomes an obstacle to the progress and liberation of his being.

So for everyone—except those who are born free, and that is obviously very rare—this state of reason, of effort, of desire, of individualisation, of solid physical balance in the ordinary way, is indispensable to begin with until you have become a

conscious being, when you must leave all these things behind in order to become a spiritual being.

Now, has anyone a question to ask about this?

Sweet Mother, when can a person be considered conscious?

It is always relative. One is never totally unconscious, and one is never completely conscious. It is a progressive condition.

But there comes a time when, instead of doing things automatically, impelled by a consciousness and a force of which we are in fact quite unconscious...a time when we become able to observe what is going on within ourselves, examine our own movements, discover their causes, and at the same time begin to have some control, first of all over what happens within us, and then over the influences that are thrown upon us from outside and make us act, at first quite unconsciously and almost involuntarily, but gradually more and more consciously; and then our will can wake up and resist. So then, when there is a conscious will with the capacity to resist, one can say, "I have become conscious."

That doesn't mean that your consciousness is total and perfect—it means the beginning: when you are able to observe, for example, all the reactions in your being and to exercise a certain control over them, to allow expression to those you approve of and to control, prevent, eradicate those you disapprove of.

It is also necessary to have become aware of something like a goal within you, a purpose or an ideal you want to realise; something more than the mere instinct impelling you to live without knowing why or how. Then you can say that you are conscious, but it doesn't mean that you are perfectly conscious.

And in fact this 'perfection' is something so progressive that I don't think anyone can say that they are perfectly conscious. They may be on the way to perfect consciousness, but they cannot have achieved it.

Sweet Mother, this state in which one has passed beyond all enjoyings—what is it like?

Well... It is a desireless state, in which you live, as Sri Aurobindo explains further on, in an Ananda without cause, which is not dependent on any circumstances, inner or outer, a permanent condition which does not depend on the circumstances of your life, which is without cause. You are in a state of Ananda because you are in a state of Ananda.

And in fact it is just because you have become aware of the divine Reality.

But you can only experience Ananda when you no longer have any desires. If you have desires, all you can feel are pleasures or enjoyings, but not Ananda. Ananda is of a totally different nature and it can only manifest in your being when all desires are abolished. So long as you are a being of Desire, you cannot experi-

ence Ananda; even if a force of Ananda descended, it would immediately get falsified by the presence of your desires.

28.II.1956

Chapter 4: THE GOAL, Part Three

Now we are going to read what must be done in order to realise what has been expressed in the five foregoing paragraphs:

Transform reason into ordered intuition; let all thyself be light. This is thy goal.

Transform effort into an even and sovereign overflowing of the soul-strength; let all thyself be conscious force. This is thy goal.

Transform enjoying into an even and objectless ecstasy; let all thyself be bliss. This is thy goal.

Transform the divided individual into the world-personality; let all thyself be the divine. This is thy goal.

Transform the animal into the Driver of the herds; let all thyself be Krishna. This is thy goal.

This is what has to be done.

I think there's no need for any explanations, it's quite clear... unless you have some questions? Yes?

Mother, what does 'ordered intuition' mean?

Ordered intuition Because, when you first enter into contact with the domain of intuition, it is a sort of intermittent contact. That means that from time to time, for reasons that are more or less explicable or conscious, you suddenly get an intuition, or are penetrated by the intuitive spirit; but it is not regular, it's not something that happens at will, something organised, obeying a central will.

Whereas Sri Aurobindo says that if the entire reason is transformed—for he is speaking about transformation—if the reason is transformed into the very essence, the substance of intuition, then the whole inner movement, of the inner mind, becomes an intuitive movement, which is organised as reason is organised; that is to say, it becomes active at will, responds when needed and occurs according to a methodical system. It's not a thing that comes and goes and you don't know why or how; it is the result of the transformation of the reason, which is the higher part of the human mind, into a higher light than the light of the mind, a light of in-

tuition. It becomes ordered, organised, instead of being intermittent and uncoordinated.

Here it says, 'Transform enjoyment into an even and objectless ecstasy'...?

Yes; it means a delight without a cause.

Normally you feel a pleasure or a joy or an enjoyment because of this or because of that: from the most material things to psychological or even mental ones. For example, to take a mental thing: you read a sentence which gives you great delight because it brings you a new light, a new understanding. So that delight is delight with an object; you feel the delight because you have read the sentence; if you hadn't read it, you would not have felt the delight. In the same way when you hear a beautiful piece of music or see a beautiful picture or a beautiful landscape, that gives you delight. Without those things you would not have felt that delight—they have given it to you. That is delight with an object, a cause.

What Sri Aurobindo is saying is that this enjoyment, this delight, this pleasure, whether it be high or low, should be replaced by an inner bliss that fills the whole being and which is even—it needs no reason, no cause in order to exist. The cause is a contact with the divine Bliss which is everywhere and in everything.

So once you are in contact with that universal, eternal Bliss, you no longer need any outer object, any outer cause in order to feel the delight: it is objectless, and since it is objectless it can be even. You have found the source of delight within yourself—that is, the divine Presence, the communion with the Divine. And since you have found this source of Delight within yourself, you no longer need anything in order to feel the delight. And since it has no cause, it does not come to an end, it is a constant state.

5.12.1956

Sweet Mother, when one has a world-personality doesn't one need the individual personality any more?

Need? I don't understand.

What use is it?

But it is the individual personality that gets transformed into the world-personality. Instead of the ordinary sense of individuality—this utterly limited individual who is one little person among so many millions and millions of others, one little isolated person—instead of feeling like that, this same separated isolated individual, this little person amidst all the others, becomes aware of the universal individual, the world-personality, and naturally becomes divine. It is a transformation: the one is transformed into the other.

And Sri Aurobindo doesn't mean that you lose your body; he is not speaking

about the body. He is referring to the vital consciousness, the psychological consciousness, the sense of separate individuality.

You, for example, are one person among so many others; well, instead of being like that, you feel yourself to be the world-personality. This sense of division and separation disappears, this limitation vanishes. But you remain in your body, you don't necessarily have to lose your body, the body is another matter.

What are the characteristic traits of a world-personality?

The most characteristic trait is precisely this change of consciousness. Instead of feeling like a little isolated person separated from others, you feel yourself to be a world-personality, containing all the others and intimately united and identified with them.

How does this person speak and act?

Speak! The question is not very well framed, because if you ask how he speaks—well, he speaks like everyone else, with his voice, his tongue, his mouth and words! If you asked about the nature of what he says.... Obviously, if he expresses the state of consciousness he is in, he expresses a universal state of consciousness; and since he sees things in a different way from ordinary human beings, he will express them differently, according to what he sees and feels. As for acting.... If all the parts of his being are in harmony, obviously his action will express his state of consciousness.

Now there are people who have very decisive experiences in one part of their being which do not necessarily get expressed, or at any rate not immediately, in the other parts of their being. It is quite possible that someone, through *sādhanā* or concentration, or by Grace, may have attained the *consciousness* of a world-personality, but yet continues to act physically in a completely ordinary, normal way because he has not gone to the trouble of unifying his whole being, and although one part of him is universally conscious, as soon as he starts eating, sleeping, walking, acting, he behaves like all human animals. That can happen. So again it is a purely personal question—it depends on each person, on his degree of development.

But if it is a being who has taken the trouble to unify himself, to identify all the parts of his being with the central truth, then of course he will act with a total absence of egoism, with an understanding of others which comes to him from his oneness with them—and so he will act like a sage. But this depends on the effort you have made to unify your whole being around the central consciousness.

For example, to take the most concretely material things such as food and sleep; it is quite possible, if he has not taken pains to infuse, so to say, his new consciousness into his body, that his need for food and for sleep will remain more or less the same and he will not have much control over them. But if, on the other hand, he

has taken the trouble to unify his being and has infused his consciousness into the elements that make up his body, well, his sleep will be a conscious sleep, of a universal kind; he will be able to know at will what is happening here or there, in this person or that one, in this or that corner of the world; and his consciousness will naturally, since it is universal, put him in contact with everything he wants to know. Instead of having an unconscious sleep that is useless except from the purely material point of view, he will have a productive and fully conscious sleep.

For food it will be the same: instead of being enslaved to his needs, in the normal total ignorance of *what* one needs, well, he will be perfectly conscious both of the needs of his body and of the way to master them. He will be able to control his needs and govern them, transform them according to the demands of what he decides to do.

But this requires a great self-mastery and the realisation of what Sri Aurobindo says in the last paragraph: that is, instead of being subject to the laws of Nature, ruled by them and obliged to submit to them or else lose your balance completely, you become the master, you see things from above, you know the truth of these things and you can impose it on the body, which will normally accept it without difficulty. He is referring to the body in the last paragraph:

'Transform the animal into the Driver of the herds....'

It is an image: the animal means all the instincts of the physical being—the needs of the physical being and all the habits, all the impulses, all the movements of the physical being: the need for food, for sleep, for activity—all that makes up the animal part of the being. And Sri Aurobindo gives the image of Krishna, whom he describes as the Driver of the herds, which is just an image. It means that the divine consciousness takes possession of all the activities of the physical being and directs and guides all its needs, controls and governs all the movements of the physical animal in man.

Sri Aurobindo uses what we might call Indian mythology, taking Krishna as the symbol of the Divine, and the herds as the symbol for the animal instincts and needs of man.

So instead of being one of the animals in the herd, you become the one who drives the herds and controls all their movements instead of allowing himself to be mastered by them.

You are bound. In the ordinary life you are bound to the physical life and all the needs it represents: needs for food, sleep, activity, rest and so on; well, instead of being the animal, one who is subject to these things and forced to submit to them, you become the Driver of the herds, whom Sri Aurobindo calls Krishna—that is, the Divine who takes possession of all the movements of the being and guides and drives them towards the divine Truth.

When you become a divine consciousness, a divine personality, then you can

become master of all your bodily activities because you are above them. You are not bound to those activities, you are not subject to them, you stand over them; you have a consciousness that is greater than the consciousness of the little separate individual—so you can make one further progress and instead of being subject to all these animal needs of the being, you master them.

5.12.1956

THY SMILE

THE link of Thy fleeting smile
With Thy Love's strength, armours me thus,
That I can embrace with utmost ease
The blackest hate, the driest grief,
The bleakest life, and all that betrays.
The wounded, on my frail shoulders,
Are ready to throw all their weight.
The pain of the tortured and the maimed,
Life's indigence, penury, twists and stabs
With an even heart I can face,
Shored by Thy presence, seated in Thy lap.

SHYAM KUMARI

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON MARCH 14, 1956

“The practice of this Yoga demands a constant inward remembrance of the one central liberating knowledge.... In all is the one Self, the one Divine is all; all are in the Divine, all are the Divine and there is nothing else in the universe,—thus thought or this faith is the whole background until it becomes the whole substance of the consciousness of the worker. A memory, a Self-dynamising meditation of this kind, must and does in its end turn into profound and uninterrupted vision and a vivid and all-embracing consciousness of that which we so powerfully remember or on which we so constantly meditate.”

The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 104

Sweet Mother, what does Sri Aurobindo mean by “a self-dynamising meditation”?

IT is a meditation that has the power of transforming your being. It is a meditation which makes you progress, as opposed to static meditation which is immobile and relatively inert, and which changes nothing in your consciousness or in your way of being. A dynamic meditation is a meditation of transformation.

Generally, people don't have a dynamic meditation. When they enter into meditation—or at least what they call meditation,—they enter into a kind of immobility where nothing stirs, and they come out of it exactly as they went in, without any change either in their being or in their consciousness. And the more motionless it is, the happier they are. They could meditate in this way for eternities, it would never change anything either in the universe or in themselves. That is why Sri Aurobindo speaks of a dynamic meditation which is exactly the very opposite. It is a transforming meditation.

How is it done? Is it done in a different way?

I think it is the aspiration that should be different, the attitude should be different. “Different way”—what do you mean by “way”—(*laughing*) the way of sitting?... Not that? The inner way?

Yes.

But for each one it is different.

I think the most important thing is to know why one meditates; this is what gives the quality of the meditation and makes it of one order or another.

You may meditate to open yourself to the divine Force, you may meditate to reject the ordinary consciousness, you may meditate to enter the depths of your being, you may meditate to learn how to give yourself integrally; you may meditate

for all kinds of things. You may meditate to enter into peace and calm and silence—this is what people generally do, but without much success. But you may also meditate to receive the Force of transformation, to discover the points to be transformed, to trace out the line of progress. And then you may also meditate for very practical reasons: when you have a difficulty to clear up, a solution to find, when you want help in some action or other. You may meditate for that too.

I think everyone has his own mode of meditation. But if one wants the meditation to be dynamic, one must have an aspiration for progress and the meditation must be done to help and fulfil this aspiration for progress. Then it becomes dynamic.

Sweet Mother, here Sri Aurobindo writes: "No matter what the gift and to whom it is presented by us..." and then "there must be a consciousness in the act that we are presenting it to the one divine Being."

Ibid., p. 103

These two phrases are contradictory, aren't they?

No, my child. That's because you don't understand the turn of the sentence. This means: the nature of the gift we make and to whom we give it is of little importance, provided that it is made as an act of consecration to the Divine.

That is what I always tell people in other words: whatever work you do—whether you go to an office, keep accounts, drive a car, anything—whatever the work you do, and naturally whomever you do it for, it must be an offering to the Divine. While doing it, you should keep the remembrance of the Divine and do it as an expression of your consecration to the Divine. This is what Sri Aurobindo says, nothing else.

Sweet Mother, I have a question to ask you, but it is not my own, it is someone else's.

Ah! let us see.

Why? That person isn't here?... He is afraid to speak! All right, ask your question.

It is often said, or predicted, that the numbers 2,3,4,5,6, (23 April 56) will have a special significance for the Ashram. Is this true?

I can reply with a joke, if you like. There's talk now about changing the calendar; if it is changed, the numbers will be changed, and then the whole of History will have gone, flown away!

It is a convention, you see.

Obviously, if the convention is generalised, as is the case with the calendar, it can become a very powerful formation. But it must be very widely adopted to become

a powerful formation. What I call "formations" are images which can be animated by a force and taken as symbols. Some people create images for themselves and use them as their own symbols; and for them they may be very useful and valid, as, for instance, the symbols of dreams. But these are valid only for them, they are purely subjective. While, if you take the calendar which has been adopted by almost all human beings, your symbols can act on a much wider field; but the origin is the same, it is a convention. Naturally, these are things we are used to, for they were like that when we were small children; but it depends on the country of one's birth and the community in which one is born.

There are communities which count differently. And so, for them, other numbers at other times have a symbolic significance. Only, if our formation—the one in which you are born, which you have adopted—if this formation is adopted by the vast majority of men, you will be able to act on this majority by acting through this formation. You can act through a formation only to the extent to which it is adopted by a certain number of people. It is purely conventional. We began counting from a certain date—which, besides, was chosen quite arbitrarily—and so the numbers came to be what they are today. But, for instance, one has only to visit a Muslim community, where they started counting from—I don't know whether it is the birth or the death of Mohammed—and their numbers are quite different. So, if you go and tell them: "2,3,4,5,6", they will say, "What does your number mean, 2,3, 4,5,6? Nothing at all."

These things can be taken usefully as symbols and as a means of bringing a more subtle world in contact with a more material world. They may be used in this way, that's all.

But if, instead of the millions of people who use the present calendar, there were only three or four, it would be pointless to say that these numbers are symbolic. They would be symbolic only for these three or four people. Therefore, it is not the thing in itself which counts, it is the extent of its usage. That's what's important.

People make the same mistake with the stars and horoscopes. It is quite simply a language and a convention, and if this convention is adopted, it may be utilised to do a certain work. But it has only a relative value in proportion to the number of people who have adopted it.

In this relative world, everything is necessarily relative. So things should not be taken literally, for that makes your mind small and narrow.

The more primitive people are, the more simple-minded they are, and these things take on a more superstitious turn. Superstitions are simply a wrong generalisation of a particular fact.

I always give the example of a person passing under a ladder. At the top of the ladder a man is working and, by an unlucky coincidence, he drops his tool on the head of the passer-by and breaks his head—that can happen, it is a fact, and the man's head is shattered. But someone, who sees this accident, later makes a general rule and says, "To walk under a ladder is a bad omen"—*that* is a superstition. And

that's how it happens with everything.

Moreover, many facts of knowledge have exactly the same origin. For instance, if a certain medicine, through a concurrence of favourable circumstances, has cured a number of people, immediately it is proclaimed that this medicine is all-powerful against this disease. But it is not true. And the proof is that if the same medicine is administered in the same way to a hundred people, there won't be two similar results, and sometimes the effects will be diametrically opposite. Therefore, it is not the property of the medicine itself which cures; to believe in this medicine is a superstition.

And in fact, there is a very slight difference between science and superstition. Perhaps it lies only in the care taken in expressing things. If one is careful as scientists are, to say, "It seems this may be like that... one would think that... everything combines to make us think..." then there's no longer any superstition! But otherwise when one says, "It is like that", this is necessarily a superstition. *Voilà*.

So, to the person who asked you the question you will reply like this: "If with 3,4,5,6, or with 2,3,4,5,6, something exceptional happens to you and you have an inner or outer revelation, you may proclaim that it is an exceptional date. But if nothing happens to you, it will not be an exceptional date for you at all; it will be a date like all the others!"

(*Silence*)

There was a very old tradition, very, very old, even older than the Vedic tradition here, which said, "If twelve men of goodwill unite and call the Divine, the Divine is obliged to come." Well, perhaps this is a truth, perhaps a superstition. Perhaps it depends on the twelve men of goodwill and what they are. Perhaps it depends on other things also. If you ask me, I think that it probably happened like this, that in the beginning twelve men gathered together—there happened to be twelve, perhaps they didn't even know why—and they were so united in their aspiration, an aspiration so intense and powerful, that they received the response. But to say, "If twelve men of goodwill unite in an aspiration, they are sure to make the Divine descend" is a superstition.

In fact, things must have happened like that, and the person who noted it put it down carefully: "If twelve men of goodwill unite their aspiration, the Divine is obliged to come." And since then, I can tell you that a considerable number of groups of twelve men have united in a common aspiration... and they did not bring down the Divine! But all the same the tradition has been left intact.

There we are.

We are many more than twelve this evening. (*Laughter*) Shall we try it once and see if we succeed!

(*Meditation*)

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the joint issue of January-February 1987)

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

December 29, 1940

M: Sir, why are the flowers counted by Mother when they are brought to her?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why shouldn't they be? The stars are counted in astronomy.

M: The Mother has recently started counting, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Astronomers also have been recently doing it. (*Laughter*)

M: Do they count them as beads are counted?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. You can ask them. (*After a while*) He perhaps wants to know if there is any *punya* in it. (*Laughter*)

M: No, Sir. There are transformation flowers in our house. Ambu picks them and brings them to Mother. He says Mother counts every one of them. When I asked the reason he said, "All I know is that it has an occult reason. I don't know any more and can't tell you any more."

SRI AUROBINDO: Nor can I. Even that much I don't know. (*Laughter*)

Evening

M: Have you read Savarkar's speech, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. What about it?

M: What do you think of it? He says we should join the army in order to profit by the experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a point of view forcibly stated.

M: Have you also read Chandravarkar's speech?

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

M: He says the Morley-Minto reform scheme with its separate electorate is responsible for this Hindu-Muslim disunity.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anybody could have said that.

M: Savarkar also says that the British can't be defeated.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is nonsense. They were saved by Divine Intervention during this War. They would have been smashed if Hitler had invaded England at the right time, after the fall of France.

M: Why didn't the Divine intervene in France, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because the French were corrupt and had no power of resistance. The English people have still some of their old virtues left to which support could be given.

M: They say that Hitler may occupy Italy if Italy meets with reverses.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is one of the possibilities. But it will be hard for Germany to keep so many people under control.

December 31, 1940

M (*as N was bending to touch Sri Aurobindo's knee*): I see a trident, Sir, on Nirod's forehead.

SRI AUROBINDO: A trident?

M: Yes, Sir.

N: What does it mean?

SRI AUROBINDO: It means that you are Shiva. (*Laughter*)

N (*after a time*): Some people want to know how to increase receptivity.

SRI AUROBINDO: The answer would be followed by "How to do that?"

(*Laughter*)

M: One can understand how to open the lid of a vessel: one just pulls and it comes off. But (*touching his head*) how to open here?

SRI AUROBINDO: Just open it. (*Laughter*)

M: Could you not smash our heads, Sir, as the blacksmith smashed Jupiter's head in the Greek story?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is that story? I don't know of any blacksmith doing that.

M: That is what is given in children's books, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: That may be for children. What I know is that Jupiter had a severe pain in his head. Suddenly his head burst open and Minerva came out of it.

M: What about Nirod's receptivity question, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to become quiet, become wide and open or become open and wide.

N: Is not wideness a result of quietness?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily; one may be open without being quiet.

M: It seems to me, Sir, quietude of the mind is most important.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not only mind, there is the vital, then the physical—and (*nodding his head*) then the Inconscient. (*Laughter*)

M: End of the story, Sir? (*Laughter*).

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes! When the Inconscient is in a proper condition of quietude you are able to receive.

M: That would mean throwing away all disturbances.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not all. There is a central quietness—when the stuff of the

mind becomes quiet—a condition in which one can receive in spite of all disturbances.

M: Am I receptive, Sir? (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: Your mind may be but your body is not.

M: What percentage of receptivity have I, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: These things don't go by percentage. Besides, receptivity is infinite.

M: How to know if one is receptive?

SRI AUROBINDO: If you receive you know you are receptive. (*Laughter*)

M: My shoulder is the same, Sir—painful as before.

SRI AUROBINDO: That means it doesn't receive and so is not receptive.

Evening

M: They speak of a golden lid, Sir, above the head which covers the face of the Sun. Is it a matter of experience?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course.

M: Is it in the subtle body that one feels these things?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; one feels a sense of boring, drilling, hammering—so many things. Never had any such experience?

M: Yes, Sir. I had but long ago. It was marvellous, Sir, at that time. Even while going in a carriage I used to feel the descent of Ananda, Force, etc. Now all that is past history. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: They were experiences in the mind. Never had any force descending into the vital?

M: No, Sir!

SRI AUROBINDO: You are shut in the vital then and, when the vital opens, you can be shut in the physical again. (*Laughter*)

M: Tragedy after tragedy, Sir. Experience of ascent and descent also stopped, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? Didn't you find it interesting?

M: Very interesting.

January 1, 1941

(Hitler has prayed to God to protect him against his enemies as he is a single power surrounded by enemies.)

SRI AUROBINDO: Since when has he become pious?

M: God must be in a fix, Sir. (*Laughter*)

SRI AUROBINDO: He is always in a fix.

M: And he prays to the Almighty, not just to God.

SRI AUROBINDO: He thinks himself a mighty man; God being almighty will be on his side he thinks.

M: On which side would be Krishna, Sir, in this war? On the British?

SRI AUROBINDO: But his army might be on the other side as in the Mahabharata. Send a letter of enquiry to his chief secretary. (*Laughter*)

M: I was telling Nirod that when a medicine has both good and bad effects, it is the good aspect that acts in a disease, the bad effect remains behind. For instance, aspirin when given in rheumatism exerts only its good effect.

SRI AUROBINDO: The bad effect has no occasion to exert itself, so it has time to lie idle! (*Laughter*)

M: While if aspirin is given in normal health, it may exert a bad effect on the heart.

SRI AUROBINDO: Since it can't do good, it does harm? (*Laughter*) Is it true that sometimes a thing which is contraindicated in a disease cures the disease? Mother told me the story that some lady in Paris was suffering from diabetes. The doctor asked her not to eat potatoes at any cost. But at that time no other vegetable was available than potatoes. So she ate them and got cured. (*Laughter*) Is it possible?

M: Not impossible, Sir. I have no faith in doctors and medicines.

N: But you take medicines all the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: Habit or chance! (*Laughter*)

After the others had left except myself, Purani and Champaklal, Sri Aurobindo added: "Modern science says that quantity and movement alone are real. Quality is a creation of the senses. What is seen around is a configuration of the senses. The configuration of reason acting on the configuration of the senses produces what is seen! But that doesn't go far enough, for the scientific researches which deal with quantity and movement as data are also a configuration of the senses. So everything is maya, illusion.

January 2, 1941

(Anil Baran has been trying to introduce The Life Divine as a course of study in Indian Universities. Some universities have refused on varying grounds. Others have given hopeful answers. He wants to make the study of religion also a part of the curriculam.)

SRI AUROBINDO: If he wants to make *The Life Divine* a textbook for the colleges I object. It will have worse results than in Manilal's case. (*Laughter*)

Anil Baran has made a few drafts of letters to be sent to the Universities for that purpose. Sri Aurobindo approved none of them. He remarked that Anil Baran had made The Life Divine a special course of study.

P: He wants to make it compulsory.

SRI AUROBINDO: Hitlerian? No, what should be done is to introduce a course of Indian philosophy in Indian Universities and *The Life Divine* can come by the

way. It can't be made a principal subject. (*Laughing*) If it is made a textbook, one indubitable effect will be that the Arya Publishing House will get a lot of money and my private purse will get fat.

M: In this year's prayer, we are expected to be valiant warriors, Sir. I should like to be a warrior, but a warrior against what? Whom shall I fight?

SRI AUROBINDO: Suppose you are to be sent to Italy as an air pilot?

M: No, Sir. I can give only suggestions.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to fight the hostile forces. But how can you do that without knowing how to use the Force.

N: Dilip says Asoka Maitra—Heramba Maitra's son—who has married a famous actress—has asked Dilip for permission for your Darshan.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why do all the actors and actresses want to come for Darshan?

N: Dilip says they are very fine people.

SRI AUROBINDO: Everybody is fine to Dilip. How old is this Asoka Maitra?

N: Of my age. We were in the same class in City College.

SRI AUROBINDO: You were in City College?

N: Yes, one year.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not time enough to be Herambaised¹?

N: Dilip says many good people from Madras are coming for the Darshan this time—an Insurance manager, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: He means high-placed people?

P: So others who have come are bad people? (*Laughter*)

M: How can bad people come? They won't get permission.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can't say that.

M: But all who are permitted come with the intention of doing yoga and are fit for yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: They may be fit but they have no intention.

(*To be continued*)

NIRODBARAN

¹ Heramba Maitra, the Principal of City College, Calcutta.

THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the joint issue of January-February 1987)

The Mother's Message

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



Volume Three: 1959

4

ONE Sunday Mohansingh, Jayantibhai and Ramesh invited Sudha and me to lunch at East Africa House.

We went and saw the E.A.H. for the first time. It was a nice place. Everywhere I could feel a masculine atmosphere. We were ushered into the dining hall and sat at a table of six people. The whole arrangement of the hall was impeccable.

Quite a number of men, dressed smartly in grey pants and royal-blue coats with badges indicating several colleges, clustered round us and exchanged greetings with one another.

There I met Narendra Vadera who was the son of a Director of Vithaldas Haridas & Co. in Kakira (Uganda). My father also was a Director. Praful Rajani was the Manager's son in the same concern. Manu Kotecha was a brother of my sister-in-law, Manjula. Later they too invited us to lunch in a posh restaurant. Then there was Mr. Gheevala from Porbandar (India), Pradyumna Jivrajani, son of Shantilal Jivrajani, a sadhak in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. There was also another gentleman, whose name I forget totally. He had come from Nairobi to his Bar-at-law at Lincoln's Inn. Much later he proposed to me. I turned down his proposal politely. Marriage is a slavery.

I simply steered clear of any romantic involvement and flirtation. Apart from such complications, I usually prefer men's company to women's, because I can learn much from them. The majority of women speak most of the time about their feminine fripperies which bore me.

Here in London, I hardly came across Indian women and girls.

During the luncheon, our conversation covered a series of subjects from studies to the latest world events.

Mohansingh entertained us with an easy flow of amusing anecdotes. I did not know, till he said it to me, that he was a Sikh; he was clean-shaven. I asked for the reason. He answered: "I don't believe in keeping long hair, beard, kripān, etc. Decades back it was appropriate to the situation and circumstances. One should not take religion as fixed once for all."

I fully agreed with him. I talked to the gentlemen about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and their teaching, and also asked them to attend the meeting at Doris's house. I gave them her address.

I added: "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are a hundred years ahead of our time. They always ask us to be plastic and not to cling rigidly to the old rites and rituals. We must live in accord with the present time and the future hope." All concurred with me.

The meal was satisfactory. We enjoyed it.

Although there was a strict rule that men should not take their girl-friends into their rooms, these gentlemen showed us their rooms which were very small and compact.

Jayantibhai pointed out: "I mean... both of you are... er... our sisters. No girl-friends. But... er... for safety's sake let us... er... get out from the back staircase unnoticed. Shall we?" It was a Herculean task to suppress our laughter.

After that we set out for a promenade in Hyde Park. Ramesh said: "Do you know that Hyde Park was once a forest? There were animals like deer, bears and bulls. It is a vast area more than three hundred and fifty acres—full of flowers, trees, a lake and ponds. Hyde Park closes at midnight." While pointing to one of

its corners where somebody was giving a speech with vigorous gestures and a crowd had gathered around him, Ramesh said further:

“This is called ‘Speaker’s Corner’ where on Sunday afternoons anyone can lecture on any topic. Even one can condemn and abuse the Royal family, the Prime Minister and other notables.”

We walked on and on crossing one garden after another, packed with picturesque scenes created by the Spring. Then suddenly I stopped and stared at the Lake Serpentine. My inner being drank in unquenchedly the beauty of the panorama formed by black and white swans with their cygnets. They glided majestically on the wavelets of the water. Some preened their wings with red and orange bills. What coolness, peace, serenity—I closed my eyes in sheer bliss and imprinted this view on my consciousness for ever.

There were other waterfowls—some flapped about on the bank and squawked.

We all seemed to be indrawn. Nobody spoke for some time. My heart soared and sang silent songs in this marvellous unbelievable atmosphere.

Then we retraced our steps. Meanwhile, Jayantibhai showed us one of the cafés and asked us to have something cold. In his every sentence he would say, “I mean” and “er”. “I mean this place is... er... wonderful.”

We sat on wicker chairs outside the café. Tall glasses of coca-cola with clinking-ice-cubes in our hands, we leisurely sipped and watched the people from all walks of life stroll and pass by. We exchanged pleasantries and laughed at some witty jokes.

It was amusing to see how tiny toylike groomed poodles, chihuahuas and terriers clad in their elegant coats and hats, adorned with tassels and ribbons, trotted happily beside their masters and mistresses who wore bright colourful dresses. Mohansingh remarked: “Dogs here are treated like princes and princesses.”

Sudha sucked on her straw making a grating sound at the bottom of her empty glass. The drink was an excellent restorative and exactly what we needed at that moment. She said: “This city is surrounded by lovely parks with a profusion of flowers, trees, rivers, ponds, lakes, swans and birds. Indeed, Londoners are lovers of Nature.” After a pause she resumed: “Rose gardens in Johannesburg are exquisite—almost ethereal. The roses are of various sizes, shapes, colours and perfumes. They add their glory to the big city and are drenched with beauty.”

Ramesh said indicating the flowers: “Look, there are primroses, azaleas, rhododendrons, daffodils, crocuses and tulips with varied hues. These dewy masses of flowers fill the air with their scent. Really magical spring has now cast its spell over everything.”

Mohansingh said teasingly: “Ah, Ramesh, you ought to have been a poet instead of an engineer!”

We all laughed. These were the light moments of our chats.

Afternoon subsided gently into the tender dusk of a spring evening. Now it was time for us to return home.

We wished each other good night. Along with Sudha I thanked the gentlemen for the delicious lunch, the drinks and a delightful time.

Now I relive the scenery of the city parks, which is unfolding before my eyes in vividness and the Mother's words leap to my mind:

"Flowers speak to us when we know how to listen to them."

How can these charming lines from *Savitri* escape me?

"The world's senseless beauty mirrors God's delight.
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."

*

Doris found a private college for me at Hamstead Heath. The place was the highest point in London. She also found a hostel which was close by. The principal Miss Margaret Darvall was a nice person.

I went to stay at Hamstead Heath. The landlady Miss Simcha was there alone in a three-storey building. She informed me that all the girls had gone for their holidays. She was staying in the basement. I did not appreciate the idea when she said that as a rule nobody was allowed to lock the door of their room.

I was given a small room on the third floor. Inside it there was a door leading to a dark-looking small attic. It kept banging at night. I had two chairs—one I placed against the attic-door and the other plus a suitcase against the room's door, because I had not been given its key.

The bathroom was on the second floor. It was frightful to go there at night.

The landlady gave me only breakfast. The rest of the meals I had to take in a restaurant which was nearly one mile from my premises.

I could not go without a bath. In the bathroom the arrangement was rather peculiar—I had to keep inserting a penny in a slot again and again before the bathtub was full of hot water. But the water became lukewarm by the time the tub was brimmed. As winter was still slightly lingering, a wave of icy cold air swept over me when I stepped out of my bath. I was left frozen and leaden-bodied.

One day I went to a hair-dresser for a shampoo and a set. She advised me to cut my hair short, because she could not manage my long hair. I refused. So she called her assistant to help her wash it. Then I was placed beneath an electric dryer.

I enjoyed the pampered luxury of the shampoo and the set. But I fidgetted under the dryer.

They charged me 15s.

*

A few days drifted by and I was filled with terrible dread especially at night when my room was plunged in darkness. Once again I wanted to change houses. I telephoned Doris to come to my aid.

We had lunch in one of the restaurants. I explained to her about my hostel and requested her to find me a very good place where I could stay comfortably.

She assured me that she would do her best in this regard. I thanked her.

*

Mrs. Bee redirected my letters. It was a pleasure to receive from the Mother a painted card dated 13th April. It illustrated a lovely landscape. Her words were:

“My dear little child Huta,

Yesterday I went to lay the first stone of the Sugar Mill.

Here is a painted view of the place. I am sending it to you with all my love and blessings.”

Among other letters I found Dyuman’s informative letter which said that the Mother had asked Krishnalal to paint the card specially for me.

He also reported that the Mother had gone to the site of the Sugar Mill at Sacur twelve miles away from Pondicherry and laid the foundation stone which was of pink granite. The Mother’s message in her own hand was engraved on it:

“Faithfulness is the sure basis of success.”

(To be continued)

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LIFE-POETRY-YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS TO A SADHAK

YOU have become a storehouse of creative life, fissioning the human to set free the divine within and fusing the human and the divine to bring about the super-person ahead. Then there is the energy evoked—energy to go through a car-journey and, instead of resting, sitting down to type out a scientific passage and interspersing it with mystic hints and glints. I used to be like that once—coming to Bombay by train from Pondi after two and a half days' run and immediately getting busy penning a long letter to my associate editor and fellow sadhak in Pondi on the philosophical implications of modern physics.

What is this about it being “wonderful to be with you, near you, at your feet, just as the doctor ordered”? I think the extraordinary doctor must have read symptoms of “poetic pains” in you and recommended the metrical feet—the iambs, trochees, anapaests, dactyls, spondees, pyrrhics—on which I move towards the Master of the Mantra. But haven't I told you not to bother about prosody? Perhaps, as an orthopaedic surgeon, you are interested in the non-prosodic long-short, stress-slack, which my feet exhibit with their semi-paraplegic oddities?

Your scientific quotation interested me in parts, for the ultimate hang of it somewhat eluded me. Anyway, the most important bits were your occasional interpolations, your running off into “Hari-bolo” without landing in Hari-boloney as often happens with misguided modern enthusiasts. The suggestion of a hymn to Indra is a little opaque to me, but I appreciate the remark about Grace on why “transformation is so essential to contain ‘Grace’”. I would put the matter thus: “Grace comes God-knows-why (the Rigvedic Rishi might have said ‘Perhaps even He does not know!’) but we must not receive it as merely an enrapturing freak: we must become gracious and graceful as a result of its bewildering visits, so that we become examples of its victory, forms of light and love chiselled to perfection by its sudden kisses and caresses.”

Your next query is: “The nescience is nearest the Divine in the ‘tail-in-the-mouth’ snake-analogy; why couldn't it go in reverse gear instead of ‘evolving’ and causing all this bother?” If the divine car could have been put in reverse gear it would have been only the positive Divine dealing with the negative Divine, and perhaps there wouldn't be much fun in that. All the fun seems to lie in masquerading as Dinkar and Amal and their likes, who don't know they are Parabrahman and Paramataman and Parameshwar and in whom the Supremos have to play all sorts of fumbling, stumbling, grumbling roles, not to mention all the teeming multitudes of pre-human parts we have played. Of course it is a strange kind of fun with mocks and knocks and shocks and blocks which the Divine alone can willingly accept, but anything that does not involve the One functioning as the Many is not in the Divine's line of action.

“Involve” is a good cue for a few further words. For it is by our being “involved” that the evolution so regretted by you has taken place. And it has taken place because the real you felt that it would never be regretted. All of us—the Many in the One—chose the arduous evolution with a grand “Hurrah” when the prospect of breaking out of the Divine’s very opposite—the Inconscient—was offered to us with the lure of a darkness which was a locked light. In a freedom of soul-sight the great adventure was accepted.

A cosmological question arising here is one that does not appear to be finally settled by Sri Aurobindo’s writings. Did the empyreal Superconscient project the abysmal Inconscient first and then build up the ladder of the intervening planes or did He descend step by step with those planes to reach at last the inconscient state? Possibly the solution lies in saying that this state along with the so called intervening planes came into existence simultaneously and the ensemble allows us to regard it from two different points of view, both of which have their legitimate significances. The Superconscient immediately turning into the Inconscient and the planes taking shape to link the twins would represent the magic of the Infinite and Eternal. The Superconscient growing less and less super until it ends up as the Inconscient would represent the Infinite-Eternal’s logic. Unless the Divine is at once magic and logic, He cannot be the Divine. And this combination coming into action is rendered possible by the simultaneity I have mentioned.

Maybe we are getting into too deep waters. And I will conclude with one more thought springing out of your long quotation. It is in relation to its starting-point: “a pail of water.” Your parenthetical “except the Yogis and sadhaks” to the article’s statement that “no-one is anywhere near getting out more energy than they put in” finds appropriate elucidation in Sri Aurobindo’s remark: “Aspiration and will of consecration calling down a greater Force to do the work is a method which brings great results.... That is a great secret of sadhana, to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind’s effort.”

By the way the reference to electrons and neutrons in the article reminds me of one of the startling enigmas of fundamental physics. Particles like protons and neutrons—broadly classified as “hadrons”—are made up of parts which are now known as “quarks”. But their fellow particles like electrons and neutrinos, broadly termed “leptons”, have not been found to be composed of parts. They seem to be ultimate, which looks like an impossibility.

Your beautiful last sentence—“O how I adore Her and how much more I have to learn to love Her”—sums up the whole glory and grope of our endless Yoga.

(21.4.1986)

Your quotation of the *Savitri* lines on the black Inconscient brought back to my mind one of my cheeky criticisms of Sri Aurobindo. I had jibbed at what struck me as abstractness in his

Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscience to wake Ignorance.

When in the course of his reply he wrote of the Inconscient's coming in persistently in the cantos of the first Book of *Savitri*, and referred to the four lines—

Opponent of that glory of escape,
The black Inconscient swung its dragon tail
Lashing a slumberous Infinite by its force
Into the deep obscurities of form—

I protested that here was something vivid and visual and concretely suggested whereas the earlier instance left Inconscience no less than Ignorance unvitalised despite the concretely suggestive act of "teasing". Teasing here means insistently stirring, vexing, importuning. It is a memorable usage which can well bear comparison though not with the same shade of suggestion to the Keatsian apostrophe to a Grecian Urn:

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth Eternity.

Here the sense is that something exceedingly beautiful in its meaningful depictions without ever saying a word for thought to fasten on takes us beyond thinking just as the feeling aroused by the idea of Eternity dumbs and numbs the brain. Keats has another moment too of Eternity's teasing, though without the actual term being employed. In an Ode to Pan woven into his *Endymion*, Pan's temple is addressed:

Be thou the unimaginable lodge
Of solitary thinking such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain....

Unformulable mysterious movements of the mind are said to take place exceeding the range and grasp of the physical conceiving consciousness. A sort of reverse movement, not anything arising from our life but visiting it from the Higher, the Illumined, the Intuitive Mind occurs when Savitri's future father Aswapaty has returned from his supra-mundane travels:

Once more he moved among material scenes,
Lifted by intimations from the heights
And in the pauses of the building brain
Touched by the thoughts that skim the fathomless surge
Of Nature and wing back to hidden shores.

I am afraid poetic associations have carried me far from the questions you have asked. Perhaps the questions are difficult to answer and so I have side-tracked into a domain where I am more at home. I suppose the Inconscient is no passive reality but an active adverse power by which the divine presence hidden in the cosmos—like “a slumberous Infinite”—is creatively bestirred into no more than forms ignorantly obscuring the soul which is born within them. Aswapaty escapes from this world of living Death—“Death and his brother Sleep”, as Shelley’s phrase sums up. The terms in which Sri Aurobindo expresses Aswapaty’s breakthrough interest me very much because of the line—

A ray returning to its parent sun—

which keeps me in mind of what the name given me by Sri Aurobindo—“Amal Kiran (The Clear Ray)”—commands me to do. My destiny is to

Climb through white rays to meet an unseen sun.

But, to fulfil him, there must come the omnipotent Grace from beyond, such as Aswapaty meets in those lines about “a strong Descent” which you feel to be from the Overmind plane. Indeed they are very powerful, not only luminously descriptive but penetratingly creative: the reality pictured in them takes hold of word and rhythm: the sheer stuff of their sense comes alive in their movement and vibration, and Aswapaty’s experience is so expressed as if it could seize the reader himself. A super-Shakespeare’s vitality and vividness are here, revealing and communicating with the Overmind’s blend of the immense and the intense the Divine as at once a vast Puissance and an intimate Person, bringing “stupendous limbs” and “the Unknown’s grasp”.

If we identify with the inspired energy of the passage, both illuminative and formative, we shall indeed bring closer our Aurobindonian “tomorrow”.

(6.5.1986)

It is not inconsistent with my image of you that you should have illness of one sort or another but always I see you smiling. A perverse form of that smile is in your saying about your severe attack of sinusitis: “I suspect I even liked it.” Of course you noticed the perversion and “came out of it”. Still, behind it is the smile of the poet who can get the *rasa*, the enjoying taste, of the tragic and the terrible by his touch on the Divine’s delight in all possibilities. Rembrandt’s portrait of his mother in which wrinkled dejected old age is caught in a perfection of pose and pattern and pigment—Picasso’s delineation of the manifold composite harmony of war’s cut and slash and gruesome grotesquerie which we witness in his “Guernica”: that is how the world comes to the *rasa*-drinker, or should I say *rasa*-Dinkar? And as long as you can keep a smile on your face in the midst of all sinusitis or even osteo-

arthritis you will not only have the artist's universal pleasure but also move towards the deep soul's unconditional bliss,

The joy that is known to giants,
The joy without a cause,

as G.K.C. puts it, not quite knowing what he was talking of, for the only giant who can have such joy is one hidden within the Divine Dwarf in our depths, the Upanishad's "Purusha no bigger than the thumb of a man", the true Soul or psychic being, who has the power to go towering towards heaven, at the same time his original home and destined goal.

Apropos of this reference I may quote to you a poem of mine which you will be the first to read. It expresses the culmination of a long-drawn-out experience and marks a crucial moment of the inner life. It was written on May 15 and looks as if only on that day what is said took place. Actually, it focuses with a finality a truth to which I have always been feeling my way with a wondrous warmth in the heart but had never fully realised before as the sole felicity:

AT LAST

At last the unfading Rose—
Felt mine yet sought afar
In the flowering of forms
That proved but surface-sheens,
Mirrors of a mystery
That never broke to a star.

Now wakes a sudden sky
In the centre of my chest.
Bliss-wafts that never die
Float from a petalled fire
Rooted in godlike rest.
They spread in the whole world's air,
Gold distances breathe close,
Worship burns everywhere,
Life flows to the Eternal's face.

Unveiled within, light's spire,
At last the unfading Rose.

(18.5.1986)

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

Postscript

“Sole felicity” does not mean that one finds no happiness any more in the things of life. It means that all the other happinesses become transparent to the presence of the inner paradise, turn into aspects of it even while their individual lines are appreciated to the full and, in the process of their change, they lose their shortcomings, grow purified, allow the heart to remain free and, if they pass, there is no aching absence left.

A. K.

MY LIFE AND THOU

My life has found its glorious turning
 When came to rest my long-since yearning.
 Love's ecstasy and life's true fire
 Ever my beloved and heart's desire,
 Thou hast taken up, made one with thee,
 This lowly unworthy earthly me.
 My days and nights have grown sheer bliss
 For everywhere I feel thy kiss.
 Thou hast let me count thy magic steps
 And taken me from depths to depths.
 All search is lost for flash and fame,
 I only keep on my lips thy name.
 My trust in thee will never cease
 And I shall always be at ease,
 For I know that thou art never late
 And thou hast the power to change our fate.
 A sweet mirror I seek to be
 And serve thee ever perfectly
 That every little hour I may
 Reflect thy light in every way.
 I have surrendered at thy feet
 And count thy steps with each heart-beat.
 Grateful I'll be till my last day
 For glorious thou hast made my stay.

VIKAS BAMBA

BEAUTY AND GREATNESS IN SONGS TO MYRTILLA

(Continued from the joint issue of January-February 1987)

2

In the same exalted vein as "Lines on Ireland" is written the small eulogy "Saraswati with the Lotus" at the passing of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee—the Rishi who gave to India "Bande Mataram" ("Mother, I bow to Thee"), the mantra of rejuvenation and awakening when this nation was deeply immersed in inertia and inaction.

To quote K. D. Sethna, "Felicitous in-look and a subtle strength of spirit are the repeated marks of Sri Aurobindo's poetry from the start and it grows increasingly keener and finer on the whole with the opening of his Europeanised mind, familiar with French, German and Italian no less than Greek and Latin, to the manifold opulence of his country's culture and life."¹

Bankim's pen made him one of the greatest authors in the world. Of him Sri Aurobindo wrote elsewhere: "Scholar, poet, essayist, novelist, philosopher, lawyer, critic, official, philologist and religious innovator,—the whole world seemed to be shut up in his single brain."² And he gives him the credit for creating the Bengali language, literature and nation.³

In this poem Sri Aurobindo brings out the greatness of Bankim by inference—stating that the goddess of learning, Saraswati herself, sheds honeyed tears at his sad and early departure—

"Yet even their sweetness can no more relume
The golden light, the fragrance heaven rears,
The fragrance and the light forever shed
Upon his lips immortal who is dead."⁴

But Sri Aurobindo's heart is not satisfied with only this much homage, this much admiration for the great author, and he writes another in praise of this magician of words. He addresses the month of May thus—

"All these thy children into lovely words
He changed at will and made soul-moving books.
From hearts of men and woman's honied looks.
O master of delicious words!...

The eye receives

¹ *Sri Aurobindo—The Poet*, p. 64.

² *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol. 3, p. 86.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 95. ⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 26.

That reads these lines an image of delight,
 A world with shapes of spring and summer, noon and night;
 All nature is a page, no pleasing show
 But men more real than the friends we know.”

And he reminds Bengal of its great loss—

“Your heart was this man’s heart. Subtly he knew
 The beauty and divinity in you.”¹

The poet’s heart brims and its emotions burst in sparks of a still more luminous and deeper appreciation, that are like a glorious diadem placed on the lofty brow of the departed author—

“His nature kingly was and as a god
 In large serenity and light he trod
 His daily way, yet beauty, like soft flowers
 Wreathing a hero’s sword, ruled all his hours.

He sowed the desert with ruddy-hearted rose,
 The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose.”²

In the same exalted and intensely emotional vein is the poem written on Madhusudan Dutt whose genius, according to Sri Aurobindo, along with Bankim’s raised Bengali from the level of a dialect to a great literary language capable of portraying the most sublime thoughts and the profoundest feelings—

“Poet, who first with skill inspired did teach
 Greatness to our divine Bengali speech,
 Thou mad’st her godlike who was only fair.”³

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo wrote apropos of Bengali: “In Madhusudan Dutt’s hands that nerveless and feminine dialect became the large utterance of the early Gods, a tongue epic and Titanic, a tongue for the storms and whirlwinds to speak in: he caught and studied his diction from the echo and rumour of the sea. All the stormiest passions of man’s soul he expressed in gigantic language.”⁴

The notes were honied, the accents pure and perfect, the language enlarged so as to encompass all the ranges of the depths and heights possible to human beings,

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 25.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 95.

Titans or Gods. As if the cowherd of Vrindavan himself had worked in the hands of the poet—

“No human hands such notes ambrosial moved;
 These accents are not of the imperfect earth;
 Rather the god was voiceful in their birth,
 The god himself of the enchanting flute,
 The god himself took up thy pen and wrote.”¹

Then in three poems the poet touches those dominant notes of literature—pathos and tragedy—a sad life that is not yet transmuted into felicity as in Sri Aurobindo’s later poetry. In two of these poems love is defeated by death. In the piece “Night by the Sea” this preoccupation with death, this sadness, is truly strange since a lover at the zenith of felicity drifts into unwarranted thoughts of transience, the brief spring of love, the passing of human hopes and lives, and his words are almost a sigh—

“Love, a moment drop thy hands;
 Night within my soul expands.”²

In the dim eve lighted by coloured lanterns of flowers, at the most idyllic moment of love he cries out—

“Coral kisses ravish not
 When the soul is tinged with thought;
 Burning looks are then forbid.”³

The whole poem pictures a solemn enlarging eve hovering above the earth in the twilight hush and, one after another, stars surround her like sentinels. Here the poet has blended his anguished and thoughtful mood with different moods and cadences of the sea—

“Darkness brightens; silvering flee
 Pumps of foam the driven sea.”⁴

or

“To the wind that with him dwells
 Ocean, old historian, tells
 All the dreadful heart of tears
 Hidden in the pleasant years.
 Summer’s children, what do ye
 By the stern and cheerless sea?”⁵

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 27. ² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³ *Ibid.* ⁴ *Ibid.* ⁵ *Ibid.*

These few lines concretize in our consciousness on one side the thundering surge, on the other the gentle shore-lapping waves. Then we chance upon lines that are splendid flambeau-runners of *Urvásie* and *Ilion*:

“Breast, the ardent conqueror’s spoil,”¹

or an echo of the later perfection of the sonnets—

“I thought Love soft as velvet sleep,”²

or kin to the bold romance of his plays—

“But error led my plucking hands astray
And with a sudden sweet dismay
My heart into her apron fell.”³

Then we chance upon some controlled and detached lines full of yearning and grief—

“Ye glades, your bliss I grudge you not,
Nor would I that my grief profane
Your sacred summer with intruding thought.
Yet since I will no more behold
Your glorious beauty stained with gold
From shadows of her hair, nor by some well
Made naked of their sylvan dress
The breasts, the limbs I never shall possess,
Therefore, O mother Arethuse, farewell.”⁴

Later on, the poet renounces this sigh of love and takes our hand firmly and leads us away from sadness to lines full of lofty ideals, free from lovers’ frailty. For in the next poem “Love in Sorrow” a moment of loneliness is at once followed by the realisation of the poet’s own greatness and nobility. By a magic transformation self-commiseration is enlarged into self-confidence—as if a king has thrown away a beggar’s garb and remembers to put on his crown. It is an awakening from the hypnotism of the senses—

“For there was none who loved me, no, not one.
Alas, what was there that a man should love?
For I was misery’s last and frailest son
And even my mother bade me homeless rove.
And I had wronged my youth and nobler powers
By weak attempts, small failures, wasted hours.”⁵

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Likewise in the small poem "Estelle" our eyes alight on lines which if freed from their context are full of greatness and give us a foretaste of *Savitri*—

"My spirit is a heaven of thousand stars,
And all these lights are thine and open doors on thee."¹

Also we chance upon the first notes of his high passion, the love of his motherland—India, whose heartland is Bengal:

"O plains, O hills, O rivers of sweet Bengal,
O land of love and flowers, the spring-bird's call
And southern winds are sweet among your trees:
Your poet's words are sweeter far than these.
Your heart was this man's heart. Subtly he knew
The beauty and divinity in you."²

Sri Aurobindo's later consummate artistry flashes out in line after line of appreciation. And the book ends with a noble poem "Envoi"—and its four momentous closing lines are significant of an event which proved epoch-making:

"Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow."³

These are some soul-scintillating samples of Sri Aurobindo's early poetic perfection, the dawn-unveiling by a master's pen, the echoes of the Eternal's call which the seer poet has heard and which will later change the direction of human history.

(Concluded)

SHYAM KUMARI

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

JUNG'S RELEVANCE TO INDIA

WARS, REVOLUTIONS AND CATASTROPHES

THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES

(Continued from the joint issue of January-February 1987)

WARS and revolutions concern men, men are involved in them. They cannot be said to be imposed upon them externally without their having an inner sympathetic relation with these momentous events. Inner sympathetic relation means a participation of 'will' in them.

It was a revolutionary thing when Freud said that the symptoms of the disease are willed by the patient. But the unconscious in the neurotic has a strong compensatory reaction and the symptoms of the neurotic afford to him a satisfaction, though spurious, and he wills them for that vain sort of satisfaction.

A child, not wanting to go to school, says he has fever and may easily get a little temperature. An adult can also do so, if a keen will is involved.

Analytical psychologists (Freud and Jung in particular) have, through elaborate clinical studies, shown that the symptoms of the disease are willed by the patient.

The unconscious in the individual is a vast unknown factor and its determining power is immense. Superficially we are a being primarily determined by social standards, but the unconscious personality is a contrary and complementary phenomenon. This psychological situation creates the contradictions and anomalies of life. Freud wrote a scientific paper in which he affirmed that the accidents too are willed events. How improbable! Catastrophes, natural calamities, an earthquake, a flood, a drought are things of the universal scheme of things, the balance and imbalance of things of which humanity is a part. And the collective unconscious of humanity is a great force which interacts with the physical forces. It is wrong to take physical forces as a factor sufficient by itself. The universe is, on the whole, an interconnected unity, with the physical, biological, mental, social and spiritual all interwoven and acting on one another. Thus catastrophes must be a part of man's life. In view of the collective unconscious of man, which has a long historical background, this must be so even more.

Such a view strikes us as improbable, because of the sharp but unreal separation we are accustomed to make between physical and mental realities. But our body demonstrates that the two orders of reality are really one. Secondly, human egoism and its self-justification or self-innocence prevents us from recognising that our ailment, from which we suffer, can be willed by some part of us, that wars and other large upsettings of life too can be somehow secretly willed by us, even catastrophes and accidents can have a participation of our will in them. Our will, as we know it,

is the conscious rational and social will in us. But there is a great deal of irrational will too and an immense collective will also in each one of us. And these various wills are not a unified fact. There is much division and contradiction in them and we are capable of contradictory willings producing paradoxical results. This is a marvellous fact of human life, which Analytical Psychology has demonstrated in recent times.

The yogic life relying on deep introspection has surprisingly held a similar position. Says Sri Aurobindo, "Nothing can endure, if it has not a will in our nature, a sanction of the Purusha, a sustained pleasure in some part of our being, even though it is a secret or a perverse pleasure, to keep it in continuance."¹ Now, does this not corroborate what we have been discussing above? The Mother has said that man in his egoism misuses the bountiful gifts of nature, hoards them, uses them excessively, forgetting that others too need the same and that produces much misery in life. A conscious fair-minded approach to the goods of life could make things simpler. The Mother tells us that even death is willed by man. Death has always been there and it has now become a habit. If the ingrained belief in death could be eradicated, things could be different. But this eradication is the problem. Further, life being an adventure of experience, a search for, in fact, infinite experience, we 'will' even the kind of death we are going to have. A young man who died in an accident evoked from the Mother the remark, "Well, he had wanted this experience, the experience of instantaneous death in an accident." Of course, that wanting was not in him a conscious wanting.

This view of the unpleasant aspects of life, of disease, death, wars, revolutions, catastrophes and accidents, is truly hard to appreciate. But in the degree we are able to do so, we develop some understanding for the most understandable things of life. And contemporary analytical psychology and yoga have a definite light to throw on this subject.

Jung's collective unconscious has been to him a great guide in interpreting contemporary events of history and the insights he has given are truly illuminating. Here are his own words on the subject, which can provoke deep contemplation.

"I hold the view that the greatest changes in human history are to be traced back to internal causal conditions, and that they are founded upon internal psychological necessity. For it often seems that external conditions serve merely as occasions on which a new attitude long in preparation becomes manifest."²

*

".... This gradual accumulation means a gradual increase of the energy of the unconscious contents. Certain individuals gifted with particularly refined intuition

¹ *The Life Divine*, S.A.B.C.L. Vol. 18, p. 391.

² C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London), p. 139.

become aware of the change going on in the collective unconscious, and sometimes even succeed in translating perceptions of it into communicable ideas. The new ideas spread more or less rapidly in accordance with the state of readiness in the unconscious of other people. In proportion to the more or less universal unconscious readiness, people are ready to accept new ideas, or else to show particular resistance to them."¹

*

"There are many people who are only partially conscious. Even among absolutely civilized Europeans there is a disproportionately high number of abnormally unconscious individuals who spend a great part of their lives in an unconscious state. They know what happens to them, but they do not know what they do or say. They cannot judge of the consequences of their actions. These are people who are abnormally unconscious, that is, in a primitive state. What then finally makes them conscious? If they get a slap in the face, then they become conscious; something really happens, and that makes them conscious. They meet with something fatal and then they suddenly realise what they are doing."²

*

"An inflated consciousness is always egocentric and conscious of nothing but its own presence. It is incapable of learning from the past, incapable of understanding contemporary events, and incapable of drawing right conclusions about the future. It is hypnotized by itself and therefore cannot be argued with. It inevitably dooms itself to calamities that must strike it dead."³

*

"The great problems of life are always related to the primordial images of the collective unconscious. These images are really balancing or compensating factors which correspond with the problems life presents in actuality. This is not to be marvelled at, since these images are deposits representing the accumulated experience of thousands of years of struggle for adaptation and existence. Every great experience in life, every profound conflict, evokes the treasured wealth of these images and brings them to inner perception; as such they become accessible to consciousness only in the presence of that degree of self-awareness and power of understanding which enables a man also to think what he experiences instead of just living it blindly."⁴

*

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

“Do we ever understand what we think? We only understand that thinking which is a mere equation, and from which nothing comes out but what we have put in. That is the working of the intellect. But beyond that there is a thinking in primordial images—in symbols which are older than historical man, which have been ingrained in him from earliest times and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche.”¹

All these words present a new and original way of interpreting historical phenomena. And they seem to make sense. The so-called external causes often appear to be trivial in comparison with the massive changes they bring about and the colossal energy they mobilise. Surely there is a truth in this interpretation and that can help much in managing human affairs.

In the spiritual consideration of the matter the world is a working of light and darkness in which light is progressively advancing, but as yet darkness and selfishness and egoism are dominant. Hence disharmonies, incongruities, devastations, calamities have their place. However, the light grows and abides, joy is more than sorrow, the will to live is ever so strong and the attempt to overcome the evils of life is always there.

One must look at life as a whole and not only do so under stress of personal suffering.

INDRA SEN

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2.

A WEEK IN COURTALLAM

(Continued from the joint issue of January-February 1987)

4

AGAIN we wanted to avoid any weekend crowds, so decided to look for a secluded spot up the hillside from Tiger Falls. When we reached the falls at about 9.30 no-one was there, so we changed for bathing. Of course others soon arrived: a plump young man, and two daring small boys, who dived and tumbled and played vigorously in the little pool. When we came back in the evening they were still playing a little lower down the stream, making their thin bodies strong with the water.

We found a path that took us up beyond the head of the second, nameless fall that we somehow consider specially our own. At the top was a lovely water-and-rock garden, with lots of plants that I wanted to draw, but the path promised to take us even higher, and on we went—further and further up, and far away from the water, westwards as if the path would go over the top into the main valley. But when we were high up on the ridge above the town we met some herd boys, who said that the path didn't lead anywhere—only to the top. There were not many trees up there, only big clumps of lemon-grass holding back the steep slope in steps and narrow terraces. We found some shade and sat looking out over the fertile plain spread out to the foot of the misty mountains in the north, and ate a little, resting after the long strenuous climb.

Then we wanted to go back down to the stream we had left far below; I would have liked to sit and write and draw there for several hours. But on the way down we took another turn, which led us straight downhill back to Tiger Falls again. This time the place was full of people—many poor-looking children—and monkeys. H. went under the falls, but I didn't feel like it: the place is so small, it is not nice to be there in a crowd. So we were back at the guesthouse quite early—soon after three.

I am amazed to observe how relaxed I feel—in my body and inwardly... but feel sorry that I could not draw today.

5

Our two visits to 'Five Falls', and the valley above them, are recorded in my notebook only by sketches. Now I regret that I did not record the days' happenings at the time, for though I remember them as specially enjoyable, it would be impossible to capture the flavour of them now, in a record made up from memory. Five Falls was the only place where we really enjoyed bathing with the crowd—there is something specially intimate and joyful about the atmosphere there; and the bathing spot we found for ourselves, higher up in the hills, was the best of all our discover-

ies. On the walk there we tried to avoid the metalled road, and though this was not always possible, our deviations led us through some lovely teak plantations and wild forest. The light in these young teak forests (the trees seemed to be about twenty or thirty years old) is something special; the broad leaves cast a mottled shadow on the reddish, regularly-spaced trunks, and on the rather clean forest floor; there is nothing gloomy about a teak forest, even on a cloudy day.

6

Those roads wind, in my mind
Up into the valleys, fade
Into tracks, then footpaths
Stepping steeply up the mountainside
Up beyond the blossoming teak trees
Up around black rocks like sleeping mammoths
Through flowering thickets
To where long rustling grasses lie
Green and open to the sky.

See how the land lies
Spread out below us:
Innocent and peaceful, chequered with
Bright green of rice fields
Dark green of groves and orchards
Red where ploughed land lies briefly fallow
The sky-reflecting river looping lazily between,
A sprinkling of villages
And, far beyond, the brooding mountain-ranges
Blue like rain-clouds
With the rain-clouds above them.

We can smell the rain on the wind;
A shower will soon redouble
The fragrance of these fragrant thickets.
A small bird pipes
A note as thin as air
And there below where water slides
Gurgling between smooth stones
And drops into deep pools
Cicadas shriek their insistent rhythms.
Bright butterflies hover
And the wind sighs in the tree-tops.

Now I am bound in the far city
 I cannot rise and go there—
 Perhaps those blossoming forests
 Have long since fallen under the woodsman's stroke.
 But in my mind
 Those roads still wind
 Far up into the steep green valleys.
 Indra sits, garlanded with marigold and jasmine,
 In the shade of the banyan, looking out over the rice-field.
 As we pass and offer salutations
 The Rain-King calls his sweet wind off the mountain
 And sends it rippling out across the rice-field.
 Then every green apsara sways her golden head
 And dances. Have you seen the rice-field dancing?
 Such wonderful ripple-mazes and flowing patterns!
 The rhythmic coming-going of gold and green!

But one of us said:
 "Each grass is rooted—only the wind passes through them:
 You can very clearly see, it is only a vibration."
 Astonished, the dancers stood stock still,
 Hung their heads and would not stir again;
 For, though rooted, they had been dancing—
 And wished us to enjoy their dance.

There are gods who dwell on the mountain tops
 And gods who live beside the falling water;
 Gods who live in the forest glades,
 And gods who live in the fields.

Today I would like to walk out
 On narrow paths between green rice
 To where an ancient tree spreads its shade
 And sit there at the feet of one of those gods
 Who look tranquilly out upon the sea of green
 That moves beneath the cloudless sky.

Rice-seas bordered with young coconut trees:
 The image of plenty,
 Where the slow river loops
 Mirroring a smiling sky.

This year the rains have failed. Many watercourses lie dry and reservoirs are empty. We must be grateful for the 20th-century chug-chug-chug of diesel motors, and the lines of ugly wires and pylons that bring the water-goddess Sri of prosperity and plenty up out of the earth to make the fields green and giving.

7

A familiar sight: the white heron (? paddy-bird) who stands in the pool above the bridge into the town. We pass him morning and evening where he stalks or floats beneath the great trees. Usually his neck is tucked in, so that his small head fits onto the large body, making him look like a disproportioned duck. But now we have seen him sometimes unwound, darting for fish. He is always there.

So, until today, was the old beggar-man who lay so still in the dust beside the road on the day we arrived that I thought he was a dead body soon to be cleared away. Going out that evening we realised with helpless horror that there was still life in that corpse. What to do? Still I dare not open my heart to what it means to be old and ill and abandoned, lying in the dust by the roadside. We passed him several times a day on our way to and from dosais and coffee, until we found another way to go; but horror never allowed us to drop him a coin or offer any service. What service could one give, less than total commitment? We would have had to find a hospital, arrange transport, pick him up and carry him to it... it was too much for us.

We never saw him sit up, but now and then he would roll himself into a different position. I never saw his face—he kept it covered with a dusty cloth; but I saw once that he was scratching short stubbly white hair with both hands—he did not seem to be a leper: no fingers or toes were missing. He had a sore on one leg, I saw, but it seemed to be healed over.

On the second day someone had given him a bottle of water and some packets of food. He did not drink and eat all at once. Another day I saw the bottle was almost empty; I could easily have filled and brought it to him, bought a packet of rice or vadai and left it by his side. These simple actions felt somehow grossly inappropriate—though surely better than leaving him to die in an agony of thirst. He did not stink, and though his few clothes were colourless with dust, he kept himself always decently covered. He was not blind: from under his cloth he saw us coming and cried once ‘Aiyar!'; and yesterday, from across the road, I heard him call out—to someone else—“Tanir”. Today he was not there—to our relief; someone else had done what we could not do, had brought that poor body—dead or alive still?—to where it could be better cared for. I tell myself that we are strangers here—in our own country we would know what to do in such a case, here we feel helpless; but still, it is a poor karma, to have been unable to help a fellow-creature so obviously in need.

(To be continued)

SHRADDHAVAN

TRAVELOGUE

THE SISTINE CHAPEL

St. Peter's basilica is too large a chapel to be decorated or arranged for every function and festival. This mammoth of a Cathedral needs many hours and many men to have it cleaned and organised for any occasion.

Pope Sixtus IV conceived the idea of building a smaller church for the private use of the Popes. He wanted it to be small but wanted it to be a jewel. On the right side of the great St. Peter's and on the left side of the Papal Palace there were a few buildings. These were brought down to make place for a small church. The inside decoration should be unique, a wonder, a showpiece, the very best that the age can give. He died without seeing the completion of his favourite project. Pope Julius II imbibed his desires and ideas. He assembled the then talented artists of his time, a very distinguished group it must have been with Perugino and Botticelli and Signorelli and of course Michelangelo.

Finally in 1508 the whole work of decorating the inside of the chapel fell to Michelangelo Buonaroti, who it seems did not want the commission at all. He protested saying that painting was not his line, he was a sculptor. Pope Julius would have none of it; he brushed aside Michelangelo's unwillingness and offered him 3,000 ducats for the work. At first all sorts of ideas came in, clashed and mingled so that for a long time no definite sketch could be drawn up. At one time the Pope desired it to be in line with Solomon's Temple as it is described in the Book of Kings. He wanted it to be in line, rather in continuity, with the laws of Moses and of David and the ancestors of Christ, 'depicting the coming of the Saviour, everything pagan and Christian side by side to show the continuity. At other times he wanted it to be more modern and wanted the acts of the apostles to be shown.

Unable to decide what it should be he gave up, and gave a free hand to Michelangelo, and it was recognised by all, and still is recognised, that his dream was far grander than anything conceived before. The idea of continuity was liked by Michelangelo. To him the vault of the tiny church was the open sky. On it he would paint the story of Creation, the Hebrew Prophets, the Christian scenes, the coming of the Messiah and, even after that, the Final Day of Judgement. He conceived all that in one vast sweep. The vault was sectioned out into nine spaces and in each is a scene from Genesis. The style is High Renaissance and, to some critics, superior to the Quattrocento. The Old Testament and the new evangelical laws, all were side by side. It was the time of the Great Schism, Protestantism was rampant. So the Pope in every way possible tried to reinforce the old Church and his position, The Altar-piece in the Sistine Chapel is an enormous painting of the Last Judgement. I shall discuss it last. Tourists are made to enter the Sistine Chapel by a side-door near the Altar so that we do not see it immediately but leave it for a while at our back.

The main vault is divided into nine sections, each depicting a particular scene. Directly overhead as we enter is Zechariah, then the Drunkenness of Noah, then the Flood, the sacrifice of Noah, Lamentation and Expulsion, the Creation of Eve, the Creation of Adam, Separation of Land and Water, the Creation of the Moon and the Sun and the Planets, the Separation of Light from Darkness, finally Jonah coming out of the belly of a fish. This is as we saw it as we entered. Actually it should be read from the far side to keep the proper sequence of the story. There are high glass-windows between these scenes and the vault; in the lunettes and spandrels are the prophets. On either side of the Altar are David and Goliath on the right and Judith and Holofernes. Then as we proceed with our sight we meet Dalphica on the right, Joel on the left and Isaiah and Erythrace, Cumaea and Ezekiel, Daniel and Pesica Lithica and Jeremiah. The two far corners show Moses and the Brass Serpent, and the death of Haman. With each main figure are other figures and children and cherubs. One perceives that the work as it proceeds becomes more and more clear, precise, accurate, the lines more bold, the images far more powerful, majestic, awesome where that is needed, iconographically richer, interpreting various levels of meaning.

The Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo is the most grandiose pictorial *ensemblement* in all Western art. It is an amazing exhibition of how sculpture-effect could be attained by paint. I would like to quote here a poem by Zechariah. Incidentally the prophets are arranged according to date and importance.

Rejoice, rejoice, daughter of Zion
 Shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem
 For, see your King is coming to you
 His cause won, his victory gained,
 Humble and mounted on an ass,
 He shall speak peacefully to every nation.
 And his rule shall extend from sea to sea
 From the river to the end of the earth.

The Pope, Christ's vicar, ceremonially enters the chapel by the door directly under Zechariah. The work took more time than any one thought it would. The impatient Pope one day threatened to throw down Michelangelo from the scaffolding if he did not finish soon. Moaned the artist, "I have goitre straining from my ladder my head towards the Heaven, I feel the back of my brain and a Harpy on my breast." Lying on his back flat on the scaffolding he went on painting. The medium he used was water colour painted on to new damp plaster. Eventually he came out from an essentially classical formulation to an elegance of his own, a stylistic current quite individual and at places foreshadowing the 17th century Rubens and Bernini.

God in Michelangelo's painting looks like God. Has anyone seen God? One might get some inkling on seeing Michelangelo's God. What majesty, what royal

eyes, what impervious expression, implacable gait and posture, yet what loveliness, a face full of benignity and showering benevolence from his whole frame. Such is Michelangelo's God. No one has ever painted before or after him such a figure of God. His God after having created Adam reaches out and with piercing gaze invests the beautiful clay with a thinking brain and troubled soul. We gaze and gaze, yet our senses never get saturated. We want to go on looking. God in this scene is supported by wingless angels and his left arm embraces what people think immaculate Mary. The symbolic heavenly cloak surrounds the energetic figure of God contrasted with the bared naked languorous figure of Adam. The characteristically opposite figures become electric at the juncture of the two extended hands. The Creation of Adam is considered a tremendous achievement of Michelangelo. Perhaps it expresses his own galvanic creative power, which encompasses both man and God. When separating land from water God looks even more enormous. In the scene depicting the creation of the moon and the sun and the planets he seems to fly towards us in a dynamic orbiting motion, a whirling figure of awesome generative power.

The coloration has naturally suffered from dirt and light, yet it still retains its gold, green blue and red and rose and the whole is still warm and alive. Never in the history of fresco-painting is such a mighty idea conceived and so successfully executed. Not only in the main figures but also in the decorative embellishment he had put such fineness and accuracy, such monumental life-like cast adjusted to perspective variation and level. It is man's greatest achievement in picture-story.

Coming round we are back to the Altar. We are now face to face with the Last Judgement. Late in 1533 Pope Clement VII (a Medici) wanted to decorate the Altar wall which had been untouched so far. It was decided that the Last Judgement would be the most fitting picture as a backdrop to the Altar. What decided the final choice may have been the defection of King Henry VIII of England. His defection and rebellion against Papal authority naturally angered the Pope who wanted the picture to be a grave warning to him and to all those who sought salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church. The wall was unveiled on All-Hallows eve 29 years after the ceiling. In this painting Christ sits high with one hand raised high above. This painting the critics say, was more in Hellenic style than in the Christian. It was taken from an image of Jupiter. Half shows the blessed and half the damned. This latter half is certainly not a pretty picture. Laymen yet lovers of art would find it gruesome, disgusting, even ugly. But ugly is not the right word. In India we have a word *Vivatsha Rasa*, it is this. But connoisseurs and critics praise even this portion. Never in the history of painting has anyone seen all the distortions of man's body and mind. How did Michelangelo draw these, where did he see such things and how did he manage to paint such ugliness with such accuracy? Ugly was perfectly ugly, it is unsurpassed.

To enjoy the paintings of the Sistine Chapel the best place is the coolth of a Library and big art books. For in the Chapel the bumps and jolts from the crowd

make it impossible. Even binoculars are risky for a bad dash might even injure your eyes.

Looking at Michelangelo's Moses one wonders if he has not just come out from an interview with God, a rendezvous with his Jehovah. Likewise we coming out of the Sistine Chapel felt that we have had an assignation with the Omnipotence.

CHAUNDONA S. BANERJI

Editor's Note: We regret to announce that the author of the "Travelogue" passed away recently as the result of a heart-attack. Some articles of hers remain with us for future publication.

FOR YOUR EARS ONLY

(Continued from the joint of issue of January-February 1987)

2. THE STORY OF MY BOOKS

“ANYONE worthy the name gentleman should possess at least 16,000 volumes in his library,” so said Mark Pattison. Had he visited mine he would have remarked, “Well, Mr. Raja! You are fit to be nearly half-a-gentleman.”

I myself have so far never bothered to count my books in my study. My sons having nothing else to do during this summer vacation did the counting. Since they are good at numbers the figures they gave came as a surprise to me. “So much!” remarked my wife, wide-eyed. After a pause she added, “Just imagine how much of your precious money has gone into the making of such a collection. Understand how uselessly you have spent it as if there were nothing else in this world to invest in.”

I have kept no account of how much I have spent on books. Yet when I think of my collection, I am reminded of how I collected them. And I have a story to tell.

To begin with, 99.9% of what I have in my library belonged to various owners. I am their second or third or fourth or even fifth owner. I would be glad to be even their tenth owner if for all their miserable condition they could present themselves before me without having shed a single leaf. I run here and there in my study to see whether I can find a few books of which I may claim to be their first owner. But... but... ah! the two-volume *Oxford Universal Dictionary* which I have purchased in fifteen easy instalments. Then the Chinese erotic classic *The Golden Lotus* in four volumes. And then what else? No... as far as I see, no. It can only be a waste of time to search further.

Books presented to friends by friends on memorable days or occasions, books presented to ladies by their lovers with tickling inscriptions and a request not to lend them to anyone, books given by their authors to their so-called fans, books presented by Swamijis to their “faithful” disciples, books sent by the publishers for favour of review, books from the libraries of the U.S.A. and England marked with the rubber stamp ‘Please return this book to***Library’, and books whose first owners intimidate the borrowers with the handwritten words: “Cursed be he who keeps my books and blessed be he who returns them,” are all with me.

But how come I got them?... To confess, I am a regular visitor to all the seventeen (the statistics are mine) secondhand bookshops in Pondicherry whose main business is wastepaper. Whenever I go out of Pondicherry my eyes are always on the hunt for second-hand or pavement booksellers. Further, in a strange place, while my family members or friends would ask, “What are the places worth seeing here?” I would ask to everybody’s surprise, “Is there a second-hand bookshop here?”

Till the time I entered the first year B.A. degree course with English Literature main, I had no love for books. I had at home practically nothing except *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary* and *Oxford School Atlas* that belonged to my father. And to speak nothing but the truth I had not done any extra reading. I had never even heard of Aesop, for I studied in a Missionary school where the teachers gave importance to the prescribed text-books and all my time went into mugging every word of them. As a result I learnt neither the language nor the art of creative thinking. Had I tried so, the canes of my masters would have skinned me alive. That is another story.

It was only in college, that I came under the influence of two great minds—Professors R. Venugopalan Nair and N. Santhalingam—whose vast reading and scholarship even today remain the envy of their colleagues. I was one among the privileged few guided properly by these two great lamps. The former took me to the realms of World Literature and the latter taught me ungrudgingly the nuances of the English language. One taught me how to read and enjoy a work of literature. The other told me that even a scrap of paper that comes home holding grocery is worth reading if one is interested in increasing one's vocabulary. I had access to their huge collections of books. And both advised me, "If a book is worth reading it is worth buying .. mere possession is a part of scholarship." That was the turning point in my aimless life. Or shall I say I date the beginning of my life from that year? And this was fifteen years ago.

As a student I had very little money to spend on books. The fees I earned as a private tutor to high-school boys in the early hours and after sunset as a typist in a cotton godown plus the pocket-money given by my generous father made the secondhand booksellers richer by a hundred rupees every month.

Once in Madras, misguided by a mischievous monkey in the form of a neatly dressed human being, I took a wrong bus. After a fifteen-minute journey, the bus-conductor threw me out. The short journey was to me a blessing in disguise. Once out of the bus, I was pleased to see a row of pavement bookshops. I pounced on a pile of eleven books, all plays by Shakespeare published by the Clarendon Press. "How much have I to pay?" I asked.

"Rupee for ten," he said and continued, "They are five per rupee," pointing at one corner of his shop where volumes slightly bigger in size and shape lay in no order.

For a time I could not believe my ears. I felt that I was in the cave of Alibaba. I had enough money in my pocket. Somerset Maugham, V. S. Naipaul, Jane Austen, R. K. Narayan, Maxim Gorky, S. Radhakrishnan, Bertrand Russell and many others mostly in penguins altogether 200 in number that once belonged to various owners were now mine. I remember to have carried them in two big cartons and paid the rickshaw-wallah a few rupees more than what I had spent on books. I should say that that was my first big collection.

Summer was always pleasant to me, for it brought enough money into my

pockets. Every year during the summer vacation a car-dealer offered me the post of a clerk-*cum*-typist with a salary of Rs. 200 per month. Fifteen years ago it was an attractive amount. And I had three months of vacation. I used to save the entire amount to go to Madras. Three days' stay in Madras and the great hunt for the classics of the world made my library grow. When Madras Moore Market was burnt down I really had a heavy heart and wept like a child at the loss of a beloved mother. And I happily remember the days I wandered in the Moore Market, for the treasures of the world. Trichy was another place I always loved to go to, for it was there I picked up nearly all the plays of Bernard Shaw and the works of Tagore for a song.

I have spent hours together, sometimes forgoing even my meals, inside the second-hand bookshops digging out the books of any taste and any subject from dust-laden piles, all the time sneezing and blowing my nose into my hanky as I am allergic to dust. Three to four hours of search sometimes would disappoint me and at times just a half-hour ransack would yield enough harvest. Like the busy bee storing droplets after droplets of honey, I have collected book after book.

Most of the books I carried home from my haunts were quite often without cover or in bad shape or the stitching had already given way or they were moth-eaten. But all such books were sent to my friend R. Marimuthu, a school-teacher, an expert in binding books who in his leisure nursed them, doctored them and when he sent them back to me cured of all diseases and elegantly dressed, I found no words to express my gratitude to him. I don't see any section of my library that does not display his skill. I should never forgive myself if I forgot my binder-friend, for he did all this for nothing, but love.

And then there was a famous Tamil critic and writer, Mr P. Kothandaraman of Pondicherry who spent his last days in misery. Before his death, he gave me three sackloads containing English critical writings, French classics in English translation and volumes of Tamil literature as a recompense for the small help I rendered to meet a portion of his medical expenses.

I should be much of a hound if I lost gratitude to Mr. K. D. Sethna, for it was *Mother India* that made me a reviewer. Soon I was honoured by half-a-dozen magazines from various parts of India. Sometimes they sent me two copies of the same book, the extra copy of which I gave to libraries or interested friends. They added themselves to my library. And I have written nearly a hundred reviews.

"Beg, borrow or steal," wrote Shakespeare. I did everything. I see around me a few books which I have borrowed from my friends and conveniently forgot to return them. Does it not amount to stealing? I hate to part with a book that I love and if I do not love a book I do not bother to borrow it. I do, of course, lend books but not before entering them in my lending register. I esteem a book more than a friend. If a friend loses a book of mine he loses my friendship too. I have lost many friends. Yet I lend books to friends, for books after all are meant to be read. I expect the borrower to remember that they are mine and I am theirs.

To acquire a legacy of books is a rarity in India. I will disclaim no such legacy and hereby undertake to accept it, however dusty and dog-eared. And whoever leaves a legacy to me may have the satisfaction that the books he once loved and liked to keep in his room have not gone to waste as wrapping paper in a grocery shop or been blown to shreds in Sivakasi Fireworks factory.

I wish to live a full-fledged gentleman.

(To be continued)

P. RAJA

STORIES FROM TAMIL LITERATURE

(Continued from the issue of August 15, 1986)

33. Unequal Love

AMBİKAPATHI was the son of the great poet Kamban. He was a good-looking young man and himself a talented poet. Kulothungan III was the Chola king at that time and Kamban was his Poet Laureate. Being the privileged son of the Poet Laureate Ambikapathi visited the king's court often. His dazzling wit and charming manners attracted the attention of princess Amaravathi, the daughter of the king. They had frequent occasions to meet and by and by they fell in love with each other. But they had to keep their love secret, for it was unthinkable for a princess to marry a plebeian. Days passed and it became very difficult for them to hide their feelings. The king became suspicious. He was indignant at the audacity of Ambikapathi, but he wanted to make sure before he took any action.

Without revealing his suspicions to anyone, he arranged a banquet in the palace. Ambikapathi was invited. The king's intention was to have a close watch over the lovers to see for himself how they behaved in each other's presence. When every guest was seated princess Amaravathi walked into the hall like a fairy. Ambikapathi was a passionate youth. The moment he saw his lady-love he forgot the whole situation and burst into a poem paying high tribute to the beauty and charm of the princess. Kamban saw the danger and quickly diverted the course of the poem by taking it up from Ambikapathi and ending it in a quite different note. Though his suspicions were strengthened, the king could not prove anything.

However, the lovers couldn't escape for long the watchful eyes of the king, and one day they were caught red-handed. The immediate reaction of the king was to put Ambikapathi to death. But his counsellors advised him against it. He might have to face the wrath of the common people if he dealt with Ambikapathi so summarily. So he called his Council and put the matter before it. Kamban begged the king to forgive Ambikapathi. He assured the king that he would see to it that his son behaved himself in the future. Most members of the Council were sympathetic towards Ambikapathi. Some of them even boldly said that it was not wrong to fall in love.

Meanwhile Amaravathi was in tears. She refused food and drink. She pleaded with her father not to stand in the way of her happiness. She said that if anything happened to her lover she would immediately kill herself. The king was in a dilemma. Ottakuthar, who was poet and counsellor to the king and not very well disposed towards Kamban and his son, came out with an idea. He suggested that Ambikapathi should be put to a test. If he could extemporaneously compose a hundred stanzas of poetry purely on a devotional theme, without mixing in it a single thought or metaphor on love, he might be forgiven. But if he failed to complete the

hundred stanzas or if any thought of love intruded anywhere in the stanzas, he should be put to death. The Council agreed to this and Amaravathi was overjoyed. She had full confidence in the poetic powers of Ambikapathi.

The young lover, too, was sure he would win. His ardent love for the princess would carry him through. And the test began. Ambikapathi was seated before the court. All the poet-judges were there on both sides of the king. Amaravathi took her seat on the balcony, hidden from Ambikapathi's eyes, but she could hear everything that passed in the court. And she had one hundred roses with her to count out the stanzas as and when they were recited. Ambikapathi started with an invocation to his favourite deity. Then he began the devotional series. It was mere child's play to him to rattle off stanza after brilliant stanza. Everyone was amazed at his extraordinary powers and many secretly wished that he should win. As he neared the end everyone was sure of his victory. But fate interfered at the last moment. When her hundred roses were counted out, a jubilant Amravathi stood up and applauded Ambikapathi. Seeing her there, Ambikapathi discarded his devotional theme and began singing of her exquisite beauty, thinking that the test was over. But alas, the test was not yet over. There remained one more stanza to be completed. In her ignorance Amaravathi had counted the stanzas right from the invocation. The usual custom was not to include the invocation with the other stanzas. So the judges gave the verdict that Ambikapathi had failed in the test. Amaravathi's heart broke. She fell down in a faint.

Kamban again pleaded with the king for mercy. He pointed out that it was all the fault of the princess who had counted wrongly. A few others supported Kamban, but the king would not listen. He was adamant that Ambikapathi should die and soon passed orders for his immediate execution. Ambikapathi was taken to the gallows and was hanged. When Amaravathi came to hear of this, she fell into a swoon again and rose no more.

34. The Revenge of Kamban

After the killing of Ambikapathi who was his only son, Kamban left the court of Kulothungan in great sorrow and bitterness. Abhorring all human company he went into the forest and began to lead the life of a recluse. The heartlessness of the king rankled in his mind. He had been a very close friend of the king for many years, much respected and loved by the Tamil people as the greatest poet of his time. Yet the king had shown no consideration for his feelings. He had put Ambikapathi to death with a vengeance. However hard he tried, Kamban couldn't forgive the king. And he tried to forget his grief in writing.

Day in and day out he sat in his lonely hut in the forest and wrote poetry. One day while he was writing, there was a sound of running footsteps outside. He stopped and peeped out. A young man came running towards the hut. He was panting heavily and was at the point of breaking down. Kamban immediately recognised

him as the Chola prince, the son of Kulothungan. The prince said that he was being chased by a killer elephant and begged Kamban to give him protection. Kamban whose heart was still full of rancour against the royal family was overcome with hatred at the sight of the prince. The poet was holding a style in his hand and in an impulsive outburst of spitefulness he hacked the helpless prince to death.

Great was the king's fury when the news reached him. He sent soldiers and had Kamban brought before him in chains. The poet faced him without flinching. "You killed my son for no fault of his. Chance came my way and I killed your son, not for any fault of his, but to give you the same suffering and pain you have given me in my old age. I may be guilty in the eyes of the law, but not in the eyes of the world."

Kulothungan sentenced Kamban to death. He said he himself would execute the sentence. Kamban said that he was ready to die then and there. The king took his bow and arrow. He aimed at the heart of the poet and drew the bow. The arrow pierced the heart of Kamban. Gasping for breath he uttered these last words:

"There are two kinds of weapons in this world. One is the arrow of steel and the other the arrow of words. The arrow of words is stronger and more dangerous than the arrow of steel. Your arrow of steel has killed me, but be sure my arrow of words will destroy not only you but the whole of your dynasty. My grief has so much power." With these words Kamban fell down dead.

M. L. THANGAPPA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE: 17 August 1986

SRI AUROBINDO'S CALL

INTRODUCTORY SPEECH BY KISHOR GANDHI

Friends,

WE are holding this Conference to commemorate the 115th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. For all the disciples and followers of Sri Aurobindo this day is a solemn occasion every year to recollect the vast and profound significance of his birth and also of the great mission to which he devoted his whole life single-pointedly. This recollection should also be a spur to renew our adherence to his mission and our dedication to its accomplishment with greater zeal.

What is the significance of Sri Aurobindo's birth and his life-work or mission?

The Mother once said that Sri Aurobindo's birth is "the birth of the Eternal upon earth", which "recurs for ever from age to age". If we interpret rightly this statement of the Mother we will be able to realise the immeasurable significance of Sri Aurobindo's birth not only for his disciples and devotees but for the whole of mankind, and not only for mankind in the present age but for all the past and future ages of the earth's evolutionary history.

The "Eternal" of whom the Mother speaks is in fact the Supreme Divine whom the popular religions call God. His birth is therefore the birth of God Himself in a human body. It is the Divine Incarnation known in India as the Avatar which occurs repeatedly from age to age. So, according to the Mother, Sri Aurobindo is the present Avatar or Incarnation of the Supreme Lord who incarnated several times before and will continue to incarnate in future also *ad infinitum*, as she once remarked.

And this clarifies at once the purpose and significance of Sri Aurobindo's birth and his life-work or mission, because the Avatar in each of his incarnations comes to accomplish a certain special work upon earth. The Avatar is not merely a great spiritual personality or a great yogi. Even the greatest yogi who has attained the highest spiritual perfection is not necessarily an Avatar. An Avatar is something different.

To understand this difference we must realise that Avatarhood is necessarily connected with the terrestrial evolution. As Sri Aurobindo has said, "Avatarhood would have little meaning if it were not connected with the evolution."¹

And the connection is this that the Avatar comes repeatedly upon earth to raise the evolution each time from its present accomplished level to the next higher level.

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 22), pp. 401-402.

This is his recurrent role, his persistent life-work, his special ceaseless mission. Without his direct intervention at every critical juncture of terrestrial evolution, that evolution cannot take its next forward leap. That is why the Mother once said: "Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations, under one form or another, one name or another."¹

At present the evolution is passing through the human stage. But evolution on earth did not begin with man nor will it end with him. It began long before man arrived on the scene and will continue long after he is surpassed, for it is a continuous process stretching backward to countless milleniums in the past and extending forward to endless vistas in the future.

But in this continuous progression there are distinctive stages like steps of a ladder, each of which is characterised by the emergence of a new level of consciousness embodied in a new species. But the transition from any particular stage to the next higher one is always marked by a critical period due to the tremendous resistance which the forces of the old established level offer to the next emerging one. It is during such critical evolutionary junctures that a special intervention of the Supreme Divine in the form of a new Avatar is indispensable, because, as I said, without such a direct intervention by Him the next higher stage cannot be reached. This is the reason why the Avatar has to be born again and again, each time incarnating a higher degree of the ascending consciousness. This is the reason why the Mother says that the birth of the Eternal "recurs for ever from age to age". And the same thing is said in the Gita by Krishna in the phrase *sambhavāmi yuge yuge*.² This is also the real significance of the Hindu parable of ten Avatars—some pre-human, others human at various stages of development, finally superhuman—culminating in Kalki, the Purna Avatar, who comes to establish the Kingdom of God upon earth.

In this progression man represents a middle stage. He is not its final perfect product. So Sri Aurobindo calls him "a transitional being". Beyond him there are still higher rungs to be scaled, greater heights to be reached. Above human mind are the ascending levels of the spirit, rising to their highest in what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the integral Truth-Consciousness of the dynamic Spirit which is now imminently pressing to manifest in earthly life.

It is in this large evolutionary context that we have to interpret the significance of Sri Aurobindo's birth and his life-work, his Avataric mission. For it is to manifest this highest Supramental Truth-Consciousness in earth-evolution that the Supreme Lord manifested as Sri Aurobindo. His mission was, and still is, to raise up the present human race stationed on the mental consciousness to the supramental consciousness, creating a new race of supramental beings in evolution. As the Mother has said:

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 13, p. 10.

² "I am born from age to age", *Gita*, IV 8.

“Sri Aurobindo is an emanation of the Supreme who came on earth to announce the manifestation of a new race and a new world: the Supramental.”¹

And she has also said:

“Sri Aurobindo incarnated in a human body the supramental consciousness and has not only revealed to us the nature of the path to follow and the method of following it so as to arrive at the goal, but has also by his personal realisation given us the example; he has provided us with the proof that the thing can be done and the time is now to do it.”²

This being his Avataric mission, Sri Aurobindo laboured all his life and finally even sacrificed his own body for its early realisation. And even after his so-called death he is still intensely and exclusively preoccupied with it, and will remain so till it is fully accomplished.

*

But here there is a very important point which it is very necessary to bear in mind, especially for those who profess to be his disciples and followers.

And it is this that though Sri Aurobindo as the Incarnation of the Supreme Lord is in his essential nature All-Powerful, yet in the dynamics of the evolutionary process when he manifests at a particular stage to raise it to a higher level, he has to work under the conditions of that stage for the successful achievement of his mission. At the present human stage, since man is a conscious mental being, the necessary condition is that a certain conscious collaboration from humanity is also needed before the next higher stage, the supramental, can be securely established in human life by the Avatar. The supramental Avatar by himself alone cannot lift up humanity to that higher level. He can open the way and lead humanity to it, but humanity must also respond by willingly following the way opened out by him. But, as the Mother has so poignantly pointed out, the general mass of humanity is not ready to give this response and is not even likely to do so. But fortunately, as again she has pointed out, if even a very small section of humanity, a small number of individuals, gives the needed response, it will suffice to accomplish successfully Sri Aurobindo's mission. This is the help which Sri Aurobindo always needed, and still very urgently needs, from those who profess to be his disciples, in order to fulfil his great work of supreme significance for humanity's future, because not only will it bring a lasting solution of all the age-long problems with which humanity has been persistently riddled and which have till this day defied all efforts at their solution, but also raise it up to a superhuman level of glorious life far exceeding even its most sublime dreams of perfection. It is this help which the Mother repeatedly called for with an increasing sense of urgency year after year, especially after Sri Aurobindo's passing in 1950. Here is one such typical call given in her New Year Message of 1970:

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 13, p. 19.

² *Ibid.* p. 21.

“The world is preparing for a big change.
Will you help?”¹

This “big change” to which the Mother refers is the evolutionary leap from the mental to the supramental level which will divinise human life and the help that she calls for is the sadhana of transformation of the whole human nature which alone can divinise human life. But this sadhana is an extremely difficult endeavour involving a prolonged battle with one’s own lower nature which obstinately resists the change and a fierce and relentless fight with all the present established forces of universal Nature which have so far ruled the world and which refuse to yield their empire. And the worst difficulties are created by the formidable adverse forces of falsehood and evil which are brutally opposed to the advent of the supramental Truth upon earth because they know very well that it will bring about their end.

Each person who calls himself a disciple of Sri Aurobindo has to undertake this work of transformation and face this fierce and formidable challenge in order to render his help or collaboration in accomplishing the “big change” in the world which is Sri Aurobindo’s Avataric mission. Only those—and they cannot be many—who carry in their hearts the irrepressible urge for the divine life and who have the dauntless spirit of adventure to take the evolutionary saltus in “the next future” can render this help, for the mass of humanity has neither the capacity nor the courage to undertake the necessary endeavour. It is for this reason that in her New Year Message for 1972 the Mother said, “The future is for those who have the soul of a hero”, and when asked to explain what she meant by “a hero” replied, “A hero fears nothing, complains of nothing and never gives way.”²

So Sri Aurobindo’s birthday each year is a renewal of the call to his followers to participate in this heroic endeavour of integral transformation which, as I said, is the necessary condition for the fulfilment of his Avataric mission. Those who whole-heartedly collaborate in this extremely difficult and sometimes even dangerous endeavour will be the Pioneers of the New Age which will usher in a new era in the evolutionary history of earth and raise up man to a superhuman level.

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At the present moment the need of this collaboration has become imminent because the formidable forces of falsehood and evil which have so far ruled the earth and human life, and which are bent upon destroying the New Light that Sri Aurobindo is manifesting, have become most furious and have unleashed their unprecedented violence all over the world. That is the real explanation of the extremely catastrophic conditions which have of late surged up not only in India but

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 15, p. 188.

² *The New Age* (1977) edited by Kishor Gandhi, p. 609.

everywhere in the world, and which, if not checked in time, pose the grave danger of annihilating the whole human race.

Because of this, we are at present at a crucial juncture in earth's evolutionary history where the destiny of the whole human race hangs in the balance. I say this because though the ultimate successful issue of the present crisis is certain, for nothing can frustrate the Divine's Will of carrying the evolution from the mental to the supramental level and of establishing the Divine Life upon earth, there are two possible ways by which it can happen. One is that if even a small number of individuals carry out in themselves the arduous work of transformation by their heroic endeavour and thus fulfil the necessary condition for the evolutionary transition, then they can tilt the balance on the positive side, and by their receptivity open up a passage for the New Truth to manifest in them and through them spread to the rest of humanity. But the other possibility is also there that if this collaboration by even a few individuals out of the whole of humanity is not forthcoming and there is a continued blind resistance to the Truth that is at present pressing to emerge with increasing urgency, then there might be a catastrophic destruction of that resistance before the New Truth can make its forceful landing in the life of humanity.

Let me remind you here that this is not my conjecture but a warning which both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have repeatedly given. I quote two of them here as typical examples:

In September 1945 Sri Aurobindo said:

"The present must surely change, but whether by a destruction or a new construction on the basis of a greater Truth, is the issue."¹

And in 1964 the Mother gave the same warning:

"The future of the Earth depends on a Change of Consciousness.

"The only hope for the future is a change of man's consciousness and the change is bound to come.

"But it is left to men to decide if they will collaborate for this change or it will have to be enforced upon them by the power of crashing circumstances."²

It is of course understood that we are not asked to carry out this work of transformation by our own unaided effort. In fact that is not even possible. What we are asked to do is simply to open ourselves more and more to the New Force that has already manifested in the earth's subtle atmosphere, and in all sincerity surrendering to it wholly, let it work out in us the entire process of transformation down to the most material cellular level. It is only with this unflinching help that the difficult work of transformation is to be done. And we must remember that this help is not withdrawn from us after the passing of Sri Aurobindo. On the contrary, it is very concretely and intensely there with those who are open to his influence. The Mother has repeatedly assured us of this help in a number of messages which she gave after

¹ *On Himself* (Cent Ed., Vol. 26), pp 167-68.

² Message to the World Conference of Sri Aurobindo Society, August 1964.

Sri Aurobindo's passing in 1950. I quote here one which she gave at the beginning of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary year, 1972:

"When Sri Aurobindo left his body he said that he would not abandon us. And, in truth, during these twenty-one years, he has always been with us, guiding and helping all those who are receptive and open to his influence.

"In this year of his centenary, his help will be stronger still. It is up to us to be more open and to know how to take advantage of it. The future is for those who have the soul of a hero. The stronger and more sincere our faith, the more powerful and effective will be the help received."¹

During the last fourteen years since Sri Aurobindo's centenary the urgency of this call has become increasingly imminent. This is because the work of transformation which began on the mental level when Sri Aurobindo started the Ashram, and which progressively came down to the lower vital and physical layers, has for some years entered into the still lower material and subconscious layers and is at present plunged into the lowest inconscient depths where all the root-difficulties of earth-nature are firmly entrenched as in a massive bedrock. It is a region of sheer darkness where the resistance is so tenaciously obstinate and the opposition of hostile powers so formidable and intractable that all hope of conquering it seems almost vain even after a prolonged battle. But unless this bedrock of inconscience is shattered by the supramental Light descending from above and joining with the supramental Light concealed in the very heart of that inconscient, there can be no decisive victory of the Truth and the promise of the Divine Life upon earth will ever remain an unfulfilled dream. So it is at this lowest inconscient level that the crucial battle is now being waged and the issue, though ultimately certain, is still poised in a precarious balance. Sri Aurobindo, whose Avataric role is to assure this victory for the earth and humanity, is at the very centre of this battle facing the brunt of the attack but, as I said, the exigencies of the evolutionary process require the collaboration of a few heroic souls who have also the intrepid courage to undergo their share of the difficulties and dangers. His mission is to open a Sunlit Path in the very heart of this inconscient darkness so that humanity can tread on it safely and easily later on. But without the collaboration of a few comrades-in-arms, the opening of this Path may have to be preceded by a catastrophic upheaval and massive destruction. Either way, the supramental power is sure "to shatter the heart of the darkness" of the Inconscient and win the victory but at the present moment, which is "The Hour of God" in the terrestrial evolution, the issue still seems to be hanging in the balance. That is why Sri Aurobindo also called it "the hour of the unexpected, the incalculable, the immeasurable."²

Each birthday of Sri Aurobindo is for this reason an increasingly urgent reminder to those who call themselves his disciples to offer their collaboration in this mighty work of transformation, and by doing so help in tilting the balance on the

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 13, p. 17.

² *The Hour of God* (1982 Edition), p. 4.

positive side so that the catastrophic destruction might be avoided and the wide and thornless sunlit path opened up for humanity to move safely forward to its luminous future.

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Friends, my intention in this introductory speech is not to present any ideas or conjectures of my own but to focus pointed attention upon what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have repeatedly stated regarding the central purpose of their life-work, for it needs hardly to be said that whatever is true of Sri Aurobindo's life-work is equally true of the Mother's because of the identity of their consciousness and their Avataric role. To make this evident, I shall read here an extract from a short talk of the Mother which she gave to explain a passage in Sri Aurobindo's book *Thoughts and Glimpses* that has a distinct bearing on the present critical world-situation. First I will read the passage from Sri Aurobindo's book:

"Wherefore God hammers so fiercely at his world, tramples and kneads it like dough, casts it so often into the blood-bath and the red hell-heat of the furnace? Because humanity in the mass is still a hard, crude and vile ore which will not otherwise be smelted and shaped; as is his material, so is his method. Let it help to transmute itself into nobler and purer metal, his ways with it will be gentler and sweeter, much loftier and fairer its uses."

Commenting on this passage, the Mother said:

"After all, the whole problem is to know whether humanity has reached the state of pure gold or whether it still needs to be tested in the crucible.

"One thing is evident, humanity has not become pure gold; that is visible and certain.

"But something has happened in the world's history which allows us to hope that a selected few in humanity, a small number of beings, perhaps, are ready to be transformed into pure gold and that they will be able to manifest strength without violence, heroism without destruction and courage without catastrophe...

"At the moment we are at a decisive turning point in the history of the earth, once again. From every side I am asked, 'What is going to happen?' Everywhere there is anguish, expectation, fear. 'What is going to happen?'... There is only one reply: 'If only man could consent to be spiritualised.'

"And perhaps it would be enough if some individuals become pure gold, for this would be enough to change the course of events.... We are faced with this necessity in a very urgent way.

"This courage, this heroism which the Divine wants of us, why not use it to fight against one's own difficulties, one's own imperfections, one's own obscurities? Why not heroically face the furnace of inner purification so that it does not become necessary to pass once more through one of those terrible, gigantic destructions which plunge an entire civilisation into darkness?

"This is the problem before us. It is for each one to solve it in his own way..."

“And I add: Time presses... from the human point of view.”¹

This then is the task to which Sri Aurobindo has called us and only those who endeavour to fulfil it in all sincerity and earnestness can have the privilege of calling themselves his disciples or followers. Surely, those who want to lead a safe and comfortable life, or seek their own personal spiritual salvation unmindful of the present pressing need of saving humanity from a catastrophic destruction, cannot deserve that designation, for, if on the one hand, to be a follower of Sri Aurobindo is a supreme privilege, it is also, on the other, an onerous responsibility, to fulfil which exceptional qualities are needed. But the privilege is offered to everyone and the call is given to all. Those who answer the call of Sri Aurobindo, which is also the call of the Supreme Lord at the present crucial evolutionary juncture, to lend a helping hand to turn the wheel of destiny in humanity's favour, will be those who will lead humanity to its glorious future.

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 9, pp. 73-4.

THE EPIC OF THE UNIVERSE

(Continued from the joint issue of January-February 1987)

7. The Early Universe

WE have seen the various stages through which a star goes in its lifetime. We also saw the possibility that a star could become a black hole. What happens then to it? Does it “disappear”? In case it does, we may ask: “In what manner can such an event at all take place in space?” These questions imply that we have to have a clear notion or concept of the nature of space itself—space and time. Let us draw an analogy.

Space and time may be imagined as a thin rubber sheet. So stars and other objects can be imagined to be tiny steel balls resting on this sheet, producing dimples in it. The heavier the object the deeper would be the dimple. Stars as massive as black holes, therefore, create such distortions in the space-time sheet that we might as well say that they have disappeared at one place and reappeared somewhere else in time and space. This location is not directly accessible to us for observation and we say that the object has become a black hole. The analogy is fictitious but it has served to help us visualize the problem.

In a more formal way, the Universe may be represented as a four-dimensional structure called space-time. Any event may be specified by three spatial coordinates and one time coordinate although, strictly speaking, they cannot be separated from each other in this way. We only mention here that, in attempts to unify the four forces of Nature we have discussed earlier, theories have been proposed that represent the Universe in eleven dimensions.

We have seen the different attempts that have been made to represent and comprehend the structure of the Universe. But does this structure remain static or does it change with time? Does the Universe—like the stars—have a beginning and an end? The four forces that account for all the phenomena in Nature, were they present in the early phase of the Universe? These are the questions that may be asked and answers based on our present scientific theories proposed. For instance, it has been suggested that the four forces of Nature were unified at the birth of the Universe.

How has the Universe come into being? A Babylonian epic describes the beginning as the separation of land and sky. In the 20th century we have created our own epic, using the language of science, based on the assumption that the Universe has been formed by natural laws that are discoverable today.

In 1920 it was discovered that the Universe is expanding. Based on observations made today we try to find out when that expansion started. This initial event, known as the Big Bang, is believed to have occurred about 15 billion years ago.

How do we know that the Big Bang actually occurred? Let us look at it this way. How do we know that there had been a fire in the fireplace even after the

flames have died away? If we see coals or logs still glowing we immediately assert the presence of fire. But if the coals are no longer glowing, we could still put our hands above the embers to see whether we feel any heat. If we do then we would infer the presence of fire that must have been there earlier.

We can say that the radiation resulting from the fire in the first case is in the visible part of the electromagnetic spectrum and in the second case the radiation is in the infra-red region. This analogy helps us to understand the fact that the Big Bang occurred so long ago that its radiation can be detected today not in the infra-red but in the microwave region. Such radiation was first detected in 1964 by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson at the Bell Telephone Laboratory in the USA. This is considered to be strong evidence in support of the Big Bang hypothesis.

The other observational evidence in support of the theory is the phenomenon of the red shift. The light coming to us from stars and galaxies has been found to be shifted to longer wavelengths, thus implying that our galactic neighbours are receding from us. This is how the astronomers in 1920 had arrived at the conclusion that our Universe is expanding. We may summarise this observation in terms of the law $V=H d$, where v is the velocity of the receding object at distance d , and H is the Hubble constant (15.40 km per second per million light-years).

Taking the Big Bang as the starting point and using our knowledge of the behaviour of matter and radiation, we shall trace chronologically the important event which ultimately brought about the present structure of the Universe. We shall trace how out of the hot matter and radiation, the primordial soup, the only ingredient present at the moment of the Big Bang, the superstructure of a cosmos that we witness at the present time was made.

But to do this we must first understand the implication of the term 'unification of the forces'.

The temperature of the Universe immediately after the Big Bang was so high and the energy with which the constituent particles of the Universe collided so great, that the character of the four fundamental forces was altogether different from what we know it to be today; these forces were indistinguishable from one another; in fact, they were fused into one, acting as a single force.

To comprehend the point better, imagine the following. A marble, initially at rest on a flat frictionless surface, is rolled towards a hole in the surface some distance away. Obviously, after some time it will fall into the hole. Now imagine the same marble rolled towards a hole up a small smooth mound. If the energy of the marble is high enough then it will again fall into the hole. But if the energy is less the marble will climb up to a certain height and roll back. The dropping of the marble into the hole can be likened to an attractive force; its rolling back down the slope is a kind of repulsive force between the marble and the hole. The latter manifests only at lower energies. In other words, the character of the force depends upon the energies of the interacting particles. At very high energies all the forces are therefore as if unified.

In our story, when the energy supplied to particles is unusually high, the forces that appear so different will exhibit a basic similarity. In the language of theoretical physics we say they are unified. Such an idea is called a unified field theory.

Thus if we take the moment of the Big Bang at time zero, then up to $0+10^{-43}$ second all the four forces—gravity, electromagnetism, the weak, and the strong—must have been unified. However, as yet, no theoretical framework for this unified force has been established. All our guidelines along which gravity could have united with the other three forces fail to give us any understanding of this initial event.

In the period between 0 and 10^{-43} second, when the Universe was ruled by a single force, we might, in a certain sense, say that it was as simple as it could be.

Then, after 10^{-43} second and up to 10^{-35} second the single force broke up. Gravity separated itself from the other three. In the period 10^{-43} to 10^{-35} second only two forces existed, gravity and the strong-electro weak. Theories that describe this process are called Grand Unification Theories, or GUTs.

As the flow of time crossed the 10^{-35} second mark and reached 10^{-10} second the two forces that have been just described too broke into three: gravity, the strong force, and the electro weak force. The theory that proposed the electro weak unification was developed in the 1960s by Weinberg, Glashow, and Salam.

To recapitulate, we first see gravity breaking away from the other three forces at 10^{-43} second after the Big Bang; then the strong separates itself from the electro-weak at 10^{-15} second. Well after 10^{-10} second even the weak and the electromagnetic forces become distinct. In other words, after 10^{-10} second from the Big Bang all the four forces that we see in operation today get separated from one another.

In this account, we have seen changes in the way the interactions of these forces, as we call them now, appeared. But interactions amongst what? Up to now the Universe was only a sea of radiation and sub-nucleic particles. From this point onward the changes that took place followed the changes in terms of new forms of matter. For this we will have to make acquaintance with these 'elementary' particles.

In 1963 a suggestion was made that what we know as elementary particles, a class which includes protons, neutrons, and all their short-lived colleagues, might not be truly elementary but might themselves be nothing more than combinations of still more basic entities called quarks. The suggestion was that three quarks make up a proton or a neutron. We thus recognise, apart from the components of radiation (photons), two basic types of matter: (i) particles made up of quarks, and (ii) electrons along with their relatives, all together called the leptons. Matter is made up of quarks and leptons.

Resuming our journey forward in time, we come to the span between 10^{-10} second and 10^{-4} second when only these two kinds of elementary particles, quarks and leptons, and of course radiation, made up the Universe. The temperature of the Universe during this period was too high to allow the quarks to combine and form protons and neutrons. They existed as individual entities.

Let us continue our journey farther. Between 10^{-4} second and 10^{-2} second (3 minutes) past the moment of the Big Bang, the temperature of the Universe dropped sufficiently to allow quarks to combine to form protons and neutrons. This is a period in which protons, neutrons, leptons and radiation interacted with one another through the four fundamental forces now well-separated from one another.

In looking back, we see that the closer we are to time zero, the moment of the Big Bang, the higher is the temperature and faster are the constituent particles of the Universe moving: the energy involved in collisions is the greatest when we are closest to the Big Bang.

Just before the 3-minute mark, the energy of the interaction between protons and neutrons and other particles has fallen to a level where the simple nuclei can form. The temperature is in fact relatively high—70 times that which is found in the core of the sun—but still good enough for the production of light nuclei such as deuterium (made up of one proton and one neutron), tritium (one proton and two neutrons), and helium-3 (two protons and one neutron).

The next milestone occurs at 10^{-13} second (500,000 years) after the Big Bang. This is a large jump in the time-scale we are considering. It is here that we see the formation of atoms taking place. To put it in other words, the constituents of matter we are familiar with took 500,000 years to come into existence after the primordial explosion.

Let us look more closely at this process. We know that the basic constituents of the atom are the nucleus and electrons maintaining an overall electrical neutrality of the atom. Before the 500,000-year mark the temperature of the Universe was so high that even if an electron had attached itself to a nucleus to form an atom, the other surrounding particles and radiation in the environment would have had so much energy that, as soon as a newly-born atom collided with one of its neighbours or with radiation, the electron would have been knocked off. In other words, before the 500,000-year mark the Universe consisted of nuclei and free electrons swirling in a sea of hot radiation. It was a state of hot plasma. When the temperature fell below the point where collisions would not cause atoms to be broken up, the electrons, drawn by electrical forces towards the nucleus, began to settle into atomic orbits and stay there. From a sea of dissociated particles the Universe froze into a collection of neutral atoms, which is what we see today.

We have traced the birth of the Universe and have pictured the various processes involved in the creation of the cosmos. In all that we have seen, there is a general rational development in the train of events described. We may also note that when the forces are unified there is an aspect of symmetry associated with them. Any event due to the action of the unified or the "compound" force is attributed to the presence of one or the other of the individual forces in the conglomerate. There exists, due to this symmetry, a kind of equivalence between individual forces because they are, after all, only different facets of the same "compound" force. When the

energy of interaction between particles falls below a certain point, this symmetry breaks down and the individual forces become distinct. The separation of forces, in turn, produces new forms of matter. To give an analogy let us consider a rod of iron at high temperature. It will not exhibit any spontaneous magnetisation. But when it is cooled below a certain temperature it can become a magnet. The appearance of this property, that iron can produce a magnetic field, a sort of polarisation of north and south poles, is equivalent to the breaking up of symmetry. What is undifferentiated gets differentiated in this process presenting itself as a force.

Creation, we say, began with the Big Bang, but is that really so? How far is the Big Bang theory credible? Did the events described in the story of creation really follow each other in the sequence as mentioned? Let us make a short assessment.

The primary evidences found to suggest the possibility of a Big Bang are the red shift in light coming from receding objects and the detection of microwave radiation long after the event. On the other hand, we can never verify that the breaking up of symmetry between unified forces led to their separation and that it led to the creation of different forms of matter. This is because we cannot and may never be able to artificially provide such gigantic amounts of energy to particles as were available to them close to the moment of the Big Bang. Thus we can never truly claim to know about the behaviour of particles at such high energies. Our speculations are based on working backward in time the only things which we can observe in the laboratory today.

Yet can the Big Bang be supposed to be a settled hypothesis? In spite of the evidence available for this theory, there is a considerable uncertainty in the details. It is highly speculative in nature, the unification of force has not yet been fully done, the experimental verification for this unification may be lacking as it will not be possible to produce such high energies in the laboratory. In addition to that, there seems to be a sort of asymmetry in space: space around a given point is not uniform or isotropic in all the directions. The present observations indicate that the Universe has a spherical volume corresponding to a radius of 350 million light-years and is filled up with 400 elliptical galaxies. These are not distributed uniformly in different directions. For instance, at a distance corresponding to 200 million light-years, these galaxies must recede from us with a velocity of 3000 km per second. But what is observed is that the velocity is 2300 km per second in one hemisphere and 3700 km per second in the other. The Universe is skewed with a velocity of 700 km per second. Presently this skewness is accounted for in terms of "missing mass" in some parts of the Universe. We shall discuss this topic in more detail in the following section.

(To be continued)

SHARAN and SUBROTO
(Higher Course, 3rd year)