

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

MARCH 1988

Price: Rs. 3.75

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 42.00

Life Membership: Rs. 588.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$16.00 or £10.00

Life Membership: \$224.00 or £140.00

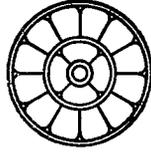
Air Mail:

Annual: \$36.00 for American & Pacific countries

£26.00 for all other countries

Life Membership: \$504.00 for American & Pacific countries

£364.00 for all other countries



Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.

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

All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Editor's Phone: 24782

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Editor: K. D. SETHNA

Published by: P. COUNOUMA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY - 605 002

Printed by: AMIYO RANJAN GANGULY

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry - 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

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

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLI

No. 3

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
DESIRE AND PURE WILL: AN INSIGHT FROM SRI AUROBINDO	... 153
THE MOTHER'S COMMENTARIES ON SRI AUROBINDO'S <i>Thoughts and Glimpses</i> (COMPILED FROM HER TALKS TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN, 1956-1957, IN A NEW TRANSLATION BY SHRADDHAVAN)	... 154
A TALK BY THE MOTHER TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 13 MARCH 1957	... 157
THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE IN THE LIGHT OF HER <i>Prayers and Meditations</i>	<i>Nilima Das</i> ... 160
VIGNETTES OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO	<i>Compiled by S</i> ... 165
HOW THEY CAME TO THE ASHRAM	<i>Compiled by K</i> ... 166
A WONDERFUL CURE	<i>Ibha Roy</i> ... 167
TWO PUZZLING POINTS IN THE GITA	<i>K. D. Sethna</i> ... 169
NOLINI KANTA GUPTA BIRTH CENTENARY THE ASHRAM'S INNER REALITY DIFFICULTIES ON JOINING THE ASHRAM	<i>Compiled by Shyam Kumari</i> ... 173
THE STORY OF A SOUL	<i>Huta</i> ... 175
DISCOVERY (Poem)	<i>Debanshu</i> ... 179
"ALL NIGHT ON A FLUTE"	<i>Samar Jha</i> ... 180

CONTENTS

HUMOUR IN THE PLAYS OF SRI AUROBINDO 3. <i>Perseus the Deliverer</i>	<i>Shyam Kumari</i> ... 183
SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA	<i>Nilima Das</i> ... 190
A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE UPANISHADS	<i>Indra Sen</i> ... 193
WATERS OF ETERNITY (Poem)	<i>Jayāntilal</i> ... 196
THE ETERNAL CHILD AND THE ETERNAL MARVEL THE SQUARING OF THE CIRCLE 3. TROJAN TRIO, THE APPLE OF DISCORD AND THE SMILE OF THE ALL-BEAUTIFUL	<i>B. Petris</i> ... 197
PADMA THE DEVOTED SISTER (Translated by Goura Mohan Mahanta into English)	<i>Gunananda Das</i> ... 202
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE FOLK TALES OF PONDICHERRY by P. Raja	<i>Review by Shraddhavan</i> ... 204

STUDENTS' SECTION

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION: TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE 16 AUGUST 1987, THE PRESENT WORLD-SITUATION INTRODUCTORY SPEECH BY	<i>Kishor Gandhi</i> ... 207
--	------------------------------

MOTHER INDIA INDEX 1987 PART I: TITLES

DESIRE AND PURE WILL

AN INSIGHT FROM SRI AUROBINDO

DESIRE, it is thought, is the real motive power of human living and to cast it out would be to stop the springs of life; satisfaction of desire is man's only enjoyment and to eliminate it would be to extinguish the impulse of life by a quietistic asceticism. But the real motive power of the life of the soul is Will; desire is only a deformation of will in the dominant bodily life and physical mind.

The essential turn of the soul to possession and enjoyment of the world consists in a will to delight, and the enjoyment of the satisfaction of craving is only a vital and physical degradation of the will to delight.

It is essential that we should distinguish between pure will and desire, between the inner will to delight and the outer lust and craving of the mind and body. If we are unable to make this distinction practically in the experience of our being, we can only make a choice between a life-killing asceticism and the gross will to live or else try to effect an awkward, uncertain and precarious compromise between them.

This is in fact what the mass of men do; a small minority trample down the life instinct and strain after an ascetic perfection; most obey the gross will to live with such modifications and restraints as society imposes or the normal social man has been trained to impose on his own mind and actions; others set up a balance between ethical austerity and temperate indulgence of the desiring mental and vital self and see in this balance the golden mean of a sane mind and healthy human living.

But none of these ways gives the perfection which we are seeking, the divine government of the will in life. To tread down altogether the prana, the vital being, is to kill the force of life by which the large action of the embodied soul in the human being must be supported; to indulge the gross will to live is to remain satisfied with imperfection; to compromise between them is to stop half way and possess neither earth nor heaven.

But if we can get at the pure will undeformed by desire,—which we shall find to be a much more free, tranquil, steady and effective force than the leaping smoke-stifled, soon fatigued and baffled flame of desire,—and at the calm inner will of delight not afflicted or limited by any trouble of craving, we can then transform the prana from a tyrant enemy, assailant of the mind into an obedient instrument.

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

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

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1988)

Chapter 20: THOUGHTS AND GLIMPSES: Part Three

The Spiritual Revolution

All would change if man could once consent to be spiritualised, but his nature, mental and vital and physical, is rebellious to the higher law. He loves his imperfection.

The Spirit is the truth of our being; mind and life and body in their imperfection are its masks, but in their perfection should be its moulds. To be spiritual only is not enough; that prepares a number of souls for heaven, but leaves the earth very much where it was. Neither is a compromise the way of salvation.

The world knows three kinds of revolution. The material has strong results, the moral and intellectual are infinitely larger in their scope and richer in their fruits, but the spiritual are the great sowings.

If the triple change could coincide in a perfect correspondence, a faultless work would be done; but the mind and body of mankind cannot hold perfectly a strong spiritual inrush: most is spilt, much of the rest is corrupted. Many intellectual and physical upturnings of our soil are needed to work out a little result from a large spiritual sowing.

Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer; Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult-egoism stand in the way.

All religions have saved a number of souls, but none yet has been able to spiritualise mankind. For that there is needed not cult and creed, but a sustained and all-comprehending effort at spiritual self-evolution.

The changes we see in the world today are intellectual, moral, physical in their ideal and intention: the spiritual revolution waits for its hour and throws up meanwhile its waves here and there. Until it comes the sense of the others cannot be understood and till then all interpretations of present happening and forecast of man's future are vain things. For its nature, power, event are that which will determine the next cycle of our humanity.

*

Mother, how can these God-visions cast themselves into each other?

In the mental consciousness these things cannot be harmonised and synthesised. For that one must go higher, find the idea behind the thought.

For example, here Sri Aurobindo shows what each of these religions represents in human effort, aspiration and achievement. If instead of taking the religions in their outer forms, which are just dogmas and intellectual concepts, we take them in their spirit, in the principle each represents, there is no problem in unifying them. They are very simply different aspects of human progress, which complement each other perfectly well and which should unite with many other aspects to form a more total, more complete progress, a more perfect understanding of life, a more integral approach to the Divine.

And even this unification, which already requires a return towards the spirit underlying things, is not enough: to it must be added a vision of the future, of the goal towards which humanity is moving, of the future fulfilment of the world, this last 'spiritual revolution' of which he speaks which will open up a new era—the supramental revolution.

In the supramental consciousness none of these things are contradictory or exclusive any more. They all complete one another. Only the mental form divides. What the mental form represents must be united with what all the other mental forms represent in order to make a harmonious whole. And that is the essential difference between a religion and the true spiritual life. A religion exists almost exclusively in its form, in its cult, in a particular set of ideas, and it becomes great only through the spirituality of a few exceptional individuals. Whereas the true spiritual life, and especially what the supramental realisation will be, is not dependent on any precise intellectual form or any limited form of life. It embraces all possibilities and all manifestations and makes them the expression, the vehicle of a higher and more universal truth.

A new religion would be not merely unnecessary, but a disaster. It is a new

life that needs to be created; a new *consciousness* needs to be expressed. It is something far beyond the limitations of the intellect and the formulas of the mind: a living truth needs to be manifested.

Everything in its essence and truth must be able to be included in this realisation. It must be as complete, as total, as universal as possible an expression of the divine Reality. Only this can save mankind and the world. This is the great spiritual revolution that Sri Aurobindo speaks of; and it is just this which he wanted us to achieve.

He has given a broad outline of it in the book we shall start reading next Wednesday: *The Supramental Manifestation*. And the first sentence that I read out today remains the key to the whole problem, not only individually but collectively: "*All would change if man could once consent to be spiritualised; but his nature, mental and vital and physical, is rebellious to the higher law. He loves his imperfection.*"

I would like us to take this as the theme of our meditation.

3.4.1957

(Concluded)

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 13 MARCH 1957

THIS evening, once again, no reading. But someone has asked me a question on something I have written—Pavitra, do you have it? Read it.

(Pavitra reads) “*Our best friend is he who loves us in our best part, and yet does not ask us to be different from what we are.*”

Words of the Mother, Third Series, 1966 ed p.66

I am asked to explain what this means. I have a good mind to tell you all sorts of paradoxical things! But still...

Anyway, I wrote this with something in mind which one usually forgets: one asks one's friends and those around one to be not what they are but what one would like them to be—one can form an ideal for oneself and want to apply it to everybody, but... This reminds me of Tolstoy's son whom I met in Japan and who was going round the world in the hope of bringing about unity among men. His intentions were excellent, but his way of doing it seemed less happy! He said with an imperturbable seriousness that if everybody spoke the same language, if everybody dressed in the same way, ate in the same way and behaved in the same way, that would inevitably bring about unity! And when asked how he planned to realise this he said it would be enough to go from land to land preaching a new but universal language, a new but universal dress, and new but universal habits. That was all.... And that was what he intended to do!

(*Laughing*) Well, everyone in his own little field is like that. He has an ideal, a conception of what is true and beautiful and noble, and even divine, and this conception of his he wants to impose on others. There are also many people who have a conception of the Divine and who try with all their might to impose their conception on the Divine... and usually don't lose heart until they have lost their life!

It is the *spontaneous* and almost unconscious attitude I had in mind, for if I were to tell one of you, “There! that's what you want to do”, he would protest very vehemently and say, “What! never in my life!” But when one has opinions about people and especially reactions to their way of life, it is because one blames them for not being what one thinks they ought to be. If we never forget that there cannot be, should not be two things exactly alike in the universe, for the second would be useless since there would already be one of the same kind, and that the universe is constituted for the harmony of an infinite multiplicity in which two movements—and even more, two consciousnesses—are never alike, then what right have we to intervene and want that somebody should conform

to our own thought? ... For if you think in a particular way, it is certain that the other won't be able to think in the same way. And if you are a person of a certain type, it is absolutely certain that the other cannot be of the same type. And what you ought to learn is to harmonise, synthesise, combine all the disparate things in the universe by putting each one *in its place*. Total harmony does not at all lie in an identity, but in a harmonisation which can come only by putting each thing in its place.

And this must be at the basis of the reaction that one has the right to expect from a true friend, who should wish not that his friend should be like him, but that he may be what he is.

Now, at the beginning of the sentence I said. "He loves you in the best part of yourself...." To put it a little more positively: Your friend is not one who encourages you to come down to your lowest level, encourages you to do foolish things along with him or fall into bad ways with him or one who commends you for all the nasty things you do, that's quite clear. And yet, usually, very, very often, much too often, one makes friends with somebody with whom one doesn't feel uneasy when one has sunk lower. One considers as one's best friend somebody who encourages one in one's follies: one mixes with others to roam about instead of going to school, to go and steal fruit from gardens, to make fun of one's teachers and for all kinds of things like that. I am not making any personal remarks, but indeed I could quote some examples, unhappily far too many. And perhaps this is why I said, "They are not your true friends." But still, they are the most convenient friends, for they don't make you feel that you are in the wrong; while to one who comes and tells you, "Now then, instead of roaming about and doing nothing or doing stupid things, if you came to the class, don't you think it would be better!" usually one replies, "Don't bother me! you are not my friend." This is perhaps why I wrote this sentence. There you are. I repeat, I am not making any personal remarks, but still it is an opportunity to tell you something that unfortunately happens much too often.

There are children here who were full of promise, who were at the top of their class, who used to work seriously, from whom I expected much, and who have been completely ruined by this kind of friendship. Since we are speaking of this, I shall tell them today that I regret this very much and that I do not call such people friends but mortal enemies against whom one should protect oneself as one would against a contagious disease.

We don't like the company of someone who has a contagious disease, and avoid him carefully; generally he is segregated so that it does not spread. But the contagion of vice and bad behaviour, the contagion of depravity, falsehood and what is base, is infinitely more dangerous than the contagion of any disease, and this is what must be very carefully avoided. You must consider as your best friend the one who tells you that he does not wish to participate in any bad or ugly act, the one who gives you courage to resist low temptations; he is a

friend. He is the one you must associate with and not someone with whom you have fun and who strengthens your evil propensities. That's all.

Now, we won't labour the point and I hope that those I have in mind will understand what I have said.

Indeed, you should choose as friends only those who are wiser than yourself, those whose company ennobles you and helps you to master yourself, to progress, to act in a better way and see more clearly. And finally, the best friend one can have—isn't he the Divine, to whom one can say everything, reveal everything? For there indeed is the source of all compassion, of all power to efface every error when it is not repeated,¹ to open the road to true realisation; it is he who can understand all, heal all, and always help on the path, help you not to fail, not to falter, not to fall, but to walk straight to the goal. He is the true friend, the friend of good and bad days, the one who can understand, can heal, and who is always there when you need him. When you call him sincerely, he is always there to guide and uphold you—and to love you in the true way.

(Questions and Answers 1957-58, pp 54-57)

¹ In 1961 when this talk was first published, Mother commented on this phrase: "So long as one repeats one's mistakes, nothing can be abolished, for one recreates them every minute. When someone makes a mistake, serious or not, this mistake has consequences in his life, a 'Karma' which must be exhausted, but the Divine Grace, if one turns to It, has the power of cutting off the consequences: but for this the fault must not be repeated. One shouldn't think one can continue to commit the same stupidities indefinitely and that indefinitely the Grace will cancel all the consequences, it does not happen like that! The past may be completely purified, cleansed, to the point of having no effect on the future, but on condition that one doesn't change it again into a perpetual present; you yourself must stop the bad vibration in yourself, you must not go on reproducing the same vibration indefinitely."

THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

IN THE LIGHT OF HER *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1988)

“O my sweet Lord, teach me to be the instrument of Thy Love.”

(December 29, 1916)

THE cardinal truth of the Mother's life and the hidden principle of her spiritual achievement is her love. Her love is the key to the synthesis of her vast and complex personality. By her irresistible and unlimited magnetism she holds the hearts of thousands of God-seekers. The Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* reveals the rapturous aspects of her love and the completest expression of the divine Truth she sought to manifest.

The Mother's supramental power of Love and Ananda expresses itself in a victorious power of illumination and transformation. The Love and Ananda were difficult to bring down from above, due to lack of receptivity in humanity.

A disciple asked Sri Aurobindo about the Mother's personality of Love and Ananda: “In the ‘Chandi’ the names of the four Cosmic Powers of the Mother—Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati—are mentioned along with others, but the name ‘Radha’ is not mentioned. This is a clear proof of the fact that when the ‘Chandi’ was composed the Radha-Power was not manifested to the vision of the saints and that the ‘Chandi’ mentions only the Cosmic Powers of the Mother and not her Supramental Powers. In the book, ‘The Mother’, after describing the four Powers of the Mother, you have said that: There are other great Personalities of the Divine Mother, but they were more difficult to bring down and have not stood out in front with so much prominence in the evolution of the earth-spirit. There are among them Presences indispensable for the Supramental realisation—most of all one who is her personality of that mysterious and powerful ecstasy and Ananda which flows from a supreme divine Love, the Ananda that alone can heal the gulf between the highest heights of the supramental spirit and the lowest abysses of Matter, the Ananda that holds the key of a wonderful divinest Life and now supports from its secrecies the work of all the Powers of the universe. Is not the Personality referred to in this passage the Radha-Power which is spoken of as Premamayi Radha, Mahaprana Shakti and Hladini Shakti?”¹

Sri Aurobindo replied: “Yes, but the images of the Radha-Krishna lila are taken from the vital world and therefore it is only an inner manifestation of the Radha-Shakti that is there depicted. That is why she is called Mahaprana Shakti and Hladini Shakti.”²

The Vaishnava cult seeks to express the human love for the Divine as it

works on the emotional-vital plane, and draws the response of the Divine there. We cannot ascribe the experience to what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supramental Love.

“The supramental is something in which the basis is absolute calm and however intense a Divine Love there is in it, it does not disturb the calm but increases its depth. Chaitanya’s experience was not that of supermind, but of Love and Ananda brought from above into the vital—the response of the vital is an extreme passion and exultation of Godward love and Ananda the result of which are these *vikāras**. Chaitanya claimed this supremacy for the Radha experience because Ananda is higher than the experiences of the spiritual mind, Ananda being, according to the Upanishads, the supreme plane of experience. But this is a logical conclusion which cannot be accepted wholly—one must pass through the supermind to arrive to the highest Ananda, and in the supermind there is an unification and harmonisation of all the divine Powers (Knowledge etc. as well as Love and Ananda).”³

The Mother’s *Prayers and Meditations* discloses to us three aspects of her dynamic love. First, the aspect of her love for the Divine—a psychic flame, burning in the heart with intensity; second, the aspect for the divine love in her—a dazzling sun-fire; the third aspect is the combination of psychic love and the divine love pouring out upon the world, upon all mankind. These three aspects are interwoven together to work for the future transformation by Grace. It is not like the Grace that stretches hands in an act of Blessing from the Amitabha Buddha. Here is a Grace that has assumed a human form from its eternity. Sri Aurobindo has explained. “It is the work of the Cosmic Power to maintain the cosmos and the law of the cosmos. The greater transformation comes from the Transcendent above the universal, and it is that transcendent Grace which the embodiment of the Mother is there to bring to action.”⁴

The Grace has come down not only to liberate humanity. Its work is far greater and deeper. In her prayer dated December 24, 1916, the Mother says: “As always Thy will is an infinite Grace which floods the being with Thy divine delight and transports it far above all petty contingencies to the Glory of Thy celestial dwelling-place.”

In her prayer dated May 11, 1913 she says: “I no longer know whether the universe is I or I the universe, whether Thou art in me or I in Thee, Thou alone art and all is Thou; and the streams of Thy infinite grace fill and overflow the world.

Sing, O lands, sing, O peoples, sing, O men,
The Divine Harmony is there.”

The Mother bursts forth in a canticle of divine love in her prayer dated March or April 1915 in her book *Words of Long Ago* (pp. 116, 117):

* deviations from the natural state (Editor’s Note)

“...I watched thee in the silence, thou didst speak to me more deeply still, and thou didst tell me of the great mystery of eternal Love that loves itself in all forms and is self-revealed in all activities. Already in my being this ineffable Love lived self-aware, but at that hour its life took on an exceptional intensity, or perhaps the individual perception was exceptionally clear. O adorable Lord, Sovereign Master of the world, Thou who, being all, possessest and delightest in all, didst Thou in that moment of Thy eternity cast a closer glance towards us, that we were thus bathed in such a magnificence of love? Or was it that Thou didst wish, in the humble instrument of this ephemeral and limited being, to taste more strongly and fully, with more intensity and with precision, Thy own delight of being and self-manifestation? Suddenly all was lit with the inexpressible beauty of Thy Truth, and in the mirror of the individual consciousness Thou didst reflect all the infinitely varied modes of self-expression of Thy being of Love. Pain and enjoyment united and fused in an ecstasy which seemed as if it must consume the whole being in its blaze.”

In fact, it is the descent and manifestation of the Supreme Love that alone can effectuate the final transfiguration. This Love is constantly helping us as much as it is possible in the form of Grace.

In a much later period the Mother tells us: “As it is all-powerful, some receptivity must be prepared upon earth so that the effects may not be shattering.” Again in August 27, 1914 she says: “To be the divine love, love powerful, infinite, unfathomable, in every activity, in all the worlds of being — it is for this I cry to Thee, O Lord. Let me be consumed with this love divine, love powerful, infinite, unfathomable, in every activity, in all the worlds of being! Transmute me into that burning brazier so that all the atmosphere of earth may be purified with its flame”.

It is this love that is literally incarnated in the Mother. In all her activities, in all her gestures, in all her forms this rapturous divine love plays the primal part.

The Mother’s aspiration for the divine love has been expressed in the following prayer dated September 30, 1914: “O Thou, Sublime Love, to whom I gave never any other name, but who art so wholly the very substance of my being, Thou whom I feel vibrant and alive in the least of my atoms even as in the infinite universe and beyond, Thou who breathest in every breath, movest in the heart of all activities, art radiant through all that is of good will and hidden behind all sufferings, Thou for whom I cherish a cult without limit which grows ever more intense, permit that I may with more and more reason feel that I am Thyself wholly.”

On December 20, 1916, the Mother during her meditation received a communication at 5.30 in the evening from Sakyamuni: “... As thou art contemplating me, I shall speak to thee this evening. I see in thy heart a diamond surrounded by a golden light. It is at once pure and warm, something which may

manifest impersonal love, but why dost thou keep this treasure enclosed in that dark casket lined with deep purple? The outermost covering is of a deep lustreless blue, a real mantle of darkness. It would seem that thou art afraid of showing thy splendour. Learn to radiate and do not fear the storm: the wind carries us far from the shore but shows us over the world. Wouldst thou be thrifty of thy tenderness? But the source of love is infinite. Dost thou fear to be misunderstood? But where hast thou seen man capable of understanding the Divine? And if the eternal truth finds in thee a means of manifesting itself, what dost thou care for all the rest?... Listen, I too hesitated for days, for I could foresee both my preaching and its results: the imperfection of expression and the still greater imperfection of understanding. And yet I turned to the earth and men and brought them my message."

From a report of Sanat K. Banerji we learn:

"The Mother said she had seen the Buddha for the first time at a lecture given by Mme. Alexandra David-Neel, in Paris during the first decade of the century. That lady was a well-known Buddhist, a luminary of the Buddhist world in those days. As Mme David-Neel spoke of the Buddhist doctrine, the Mother saw the Buddha appear in person behind the speaker. He had a bluish light around him. The Mother went up to the lady and told her that the Buddha was actually there, inspiring her speech. She was shocked, and said to the Mother that she must have been seeing visions!

"Later on, when the Mother was in Japan, the Buddha would come to her quite often. He resembled very much the type of face we see in the Indian images. He told the Mother that he had not finished his work: the work of transformation remained to be done.

"‘I know and love you as you knew and loved me before.’ In reply to a question from one of the children, ‘Who were you at that time,’ the Mother said in a discouraging tone: ‘Every time the Consciousness has manifested on earth, I was there.’ We were left to guess who she was at the time of the Buddha."⁵

Relevant here is the Mother's prayer on December 21, 1916: "Lord, Thou didst speak to me through the lips of one of those who have known Thee best—most probably to make me understand Thy lesson better (was I then deaf to Thy direct suggestion?). And still I do not understand at the moment what to do. Thou knowest what happiness would be mine if by Thy grace I could be integrally transformed into a hearth of divine love—that love which is the first and highest manifestation of thy eternal Truth, that love which is at once the completest expression in this world of Thy Truth and the most direct road to lead to it the human consciousness that has gone astray. In the days when I used to aspire, desire and ask, how many times have I asked of Thee the grace of this state as the one most in conformity with my present ideal of action!"

The Mother knew very well during the early period of her life that the Divine's vibhūtis, powers, and personalities, even from the overmind, cannot

conquer matter and the darkness of the inconscience.

So she prayed to the Lord on 31 March 1917. "How great is Thy power, O Lord of all existences, that an atom of Thy Joy is sufficient to efface so much darkness, so many sorrows and a single ray of Thy glory can light up thus the dullest pebble, illumine the blackest consciousness!"

The Mother whom we adore is the incarnation of the Supreme Divine Love, and is the golden bridge for the accomplishment of its great mission in this ignorant world.

What is its great mission? She says herself on March 4, 1915: "Always the same harsh solitude... but it is not painful, on the contrary. In it more clearly than ever, is revealed the pure and infinite love in which the whole earth is immersed."

We can read further about its mission, on June 14, 1914: "It is a veritable work of creation we have to do: to create activities, new modes of being so that this Force, unknown to the earth till today, may manifest in its plenitude."

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

REFERENCES

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, pp 442-443
- 2 *Ibid*, p. 444
- 3 *S.A.B.C.L*, Vol. 22, pp 91, 92
- 4 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p 435
- 5 *Mother India*, June 1979, p 327.

VIGNETTES OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1988)

A SIGN OF COMING VICTORY

ON 29th March 1953 X escorted, as it was a part of his duty, some ladies to the playground and then went and sat under the Neem tree, that stood there in those days, for meditation.

He closed his eyes and saw as if great fireworks were held and from them big golden drops and bubbles, etc. were falling. Dazzled he opened his eyes and then closed them again to behold the same glorious phenomenon. Night after heady night at the playground he saw this spectacle. Its grandeur was beyond words. It continued upto 7th June 1953.

In those days X was staying at Park-à-Charbon. Y, another sadhak, used to halt there every day on his way to the Ashram to see the Mother. One day X asked him, "May I write something in your diary which you may show to the Mother?" "Certainly," replied Y, for the two were good friends. X wrote the above experience in Y's diary and accompanied him to the Ashram.

Y went up and showed the diary to the Mother. The Mother summoned X and severely rebuked him, "Why did you write in his note-book?" Saying thus she tore out X's page and flung it to one side and threw the diary to Y. Then she asked Y and another person there to leave her alone with X.

Now that they were alone the Mother said, "I give experiences to my devoted children. Now others will know. These experiences are a sign of the coming victory." It was written in X's horoscope that he would die in 1954. The Mother didn't know of this at all. With this fear at the back of his mind he impulsively and pleadingly asked, "Mother, can I witness your victory?"

With great force the Mother replied, "Yes, you will see it." Then she added, "Throw away your horoscope into the sea."

Compiled by S

HOW THEY CAME TO THE ASHRAM

7

ON her birthday in the first week of November X read the New Year message of the Mother—

“Blessed are those who take a leap towards the future.”

Something within her was deeply moved. She yearned to offer everything to the Mother. Then she wrote a letter to Nolini-da saying that she wanted to offer her children to the Mother. They were her only treasure. She had nothing else worthy of offering to the Divine. She begged Nolini-da to help her in making her offering actual.

Things moved with a truly divine speed. She received a telegram asking her to come to Pondicherry along with her children. Within twelve days of writing her letter she came to Pondicherry with them. She planned to leave her children here and go back to her job.

The very idea of leaving her children, of being separated from them was so agonising that she fell ill and was taken to the Nursing Home and the children were at once admitted into an Ashram Boarding. She sent her golden bangle to the Mother praying for her protection. Then she had a great and, for her, a bewildering experience. She was engulfed in such a Silence that she found it hard to bear. She told this experience to Nolini-da who whispered to her just two words: “Divine Peace.”

Needless to say that X went back to her native place to settle her affairs and then came back to join the Ashram forever.

The Divine Peace has remained with her since then. Blessed is she, for she truly took a leap towards the future.

Compiled by K

A WONDERFUL CURE

My father, the late Debidas Roy, was deeply devoted to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Many people came to know about them from him for the first time and they loved to hear him speak on these spiritual figures.

Dr. Prabhat Sanyal was one of his intimate and loving friends in those days. In 1946 no sooner had he landed in Calcutta after his further training abroad in plastic surgery, than father called him for his eldest son who had sustained a sports-injury of the cervical spine in our own cultural association club founded by father as president. The doctor came with great concern and after hearing the details ordered his assistant to cut the colossal plastering put by the previous doctor to the bare minimum. Friendship thickened between Dr. Sanyal and father and us.

In 1969 the following event took place in father's late life. He had a small wound under his left big toe which never healed for good. It opened again and again indicating bone-infection (osteomyelitis). He was on oral anti-diabetic tab. Rastinon. The doctor switched over soon to inj. Insulin Lente P.Z.I., with plain Insulin mixed. But still one day we marked his leg had swollen and become red, he had very high fever. The doctor advised us to admit him to Jipmer under close supervision of Diabetic and Surgical Departments.

With the Mother's blessings we took him to Jipmer and he was admitted at 2 p.m. During visiting hours, when we went to see him, the swelling had come down along with the redness and fever. They had dipped his leg in "Eusol solution" for a fairly long time and dressed it. Next when we met the Surgeon in charge of him, Dr. S. Choudhury, he told us in father's presence that unless he agreed to undergo surgery (amputation) nothing further could be done for him. Hearing this father told us, "Take me back to the Ashram at once or I will start walking down by myself." Somehow we convinced him to stay overnight. He was helped by the two conscientious, fresh-minded young boys of Batti-da's group who had come there for night duty.

Early next morning Vasudhaben told us that the Mother had asked us to bring him back at once. We made the arrangement for a car and when we reached Jipmer he was waiting eagerly to hear what the Mother had said.

Vasudhaben told us that the Mother never gives an open verdict against the doctors but she narrated two facts: (1) There was a king in France who had a similar diabetic gangrene. His house-physician after consulting the surgeons advised him to get the limb amputated. The King asked his physician, "This wound is not healing because of diabetes, etc.... Can you guarantee that the wound of amputation will heal or will you want to chop even higher up next?" They could not give the guarantee. So the king said he preferred to remain as he was. (2) He has had all the experiences of his life and done the work he had to do. What is the meaning in cutting off a part of the body to save the rest—I don't under-

stand. Incidentally we heard of a similar case in Jipmer where the patient passed away soon after his amputation.

All the surgeons known to us were of the one opinion that there was *no other cure but amputation*. So they left us alone as far as treatment was concerned. Dr. Sanyal had given us a bin and a few forceps, etc., for aseptic sterile dressing which I was doing at home. I continued that.

At this juncture it occurred to my father that his uncle, the late Dr, Sarada Kanto Roy, an eminent Allopath-cum-Homeopath of his day, practised a little Ayurveda also. He used to prepare an ointment by boiling crushed neem leaves in pure ghee and straining them. He would use this with great success to purge out pus from the worst types of wounds. We wrote to the Mother; she gave us her blessing and we went forward in the battle against decay, disease and death.

With faith and patience we went on; my other sisters and aunt helped in various ways. My uncle (father's younger brother) helped keep up his mood and his mind occupied by reading long passages from famous epic poems by great authors. We would read from the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's books before going for our work. He would listen to beautiful songs during his tea and supper, short of which he would not eat.

We never gave up inj. Insulin, the treatment in which my uncle Dr. J.C. Das Gupta (children's Dispensary) was guiding us. I carried on the most aseptic surgical dressing. Dr. Nipendra had agreed to get the dressing materials sterilized after I had prepared them at home exactly to my need. Antibiotics also we continued so long as the pus should be there, as prescribed by the Calcutta doctors.

Where to get pure ghee? The late Ayurvedic doctor Kesharimalji said, "Bhai ke liye mere khaneka ghee de dega. (For my brother I will give up my own cooking ghee.)"

In the beginning I was changing the dressing at 7.30 a.m.; 11.30 a.m.; 2.30 p.m.; and 6.30 p.m. in between my work and play. Then gradually the frequency was reduced, till one fine day after 8 to 9 weeks everything was clean and clear. One small piece of the affected bone had dropped off by itself along with the pus and slough during the daily dressings without the least use of any sharp or pointed instrument.

Father walked again with full weight on that leg.

IBHA ROY

TWO PUZZLING POINTS IN THE GITA

DOWN the ages the Gita has presented many problems, both conceptual and textual. Commentators of different schools of spiritual realisation have sought to tilt this scripture in one direction or another and give it a sectarian aspect. Only Sri Aurobindo has looked upon it as a grand synthesis and from his own manifold yogic experience brought us a satisfying conceptual solution. But two points partly conceptual and partly textual remained in my mind, on which I did not have the luck to consult Sri Aurobindo. I am mentioning them here and, where possible, submitting whatever key I have come across to their riddle.

First, there are the verses 45 and 46 in Chapter XI, in which Arjuna, after being overwhelmed by the Vision of the Cosmic Form, pleads with Sri Krishna: "O Godhead, show me that other form of Thine; turn Thy heart to grace... I would see Thee even as before, crowned and with Thy mace and discus. Assume Thy four-armed shape, O thousand-armed, O Form universal."¹

Evidently "that other form" is Sri Krishna as known to Arjuna in daily relationship. This is made clear by verses 50 and 51. In the former, Sanjaya who has been reporting with his second sight the whole drama of the Kurukshetra battle to the blind king Dhritarashtra says of Sri Krishna: "...assuming again his sweet and serene form, Mahatma (the Great Soul) consoled that frightened soul (Arjuna)."² In verse 51 Arjuna declares: "Beholding again Thy sweet and serene human Image, O Janardana, I feel collected and in my wits, rehabilitated in my nature."³ The vital word here is the epithet "human" (*manushya* in Sanskrit). What Arjuna asks to see once more and what Sri Krishna shows him in response is the Avatar's human shape in which he has associated with Arjuna and all the other personages participating in the Bharata War. But here arises the crucial question: "How can this human shape be called 'four-armed'?"

In the Vaishnava tradition Sri Krishna is taken to be the human embodiment of Vishnu and Vishnu is always imaged as having four arms, holding in them the conch, the discus, the mace and the lotus. We mark some link with this tradition in the Gita's reference to "Thy mace and discus". But it is noteworthy that the other two emblems of Vishnu's power are absent, as if to suggest that there were only two arms like a human being's, at whose extremities this couple of emblems were held. There seems to be a discrepancy between such a suggestion and the phrase: "Thy four-armed shape."

Every commentary I had read left this discrepancy untouched. I believed the same omission was in the one which, next to Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*,

¹ *Bhagavad Gita in the Light of Sri Aurobindo*, edited by Maheshwar (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1978), p 163

² *Ibid.*, p 165

³ *Ibid*

had impressed me most, *The Yoga of the Bhagavat Gita*¹ by Sri Krishna Prem (the Englishman Ronald Nixon), a Yogi no less than a scholar. I recommended this book to my friend Nilima Das who was engaged in writing a review of Maheshwar's latest publication.² I also mentioned to her my perplexity over the shape of four arms which yet had been called "human". When she was going through the recommended volume she came upon a footnote that threw light on my puzzle. She showed it to me. Obviously in the past I had overlooked it because at that time the puzzle had not faced me acutely. The footnote (pp. 109-10) ran:

"The *caturbhujā* form of verse 46 should be translated 'four-limbed' (*i.e.* two arms and two legs) and not, as usually done, 'four-armed'. The word *bhujā* means limb as well as arm, and verses 49 and 51 clearly show that the form in question was a *human* one, four-limbed in contrast to the thousand arms and legs of the symbolic vision. The *Viṣṇu* form, no doubt, has four arms; but in the earliest texts, such as the *Mahāvārata*, Krishna has always the normal human two.

"For this interpretation I am indebted to my friend Pandit Jagadish Chandra Chatterji, Vidya Varidhi."

Thanks to Sri Krishna Prem's own bafflement and Pandit Chatterji's erudition, the problem has been settled for me. To support the answer I searched the Gita's Chapter XI for all the terms that are usually translated as "arms". Verse 16 has the word *hastena* (literally "hands"), verse 19 gives us *bāhu*, verse 23 the same. In verse 46 where the rendering is "four-armed" the next compound "thousand-armed" uses *bāhu* again. So, clearly, the use of *bhujā* in our expression stands away from the common *bāhu* which exclusively connotes "arms" and from the synecdoche *hastena* which too cannot but signify the same. The employment of *bhujā* in variance from the other vocables must be deliberate and mean the permitted alternative "limbs", covering both arms and legs. That the familiar shape differed not only in the number of arms but also in that of legs, as Sri Krishna Prem indicates, is proved by verse 23 where we read: "...Thy great Form of many mouths and eyes, ... with many arms and thighs and feet..."³

The second point which posed an enigma to me is still unresolved. It emerges from Sri Krishna's statements in Chapter X about his various "Vibhūtis", the self-manifestations of Him in His sovereign power of becoming. In a sense all the world and its creatures and objects are his Vibhūtis, but in a special connotation whatever is the leading figure in each category of existence is the Vibhūti. In the Gita the One who declares His list of Vibhūtis is the Purushottama, the Supreme Self and Lord. The Purushottama is not only beyond the whole

¹ Published by John N. Watkins, London, 1958

² *From Crisis to Liberation: The Gita's Gospel in Sri Aurobindo's Light* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1987).

³ *Bhagavad Gita in the Light of Sri Aurobindo*, p 154

universe even while pervading all of it: He is also beyond His own embodied representative, the Avatar known as Sri Krishna. For the Divine Speaker in Chapter X, verse 37, says: "Among the *Vṛṣṇīs* I am *Vāsudeva* (*Kṛṣṇa*), *Dhanañjaya* (*Arjuna*) among the *Pāṇḍavas*; also among the sages I am *Vyāsa*, among the seer-poets the Seer-Poet *Uśanā*."¹ As Sri Aurobindo remarks: "The Avatar is at the same time the Vibhuti. This Krishna who in his divine inner being is the Godhead in a human form, is in his outer human being the leader of his age, the great man of the Vrishnis."² Now, Sri Krishna as the Purushottama announces: "I am *Viṣṇu* among the *Ādityas*..." (X.21). The Adityas are a class of Vedic Gods, sons of the infinite Mother, Aditi. Similarly he proclaims: "And among the Rudras I am *Śankara* (Shiva)..." (X.22). So the Purushottama is superior to both Vishnu and Shiva. This is borne out in the next Chapter when Arjuna cries: "I now wish to see Thy divine Form, O Purushottama" (3) and "the Blessed Lord", telling his disciple to "behold" His multifold "shapes and hues", goes on to say: "Behold the *Ādityas*, the *Vasus*, *Rudras*..." (5). And then Arjuna is shown "the supreme Form, the supreme Godhead" (9). Arjuna exclaims: "I see all the gods in Thy Body, O God..." (15)—and a little later: "The *Rudras*, *Ādityas*, *Vasus*... all have their eyes fixed on Thee in amazement" (22). But, soon after, we have two verses in which Arjuna addresses the terrific Cosmic Form: "Seeing Thee touch the skies, O Vishnu, ... my soul is anguished; I know not composure nor peace of mind" (24)—"Devouring all, Thou, O Vishnu, lickest all the worlds from all ends with Thy flaming mouths..." (30). The difficulty for me lies in grasping how the Purushottama of whom Vishnu is a Vibhuti and in whose universal Body Vishnu as an Aditya is a part and at whom this Aditya gazes in amazement can be himself the Purushottama in His cosmic Form. The embodied Sri Krishna, leader of the Vrishnis, could be the Supreme Self and Lord, because this leader is the same Ultimate come as an Avatar who plays the role of a Vrishni-leader. But any other Vibhuti cannot be equated to that Ultimate. Why not Shiva, the Vibhuti among the Rudras, instead of Vishnu? The Cosmic Form is of Time (*Kāla*) the Destroyer (32), and the destructive aspect of the Divine is Shiva, not Vishnu. Of course, in relation to the Vaishnava cult in which Sri Krishna, along with other Avatars, was a descent of Vishnu in human form, those two cries of "O Vishnu" would be quite in order. But in Vaishnavism Vishnu would never figure as the Vibhuti of Sri Krishna. I await some clarifying ray upon my perplexity.

On my own, I can only venture two guesses. Perhaps "Vishnu" is a substitution for some other term apt to the occasion. In the Mahabharata we find *viṣṇu* frequently accompanied by the epithet *jiṣṇu*, "victorious".³ Could it be that the two verses concerned had originally this epithet by itself which sectarians later replaced by the more explicit designation of their deity?

¹ *Ibid*, p. 145

² *Ibid*

³ Harivamśa, 2503

Or else "Vishnu" in Chapter XI is not meant to be such a designation at all but is a name like several others expressing Krishna's distinctive qualities, physical, mythological or spiritual. An example of the first category is "Hrishikesha" ("curly-haired")—of the second, "Madhusudana" ("slayer of the demon Madhu")—of the third, "Achyuta" ("the Immovable"). Similarly "Vishnu" might signify just what its etymology indicates. Here I shall take the help of the German savant Rudolf Otto.¹ In the *Brhad-devatā*, II.69, the root of the name is traced to *viś*, meaning "permeation". There is also *vi*, which means "right through something", as in the word *vibhū*—all-pervading. A *viśnu* would thus connote "one who extends himself through anything", and in that sense a pervader or permeator. In the Gita XI.24 we have the phrase "Seeing Thee touch the skies" and in XI.30 we read "... all the worlds from all ends". The Great Being addressed is surely one who pervades and permeates everything, one extended through infinite space. So "Vishnu" would be a fit general appellation. In fact, it would be on a par with "Vāsudeva" in that famous declaration "*Vāsudeva sarvamiti*—"Vāsudeva is all" (VII.19).

Otto² has gone to the extent of equating "Vāsudeva" with "Vishnu" in a fundamental sense. The common belief is that Krishna's father was "Vāsudeva" and therefore Krishna was called "Vāsudeva", Vāsudeva's son. But Otto points out that in the *Harivamśa*, verses 1924, 9040, the name of Krishna's father is given as *Ānakadundubhi*. He traces "Vāsudeva" to the root *vas*, meaning "to dwell or reside in anything". From this root we obtain *vasa*—"dwelling, the stem vowel here having been given the *guṇa* gradation, whence *vāsu* must mean a *dweller*." Otto goes on to say: "In fact, therefore, a *vāsu-deva* is simply synonymous with *Viśnu*: both alike mean, first of all, indwelling, permeating power or potency. The word *vāsu*, however, also appears in isolation as a designation for Krishna;³ and a *vāsudeva* is merely the expanded form of this—a resident spirit. Thus the *Abhirbudhnya Samhitā*, p. 550, v. 65:—"Because the Universe is immanent in him and because he is immanent in the Universe: that is the meaning of *Vāsu*." According to this interpretation, to address Krishna as Vishnu is the same as to call him Vāsudeva. No conflict should be seen between the *āditya* Vishnu who in Chapter X is a *vibhuti* of Krishna and the identical name in Chapter XI which is intended to suggest the Pervader and Permeator of everything and all space.

It is for scholars to decide whether my guesses have any substance.

K. D. SETHNA

¹ *The Original Gita*, translated and edited by J.E. Turner (George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London, 1939), pp. 249, 250.

² *Ibid*, pp. 253, 254.

³ Cf. Apte's *Dictionary*, *sub vāsu*

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA BIRTH CENTENARY

(2)

Compiler's Note

Nolini Kanta Gupta was as great a master of the theory of Yoga as of its practice. His writings are a glowing testimony to his wide-ranging vision and intellectual attainment. His spiritual status is well known to the devotees of Sri Aurobindo. What is not so well known is that his understanding of worldly affairs and his practical acumen were as extraordinary. No detail of life was trivial for him, no problem insignificant. All those who came to him were guided at each step with infinite patience on this razor-sharp perilous path of yoga. Here are three of his utterances which will be of general interest.

SHYAM KUMARI

The Ashram's Inner Reality

PEOPLE who come to the Ashram expected ochre robes and thatched huts. The beauty and plenitude of the Ashram life baffle them and in their ignorance they censor the Ashramites and think, "People here live a life of ease and comfort, where is the spirituality in all this?" This attitude was known to Nolini-da and one day he said:

"The life of the Ashram is like an electric wire. From outside the wire looks quite ordinary. When you touch it you feel the tremendous voltage that is passing through it. People do not know the Ashram's inner reality."

Difficulties

"Our Ashram here is the symbol of all the difficulties that humanity faces, difficulties psychological and material, national and social... The individuals here have to meet all kinds of difficulties so that a way out of them may be discovered both in the individual nature and collective achievement."¹

On Joining the Ashram

Many of X's friends, acquaintances and even casual visitors to the Ashram became eager to settle in the Ashram. They plied X with many questions about the process. X was perplexed as to what he should say and how he should guide them. He put the problem before Nolini-da who became grave. After a long silence he replied:

¹ *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol 4, pp. 269-270.

“Never encourage anybody to come and settle in the Ashram.

“It is a place where the supreme Divine Force is acting at its highest but then the adverse forces are equally strong. And whenever one takes the decision to come and settle here they pounce upon him in full fury and only those can stand these attacks who are sufficiently prepared and always in conscious contact with the Mother.”

THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1988)

The Mother's Message

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



Volume Three: 1959

15

ON Saturday 10th October 1959 Sudha invited me to dinner.

It was still drizzling after the torrent of rain—large crystal drops spangled the remaining yellow leaves of the trees—the wet lawn emitted a poignant earthly scent. I reached her apartment at Marble Arch. She greeted me with a smile.

She cooked Gujarati food. The yogurt was inevitable—our favourite item.

After the meal, we washed the dishes. Then Sudha was busy making tea. I peered through a window. It was dark outside, street lamps glowed on pavements damp with rain. I could see a stream of cars crossing the roads. People hurried past hunched under their umbrellas. Everything seemed as if I were looking at a television screen with the volume turned down.

Now rain lashing against the window only emphasized the comfort in the room. I withdrew from the scene and sat on a sofa. We dallied over our tea—had a cosy woman-to-woman chat. We exchanged observations about colleges, teachers and girls. Since Sudha had co-education at Pitman's she had more to communicate. She mimicked European girls and commented on their flashy and ostentatious costumes. There was laughter in her voice when she said: "I wish you could see their heavy make-up—eye-shadows, maskaras, dark lipsticks—their life-style is glossy. It was really amusing to view hair-does of some of them: phew! their hair tumbling over their faces like a Yorkshire terrier's!" And she gave a merry infectious laugh. She added: "In our class a handsome professor said: 'There is a humorous homily for would-be secretaries: when the boss tells you to sit, don't grope for a chair—sit on his lap!'"

Sudha and I mocked and joked at the expense of middle-aged and old men who, we thought, were highly enamoured of young and pretty girls.

She informed me: "The other day I came across in the 'Wanted' column, 'Required a personal secretary between 19 & 28, attractive, smart, smiling, bold, trustworthy, versatile, with good manners, enduring, patient: Payment according to merit—send application along with a photograph' and so on...."

She burst into a gurgle of mirth as she remarked: "Ah, the secretaries do not know whether the oldsters and bosses themselves have these virtues!"

I contributed: "Our vice-principal explained to us in our class: 'Girls, secretaries must have presence of mind, they must be alert, quick-witted, meticulous, faithful to their bosses, keep their secrets, face any risks, readily stand by in crises, be good organisers, take responsibilities courageously, be tolerant, calm....' She warned us: 'You cannot be a personal secretary straight away. It takes a long time to gain considerable experience and to be an efficient personal secretary or personal assistant to top officials, senior executives and dignitaries who certainly expect their P.S. and P.A. to dedicate themselves totally to their work...'" Sudha, some naughty girls spoke from the rear chairs: 'Also expect warm relationship with them and to hear their sweet-nothings....' The principal diverted her attention to other subjects, altogether ignoring the piquant remark! 'Girls, you should learn thoroughly shorthand, typing, book-keeping, correspondence, office-management, banking, filing-system, record-arrangement. Besides, you should learn human-relations and public-relations. Not only that but you have to be very careful how to dress up and makeup—watch your deportment, postures and manners. Learn to move with grace and ease. You should be up-to-date, but never overdo things.'"

Once more we laughed. Those were our light-hearted hours.

I told Sudha: "If according to our principal's advice I have to be like a door-mat, I would prefer to serve the bosses' BOSS and Emperors' EMPEROR—the Supreme Lord."

She asked me: "Then why on earth do you go through the tedious secretarial course?"

I replied: "Because I want experience and self-confidence. But I have had enough of my college. I may change it soon and take subjects of my choice."

Then suddenly I glanced at my watch—it was 10.30 p.m. I rose from the sofa and slid into my coat, wore gloves, took my handbag and umbrella. I shivered. The night air was chilly.

Sudha saw me off at the tube station. I thanked her and bade her goodnight.

When I entered Mercury House, I saw George Hubbard near the staircase with a broad smile. I had met him a month back. He had come once again from Birmingham. He was a leader of the Rosicrucians and a senior executive in a big firm. For his excellent service during the Second World War he had been made an M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire).

Since he was interested in spirituality, we got on quite well. Frequently he came to London for some work and stayed at Mercury House for a day or two.

He was a perfect gentleman. He gave me several booklets. Among them I liked two the most. *The Greatest Thing in the World* by Henry Drummond and *The Hound of Heaven* by Francis Thompson. I quote from the first:

"'The greatest thing,' says someone, 'a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children.' I wonder why it is that we are not all kinder than we are. How much the world needs it. How easily it is done. How instantaneously it acts. How infallibly it is remembered. How superabundantly it pays itself back—for there is no debtor in the world so honourable, so superbly honourable, as Love. 'Love never faileth.' Love is success, Love is happiness, Love is life. 'Love, I say,' with Browning, 'is energy of life'

'For life, with all it yields of joy and woe
And hope and fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,—
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is.'

Where Love is, God is. He that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God. God is Love. Therefore *Love....*"

Kahlil Gibran writes about Love thus:

"Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself.

Love possesses not nor would it be possessed,
 For love is sufficient unto love.
 Love has no other desire but to fulfil itself.
 But if you love and must needs have desire, let there be desires:
 To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night.
 To know the pain of too much tenderness.
 To be wounded by your understanding of love;
 And to bleed willingly and joyfully....”

I may recount these verses from *The Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore:

“If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart, thy love for me still waits for my love.”

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given their insights:

“Divine Love, true love finds its delight and its satisfaction in itself; it has no need to be received and appreciated, nor to be shared—it loves for the sake of loving, as a flower blooms.

“To feel this love in oneself is to possess an immutable happiness”

—THE MOTHER

“Love in all forms of adoration is a spiritual force. Love of the highest and total surrender are a straight and swift way to the Divine.”

—SRI AUROBINDO

Now I cite the last verses from the *Hound of Heaven*:

“Halts by me that footfall:
 Is my gloom, after all,
 Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
 ‘Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
 I am He whom thou seekest!
 Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.’”

Hala Satavahana has stated:

“However far my eye may wander
 Thou standest before me!
 For the heavens and the splendour of the stars
 Are Thy image!”

(To be continued)

Copyright © Huta D. Hindocha

DISCOVERY

I FEEL sure that I have not given you my best.
There is something left unidentified, yet to dedicate.
In my heart's blackest bottom, what treasure lies?
And why this constant prick of discontent,
A bourgeoning false note in my musical scheme?
Questions follow questions, quests multiply
Only to end in blind alleys of heart-break.
Life—an incomplete structure refuse-dumped,
Desolate, abandoned on the road-side!
I the first on-looker would turn my head away
To avoid this ghastly sight of a ruin,
A dead cat rotting under a coat of flies—
Succour and sympathy swept behind
The cruel curtain of disharmony.
Gloomy avalanche hurls down on the mind.
A pang I suffer,—no second one to know the sting.
Out there, swirling black clouds of a storm-eve gather.
Poor bird perched on the branch of a tree—
Leaves stilled, apprehensive of the impending doom.
Foolish one! take refuge in your nest
Before you are tossed and torn by the tornado.
But it sings on heedless of the impending peril
Pouring the heart out in a chirpy prayer,
Head skywards, beak parted in ecstasy.
Just as the lone forest plant bequests
Its hue and incense to the creator,
Even when the forest is on fire.
In a flash a flood of clement conviction
Forced itself deep into my heart and mind fields.
The supreme offering to you shall be music
Which I in my ego kept concealed for myself.
Proven that artful selection has not the stamp of giving.
But here at last is the whole being's responsive spontaneity.

DEBANSHU

“ALL NIGHT ON A FLUTE”

THE Japanese psyche is today a popular subject for both parlour discussion and serious study. But we cannot understand the minds of these people from temperate Asia without some knowledge of their cultural roots.

What emerges from such an inquiry is that the Japanese have two sides to their character. On the one hand, they are an industrious people, sincere and serious in their belief and in their work; on the other hand, they are a nation nurtured in artistic and cultural traditions. They are sensitive to beauty. Their literature, their paintings, their gardens bear testimony to this.

Not many in India, however, have had the opportunity to drink from the nectar bowl of their literature. It might appear unfamiliar and, therefore, baffling when one first reads haiku, the popular form of poetry from Japan.

To the westerner it is an exotic form of verse. But for us Indians these 17-syllable creations are familiar enough. We have our Urdu couplets, and even the four-line poems of Tagore. But the haiku's similarity to our poetry starts and ends with size.

It is the content and not really the size of the haiku that determines its unique character. Invariably, it has as its nucleus one of the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn or winter. The season's name may not always be specifically mentioned; often a keyword or reference makes it identifiable.

Built around this seed is the flesh comprising descriptions of life, nature and humans, the ingredients of most poetry. What gives it an unusual flavour is that the haiku leaves much unsaid:

When the autumn wind
Scatters peonies,
A few petals fall in pairs.

—BUSON

The haiku started as the first three lines of the tanka, a poem of five lines composed by two people as a sort of literary game. One person composed the first three lines; the poem was then completed by the other. Eventually, the first portion of the tanka gained popularity as a separate verse form.

Even in the original Japanese, the haiku has no end-rhymes. Of the 17 syllables, the first and the third lines have five syllables each. Within these narrow confines sometimes the haiku brings together two apparently different ideas, such as here:

For a lovely bowl
Let us arrange these flowers...
Since there is no rice.

—BASHO

For a better understanding of the haiku, we must appreciate the influence of Zen Buddhism and its philosophy on the poets. Reading haikus gives the distinct impression that they are exquisite crystallisations of very sharp and accurate observations of the world around the poet. It should be realised that only those trained to switch on the mind as a receiver would be capable of reading such insights into everyday schemes.

The greatest acknowledged haiku poet—Basho, who flourished in the 17th century—was a student of Zen Buddhism in his later years. His Zen-training yielded gems such as:

My eyes following
 Until the bird was lost at sea
 Found a small island.

The charm of the haiku lies in the fact that in spite of the narrow constraints of its form and content, it is able to convey a whole range of emotions and images, leaving enough unsaid to lead the reader to complete the canvas with his or her own experiences. Some of the best haikus, of course, describe nature in its purest form. Here is one example:

One fallen flower returning to
 the branch?
 ... oh no!
 A white butterfly.
 —MARITAKE

An observer of the world cannot but be struck occasionally by the sheer illogic and unpredictability of human nature:

Don't touch my plum-tree!
 Said my friend, and saying so
 Broke the branch for me
 —TAIGI

Hope lies eternally dormant in the human heart, said a keen observer from, another part of the world. But the sheer intensity of a haiku master's optimism takes one's breath away. One almost welcomes adversity:

Since my house
 Burned down, I now own
 A better view of the rising moon
 —MASAHIDE

The poet's sights do not settle on nature to discover only her grace and sublimity; he also observes the darker side. Even a man-made apparition can be the subject from which to draw a lesson:

The people, we know...
But these days, even scarecrows
Do not stand upright

—ISSA

Is the poet capable of discerning only the grim, the sober and the solemn? Here again, we are surprised:

Oh moon, why must you inspire
My neighbour to chirp
All night on a flute

—KOYO

Yet, it is in the solemn that the haiku masters really excel. Some of the finest lines on death are worth quoting:

The leaves never know
Which leaf will be the first to fall...
Does the wind know?

—SOSEKI

As in all literary forms the translation can never retain the flavour of the original. In the Japanese version, the haiku is full of literary quotations, allusions and double meanings which would not only be virtually impossible to translate but would also be beyond understanding even if a proper translation were made available.

SAMAR JHA

(With acknowledgments to *The Times of India*, 4,2 1985, p. 4)

HUMOUR IN THE PLAYS OF SRI AUROBINDO

PART 3. PERSEUS THE DELIVERER

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1988)

HOWEVER pathetic the scene and howsoever gruesome the heroine Andromeda's impending doom, with good Perissus the butcher around, one cannot be gloomy for long. His strange views of life and men, his making light of death, his very original comments leave the reader a little strengthened against the tragedy. He has no illusions about the ordinary rabble who on one hand have become presumptuous enough to condemn royalty but are afraid of the sea-monster on the other. He expresses his contempt succinctly—

Do you quake, my brave shouters? must you curl your tails in between your manly legs? I will stay, priest, who fear neither dog nor dragon. I am Perissus, I am the butcher.

Polydaon—

I'll not forget thy service, good Perissus.

Perissus—

Will you then make me butcher-in-chief to your viceroy in Damascus, and shall I cut my joints under the patronage of Kind Polydaon?...¹

Perissus is of a rather special brand. Sri Aurobindo has woven his character with such dextrousness that it seems natural for a butcher to be kind and sanguinary at the same time. This brave fellow having done whatsoever he could for Andromeda is put on guard duty and asked to report Andromeda's death by the jaws of the sea-monster, while others run for fear of their lives. He witnesses Andromeda's glorious rescue by Perseus. For the first time even this unshakable Perissus is astounded. He cannot fully grasp what he has seen and entranced with wonder talks in a most entertaining riddle—

Polydaon—

...Your news!

Did the sea-monster come and eat and go?

Perissus—

He came but went not.

Polydaon—

Was not the maiden seized?

Perissus—

Ay, was she, in a close and mighty grasp.

¹ *Ibid*, p. 156

Polydaon—
By the sea-beast?
Perissus—

'Tis said we all are animals;
Then so was he: 'twas a glorious beast.

Polydaon—
And was she quite devoured?
Perissus—

Why, in a manner,—
If kisses eat.

Polydaon—
Ha! ha! such soft caresses
May all my enemies have. She was not torn?
What, was she taken whole and quite engulfed?

Perissus—
Something like that.
Polydaon—

You speak with difficult slowness
And strangely. Where's your blithe robustness gone,
Perissus?

Perissus—
Coming, with the beast. He lifted her
Mightily from the cliff to the heaven
Polydaon—

So, Queen,
Nothing is left thee of Andromeda.

Perissus—
Why, something yet, a sweet and handsome piece.

Polydaon—
You should have brought it here, my merry butcher,
That remnant of her daughter.

Perissus—

It is coming

Perissus is still dazed at the marvel of what he had witnessed. He must surely be happy and relieved at the sudden turn events have taken. In the above conversation with Polydaon all his words are ambiguous. He plays with him as a cat with a mouse. By this pretext he keeps Polydaon from taking sudden revenge on the other members of the royal household. The dexterous twists and double meanings of his clipped sentences add a joyous note very much needed in that sombre place at that heart-breaking moment. Humour keeps a man sane, otherwise the harsh knocks of life may drive him crazy. Perissus, though no

innocent, is a sort of philosopher. He is quick to grasp people's changing moods. As we see in his witty asides to the now repentant Therops':

Perissus—

Therops, my crowd-compeller, my eloquent Zeus of the market-place, I know thy heart is big with the sweet passion of repentance, but let it not burst into action yet....

Always true to his character and vocation with his sharp intellect Perissus also notes the passionate chameleon-like changes in easily swayed lesser mortals. So devious is he that when he talks about Polydaon one doesn't know if he is mocking or praising him:

Perissus—

Polydaon, old crony, grows thy soul too great within thee? dost thou kick the unworthy earth and hit out with thy noble fists at Heaven?¹

When Polydaon ultimately does die Perissus' lament has the unmistakable stamp of a butchery humour.

Art thou then gone, Polydaon? My monarch of breast-hackers, this was an evil ending. My heart is full of woe for thee, my fellow-butcher."²

This Perissus is a true follower of Rudra the destroyer who destroys with compassion. Many a living heart has been cleaved out of a terrified bosom of the victim by him. Yet he must have done it without a trace of cruelty, for the time and culture of those ages made human sacrifice seem natural. A cruel profession has turned Perissus into a kind and soft person, with a comprehensive mind who reads the thoughts and feelings of Phineus, Polydaon, Therops, etc., like open books. The reader has not seen a more likeable butcher in the whole of world literature. Such is the magic of Sri Aurobindo that Perissus with his penchant for badinage may seem a strange but never an improbable character. As soon as Phineus' name is mentioned Perissus' ire rises against that royal nose—

He cannot be satisfied, his nose is too long; it will not listen to reason, for it thinks all the reason and policy in the world are shut up in the small brain to which it is a long hooked outlet.³

When Perseus thanks him for being kind to Andromeda he remarks:

There was nothing astonishing in that; I am as chokeful with natural kindness

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-169

² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 178

as a rabbit is with guts; I have bowels, great Perseus. For am I not Perissus?
Am I not the butcher?¹

Apart from this bloody brand of humour there is also a softer laugh, a silken rose set in the ruby-red canvas—the 'light lovely babble' of Cydone—ready to laugh in the face of death, at the moment of supreme terror. Hers is sweet humour and what Andromeda says is surely true—

Sorrow was not in the same world as she.²

When Iolaus threatens to bind her to a tree, she welcomes a sure-seeming death with banter and badinage—

I'll bring the tree and all and follow you³.

In the darkest moment of peril she babbles to chained Andromeda making light of her peril, making her smile in spite of the pending doom—

I think he cheats me.
You are Iolaus changed into a girl.
Come, I will kiss you dumb for cheating me
With changes of yourself.⁴

And the same care-free spirit is evident in the joy of victory—always bubbling:

... O you girl-Iolaus,
You shall not marry Perseus: you are mine now.⁵

When one has such fellow travellers life loses all its poison, dawn comes nearer, night retreats. Our hearts become light with joy and laughter.

Also we hear once again the skipping steps of that tall insouciance Diomede who returns as if new-born to make herself a sweet nuisance to Praxilla whose answer is again on the same lines. Their quarreling is a happy sigh, a joyous rustle of trees raising their heads after a tempest—

Diomede—

As if your little hand could hurt!
I'm off, Praxilla, to pick scarlet berries

¹ *Ibid*, p. 181.

² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 160.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183

In Argolis and hear the seabirds' cries
 And Ocean singing to the Cyclades. `
 I'll buy you brand-new leather for a relic
 To whip the memory of me with sometimes,

Praxilla.

Praxilla—

You shall taste it then before you go.
 You'll make a fine fair couple of wilfulnesses.
 I pity Perseus.¹

One after another these sunny souls appear in the last scene to raise a final triumphant laugh. Cireas is the same undaunted soul looking for the amusing and glib in life's acts and ready to make fun of a commoner or a prince, equally and impartially—be it a Therops or a Iolaus.

Cireas (*to Diomedes*)—

This it is to be an orator! We shall hear him haranguing the people next market-day on fidelity to princes and the divine right of queens to have favourites.

Iolaus—

Cireas, old bribe-taker, art thou living? Did Poseidon forget thee?

Cireas—

I pray you, Prince, remind me not of past foolishness. I have grown pious. I will never speak ill again of authorities and divinities.²

Iolaus teases him —

Thou art grown ascetic? thou carest no longer then for gold? I am glad, for my purse will be spared a very heavy lightning.³

Aghast to see fortune slipping through his fingers Cireas hastens to add—

Prince, I will not suffer my young piety to make you break old promises; for if it is perilous to sin, it is worse to be the cause of sin in others.⁴

We laugh and feel all is well and will be well, our hearts glad for the good fortune of worthy Cireas at last freed from the dual chains of slavery and poverty. There is also a last happy glimpse of the flustering and blustering anatomy-angled, polysyllabic-prone humour of Perissus when visibly agitated he bursts in the presence of the King who asks the reason of his anger. Thus he answers—

King Cepheus, shall I not be angry? Art thou not again our majesty of Syria?

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185

² *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

And shall our majesty be insulted with noses? Shall it be prodded by a proboscis? Perseus, thou hast slaughtered yonder palaeozoic ichthyosaurus; wilt thou suffer me to chop this neozoan?¹

Perseus is amused and says—

Calmly, precisely and not so polysyllabically, my good Perissus. Tell the King what is this clamour.²

Perissus—

My monarch, Phineus of Tyre has brought his long-nosed royalty to thy gates and poke it he will into thy kingly presence. His blusterings, King, have flustered my calm great heart within me.

Cepheus—

Comes he alone?

Perissus—

Damoetes and some scores more hang on to his long tail of hook-nosed Tyrians, but they are all rabble and proletariat, not a citizen butcher in the whole picking. They brandish skewers; they threaten to poke me with their dainty iron spits,—me, Perissus, me, the butcher!³

On making acquaintance with Perissus we come to believe that it is possible for Rudra to be kind, that it is possible to love a citizen butcher. One cannot fail to marvel at the master craftsman who creates such a character so full of humour and compassion-traits completely at variance with his profession, which yet never even once seems unnatural.

Before we close this great play we must smile once more with Cireas and Perissus. These two must have surely been overawed by the power of Perseus and the spectacle of a whole charging armed mob turned into stone but who still have enough command of their wits to set fire to a literary sparkler or two.

Cireas—

O Zeus, I thought thou couldst juggle only with feathers and phosphorus, but I see thou canst give wrinkles in magic to Babylon and Medes. (*shaking himself*) I cannot feel sure yet that I am not myself a statue. Ugh! this was a stormy conjuring.

Perissus (*who has gone out and returned*)—

What hast thou done, comrade Perseus? Thou hast immortalised his long nose to all time in stone! This is a woeful thing for posterity; thou hadst no right to leave behind thee for its dismay such a fossil.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

² *Ibid.*, pp 190-191

³ *Ibid.*, pp 190-191

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 198-99

By skilfully introducing Cireas, Cydone and Perissus Sri Aurobindo has managed to lighten the crimson hues of the dark foreboding tale. So naturally has he woven them into the pattern of the play that they seem its integral parts. What is more natural than a prince having a lovely sweet heart with a ready wit and nimble tongue and what is more natural than Cireas, the attendant of Poseidon having a humorous tongue ready to match its flow with the grim red that must have cascaded down the altar?

For nature revels in contraries and, without this capacity to laugh, the grim shadows of Poseidon's image might have overwhelmed his attendant's sanity, driving him to Hades much before his time. His sense of humour gives him the strength to mock himself and his fellow-beings and even the Gods. So powerful is the pen of Sri Aurobindo that this banter and laughter in the temple of sacrifice and death does not seem out of place or artificial.

(Concluded)

SHYAM KUMARI

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

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

THE MOTHER

THE soul of a great figure in a country very often revolutionises the evolution of the human race. At critical moments in the world’s history mighty souls come to manifest a power of God or the Godhead himself to help humanity. They have to march forward, whatever the impediments on the way. This is how evolutionary nature helps to forward its ultimate destiny. These souls are the precursors of the new dawns. They are the pillars that build a new era of history. Sisir Kumar Mitra says: “It is in their life and work that lies the deeper meaning of Carlyle’s concept of ‘Universal History’ which is ‘at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked in the world’. He adds: ‘History is the essence of numerous biographies. If one wants to know the meaning of history, let him look into the lives of great men.’ For Emerson ‘There is properly no history; only biography,’ for Vivekananda ‘The history of the world is the history of a few great men who had faith in themselves.’ ‘In all acts of social creation’, says Arnold Toynbee, ‘the creators are either creative individuals or at least creative minorities.’”¹

History keeps no record of the silent work of mystics and Yogis. That is why Sri Aurobindo has said about himself: “My life... has never been on the surface for men to see.”² Even the political work he did in six brief years had a long preceding period of silent inner preparation. In fact his spiritual work began with his work for India’s freedom. It was Sri Aurobindo the Master-Patriot who later became the Master-Yogi.

At one point he writes that his experience of Yoga delighted him precisely because he discovered its harmony with political activity. “I had thought a yoga which required me to give up the world was not for me. I had to liberate my country. I took to it seriously when I learnt that the same Tapasya which one does to get away from the world can be turned to action. I learnt that Yoga gives power, and I thought why the devil should I not get the power and use it to liberate my country...?”³

In the words of June O’Connor: “A further value in pursuing Aurobindo’s thought rests in the fact that he speaks within himself a living dialogue between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’.” Robert McDermott says: “the dual ideals of a total resurgence of India and the total transformation of man characterised the mature work of Aurobindo Ghose, the political revolutionary of Bengal (1905-10) and of Sri Aurobindo, the mystical Yogi of Pondicherry (1910-50). This complementarity of politics and spirituality typifies Sri Aurobindo’s ability to draw diverse strains into a rich and dynamic synthesis. as he combined politics and Yoga, he also combined Western and Indian values. The conditions for this

synthesizing ability were created by the highly diverse strains in his personal life.”⁴

Who is Sri Aurobindo? What is his significance? The revealing answer comes from his close associate Nolini Kanta Gupta: “...the Yogi, the Divine, the Impersonal man in Sri Aurobindo was the real person always there from the very birth. Thus we see him starting life exactly with the thing where everyone ends. In his inner being he had not to pass through the gradations that lead an ordinary person gradually towards the widening ranges of consciousness and existence. In all the stations of his life, in every sphere and status Sri Aurobindo was doing his duties, that is, his work—*kartavyam karma*—selflessly, which means with no sense of self, or perhaps we should say, with supreme Selfhoodness; for such is the character, the very nature of the born Yogi, the God-man.”⁵

Sri Aurobindo visioned and revealed the truth of man’s destiny and the divine perfection which India had been striving after through the ages. He discloses the meaning of the past endeavours and achievements of the race.

The first of the stages (according to Sri Aurobindo) is known as “the divine childhood of the race”, called the Vedic Dawn.

Here are Sisir Kumar Mitra’s words: “India started on her historic adventure with the Vedic vision of the Light that was to descend into man and lift him above himself and new-make him into a divine perfection. It was this her early knowledge of Reality with the infinite glories of its future manifestation that gave to the soul of India—born in that Light... its own character, its own strength and energy to which she owed her splendid achievements in every sphere of life. Indeed she created and created and created, and not for centuries, not even for only a millennium or two, but for more than five thousand years. And there was no domain of spiritual or secular knowledge, no field of culture or social activity, in which she did not make her immense original contribution.”⁶

Sri Aurobindo says about the Indian people: “One of the oldest races and greatest civilisations on this earth, the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality.”⁷ India has taken into itself “numerous sources of strength from foreign strains of blood and other types of human civilisation.”⁸

The Vedic Dawn: “Almost when her history began there came to the Seers of India intuitive visions of the Infinite Light of heaven and of its three modes of self-unfoldment, *rtam*, *satyam*, *brhat*, ‘the Right, the True, the Vast’. The force of these visions impelled the soul of India to grow and expand both in her inner and outer life, the two aspects being one in the oneness of the spirit. *Ritam* is the action of the Divine knowledge, will and joy in the lines of the Truth, the play of the Truth-consciousness. These lines of the Truth later became the lines of the Dharma which connect the individual soul with its godhead. *Satyam* is the dynamic essence of the truth-consciousness which has to permeate the being and convert it into its substance. *Brihat* is the infinity of Sachchidananda out of

which the other two proceed and in which they are founded. Man's divine perfection towards which the force of these visions secretly prepares him lies in the fulfilment of the infinite possibilities of his terrestrial existence, indicated by them. These visions are the spiritual foundations of the culture of India and the world.

"Here is the Rishis' paeon of joy: 'We have crossed to the other shore of this darkness, Dawn is breaking forth and she creates and forms the birth of knowledge.' And the fact that this Dawn—the discovery of the Light—had been already achieved by the ancient Fathers is so often proclaimed in utterances like: 'Our fathers found out the hidden light, by the truth in their thoughts, they brought to birth the Dawn'

This Dawn is the 'Dawn divine who brings with her the heaven of light.' The discovery of the Dawn meant a new birth into a new consciousness, into Light and Knowledge. Dawn is the illumination of the Truth upon the mentality of man to bring the day of full consciousness into the darkness, or the half-lit night of his being. The Rishi, when he sees extra wide-shining of this Dawn, followed by the continuous splendour of the all-illuminating Light, bursts forth: 'Arise, O Souls, arise! Strength has come, darkness has passed away—the light is arriving!'"⁹

(To be continued)

NILIMA DĀS

REFERENCES

- 1 *Resurgent India*, by Sisir Kumar Mitra, p. 1.
- 2 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A B Purani, p v
- 3 *Ibid*, p 58.
- 4 *The Quest for Political and Spiritual Liberation*, by June O'Connor, Preface
- 5, *Sri Aurobindo*, by Sisir Kumar Mitra, p 11
- 6 *The Liberator*, by Sisir Kumar Mitra
- 7 *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, Vol 2, p 16
8. *Ibid*
- 9 *Resurgent India*, by Sisir Kumar Mitra, pp. 3-4

A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE UPANISHADS

(1)

PREFACE

THE Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita stand together. The Vedas are the inspiration, the Upanishads the intensification and elaboration, the Gita the essence and the substance.

The Upanishads are deep insights into the perennial truths of life and existence. What are these perennial truths? They lie in the answers to the questions: what is life? What is death? What is Real? What is unreal? What is Soul? What is God?

The way to seek knowledge of these great secrets of life is shown in the very word 'Upanishad'. The word literally means: "sitting close to a teacher." The methods of spiritual teaching, which are basic to our ordinary teaching, stand wonderfully illustrated in the Upanishads.

A student goes to a teacher and says, "Sir, I want to know that by knowing which everything gets known." If we know the basic existence, we naturally know everything that is contained in it, is a part of it.

A son, Bhrigu, approaches his father, Varuna, and requests, "Lord, teach me the Eternal."

When Yajnavalkya wanted to give to his wife-Maitreyi her share of property on renouncing worldly life, she exclaimed, "Will it give me immortality, an existence without death?"

The Upanishads are full of such incidents, which have inspired men everywhere and for a long time.

But they were written long ago and sometimes they are not understandable by the modern reader. But what is understandable is wonderful. And these things are deeply psychological whether they relate to life, death, Atman or Brahman or the teaching methods, as they were cherished, pursued, realised and enjoyed as facts of experience. The same is the attempt here.

WHAT ARE THE UPANISHADS? WHAT ARE THEY CONCERNED WITH?

The Upanishads are books by earnest and devoted seekers of truth, embodying their insights and realisations, which arose out of the Vedic life and which followed it. The Vedic life embodied two tendencies. One, the outer yajna, sacrifice; two, the inner seeking and realisation of truth. The Brahmana treatises represent the ritualistic trend and the Upanishadic writings the trend of knowledge.

The spirit of these writings is remarkably free. The main quest is: What is ultimately real, truly tried out? And it is permeated with a spirit of simplicity, honesty and frankness and it touches the same chords in a reader capable of responding.

The number of such writings is very large though 18 are recognised as important. These are: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitereya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Kaushit, Maitrayan and Shweta-shwatara, Narayan, Jabal, Arunik, Kaivalya and Brahmabindu.

The subject-matter of the Upanishads is the Ultimate and the Real. The Isha gives a comprehensive view of life and existence, of the Supreme truth and its unity and of the multiplicity of this world. All belongs to That and should be enjoyed as That. Works are real and should be pursued as such. The Isha gives a complete possibility of spiritual living in the world.

The Kena asks what it is that moves the mind to see, hear, etc. The answer is: it is Brahman that does it.

Very often the question to start with is; what is Brahman or Atman or Self? The opening quest is always peculiar to each Upanishad, but its exposition is of the nature of Brahman, the ground of existence.

Brahman is infinite, and infinite can be the approaches to it. The subject-matter of all the Upanishads is Brahman, the Ultimate, the infinite Existence, but each Upanishad has its own independent approach, which contributes much to the richness of the Upanishadic literature.

Since the Upanishads deal with the Ultimate, their attitude and their knowledge have determined Indian life. The Upanishadic seers, who derive inspiration from the Vedas, laid the foundations of Indian life. They are the creators of Indian life. And the spirit of sincere and free seeking, which permeates these writings, constitute their true power and attraction. They, therefore, continue to shine with undimmed light.

The atmosphere of the Upanishads is the most valuable thing. In reading them, if one contemplates them as a whole, the sincerity of the Upanishadic Rishis, their honesty and their truthfulness and their profound insights into life and existence, and thus gets into a proper approach to the writings, one may get a beautiful experience—an experience of depth, of peace and of joy, which can greatly enhance the joy of reading them. One can begin to enjoy a relation with the Ultimate, the Real and feel in oneself the same. That would be a true reading of the Upanishads, the sense of trust and confidence in a teacher and the sitting close to him in love and adoration and enjoying that relationship. The Upanishadic Rishis are such teachers who impart in confidence the most secret teachings of life and existence.

Atmosphere is a great truth of life, but one has to seek it to learn to appreciate it. Each one of us has an atmosphere of his own and that depends on our consciousness. In anger, even when not outwardly expressed, our atmosphere

is different from when we are in a state of good will and love. This is in the case of our ordinary human nature which is an amalgam of good and evil propensities. The Rishis underwent a long sadhana of self-purification and presumably possessed a consciousness of great purity and effectivity—their atmosphere and the same reflected in their writings would be a most useful thing to cherish and enjoy.

This approach is a fact of life to consider and make use of.

(To be continued)

INDRA SEN

WATERS OF ETERNITY

WATERS of Eternity
Spreading wide and far,
One, undivided
Perfect reflector of light
And light's liquid form.
O mysterious movements—
Powerful, passionate, rock-rough,
Rising and falling
In a soul-stirring rhythm—
Bosom friend of the winds,
Companion of whirlwind and storm,
Surging to unknown lands.
O earth's raised insistent hands,
Life's ceaseless soaring wings—
Settled in repose;
Moving, ever moving.
Mother of worlds bright and dark,
Of suns and moons
And their luminous herds,
Cool home of the sacred fire—
O fiery depths digging deep;
Silent soul
Calm horizon-clad,
Pure, transparent
Full bloomed breast of bliss.
O liquid divinity
Stealing to unknown interiors,
I melt into thy glowing Self.

JAYANTILAL

THE ETERNAL CHILD AND THE ETERNAL MARVEL

THE SQUARING OF THE CIRCLE

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1988)

3: Trojan Trio: the Apple of Discord and the Smile of the All-Beautiful

THE sun-like radiance of Helen's face still glowed before Prince Paris's misted eyes, like the after-image of a dawn gazed on too long.

Life after life, age after age, the same divine smile, imperturbably capricious, had rent the veils of an oblivion that seeks to separate us from our one eternal Love. In this life too, the shock of a supra-celestial sweetness had dissolved the sombre clouds of the last millennium of the Age of Darkness

... and matter had begun to transmute into energy...

The Sky-Prince still bore upon his lips the unforgettable aroma of that single kiss, which had called into earthly life the unknown marvel of the Land of Dreams.... Paris sighed. For now, not snow-white sun-bright Helen, but the Ancient Sorceress was pouring around him the magic gaze of her soul, in secret streams of her infra-terrestrial sweetness. And yet she was almost as beautiful as his Soul's Queen: the magic mirror had to acknowledge it...

both were born of the same divine violence.¹

Ever since that night of flame and destruction, Paris had been unable to stop dreaming. Was it all he could do, in a universe where man and machine, hardly distinguishable, were on a honeymoon voyage of conquest over the galaxies, swallowing everything into their clockwork coils of nothingness?

Yet Helen was on earth...though he would willingly have journeyed

¹ Mystery surrounds the origins of Helen. According to mythology, she was born, together with her terrible twin, from a golden egg, conceived from the union of Leda with Zeus, King of the Gods and God of Thunder, who had taken the form of a swan in order to possess the mortal who had infatuated him. There are striking analogies between this tale and the Vedic myth of Martanda, 'the egg of death, the sun hidden in darkness, the light and energy laid by the *hamsa*—the divine Swan who symbolises the Spirit—in the dark inertia of physical matter. The very name of Helen is derived from *Helios*, Sun. And does not that 'golden apple' over which the gods quarrelled, and which decided the destiny of Troy, also seem, in its symbolic, gnostic sense, to confirm the perspective which links the Greek myth to its ancient origins, the solar myth of the Vedic Aryan past—the secret knowledge of the Golden Age? And this nuclear energy that man has just discovered in the heart of the atom—if we succeeded in deciphering its psychological and spiritual significance—would it not also lead us back to the rediscovery of those ancient mystical legends? The fact is that even today Paris still loves his beautiful Helen as intensely as ever

through the nebulous deeps of the stars to find her.... And he, this time was the prisoner of her rival, the Black Queen—while his Snow-White of Troy was on the other side of the world. She had always been on the other side, and he had always had to go and win her. Once before, it had been sufficient to cross the Aegean; this time must he cross the globe—or were they to meet at the centre?

... and what would they discover, at the centre of things?

The Prince's face relaxed into a smile: beyond dream-waves his heart had reached a shore where time is one. He relived the ancient scene: that mountain beside the Trojan plain, the sunlit green of a long-ago morning, the silvery murmur of a stream that seemed to mingle with the dreaming harmonies of his lyre.... Then there had been a silence, as if sudden snow had absorbed all sound. Somewhere else, birds were singing. Blossoming branches bent in a motionless wind... and the Silence began to dance: three goddesses stood before him. And just above his cupped hands floated a ball of light....

The rest is history: Hera gave a command, Athena tried to reason, Aphrodite smiled—and won the 'golden apple'. Paris did not know what to make of Power, Cleverness did not interest him; but to Beauty...he would always give all he had. This time, it was that sun-pearl which Discord had thrown among the gods gathered for the marriage of the pair who were to be the parents of Achilles...

... the same drop of light that lies within the heart of every thing?

The Goddesses had vanished, the breeze was again playing through his hair, the water took up its old song, and his hands, warm still with an energy unknown, would have gone on stroking his lyre...but now a new melody was singing in his blood, his eyes were dazzled by that snow-and-rainbow smile, and his heart, pierced by that look of light and ecstasy, seemed to have already forsaken the gentle countryside where the exiled prince had known the tranquil happiness of a shepherd boyhood.

When his royal parents soon afterwards rediscovered him, and the still-clear signs of his encounter with divinity had driven away the obscure memory of that horrifying prophecy of Troy's destruction, even among the palaces and gardens of the city built by the Gods, the nostalgia of a far lovelier dream seemed to haunt him; and at last he launched himself into the blue immensity of the Western seas in search of the look and the smile of the All-Beautiful.

The isles and coasts of Greece, garlanded with spray and with marble, seemed to beckon the Prince of the East; but the iron weapons and grim fortresses of their fierce overlords hung like a heavy threat of implacable Fate over that call of enchanted promise.

And in Sparta, amid the hollow of arid mountains, in the granite-bastioned citadel ruled by a King of eagle-eye and panther-limbs, in that austere megaron lit by unperfumed torches, like a pearl in the darkness of the abyss

once more the unearthly marvel smiled at him.

Once more, all he had to do was to follow his heart. Caressing a lyre, he sang of a shepherd-prince visited by strange visions, to whom the Queen of Beauty had promised the most beautiful of all queens.

Helen listened in a reverie, smiling at the stranger. The King had fallen asleep. When Paris rose to go, she followed him wordlessly, decked in all her jewels. They glittered all night in the moonbeams; and when the ship raised anchor, the first rays of dawn lit up a million fires in the gems adorning the Queen of the Greeks. She looked straight before her, and as day dawned in the East saw before her eyes

the pearl of light her lover had once offered to the Goddess of Beauty.

Troy welcomed her as its most splendid trophy, the most precious jewel which the summit of its crown had still lacked, its standard of glory for the tallest of its towers. It seemed as if this city, which the gods had built as a hymn to Beauty, had awaited her like a divine breath which would fill its monuments and temples with life. Her smile lit up its golden cupolas and marble palaces with an unearthly splendour, a magic radiance. Paris the poet had brought home to the Capital of the East the supreme secret for which all those centuries of triumph and grandeur had been preparing:

its soul.

And,—last act of that divine tragedy, the whole city offered itself in a fiery sacrifice to the supreme marvel of its spiritual discovery. As if at a festival that sealed the destiny of a nation, its children and old people ran to throw themselves onto the enemy fire. One by one the hundred sons of Priam fell in the dust of battle; and at last the entire city, with towers and domes, ramparts and colonnades, was all consumed in the flames of the final sacrifice.

The iron men of Europe, victorious, took back to their dark strongholds their accursed booty of ashes and ruin.

Yet, eternally beautiful in its superhuman dream of wonder and love, the city of Paris and Helen would live forever in the song of the King of Poets:

built by the gods for the smile of the supreme Beauty.

The Prince mused.... Had his Snow-White melted beneath those long-ago kisses? Or had Apollo sent him now on a secret mission to the home of the Sorceress, the Dark Queen, the Power of Night? The magic mirror had shown him all its crystalline wisdom; but in the end, did not all the images it reflected suffer from the same defect of tridimensional flatness? There still remained undiscovered the secret of that pearl of darkness, that drop of nothingness, that absolute venom, that atom of death, that *black hole*—the 'poison of Discord'. What unknown fourth dimension lay hidden within that ominous spell?

Would the Guardian of the ancient witchcraft unveil to him her blind mystery? Helen was on the other side of the world, and Paris was searching for the profoundest key of all arcanas:

the secret meaning of Evil.

The Prince plunged into that Night. The snowy smile of white Helen had melted in the dark fire of his quest, had vanished like light at the entrance to an underground labyrinth. He was alone with Darkness, and gazed into its heart.

The ancient Sorceress dreamed of a vision buried beyond eternities of oblivion. The reflection of some tender glow seemed to flit across her sombre regard. Paris, fascinated, focussed on this slender crescent of hope amid the night, this thread of smiling memory like the trace of a childhood spring-day in the eyes of a blind man, like the unfolding of a black orchid in the heart of a starless jungle, like the defiant gleam of a black pearl at the bottom of an inescapable gulf:

what obscure Sun haunted this chasm forever barred from light?

And then the Prince, as he had once awakened his sleeping snow-white love, leaned above that stony visage and with his whole soul laid a kiss upon the stern lips of the Queen of Shadows. Sweet as honey forbidden, she enveloped him with the velvet magic of her nocturnal love. At last she smiled. The moon blazed in the heart of the hero. He closed his eyes. Like the song that lulls the stars, like a poem without words, the voice of his Spouse of Darkness led him to the secret sill of the profoundest of all mysteries:

*In the core of all night sleeps a forgotten sun
supreme reverse of my own shadow-image
pearl of my dark love, thrown once by Discord
to unmask the compromises of the gods....
Beyond all night dreams an immortal dawn....*

And when he opened his eyes, a new marvel awaited him: the cold silver mirror had vanished. In its place, a point of light, like an atom sun, revealed in its in-

numerable rays the miracle of a limitless world.

Paris stretched out his hands. Yet again he invoked the smile of beauty. And the point was dancing in his heart. The golden egg, the lost sun, opened its omnipotent eye upon each instant of life. Helen was coming yet again to kindle the world of men to flame with her mystic gaze. She would awaken in every atom the dawn of a life that Night had pretended in vain to conceal by her mystery-play...

*and on the knees of the Virgin of the Abyss,
the dark Magician-Woman of the Worlds,
new-born from the new love of Sky and Earth,
a child of light smiled at the eternal dawn.*

B. PETRIS

(Translated by Shraddhavan from the original French)

PADMA THE DEVOTED SISTER

OUR India is a wonderful land which has produced at times heroic women as powerful and courageous as men. They have crowned the country with glory and their lives are examples worthy of imitation by other women.

About two hundred years ago in a poor family of the warrior caste at Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, a daughter was born. The story of her life, which shows her highest devotion to her brother, may seem to the modern girls something like a piece of fiction, but it is an out-and-out fact.

The child was named Padma. Her father was a poor farmer. She lost her parents when she was only two and a half years old. Her brother, Jobar Singh, was then sixteen years old. Though young, Jobar Singh was possessed of heroic qualities. He took upon himself the burden of bringing up his young sister. He taught her the use of the sword and shield from her very childhood. She was taught horse-riding as well. Padma garbed herself like a man and learnt the martial arts and skills with such concentration that she acquired mastery in them soon. She attained proficiency in the management of her house too.

The money left by her father by way of savings from his small earnings was exhausted soon and Jobar Singh perforce had to run into debts. Being deeply involved he was unable to pay off his debts in time. The money-lender came now and then to his house and hurled at him abusive and unkind words. At last he sued him in the court of Bhopal. After the trial Jobar was put in jail for not being able to repay his loan. This incident deeply grieved Padma. In order to release her brother from the prison she gave up her womanly garments and put on the uniform of a Rajput soldier. She then left for Gwalior. At that time Gwalior was ruled by king Daultaraji Sindhia. Padma introduced herself to the king by the name of Padma Singh, and beseeched him to enlist her as a soldier in his army. The king put her to the test to know her dexterity in horse-riding and manipulation of the sword and shield. Padma came out successful and was admitted into the army.

During that period Sindhia was engaged in a war, which lasted for three years, with the British. Padma fought very bravely in that war and won the appreciation of the king. The king was so pleased with her that he raised her from the rank of soldier to that of havildar.

In the course of fighting she received several bullets in her thighs and arms, but she never vacillated nor ceased for a moment from fighting. Her dauntless courage terrified the enemy soldiers and made them tremble with fear. Like deer frightened by the sound of a tiger they fled hither and thither at the sound of her horse's feet.

Padma used to have her bath in seclusion lest anybody should discover her true identity. But the fact that she was in disguise could not be concealed for long. Her solitary bath and not growing any moustache aroused curiosity in the

mind of a soldier who one day stealthily followed her to the place of her bath and watched her bathing. He found that Padma was really a woman and not a man. He at once hurried to the king and disclosed the fact. Hearing his statement the king sent for Padma to know the fact for himself. Padma now unravelled the mystery before the king. On his enquiry she replied, "I am a woman. My brother is a prisoner in the Bhopal jail. I have put on this male dress in order to free my brother at any cost. I spend only half of my salary and the other half I save for my brother." After saying this she burst into tears in front of the king. The king was highly pleased with her for her devotion to her brother, her heroism, courage and truthfulness. He called his treasurer then and there and ordered him to pay out of his own treasury as much money as was necessary to clear the debts of Padma's brother. He thus got Jobar Singh released from the prison and had him brought to Gwalior.

Having arrived at Gwalior Jobar Singh met his sister who was eagerly waiting there to see him. The meeting filled the hearts of both with unusual delight. At last Sindhia, the King of Gwalior, offered Jobar Singh a high position in his army and had Padma married to his general.

GUNANANDA DAS

(Translated by Goura Mohan Mahanta into English)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Folk Tales of Pondicherry, by *P. Raja*, New Delhi, Sterling, 1987, pp. 119, Paperback: Rs. 25; H.B.: Rs. 60.

WHO does not love a good story? Indeed, the apparently limitless market for novels of every grade, films and television-serials is a strong indication that most people would rather spend their time with a story than on almost anything else. We make a certain distinction between stories that claim at least some basis in an actual happening—they run the whole gamut from history through journalism to pure gossip, but if one looks closely perhaps there is no great difference between the three—and those that are frankly fictitious. Though the former variety has its devotees, many people prefer the latter as being both truer and more entertaining—and therefore more instructive. In the days before printing, mass-literacy, films and television had brought the present-day wealth of stories into virtually every home and street, the story-teller was an indispensable and valued member of the community. And the high honour accorded to poets was probably in recognition of their invaluable gift of being able to invent new stories rather than merely repeat those they had heard or experienced.

There must be very few areas of the world remaining where this ancient oral art and its audience has not come under attack from the pulp-novel and film industries. But a few master story-tellers have survived into our own age—and been able to reach new appreciative audiences through the modern mass media. I have seen on television a Jamaican grandmother who was justly renowned for her art; and have heard on cassette-tape Countess Sophie von Kamphoever, who in her old age wrote down and later recorded the wonderful tales she had learnt in her teens as an apprentice to a nomadic tale-master in Anatolia. Perhaps her tales—a translation of one of them appeared in the October 1986 issue of *Mother India*—told and retold by generations of *professional* story-tellers, show a refinement and polish which takes them beyond the sphere of the pure 'folk-tale'; but the Countess was taking them into a new realm when she translated them and wrote them down for an audience thousands of miles as well as culturally distant from their original hearers.

Of course, wonderful tales originally told and re-told around fires or by lamplight have been collected and written down since time immemorial. Many believe that the great ancient epics of Homer, Vyasa and Valmiki originated as collections of oral tales, transmuted to literature in the hands of master-poets. What is the Bible, what are the Puranas, but collections of tales that must have been told long before they were written down? The Panchatantra and Aesop's Fables clearly spring from a wealth of oral tradition. Nearer our own day, the Brothers Grimm made their names into household words by writing down for the first time and publishing tales they had collected from vernacular sources. Recently

these pioneer collectors of folk material have come under attack for being 'un-scientific' in their method of collecting—one of their main sources was a story-teller who, it has been discovered, was not an illiterate old crone, but a farmer's wife with some education—and of telling the tales—they did not record verbatim the language of their sources but retold what they had heard in a way that may have owed something to literary art. Today's professional folk-tale scholars would strive for greater authenticity. But, strangely enough, the material they present us with, passed so scrupulously through their scholarly hands, often seems to have lost the fresh bloom of immediacy, and to have been stained by the dry-dust of too many university libraries.

We prefer our stories from the mouth, or at least the pen, of one who is himself a story-teller, who has the gift of being able to draw us into the vivid magic of the story-world. Mr. P. Raja, who collected these 31 tales, and as many more, from accomplished story-tellers in the state of Pondicherry, has a flair for narrative himself—as is known to readers of *Mother India*, where several of these tales as well as other folk-material collected by him first appeared in print. Mr. Raja does not indicate how closely he has stuck to the language of his sources, since these tales must have been told to him in Tamil, he has at least had to translate them. One has the feeling that he has done more than literally render them into English: he has translated his own understanding of the story, and transmitted it to us, his readers, with the racy vividness of vernacular speech, so that they come to us with the full flavour of authentic 'folk' tales.

This vividness of direct speech is one quality that we look for in a true folk tale. What other characteristics are implied in the term? I consider that, to qualify, stories should be clearly rooted in the local consciousness of a particular people, as-yet-uninfluenced by the global message of radio and television—and especially of the 'folk', as opposed to the aristocracy or any educated élite. And, then, they should be frankly 'tales': though reflecting the customs and life-views of a particular group, they are not meant to be realistic—at the very least they are legendary, and often fabulous or fantastic.

Bearing these qualifications in mind, I thought it would be interesting to classify the subject-matter of the tales in this collection. I found that, out of a total of 31 stories, the 'punch-line' of 4 was the explanation of some natural phenomena, observed in the surroundings—stories that tell why the sun is hot and the moon cold, why the waves look the way they do, and so on; 3 were legends which might have some claim to a historical happening at their origin, and of these, 2 were devotional in character. 3 had 'fairy-tale' characteristics... magic, misunderstandings, vindication of the oppressed; no less than 15 exemplify 'folk-wisdom'... shrewd observation and humorous comment on the ways of the world; and 4 are just 'pure entertainment' with no discernible point other than amusement. Almost all are humorous in tone, although 1 or 2 are

serious or even tragic—but this may reflect a preference of the collector? 7 are ‘animal fables’—animal characters illustrating some point about human behaviour. Only 1 tale, ‘The Reward of Cowardice’, seems to belong to another milieu, the court rather than the village, and to a much earlier age—perhaps, like idioms and customs, stories too can filter down from an aristocratic to a rustic usage in the course of time; and, to one who has avidly devoured stories of every kind, from all over the world, for the last forty years, all had the virtue of appearing new.

Perhaps it is worth pointing out that these days we tend to think of fairy-tales and folk-stories as especially suitable for children; but their original audience must have included many adults, and these tales at least seem to have been intended primarily for them. Probably, as in many other aspects of village life, the distinction between the generations was in this respect not so trenchant as in our modern urban society. Here is one literate adult at least who thoroughly enjoyed this collection—and for the qualifying characteristics: their reflection of a way and view of life distinctly Tamil and rural, and for their pre-literary vigour and directness, which Mr. Raja has managed to transmit convincingly even through the veiling medium of the printed page.

The book is one of an extensive series. If all the other collections are as authentic and fresh as this one, the series as a whole must represent a considerable wealth of traditional material worth recording in this more sophisticated but not necessarily wiser age.

SHRADDHAVAN

Editor's Note

The book reviewed above has won a cash award of Rs. 1000/- plus a shawl from Pondicherry Central University. Hon'ble Shri K. C. Pant, Union Minister of Defence and Mrs. Ila Pant presented the award on 16th October 1987. We heartily congratulate Mr. P Raja.

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

16 August 1987

THE PRESENT WORLD-SITUATION

Introductory Speech by Kishor Gandhi*

(1)

SRI Aurobindo repeatedly said that his own sadhana and his life-work were not meant only for himself or for his disciples or for India alone but for the whole world. He also said that this work had begun not only during his present life but since the beginning of earth evolution and that it had consisted in carrying on that evolution through its successive stages till in his present birth he had come to lift it up from the mental to the supramental level which would establish securely the Divine Life upon earth and create a new race of Gnostic Beings. As this was his mission in his present life he was intimately concerned with all the world-movements during his life-time and, though not outwardly participating in them, was secretly guiding them through all the vicissitudes towards their destined goal. In view of this, it would be worthwhile to consider and evaluate the present world-situation in the light of his world-vision and his life-work in order to have the right perspective of it and not be bewildered by the extremely distressing conditions which of late have precipitated themselves all over the world and which seem to have plunged humanity into a dark abyss. For us, who claim to be Sri Aurobindo's disciples and who have therefore undertaken to collaborate in the fulfilment of his life-mission, this is a matter of extreme importance. So I propose to dwell on it at some length in my introductory speech at this Conference which we have organised to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's 116th birth anniversary which fell yesterday. I have chosen it because his birth anniversary is the most appropriate occasion to take stock of the present world-movement in the context of his own role as its secret guide and director.

Some of you will recollect that on the 15 August 1971, which marked the beginning of Sri Aurobindo's centenary year, the Mother gave the following message:

* Revised and enlarged

“Today is the first day of Sri Aurobindo’s centenary year. Though he has left his body he is still with us, active and alive.

“Sri Aurobindo belongs to the future; he is the messenger of the future. He still shows the way to follow in order to hasten the realisation of a glorious future fashioned by the Divine Will.

“All those who want to collaborate for the progress of humanity and for India’s luminous destiny must unite in a clairvoyant aspiration and in an illumined work.”¹

This message is bound to raise doubts in many minds because, considered in the light of what the Mother has said in it, the present situation both in India and the world at large seems to have become, as I mentioned, most paradoxical and bewildering. For the Mother speaks of Sri Aurobindo’s work to be the realisation of humanity’s glorious future and of India’s luminous destiny, but actually what is happening of late seems to drive both India and the world in exactly the opposite direction. For lately there has been an overwhelming upsurge of extremely dark, dangerous and destructive forces of falsehood and evil and they are pressing forward with such an unprecedented fury that they seem to be pushing the world to the brink of a precipice from where, if it does not retrace its steps soon, it may plunge headlong into its catastrophic doom.

So at the present moment the most poignant question perplexing the minds of all thoughtful persons is: Is the world moving towards “a glorious future” of which Sri Aurobindo is “the messenger” and to accomplish which was his life-mission as the Mother says in her message, or is it heading towards a cataclysmic destruction? And, if we have to accept the Mother’s optimistic answer to this question, what substantial grounds do we have to justify such optimism?

The answer to this question rests altogether upon one’s view of what force or power really directs and determines the course of the world-movement? Is it governed by a blind inconscient material energy in which everything happens by chance or accident, or is it determined by the ignorant and egoistic human will which can possibly be driven by anarchic forces of falsehood and evil which may lead it to its destruction or, overriding both these possibilities, is there some other power which secretly guides it and which will eventually carry it to its luminous destination despite the temporary setbacks it may have to suffer on its way, in which case such setbacks can only be passing interludes which cannot frustrate its reaching its destined goal?

All these three views of the world-movement have been held and propagated by different philosophic thinkers and even some religious and spiritual traditions have supported them. But here we have the unique privilege of having Sri Aurobindo’s view, derived from his spiritual vision, of this problem, and since it provides a true answer to it, I propose to draw your attention to some of

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 14

its salient features as it would help in visualising the present apparently bewildering world-condition in its right perspective.

In Sri Aurobindo's vision the present world-situation, like any other in the past or future, must be seen not as an isolated episode but as part or a phase of the total world-movement which in terms of his evolutionary theory is in its secret reality a divinely guided progressive development in a cyclic rhythm starting from inconscient matter and culminating in the supreme Spirit. For this reason no transitional or intermediate stage in this development can be taken as definitive or ultimately determinative even though because of its cyclic character there are bound to be alternations of bright and dark periods in it. The present world-situation, however dark it may be, is thus only a passing phase in the total world-movement which because it is divinely guided must inevitably culminate in the emergence of the perfect light of the Spirit.

Instead of elaborating further on this central point of Sri Aurobindo's vision in my own words, I would, like to read here a letter of Sri Aurobindo in which he has himself explained it at some length. I think it best to read the whole of it because it is most helpful in having a clear understanding of his definitive view on this crucial question. It was written in February 1942 to a disciple who had posed this very same question to him for elucidation. Here is the letter:

“The question you have put raises one of the most difficult and complicated of all problems and to deal with it at all adequately would need an answer as long as the longest chapter of *The Life Divine*. I can only state my own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience that there is such a guidance and that nothing is in vain in this universe.

“If we look only at outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most, we may see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge—even scientific knowledge—comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering, and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as ‘this unhappy and transient world’, *anityam asukham*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanical inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something behind its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then inevitably there must be a guidance—and that means that a supporting Consciousness and Will is there with which we can come into inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the

world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual or eventual failure.

“This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience and an ignorant mind and life full of that Inconscience: error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently too a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty,—at least a partial flowering of these things. The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and must be leading towards that higher state of things. It is leading the individual, certainly, and the world, presumably, towards the higher state, but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms, still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a higher Light, Truth and Bliss; the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

“The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can get only an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge and vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and can observe how they all tended, without our knowing it, towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made,—not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but also the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of further experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course: they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance, by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come which helps or directly guides or moves us: it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them—

except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

“It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world-movement. That seems to move according to the conditions and laws or forces of the moment through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens at a particular juncture of the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophical, is not ultimately determinative. Here, too, one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case or at a particular time but also the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all. Falsehood and Darkness are strong everywhere on the earth, and have always been so and at times they seem to dominate; but there have also been not only gleams but outbursts of the Light. In the mass of things and the long course of Time, whatever may be the appearance of this or that epoch or movement, the growth of Light is there and the struggle towards better things does not cease. At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful; but even if we reject the assertion of the mystics and prophets since early times that such a condition of things must precede the Manifestation and is even a sign of its approach, yet it does not necessarily indicate the decisive victory—even temporary—of the Falsehood. It merely means that the struggle between the Forces is at its acme. The result may very well be the stronger emergence of the best that can be: for the world-movement often works in that way. I leave it at that and say nothing more.”¹

From this rather long letter which I have just read, it will be clear that in Sri Aurobindo's view there is no need to take a pessimistic view of the world's future even though the present world conditions are undoubtedly most distressing. According to his “own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience” it is only a transitional phase of the world's evolutionary development which because it is divinely guided must ultimately arrive at its luminous goal by the victory of Truth over whatever upsurge of darkness may temporarily overwhelm its course.

(2)

Not only so but, in Sri Aurobindo's view, there is a purpose and a meaning, even a necessity for the world-movement to pass through such dark phases because, as he has said in the letter I just read, “nothing is in vain in this universe”.

What can be the purpose and significance of the dark periods in evolution like the present world-condition? Actually, the present historical phase is the product of the rational-scientific age which became dominant in Europe around

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed Vol 24), pp. 1626-29

the 18th century and created there its materialistic civilisation, and from there has triumphantly spread all over the world, trying to destroy all higher cultural and spiritual values. But, in Sri Aurobindo's view, even this materialistic phase was not without its significance and perhaps even its necessity for the emergence of the Spirit and the fulfilment of the secret divine purpose guiding the evolutionary development. Here again I will read a letter of Sri Aurobindo in which he has stated his view of modern materialism showing both its positive and negative sides

“The condition of present-day civilisation, materialistic with an externalised intellect and life-endeavour, which you find so painful, is an episode, but one which was perhaps inevitable. For if the spiritualisation of the mind, life and body is the thing to be achieved, the conscious presence of the Spirit even in the physical consciousness and material body, an age which puts Matter and the physical life in the forefront and devotes itself to the effort of the intellect to discover the truth of material existence, had perhaps to come. On one side, by materialising everything up to the intellect itself it has created the extreme difficulty of which you speak for the spiritual seeker, but, on the other hand, it has given the life in Matter an importance which the spirituality of the past was inclined to deny to it. In a way it has made the spiritualisation of it a necessity for spiritual seeking and so aided the descent movement of the evolving spiritual consciousness in the earth-nature. More than that we cannot claim for it; its conscious effect has been rather to stifle and almost extinguish the spiritual element in humanity; it is only by the divine use of the pressure of contraries and an intervention from above that there will be the spiritual outcome.”¹

This is Sri Aurobindo's view of the significance of the modern materialistic phase in human history in the larger evolutionary context. But we must remember that its evil consequences which he has pointed out started assuming threatening proportions from the beginning of the present century and became patently evident when they culminated in the stupendous conflagration of the First World War, and even after that have continued unabated to swell to alarming dimensions, so that at the present moment humanity seems to be perilously perched on the brink of a cataclysmic disaster. Being deeply aware of this ominous development Sri Aurobindo drew pointed attention to it a number of times. For example, in a letter written to the Mother during the First World War on 6 May 1915 he said:

“One needs to have a calm heart, a settled will, entire self-abnegation and the eyes constantly fixed on the beyond to live undiscouraged in times like these which are truly a period of universal decomposition.”²

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed, Vol 22), p 4

² *On Himself* (Cent Ed, Vol 26), p. 424.

After that, during the years following the First World War until his departure in 1950, he wrote in several letters about the increasingly worsening world-conditions and their grim prospects for humanity's future. But since in his view these dark conditions, however ominous they may seem, were only passing phases, he also advised not to feel disheartened by them but to remain firmly fixed in the faith in the eventual victory of the Light. I again quote from two of his letters written in 1947 and 1948 which though short are very illuminating and heartening.

“The extreme acuteness of your difficulties is due to the yoga having come down against the bed-rock of Inconscience which is the fundamental basis of all resistance in the individual and in the world to the victory of the Spirit and the Divine Work that is leading toward that victory. The difficulties themselves are general in the Ashram as well as in the outside world. Doubt, discouragement, diminution or loss of faith, waning of the vital enthusiasm for the ideal, perplexity and a baffling of the hope for the future are the common features of the difficulty. In the world outside there are much worse symptoms such as the general increase of cynicism, a refusal to believe in anything at all, a decrease of honesty, an immense corruption, a preoccupation with food, money, comfort, pleasure, to the exclusion of higher things, and a general expectation of worse and worse things awaiting the world. All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the world-energy and the workings of the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming. Those who seek for the Divine have to stand firm and persist in their seeking; after a time, the darkness will fade and begin to disappear and the Light will come.”¹

“I am afraid I can hold out but cold comfort—for the present at least—to those of your correspondents who are lamenting the present state of things. Things are bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible—and anything, however paradoxical, seems possible in the present perturbed world. The best thing for them is to realise that all this was necessary because certain possibilities had to emerge and be got rid of, if a new and better world was at all to come into being: it would not have done to postpone them for a later time. It is, as in yoga, where things active or latent in the being have to be put into action in the light so that they may be grappled with and thrown out or to emerge from latency in the depths for the same purificatory purpose. Also they can remember the adage that night is darkest before dawn and that the coming of dawn is inevitable. But they must remember

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 24), p. 1611.

too that the new world whose coming we envisage is not to be made of the same texture as the old and different only in pattern, and that it must come by other means—from within and not from without; so the best way is not to be too much preoccupied with the lamentable things that are happening outside, but themselves to grow within so that they may be ready for the new world, whatever the form it may take.”¹

(3)

After Sri Aurobindo’s passing in 1950 the world-conditions have continued to worsen. But then in February 1956 the Mother announced the manifestation of the Supermind on a global scale in the subtle physical layer of the earth. This victorious advent of the supramental Truth, which was an event of supreme significance in the evolutionary history of the earth, generated high hopes and there was a widespread expectation that the world-movement which was till then plunging downwards would now take an upward turn and would bring about a great outburst of Light and Joy and Harmony upon earth. But evidently this expectation has not been fulfilled. On the contrary, the downward curve seems to have plunged into a deeper darkness which is so overwhelming that it reminds us of Sri Aurobindo’s line in *Savitri*: “When darkness deepens strangling the earth’s breast.”² We may even say that what is actually happening in the world in recent years is exactly the opposite of what was expected from the supramental manifestation in February 1956. The result of this paradoxical situation is widespread anxiety and despair at the present moment to which I referred at the beginning of my speech.

A special reason for the extreme acuteness of the chaotic and destructive conditions in the contemporary world is, as the Mother has repeatedly said, that along with the advent of the supramental Truth in the earth’s subtle physical layer there has also occurred a precipitation from the asuric vital world of extremely dangerous and destructive forces of falsehood which are fiercely fighting to destroy it in order to retain their age-long grip over the life of humanity. I quote a few lines from one of her talks on this point:

“This struggle, this conflict is becoming more and more evident, marked and visible between the constructive forces of ascending evolution, a more and more perfect and divine realisation and the forces that are becoming more and more destructive, powerfully destructive, the forces of madness that are beyond all control; it is a kind of race as to who will arrive first at the goal. It would seem that all the adverse anti-divine forces, the forces of the vital world have descended upon earth, using it as their field of action and at the same time a

¹ *Ibid.*, pp 1611-12.

² *Savitri* (Cent. Ed., Vol 28), p 55.

spiritual force, highest and most powerful, has also descended upon earth for the first time to bring a new life there. That makes the struggle all the more acute, violent, visible, but also, it would seem, definitive and that is why one can hope to arrive at an immediate solution.”¹

We should also note another aspect of this problem which explains why this struggle between the new Truth that is now trying to manifest upon earth and the resistance of the lower nature and of the adverse vital forces is increasingly becoming critical and assuming alarming proportions. Sri Aurobindo mentions at one place that “The end of a stage of evolution is usually marked by a powerful recrudescence of all that has to go out of the evolution,”² and he further explains that evolutionary Nature herself deliberately raises up all the actual and even the latent resistances that have to go out of the evolution in order to finally and decisively expel them from the life of humanity. Here again I quote from Sri Aurobindo:

“As in the practice of the spiritual science and art of Yoga one has to raise up the psychological possibilities which are there in the nature and stand in the way of its spiritual perfection and fulfilment so as to eliminate them, even, it may be, the sleeping possibilities which might arise in future to break the work that has been done, so too Nature acts with the world-forces that meet her on the way, not only calling up those which will assist her but raising too, so as to finish with them, those that she knows to be the normal or even the unavoidable obstacles which cannot but start up to impede her secret will. This one has often seen in the history of mankind; one sees it exemplified today with an enormous force commensurable with the magnitude of the thing that has to be done. But always these resistances turn out to have assisted by the resistance much more than they have impeded the intention of the great Creatrix and her Mover.”³

I have read this and also the earlier passages from Sri Aurobindo’s writings to emphasise the very important fact that in his view, derived from his deep spiritual vision and experience, however overwhelming and distressing the pressure of darkness and falsehood at the present moment may be, and even if they may keep on increasing for sometime more, becoming “worse than worst”, as he has said in one of his letters which I read before, it does not at all signify the defeat of the supramental Truth that is now trying to establish itself upon earth; rather it indicates its sure eventual victory, even though that victory may come after an acutely critical struggle with the opposing forces which are bent upon destroying it.

(To be continued)

¹ *Bulletin of Physical Education*, August 1958

² From *The Karmayogin* (Cent. Ed., Vol 3), p. 347

³ *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 15), pp 557-58.

