

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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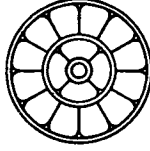
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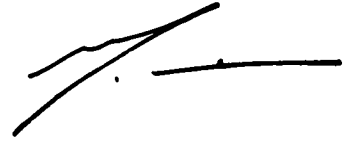
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled



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All correspondence to be addressed to  
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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLII

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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# TO A BEGINNER IN YOGA

## A LETTER

SRI Aurobindo has received your letter and wants me to reply to you.

Undoubtedly, the conditions of Western life are not, generally speaking, favourable to a spiritual existence, in so far as its whole activity is turned outwards. A greater effort will have to be made if one wishes to turn away from the present collective trend of action, sensation and thought. And it is certain too that at the outset, periods of calm, comparative solitude and concentration are necessary in order to enable the consciousness to make this effort and to turn inwards or upwards.

But the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo (following herein the master idea of the Gita) is not a flight far from the world, a renouncement of action. Its aim is rather to transform action and to make it a part of spiritual life itself.

It is true that Yoga demands an equipoise and that every weak point, physical or mental, is a source of much trouble and much difficulty. But what *is*, should always be taken as it is; it is inevitably the point from which one has to start. And the start must be made forthwith. Even if you can see only a part of the road (as a matter of fact it is always so) it would be unwise to wait for more favourable circumstances. The circumstances of today are the outcome of the past, and those of the future, even of the near future, depend in their turn on our present attitude and our present aspiration. It is possible to alter circumstances that are unfavourable, and you may be sure that, if your aspiration is sincere and intense, possibilities will open out before you and enable you to realise your spiritual destiny. Besides, very often, circumstances are unfavourable only in appearance. If they appear hostile it is only because there is a conflict within us; we are ourselves divided, dragged asunder by contrary tendencies. The soul aspires after one thing, the mind longs for another, the vital craves yet for another; that is why our life is made up of shocks and is overstrewn with obstacles.

It would then be vain to wait until circumstances offer you an easy Yoga in twenty-five lessons. Your primary task is to unify your whole being around the central spiritual will, the will that ever tends towards a Divine union and a Divine manifestation. This task you can undertake where you are, in your actual life, even if there be certain difficulties on the score of health, for, above all, it is a change of inner attitude that is sought. In proportion as you progress, external circumstances will become your helpers and allies, instead of holding you back and blocking your way.

Start work, such as you are, knowing the way to be long and arduous, knowing that you will have to surmount many obstacles, such as doubt and discouragement, but knowing also that you are going to penetrate into the light

of Truth, by short flashes at first, but later on in a more stable and continuous manner; you will become conscious of the Divine presence, and you will learn to live the only life that is worth living.

Go forward and the door will open unto you.

PAVITRA

(With acknowledgments to *Sri Aurobindo Circle, Third Number*, pp 91-92)

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## INVISIBLE

WHEN lips go singing love,  
 The eyes are wet  
 Because of an unviewed Visage  
 They never can forget.

Immitigable gloom  
 Hangs between  
 Our dream and dawns of Beauty  
 No yearning heart has seen.

O vain all magic tune  
 Weaved by despair:  
 Who shall imprison Godhead  
 In moving nets of air?

Only the quiet fall  
 Of pure flesh-line  
 Rhyming with soul of worship  
 Beckons the far Divine,

And though clay-eyes are dim  
 The lips' lone drouth  
 Is sealed to a hush of heaven  
 By a viewless Lover's mouth

AMAL KIRAN

## A TALK BY THE MOTHER

### TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN

*Sweet Mother, how can one find the right stage and turn of one's development?*

How can you find it! . . . You must look for it. You must want it persistently. It must be *the* important thing for you

(*Silence*)

What happens most often when one makes the inner effort that's needed to discover one's soul, to unite with it and allow it to govern one's life, is a kind of marvellous enchantment with this discovery, as a result of which the first instinct is to tell oneself, "Now I have what I need, I have found infinite delight!" and no longer to be concerned with anything else.

In fact this is what has happened to almost all those who have made this discovery, and some of them have even set up this experience as a principle of realisation and said, "When you have done that, everything is done, there is nothing more to do; you have reached the goal and the end of the road."

Indeed, a great courage is necessary to go farther; this soul one discovers must be an intrepid warrior soul which does not at all rest satisfied with its own inner joy while comforting itself for the unhappiness of others with the idea that sooner or later everybody will reach that state and that it is good for others to make the same effort that one has made or, at best, that from this state of inner wisdom one can, with "great benevolence" and "deep compassion" help others to reach it, and that when everybody has attained it, well, that will be the end of the world and that's so much the better for those who don't like suffering!

But.. there is a "but". Are you sure that this was the aim and intention of the Supreme when he manifested?

(*Silence*)

The whole creation, the whole universal manifestation appears at best like a very bad joke if it only comes to this. Why begin at all if it is only to get out of it! What is the use of having struggled so much, suffered so much, of having created something which, at least in its external appearance, is so tragic and dramatic, if it is simply to teach you how to get out of it—it would have been better not to begin at all.

But if one goes to the very depth of things, if, stripped not only of all egoism but also of the ego, one gives oneself totally, without reserve, so completely and

disinterestedly that one becomes capable of understanding the plan of the Lord, then one knows that it is *not* a bad joke, *not* a tortuous path by which you return, a little battered, to the starting-point; on the contrary, it is to teach the entire creation the delight of being, the beauty of being, the greatness of being, the majesty of a sublime life, and the perpetual growth, perpetually progressive, of that delight, that beauty, that greatness. Then everything has a meaning, then one no longer regrets having struggled and suffered, one has only the enthusiasm to realise the divine goal, and one plunges headlong into the realisation with the *certitude* of the goal and victory.

But to know that, one must stop being egoistic, being a separate person turned in on oneself and cut off from the supreme origin. That is what must be done: to cast off one's ego. Then one can know the true goal—and this is the only way!

To cast off one's ego, to let it fall off like a useless garment.

The result is worth the efforts that must be made. And then, one is not all alone on the way. One is helped, if one has trust.

If you have had even a second's contact with the Grace—that marvellous Grace which carries you along, speeds you on the path, even makes you forget that you have to hurry—if you have had only a second's contact with that, then you can strive not to forget. And with the candour of a child, the simplicity of a child for whom there are no complications, give yourself to that Grace and let it do everything.

What is necessary is not to listen to what resists, not to believe what contradicts—to have trust, a real trust, a confidence which makes you give yourself fully without calculating, without bargaining. Trust! The trust that says, "Do this, do this for me, I leave it to You."

That is the best way.



# AN UNUSUAL MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO

## INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS the end of September 1947, leading Indian newspapers carried reports that Sri Aurobindo, in seclusion since 1926, had received two visitors... the first, it was said, since his meeting with Tagore 19 years earlier. These two visitors, who remained with Sri Aurobindo in his room for three-quarters of an hour, were M. Maurice Schumann, leading a cultural mission despatched to newly-independent India by the Government of recently-liberated France, and M. François Baron, then Governor of Pondicherry.

In his book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, Nirodbaran refers to this visit as follows (p. 251):

Among the interviews granted to public figures by Sri Aurobindo the first one was in September 1947, followed by a few others at a later date. It was a great concession on his part to break his self-imposed seclusion. A prominent French politician Maurice Schumann was deputed by the French Government as the leader of a cultural mission to see Sri Aurobindo and pay him homage from the French Government and to propose to set up at Pondicherry an institute for research and study of Indian and European cultures with Sri Aurobindo as its head. I was happily surprised to hear this great news, great in the sense that Sri Aurobindo had at all consented to the proposal, for I hailed it as an indication of his future public appearance. The fact that it came on the heels of India's Independence pointed to her role as a dominant power in the comity of nations, as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. It seems Sri Aurobindo asked the Mother in what language he should speak to the delegates. The Mother replied, "Why, in French! You know French." Sri Aurobindo protested, "No, no! I can't speak in French." The Mother, Sri Aurobindo and the French delegates were closeted in Sri Aurobindo's room and we don't know what passed among them.

Three members of Auroville International France were privileged to meet M. Schumann in December 1988, and to interview him about his visit to Sri Aurobindo. The text that follows is an extract translated from the account of this interview published in the Summer 1989 issue of *La Revue d'Auroville*. It tells us something of what happened in Sri Aurobindo's room that day.

M. Maurice Schumann, at that time 35, had been an official spokesman of the Free French forces in London throughout the war. Later he became Secretary of State in his country's Foreign Affairs Ministry, and was its Minister from 1969-1973. He is still alive, now approaching his eighties, a member of the French Senate and the Académie Française, known not only as a statesman but

as a philosopher (he holds the Chair of Philosophy in Lille University) and as a writer. Outside his own country he is best known for his championship of the idea of a united free Europe, and the steps he has taken to foster the formation and growth of the European Economic Community, which is now moving closer to the political union envisaged by Sri Aurobindo.

M. Schumann's mission, officially a 'cultural' one, had, in fact, a political aim. Although India and Pakistan had become independent in the previous month, the era of de-colonisation had hardly begun. The post-war Government of France was envisaging a transformation of their former 'Empire' into a Union of French States. In India they still possessed five *comptoirs*, or commercial outposts: Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Karaikal, Mahé and Yanam. For a number of reasons, they wished to avoid having these territories annexed immediately by the new Indian Government. M. Schumann's mission was, in his own words, "to persuade the Government of independent India not to proceed with the annexure immediately and by force." When he left France, there seemed very little hope of success. The President of the Republic, M. Ramadier, received him before his departure and told him, "I regret that you have been given a mission which I fear is doomed from the start." M. Schumann told his interviewers: "It was thanks to Sri Aurobindo that this mission miraculously succeeded."

SHRADDHAVAN

## INTERVIEW

When I reached Pondicherry, I found as governor there François Baron... a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, steeped in Hindu mysticism but, above all, a former volunteer in the Free French forces, linked to me by those ties of loyalty that very rightly still connected, so shortly after the end of the war, all those who had made the right choice already in 1940—and not just in 1942-3 or in 1944.

And François told me, "We'll go straight away to see the Mother of the Ashram, Mme Alfassa—an extraordinary woman I have often spoken about."

Her patriotism and her mysticism went very well together. And she saw immediately that if Sri Aurobindo—who had taken refuge in Pondicherry from the British police, and who was recognised throughout India as 'Sri'... as a man who had travelled the entire distance separating ordinary life from sainthood, who had delved deep into mysticism, far beyond Gandhi, who was a 'mahatma', a great soul, but, if I dare say it, no more than that—if I were received by Sri Aurobindo, whose presence sanctified the soil of Pondicherry, the Indian Government would avoid any show of force. That would be our starting-point.

So I spent an hour with Sri Aurobindo, who impressed me vividly by the tremendous radiance that flowed from him. I also noticed at once something that

struck me several times in India, and that I have tried to explain in the chapter of my book that you mentioned: that the modern Hindu thinkers were essentially and initially marked by the West. In return they were to have an enormous influence upon the West, but it was from the West that they came. This struck me at the bedside of Gandhi, with whom I spent a whole day. I noticed, in particular, that he was reading the *Bhagavad Gita* in Matthew Arnold's English version.<sup>1</sup> That struck me forcibly. Sri Aurobindo's essential book is *The Life Divine*.

He also spoke excellent English, and if one closed one's eyes one would have thought oneself in Oxford rather than in Pondicherry, listening to a man who had discovered Hindu mysticism *through* his Western culture. This impression was above all a physical one—I don't want to make a doctrine or a theory out of it, much less a discovery.

No mention was made of the threat to France's possession of Pondicherry—none. But immediately, throughout India, the feeling was created that the game was won: the game we had come to play... we were not so foolish as to imagine that in the year 2000, in an India independent for 53 years, Pondicherry would still be French.

Of course, the Ashram, which as you know has a communal life, had at that time attracted a number of French figures, in particular Barbier de Saint-Hilaire, a Polytechnician who was known as 'Pavitra'

When I left Pondicherry, I was two people: the man charged with a mission, and the man who had practised or taught philosophy all his life, and who was, naturally, enthralled by *The Life Divine*.

When I reached Chandernagore, I found there a situation that was quite clearly untenable... Much more than Pondicherry, which is a separate entity, Chandernagore was obviously a geographical or historical scandal, for really it is part of the industrial suburbs [*of Calcutta*].

But I must immediately add—and this was the second, very regrettable and even dramatic, aspect of the success of our mission—that at that moment India was being torn apart by what were called 'communal conflicts'... a charming euphemism! That is, ravaged by massacres. (As is our century in general, of course. . . what seems to be going on today in Armenia and the Armenian enclave of Azerbaijan.) But there is no comparison. In India everything is multiplied by 10, by 100 or by 1000. Calcutta was a terrible sight: the taxi-drivers there were all Muslims; and the day before I got there, beside every taxi was a Muslim with his throat cut. Not to mention the extreme poverty: I was coming from a Europe which had not yet recovered from the war, but which seemed to be rolling in opulence compared with the spectacle of independent India.

As I recount in the chapter of my book devoted to the death of Gandhi, Gandhi was at that time on a fast unto death in an attempt to halt the internal

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note Not Matthew but Edwin Arnold was the translator

strife. Already he was grief-stricken at the partition of 'Mother India'—and then the massacres. .!

That was the atmosphere in India at that moment. Obviously it would have been only too easy to divert attention to Chandernagore. Gandhi simply said to me—it was the only reference he made to it... and in the presence of his attendants, so that it would be repeated—"So, you have met Sri Aurobindo!" That meant everything in the language of the period: Pondicherry was not to be touched for the time being.

And when I met Nehru, whom I knew from before the war ... Actually I knew Indira better (and she died tragically in her turn!) because Indira, as a charming young woman in 1939, was looking for a bilingual Frenchman who had studied in England to translate her father's Memoirs; and without allowing myself any illusions, I told her. "Yes, gladly, but listen, Gallimard are handling a novel of mine, and they have asked me to change one chapter. If that's finished at the end of 1939, by the beginning of 1940 I will start on the translation." So I was expecting to be received rather warmly by Nehru.

But I was not. He received me in silence, and very coldly: I was presenting him with a *fait accompli*. Perhaps he would have been only too pleased to tell me, "Out of regard for France and her sufferings.. I agree not to. you can tell M. Ramadier that he need not worry for the moment ..." But by the time I reached him, the game was already won, and political people don't like that!

He had an extraordinary power of silence. At that time the French Ambassador was Daniel Lévy, the son of Sylvain Lévy, and Nehru admired him very much. because of the respect he felt for the memory of his father, who had been the main one to introduce Hindu thought and Indology into France, and had held a Chair in the Collège de France. Nehru kept turning towards Daniel Lévy, as if to say, "I don't know why they have sent this young fellow (I was 35) when you, the accredited ambassador, the son of Sylvain Lévy, are handling everything perfectly well. So.. he received me very coldly. Later on, relations became extremely cordial, and I was a friend of Indira.

That was the essence of our mission. So, first of all, I owe a political debt—to call things by their true names—to the memory of Sri Aurobindo. But since I had never gone any deeper into the superficial knowledge that I had about Hindu philosophy and thought, I felt myself carried several years back into the past as soon as I met Sri Aurobindo. Why? Well, because the Song of the Blessed Lord had been a real bedside book for me. And what interests me very much in the *Bhagavad Gita* is that it celebrates resistance to evil, not non-resistance.... It is a gospel of commitment. The dialogue of Arjuna is something absolutely extraordinary.

The conversation with Sri Aurobindo was very short. The interview was long, and the conversation was very short: one has to know India to understand what that means. There one can remain together for I don't know how long, look

at each other, and not say anything. This was true, on the political plane, with Nehru; and it had been true with Sri Aurobindo, who cultivated silence and had lost the taste or feeling for conversation.

But at the beginning there was a very characteristic scene: François Baron, who was a disciple of his, knelt before him and expressed the emotion he felt at seeing him for the first time almost alone. And it started with a conversation, in which each spoke only a few words, about how François Baron's life had been transformed: brother of a surrealist poet, a Parisian of between the wars, that was François Baron... dreaming of writing (and he did write a novel, later); and he had been transformed by two encounters: he had become a man of action because he met de Gaulle; and he became a mystic and thinker because he met Sri Aurobindo. He was dreaming of retiring to Pondicherry for the rest of his life.

*And the political part?*

The political part? The political part was the simple fact of being received. And there was no need even to mention it. The papers had only to report, "M. Maurice Schumann, a deputy in the French Assembly, sent to India on an official mission by the government of M. Paul Ramadier, yesterday had a private interview of one hour with Sri Aurobindo." That was the political part.

I think I must have been the last person from outside the Ashram to have met Sri Aurobindo, and especially to have had such a long interview with him, because he was already very old. He even referred to his departure from the earth in the near future.. .

*Do you remember what he said?*

No, no... It was quite commonplace, but clear: "I who already no longer entirely belong here. ."

*Did Mother take part in the conversation?*

At the beginning, to make the introductions; after that she did not say a word. In 1947, she must have already been 70....

*She was born in 1878.*

In '78? 1947... yes, she was 70. No need to tell that to me, who am 77 today, she seemed like a great-great-grandmother. How could anyone be 70 years old? But she floored me, because, after the frugal evening meal, she asked me, "Wouldn't you like to play ping-pong? I've heard you know how to play..." And I replied,

“Yes, I used to play well when I was 18, but now I have other things to do. .”  
 “But that makes no difference, come along, quick!” And then I saw this 70-year-old lady flying from one side of the table to the other... and she beat me hollow!  
*(laughter)*

*Did you discuss anything with her?*

She only asked me about France.

*About the political situation in France?*

About the political situation in France, how things were after the war, Alsace, etc. I told her, “You remind me of Marco Polo, who thought only of Venice... but he returned. .” Well, that’s what the Mother was interested in. She was completely absorbed in Sri Aurobindo and his thought, and at the same time she remained, there where she was, totally French. She was completely... I don’t want to say ‘Hindu’, but completely immersed in Hindu mysticism; and at the same time, totally connected with the land of her origin.

*Did you speak in English during your meeting?*

With Sri Aurobindo, yes, of course.

*Did you meet Pavitra?*

Barbier de Saint-Hilaire? Yes, for quite some time.

*Do you remember your conversation with him?*

No, he was not disposed towards conversation. The atmosphere of the Ashram was one of witness .. one could not start questioning or interviewing. Barbier de Saint-Hilaire, with his Polytechnician’s mind, explained to me at length the difference between a community of thought and a community of life. He was the one who explained to me what the Ashram was. He didn’t want me to confound it with a seminar at the Sorbonne, if you see what I mean...

*One could almost say that it was that conversation with Sri Aurobindo about the Bhagavat Gita that ‘saved’ France at that moment.. .*

‘Saved France’ is saying too much; because the destiny of France was not dependent on her colonies for one thing, and even less on her commercial outposts.

The aim was to maintain in Pondicherry a sort of display-window for France in India, and a window into India for France. What is the situation like today? I think there is still something special about Pondicherry?

*The French presence there is significant first of all, there are several thousand Pondicherry Indians with French nationality; there is a French Lycée, an 'Alliance Française' with an educational centre, an Institute of Indology, a Consulate. .. Many French people live in Pondicherry, and there are many in Auroville too—all that creates an ambience that is still quite French*

So that was the aim! The aim was to give us time to set up that French window, which had not been done at all during the period of colonial domination... to give us time to establish it under the French Union, and later to keep it, by agreement with India. It is a model of intelligent decolonisation.

For ten years I was President of the Commission on Foreign Affairs in the National Assembly, and for four years Minister of Foreign Affairs, and I have always taken an interest in Pondicherry, in memory of the mission of '47.

\*

When M. Schumann was told that the Mother had left her body in 1973, he exclaimed, "She died at 95! At 70 she was playing ping-pong as if she were 18!"

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

It would be wrong to conclude from this account by M. Schumann that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were in any way in favour of delaying the integration of Pondicherry into the newly independent state of India. On the contrary, as two interesting narratives which we shall publish next month indicate, they did all they could to hasten and smooth the way for that small but critical step towards the fully united India they envisaged as the only true embodiment of 'Mother India'

## THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

### IN THE LIGHT OF HER *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

*(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1989)*

THE Mother knew very well the animosities, hypocrisies and corruptions in human nature but she took up the challenge to keep equanimity and kept faith in human nature, confident that it would be transformed. She stood the test

She wrote on April 28, 1914:

“Thou art the Master of the world; Thy law unfolds before us with precision, and as I thought or rather as Thou didst make me understand it before we left Paris, it is the best—what could best serve Thy work in the world—that has happened.

“In beatitude I communed with Thy puissance dominating over darkness and error, shining like a marvellous and eternal dawn above the mud of hypocritical force and its apparent success. Everything has been brought to light, we have taken one more step towards the full light of sincerity, and this full light will be the first stage of Thy reign upon earth

“O Thou inconceivable splendour, Thou conqueror of all ignorance, victor over all egoism, Thou who dost illumine all hearts and enlighten all minds, Thou who art Knowledge and Love and Being, let me live constantly in the consciousness of Thy unity, let me always conform to Thy Will.”

She realised the eternal Infinity beyond joy and sorrow, beyond health and illness. The core of her heart she described with precision on May 2, 1914:

“Beyond all human conceptions, even the most marvellous, beyond all human feelings, even the most sublime, beyond the most magnificent aspirations and purest flights, beyond Love, Knowledge and the Oneness of Being, I would enter into constant communion with Thee, O Lord. Free from all shackles I shall be Thyself; it will be Thou who wilt see the world through this body, it will be Thou who wilt act in the world through this instrument.

“In me is the calm serenity of perfect certitude ”

Again she writes of her aspiration on May 9, 1914:

“Let me be a vast mantle of love enveloping all the earth, entering all hearts, murmuring in every ear Thy divine message of hope and peace. O divine Master, how ardently I aspire for Thee!

“Break these chains of darkness and error, dispel this ignorance, liberate,



liberate me, make me see Thy light..

“Break, break, these chains.. I want to understand and I want to be. That is to say, this ‘I’ must be Thy ‘I’ and there must be only one single ‘I’ in the world ”

In her prayer dated May 12, 1914, she records her experience

“This morning passing by a rapid experience from depth to depth, I was able, once again, as always, to identify my consciousness with Thine and to live no longer in aught but Thee,—indeed, it was Thou alone that wast living, but immediately Thy will pulled my consciousness towards the exterior, towards the work to be done, and Thou saidst to me, ‘Be the instrument of which I have need ’ And is not this the last renunciation, to renounce identification with Thee, to renounce the sweet and pure joy of no longer distinguishing between Thee and me, the joy of knowing at each moment, not only with the intellect but by an integral experience, that Thou art the unique Reality and that all the rest is but appearance and illusion? That the exterior being should be the docile instrument which does not even need to be conscious of the will which moves it, is not doubtful, but why must I be almost entirely identified with the instrument and why should not the ‘I’ be entirely merged in Thee and live Thy full and absolute consciousness?”

The Mother realises the synthesis of Matter and Spirit in the universe as well as in individual man like a ladder of interlinked worlds of the single Consciousness. She writes on May 20, 1914:

“O My sweet Master, Thou hast caused a new veil to be rent, another veil of my ignorance and, without leaving my blissful place in Thy eternal heart, I am at the same time in the imperceptible but infinite heart of each of the atoms constituting my body.

“Strengthen this complete and perfect consciousness. Make me enter into all the details of its perfection and grant that, without leaving Thee for a single moment, I may constantly move up and down this infinite ladder, according to the necessity of the work Thou hast prescribed for me.”

The Mother has said in one of her talks

“The consciousness is like a ladder. At each great epoch there has been one great being capable of adding one more step to the ladder and reaching a place where the ordinary consciousness had never been. It is possible to attain a high level and get completely out of the material consciousness, but then one does not retain the ladder. To get up and down and join the top to the bottom is the

whole secret of realisation, and that is the work of the Avatar. Each time he adds one more step to the ladder there is a new creation upon earth.

“The step which is being added now Sri Aurobindo has called the Supramental... and the chief spirit of force, the Shakti active at present, is Mahasaraswati, the Goddess of perfect organisation...

“Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect on the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.”<sup>1</sup>

The Mother in the year 1914 intuitively planned out her sublime future work.

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

#### REFERENCE

- 1 *Mother India*, December 1967, pp 667-8

## GOLCONDE: A LOOK BEHIND

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1989)

*This series is an arrangement of material about Golconde that has been deposited with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library. The compiler and the Archives would be happy to receive additional information about this exceptional building and those who were the Mother's instruments in realising it.*

SHRADDHAVAN

### 11. THE BUILDERS

(7)

As we have seen, Mrityunjoy himself was one of those “young enthusiasts” who constructed Golconde. In the later part of his “Look Behind”, he tells us:

MRITYUNJOY: I never knew that I would be one of the main workers at Golconde for five or six years, dealing with the labourers and the technical group of workmen, with sand, cement, crude oil and machines. But it became one of my main jobs; some days I even worked fourteen hours there, especially when a big concreting work was on. When we see the present-day Building Service of the Ashram, we feel that in those days, even with laymen like us as supervisors, the work was far superior both in quantity and quality. But that was because the Mother was directly guiding everything about Golconde. What that means exactly, it is impossible to explain, impossible for anyone to imagine. The Mother had the whole Ashram to look after, every detail of it, every individual problem. There were other departments to attend to; the number of people were fewer in those days, but the departments and problems were not less. Other building works were going on too; the Mother had to look into all their reports and answer all their queries, which were not at all easy and simple. Still she found time for Golconde.

In the case of Golconde, the details were innumerable and became more and more complicated—externally because of the war, internally because of the upsurge of the lower vital elements in us: egoistic feelings, love of power, a display of tactics among co-workers. Sometimes the Mother told us in disgust, when we insisted on our own correctness and saw all the mistakes on the other side: “If I had known that it would be like this, I would never have begun.” The Mother descended into the darkness on our level, became one of us, expressed her disgust like us. But it was also she who solved the problems in spite of us, we

who were unaware of her ways of working.

Chandulal, who was then the chief engineer, was the most devoted worker of all; his life was dedicated to the service of the Mother. He ate only the Ashram food, slept on a mat and pillow on a cot, dressed always in half-pants and Ashram sandals, and had no other hobbies than the Building Service. The Mother had great confidence in him. Yet he had never had any experience with reinforced concrete, or with such a big building as Golconde. His junior engineer, Jatindranath Baul, who came a little later, knew much more in this respect. He had studied in England and then acquired three years' experience with reinforced concreting while working on the Tata dams in Bombay under Mr. Kohl, an American engineering specialist to whom the Tatas were said to have paid Rs 6,000 per month.

During the approximately eight years (1937-45) of the construction work, many building-specialists—engineers, contractors, architects, from India and abroad—came to visit the site. Always they were struck by the sincerity and one-pointedness of the work, and the singular spirit of harmony and cheerfulness. They could not but be convinced that “something else” was behind the performance. Some of them frankly admitted that such an effort would not be possible outside if one had to run a business. One professional engineer, a friend visiting during the Darshan days, spent several days on site with us, observing the work in progress. “You are working out of devotion,” he told us, “not to earn your living. The very best quality of materials are being used, and with such care. This attitude is out of the question elsewhere.” His parting remarks were genuinely touching. He said “My visit this time for the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has been unforgettably revealing, about things I was quite unaware of. I am a practical man, dealing with sand, stone, steel and cement all the time; that has almost hardened my life. But here during these few days I discovered a new thing in life. It is not the Divine aloof in the temple, not just Sri Aurobindo in his room, but the Divine in action, making the material plastic and submissive for a new creation. You people are lucky to be tools in the hands of the Mother. I shall come again on a pilgrimage to see the building when it is ready.”<sup>1</sup>

*(To be continued)*

#### REFERENCE

<sup>1</sup> *A Look Behind* by Mrityunjoy Mukherjee unpublished ms in Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library

# YOGA—LIFE—POETRY

## PERSONAL LETTERS

THE whole basis of the Vibrational Theory which you present as the way to supramentalise the body's cells is most shaky in the sense that without a supramentalisation of the inner consciousness one can't hope to supramentalise the body. Of course, by mantra-power one may subtilise the physical being but to supramentalise it is a different cup of tea—or, to hark back to Rigvedic terminology, a different goblet of Soma, the nectar of Immortality. Your friend appears to make his followers believe that by merely quieting the mind and the vital nature one can have the power to supramentalise the physical instrument by means of a mantra. No follower of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother can subscribe to this facile sadhana, this "Yoga without tears"

Now to another topic on which you seem unclear. The impression of importance the Mother gives to a person has to be understood by the deepest heart and not by the superficial mind—the deepest heart which instinctively knows the Divine's wonderful way with the soul. In the *Rās Lilā*, the traditional play of the Divine with the human, every Gopi felt that Krishna was all hers and that she was the whole world to him and that he gave her a supreme value. The Lord, we are told, multiplied himself innumerable in his dance with his devotees and each devotee had the experience that she and he were all in all to each other. Our Mother's Grace was something like that to us. I remember Counouma once telling me that one could have quite a delusion about oneself if one did not know well enough the Mother's way with those who had an intimate relationship with her. She often made them feel wonderfully unique. Something of this Krishna-like Grace is sought to be pictured in the last lines of my poem, *The Triumph of Dante*:

For, how shall earth be dark when human eyes  
Mirror the love whose smile is paradise?—  
A love that misers not its golden store  
But gives itself and yearns to give yet more,  
As though God's light were inexhaustible  
Not for His joy but this one heart to fill!

You must not be misled by the quotation of some censures passed by the Mother on this person or that. Actually she has said things in the same vein about the very person from whom you quote. Only in connection with certain specific occasions she has made critical remarks about people. They were never meant to be final summings-up carved in monumental alabaster. As the occasions change, the very opposite comments would come forth. Besides, the

critical remarks themselves were spiritual actions on a subtle plane aimed at remedying the defects criticised: they were a secret favour to the people concerned and never—as we might misconstrue them—an effusion of ordinary vindictiveness. To see them otherwise is to be dense to the way of a supreme spiritual consciousness.

The Divine Light acts in two manners. It lays bare to us our own depth, “the imprisoned Splendour”, as Browning names it. It also reveals the darkness covering and constricting that beauty. It gives us depth-evoking compliments and also passes deeply-searching censures to counteract the obscuring elements. Yes, “to counteract”—that is, work upon them not in order to expose our weaknesses for blame and contempt by the world but with the aim to dispel them by subjecting them to the Light. How and when the occasion would arise for this dispelling has to be left to the Mother’s discretion. We cannot dictate to her what she should do. But we must have the faith that all she does is for each one’s spiritual good. And we would quite misunderstand her motive if we tried to use her comments with the intention to do the other person down and bolster our own egos. (28.11 1985)

\*

A word again on the business of Mantra. I know that the Mother attached a great importance to “Om namo Bhagavaté” and found its vibrations extremely helpful to the process of awaking the cells to the Supreme and transforming them. But, to direct the Mantra to this work, there must be the true mystical state in the Mantra-repeater. And the more psychic, the more spiritual, the more supramentally oriented one is, the better the transforming effect of the Mantra. For, indeed, without the Psychic’s up-kindling thrill, the Spirit’s widening peace, the Supermind’s illuminating touch, the Mantra is sure to become an empty enchantment. Sadhana as taught by both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—yes, by the Mother even in the period when she was busy with the Mantra’s magic—is the *sine qua non*. What I understand your author to harp on is that a little quieting of the mind and of the vital being are all that is required as the background to the Mantric practice. Naturally, one has to reduce the great Supramental Yoga to this if one’s purpose is to catch the ear of a large following, particularly in the West. This is what I would consider a distortion of the world-saving message of our Gurus. Such a distortion is that cheapening of the Truth which I dub “Yoga without tears”, that is, Yoga in which everything is toned down to the capacity of the average man who does not want to exert himself to gain God but desires everything to be made easy, God to be almost brought to him on a platter. “Yoga without tears”, in my sense, has nothing in common with the “Sunlit Path” to which you equate it but which is the path of the soul’s spontaneous leap towards the Divine and its effortless increasing of its core of

self-existent happiness to become the universal and transcendent Ananda that I once sought to crystallise in words with the following couplets:

Rapture that cuts away time-transient shows  
Like petals from the odour of a rose:

One breath of luminous all-absorbing hush—  
So wide a love that nowhere need it rush:

Calm ether of an infinite embrace—  
Beauty unblurred by limbs or longing face. (24.10.1985)

\*

You have asked whether I can say from experience whether we are able to manipulate the world by sheer will-power. There have been occasions when I wanted something to happen or to be done and a force went forth from the ideative mind but backed by an urge from the heart-centre and a drive from the vital being—and lo, the impossible-looking event which had been willed and aspired after took place. But on other occasions there was only a passing on to the Mother of what I wished for and surrendering entirely to her the desired result—without any anxiety for that result, any exercise of will towards its fulfilment. Most surprisingly, a turn of events took place and the problem to be solved, the end to be reached, were tackled in the most natural manner which I was bound to call supernatural. (24.10.1985)

\*

Your friendly letter has been before me all these days but I could not get down to answering it—partly because I had a lot of work on my hands demanding immediate attention and partly because the bright part of my friend was getting eclipsed again and again. I was much moved by your deep feeling for me which has persisted down the years, but I was saddened by the hymn of hate in the rest of the letter where others came into the picture. My concern is not with those I do not come into contact with: my concern is about people who are constantly in touch with me. When they keep nursing their hurts and letting unhappiness overshadow them and all their fine qualities suffer abeyance in any respect, I feel very disappointed. Please pull yourself out of this dejection, this sense of frustration, this violent personal reaction. When, in spite of all your efforts, something cannot go the way you want, you should put it out of your mind and not allow the memory of it to cramp your future possibilities. Infinity is calling us, divinity is stretching warm glowing hands towards us: shall we stand stuck in

grievances over past misfortunes instead of letting them be lost

In the dark backward and abysm of time

and turning our eyes

To the bright forward and empyrean of eternity?

Behind every setback, behind every contretemps, Sri Aurobindo waits for us to ask him what secret of swifter progress, what paradox of a greater leap forward hides in that distressing obscurity. If we inwardly go on offering the trouble to him and praying to him either to remove it or else, if it is for some reason irremovable, to make it open a deeper revelation of his presence within us, we shall not have wasted the uplifting love he brings to his children at every moment, be it day or night of the soul. Do not forget my favourite line from Sri Aurobindo's *Ahana*

Ever we hear in the heart of the peril a flute go before us. (5.3.1986)

\*

The idea of *utkata* or ineluctable karma is, I believe, a Jain doctrine. In one of the talks reported by Nirodbaran, it was brought to Sri Aurobindo's attention by Dr. Manilal (a Jain) after the mishap to the Master's right leg on the night of November 23, 1938. The point raised was whether the accident had been due to what is called *utkata* karma. Sri Aurobindo ruled out this explanation and referred to the constant battle he had been waging against "adverse forces" that were ever on the alert to balk him. He did not comment further on this kind of karma. I don't recollect anything written by him on the subject. What we may suppose on the strength of Sri Aurobindo's general outlook on karma is that certain actions create results which are very difficult to prevent or transcend and that we have to suffer them as long as we haven't found a way to rise above the plane on which they have their rationale. In other words, we may have to wait for freedom from them until we can ascend to the highest level of spiritual consciousness. I don't believe that there is no possibility of freedom. An absolute impossibility would not fit within Sri Aurobindo's scheme. That is perhaps why he has nowhere a word on the alleged karma of such a type.

A number of difficulties in one's being may not be amenable except to what Sri Aurobindo has called Supermind, the highest dynamic divine consciousness. These difficulties may be due to one's karma or to the play of universal force or to the folly of other people. Take, for instance, the attack of polio which my left leg suffered when I was two and a half years old. Much was done by way of



surgical intervention in London where my father, himself a doctor, had taken me three years after the attack. But, though I could cycle and even ride horses, a certain defect remained. The Mother once told me: "One day I hope to cure you. But the cure can be effected only by the Supermind. Not even the Overmind can help here." She meant that the traces of physical damage which lingered were of a rigidity that overpassed the capacity of all hitherto-known spiritual agents. Whatever the cause, the condition may be termed *utkata* in relation to "the powers that be" but not in an ultimate sense.

In conventional Christian theology the "sin" of Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden may be designated as *utkata* karma in an agelong shape, for all descendants of Adam are said to incur this "original sin" and, in consequence, are deprived of adequate power of winning "grace". So extreme is the inherited sinfulness believed to be, that no human being can atone for it. One who is taken to be God's own Son is understood to have shouldered the responsibility for it and become a human being and paid the price for it. The price is said to be his "crucifixion" as a common "criminal" on a charge of violating Jewish orthodoxy and transgressing Roman authority. By this act he is commonly credited with opening man to Divine Grace through man's faith in him as the one and only Son of God, the single universal Saviour.

I am mentioning all this as a possible illustration, not recommending the semi-mythological and narrowly sectarian form in which the doctrine of a great soul's self-sacrifice for the good of mankind has often been couched. (2.1986)

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You have touched upon an extremely personal as well as delicate subject when you ask me what I have to say apropos of the Mother's having once referred to me in the *Agenda* with the French term *imbécile* for having written to Sri Aurobindo about *Savitri* in what is termed a questioning vein. You are also asking me whether I consider the Mother to have made a mistake in using that word.

I may begin by saying that the censure would be more drastic if the word were taken in its English sense. In colloquial French I believe it means something in-between silliness and stupidity. I see that the translator of the *Agenda* into English has gone one better and employed the label: "moron." A moron is an adult with an intelligence equal to that of an average child of 8-12. To be moronic is to have an in-born defect of mind. It can never be got rid of. Surely the Mother did not mean this? For else she could easily have employed this label. But, even as regards the other term, would I say that she made a mistake?

The matter is rather complex for me. It has always appeared to me that the Divine, by the very fact of assuming a body, through the common human process must be prone at times to make mistakes, at least small ones. But I have also

always held that *the Divine's mistakes are still divine*. They happen to probe in a baffling way layers of our selves which are secretly at odds with our conscious intentions. If we can probe in turn these seeming mistakes, they can provide us with short-cuts to outgrowing our hidden weaknesses, and prove actually a grace and not a mere punishment. So, in the fundamental assessment, they are no mistakes at all.

My "questioning vein" about *Savitri* was intended to serve as an objective filter to isolate what might be Sri Aurobindo's oversights, which can certainly accompany on some occasions the incarnate Divine's insights. In addition, I wanted to anticipate whatever criticism of the new poetry the literary world at large might make, so that the poet might not unnecessarily expose himself to it. Finally, knowing the kind of poetry *Savitri* was meant to be, I was anxious for the "Overhead" level to be kept as high as possible and was eager to draw Sri Aurobindo's attention to whatever might strike my critical tympanum, rightly or wrongly, as not quite gloriously Aurobindonian. I believe Sri Aurobindo understood all these motives and knew too my basic breath-bereaved admiration of his revelatory art and was aware of how I longed to kindle up my own work with the help of his solar splendour. Let me quote to you a passage from one of his letters:

"... I can perfectly understand your anxiety that all should be lifted to or towards at least the minimum Overhead level or so near as to be touched by its influence or at the very least a good substitute for it. I do not know whether that is always possible in so long a poem as *Savitri* dealing with so many various heights and degrees and so much varying substance of thought and feeling and descriptive matter and narrative. But that has been my general aim throughout and it is the reason why I have made so many successive drafts and continual alterations till I felt that I had got the thing intended by the higher inspiration in every line and passage. It is also why I keep myself open to every suggestion from a sympathetic and understanding quarter and weigh it well, rejecting only after due consideration and accepting when I see it to be well-founded."<sup>1</sup>

There is also the fact, for which I can never be sufficiently grateful or discover a completely adequate ground—the fact that Sri Aurobindo, without my directly asking for the favour, chose me as the only disciple to see in absolute secrecy *Savitri* in the making. Morning after morning he used to send me in a sealed envelope passages of the poem in his own hand. I would type them out and put, in the margins, appreciative remarks or queries from a literary standpoint.

Obviously, in this there was nothing culpable on my part. But at times there must have been in me an urge, however faint, to find fault with *Savitri* in a few rare places in the light (or twilight) of my own aesthetic sense. I am positive the Mother's "imbécile" hit out at that lurking imp. The imp must have fed its own ego by remarks of Sri Aurobindo's like the one to Nirod on getting back the

<sup>1</sup> *Letters on Savitri* in the Centenary Edition of *Savitri*, p. 579

latest composed matter of *Savitri* which he had sent me during my visit to the Ashram in August 1947 after a long absence. He asked: “Is Amal satisfied?”

I may add in general that the Mother’s censures at any time are never meant to be ultimate pronouncements—proposed as epitaphs like “Amal the Imbecile, was born such on 25.11.1904 and died likewise on.. ” You must counterpoise the sarcasm we are discussing with the several compliments Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have paid. Sri Aurobindo’s are already in print. As for the Mother’s I may mention the known fact that when in the early days she was allotting to various rooms little paintings by me of flowers with their significances, she asked me to put in my own room a painting of the flower whose significance is: “Krishna’s light in the mind ” In later times I remember her once telling me during an interview: “If I told you what Sri Aurobindo and I think of your mind, you would get puffed up.” I refrained from asking what they thought. I tried to remain unpuffed-up. Even if I had learnt from her their precise thinking, I don’t feel I would have let it obscure my knowledge that on the one hand I have many serious gaps in my mind and that on the other it is she and Sri Aurobindo who are responsible for making me deserve any compliment.

I recognise very well my all-too human fallibility in general and how miserably I fall short in quite a number of specific fields—mathematics, linguistics, sociology, economics, business. During *Mother India*’s initial period—nearly 2 years—when it was a semi-political fortnightly I developed an understanding of political ideas, issues and events, but that was due to Sri Aurobindo’s inner help for a job he wanted to get done through me. Before *Mother India* was launched, all concerned with it had a meeting with the Mother. I was expected to write editorials on politics from the point of view of Sri Aurobindo’s world-vision. I said to the Mother: “I have no interest in or knowledge of politics.” Surprisingly she remarked in response: “Neither have I.” Then I gaped and asked: “How will I manage?” She replied: “There is Sri Aurobindo. He will do everything for you.” And he jolly well did! Once his work was done, I think I have become the same old ignoramus.

And I may honestly testify that if I have any more-than-ordinary proficiency in any sphere it is Sri Aurobindo’s creation out of whatever little potential I may have had to start with. For instance, can I ever believe that I could have written “Overhead poetry” in any bulk—tapping at times the plane which Sri Aurobindo has called “Overmind Intuition” and even receiving “an Overmind touch”—without his labouring upon my thick skull for years to bring about something of the situation hit off by him so overheadly in those lines of his own?—

Missioned voices drive to me from God’s doorway  
Words that live not save upon Nature’s summits,  
Ecstasy’s chariots.

(7.5 1988)

Sometimes my correspondence becomes rather a heap and a few letters get buried out of sight. This morning I chanced upon a letter from you dated as far back as 3.2.84, on the envelope of which I had scribbled as a reminder. "Reply soon." I am sorry two years and five days have elapsed since then.

You have asked me about a word in *Savitri* in the Centenary Edition, page 310, line 17:

Thou hast leaped into a glad divine abyss...

You report that you have heard a cassette of Nolini's recitation in which he has said not "glad" but "blind". Thinking he might have had access to unpublished information I have checked with the copy which has recently come to me from our Ashram Archives for a scrutiny of the corrections proposed on the basis of Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts. The printed text is correct. I don't know where Nolini got his epithet from. Sometimes one misreads: I have myself, while recording *Savitri* or *Ilion*, read some words wrongly, but I have been pulled up by the alert friend acting as my recorder: Chandrakant. Perhaps nobody was vigilant enough with Nolini.

However, there are rare occasions possible when some inner guidance may make one misread the published version. Thus the line 13 of page 702 in *Savitri*—

For ever love, O beautiful slave of God!—

was read by the Mother with "powerful" instead of "beautiful". She inwardly consulted Sri Aurobindo and asked why she had changed the adjective and how the mistake had come about. I don't recollect the Mother's exact report, but I can say that Sri Aurobindo replied in effect: "It is a truth you have expressed, but a truth of the future. At present the truth is 'beautiful' and not 'powerful'." Nolini's slip does not strike me as belonging to the same category. It is oversight rather than far-sight like the Mother's. So you may confidently stick to "glad".

(8.2.1986)

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

POSTSCRIPT: A friend has pointed out that Sri Aurobindo does have some words on *utkata karma* on p. 468 of Vol. 22 of the Centenary Edition. While admitting the difficult problem, he says. "Here too the achievement of the spiritual consciousness and life is supposed to annul or give the power to annul Karma. For we enter into union with the Will Divine, cosmic or transcendent, which can annul what it had sanctioned for certain conditions, new-create what it had created, the narrow fixed lines disappear, there is a more plastic freedom and wideness."

## HOW THEY CAME TO THE ASHRAM

### STEADFAST

SINCE his birth in 1924, R's life had flowed on smoothly. He was the only child of his parents and thus especially cherished. A good student with a special aptitude for mathematics, he passed his matriculation in 1940 and joined a college. Eight months passed. All of a sudden, one day, without any rhyme or reason, he took a spontaneous decision to quit his studies. When he announced this to his father the latter was stunned. He asked R the reason for the sudden change of plans, to which R replied, "It is an inner feeling, without any outward reason." His father enquired if it was due to some love affair. "No," replied R. "Perhaps your studies are too difficult? In that case I can employ a tutor for you," offered his father anxiously. "No, father, I assure you there is no such reason." R's father then urged him to give the matter deeper thought over the next fortnight. R agreed to this suggestion. At the end of two weeks his father asked him if he was still of the same mind. R answered, "Yes." R's father appeared to weigh this. Next taking the keys of their shop he said to R, "From today go to our shop and take charge of the cash." Thus from March 1941 up to April 1942, seventeen-year-old R learnt his family business.

Meanwhile R received two marriage proposals, one from a village, another from a city. R firmly refused to go for his wedding to a village. His father then finalised his match with the city girl. Two of his father's friends got this girl's horoscope cast. In accordance with tradition the two horoscopes were sought to be matched. To everyone's horror it was discovered that the entry of the bride into their household would mean the death of either parent of R within a year. R asked his father to break the match. But in India the tradition of Dasharatha—to give one's life rather than break one's word—is still living. "I have given my word and will not break it," said R's father. And the marriage took place in April 1942.

R's father was a worshipper of Child Krishna and several times in his dreams he saw Bal Krishna playing his flute. He was a social man, but had suffered much due to the treachery of his relatives. After R's marriage he became very ill. When young R could no longer stand seeing his father suffer, he prayed to Sri Krishna: "Either cure my father or take him." Soon after this one day his father called him to his bedside and said, "My son, last night Krishna came and said that he would take me after a week." And exactly one week later he passed away. The astrologers were proved right, for within ten months of R's marriage, his father died.

R took the blow calmly for he had been forewarned. Also he looked upon the event with detachment. The onlookers took this for lack of feeling and commented, "Look! how hard-hearted this young man is! He did not shed even a

single tear for his father." But R was mature enough to remain unaffected by such ignorant comments.

Now, suddenly though eighteen years old, R found himself the sole master of the family business and wealth. Luckily he had left college and learnt during the last thirteen months something of the business and this helped him. Some unseen hand was guiding him, though he was not conscious of it at the time. Many people tried to lead him astray but R did not succumb to temptations. He started reading the Mahabharata, Bhagavata, and Ramayana. His wife encouraged him to read the Scriptures. The Gita became his favourite book and he read all the available commentaries on it, including those of Shankaracharya and Tilak. He read all the special issues of *Kalyan*—a religious magazine in Hindi—thus widening and deepening his knowledge of Hindu mythology, religion and philosophy.

Upto 1947 R had not even heard the name of Sri Aurobindo. But on Independence Day—15th August, 1947—one of his friends, a professor, remarked, "Today is the birthday of Sri Aurobindo." At that time R neither paid attention to what his friend was saying nor even enquired who Sri Aurobindo was but the name of the Lord must have entered his consciousness.

In February 1948, this friend who had been reading Sri Aurobindo's books since 1942, gave R the book *Yoga and Its Objects*. As soon as R started reading the book he felt, "Oh, this is what I want." He began to discuss the contents of the book with his friend. In March his friend gave him *Bases of Yoga*. After reading these books R wrote a letter to the Mother, "I want to have the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. Kindly grant me permission." On 5th June, 1948 he received the reply, "There is great shortage of space here and Darshan time is far off. Contact the Delhi branch of the Ashram." R went to Delhi and there met Shri Vashista. He bought about ten or twelve books, amongst them *The Conversations of the Mother*, and read them avidly. He again wrote a letter to the Mother, "I went to Delhi. Acharya Abhay Dev was not there. Kindly grant me permission to come for Darshan." When this letter reached Pondicherry Acharya Abhay Dev was visiting the Ashram. Nolini-da passed the letter to him. Abhay Dev wrote to R, "Who are you? and why do you want to visit the Ashram?" He added, "If your aspiration is so intense you will surely get permission to visit the Ashram." Abhay Dev sent a card which R was to fill. R filled it and returned it, after which he got permission to come for the November 1948 Darshan.

R didn't know that birthdays have a spiritual significance in the Ashram. He started his journey to Pondicherry on his twenty-fourth birthday with the thought, "This being my birthday, let me start a new life." While he was still fifty miles from Madras a fellow traveller, on learning of his destination, abused the Ashram and advised him to go to Ramana Maharshi instead. R said, "I have come so far, I will go and see the reality myself." At Egmore Station another

person spoke ill of the Ashram. But a Sadhu who overheard him reassured R, "These people know nothing, it is a sacred and great place. Do go there."

On 20th November R had the first darshan of the Mother in the Meditation Hall. She smiled at R and he was flooded with joy. Four days passed happily. On the twenty-third an Ashramite asked R, "Have you prepared yourself for the Darshan?" Perplexed, R replied, "I will see them. How should I prepare myself?" "It is necessary for you to prepare yourself from within in order to receive whatever they give you." Unimpressed, R retorted, "If they want to give me anything they will do so. I have nothing to prepare."

On the 24th, as soon as R reached the Meditation Hall he felt as if some special power was carrying him up the stairs. As he entered the corridor in front of the Darshan Room he stepped out of the queue to one side so as to see Sri Aurobindo and the Mother well. At once he had an inner experience and had the conviction that he had been "accepted" and must come here at least twice a year. On that Darshan he had eyes only for Sri Aurobindo. The Lord sat with a handkerchief in his delicate hand, his small feet exposed, looking beautiful in an unearthly way. "He is the *Hiranyagarbha*," the phrase flashed in R's inner being. He used to recall, "If you mix golden, green and blue colours with a pinch of red, that would be the complexion of Sri Aurobindo's face." He stood on one side while the queue moved on. After some time it was as if Sri Aurobindo had gestured with his eyes to R and he moved on. After that he went and quietly lay on the sea-beach to assimilate the experience. In this quietly joyous state he went to his home-town.

He returned for the 24th April Darshan, 1949. At this Darshan he had eyes only for the Mother. As one enchanted he gazed at her. Just as when a father, long absent in far-off lands, comes home, his son is presented to him by his mother, so also did he now feel—it was as if the Mother was presenting him to Sri Aurobindo. He felt that the Mother was his mother. The same year he came for the November Darshan and stayed for a happy month.

While he was planning to come to Pondicherry for one of the Darshans his widowed mother fell ill with a very bad throat infection and asked R not to go to Pondicherry. R answered, "You will become well before I go. Why don't you call God to help you?" Next morning his mother recovered fully and disclosed, "At night That One with the Flute came and rubbed me on the stomach. At once my throat-ailment was cured."

R came for the February and August Darshans in 1950 and in November 1950 brought his mother, wife and baby-daughter. They prayed for and were granted permission for *pranām*. When R's mother approached and stood before the Mother she reverently said, "He is your own son. You have to look after him." Champaklal was asked to translate and, soon after, the Mother nodded her assent. It is amusing to note that R's mother had said this as a mere formality without actually meaning it. But the Divine Mother took her words at their face-

value and accepted them with alacrity. Later the lady grumbled about the Mother taking her words so literally. She became a victim of her own hypocrisy. A few days later she went back with some other people, while he along with his wife and daughter was to leave on 5th December. In the morning somebody brought him the news of Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi. At first he could not believe it, but rushed to the Ashram all the same. There he saw the queue and joined it. On the evening of 5th he felt a great pressure on his head in Sri Aurobindo's room and left it hurriedly. But he visited the room as often as he could in the following days, and he and his family had the Darshan of the Lord several times. They remained in Pondicherry up to 23rd December.

Astrology and astrologer's predictions are taken seriously in India. R had seen how the prediction about the death of one of his parents within a year of his marriage had come true. Astrologers had also predicted that the 27th year of his life would be dangerous for him. R's friend suggested that he should go and spend April, May and June of 1951, his 27th year, in Pondicherry. Accordingly R came to Pondicherry and stayed in Golconde. On 13th May he saw the Mother in a dream. She was blessing him. On 14th May he dreamt that he was sitting surrounded by snakes, and Sri Aurobindo came and pulled him out by his finger from the midst of the snakes. On 15th May he saw the Mother in a dream wearing a shirt and shorts.

On 25th May he had his first interview with the Mother. He told her of his three dream-visions and asked, "Was it you whom I saw?" The Mother replied, "Yes, we were there."

R said, "Mother, the astrologers have predicted that it is not a good year for me." The Mother replied, "These are all stories which may be true, or may not be so. Astrology is a science which is applicable up to a certain level. If you cross the level or come into contact with someone who has done so, it does not apply any longer. Anything destined can be completely changed by the Spiritual Force. You are my child. So astrology does not apply to you."

R further asked, "Mother, what is a psychic opening?" The Mother replied, "It is not a psychic opening, it is an opening to the psychic. The psychic is always open to the Divine and connected with It." While saying this the Mother pressed her heart with her thumb and R felt that it had some effect on him as well.

During one of these interviews with the Mother, R said, "Mother, while reading the *Bhagavata* I had the feeling that I had been a friend of Sri Krishna and had taken part in his play—*lilā*." The Mother answered, "Whether you played or not with Sri Krishna does not matter. *Now* you are sitting before the Divine." It was one of the rare occasions when the Mother herself affirmed her Divinity.

In 1951, in R's home-town an occult phenomenon took place. A young girl claimed that Sri Krishna had descended into her. By her touch she would change water into butter. People thronged to see the miracle. One of his friends forced a



reluctant R to accompany him to witness it. This girl's father knew and respected R. He asked R and his friend to be seated and called his daughter to work her miracle. The girl tried her best. She was rotating her head. It was expected that the force would do something or say something, but nothing happened. There itself R saw a vision of a *Tapasvin* sitting on a mountain, who before he had died, had not succeeded in destroying all his vital desires. Some of them still lingered, for they had remained unfulfilled. This vital being had caught this girl and was using her. R had the feeling that the Mother had shown him the truth of the phenomenon.

The next morning, again his friend forced R to accompany him to the same place. Again the girl tried and failed. All the assembled people cried out, "Who is this sinner? Because of him Sri Krishna is not coming." R felt the Mother say, "I told you everything yesterday, then why have you come again? That force cannot enter as long as I am here. Leave this place and take your friend along. Otherwise this force will hurt him." R left with his friend. For seven days this force gave R's friend a difficult time.

R wrote everything in a detailed letter to Dyuman who took the letter to the Mother and later on replied:

"The Mother's Blessings are with you. Yes, you were receiving the Mother's Force.

"Hearing the first line of your letter, She herself spoke out the whole. [rest of the story]

"It was the play of the vital force, and wherever the Mother is, such forces cannot be there and lose all their ability.

"But the Mother wants you not to go to the girl. Now you know the whole story, you can ignore it, of course you need not do any propaganda against the girl.

"The Blessings are for your friend also."

14.9.51

*(To be continued)*

*Compiled by SHYAM KUMARI*

# THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

## A DREAM-DIALOGUE

*(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1989)*

“TODAY we've come rather early so that we may spend more time with you. You know, after having waited a whole week to come and see you, our visit seems so terribly short. The minutes fly so fast that hardly have you started to talk when it is time for us to leave. Could we really come at some other time too, not just in the evening?”

“Mustn't you go to school?”

“But there are Sunday mornings or afternoons.”

“Ah no! I am terribly busy then.”

“Busy? Busy doing what? Writing? We heard that you write a great deal of poetry?”

*(Laughing)* “Oh! Those mysteries are beyond you. They deal with my yoga. I have to go to far-away places both above and below, and do so many kinds of work which would make you gape if I described them all in detail. For example, I must go and help anyone of you who is ill or send the right inspiration to the poet who needs it. These are all very minor instances of my work. Most people think that I sit here in my room spending my time in a luxurious isolation, uncaring about what is happening in the world outside. You see, very few people understand Yogis and Rishis. It is said in the Scriptures that what the common man calls day is night for the Yogi. When you grow up, you will understand better all this secret lore.”

“That's true. Visitors who come from the outside world cannot understand what we are doing here. They ask us such strange questions about you and Mother that we don't know whether to laugh or feel annoyed.”

“What sort of questions?”

“Such as why, if this is a spiritual institution, a Yogashram, do boys and girls go about so freely together and why is such an emphasis on sports, and so on. They also want to know why Mother wears beautiful clothes and what has made you give up all the work you used to do for the country to stay now shut within the four walls of your room. You know, the same stupid questions, over and over again.”

“And how do you answer them?”

“When we can't answer them satisfactorily, we ask them to go and speak to Nolinida, Pavitrada or Dada.”

“Who is Dada?”

“Don't you know Dada? Why, it's Pranabda.”

“Oh! Pranab I know, not Dada.”

“We all call him Dada, our elder brother. He is the Director of our Physical Education. We’ve just finished our exercises; had a quick wash in order to come to you. We have a very strict programme of physical education which we have to follow, with as much discipline as the programmes of our studies in the school. Because, Dada says, exercises are no less important than studies.”

“He is right. I have told you, have I not? of how, in our time, games and physical exercises were considered unimportant, how all the emphasis was placed only on studies. Today, thanks to the development of science, life-styles and attitudes have changed, and one is encouraged to pursue the science of physical development. Did you know that it held an important place in the cultures of ancient India, Greece and Rome? In our yoga too, it is essential to have a strong and healthy body.”

“Why? That is exactly what visitors to the Ashram do not understand.”

“There are several reasons. I will explain this to you in a few words. Only he who has a body firmly founded in strength and free of disease can fully receive the light and the power that we are bringing down. The more you exercise your body, the more it will become free of heaviness and inertia and inconscience, and each cell will then imbibe the Higher Light. Therefore physical education is very helpful for the transformation of the body. You understand? It is that which gives you such beautiful energetic and harmonious forms.”

“Some time ago, a group of Russian gymnasts visited the Ashram. They were so beautifully built. Some of the women, even though they were mothers, were still so physically firm and strong. Dada says that regular exercise keeps both mind and body perfectly fit.”

“Quite so. If you give up your exercises today you are sure to give your doctors a great deal more work tomorrow. Headaches and stomach-aches and indigestion will follow. One may even find that symptoms of ailments such as diabetes and blood-pressure, heart-trouble or psychological problems begin to disturb the person who does not take any exercise. Here is the doctor, ask him.”

“Who? Nirodda? He plays games and does a lot of exercise. And Nolinida runs, even at this old age.”

“Oh he was always a footballer, whereas Nirod is a doctor, and values the importance of the body. He has also seen for himself how much the English love games and sports—something for which both Oxford and Cambridge are famed. Isn’t that so?”

“Yes, we have seen them hawking and hunting, in films. It was very impressive.”

“I was once a student at Cambridge. Of course, that was a long time ago, a time when learning and degrees seemed the all-important aim in life. Perhaps today’s Cambridge is quite different.”

“Did you find many other Indians there, in your time?”

“No, just a handful. Indian students had just begun going to England then.”

“You know, it’s too early to start talking about your days at Cambridge since you haven’t finished describing your school-days to us yet ”

(*Laughing*) “Oh, all right! Let’s go back to the beginning. We may have to go back and forth in time quite often, I think. So. what is it you wish to know?”

“Since you were such a bright student at school, you must surely have received several prizes and awards.”

“That I have, of course, a few In history and literature and especially in classical studies. Do you know what classical studies are? Latin and Greek, which had the place our Sanskrit has with us If one knew these well, one could master the English tongue better Actually, all European languages and civilisations are derived from Greece and Rome. In earlier centuries all European cultures used Latin as their written language I was rather good at Latin. I have written some poetry in it and won prizes I remember once I was asked to select a prize for myself, a book I chose the *Arabian Nights* It was beautifully bound and illustrated and I kept it for years afterwards Have you read it? What fantastic imagination fills its pages! I think only Easterners could have this kind of fantasy and imagination.”

“Did you find that your Western classmates envied you your success as a student?”

“I never noticed anything of the sort. Actually I lived mostly in my own world and didn’t bother with who was thinking what. But yes, when, from my corner of the classroom, I would speak out the answer to some difficult question, I did find them turning towards me in surprise—though if you ask about envy and jealousy, no. I do not think they are defects of childhood. A child is naturally wide and generous, he lives as if in constant sunshine. Have you read Wordsworth’s famous *Ode*? There you will find a pure and shining picture of childhood. Perhaps Tagore also has written something similar Man creates his problems as he grows up, his mind is the real culprit. And yet one can’t do without the Mind.”

“We used to look upon Westerners as foreigners, at one time Mother it was who changed our outlook ”

“How?”

“We thought she was a foreigner. But when we went to her, she spoke to us with such love and sweetness, calling us ‘*Mon petit*’, that we felt she was closer to us than our own mothers. Later, we started to address her as ‘*Douce Mère*’, and just seeing her walk past was enough to fill us with delight. Recently also a couple of Irish children, brother and sister, have come here, as well as a young French girl We like them very much. The other day the little Irish girl recited a Bengali poem so beautifully that we were astounded. Even her pronunciation was so precise and correct, almost better than ours ”

“Is that so? That is because the Irish are Celts, and their tongues are less stiff than those of the English. The latter seem to me to lock themselves up from

within. For example, their friendship or affection is less demonstrative than ours. You and your friends walk with your arms around each other's necks, they will rarely do so. Yet it was just because my brother was quite a bit emotional that he made a few Englishmen his friends. One of them was Lawrence Binyon who became a famous poet. I too got to know him through my brother. The fact that I knew several languages and was interested in a wide range of subjects impressed him enormously. Once, on reading my translation of a Greek poem, he asked me why I did not write poetry. But, on the other hand, these extra-curricular interests gave me a bad name too."

"A bad name? To you?"

"I have already told you that since I was a good student my teachers looked on me with great kindness, sometimes I was even given a double promotion. But as I came to the higher classes, my interest in studies seemed to decrease. The teachers mistakenly thought that the boy was quite spoilt. The fact of the matter was that whatever was taught in class seemed so simple, so easy to me that it lost all savour. I preferred reading other books and spent most of my time studying various other subjects. Thus, during the last three years of school, I read not only all the available books on English literature, but also those on French and European literature and history. Naturally, my school studies suffered somewhat. I remember reading Shelley's long poem *The Revolt of Islam* several times, I enjoyed it so much. Not that I understood all of it clearly, but the idealism it described attracted me. Like Shelley, I also began to dream of a new age which would manifest on earth. Don't you read books, children?"

"We do, but not too many and those too are mostly story-books. In schools outside the Ashram the guardians don't encourage too much extra reading, because they feel that the children will begin to neglect their studies. This, to them, is a very big sin since they believe that a good student is one who sits successfully for examinations and gets high grades. Of course, they do not find it easy to obtain outside books, either. Not so for us in the Ashram, although we usually like reading mainly story-books."

"I never saw my elder brother read any book. Once he caught me reading one and gave me such a thrashing!" (*Laughter*)

"Must have been a novel!"

(*A little shyly*) "Yes, by Sarat Chandra Chatterji."

"He beat you up for that! He must have been a humourless chap."  
(*Laughter*)

(*To be continued*)

NIRODBARAN

(*Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali*)

# CONVERSATIONS OF THE DEAD

TRANSLATED BY SATADAL FROM THE BENGALI OF  
NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

7

**Chandragupta, Asoka**

**Chandragupta**

WHAT an inauspicious moment was that, Asoka! when you invaded Kalinga! What an inauspicious moment was that when the illusion of compassion overwhelmed your heroic heart! Otherwise, who knows, India's destiny would have been different! What an enormous inevitable result involved in a happening so small!

**Asoka**

Rightly so. Otherwise, how could India find her inner riches? How could the genius of India spread over countries beyond India? How could half the world get initiated to India's teaching and culture? Blessed was the moment when Lord Buddha appeared before me in the form of a girl and dispelled the darkness of my asuric ignorance, flooding it with the soothing moonlight of divine knowledge! Blessed was that Kalinga-invasion of mine for its reaction in me!

**Chandragupta**

Maybe that was good for your personal life, I don't know, and I am not raising that issue either. But, for the country, nothing could have been so utterly harmful as that. The day when Asoka the terrible became Asoka the pious and pitiful, when the king adopted the ways of a religious mendicant and the man-at-arms took up the begging bowl in place of the sword, started wearing the ochre robe in place of armour, that very day I knew that the efforts of Chandragupta were going to be fruitless. I had united segmented India into a great and powerful state. You frustrated that work for centuries.

**Asoka**

I did follow your path and ideal for sometime, but God came to my rescue from that error. If I had followed in your footsteps, it would have been a great misfortune rather than good for India. That would have made India a great asuric force, but it would have been a terrible nightmare for her. Besides, how long can one remain great solely on the basis of this-worldly force? The greater is one's rise, the more inevitable and terrible will be one's fall. But the force which I have brought India into touch with, the empire that I have established, remain

and will remain unabated even with the decline of the body or the state. India's empire of *dharma* has not yet been shaken, even now it is established as the inner riches of humanity in its ideal and teaching and culture in country after country. Is it merely my personal gain?

### Chandragupta

No inner riches can be effective without a strong body and a lively vital being. Without a healthy state the genius of a nation cannot blossom to the full. In the subtle vision of your imagination, you are seeing only the subtle influence of the genius of India on the rest of the world—but just take a look at the reality. Other countries, however deeply they might have been influenced by your ideal in the world of ideas, have never forgotten the material world. India is following your path one-eyed, that's why she is wretched, poor, weak, dominated by others, split into a hundred pieces. He who is incapable of sustaining and maintaining the body, how will he be capable of some leisure to search for the inner riches? That's why you see she has become crippled even in the inner life by being crippled in the outer. Where can you find a living development of *dharma* in India? What is done is only to practise some rituals, to follow certain disciplines with a lot of physical hardship. Outer incapacity has infused fear in her, that's why she follows the doctrine of religion for fear of sin—not on the strength of the realisation of a living and profound truth. Where the life-force is feeble, the body itself is sick and weak, there the inner being too cannot blossom.

### Asoka

But I do not accept that physical force or political force is the basic force. First, there must be soul-force. One who has this force enshrines a novel force in his life and body. Don't you see ample proof of the capacity this force of religion infuses in the life and body? The entire Buddhist age is before you. There are infallible signs present even now to show how great and living India became in knowledge, works, arts and commerce in that age. It is not difficult to prove how deeply the culture of that age has inspired modern man. But the answer to why India is at present dominated by others, why she is disunited and poverty-stricken, is to be sought elsewhere. I say, this has happened only because *dharma* has lost the path of truth. The day India fell from the ideal I had given her, that very day saw the beginning of the decline of India. Outer fall is only the result of this inner fall.

### Chandragupta

This inner fall too has started by virtue of your new religion, your soul's new inspiration. One can discern how far the achievements of the Buddhist age which you are citing are due to the Buddhist religion. The ideal of your religion is *sannyāsa*, renunciation, *nirvāṇa*—creation by practising *nirvāṇa*, what sort of

logic is this? Whether it is a national endeavour or the arts—any form of creation is essentially against your dharma. So, your statement doesn't conform to it. Actually, the life-force of India was still there, the effect of the new-life which I infused into the nation was still there—so long as it was there, India was creative. Of course your religion had brought in a wave of new ideas, laid bare before the eyes some new points, and the living soul of India simply expressed herself by accepting and making them her own. This is amply supported by the fact that so long as India had this life-force, she was creative but no sooner did your religion overwhelm this life-force to a maximum degree than the Indians really understood that everything was unreal, everything was nothing at all, renunciation and *nirvāna* were the only things essential—*Kaupinavantah Khalu bhāgyabantah*, only those are fortunate who are in loin cloth then she had to really wear a Kaupin and become wretched and poor and puny in life and capacity. As is one's faith, so one is. From the day India started ignoring Lakshmi, Lakshmi too started ignoring her. It was the result of earlier goodness that was consumed in the riches of your Buddhist age.

#### Asoka

But this is only an explanation—a perverted way of looking at the reality—grabbing the whole share of the virtues for your side and thrusting the share of the wrongs upon others. The inner inspiration awakened in India by Buddha is best manifested in the life of a *Sramana* practising complete renunciation. But that very inspiration on the other hand has opened up the artistic genius, has moulded anew the works of a worker. *Nirvāna* is the ultimate goal. But the discipline which brings about this ultimate realisation, that very discipline helps to blossom the pure and highest inner inspirations and lead them towards the very same goal, develops all the streams of life in the light of that ideal. *Nirvāna* does not mean that the king must abstain from protecting his subjects, the artist must stop his creative art or the householder must shirk his household responsibilities. It is not that. Everyone will play their respective part, but each work must be tuned to that distant note. And at the end when the work is over, when the inspiration is gradually dimmed, then one must still oneself in ultimate peace.

#### Chandragupta

This too is only an explanation of your *nirvāna dharma*. But this proves that my blood is present in you, you could not free yourself completely from the *brāhminic* influence of India. Leave that at the moment, but if your words are true, then why does not the *nirvāna dharma* become creative even in the fields of economics and politics? Here there is no creation of *nirvāna*, rather all creation has attained *nirvāna*. Under your influence when the country started to wear only a dirty piece of cotton, made a little sandalwood or camphor their only



incense, do you know what a hue and cry shook the business community of India? India was full with a rich store of pearls, rubies and diamonds, silk and wool of very high price, various precious perfumes and unguents, so much of trade—relation with so many countries—all those gradually started to disappear one after another. Because of the lack of culture in the field of beauty, the whole country became devoid of beauty! And in the field of statecraft, the law and order and peace of the country started getting disturbed, people starved from famine, all the lower class elements of the society—cheats, dacoits and plunderers—took advantage of the situation. The heads of the frontier provinces—Yavanas in the west, Cholas and Pandyas in the south, and Bengal in the east—again started declaring war, there was no more the strength of arms, there was only non-violence, compassion and friendliness, hence we tried to pacify them with bribes. The great misfortune of India started like this.

#### Asoka

The life of pleasures and enjoyments is animal life. I wanted to establish in the society an ideal of austerity and renunciation, and if for that reason the means of some unnecessary income of some people were stopped, I am not sorry. Attraction for riches is a hindrance to the other-worldly good. That India is not a land of pleasures and enjoyments, that India has a soul self-aware, austere and ascetic,—to fix this truth in the hearts of the people became imperative; so it was for good rather than evil that all the rubbish of cosmetics and unguents for the body became useless. Then, again, the anarchy of which you are speaking did not raise its head so long as I was there. There was no one suitable to continue the work after me, otherwise if this new religion had been thoroughly propagated, if the foreign hearts had been recast in its mould, then you would have seen what a life of peace, contentment and spiritual aspiration would have flowered in humanity.

#### Chandragupta

Yes, then humanity would have turned into a society of beggars—weak, wretched and ugly. But that it could not happen was not because of any lapse in your efforts. Had you been there you might have succeeded in doing something more—but that sort of thing is not possible. How long can you suppress and dominate the truth of man's heart? The heart of man wants a free expanse, a play of many forces, a manifestation of riches. That's why in social life there must be a seat for Lakshmi and Kartikeya, there must be a growing organisation of finances and a capable state.

#### Asoka

Then is there no place for *dharma* and *mokṣa* in the social organisation? Are only *kāma* and *artha* all? Ordinary man does want only *kāma* and *artha*, wants

the play of life's desires, hence the structure of the ordinary society too has taken that form. But man is man, because he wants to break this inferior structure of the society and recast it in the mould of an ideal—without being contented with *kāma* and *artha*, man wants to express in his life some traits of his soul—of *dharma* and *mokṣa*.

### Chandragupta

Soul, *dharma*, *mokṣa*—these are simply names—what do they mean? Is there no place for life's play left by them? If *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa* is the ultimate goal, even then *dharma* does not mean only renunciation, austerity and your eight-fold path. Dharma is not so easy a thing. The courses of dharma are manifold and complicated. The soul's expression is rich in variety. Each limb of the society accepts and follows a particular course, and all of them together have given a shape to the ideal of a complete and integral dharma. Even you have admitted that the practice of dharma is different for different individuals. As the Brahmins have a dharma, so the kshatriyas have one, so the Vaishyas and the Sudras. Renunciation, discipline and love are the dharma of a particular class who want to keep alive and safe the inner riches of the society. But the body and life too of the society must be kept alive and safe—in wealth and riches and power—and that needs another class of men. These two domains are given to men of two types of temperament, or these two types of work may be accomplished by the same sadhak in different stages of sadhana. If this division of castes and of ashramas are not there as a duty according to one's nature, then there comes chaos and disorder in the society—culminating in destruction

### Asoka

But is it not an impossible attempt to try to harmonise two completely contradictory truths? Is it not for the very same reason that Lord Buddha stood against the Brahminic religion? On one side renunciation and non-violence and on the other enjoyment and violence—if these two courses stream through the same society, it is no wonder that the society will be divided and destroyed. You cannot bring about a harmony between two opposing dharmas, you must accept one of the two. Otherwise, if you try to tie together two antagonists with some sort of compromise, the seed of antagonism will always be there. Besides, such a divisive policy, such disparity in the society unnecessarily creates dispute. Sudras have no right to study the Vedas, one cannot practise the sadhana of self-liberation unless one passes through the ashramas one after the other—these are very unjust and unlawful codes and it is because of them that the Brahminic society is so weak and fallen.

### Chandragupta

Disparity is the law of nature—you or I did not create it and cannot reverse it

either. Each man has a separate nature and the self-law that develops with that nature as the basis becomes true and natural. Everyone cannot become an innocent sattwic, cannot become a saint altogether. Some have the strength of knowledge, some have physical strength, someone's genius opens up while handling gross material things, while someone else's with subtle things. This disparity between man and man must be admitted. But disparity does not necessarily mean discord. At times in the personal life that discord may appear at some stage, but that is an affair of one's inner sadhana. There is no place for such a discord in the collective life of the society. Social systems are meant to provide various fields for a variety of natures and to put all of them in tune with a higher goal. Your spiritual sadhana may be for that ultimate object and goal. But according to the nature of the sadhak, that sadhana has diverse stages and modes. That is why the rise of Kshatriya and Vaishya shakti too is needed. If not for anything else, those two shaktis are necessary for the collective spiritual discipline. In a society, free from the torment of poverty, where there is abundance, where there is peace and order in place of anarchy and disorder—where the Kshatriya and Vaishya shaktis have built up a well-knit life-seat, it is only there that some culture of knowledge and spiritual sadhana are possible. The base of the spiritual summit of a society is strengthened by powerful Kshatriya and Vaishya shaktis. The state-force, even if it does not do anything else, builds for the country a material basis for the spiritual life.

### Asoka

I don't accept it. The state which is established on the power of possession and strength of the arm, leaves the stamp of that self-indulgence and asuric force on every limb of the society. A racial religious order cannot develop in it. If the whole race has to be cast in a spiritual mould, then one must start from the very base, one must provide a completely new foundation for the state. High and low, Brahmin and Sudra, man and woman—if each one follows a dharma in opposition to the other, then it won't do. All must rise and stand up to the same ideal, the same path and the same mode—then only will a collective dharma-shakti steadily crystallise in the society.

### Chandragupta

You are the very same headstrong and biased man as ever, Asoka! You can not accommodate more than one idea at a time in your head. When at first you were a warrior, an emperor—at that time there was perhaps none to understand so strongly as you that *balam balam bāhubalam*, strength of arm is the only strength. Again, when suddenly you became a saint, then you made an ultimate of asceticism, non-violence, compassion and friendship and held fast to it. But none of these two attitudes is a healthy sign. There is and can be a harmony

between power and love. In an ideal man, in an ideal society both can flower equally. Physical strength is not despicable, and there must not necessarily be a discord between physical strength and soul-force. Physical strength too can be an expression of soul-force itself. The ancient discipline of India always made a synthesis between body and soul, between this world and the other. Your Buddha has unnecessarily created a dispute by bringing in a new reality and breaking up that sadhana. At least Lord Buddha was contented with creating a separate field by virtue of his sadhana but you have simply brought about an intermixing of dharma, a disaster in sadhana by imposing the dharma of one field upon another, by applying the monastic and ascetic discipline in the collective life of the race.

#### Asoka

But, that extraordinary life must be given expression in this very ordinary life of man—because the truth of that life, of that world is the real truth. My duty was that only. Whatever truth of the inner life of an individual was expounded by Lord Buddha, I have wished to get it embodied in the life of the society, of the country.

#### Chandragupta

There and there only you are mistaken. You are forgetting that you are the king. The work of which you are speaking of is not the work of a king. That is the work of a Buddhist mendicant, a saint or an ascetic, of a preacher. If you were in love with that very work, then you ought to have done it after relinquishing the king's sceptre, after moving away from the field of practical life. Lord Buddha himself did that. When you are seated on the royal throne, you are obliged to discharge royal duties. The king is the centre of *kshātra-shakti*—by imposing the duties of a Brahmin on him you have entangled and mixed up two diverse fields of work and have created confusion.

#### Asoka

Does warfare, luxury and enjoyment epitomize royal duty? Whatever path the head of a state or a society will follow and show, will not the public follow him along the very same path? If the king himself is an asura, how is it possible to ask the people to become godlike?

#### Chandragupta

It is the diversity of creation which is a great truth. There are truths of the asuras, truths of the gods, truths of this world, truths of the other world—each man has a separate truth. The truth which does not mix up all the truths but helps to flower and grow each one's truth to the full is the integral Truth.

**Asoka**

Maybe, your words are true as a philosophic principle. But that is the normal play of Nature—man's manhood lies in establishing man's ideal in Nature's play.

**Chandragupta**

Man's ideal cannot thrive by shunning or violating Nature's law. To fulfil Nature is man's fulfilment.

**Asoka**

To conquer Nature is man's sadhana, and in that is Nature's true fulfilment.

## SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN “EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

### A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

I WAS born into an old and noble family. Both my grandfathers were well known in Bengal. My paternal grandfather, Mahendranath, was a celebrated political leader and later a high-ranking government official during the Reform Scheme. My maternal grandfather Ravindralal, was known for his literary genius.

One day, Mahendranath paid an unexpected visit to Ravindralal.

“Mahendrababu,” Ravindralal said, “What an honour for me that you should call upon me. Welcome. I had not expected to see you here even in my dreams.”

“How true,” Mahendranath answered. “Our paths would not normally cross, as it appears we have little in common. But sometimes the unexpected comes to pass, as you well know. I have come on urgent business.”

“Business?” Ravindralal exclaimed. “Of what kind?”

“I would like your daughter’s hand for my son,” replied Mahendranath.

Ravindralal was struck dumb. He looked intently at Mahendranath and asked gravely, “Have you seen my daughter or heard anything about her?”

“No.”

Then how can you make such a proposal? I’m puzzled how you could show interest in such a connection.”

“I am interested because of the father, not the daughter,” Mahendranath answered. “I would like to establish an enduring blood-relationship between our two distinguished families.”

Ravindralal paused for a moment. “With my apologies, I must refuse your offer,” he said.

Now it was Mahendranath’s turn to be amazed. The proposed marriage was in every way most desirable, even enviable. Heredity, fame, wealth, culture—nothing better could have been hoped for by either party. Coming to himself, he asked, “May I know why? Is there anything that you find amiss in my son?”

“Nothing. Your son may be good, but to tell the truth, a great man’s son does not usually become great himself. Such a marriage may not be happy and I would not like my only daughter to suffer such a fate and consider me responsible for it. Besides, I am not a rich man myself as you are. Such unequal unions end in grief.”

“Is that your final decision?” Mahendranath asked. “If so, I cannot force the marriage. Let it be as you wish.” He turned to go, but retraced his steps and said in a determined tone, “Listen, Ravindralal, this person Mahendranath, who has come to your door, has never met with failure in his life. Here too he will not fail. The marriage shall take place.”

"Perhaps, but I will not be a party to it," Ravindralal replied calmly.

Only one other person was present during this exchange, my maternal uncle

As things turned out, my grandfather Ravindralal died the next year. Now Mahendranath revived the proposal, this time to my uncle who had become my guardian. Embarrassed by this fresh overture, my uncle gave it much thought, and finally decided to accept. My mother, overcome with surprise, asked her brother, "Dada, how is it that you have given your consent, when you were aware of our father's objections to the match?"

"I feel we have no choice, Asha," Uncle replied. "Listen, so long as you remain single, I cannot pursue any career of my own. If you are without a protector, I cannot, for example, go to England if I want to."

I can imagine the happiness of my grandfather, Mahendranath, when his prophecy came true. It made him forget his former humiliation. The marriage took place with great pomp. However, it did not turn out to be as happy as everyone had hoped, not due to any incompatibility between my mother and father but because of disagreements and quarrels which his sisters who had come away from their in-laws' houses would create. How often such situations arise in joint families all over India!

My grandfather, Mahendranath, lived ten years more. He knew of the disharmony between his daughters and my mother, and told them, "I have brought this girl into my house. I can't drive her away as you well know. If you cannot get on with her and with each other, you had better go back to your fathers-in-law." So it was that the sisters left the house.

For ten years my parents had no children. At one time they even thought of adopting a child. However, relatives suggested that they go to Tarakeshwar, a holy place where the deity was renowned for his supernatural powers, and might be implored for the boon of a child.

Neither my grandfather nor my father had any faith in these supposed superstitions. But my mother approached grandfather and said, "Father, as everybody is urging me to go to Tarakeshwar, should I go?"

"You may go," he replied. "At least there can be no harm in going. But I won't allow you to go without special arrangements. I know the Head Priest there and shall ask him to look after you."

When they arrived at Tarakeshwar, the priest did indeed show himself to be overzealous in his concern for them, not only because my grandfather was a high dignitary but also because he had once saved him from the gallows after he had been sentenced for a grave crime. The Panda had never forgotten this favour. He took my parents to the temple and gave them a seat in front of the idol of Lord Shiva. There were two pits on either side of the statue. Devotees had to put a white flower and a red one into the pits. Mother did as she was told and waited with father by her side. Suddenly the white flower seemed to spring up and fall

into my mother's lap The Panda was overjoyed.

"Ma, the Thakur has heard your prayer," he said with a smile. "You will have a daughter."

So it was that I was born This must be the way Shiva answers prayers

But Lord Shiva graced them with a sickly baby. Nevertheless, from my birth, we used to visit the temple at Tarakeshwar every year, and my father would distribute blankets to the poor, about two thousand on each occasion, until his death, his earnest wish being that I should have a long life

I continued all the while to suffer from delicate health, falling prey to one ailment after another My poor father used to run to various astrologers asking, "Will my daughter survive?" And they always assured him that I would. "We don't see pre-mature death in her horoscope "

My uncle would taunt my father with the suggestion that he was spoiling me with his excessive fondness. "Send her to a boarding school, and you'll see that she will be all right."

To this my father would retort, "Excessive fondness can never spoil a child; it is excessive neglect that does it I have no respect for boarding-school education. Let her grow up and have sound health first " It was my father's final verdict in the matter.

A famous Calcutta physician used to attend to me during my illnesses. I shall relate later how we turned against each other

Meanwhile, once when my father fell ill, he engaged a young man of the neighbourhood to look after him The boy did not have a good reputation, and when my father asked him to attend on me as well, my mother was shocked, and remonstrated "How dare you do such a thing when you know what kind of a character he is?"

"Because I know my daughter even better," he replied "I would rather cut off my hand than believe my daughter is capable of going astray." That was the kind of faith he had in me, and in others as well.

Sri Aurobindo observed about him at one time, "He is a fine man, but has no turn towards God."

*(To be continued)*

SATYAM



# SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of October 1989)*

## THE TRUE MEANING AND NATURE OF THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

THE first phase of the impact of the West on India and its reverberation in the life of the people made a new chapter in the history of the country.

We must study the psychological background of the Indian Renaissance. When its effervescence subsided, the new ferment calmed down to a new needed force which broke the inertia of the people and liberated their mind into an impassioned endeavour to rise up. The Europeans came into India when her ancient ideals were visibly faded and the people had lost their dharma, will-power and energy. But India never lost her inner past glow. She sought a fresh energy, a new going-forth. Truly speaking, it was “Western culture which gave a jerk in the mind of Indians to come out from their deep darkness”.

The nineteenth century was looking forward to the birth, growth and expansion of a remarkable political and cultural movement in the world. It sought to probe a new perspective of human progress. Large ideas, vast hopes, luminous visions stirred the heart and soul of man and it began to feel that a new world was being born. Evolutionary nature had been working through the previous century by its wars and social changes. One of the causes of an all-round change in life in the nineteenth century was the Industrial Revolution. Science and reason played a vital part to create a new base in Europe.

After the French Revolution a great Italian seer and revolutionary leader, Giuseppe Mazzini, came to preach a progressive uplifting of mankind and a true sense of Nationalism. Sri Aurobindo says apropos of Mazzini:

“Nationalism has done part of the work of a Mazzini by awakening a great spiritual force in the country and giving the new generation great ideals, a wide horizon of hope and aspiration, an intense faith and energy. It has sought like Mazzini to raise up the moral condition of the nation to the height of love, strength, self-sacrifice, constancy under defeat, unwearied and undaunted perseverance, the habit of individual and organised action, self-reliance and indomitable enterprise; but it has rejected the old methods of insurrectionary violence and replaced them by self-help and passive resistance. That work is not yet complete and only when it is complete will it be possible for a strength to be generated in the country which the past represented by the bureaucracy will consent to recognise as the representative of the future and to abdicate in its favour by a gradual cessation of powers. It is our hope that as the work has begun, so it will continue in the spirit of Nationalism and not only the political circumstances of India be changed but her deeper disease be cured and by a full

evocation of her immense stores of moral and spiritual strength that be accomplished for India which Mazzini could not accomplish for Italy, to replace her in the head and forefront of the new world whose birth-throes are now beginning to convulse the Earth ”<sup>1</sup>

What is the inner and deeper Force that lies behind the Renaissance of India? Sri Aurobindo wrote in response to the question of Mr Cousins in the following words: “Mr. Cousins puts the question in his book whether the word ‘renaissance’ at all applies since India has always been awake and stood in no need of reawakening. There is a certain truth behind that and to one coming in with a fresh mind from outside and struck by the living continuity of past and present India, it may be especially apparent; but that is not quite how we can see it who are her children and are still suffering from the bitter effects of the great decline which came to a head in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Undoubtedly there was a period, a brief but very disastrous period of the dwindling of that great fire of life, even a moment of incipient disintegration, marked politically by the anarchy which gave the European adventure its chance, inwardly by an increasing torpor of the creative spirit in religion and art,—science and philosophy and intellectual knowledge had long been dead or petrified into a mere scholastic Punditism—all pointing to a nadir of setting energy, the evening-time from which, according to the Indian idea of the cycles, a new age has to start. It was that moment and the pressure of a superimposed European culture which followed it that made the reawakening necessary.”<sup>2</sup>

Three essential features are working behind the Renaissance in India Sri Aurobindo says:

“India has been pre-eminently the land of the Dharma and the Shastra. She searched for the inner truth and law of each human or cosmic activity, its dharma; that found, she laboured to cast into elaborate form and detailed law of arrangement its application in fact and rule of life. Her first period was luminous with the discovery of the Spirit, her second completed the discovery of the Dharma; her third elaborated into detail the first simpler formulation of the Shastra; but none was exclusive, the three elements are always present.

“In this third period the curious elaboration of all life into a science and an art assumes extraordinary proportions.”<sup>3</sup>

Now after a long period of ups and downs, forward and backward movements and a temporary decline, a fresh surge of life has come about. Sri Aurobindo has traced its earlier career:

“The process which has led up to the Renaissance now inevitable, may be analysed, both historically and logically, into three steps by which a transition is

being managed, a complex breaking, reshaping and new building, with the final result yet distant in prospect,—though here and there the first bases may have been already laid,—a new age of an old culture transformed, not an affiliation of a new born civilisation to one that is old and dead, but a true rebirth, a renaissance ”<sup>4</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

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- 2 *The Renaissance in India*, p 3
- 3 *Ibid* , p 9
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## HEIDEGGER DETHRONED

*It is a pity that in the birth centenary year of so influential a philosopher of Existentialism an article like the following should be necessary. But facts cannot be blinked And an assessment cannot be avoided of the deliberate and continued actions of the personality behind the philosophy.*

IN 1985 the renowned German Rowohlt Verlag published its title *Heidegger* in an excellent series, called *Bild monographien*, in which the life-stories and important achievements of great philosophers, poets, artists, etc. are presented with rich picture material. But this particular title offered a strange surprise: Heidegger's biography had simply been omitted, except for a few remarks. Walter Biemel, the author, tells us that Heidegger's life need not be discussed since it does not shed any light on his philosophy. As for his political error in 1933, when he welcomed Hitler as the true Fuhrer, Biemel writes that it did not last long, after all. "It is easy to pounce on this error for condemning Heidegger. If the error were a result of his thinking, this thinking would have had to be finished along with it; the contrary is the case: after 1934 his thinking achieves its true unfolding." (pp. 7-8)

Probably Biemel knew that going into the details of Heidegger's life would be equal to opening a Pandora's box with all the unpleasant consequences. So he may have stayed away from it, "wisely", to preserve the philosopher's aura of a majestic thinker, in fact the greatest of this century in the opinion of many experts. But then it was a Chilean researcher in Berlin, Victor Farias, a former student of Heidegger (1889-1976), who did open the box in 1987 when he published his study on Heidegger's affiliation with Hitler and Nazism.

The original motivation for this study dates back to the year 1967 when the philosopher asked Farias whether he could not translate *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) into Spanish. The Chilean student, probably aware of the fact that Heidegger's language is a veritable translator's nightmare, diplomatically answered that he would learn Greek if he wanted to read Plato, and German if he wanted to read Heidegger. The latter was quite pleased with this answer and added that the Romance languages did not have the force to penetrate into the essence of things.

Perhaps it was this brief remark which caused the fateful developments described in this article, because it provoked the Spanish-speaking Farias and made him look closer into the political past of the philosopher. Had Heidegger himself not strayed away from the true Essence when he became a herald of the Third Reich? Farias' study was written in Spanish and German, but first published in French, since he could not find a publisher in Germany at that time. The publication of *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Editions Vercier, Lagrasse) became

something like a sensation in France where the German thinker was held in great esteem in academic circles. J. P. Sartre was among those who had openly acknowledged their debt to him.

Farias, a leftist intellectual, now brought out the truth and painted it in as black colours as possible. Rudolf Augstein, editor of *Der Spiegel*, who had conducted the only lengthy interview with Heidegger in 1966, discussed Farias's book in his newsmagazine (23-11-87) and pointed out that Farias's findings were not really new in essence, although quite shocking in their combined presentation. Farias showed that Heidegger had not only welcomed Hitler as the true Führer of Germany, but also kept praising National Socialism long after 1933/4 when—according to most biographical notes—he “realized his error”.

The tendentious style of Farias's book could persuade many well-wishers of Heidegger that perhaps the author's outlook was partial and that a more objective investigation might result in a more favourable total impression, but this hope was nullified with the publication of Hugo Ott's book *Martin Heidegger. Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt: Campus). Ott is like a judge who, though not entirely without sympathy for the accused, cannot help arriving at the verdict “guilty” in most points. To the dismay of colleagues at Freiburg University (where Heidegger used to teach) Ott revealed that the official story about the philosopher's involvement with National Socialism was full of distortions and lies, fabricated by Heidegger himself and his followers.

It was Heidegger's bad luck that he grew up in an arch-conservative-nationalist Black Forest region where even today right-extremist parties can expect a more favourable welcome than in most other regions of the country. In 1932, Heidegger welcomed Hitler enthusiastically, met pro-Nazi colleagues in 1933 to arrange for his own election as *Rektor* (Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor in Indian terms) of Freiburg University. In many ways he actively encouraged the Nazi movement and even adopted a militaristic vocabulary. If he resigned from office in 1934, after one year, it was basically not because he had recognized his fundamental error of judgment, but because he got disenchanted with the Nazis who did not accept him as their guru and who disapproved of his private style National Socialism which discarded some of the cruder elements referring to racial hatred, etc (Heidegger refused, for instance, to have books of Jewish authors removed from the libraries.) In fact, he believed that his philosophy, Holderlin's poetry and Hitler's statesmanship were the three elements that could rebuild Germany and protect it against decadence and communism. What a provocation it must have been to his former Jewish student Karl Lowith, when Heidegger met him in 1936 in Rome for a day, wearing the Nazi Party badge all the time without any need and compulsion! Lowith openly told Heidegger he believed that his endorsement of National Socialism was founded in the essence of his philosophy. “Heidegger agreed with me without reservation and pointed out that his concept of “Historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) was the basis for his

political activities He also left no doubt about his faith in Hitler ..” (Ott, p 132)

Michael Zimmermann, who has written a well-informed review of Ott’s book (published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, May 5-11), offers the following conclusion:

“In this indispensable book, Hugo Ott demonstrates that Heidegger’s commitment to National Socialism was neither accidental, nor unrelated to his philosophy, but rather was profound and enduring because he himself believed his philosophy was the spiritual core of that movement Henceforth, readers of Heidegger’s works must acknowledge that his thinking was inextricably embedded in a reactionary world-view consistent in many ways with Nazism. Certainly, his thinking is too profound and original to be described as merely an exercise in Nazi apologetics, yet those who admire it must also reckon with its indisputable and deeply troubling political dimension.”

However, Zimmermann and other writers fail to explain how it could happen that Sartre and many other great thinkers who were certainly immune against even a subtle infiltration of Nazi ideas did not detect that element in Heidegger’s philosophy. There appear to be two possible answers: either Heidegger has written his best philosophy from a plane which is not touched at all by the “reactionary” in himself, or else all these famous philosophers have shared the fate of common readers—they simply do not understand the language, whether in the original German or in translation Otto Poggeler, whose book *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* is believed to be the best introduction to Heidegger’s thought (the philosopher personally helped him in his work), writes in the preface (though in a different context):

“It cannot be our task to struggle against any misunderstandings [of Heidegger’s philosophy] Of what help could be the hint that Heidegger was misunderstood—that perhaps even he himself misunderstood himself and his true interest (*Anliegen*) on his path for a while?” (Neske Verlag, 1963/83, p 8. Translation mine.)

We feel reminded here of Sri Aurobindo’s critique of Nietzsche who “misunderstood his own message”, although in his best moments he had “rare gleaming intuitions”. But for Nietzsche the adoration of a vitalistic *Herren-mensch* was hardly more than a philosophical error. For Heidegger, praising Hitler was a falsehood in quite another dimension If philosophy is a discipline of pure and true thinking, what help did he get from this instrument vis-à-vis the shouting dictator? How could he fail to see through the dangerous demagogue, inspired by a Demon of Destruction, not a God of Creation, luring the German people into the abyss with cheap, brute promises? The answer to these questions, whatever it be, must be troubling, indeed. At a moment when it mattered most in German history, he failed to recognize what was true and essential Being and publicly endorsed Pseudo-Being. “I believe a philosopher

cannot afford such error without discrediting his own proper philosophy," Herbet Marcuse commented thirty years ago. That verdict appears in a new light now especially in view of the fact that the German philosopher could never persuade himself to put an end to this whole discussion through a massive and unequivocal confession of his blindness

Rhoda le Cocq, in her book *The Radical Thinkers—Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo*, briefly discusses the issue of Heidegger's political involvement, on the basis of the (insufficient) sources available twenty years ago and writes in the first chapter: "... Sri Aurobindo stood unequivocally against the Nazi regime. Later, he spoke against communism. More clearly than Heidegger, Sri Aurobindo saw that both *isms* limited human, individual freedom, and this he considered a basic necessity for the spiritual development of the race." (p. 5)

Against the background of today's knowledge we would rather have to state: "Even while Sri Aurobindo never had the slightest illusion about Hitler, Nazism and their devastating effects on human freedom and development and actively encouraged the war against the Nazis, Heidegger on the contrary was totally deluded from the beginning, was himself engaged in some activities which limited individual freedom and development and possibly believed up to the end of his life that the only thing that had gone wrong was that Hitler and the Nazis did not listen to him."

After the books of Farias and Ott, Heidegger and his philosophy will never be the same again. The truth has come out—and truth is, as the philosopher himself pointed out so often by a Greek word, *a-letheia*: un-concealedness.

WILFRIED HUCHZERMAYER

### Postscript

Hugo Ott's book is currently being translated into eight languages, which underlines the importance internationally given to his findings.

W. H.

## REVOLUTION THAT GAVE BIRTH TO TERRORISM

PARIS, July 9 (Reuter) The French Revolution not only changed the face of France, it spawned thousands of new words—among them ‘terrorism’ and ‘guillotine’—still in use 200 years later.

Another legacy recalled as France marks the anniversary of the revolution this month is the metric system

To cope with the changes wrought by the revolution, the French had to invent so many new expressions—nearly 2,000—that a dozen dictionaries were printed in the decade from 1789 to 1799.

Out of the blood-drenched months of the terror, the period from 1793 to 1794 when thousands of heads fell under the blade of the guillotine, came the now universal notion of “terrorism”.

Wholesale confiscation of church and private property gave the word “nationalisation”.

The French language historian Jacques Cellard says in a book on the period that the enormous influx of new words was “unique in the history of our language for such a brief period ”

A dictionary of the times offered definitions of “words which are on everyone’s lips but are not very clear.” Another listed “expressions newly created by the French people”.

It was a time of radical change. The abolition of feudalism, the crushing of the king and the drive against the church left a vacuum which the revolutionaries sought to fill by reorganising life according to reason and nature

People changed their names, dropping the royal Louis or Marie for constitution or civilisation names inspired by contemporary events.

Nature provided Dandelion for girls, Rhubarb for boys

The “queen bee” was renamed “laying bee”, chess pieces changed to eradicate the smack of royalty and saints’ days replaced so that St Catherine’s became the day of the pig and St Cecilia’s the day of the turnip

The French, said US historian Robert Darnton, “experienced reality as something that could be destroyed and reconstructed”.

The spree to create a new order threw up the metric system, with the base unit, the metre, decreed in 1790 to be “equal to one ten-millionth part of the arc of the terrestrial meridian”

The system was later extended to weight—grammes and kilogrammes—litres and, during a trial period, to time. Days were divided into 20 hours, hours into 50 minutes and minutes into 100 seconds.

In 1793, legislators adopted a new calendar whose year one begun September 22, 1792, the day of the fall of the monarchy

Abolished in 1805, it too was a tribute to reason and nature. Ten-day weeks gave one day of rest and the three-week months were named after the seasons, brumaire for fog or pluviôse for rain



Bent on scrapping the old royal provinces, 18th-century leaders then reorganised France into administrative “departments”, thus giving the country a new-found unity which in turn nurtured novel concepts such as “nation” and “patriot”.

The new rules, tightening their grip, invented “identity cards” and “conscription” as fears of foreign invasion spread.

Their new “revolutionary tribunals” turned the adjective “subject” into a noun.

The guillotine, the machine invented to decapitate the “counter-revolutionaries”—also a new word—was referred to as “the revolutionary instrument”.

Dr. Guillotin had invented the machine to spare the condemned any pain. ‘Emigré’ joined the Lexicon when nobles, tradesmen and farmers who failed to rally to the revolution were forced to flee almost certain death.

The tribunals had to turn to England for much of their terminology, adopting the words “agitator” and “outlaw”.

The revolution, with its cry liberty, equality and fraternity, spawned the words “citizen” and “citizenship”, described by an official 1790 text as “residents of a free state”.

In 1792, it was decreed that “citizen” and “citizenship” would replace the words “monsieur” and “madame”.

“Baignade”, a modern French word for bathing or “taking a dip” which conjures up the sunshine and smiles of an impressionist waterscape has a horrific root.

“The word is as new as the fact,” says a 1796 dictionary quoted by Cellard. “It was invented by the destructive genius of the Jacobins. It consists of throwing bound, innocent people into the Loire river from aboard a barge and scuttling it.”

Some 5,000 “counter-revolutionaries” from the western Vendée region are believed to have been killed in this fashion in 1793 under the orders of zealot Jean-Baptiste Carrier.

The harsh and grisly reign of the Terror is viewed by some historians as a precursor of the gulags.

*(With acknowledgments to The Indian Express, July 10, 1989)*

## LOST IDENTITY

AFTER being in the Ashram for twenty years, all ties and connections with old friends have ceased to exist. Sometimes some stray aspiring souls from amongst them come to the Ashram. When I enquire about their sons they proudly tell of their intellectual achievements and their present positions in the world. When I ask about their daughters they inform me about the positions their son-in-laws hold. There is no identity of their daughters. Hardly one in a hundred has achieved something on her own. And all these friends are high-achieving professionals who have reached the top in their fields. Yes, even if their daughters had high degrees each had to sacrifice her career on the altar of her husband's convenience and sometimes on the altar of his ego. I remember our landlord in Lucknow, a retired deputy-secretary, telling me the tale of how he gave his only child—a daughter—every advantage. She was highly educated and took the Master's degree at least in two or three subjects with a diploma or two thrown in. The reason was that the couple kept her in the university as long as they could, so as to delay the moment of inevitable parting. They married her to a very successful executive, who needed her as his beloved, his hostess, a decoration to his home, and a mother of his children. All her education came to nought. He even felt slighted by her achievements which were greater than his own.

Her fond father used to write down all her degrees on the address of the letters he frequently wrote to her. She wrote to him not to write her degrees after her name as this was not liked by her husband.

Humanity, by keeping its women back, has paralysed half of its limbs and circumscribed its unlimited possibilities. By denying the full growth of their talents to the women humanity has committed the greatest stupidity. It is like running a race—the race of life—carrying a dead weight. How many Lakshmi Bais, Gargis and Maitreyis, Indira Gandhis, how many poetesses, executives, artists, warriors and inventors are thus lost and remain imprisoned in the four walls of the millions of prisons of the world, called 'homes'!

A relative of mine has two daughters who did very well in their studies and would have been achievers, had they been allowed and helped to proceed with their studies and make their own careers. But sadly, unwillingly they were married off. And to add insult to injury, the parents borrowed money to pay dowries to bridegrooms whose education or potential was in no way greater than that of these girls.

This same couple paid a capitation fee to get their son who hadn't done well in his studies admitted to a professional college. This injustice pained his two brilliant sisters. One of them was bold enough to point this fact out to her parents. I suggested to one of these girls that she should break away from her parents. But they were too faithful and obedient. The Indian parents emo-

tionally blackmail their daughters and the traditional values of obedience are too strong in India for most girls to break.

Our newspapers are full of how the girls are scoring much better in every field than the boys even in subjects like science and mathematics. This bias has to go. I appeal to all the parents, "In the name of God, in the name of the Spirit of the Age, give an identity to your daughters."

Once a lady-doctor asked me my name. I automatically replied, "Mrs. R. K. Agarwal." She raised her eyes from the form she was filling, looked a bit sadly at me and remarked, "I asked your name, not your husband's. How sad is it that in our country the uneducated women do not say their husbands' names, the educated ones do not their own" (In North India a woman never used to utter her husband's name. Even now the forward-looking women may but the mass of women do not speak their husband's name.)

I sat stunned and realised that after marriage somewhere along the byways of life I had lost my identity without even realising it. I did not think of myself as Shyam Kumari but as Mrs. R. K. Agarwal. I proudly declared myself as belonging to another person. This is a question every woman has to ask herself—to whom does she belong? and is it right that a person should not be the master of her own self and live in the shadows of another? The question has to be answered today and now, tomorrow or later may be too late to recover the pearl of the soul, the crown of the spirit. For the soul cannot be achieved by the weakling, the slave.

*"nāyam ātmā balahīnena labhyaḥ."*<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of the here and the hereafter we, the women of this era, have to find our lost identity.

SHYAM KUMARI

<sup>1</sup> "This Self cannot be won by any who is without strength"—Mundaka Upanishad, 3 2 4

# THE TIDES

## A NOVELLA

*(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1989)*

### VI

NEXT morning I got up quite early to go in search of the fisherman. I wanted to find him as soon as possible. There was the need to inform Mr. Roy about the old building and its occupant, if any. Outside, a dense fog obscured the view of the morning scenery, as if it wore a mask of linen to hide its fresh, green visage. The cold was comparatively less than on other days. I postponed going out till the sun shone. After breakfast I went to Bose-da's dispensary, took a chair beside the window and sat down with the day's newspaper spread on my knees. I did not know after how long the sun-rays struck my cheek. I jerked myself up ready to go out but then heard the sound of horses' hooves and the rattling of wheels. A Tanga came and stopped in front of the dispensary.

Bose-da muttered, "Perhaps magistrate Gupta has sent his Tanga to take me to his place. Yesterday Mrs. Gupta was not well." I peered through the window to find two persons seated in the vehicle, one had covered his head with a light-blue monkey-cap and the other had wrapped herself in a yellow scarf. I observed them keenly and was assailed by joy and surprise at the same time. I whispered to Bose-da, "Mr. Roy and Manju Devi have come from Allahabad." "Is it so?" He jumped to his feet from his seat, hurried to the door and greeted them with folded hands, "Come, come, Mr. Roy, oh how fortunate we are! But where is your luggage? Isn't it Mr. Gupta's Tanga?"

"Yes, you are right, we are just coming from his bungalow to take you there." "To take me there? How is Mrs. Gupta, has she not improved?" "She is quite well. No, not for that. We have come to take you both for reasons of our own."

"That's all right, but won't you favour me by stepping down into my dispensary for a while?" "Of course, why not, why not? Manju, can you get down without help?" I understood and reached out my hand to Mr. Roy to help the old man get down from the high Tanga. As we all sat together I felt guilty at not informing Mr. Roy about the old building on time. I apologised, "I am sorry, Mr. Roy, I could not explore till now the old abode of your brother. So the delay in writing to you." "Doesn't matter, we all expect to go there today. That is why we have come to take you." "Have you decided to go there by boat?" I asked. "Oh no, we shall go by Tanga and then, if necessary, on foot." "But how could you know the route from Allahabad, which I have failed to make out even from here in spite of my ardent effort?" Mr. Roy observed with a broad smile, "All credit goes to Manju."

Manju Devi opened her mouth for the first time, "How does the question of credit come here, papa? One day you told me casually that one of your classmates, some Gupta, was posted now at Ghazipur. I took the chance and gathering his address from you I wrote him a letter in your name stating your problem. He replied to you, not to me, inviting you to come to his place. That's all." I was taken aback at the disclosure, but then consoled myself thinking that what was possible to do for a magistrate might not be so easily possible for a layman like me. Perhaps Manju Devi guessed my trend of thought. She stood up abruptly and said, "Dr. Bose, we are short of time, please let us make a move." "Oh yes." Bose-da went to his compounder, talked to him, perhaps sorted out his duties during his absence. Then we all went out and mounted the Tanga.

Sitting on one of the cane chairs spread over the wide veranda of his big and beautiful bungalow Mr. Gupta was getting a shave from his barber. As we arrived he set aside the barber's hand with his own and exclaimed, "Dr. Bose, first of all let me thank you for the wonderful medicine. Suruchi is almost normal now. Please go into the drawing room, make yourself comfortable, I am just coming." At the door of the drawing room a tall, aged but very gentle-looking lady came forward to receive us with a sweet smile. Bose-da asked, "How do you feel now, Mrs. Gupta? No trouble?" "I am almost cured, Dr. Bose. Thank you very much."

I wanted to know from Mr. Roy if Mr. Gupta would accompany us or not. He said, "Oh no, he is too busy with his own work to spare a single minute even. He has arranged for a man to show us the way, perhaps he is waiting in the out-house." Mr. Gupta, a heavily-built elderly man with a square face and a finely-cut moustache entered and greeted us with hearty hand-shakes. He alerted us saying, "Roy, you are already late, make a move and try to come back before lunch. We shall talk about our old days. There's a special joy in doing so." He went inside to take a bath. After having a cup of tea each and light snacks, joyfully served by Mrs. Gupta, we took leave from her and went out. Reaching the Tanga I got enraged at what I saw. The man sitting beside the coach-man was none else than the fisherman I had looked for during the whole afternoon yesterday. He tried in vain to conceal his face from me. I thundered, "Oh, it's you, eh? Yesterday I left no stone unturned to find you. Tell me: where were you?"

"I saw you, sir, but did not show myself to you," he replied with an awkward smile. "But why this hide-and-peek, eh?" "I was afraid of you." "Afraid of me! Strange." "Till this moment I did not know that you were of the same party. That day after meeting you, when I came here to sell fish, Sahib wanted me to show the way to the same ruined building where you had wanted to go. So I was gripped by doubt and apprehension about your purpose and motive." I laughed aloud and a burden was lifted from my mind. Now I could be without obligation to Mr. Roy and Manju Devi.

The Tanga wheeled along smoothly for a long time and then stopped suddenly in front of a narrow and uneven path. We all got down and marched ahead following the fisherman. Traversing a number of turns and slopes we got at last to an open place, the other end of which was blocked by an apparently impenetrable jungle. I recognised at once that this was the same place from where I had returned the other day. I cast a questioning look at the fisherman. Unperturbed, he requested us to wait and himself approached the border of the jungle. We could see from a distance that he was trying to explore some opening. Then he disappeared.

“A fine way of evading responsibility, isn't it?” I asked Bose-da. He objected, “Oh no, he won't dare to escape, it is the magistrate's affair.” After a while, no doubt, the man reappeared as if to justify Bose-da's comment. He waved his hand to call us. We neared him and peeped at the spot he pointed out. Yes, there was a very narrow, thread-like footpath across, but the mouth was covered with thick long grass. The man cleared it with quick hands and signed us to follow him. Bose-da hesitated, “Will it be safe to follow him unarmed?” Mr. Roy drew out a revolver from one of his pockets and said, “This is the answer.” Then Bose-da raised another point, “We three have trousers on but what about Manju Devi with her loose sari?” We looked for her but she was not there. When we were about to shout her name she came out from behind a big tree nearby. Her sari was transformed now into a Salwar, such was her skill in readjusting it.

It was not easy to go by that narrow, clumsy path full of hurdles: mud, water, broken bricks, thorny undergrowth, frogs and a hundred ugly insects. Finally when we crossed it, the cool breeze and the beauty of the gently flowing Ganges soothed us. Now, unlike in the rainy season, the river was calm like the meditative Mahadeva himself from whose matted hair she had descended, according to mythology. Close at hand we could see an ancient stone-ghat but where was our destination, the much-longed-for building? All eyes fell on the fisherman. He was puzzled at first, but looking minutely around he showed us afar an earthen structure emerging from a cluster of bushes and shrubs against a background of vast blue sky. As it did not agree at all with Deepu's description we did not know what to do. But the fisherman insisted on our going there and checking the place. There was no passage whatsoever to the place. Still, following the man and with a lot of difficulty we somehow reached it and found that the structure was actually the remnant of an old building reduced to earth by the diligent masonry of white ants.

Mr. Roy's deep, heart-broken sigh made us aware of his utter disappointment. The doors of the house were ajar revealing its forlorn hopeless state. We were about to return but Mr. Roy wanted to see everything and stepped into the house first. We could not but accompany him. It was a medium-sized room whose floor and walls had, as it were, protruded veins and arteries due to old age.

and the work of white ants. At the far end there was an empty book-shelf, in the centre stood two chairs and a table decorated by white ants with diverse geometrical figures Mr Roy ran his hand over the table as if to clean it and at the same time murmured, "Oh rejected and dirty table, with what ardour I longed to meet your master, but fortune .." His voice broke and the words stopped

We moved to the side-room followed by Manju Devi and Mr Roy. It was perhaps a bed-room cum kitchen, the walls were somewhat free from the attack of white ants. Suddenly our eyes became wide-open and awe-stricken to see an object hanging from a hook on the wall. It was a set of false matted hair, beard and moustache Bose-da gently collected it from the hook and offered it to Mr. Roy. He was emotionally affected already After finding his great brother's disguise he could no longer check himself He clasped it eagerly very close to his bosom and went on reciting something with closed eyes. Drops of tears from his eyes fell on the set Manju Devi called, "Papa, let us return now." "Yes, my child, let's go," he gave the thing to her for safe-keeping

We returned to Mr Gupta's bungalow a little after noon. Mrs Gupta did all she could to please us First she served us delicious cold drinks and then a tasty, nutritious, well-cooked lunch. After that we waited on chairs in the veranda for Mr. Gupta to come back from his work. Only Bose-da kept moving up and down with a grave look Suddenly he approached Manju Devi and collecting the disguise from her requested Mr. Roy to put it on. He turned pale and lowered his head reluctantly. Manju Devi encouraged him, "What's the harm, papa? There must be some genuine reason" she helped her father to put on the set. Bose-da observed him for a while and then said with enthusiasm and satisfaction, "Good heavens, I have got it now!"

"What have you got, Dr Bose?" asked Mr. Gupta while getting in.

"Oh you have come! Very nice of you. Now tell us, Mr. Gupta, did you ever see this Sadhu anywhere before?" Bose-da waited for his answer. He observed Mr Roy minutely for a few minutes and then announced, "Yes, yes, I saw such a Sadhu in the village Hazıgunj during the cholera epidemic that year When you doctors, both Government and private, failed to cope with the situation, the Sadhu appeared suddenly, as if dropped from heaven, and with his miraculous medicine and untiring service saved the village from the imminent menace." "Very correct, Mr. Gupta, and then when the Government wanted to honour him, he was found nowhere, as if he had vanished into thin air "

"Exactly so, but from where have you borrowed this disguise for Mr. Roy?" Thereupon Bose-da narrated in short the episode of our excursion and then added, "You know, Mr Gupta, I am almost certain that that Sadhu was none else than Mr Roy's long-lost brother." "Quite possible, but did you see him anywhere else after that episode?" "Actually I have not seen him myself but I heard from the villagers of Hazıgunj that he used to come there before the

episode and after that also he came once to help them in whatever way he could."

"Now what do you propose to do?" "I have a plan provided Mr. Roy consents to act the role of his brother." "Ho, ho, ho. that will be very interesting indeed. What, Roy, do you accept his proposal?" "I am ready to do everything necessary for the sake of my brother," calmly replied Mr Roy "I knew, I knew. Dr. Bose, during our college days Roy was considered the best actor in our social programmes?"

"If so, I shall come tomorrow morning to pick you up and Manju Devi as well. Please keep yourselves ready," so saying Bose-da prepared to take leave. It was almost evening when we two returned to Bose-da's house. Immediately he busied himself with the preparation of the next day's picnic programme. Bela-di assisted him I was also going to join to help them but Bose-da objected. He said, "Rather you finish your dinner and go to the drawing room to tell Alok and Archana yesterday's unfinished story of Deepu. I gave them my word. You will have to get up very early in the morning tomorrow So go to bed as early as possible, maybe you will also have to take a part "

After dinner, as I entered the drawing room, I found Alok and Archana already waiting there for me Both of them jumped with joy and came forward to lead me by the hand to my seat. "Where did we stop yesterday?" I asked. Archana replied, "Deepu asked Pisma about Saroj-da and Smriti-di " "Right you are, now Pisma answered, 'Deepu, I know nothing about them, you had better ask Asit if he knows anything about Saroj In the meantime let me come back with your breakfast.'

"Dandibaba was sitting self-absorbed after his inspiring words. Deepu and Rasu approached him politely. He turned his vacant meditative look towards them Deepu repeated the question he had put to Pisma. Dandibaba opened his mouth reluctantly, 'I am sorry, I cannot tell you where they are now But this much you should know that they are quite safe and sound and doing their destined work incognito, as before ' He became absolutely silent again. None of them dared to ask him any more question. Pisma returned with snacks for them. While serving the dishes she asked, 'Asit, where were you yourself during these years and what is the news about your partymen?'

" 'Didi, after the episode here in this house we all dispersed to different parts of India, some even managed to go abroad. As for me, I became Dandibaba, as you see, and travelled the length and breadth of the country over and over again as a mendicant Recently I came here to see my native place and you, the favourite Didi of us all '

" 'But where are you putting up here?' 'Didi, though I would have very much liked to stay with you, it has not to be. Because it is very risky both for you and myself. An all-India upheaval is in the offing Till that is over we must be on our guard very strictly.' He looked at Deepu and asked, 'Deepu, you are



staying with your Pisemashay, I suppose.' Deepu understood the intention and nodding his head in assent left the place with Rasu leaving them alone to talk freely

"The meeting opened a new horizon of ideas and visions in their consciousness. None of them spoke, Rasu went to his shop silently to work and Deepu to the garden beside the Shiva-Muth, his place of rest and contemplation. He perched himself on a low branch of a tree and extended his gaze to the vast field in front. It was the end of Autumn, the field was dry and the crops had been harvested from many places. The river beyond had shrunken a lot. Looking at it, Deepu felt suddenly a peculiar emptiness within, an all-negating void, as it were. He felt like falling down from the branch. Just then he heard a feeble voice within, 'Courage, we shall meet again'. The memory of Smriti-dī steadied him, he got to the ground. At once he was transformed into a dynamo of energy and vigour. He remembered his resolution. 'No, no more confinement, I must free myself from Pisemashay's grip'. As he turned round he was terribly shocked to see Ganesh, the new servant, standing in front of him. He said, 'Chhotababu, from yesterday you have become very irregular. Today also you have not taken your breakfast even. Burrababu wants you to see him immediately'..

"Next day Deepu woke up long before daybreak. Ganesh was in deep sleep. Now was the best moment for him to slip away. He stepped out of the house with a small suitcase in hand and found that there was light in Pisemashay's room. Had he himself taken the charge from Ganesh to watch over him at this hour? After what had happened yesterday it mattered little whether he was watched or not. He was now a sword drawn out of its sheath. He crossed the courtyard quickly, got to the pond-side path and hurried straight to the Muth area. Heavenly sanctity, peace and silence prevailed over the place. The crescent moon in the eastern sky was showering on earth a mysterious light. A slight blush at the horizon-line spoke of the oncoming dawn. Deepu for the first time in his life stooped and touched his head devotionally on the parapet of the Muth. Then he went down to the open field and walked across it. He avoided the regular road to save time. He must reach the river-side before sunrise. In fact he reached there much before he expected to do. Ferry boats were plying with passengers for the steamer ghat. He called one and got into it.

"After about an hour Deepu alighted from the boat and headed for the steamer station, a few minutes' walk from there. He had not thought about the place to which he would go. He simply wanted to avail himself of the first steamer. Breaking the silence of the morning sky with a hoarse whistle a steamer announced its arrival. Deepu hurried to the booking office and came to know that it was the Barisal Mail. He was happy, Barisal was his favourite place and he booked a ticket for it. After about half an hour he found himself sitting on the deck facing the shore. The vessel glided on. The beauty of the river-side rural Bengal flooded with the morning rays overwhelmed him. In his diary Deepu had

given a splendid description of the panorama which reminded me of the work of the great poet Rabindranath on the subject.

“However, Deepu remained absorbed looking at the shore almost all the time. Stations came, the steamer stopped and started again, but his pose was hardly disturbed. Only at about noon the random shouting of hawkers from small boats made him aware of the surroundings. He saw that the steamer had anchored about a hundred metres away from the shore as the water there was shallow. The small boats came crowding beside the steamer to sell food to the people on board. On the other hand a huge boat carrying passengers also reached the vessel. Those who would get down here would also be taken ashore by this boat.

By now Deepu was very hungry, he got up, moved to the nearest boat to buy something but then stood dumbfounded at the sight of a ghost in the midst of purchasers from another boat, a ghost in the figure of Ganesh. Just then he understood why there was light in Pisemashay’s room at that odd hour. Immediately he receded and joined those who were waiting in the ferry-boat to be carried ashore. He did not bother to notice if Ganesh had seen him or not.

“Getting onto the ground he hurried to one of the sweetmeat shops and ordered Rasagollas. Gulping a number of them and taking a glass of water Deepu returned to the doorway, looked around but Ganesh was not found anywhere. With quick steps he went up to the main road and inquired about the means to go to the city. A pedlar replied, ‘Oh, you have missed the steamer! But the city is very far from here, about six hours’ walk. Will you venture such a distance on foot? If so, follow this way and then turn right,’ Undaunted, Deepu accepted the challenge and walked ahead, occasionally looking behind to see if he were being followed or not.”

“How old was Deepu then?” Interrupted Archana. “Why, fifteen years or so,” I looked at her confused face and then added, “Perhaps you have mixed up events, Archana. This happened before the independence of India. Whatever you might have heard from my talk with Bose-da, that I met Deepu in a Ghat of Ghazipur, took place quite a number of years after India was free.”

“Then what happened?” asked Alok. “I am feeling sleepy, have to get up very early tomorrow. So let me stop here. The little that remains I shall tell you later,” was my reply. “If it is little, why not finish it tonight itself?” requested Archana. “I could have finished, had I not been so tired and sleepy. Because from the detailed description given by Deepu I have to choose and select, make it precise to present it to you, which I am incapable of doing now.” Alok came to my rescue, “Didi, I am also feeling sleepy.” “Okay then, good night.”

From the drawing room I went directly to Bose-da in the kitchen where, along with Bela-di, he was busy arranging things for the picnic. “Bose-da, I forgot that my leave from the office ends today, I have to catch the train for Benares early tomorrow morning.” Bose-da was adamant, “How can you go at

this stage? It is impossible, please don't worry, go to sleep, you can phone to your office if it is so urgent." Bela-di remarked jokingly, "Your role in the drama of life tomorrow has already been fixed, so be a good boy and go to sleep tonight. Goodnight."

*(To be continued)*

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Tales of Mulla Nasruddin** by P. Raja B. R. Publishing Corp 1989 Rs. 120.

MR. P. Raja, who has given us *The Stupid Guru and his Foolish Disciples* (serialised in *Mother India*, published in book-form in 1981) and *Folktales from Pondicherry*, and who has entertained *Mother India* readers with his humorous autobiographical sketches in the series *For Your Ears Only*, now introduces us to another fund of humour—a collection of tales featuring the Turkish folk figure Mulla Nasruddin.

I first made the acquaintance of Nasruddin when I stayed four months in a small Turkish fishing-village more than twenty-five years ago, and he has fascinated me ever since. There everyone had a dozen different tales to tell about him, and spoke of the 'Hoca', as they called him, as familiarly as a member of their families. 'Hoca'—pronounced 'Hödja'—is equivalent to Hajji—one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. None of the tales I have come across ever mention him making such a trip, and some, which delight in his scorn of orthodoxy, suggest that he would have been unlikely to do so. The title is, in his case, simply a mark of respect, of which 'Mulla' is probably a good equivalent. But though he may not have gone to Mecca, it seems that he did travel far and wide—whether from sheer irresponsibility and restlessness, or in search of knowledge, is not clear: one tale I heard that summer (not included in this collection) suggests that he once visited India.

“When the Hoca went on his travels, he did not ride his famous donkey—he walked from city to city and country to country and saw many things. Once, after he had been passing through the mountains for quite a long time, the road started to lead steeply downhill, and he saw the plains stretching away in front of him as far as the horizon—not green and welcoming but reddish and shimmering with heat. Though he felt very hot and weary, he found no cooling spring in the shade of a fruit tree, as he would have done in his own country. The road through the plains was bare and unshaded, and the sun beat down mercilessly. After a while, however, the Hoca did come across an almost naked peasant who was carrying a basket as if he were on his way to the market. Thinking that perhaps the basket might contain some refreshing juicy fruits, the Hoca asked the man what he had for sale. At first the peasant didn't understand anything, for the Hoca spoke in Turkish, then he tried in Persian; and finally, feeling a little short-tempered, he tried in the universal language of gesture and mime. Then the peasant understood at once that this poor traveller had come a very long way; that he was very hot and thirsty, and that he would like something fresh and juicy to restore him. He knew that the fruits he had in his basket wouldn't be the right thing. He showed them to Nasruddin and made the gesture for 'No'. Nasruddin thought they looked just what he wanted—small, but green and fresh-

looking. And he thought that the man's gesture indicated merely that he was unwilling to sell. 'People are the same everywhere,' he thought. 'He wants to hike the price, because we are all alone here in the desert, and I have no choice. Well, he is right, I have no choice—if I don't get some of those fruits, I shall certainly die.' And with this in mind, he took his last coins out of his pocket and showed them to the peasant, for him to take as much as he wanted.

"Now as it happened, these coins the Hoca had, though not worth much in his own country, were of a kind much prized in the area where the peasant lived. The poor peasant was astonished to be offered an amount that would have purchased *five* baskets of such fruits—and he was especially surprised, because normally people would only wish to buy a few of them at a time, a handful at most... rarely a basketful. Whatever would this traveller do with them all? Again he shook his head and waved his hand in the negative, feeling sure there was some mistake. At this, the Hoca grew really angry. He shouted loudly in his own language 'Cheat! Extortioner! Do you want me to die here? Then why don't you cut my throat?' And he made the universally understood gesture of throat-cutting. The peasant was terrified. He didn't know what this mad traveller might do next. He hurriedly gathered up the coins the Hoca had flung in the dust, abandoned his basket and ran for his life. Relieved, Nasruddin greedily started to cram the small green delicious-looking fruits into his parched mouth. The next moment he began to scream aloud with astonished pain

When Nasruddin finally recovered a little from his first contact with chillies, he turned his face away from the plains and started back the way he had come. Whenever anyone asked him about the country beyond the mountains he would say, 'The sun is hot, the people are hot—even the fruits are hot... that country was too hot for me!'

Nasruddin combines the ready wit and 'lateral thinking' of Birbal and Tenali Rama (and by the way, when is Mr. Raja going to give us the Tenali Rama stories? Who could do it better?) with the penetration of a Central Asian 'wise fool', who perceives reality differently from commonplace folk. The redoubtable Sufi scholar, Idries Shah, has brought out two beautiful volumes of Nasruddin stories, presenting them as examples of profound Sufi wisdom—a sort of Muslim *koans*, riddles bearing enlightenment. To my friends in that little Turkish village, the Hoca was no mystic, but very much one of themselves, only a bit more quick-witted. They appreciated his scorn for all forms of authoritarianism and pretension, and felt sympathy for the difficulties he encountered at home with his wives and mothers-in-law. It is in this spirit exactly that Mr. Raja has presented him, in a readable colloquial style. But that there is some kernel of unusual wisdom in many sayings of the Hoca, there is no doubt. I can't resist closing this review with another favourite tale of mine that he has not included, since it seems to epitomise the Hoca's way of seeing and doing things.

"One day as the Hoca was strolling through the market-place, he saw,

sitting at the end of the line of vendors who were offering live chickens, ducks and turkeys for sale, a foreign-looking man who had only one bird, and that too a most unusual one: instead of brown or white feathers, it had vivid green plumage with markings of pink, yellow and scarlet on its wings. It hardly looked big enough to make much of a meal, but out of curiosity Nasruddin asked the man its price. He was astounded when the man asked for five dirhams. 'What?' cried the Hoca. 'How can you ask so much for such a scraggy little bird? There's hardly any meat on it at all! I can get a nice plump chicken for a tenth of that price!'

" 'This bird is not to be compared with a mere chicken'; the vendor replied with dignity. 'This bird talks.' And indeed the bird was soon demonstrating its skill to a small crowd of the curious, answering to its name, commenting on the weather, and praising the Prophet. Nasruddin Hoca walked away deep in thought.

"Next market day, Nasruddin went and sat opposite the parrot-seller; beside him sat his wife's fattest turkey, its feet secured with a string.

" 'Good morning,' said the parrot-seller politely. 'You're wanting to sell your turkey? How much are you asking for it?'

" 'Fifty dirhams,' replied Nasruddin, poker-faced.

" 'What?' chortled the poultry-vendor sitting next to them. 'Nasruddin, I always knew you were cracked! Look at my fat turkeys here—each of them only one dirham each. You'll never get a buyer... what a madman you are!'

" 'After all,' addeed the parrot-man in his dignified way, 'you can get this unique talking bird who has come all the way from the forests of the Deep South and who will last you a lifetime, for only five dirhams. How can you ask ten times as much for a mere barnyard turkey?'

" 'You are asking ten times the price of a chicken for your gaudy little fowl there just because it talks,' retorted the Hoca 'My turkey is worth much more—it thinks!'

If this has whetted your appetite, do get hold of Mr. Raja's collection of fifty vintage Mulla Nasruddin tales.

SHRADDHAVAN

**Gita for the Modern Mind: A Free Rendering in English by Bikas C. Sen**

Price: Rs. 12/-

The world abounds with scriptures and of them all the Gita is probably the most widely read and commented upon. It has quite naturally therefore been subjected to varying interpretations and commentaries. The Gita has a universal appeal and we may divide its readers into three broad categories. First, is the simple man living the ordinary life with all its pleasures and sorrows, all its ups

and downs. He comes to the Gita for solace and comfort in this difficult path of life. He tries to extract from it whatever little he can without too much trouble of practising it. Next, we have the intellectual and the scholar who tries with his reasoning mind to interpret the Gita. Often he indulges in hair-splitting arguments and metaphysical speculations to justify a certain position or line of argument. He has provided us with a large number of commentaries. Lastly, we have the genuine spiritual seeker who seeks to practise the Gita. For him the Gita is a treasure-house of aspiration and a living fount of spiritual knowledge.

This book is not a commentary. It is rather a free translation and rendering of the Gita. It is not essentially an intellectual creation although there is a play of the intellect. It is rather a creation from the heart, an exhortation to man to put into practice the teachings of the Gita. Written in simple language, it goes to the heart of the problem and presents the Gita in a form which is easily accessible to the common man. He even tackles philosophical aspects of the Gita in a language which may touch the common man.

The author has no claim to spiritual life and experience, but having seen life at close quarters—for he was once an advocate—he understands the great message of the Gita and its utility. Thus considered, here is a book worth perusing and, for those touched, it might be a spring-board for further reading of the great works on the Gita and even in some cases for practice.

C. RAMAKRISHNA REDDY

## *Students' Section*

### THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

26th Annual Conference

13 August 1989

Speech by Dibakar Goswami

WE have organised this Conference to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's 117th birth anniversary. For all those who are his disciples and followers this is a solemn occasion to recollect the supreme significance of the great mission of his life and his teachings, and to renew their adherence to its fulfilment with greater fervour.

The best way to realise the profound significance of Sri Aurobindo's life-mission is to study very carefully the message which he himself gave on his 75th birthday, the 15th August 1947, because it is a brief but most illuminating statement of the great aims which he relentlessly pursued all through his life and, I may add, still continues to do so even after departing from his material body.

This message was given by him at the request of the All-India Radio, Trichinopoly, for the 15th August 1947 which was also the birthday of free India. It is in two versions. The original version was found to be a little too long for the time allotted to it by the All-India Radio. So, in the second version, Sri Aurobindo abridged and recast it. This second version was broadcast on the 15th August 1947 from the All-India Radio and afterwards made public.

I am sure all of you have read this second version. What I propose to read here is the original longer version which is not known to the general public. I take this opportunity to read it now because it is most appropriate to this occasion which we are celebrating and especially because of what the Mother once said about it. Here is what she said about this message.

“His message should be read and re-read and its significance explained to millions of his compatriots. India needs Sri Aurobindo's faith and conviction.”

#### MESSAGE OF THE FIFTEENTH OF AUGUST 1947

(THE ORIGINAL VERSION)

August 15th is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the



political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of life, should have acquired this vast significance. As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement.

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity,—though these too she must not neglect,—and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race. Those aims and ideals were in their natural order these: a revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation, the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. At one time it almost seemed as if she might relapse into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. Fortunately there has now developed a strong possibility that this disastrous relapse will be avoided. The wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as

anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go,—it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.

Asia has arisen and large parts of it have been liberated or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

The unification of mankind is under way, though only in an imperfect initiative, organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and, if the experience of history can be taken as a guide, it must inevitably increase until it conquers. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that large statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For in any case the unification is a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement and its achievement can be safely foretold. Its necessity for the nations also is clear, for without it the freedom of the small peoples can never be safe hereafter and even large and powerful nations cannot really be secure. India, if she remains divided, will not herself be sure of her safety. It is therefore to the interest of all that union should take place. Only human imbecility and stupid selfishness could prevent it. Against that, it has been said, even the gods strive in vain; but it cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. Nationalism will then have fulfilled itself; an international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning

towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The rest is still a personal hope and an idea and ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must come through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far or how soon the connection will be fulfilled, depends upon this new and free India.<sup>1</sup>

SRI AUROBINDO

<sup>1</sup> *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), pp 400-403