

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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SRI AUROBINDO'S BIRTHDAY

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The sudden rise in printing costs because of an unavoidable change-over from letter-press to photo-offset from the March issue obliges us to raise our inland subscription by a small amount—that is, from Rs 42 per year to Rs 47 and accordingly our inland life-membership from Rs 588 to Rs 658. Those who have already become life-members need not pay anything more unless they themselves feel inclined to do so. Our subscribers, both old and new ones, are requested to understand our difficult situation and be kind enough to send us Rs 5 more. We shall be very thankful.

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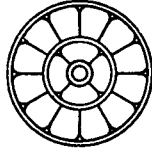
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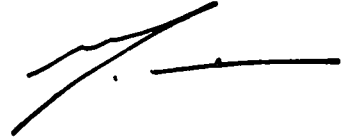
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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TWO INSIGHTS FROM SRI AUROBINDO

These quotations—both from the Karmayogin, one found on pp. 69-70 of Volume 2, the Centenary Edition, and the other on p. 406 of the same Volume—are very appropriate as an explanation of the present world-movements. We may well take them as Sri Aurobindo's message on the 117th anniversary of his birth: August 15, 1989.

THE HOUR OF GOD'S MOVEMENT*

“... there are particular movements in particular epochs in which the Divine Force manifests itself with supreme power shattering all human calculations, making a mock of the prudence of the careful statesman and the scheming politician, falsifying the prognostications of the scientific analyser and advancing with a vehemence and velocity which is obviously the manifestation of a higher than human force. The intellectual man afterwards tries to trace the reasons for the movement and lay bare the forces that made it possible, but at the time he is utterly at fault, his wisdom is falsified at every step and his science serves him not. These are the times when we say God is in the movement, He is its leader and it must fulfil itself however impossible it may be for man to see the means by which it will succeed.”

SRI AUROBINDO

GREAT CONSEQUENCES**

“The events that sway the world are often the results of trivial circumstances. When immense changes and irresistible movements are in progress, it is astonishing how a single event, often a chance event, will lead to a train of circumstances that alter the face of a country or the world. At such times a slight turn this way or that produces results out of all proportion to the cause. It is on such occasions that we feel most vividly the reality of a Power which disposes of events and defeats the calculations of men. The end of many things is brought about by the sudden act of a single individual. A world vanishes, another is created almost at a touch. Certainty disappears and we begin to realise what the *pralaya* of the Hindus, the passage from one age to another, really means and how true is the idea that it is by rapid transitions long-prepared changes are induced. Such a change now impends all over the world, and in almost all countries events are happening, the final results of which the actors do not foresee. Small incidents pass across the surface of great countries and some of them pass and are forgotten, others precipitate the future.”

SRI AUROBINDO

* Title not by Sri Aurobindo

** Title by Sri Aurobindo

SOME REMINISCENCES OF SRI AUROBINDO

BY DR. RADHA KUMUD MOOKERJI

(We have pleasure in reproducing the Message written on 15 August 1963 by Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji—one of our greatest historians, who passed away about two months later—for the public meeting held on 18 August the same year at Calcutta under the auspices of the Sri Aurobindo Parishad and presided over by Dr. Kalidas Nag, to discuss Sri Aurobindo's life and sadhana.)

I DEEM it a privilege to be called upon to associate myself with the function of this evening. We are assembled here today for a most memorable occasion—August 15—which witnessed the advent into this world of one of its supermen to whom humanity owes some of its highest thought.

Sri Aurobindo made original contributions to Indian thought, philosophy and spirituality. Indeed he is the founder of a new school of spiritual discipline which opens up the way by which man will grow into God. The system of philosophy for which Sri Aurobindo is noted is known as the Descent of the Divine into the Human, the Life Divine, the Infiltration of the Infinite into the Finite.

God is to be seen as operating in every thought and action of Man. Thus there can be no separateness between God and Man in any sphere of life and thought because these are shaped and dominated by the Divine.

I happened perhaps to be one of the very few who had the rare good fortune of coming into direct touch with Sri Aurobindo as a youth in the full bloom of his life and power when he was pleased to take over the appointment of the Principalship of the Bengal National College at which I was appointed Professor of History directly working under him. I recall my personal anecdotes about his life and work in those stirring times when the country, especially Bengal, was thrown into a whirlwind agitation over the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon.

At that time Sri Aurobindo took up the personal leadership of the Revolution which ushered in the nation's battle for freedom. Every day he would go from the Bengal National College to the evening gathering at the house of one of India's patriotic martyrs Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick in Wellington Square. The gathering, by its thought and inspiration, resembled that of the French Encyclopaedists, the intellectuals who paved the way of the French Revolution. That was before Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted in the Alipore Bomb Case and before his historic "flight" to Pondicherry.

At home, in the domestic sphere, at the college, I had rare glimpses of his innate spirituality which made him always keep calm and reticent. I used to sit by him and had the natural advantage of studying some of the remarkable traits of

his spiritual life at close quarters. One day he asked me whether he should accede to the request of the people of Uttarpara to address there a meeting. I ventured to suggest to him that it was better that sometime he should appear before the public and deliver his message. He said he would agree if I would report his speech. That was the origin of Sri Aurobindo's famous speech at Uttarpara.

Indeed I found him always absorbed in meditation and it was in that supreme state that Sri Aurobindo felt that he was seeing Lord Vasudeva all around him in the Alipore jail. I feel it is not proper for me to reveal the secrets of Sri Aurobindo's Divine Life, at its beginnings when I had the privilege of working with him at the Bengal National College. I should like to conclude by referring to an incident which happened at this time.

One evening his elder brother Poet Manomohan Ghose came rushing to the evening club at Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick's in great excitement to warn Sri Aurobindo. "Aurobindo, you forget that you are a born poet and must not drift into politics. Politics is not your mission in life. Your mission is poetry." Sri Aurobindo smiled at the anxiety of his brother for his future

I feel tempted to refer to another very singular event which happened before my very eyes.

One day Sri Aurobindo told me that he felt somewhat possessed by a spirit which revealed his name to Sri Aurobindo as Manick. The spirit was very anxious to seize the pen of Sri Aurobindo so that he might write and give vent to his feelings in the other world. I told Sri Aurobindo that he might indulge him for a few minutes to see what he was anxious to write about. Then the spirit used Sri Aurobindo's hand to write a highly inflammatory article condemning British rule in a most intolerant manner. We agreed that we might use Manick's outburst as an editorial in the *Bande Mataram* by toning down some of its extremism so as to keep it within the bounds of law. The spirit's article appeared next morning in the *Bande Mataram*.

SUPER-SCIENTIST

15 August 1872 – 5 December 1950

EINSTEIN of the super-science of the soul,
He found the Immutable's space of trance a field
Grooved with almighty thought-transcending arcs—
Figures of a single Truth bent everywhere
On linking the ultimate Suns to our mortal sod.. .
A rapt geometer in the deepest heart
Saw the long line of human hungering
Towards infinite freedom from the drag of clay
As no straight movement on and ever on,
Leaving the body a vanishing cry of woe,
But a huge curve that reaches farthest light
And comes back kindled to the darkling dust....
O mystic energy of re-entrant love,
Springing immense into the Immortal's bliss
Yet keeping earth's small poignancy your goal!

K. D SETHNA

LIGHT SHONE FORTH

*(On the memorable occasion of the 75th anniversary of the ARYA.
15 August 1989)*

TIMID had been the progress of humankind
Before the First World War broke;
Hesitant had been the move of sceptic mind,
When came at last the zero hour's stroke;
Enveloping darkness sterilised human thought
And stilled the flow of the life-stream,
Age-long inertia unflinching brought
The result of man's idle dream;
Ruthless Ruin tried to grip the race,
But it must anyhow be saved,
Youth be awakened with sun-eyed face,
And the way to LIGHT be paved
LIGHT shone forth through the ARYA's page
From the immortal pen of a Supreme Sage.

SAMAR BASU

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 13 AUGUST 1958

Sweet Mother, why don't we profit as much as we should by our presence here in the Ashram?

AH! That is very simple; it is because it is too easy!... When you have to go all round the world to find a teacher, when you have to give up everything to obtain only the first words of a teaching, then this teaching, this spiritual help becomes something very precious, like everything that is difficult to obtain, and you make a great effort to deserve it.

Most of you came here when you were very small, at an age when there can be no question of the spiritual life or spiritual teaching—it would be altogether premature. You have indeed lived in this atmosphere but without even being aware of it, you are accustomed to seeing me, hearing me, I speak to you as one does to all children, I have even played with you as one plays with children; you only have to come and sit here and you hear me speak, you only have to ask me a question and I answer you, I have never refused to say anything to anybody—it is so easy. It is enough to... live—to sleep, to eat, to do exercises and study at school. You live here as you would live anywhere else. And so, you are used to it.

If I had made strict rules, if I had said, “I shall not tell you anything until you have truly made an effort to know it”, then perhaps you might have made some effort, but that's not in keeping with my idea. I believe more in the power of the atmosphere and of example than of a rigorous teaching. I count more on something awakening in the being through contagion rather than by a methodical, disciplined effort.

Perhaps, after all, something is being prepared and one day it will spring up to the surface.

That is what I hope for.

One day you will tell yourself, “Just think! I have been here so long, I could have learnt so much, realised so much and I never even thought of it! Only like that, now and then.” And then, on that day... well, on that day, just imagine, you are going to wake up all of a sudden to something you never noticed but which is deep within you and *thirsts* for the truth, thirsts for transformation and is ready to make the effort required to realise it. On that day you will go very fast, you will advance with giant strides.... Perhaps, as I said, that day has come now after five years? I said, “I give you five years....” Now the five years have passed, so perhaps the day has come! Perhaps you will suddenly feel an *irresistible* need not to live in unconsciousness, in ignorance, in that state in which you do things without knowing why, feel things without understanding why, have contradictory wills, understand nothing about anything, live only by habit, routine,

reactions—you take life easy. And one day you are no longer satisfied with that.

It depends, for each one it is different. Most often it is the need to know, to understand; for some it is the need to do what must be done as it should be done; for others it is a vague feeling that behind this life, so unconscious, so futile, so empty of meaning, there is something to find which is *worth* being lived—that there is a reality, a truth behind these falsehoods and illusions.

One suddenly feels that everything one does, everything one sees, has no meaning, no purpose, but that *there is* something which has a meaning; that essentially one is here on earth for something, that all this—all these movements, all this agitation, all this wastage of force and energy—all that must have a purpose, an aim, and that this uneasiness one feels within oneself, this lack of satisfaction, this need, this *thrust* for something must lead us somewhere else.

And one day, you ask yourself, “But then, why is one born? Why does one die? Why does one suffer? Why does one act?”

You no longer live like a little machine, hardly half-conscious. You want to feel truly, to act truly, to know truly. Then, in ordinary life one searches for books, for people who know a little more than oneself, one begins to seek somebody who can solve these questions, lift the veil of ignorance. Here it is very simple. You only have to... do the things one does every day, but to do them with a purpose.

You go to the Samadhi, look at Sri Aurobindo’s picture, you come to receive a flower from me, sit down to a lesson; you do everything you do but... with one question within you: *Why?*

And then, if you ask the question, you receive the answer.

Why?

Because we don’t want life as it is any longer, because we don’t want falsehood and ignorance any longer, because we don’t want suffering and unconsciousness any longer, because we do not want disorder and bad will any longer, because Sri Aurobindo has come to tell us: It is not necessary to leave the earth to find the Truth, it is not necessary to leave life to find one’s soul, it is not necessary to give up the world or to have limited beliefs in order to enter into relation with the Divine. The Divine is everywhere, in everything, and if He is hidden... it is because we do not take the trouble to discover Him.

We can, simply by a sincere aspiration, open a sealed door in us and find... that Something which will change the whole significance of life, reply to all our questions, solve all our problems and lead us to the perfection we aspire for without knowing it, to that Reality which *alone* can satisfy us and give us lasting joy, equilibrium, strength, life.

All this you have heard many a time.

You have heard it—Oh! there are even some here who are so used to it that for them it seems to be the same thing as drinking a glass of water or opening a window to let in the sunlight.

But since I promised you that in five years you would be able *to live* these things, to have a concrete, real, convincing experience of them, well, that means you ought to be ready and that we are going to begin.

We have tried a little, but now we are going to try seriously!

The starting-point: to want it, truly want it, to need it. The next step: to think, *above all*, of that. A day comes, very quickly, when one is unable to think of anything else.

That is the one thing which counts. And then...

One formulates one's aspiration, lets the true prayer spring up from one's heart, the prayer which expresses the sincerity of the need. And then... well, one will see what happens.

Something will happen. Surely something will happen. For each one it will take a different form.

That's all. I am glad you gave me this.¹

(*Questions and Answers 1958*, pp 372-75)

¹ Editor's Note Perhaps the reference is to the text of 15 July 1958, brought by a child, which had said that the Mother would give the children lessons on spiritual life after five years. The text was shown during the earlier part of this Talk, a preliminary part omitted here.

THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

IN THE LIGHT OF HER PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of July 1989)

THE essence of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's philosophy and yoga is "transformation". It is the key-word of the total evolutionary process for which she worked hard. For that she was required to keep a constant and definitive union with the Divine. But union with the Divine is not her only mission. She plunged into the dark depths of Matter. That is why the "Yoga of Transformation" is a long-time arduous task. But its result is certain and inevitable. From her *Prayers and Meditations* we can get glimpses of her work and mission

Her Prayer dated January 22, 1916 runs:

"Thou hast taken entire possession of this miserable instrument and if it is not yet perfected enough for Thee to complete its transformation, its transmutation, Thou art at work in each one of its cells to knead it and make it supple and enlighten it, and in the whole being, to arrange, organise and harmonise it. Everything is in movement, everything is changing; Thy divine action makes itself felt as an ineffable spring of a purifying fire that circulates through all the atoms. And this flowing spring has brought into the being an ecstasy more marvellous than any it had ever felt before: thus to Thy action there answers the aspiration of that on which Thou workest and the aspiration is all the more ardent because the instrument has seen itself as it really is in all its infirmity

"O Lord, I implore Thee, hasten the blessed day when the divine miracle will be accomplished, hasten the day of the realisation of the Divine upon earth "

She further comments in her Prayer dated November 24, 1931, about her work of transformation in the abyss and about the sacrifice she has gladly made for the final achievement. The words of the Mother are as follows:

"O my Lord, my sweet Master, for the accomplishment of Thy Work I have sunk down into the unfathomable depths of Matter, I have touched with my finger the horror of the falsehood and the inconscience, I have reached the seat of oblivion and a supreme obscurity. But in my heart was the Remembrance, from my heart there leaped the call which could arrive to Thee: Lord, Lord, everywhere Thy enemies appear triumphant; falsehood is the monarch of the world; life without Thee is a death, a perpetual hell; doubt has usurped the place of Hope and revolt has pushed out Submission; Faith is spent. Gratitude is not born; blind passions and murderous instincts and a guilty weakness have covered and stifled Thy sweet law of love. Lord, wilt Thou permit Thy enemies to prevail, falsehood and ugliness and suffering to triumph? Lord, give the command to conquer and victory will be there. I know we are unworthy, I know the world is not yet ready. But I cry to Thee with an absolute faith in Thy Grace and I know that Thy Grace will save."

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

VIGNETTES OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

Compiler's Note

I thank all my readers for the warm welcome they have given to the book, Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Vol. 1, which came out on 21 February 1989. Here is a rare vignette for the sacred month of August from the second volume under compilation.

SHYAM KUMARI

NAGARATNAM'S MEMORIES OF SRI AUROBINDO

My father used to send me newspaper cuttings from Africa with news of Sri Aurobindo's activities. I met Sri Aurobindo in 1911: I was eleven years old at the time. When Sri Aurobindo would stand on the balcony of his house in Mission Street I would go after my school hours, do *namaskar* and depart. I did this for six months, after which one day he called me. From the balcony he gave me a sign. When I went in, he asked me why I had been visiting him daily. I replied that it was because of his greatness and that I wanted to be with him all the time. He said, "No, no, not so soon." But I got permission from my mother and kept on visiting him every day. Soon the Government started following me as Sri Aurobindo had been a political leader. Then my mother was unwilling to let me join him.

At that time there were only four people with Sri Aurobindo: Bijoy, Moni, Nolini and Sourin. I was a pet of Bijoy's. My sister joined me and started playing with Sri Aurobindo. This went on from 1912 to 1914. In the latter year he moved to François Martin Street. Straight from school my sister used to come and clean Sri Aurobindo's room. She once asked him, "Babu, how is it that you keep your room so untidy?" He used to smoke cigars. Sometimes I would prepare tea and give it to him. One day all the four youngsters who were staying with him played hockey and a pebble hit by a hockey-stick struck me. I started to bleed. My sister cried out, "What, Babu? They are killing my brother!"

Babu was always writing or walking up and down on the balcony. We had a father-and-child relationship. His birthday was like a family festival for all of us. He is said to have himself made *laddoos* to send to our house. Mine was the first garland to go to him on that day.

Babu had two dogs when he was in Mission Street. My sister used to ask him for Murunka Keena. Babu would pick all kinds of grasses and tomatoes in the garden and ask my sister to prepare chutney for him. In 1925 I was in touch with him every day. The Mother who had settled down from 1920 would often bring us coffee or tea from 14 rue Sevroi to Sri Aurobindo's residence and serve us at the table. We would meditate around the table at 5 o'clock. Nambier, Dorai-

swamy, Chattopadhyaya and several others used to come from Madras. All of them would stay with me and then go to see Sri Aurobindo. Amrita came along with me—we both were students of Calvé College. He passed his Matric but could not get a job and hence came away. Great leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Moonje came to my house. Before the Mother's arrival everyone had to go to Sri Aurobindo through me.

Once there was a big cyclone. When I went to see Sri Aurobindo I noticed that everything had been shattered. I inquired about the Mother. Sri Aurobindo asked me to go and see her. She was residing in the central hall of her house. We realised that it was not safe for the Mother to be there under such conditions, so we brought her to 14 rue François Martin. Paul Richard went away to the North and the Mother came to this new house.

Sri Aurobindo never sat down to take any posture for doing Yoga. He simply walked or wrote. His door was never locked. Occasionally I used to correct the proofs of his writings. Every evening he would meditate at 5 o'clock. The Mother would come. Bharati and some others also came and meditated sitting around the table with Babu, not on the floor. He never talked about Sadhana to me. I was following another system, *i.e.*, Siddhi Marg. Being Sri Aurobindo's favourite, I was once arrested and imprisoned for fifteen days. Bharati was in the habit of speaking about national politics with Sri Aurobindo. V. V. S. Iyer used to come. When C. R. Das came I was deputed to bring him from Tindivanam. Sri Aurobindo usually did not go out. Afterwards he began to go to the Mother's house and dine there at night. Once or twice he went to the Pondicherry station to see someone off.

(Courtesy: Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

YOU have asked me to clarify Sri Aurobindo's statement: "... to be able to take, without insistence or seeking, any food given and to find in it (whether pronounced good or bad by others) the equal *rasa*, not of the food for its own sake, but of the universal Ananda."¹

The words "any food" have puzzled you. They imply that we must get rid of preference for a particular stuff to eat or for a special style of cooking. A certain equanimity should be there and an inner feeling that whatever has come on the table has come from the Divine and is an expression of the Divine's undiminishable-delight in all that He has made. An attempt to participate in that delight would constitute "the equal *rasa*", the self-same enjoyment, spoken of by Sri Aurobindo. He wants us to get over the usual habit of the palate, the likes and dislikes of the tongue. He does not encourage us, as you seem to think, to test ourselves by going in for what is considered unwholesome food and taking it in an undisturbed way. Some hygienic sense has to be present, but in case we get something unpleasant and we need to eat it in order to have sustenance, we should have no shrinking. Surely we should not compel ourselves to seek it out. Furthermore, when we set it aside in any situation, the setting aside should be done on hygienic grounds, with a calm mind, and not because of a vitalistic reaction. What Sri Aurobindo means is that our usual likes and dislikes should be transcended and eating done with a quiet attitude and a movement of aspiration towards the Divine through whatever is set before us.

Knowing what both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have taught, I would add that food has to be taken with a gesture of inner offering of it to the Divine and of praying that it may go to the growth of His Consciousness within us.

If something is cooked in a slipshod way we may seek to correct the way, but everything must be done without the ordinary sensational response. Sri Aurobindo always said that cooking should be done cleanly and efficiently, but we are not supposed to fly into a temper if there is a mistake.

Sri Aurobindo's statements must always be understood as advising *samatā* and a healthy confrontation of circumstances. Extremist interpretations would be out of tune with the supreme poise and the profound insight as well as the highly inspired common sense that are behind his pronouncements.

Apropos of the subject of food I may recall some words of the Mother. When, after six and a half years of Ashram life with its vegetarian regime I went to Bombay for a short stay, I asked the Mother how I should live there—what my attitude should be to food and drink. She said: "Live as people in Bombay do. Don't do anything unusual." True, the Mother enjoined vegetarianism on the

¹ Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol 24, p 1468

Ashram, but she had no rigidity of mind. She never made a fad out of vegetarianism, least of all believed like some people that by being strictly vegetarian they were *ipso facto* more spiritual. There can be greed for food even in a vegetarian. It is this greed that is primarily banned in the spiritual life—and, along with greed, marked preferences. The Mother has disapproved of “the constant thinking by people of what they will eat and when they will eat and whether they are eating enough”. To conquer the greed for food, she wants “an equanimity in the being” to be developed.² She has also recommended the attitude: “I eat what I am given, and I don’t bother about it.”³ As for non-vegetarian food, she has freely allowed a fixed quota of eggs. If really from the point of view of health something other even than eggs is necessary she has put no bar. In a case of persistent diarrhoea she is known to have ordered a certain type of fish, called “sole”, to be cooked according to her directions and given to the sufferer. It is amusing to recount how insistent she was. When the girl told the Mother that she could not bear the smell of the fish given to her and had vomited, the Mother said: “You vomited? All right, then vomit—and then go back and sit down and finish it. Each time you vomit go back to eat.”⁴

In general, the Mother has said: “Everything is allowed. I haven’t refused meat to one who needed it. There were people who ate it because they needed it. But if someone comes asking me for something just in order to satisfy a desire, I say ‘No’, whatever it may be, even ice-cream!”⁵

Lastly, there is a point worth noting. The Mother has remarked: “For an ordinary man, living an ordinary life, having ordinary activities, . . . it is all right for him to eat anything at all, whatever agrees with him, whatever does him good. But if one wishes to pass from this ordinary life to a higher one, the problem begins to become interesting; and if, after having come to a higher life, one tries to prepare oneself for the transformation, then it becomes very important. For there certainly are foods which help the body to become subtle and others which keep it in a state of animality. But it is only at that particular time that this becomes very important, not before; and before reaching that moment, there are many other things to do. Certainly it is better to purify one’s mind and purify one’s vital before thinking of purifying one’s body. For even if you take all possible precautions and live physically taking care not to absorb anything except what will help to subtilise your body, if your mind and vital remain in a state of desire, inconscience, darkness, passion and all the rest, that won’t be of any use at all. Only, your body will become weak, dislocated from the inner life and one fine day it will fall ill.”⁶

² *Health and Healing in Yoga*—Selections from the Writings and Talks of the Mother (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1979), p 187

³ *Ibid* , p 189

⁴ *Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* Three Hundred and Sixty True Stories. Compiled by Shvami Kumari (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1989), p 112

⁵ *Health and Healing* p 196 ⁶ *Ibid* , p 197

The point I would like you to note is that as we are pretty far from the stage when bodily transformation begins to be a concrete fact, it is absurd to make much of small deviations in food from the Ashram regime. "Oh, he is sometimes taking fish, he goes in occasionally even for meat"! This kind of exclamation must wait for a long while indeed to become relevant and carry significance. Surely the inner life can be as intense with these "lapses" or "peccadillos" as without them. But, of course, one must not veer in the opposite direction and cock a snook at the Ashram regime, as if it were a mere superficiality, a sheer superfluity to be waved away in favour of an "uncharted freedom". I am only having a dig at long faces of disapproval on the slightest pretext. The Mother puts everything right when she says: "One must begin from above, first purify the higher and then purify the lower. I am not saying that one must indulge in all sorts of degrading things in the body That's not what I am telling you. Don't take it as an advice not to exercise control over your desires! It isn't that at all. But what I mean is, do not try to be an angel in the body if you are not already just a little of an angel in your mind and vital; for that would dislocate you in a different way from the usual one, but not one that is better. We said the other day that what is most important is to keep the equilibrium. Well, to keep the equilibrium everything must progress at the same time."

The two master-words in regard to food as in regard to everything else are: "equilibrium" and "equanimity," a sense of balance and proportion, a sense of poised detachment. (5.5.1989)

*

You have asked me in your letter of March 24: "How should I tackle objections—some from members of my own family—to my interest in the Aurobindonian Yoga which they think more akin to Hinduism, when in their opinion the religion into which I was born shows the easier way?"

What is meant by "the easier way"? One does not adopt a way just because it is easier. One goes after what one considers a greater Light, as you yourself term what is "being set forth in all the books received from the Ashram". Perhaps the members of your family mean the lack of necessity according to them to go after another "religion" than the one revealed to one's ancestors and in which one has grown up. But they overlook an important historical fact.

From time to time spiritual teachers who have entered into a more than human consciousness appear on earth. If we stick always to the religion into which we were born, no such teacher would be able to get a following. When Jesus appeared, what would have been his effect if everyone had insisted on sticking to Moses? Or—to be more relevant to your case—in Mohammed's time, would there have been any Islam if people had clung to the religion prevalent

⁷ *Ibid*, pp 197-98

among the Arabs in that period? We have to be plastic to new messages.

Then there is another point. Sri Aurobindo is not only one more teacher with direct spiritual experience: he is also quite evidently a master of the widest spirituality compassed so far on earth. I am a Zoroastrian by birth, a member of the Parsi community. Compared to what Sri Aurobindo discloses, Zoroastrianism is elementary. And, in the light of my study, so too is every other religion of the past. Hinduism itself, though providing a background to Sri Aurobindo, falls short in spite of its admirably broad outlook. When I finished reading for the first time *The Life Divine*, which seems to be your own favourite, the impact of its multi-dimensional knowledge conveyed in a language of unflinching inspiration—at once precise, sweeping, symphonic—was such that I could not help crying to myself: “The author of this book must be the author of the universe!”

You have asked about having a guru from amongst your associates for practical day-to-day spiritual guidance. This is a ticklish business. If there is an Aurobindonian who is sufficiently immersed in the Integral Yoga, you may seek his help and advice. But to open yourself to somebody out of tune with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is not a prospect I would encourage. Of course, one may always take an example from whoever you feel is leading a more-than-ordinary life of the inner consciousness, but you should be careful to note that the person is not entrenched bigotedly in any presently prevalent system of creed and dogma and ritual. The living awareness of someone consciously leading a spiritual life is always a help, but how will you find among your associates a companion with an inner wideness, an inner freedom from current religiosity? An open-minded, deep-hearted aspirant towards spiritual light can alone be of genuine assistance to you. The best way is to feel more and more the subtle presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother within you and around you and above you. Their books are the best guru.

The ending of your letter is indeed poetic: “We are into another Iranian New Year. Our old year climaxed with several falls of abundant snow and the mountains around here still keep their wonderful pure whiteness, which is all so calm and helps the inner calm too. With God’s help and protection always things move along well and hopefully for us all to vistaed futures for which we long and pray always.”

(April 1989)

*

Your wise as well as witty remarks about “thrice-blessed stumbles” and about “rogues and scoundrels” fathering saints in themselves reminds me of Oscar Wilde’s epigram: “Every saint has a past. Every sinner has a future.” There is also the great Christian theme of “Felix Culpa”—“the Happy Blunder”, “the Fortunate Fall” of Adam without which there would have been no need for a Saviour to come on earth, for the “Son of God” to visit man’s world in order to

atone for the “Original Sin”. I recall too a poem of Longfellow’s which begins—

Saint Augustine! well hast thou said
 That of our vices we can frame
 A ladder, if we will but tread
 Beneath our feet each deed of shame—

and ends:

Standing on what too long we bore
 With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
 We may discern, unseen before,
 A path to higher destinies.

Nor deem the irrevocable Past
 As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
 If, rising on its wrecks, at last
 To something nobler we attain.

You have very well put a certain aspect of the situation between us all and our gracious Gurus, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: “Once a stray thought occurred to me to the effect: ‘What if *They* desert me?’ Immediately a response arose from within: ‘But I will never desert *Them*.’ And something within me laughed. If we are hopelessly captive to the Divine, one senses in an infallible way that the Divine is equally captive to us.” This shows admirable insight and amounts to that well-known and deeply reassuring statement by Sri Aurobindo: “He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite.”

My own dealing with this problem in the past had a slightly different shade. When I first left Pondicherry for a visit to Bombay—after six and a half years of unbroken stay in the Ashram—I told the Mother: “I have only one prayer to make. Even if, by any chance, I am tempted to move away from you, please never give me up, keep always your hold on me.” Very benignly the Mother smiled and said: “I am like a fairy godmother. Whatever you pray for I can grant. If you want me to set you free of me, I can do so. But if you wish me to keep always my hold on you, I will never give you up.” And indeed she kept her hand fast on me and, through hell and hot water, brought me home again. Not only on that occasion but whenever I left Pondicherry—and the last time I did so I stayed away for sixteen years, excepting a few short visits back—the link between the Mother and me never broke although outwardly I may be said to have strayed from the Path and got myself entangled in “mortal coils”. Throughout those sixteen years my contact with my Gurus remained firm and both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother treated me as if I had been sitting at their feet every

moment. Once when there was a fairly long interval of non-communication by letters after an illness of mine, Sri Aurobindo went out of his way to write me a letter which in addition to its momentous opening part in relation to me—a colossal though tiny-seeming act of Grace—may be quoted *in extenso* for its remarks on a very promising young Englishman (soon to get killed in World War II) whose letter and picture had been sent from Cambridge by my younger brother, as well as for its sidelight on the Ashram at the time and the slowly developing *Savitri*, instalments of which Sri Aurobindo had been sending me privately when I had been in Pondicherry. The letter's last para is a simple spontaneous gesture of the Master's compassion for ailing humanity. Here is the whole document:

Pondicherry
13.1.39

Amal

I write to get news about your progress in recovery—I hear that you are better. I hope you can confirm it.

I have not yet been able to answer Homi's letter. You can tell him from me that the Mother and I were both extremely well-impressed by Bosanquet's photograph which shows a remarkable personality and great spiritual possibilities. I may be able to write about his (Bosanquet's) letter in a few days. If he comes here, we shall be glad to give him help in his spiritual aspiration.

There is nothing much to say in other matters. The Ashram increases always, but its finances are as they were, which is a mathematical equation of doubtful validity and is not so much an equation as an equivocal.

I have done an enormous amount of work with *Savitri*. The third section has been recast—not rewritten—so as to give it a more consistent epic swing and amplitude and elevation of level. The fourth section, the Worlds, is undergoing transformation. The "Life" part is in a way finished, though I shall have to go over the ground perhaps some five or six times more to ensure perfection of detail. I am now starting a recasting of the "Mind" part of which I had only made a sort of basic rough draft. I hope that this time the work will stand as more final and definitive.

In sending news of yourself, you will no doubt send news of your mother also. I saw a notice of a remedy (in the *Matin*) for hernia which they say has succeeded in America and is introduced in France, very much resembling the defunct Doctor's discovery¹ (the one who treated Lalita's father), but perhaps more assuredly scientific, it is reported to get rid for good of belts and operations and to have made millions of cures. It will be a

¹ Sri Aurobindo's actual written word was "recovery"—quite obviously a slip of the pen in the context—I also personally know what the Doctor was at

great thing for many if it turns out to be reliable.

SRI AUROBINDO

Pertinent to the first para of this letter is a communication from the Mother at a time when I was in two minds about my return to the Ashram. The communication is most memorable for resolving the perplexity in which I had been struggling. She wrote on a Darshan day:

24.4.39

Amal, my dear child,
Blessings of the day.

Just received your letter of 21st; it came to me directly (without the words) three days ago, probably when you were writing it, and my silent answer was categorical: remain there until the necessity of being here will become so imperative that all else will completely lose all value for you.

My answer now is exactly the same. I want only to assure you that we are not abandoning you and that you will always have our help and protection.

With our love and blessings.

Mira

Today is April 20. Four days ahead is again April 24, fifty years after this letter. The letter brings forward three truths. One is that the Mother's consciousness could catch our thoughts and feelings at any distance without any verbal transmission by us. Secondly, she wanted our choice of the spiritual life to be not only free but also whole-hearted. In the third place, her Grace, extending to us help and protection, could not be accounted for by our small-sighted vision: it did not depend on surface circumstances but acted from its own absolute depths of light.

When I look back, the numberless acts of Grace during that half-century from 24.4.39 crowd upon my memory. After the accident to Sri Aurobindo's right leg on the night of November 23, 1938, all correspondence with him was stopped except in the case of Dilip Kumar Roy and myself. We were allowed to keep writing to him up to the time he left his body. Through Nirod he replied to every letter from me and commented on whatever poetry or prose I sent him. Not only spiritual questions but also literary ones drew him out. The two longest letters I ever got from him were discussions on poetic problems, one of twenty typed sheets and the other of twenty-four—both received during my supposedly renegade stay in Bombay!

How steadily the inner contact with him and the Mother persisted may be guessed from a statement she made in one of her twice-weekly talks at the Playground to the Ashram children. On 23 December 1953 she spoke about

accidents and how their damage get minimised if one is constantly in touch with her through the “consciousness” remaining “wide-awake” and “in contact with one’s psychic being”. In the course of her talk she said: “I knew someone who, indeed, should have died and did not die because of this. For his consciousness reacted very fast. He had taken poison by mistake: instead of taking one dose of a certain medicine, he had taken twelve and it was a poison; he should have died, the heart should have stopped (it was many years ago) and he is still quite alive! He reacted in the right way. If these things were narrated they would be called miracles. They are not miracles: it is an awakened consciousness.”

The letter I have quoted from Sri Aurobindo indicates what the Mother meant by “many years ago”. The “mistake” of which she speaks occurred about six months before that letter of 12.1.39. How serious it was may be understood from the fact that the Mother’s mention of twelve times the dose was a slip due perhaps to the information given to her years earlier that the normal dose of the potent drug was one-twelfth of a grain. Under a misconception I had taken four grains, a dose forty-eight times the normal quantity! According to the heart-specialist Dr. Gilder, one-time attendant of Mahatma Gandhi, this was four times the dose prescribed to stimulate a horse.

The Mother has referred to the consciousness being awake and surely the sense of her presence has to be there for extraordinary interventions by her to take place, but where I am concerned I would attribute them not so much to her being in my consciousness as to my being in hers in continuous response to that earnest appeal of mine to her: “Please never give me up.” It is easy for me to think of you as saying to yourself: “I will never desert *Them*.” You are, psychologically, a strongly built person. Mentally and morally you are master of yourself. I am not making out of you a paragon incapable of any slip, but centrally you have a solid, determined character with the will-power to carry out whatever you plan. You have certainly an artistic and literary side too, but they don’t make for any marked weakness or variability. I am by nature a denizen of the Latin Quarter—extremely susceptible, chameleonish, a-moral (that is, free from conventional rules), a predominantly artistic nature, though luckily lacking in the so-called “artistic temperament” which means really a creature of moods, irresponsible, swayed by every gust of circumstance. The chameleon in me is receptive and responsive to all kinds of life’s demands and can adapt itself to diverse calls and needs of people and feel at home in the strangest of situations, but it is never prone to misunderstanding, never easily hurt, never wrapped up in its own likes and dislikes, never fickle in friendship, as is the temperament usually ascribed to the artist nature. The freedom from such a temperament has helped my attempt as a sadhak to move towards an equanimity which would have no personal reaction, no twinge of resentment, no impulse of retaliation, no shadow of frustration. But whatever degree of equanimity I may have caught from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the person who went out of the Ashram’s

precincts and lived in Bombay for years was exposed in the sensational part of him to life's "glamours" as much as any dweller on the Left Bank of the Seine. Yet all the time the Mother's assurance that she would ever keep her grip on him was like a secret flame in him burning always upward. So sure he was of her clasp that he ran blithely into danger zones and came out essentially unscathed. The Mother had at last to pull him up and tell him: "We have saved you again and again, but don't exploit our protection as you have been doing."

I have written at some length in an autobiographical vein just to contrast my weakness with your strength. I am not making a brief for my turn of character—nor do I mean by speaking of my non-retaliatory attitude that you should not fight against the varied infamy you find rampant in places. Follow your own heroic *dharma*.
(19.4.1989)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

THY VISIT IN MY DREAM

MADONNA sweet and tender,
Radiant Goddess of spring,
I wished to fly to Thee
But had no plume or wing.
I lay upon my couch
And closed my eyes to dream
And lo! I found Thee near
So winsome, full of gleam.
I listened to Thy songs
Which sang of Love divine,
I merged in Thy melody,
And drank its mystic wine!
I wish this dream comes true,
My heart be Thy abode
That Thou mayst lead me quickly
To Thy wondrous Rapture: GOD.

DEVAKI NANDAN

THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the issue of July 1989)

The Mother's Message

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



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DECEMBER 1960 came with a slight spell of coolness.

On the 2nd the Mother wrote a letter in answer to mine:

“My dear little child Huta

I quite understand that you want to explain yourself and that you have things important to say, and on my side I am quite ready to listen to what you have to say

“But as you know, these days are very busy and for the moment I cannot give you time in the morning; but I shall always be happy to see you in the afternoon.

“However, as soon as I have time, I shall let you know.

“With all my love and blessings.”

The 10th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's passing was on the 5th. There was a general meditation in the Ashram. As always I sat in the Meditation Hall upstairs—opposite the Mother's chair—on the threshold of the small room where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had given Darshan in earlier days.

Just before 10 a.m. the Mother in a white robe entered the Hall and sat on her chair.

After half an hour's meditation she departed to her room.

In the afternoon she saw the new Dairy Farm at Aryan Kuppam and then went to the flower-show at the Lefaucheur gardens

*

On the 8th the Mother sent me a note:

“Huta, my dear little child

I shall see you on the 18th, Sunday, at 10 a.m.

“With my love and blessings.”

The next morning once again there was a meditation. This time the Mother came down and sat in her chair which was placed on the veranda—near the door facing the Samadhi.

She was deep in meditation. The atmosphere was packed with silence and serenity. I was sitting close to her chair. The sweet warmth of her soothing vibrations lulled me. So automatically my eyes shut in sheer drowsiness

The Mother went upstairs to her dressing room after the meditation. I followed her quietly, but stood in the passage near the room. I was shocked to hear her loud voice addressing Dyuman and Vasudha regarding her ornaments and money. During that period the Ashram was going through tremendous financial difficulties. The Mother had already sold in 1952 all the jewellery offered to her by the devotees. And this was her last lot.

My heart was wrung with sorrow. Soon I retraced my steps and left

Later Vasudha told me in detail all that the Mother had said to them with a gesture:

“Take it, now nothing is left except my flesh and bones”

Hot tears surged in my eyes. I could not help it—I myself was going through a money-crisis for sometime—I did not have a single paise with me. The Mother was aware of it. Perhaps this too was part of the preparation of my being. Everything evoked a million echoes of the past—my girlhood, the carefree sheltered life with my parents.

Painful thoughts frequently thronged my brain producing a state of bewildering confusion. They reverted to the same problems.

A nagging anxiety rose in me—my nerves were torn to pieces—I felt as if I were alone groping to find my way in the shuddering darkness. A thousand doubts and queries assailed me.

I was exhausted. Often I wished to leave my burdensome body and find relief in nothingness.

I had not been able to sleep. I lay awake hour after hour, haunted, tormented, and then drifted into queer disturbing dreams with mingled fantasy and images of reality.

The nauseating sensation of a deep unease returned again and again to gnaw at my stomach. I felt sick as though sinking into a fathomless pit of the subconscious.

The Mother came out every morning on the first-floor balcony. People assembled on the street below to have her Darshan. I hardly went there. What an infernal fool I was!

The adverse forces assaulted me through people, situations and surroundings. The cruel, heedless forces swarmed over my consciousness like maggots on meat. They gave me the creeps.

Moreover, the Mother was totally silent about the *Savitri* paintings. What should I do? My life seemed without an aim.

My whole being flared up in revolt. I wrote to the Mother to cancel the interview, because interviews with her would not solve my dilemma, I thought.

When 18 December approached I rushed upstairs. But unhappily the Mother was busy with other people. The time given to me slipped by. I went home, disappointed, depressed.

In answer to my letter the Mother wrote:

“My dear little child Huta

You wrote to me, ‘Please cancel the interview, I am not well’ and you added some sentences which could leave no doubt about your feelings.

“Naturally, I thought you meant it, and as many people are waiting to see me and you were not there at 10 this morning, I saw the person who was waiting.

“I heard that you had come only after you had gone, otherwise I would have seen you very willingly.

“With my love and blessings.”

I knew there were so many claims on the Mother's time. Yet I longed to see her. For I realised nobody else was there for me to turn to and confide my woe.

Life was too boring, too disgusting. I wanted very much to withdraw. I expressed my feeling to the Mother. She answered:

“Huta, my dear little child,

It is your full right to refuse to live in this world if you do not like it.

But to get out of it, is not so easy as you think. Death is not the solution, far from it. Death is a clumsy and mechanical return to the endless round of existences, and what you have not achieved in one life, you have to do in the second, generally in much more difficult circumstances. The feelings that are weighing upon you now are surely the result of a previous failure. And if, once more, you accept the defeat, next time it will surely be still worse.

There is only one way of getting free from life altogether, it is to go to Nirvana; and this can be obtained only by a very strict tapasya of complete detachment.

There is also another and more simple way of getting out of trouble, it is to take refuge in the Divine's love.

With my blessings.”

Still the notion of death was hovering in my mind. The life I had accepted was exceedingly tough. I was entangled in a web of psychological struggle.

The following morning the Mother called me to the Meditation Hall upstairs and made me understand the truth of life. Later I noted down what she had said and sent it to her for confirmation. Here is the talk:

“Child, you must be obstinate. You see, the Supreme Lord Himself is very obstinate. He persists in His aim of taking away all obscurity, inertia and unhappiness from human beings and making them perfect. This process goes on in an endless cycle. He does not change human beings suddenly. Everything has its own time.

Failure always comes in human life but even he who fails can go one step forward to his goal. Not a single person can escape from misery, difficulty and failure.

A few people seem highly educated and intellectual, they are praised by many for their remarkable work and success, but, after all, these ‘wise’ people are full of ignorance, and in the end they fail to achieve their goal.

A person gets married, has children and all the rest, yet he is not happy at all. At the end he falls into the chasm of death and again he comes into this world. This goes on, and on, and on until he finds the Truth.

This world is the only place where man can progress and lessen the

burden of his past life and present life and get ready for the next more fortunate birth to find something higher and more beautiful. It is only here in this world that you are given the opportunity to progress towards the Eternal.

I have seen many other worlds, which are dull, grey and full of darkness, where people are bored and are groping to find happiness.

I know the beginning of the world and its end up to Eternity.

Your failure is that of your past birth and not of your present birth. Failure is nothing but a step forward to your success. You will have to dig in each step carefully and set your feet firmly and proceed in future to the Truth. But you must be obstinate.

The Highest cannot be realised until one becomes perfect. It takes year after year, century after century. However, you must be obstinate like the Supreme Lord. Be more and more obstinate in front of your own defects.

Life is not so simple and straight. It is like the waves of an ocean.

Do not care about what people say. They are ignorant—their judgment leads you nowhere.

Remain in the Vastness of the Supreme Love, Truth, Light and Peace.

This is the Law of the Supreme.”

The same truth is expressed in the closing verses of Sri Aurobindo’s powerful symbolic poem *To the Sea*:

“Take me, be
My way to climb the heavens, thou rude great sea.
I will seize thy mane,
O lion, I will tame thee and disdain;
Or else below
Into thy salt abysmal caverns go,
Receive thy weight
Upon me and be stubborn as my Fate.
I come, O Sea,
To measure my enormous self with thee.”

On the 25th the Mother went to the Ashram Theatre to celebrate Christmas and handed to everyone a gift with her love and blessings.

*

Days passed rapidly. Now it was the last day of December. The Mother saw me in the afternoon and gave me her photograph in which she looks up. She assigned to the picture the meaning: “Realisation.” After pointing to the pose she advised:

“Child, you see, here I look upward. I always do so. Beauty, Peace and Light are there above. They are ready to come down. Aspire always by looking up to them to manifest upon earth.

Never, never look down at the filth of falsehood—the ugly things of the world.

Look upward with me and there you will find the Supreme Truth.”

With these luminous words came the end of the year 1960.

END OF VOLUME THREE

(To be continued)

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NOTE

One of the most devoted workers in the cause of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Prapatti, originally Kangali Charan Pati, passed away in Pondicherry at 8.40 a.m. on 28 June. He was born on 30 April 1924 and joined the Ashram on 28 September 1954. An article on him and his work by Ramnath Panda, translated from Oriya into English by Nilima Das, will appear in the September issue of *Mother India*.

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

Author's Introduction

One day after Sri Aurobindo's passing, I had a dream. I saw that quite a number of children of our Ashram from various age-groups had crowded into Sri Aurobindo's room and were looking around with curious eyes. I do not remember if Sri Aurobindo was there or what he was doing. I wondered how they could have trespassed into his privacy. Who could have given them permission? But the children took no notice of my presence and felt quite at ease as if they had done nothing wrong. This spectacle gave me the inspiration to write the book whose first chapter appears below.

At the very doorway of Sri Aurobindo's room, I stopped dumbfounded. He was reclining on his bed with so many little children all around him! What were they doing here? He lay there, gently smiling like a golden god, his upper body bare and beautiful like Shiva's, chatting as if with his closest friends just as he used to with us. But how on earth did they enter this forbidden place? Who let them? Puzzled, I turned to Champaklal who was quietly standing behind Sri Aurobindo. A naughty smile was playing around his mouth, and with every nod of his head his white beard bobbed up and down as if to say—"Did you think Sri Aurobindo was your personal property?"

Baffled, I turned my head to look again at the children. They were not all of the same age, and a few faces were quite familiar. Dressed, some in green shorts and some in red, according to their age groups, they all wore a look of shining calm. Their eyes, specially, were bright with an eager and close expectancy. Sri Aurobindo looked straight in front and his voice was low and soft and quiet. Finally I too joined the children. One of them was saying:

"It seems you have said many beautiful things to others, to grown-ups. Please tell us something too "

"I've spoken all about big things. You wouldn't understand them."

"Then tell us some stories. You have read lots of story books, we're told. Do tell us something from them. Mother has told us so many things. Now it's your turn."

"No, no, no stories," interrupted another young one. "Tell us about your childhood, of when you were like us."

"Oh! that was a long time ago. And how can one remember all about one's childhood? You'll see, when you grow as old as I am, that you too will have forgotten much about today."

"But we'll never forget about our talk with you... By the way, how are we to call you? Mother we call 'Douce Mère (Sweet Mother). Shall we then call you 'Doux Père' (Sweet Father)?"

Sri Aurobindo burst out laughing. "I think you had better ask Mother about that," he said.

"We have heard that you went to England at the age of 7. How could you live there, so far away from your parents? What did you eat? Rice and curry? Do the foreigners eat only beef? Did you have to speak English all the time? Did your teachers beat or scold you?"

"Good Lord! so many questions, all at once! I think I had better start from the beginning. You know, I had a father who was rather special. He had westernised himself completely—in his dress and behaviour and activities... But probably his taste in food was Bengali. He always wore a hat-and-coat and spoke in a clipped accent. Only with the servants did he speak in Hindi and, very seldom, in Bengali. And yet he was a Bengali gentleman. Strange, isn't it? But then, look at me. I'm talking to you in English, yet I have a Bengali name. Actually, he was a doctor with a British medical degree, somewhat like your Dr Sanyal. But Dr. Sanyal is always dressed like a Bengali and speaks like one. My father was completely different. After having lived with the English in England, he had come to believe that they were rather wonderful. And so he decided that he would give his children a completely western upbringing. Therefore he enforced a strict rule—no Bengali in his house, and if one needed to communicate with the servants, it was to be in Hindi. Since my father was a government Civil Surgeon, we had plenty of servants. This reminds me of the poem by Nishikanto—have you read it? 'The King has made you King and given you servants and maids a-plenty'... By the way, you know him, don't you?"

"Of course! We all call him Kabida, since he wanders about with a dreamy look in his eyes, like a poet, and even mutters to himself, sometimes. But tell us about your mother. Did she too speak English?"

"Certainly not. She didn't care at all about these foreign ways. That reminds me of a funny thing that happened once. One day, my elder brother, Manmohan, who loved aping Western manners, dressed up like a pucca boy-Sahib and went to our mother calling her: 'Mummy, mummy!' She was very annoyed, and snapped at him. 'Go to your father and call *him* Daddy. I don't like these ways.' Manmohan's face fell and he went away, very downcast.

But, you know, my father, even though he was every inch a Sahib, loved his motherland very deeply. He wanted her to be great and strong, like the nations of Europe. Also, he never charged the poor when he treated them, and even went out of his way to help them get over their difficulties. They loved him whole-heartedly and called him 'The Lord of Rangpur'. To them, he was greater than any Sahib. You have heard of Rangpur, haven't you? That's where Nolini comes from. From there, the family moved to Khulna, where Sudhir Sarkar

comes from. I have noticed that we have today, in the Ashram, many people who come from Rangpur, Khulna, Calcutta and Gujarat—all places where we had lived.”

“Why is that?”

“Why? Why have you come to me? Take, for instance, Sudhir Sarkar. Do you know him, your Mona-da’s father?”

“Yes. But he’s a bit funny...”

“Funny?”

“He tends to launch himself into long lectures, waving his arms about...”

“Is that so? Well, when I was in prison...”

“In prison?” exclaimed a horrified little girl. “But aren’t prisons places where bad people are put, where thieves and wrong-doers are punished?”

“Well, you may say that I was a wrong-doer since I was charged with treason, that is to say, I rose against the King.”

“Then you must have had to live there like the Kabuliwallah.”

“Who’s that?”

“Don’t you know him? Tagore’s Kabuliwallah? We saw the film.”

“O-o-h! Well, no, it wasn’t quite that hard.”

“How was it then?”

“That’s another story. Let’s come back to ours. Where did we leave off?”

“You said your father had made a strict rule that no one was to speak Bengali.”

“Oh yes! You see, he wanted his sons to become great scholars in English and hoped that some day they would become Magistrates and Judges.”

“Must one speak English from childhood in order to do that?”

“Not really, but perhaps he intended to send his sons to England later and hence the English education. Anyway, he always believed that the Westerners were a superior race in every way, which was why they were ruling the world. And if anyone wanted to become great, the only way was by imitating them. Especially since, in those days, the English were our rulers. In fact, you know, many great people in our country thought the same way in those days, and imitated the foreigners in speech, clothing and manners. People were in awe of them; even the European soldiers and policemen would make them quake. Things have changed now. India is free, maybe it’s even the other way round and we strike fear in the hearts of the white race! But do you know who was the root cause of this change? Bankim. Ever heard of Bankim?”

“We have, we have. He wrote ‘Bande Mataram’, didn’t he? Our band plays that song on Darshan days when Mother takes the salute.”

“The very same Bankim. A great man. You ought to read his ‘Ananda Math’. The Swadeshi Movement in which we all took part came much after him.”

“What’s that?”

"Haven't you heard of the non-violent rebellion of Gandhi? Ours, the Swadeshi revolt, came much earlier. You'll learn about these things when you grow up. That was the reason I was sent to prison. See how fate seems to laugh at us. My father had wanted us to grow into Englishmen and there we were, the very ones who in the end began throwing the English out of the country!... If only you could see how things were in those days. Even boys of your age were all fired with the dream of Freedom..."

"Only boys? Weren't there any girls?"

"No, not really. If there had been some, things would have been much better and freedom come to us much faster. But anyway our mothers and sisters did help us, though in another way. They gave us their little boys. Boys who never ceased to chant 'Bande Mataram' even while the blows from the English canes and batons rained on them. What fiery little ones they were!"

"We've seen them here."

"Where?"

"In the film—'Bagha Jatin', the one who was our Barda's—Tejenda's—father. You too were there in that film, you know. But in it you didn't look half as beautiful—as you really are."

"Is that so? Oh then you know something of the Swadeshi movement already. Yes, Bagha Jatin, was one of the bravest of the brave. But look, we have again strayed from our story."

"That doesn't matter. We know so little of our country too "

"But why? I'm told that Nolini tells you about all this."

"He reads his articles late at night and, because we're too sleepy then, our parents don't always let us attend those classes. And his language is often too difficult for us to follow. Anyway, we're hearing all about it from *you*. Usually we don't get to see you. By the way, we'd like to ask you something. We've heard that you have been living in this room for years, that you never go out: Why is that? Don't you feel bored and lonely?"

"No, not at all. But actually I am not lonely. I have someone with whom, if you ever find that someone, you won't ever want anyone else in the world."

"Who is that? Mother?"

"Yes, Mother."

"But Mother goes out. She plays with us and talks to us. Then why do you stay so aloof? What do you do all day?"

"That's a long story which you will understand when you grow up. In simple words, I am doing this to help you to help the world."

"So you will live like this all your life?"

"No, only till the day you realise the Divine through your earnest efforts of Tapasya. That day I will come out among you."

"Goodness! That's almost impossible. What do we know of tapasya?"

"Tapasya is nothing else but calling the Lord with absolute single-minded-

ness Call Him and tell Him that you want to see Him, to know Him You are children, simple and beautiful within. The Divine will surely answer your heart-felt call. Haven't you heard of Dhruva and Prahlada? Jesus Christ also says that little children come easily to the Lord. Have you heard of him, of Christ?"

"Yes. Didn't they crucify him?"

"Yes. He suffered pain for the sake of the world."

"Did you call the Divine when you were little?"

"No, nobody taught us to do so. Father wished us to become Sahibs and so we did. The day I understood that I must love my motherland and make her great and free, I gave up being a Sahib. Then, again, the moment I realised that Godhead should be our aim, I began trying to obtain it. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell children of even your age—'Call the Mother, make demands on Her. Can She deny or disregard Her own children?' In the same way, you all too should pray to the Mother, ask Her to make you beautiful and pure, that you may love Her and serve Her. Understand? My father never thought of those things. He had only one bee in his bonnet by what means should he make his sons thoroughly westernised so that they might become great. No thought of God in all that. In fact, he didn't believe in God. And his son had to grow up into a Yogi!"

"A Yogi? What's a Yogi?"

"One who realises the Divine or who endeavours single-mindedly to do so."

"What is the Divine like?"

"Like? That's hard to describe, but if one finds Him, all man's sufferings will disappear. Men will love one another, since God is Love."

"Then why did you tell us to love Mother? Is she the Divine?"

"Yes, She is. That's just why you call Her the Divine Mother."

"Why was She born in France? And how did She come here?"

"Ah! that's a very long story. I think I ought to finish my earlier story first—the one which explains how I went to England. I've told you how much my father wanted my brothers and me to grow up into Sahibs. When he found that in spite of everything his efforts were not quite successful, that there were many difficulties in the way, he first packed us off to far-off Darjeeling. We were then 5-6 years old, just like some of you here, who live away from your parents. But then you have found Mother here and live in bliss. Isn't that so?"

"It is."

"We had all British teachers and tutors. There were a few other Indian boys but we hardly knew them. When we went there, we were quite ignorant of almost all Western ways and manners—how to dress or to talk or to eat with knife and fork. Often we spilt our soup down the front of our shirts or almost strangled ourselves trying to wear the tie properly, in short, we were really completely clumsy. How the English boys must have laughed at us! But my brother Manmohan was quite smart, actually. He wasn't ashamed to make mistakes, and even his broken English didn't put him off, he would continue

chattering and talking. I remember something funny about him. One evening, he shut his door before going to bed. A little later, when another boy, who wished to enter the room, too, found the door bolted, he called to my brother to open it. No answer. When the boy insistently beat upon the door, my brother shouted back—"I'm sleeping. Can't get up." " (Laughter)

"Did you have fights with your brothers?"

"I suppose sometimes I did. Don't you? I've a feeling Manmohan couldn't stand being beaten "

"Did you play cricket or football?"

"No. You all here are so lucky. You have been given so many facilities for games and exercises and even boxing and wrestling, and all these things are teaching you so much as well as helping you to grow up healthy and beautiful. But we were not so lucky in our day. It was only study and more study. Maybe a short walk in the evenings. Darjeeling town was, of course, very pretty. You have seen it, haven't you, at least in pictures?"

"Yes, we have, often. And the great snow-piled Himalayas in the background. But the people there are quite strange-looking, in their dress and appearance."

"They are Tibetan, that's why. Nowadays Darjeeling has grown into a big town bustling with people; in those days it was smaller and sat singly on the hillside, wonderful in its natural beauty. Its fruits and flowers, its waterfalls and its bird-song and even the friendly simplicity of its people made a deep impression on our unlettered minds. During my walks in the mornings and evenings, the play of snow and sky on those peaks used to hold me spellbound. I used to feel one with mountain and hill, with earth and trees. The fact that both of us, brothers, grew up later to become poets was helped, I believe, by the Himalayas which etched their poetry on our child-minds.

"But didn't you go home for the holidays?"

"Of course, we did. Sometimes we also went to Deoghar, to my Grandfather's."

"Did you have to speak English even there?"

"Oh no! Grandfather was very patriotic and proud to be an Indian. Not at all like Father. He was called Rishi Rajnarayan Bose and, indeed, he did look like a Rishi, a sage, with his flowing white hair and beard and his ever-smiling face. And he was so learned and wise. He told us so many stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It was he, perhaps, who taught me to know my country and to love God. Sometimes he used to take us out for long walks. One evening, on our way home, it had grown quite dark when suddenly we found that Grandfather had disappeared. "Grandfather, Grandfather," the two of us shrieked, terrified. We turned to look in all directions, then ran back part of the way where we found him standing, fast asleep, like a horse. It was our loud laughter that woke him up.

“My mother’s eldest brother was very fun-loving and mischievous. He loved to tease us. One day, on seeing me dressed in Western clothes, he held up a mirror before me, saying, ‘Isn’t this a perfect monkey?’ I was torn between laughter and anger, but decided somehow to get my own back on him. ‘Right,’ said I to myself, ‘I’ll show you.’ Soon I found my opportunity. I found him shaving in front of the mirror one day and called out, ‘Look, Big Uncle is a big monkey.’ (*Loud Laughter*)

“But in Western clothes you look exactly like a European boy.”

“You think so? How do you know?”

“Why? We’ve got your picture.”

“Oh! that picture! I think that one was taken in England.”

“Do tell us some stories of your life in England.”

“Not today, another time. It’s time for Mother to come now...”

And there She was, entering on the very words. All the children stood up.

“What’s going on? How did you all gather here?” She asked smiling. “Listening to stories, are you? But now it is getting late, you should all be going home.”

“Yes, Mother, but we would like to come again to hear about his life in England.”

Saying so, they all turned towards Sri Aurobindo and slowly filed out of the room. Silently he watched them go, a blessing in his eyes.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

HOW THEY CAME TO THE ASHRAM

20 (*continued*)

Experiences at Tapogiri

I AM just an ordinary devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and my spiritual growth throughout has been very gradual but always progressive since my first special 'Darshan' of the Mother on the 8th December 1966. As a devotee I keep myself open to Her grace sincerely as far as possible.

The year 1984 was a year of turmoil, dismay and full of sad events in my life. I had been craving for a peaceful place where I could spend a long time in meditation keeping myself away from the routine responsibilities of mundane life.

Late in the year 1985 while I was reading a monthly issue of *All India Magazine*, the advertisement regarding Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir, Jwalapur (Hardwar) and Tapogiri—Sri Aurobindo Ashram Centre (Nainital) under the management of Dr. Indra Sen—attracted my notice. The name 'Tapogiri' particularly had so much pull that I decided at once to leave for Hardwar and from there for the Tapogiri Ashram Centre.

I was not at all acquainted with anybody in the managing committee at Jwalapur but even so I wrote straightway to the Secretary informing her of my coming there and fortunately I received a prompt favourable reply.

On reaching Jwalapur in September/October 1985 I stayed a few days at Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir. I was quite charmed by the peaceful and calm atmosphere and felt the presence of the Mother. But due to some circumstances my visit to Tapogiri had to be postponed at that time. The spiritual pull, however, continued to be felt and I waited for another chance.

In May 1988 this pull was very strong and I was quite certain in my mind that this time I would succeed in reaching my desired destination. Although I was informed by the in-charge (Shree Shiv Kumar Khetan) that he was very busy with the Samadhi work for Sri Aurobindo's relics and there was no accommodation, I determined to leave for Tapogiri keeping myself wide open to the grace of the Mother for my successful journey. On reaching Hardwar, I was told that a party headed by Shree Arjun Dev (brother of Dr. Indra Sen) was to leave for Tapogiri on the 18th May 1988. I felt as though the Mother had arranged everything for me and so I was very happy within. I availed myself of this chance provided by the Mother to go to my destination. I did not know anybody in the party leaving for Tapogiri but the feeling that the Mother had arranged all aroused in me a sense of security and safety throughout my journey and stay there.

As our bus was leading towards Ramgarh and then Tapogiri Ashram, I felt a

vast, calm and silent Presence of the Mother, which gradually descended and enwrapped me, filling my inner being with a spiritual joy. On reaching my destination, I became quite certain it was Tapogiri Ashram that formed the spiritual centre of gravity emanating a subtle magnetic force such as I had never experienced anywhere else. I continued to feel the pull till I reached the place ultimately. I have no words to express my feeling of enchantment when I viewed the majestic ranges of hills before me from Tapogiri Ashram Centre.

I had a very comfortable stay there with full care taken by the management throughout my stay from 18th May to 13th June 1988. I had ample time to devote myself to meditation and reading Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's literature. Some of the discussions in the seminar meetings were quite enlightening.

The following are the spiritual visions I had the good fortune to have during my stay at Tapogiri

(i) The Mother in Lakshmi Rupa wearing a banarasi sari, mainly yellow and sometimes pink in colour with a golden crest on her head and a white lotus in her hand was smiling at me, and gave the flower to me. The Mother was sitting amidst the mountain ranges which can be viewed from the Tapogiri Ashram Centre.

The vision continued to appear for the first three or four days during my stay there. It used to fill me with such spiritual ecstasy that I almost lost at that time the consciousness of outer surroundings and could not even move to do *pranam* to the Mother pouring so much grace.

(ii) The Mother with a white turban-like cap and dressed in white salwar and kamiz the same as she used to wear when telling stories to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram children. She was explaining something to me. As I became intent on what she was saying, a huge globe appeared rolling before her. The surface of the globe was very bright and shining but there were many dark patches here and there. The Mother spoke as though saying, "Look! look at these dark patches... do you know how much spiritual force I am pouring out on the world, but there is still coarse rigidity and non-receptivity of the inconscient in the minds of people who are rejecting my spiritual force and therefore not getting transformed."

I remained spellbound till the vision disappeared.

(iii) The Mother again in Lakshmi Rupa, busy plucking various types of flowers of different colours from a river-pond below the hill-ranges. She beckoned me to come nearer and asked me to spread my sari's 'anchal'. As I did so, she gave me all the collected flowers and embraced me. I was enchanted and lost myself in the vision and became completely unaware of the surroundings.

(iv) Two great hands of the Mother... only hands (resembling the Mother's 'mudra' hands) holding a huge hurricane-lamp

She lit the flame inside a glass-chimney carefully and locked the case up with a silver lock. She explained to me as though saying, "That is how the spiritual

flame, once kindled within every being, has to be kept safely so that the flame may continue to burn and not get blown out by disturbances from outer circumstances. And that is not all. The one who leads a spiritual life has to see that the flame radiates through the safety chimney to give light to the darkness, ignorance and inconstancy which are prevailing in the material world ” So saying, she lifted the hurricane-lamp and pointed at the flame of divinity which was burning brightly within the chimney.

On the 13th June 1988, I returned to Jwalapur (Hardwar) and the Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir, stayed there for a few days and attended a collective meditation programme. There also I felt the Mother’s presence but her spiritual waves were radiating from that centre of spiritual gravity, *i.e.*, TAPOGIRI, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Centre.

On the 18th June 1988, I left the Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir, Jwalapur, filled with spiritual bliss and felt I carried within me invaluable spiritual treasures.

May the Tapogiri Ashram Centre develop and flourish in accordance with the spiritually attractive name given to it by the Mother.

Compiled by K

CONVERSATIONS OF THE DEAD

TRANSLATED BY SATADAL FROM THE BENGALI OF
NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

3

Rana Kumbha, Meerabai

Rana Kumbha

MEERA! You are my guru of love. Today I feel no hesitation in bowing down to you.

Meerabai

I too do not feel shy to accept that obeisance, because it is offered to my Lord Krishna.

Rana Kumbha

Meera! you have opened my vision, my heart's door. You have made me understand the true relation between husband and wife, showing me the secret of union of a man and a woman. That is why I am filled with joy today. Today my household has truly become a household, my body truly a body, today all my doubts have come to an end.

Meerabai

It is all the compassion of Radha's Lord. From the very day when the rude and lustful eyes of the emperor had fallen on my mortal beauty, I have understood the futility of a female body. What fiery vigour descended from somewhere and burnt my body-sense completely to ashes—and then made my whole being cool and limpid as if with a soft and soothing unguent! I could no more look upon you as before.

Rana Kumbha

How could this masculine animal body of mine understand that? That's why I have put such a load of sorrow and suffering on you. Taking man's arrogance to be his prestige I have insulted woman's womanhood. You have set me right with the sincerity of your woman-heart by radiating the wondrous light of love. The union of man and woman is not in the body, not in the vital being, not in the mind, not in this world.

Meerabai

That union is in the Divine. Who is man? Who is woman? Who are you? Who am I? Krishna's sweet blue form pervades everywhere and permeates all things.

Nobody exists but He. There is nothing else but He. To look upon this little "I" imprisoned in the body as the self—what a clever spell of that Super-tricky One!

Rana Kumbha

That spell is no longer on us, Meera. How much is man's love and how long does it last? Man's love is a sheer hunger which is easily satiated and, if indulged, causes indigestion. Man's love and woman's are nothing but a greed for possession—the pair trying to swallow each other. A tragic history of human love—excitement, exhaustion, indifference, satiety and quarrel—that's all!

Meerabai

It may be that man and woman want to mingle, mix and fuse with each other—but they do not know how that is possible. So long as man keeps himself confined in man-sense and woman in woman-sense, and strive towards this end, they cannot succeed. When will they realise this simple thing?

Rana Kumbha

You have made my love boundless, Meera. My heart is full, nowhere is there even a little void. You have uplifted me within into your Lord of the gopis—and we two have become one in Him, in His ocean of Delight.

Meerabai

That is why all love should be offered to Him. One should forget oneself and merge in Him. Then it is up to Him to perform His Divine Play.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND THE REALM OF VALUES—A NEEDLESS DICHOTOMY

By C. V. Devan Nair

It seems a paradox. My essay begins at the end. Let me explain. After writing this piece, I asked myself how much of it was my own. The answer was unflattering. Almost nothing. I don't mean that I was a conscious plagiarist, a person who dishonestly passes off as his own the words assembled by another. But none of the words I have marshalled on paper are my own coinage. They come from a lexicon to which I contributed nothing

The ideas came from everything I have read, seen, heard, felt and experienced in the environments I have moved in. Indeed, it's not unreasonable to wonder whether even the thoughts we think are our own. The yogis say they are not. They tell us that all we really do is to receive thoughts of all kinds wandering in the terrestrial atmosphere, give them "a local habitation and a name", and promptly proceed to appropriate them as our own original inventions. We are rather like television sets, in fact, which can receive images originating in several stations elsewhere. Switch on the appropriate channel, and you receive a chain of images telecast from a particular station.

The quality of the TV receiver is, of course, important. If the aerial antennae are inadequate, or not sufficiently high, the number of stations you can switch on to is also limited. Shakespeare, for instance, was a quite extraordinary receiving set with unusual antennae. And so were Plato and Einstein. They were able to switch on to stations normally inaccessible to lesser mortals.

There is one particular station to which I habitually switch on, and which I here most humbly acknowledge. It is the station which houses the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, situated on the heights of consciousness, so much so that a writer reviewing Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, said of its author: "He writes as though he stood among the stars, with the constellations for companions"

The treatment of my subject owes very much to the light cast on it by Sri Aurobindo, especially in his book *The Human Cycle*. Much of what he wrote has become an intimate portion of my own consciousness, and I sometimes am quite unaware that a phrase or expression I use in fact originated with him. Unconscious plagiarism might be excused as a revealing index of a beneficiary's debt to his benefactor. In any case, if there is any coherence in what I write, the credit belongs to Him. The incoherences, you may be sure, are mine.

Let's begin with an Indian tale. I quote it verbatim from the book in which I read it:

"There once was a wicked Maharaja who could not bear to think that anyone was his superior. So he summoned all the pandits of the realm, as was the

practice on momentous occasions, and put to them this question: 'Which of us two is the greater, I or God?' And the pandits shook with fear. Being wise by profession, they asked for time, and then through old habit they clung to their positions and their lives. But they were worthy men who would not displease God; they were therefore deep in grief, when the oldest pandit reassured them: 'Leave it to me, tomorrow I shall speak with the Prince.' The next day, the whole court was gathered in a solemn durbar when the old man quietly arrived, his hands humbly joined together, his forehead smeared with white ashes; he bowed low and pronounced these words: 'O Lord, undoubtedly thou art the greater'—The Prince twirled thrice his moustaches which he wore long and tossed high his head—'Thou art the greater, King, for thou canst banish us from thy kingdom, whilst God cannot; for verily, all is His kingdom and there is nowhere to go outside Him.' "

The significance of this story is crucial to an understanding of the human condition. There is nothing in the world more intractable than the human ego, whether it sports an intellectual, religious, scientific or political garb. In one way or another, we tend to be fanatics of opinion, creed or dogma. We are therefore always erecting barriers where none should exist. For instance, the inner life is regarded as different from the outer life. So we say our prayers one moment, and quarrel and fight with each other the next. Or we live as though Matter and Spirit, Earth and Heaven were eternally separate, mutually incompatible. Are they? In fact, have they ever been separate?

The ancients knew differently. Reverberating down the ages, we hear the calm and great voice of the nameless seer who began the divine *Ishopanishad* with the seminal pronouncement: "*Ishavasyam idam sarvam....*" "All this is for habitation by the Lord...." In other words, there is nothing and nowhere outside His kingdom, for it is as infinite as His universe. And if all this is His habitation, it stands to reason that everything we can think of or imagine, as well as the infinitely more we cannot, is equally a part of the same Divine Habitation which at once embraces and reconciles apparent contraries, like Matter and Spirit, Art and Science, Music and Mathematics, Commissar and Yogi, Marx and Jesus Christ, material measures and spiritual dimensions, secular values and spiritual values, socio-economic development and spiritual progress, our inner lives and our outer lives—all of them merely different facets of the One Reality, or different focal points in one unbroken continuum. Only, most of the time we behave as though these things were entirely independent kingdoms, without reference or relevance to each other. As if mortal tenants of transient tents pitched in human time can displace the eternal inhabitant immanent in infinite time and space. There is not a speck of dust in the entire universe where He is not. And that's precisely what the great Upanishad meant by "*Ishavasyam idam sarvam....*"

We put up a bold red **NO ENTRY** signs outside our separate kingdoms. The secular field, for example, is the exclusive prerogative of politicians, technocrats, economists and the like. Socio-economic progress is their preserve, they claim. And most of them have no time for oddballs who are enthusiastic about non-material pursuits. Spiritual traditions are judged according to the success they had in history by way of promoting the growth of modern science and technology. So we hear a great deal these days about things like the Protestant work-ethic and the Confucian work-ethic, which make for higher industrial productivity, and the anti work-ethic of the mystical and fatalist Hindu and Buddhist traditions which do not, and so on. And amidst all this infantile prattle, the realm of timeless values as enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, the Dhammapada, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita recedes, and one begins to wonder whether technology serves man, or man will end up as a sacrificial offering on the altar of technology.

My own career has been as a practitioner of socio-economic transformation. Like all such practitioners, I have my own share of entirely relative successes, and of misdiagnoses, misjudgments and miscalculations. But, mercifully, I never counted myself among those who comport themselves as though economic development was an end in itself. I saw it only as a very necessary means to larger non-material ends. Regrettably, not all engaged in socio-economic development do. For them, only material ends count—more skyscrapers, washing machines, refrigerators, automobiles, supersonic aircraft, ballistic missiles, anti-missiles—indeed more of everything which modern technology brings within human reach.

You may try a little experiment. Stop an economic expert in his tracks, as he attempts to overwhelm you with his charts, graphs, percentages and statistics, and ask him bluntly, “Do you have any idea what the non-economic objectives of economic development may be?” and you will find the expert nonplussed and inarticulate. But when he recovers his wits he is more than likely to dismiss you as a crackpot out to distract his learned attention with red herrings.

With the benefit of hindsight, I may share some personal observations of the socio-economic development process, not only in my own immediate environment, but also in other societies, and in history. Having retired from the fever and the fret of public life, I am glad that I am no longer obliged to look at the world through the coloured glasses of any political ideology or persuasion. No need to play up to any gallery either, for I aspire to no office. Nor, incidentally, am I a candidate for any kind of priesthood.

But we owe it to each other to share our moments of truth. For whether we like it or not, every human being, virtues, vices, warts and all is, willy-nilly, consciously or unconsciously, in his or her own way, a representative of the human predicament. Not even death can sunder us from the secret and inescapable solidarity which binds us to our fellow human beings. Individual and

society belong to each other. Impoverish the one, and you diminish the other. Only by realising our unity with our fellows can we arrive at our own personal fulfilments. All of us breathe the same air and, it may well be, the same air breathes us and our doings, which probably explains, among other things, the universal atmospheric pollution everybody complains about these days.

Personal observations are different from social predictions. I make none. One recalls Winston Churchill's words about political fortune-telling. He said: "Political ability is the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month and next year, and to have the ability afterward to explain why it didn't happen."

I have only personal reflections to offer, for what they may be worth. They can be neither better nor worse than any other extant set of reflections or theories. There is at least the advantage that I am under no obligation to meet the requirements of a doctoral dissertation which, in any case, is unlikely to be intelligible across the frontiers which separate it from other modern disciplines.

The excessive specialisation enforced by the exponential growth of modern science and technology has put up almost insuperable barriers to inter-disciplinary communication. Each discipline, whether it be one of the scientific disciplines, or one in the equally extensive fields of the arts and humanities, has developed its own unique jargon. One specialist's jargon, all too often, is gibberish to another's ears. Predictably, professors of the various disciplines understand each other as little, or misunderstand each other as much, as do politicians.

Only in one dimension does it seem possible for human beings to recognise and identify with each other, and that is in the invisible dimension from which the timeless values of all the great spiritual traditions of Mankind have come down to us. Which probably explains why it was not PHDs who gave to the world inspired utterances like the Sermon on the Mount, the Dhammapada, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. And which also explains why no university in the world has cared to offer degrees and doctoral programmes in peace, harmony, goodness, kindness, selflessness and compassion. One begins to understand why the late Mahatma Gandhi had once loudly wondered about all the highly qualified men and women around him, with their impressive degrees and doctorates in Laws, Letters, Economics, Science, Medicine, Engineering, Political Science and so on, all of whom claimed to seek the well-being of their nation and humanity: "How can you do good, unless you ARE good?"

The non-economic objectives of economic growth ought to be the uppermost question in the minds of those who have either lived through revolutions, or helped to launch them. The use of the word "revolution" is warranted for the good reason that the aspiration for economic growth with social justice and equality has been the pith and core of all modern revolutions since the advent of Karl Marx. Indeed, the seemingly endless social, political and ideological

tumults in developing countries these days is referred to in current sociological jargon as “the revolution of rising expectations.” We might add, “rising popular expectations”, for all revolutions nowadays are waged in the name of popular aspirations for democracy, equality, fraternity, dignity, improved living standards, and other irreproachable ideals.

Revolutions, whether bourgeois or communist, have one identical result, as revealed in the story of what an ardent communist once told his son: “You see, under capitalism, Man exploits Man. But under communism, it’s exactly the opposite.” In other words, revolutions blast the past to pieces and cast them into a pressure cooker, but what emerges is the same old Adam, sporting a new mask.

How come, we might ask, that no revolution in history has ever achieved its declared objectives? All, without exception, have been betrayed, in the shape of aborted ideals, of first principles stood on their heads, of grievous errors garbed in robes of rectitude, of know-all and explain-all theories that sank in their own quicksands. Every time, today’s victory was preparing tomorrow’s defeat, and today’s infallible principles and grandiose ideals were working some calamity worse than the ills they were trying to remedy. In the end, a hoped-for utopia that proved to be only the bright shadow of its own hidden hell. As though the revolutionary doctors had all ended up by locking themselves, and their patients, in tragic misdiagnoses. In retrospect, this perhaps was inevitable, for the doctors were, in fact, along with their patients, part of the disease. I know, for in my own time, I was one of the doctors.

However, I need to remove any suspicion that I have turned against economic growth, and have joined the back-to-Nature philosophers. That would be egregious folly. The economic functions of human societies and their governments cannot be despised or ignored with impunity. Bees which scorn flowers cannot produce honey. In this connection, I am never wearied of retailing the following story about the great American architect, philosopher and futurist, the late Mr. Buckminster Fuller. He once told an audience of culture-vultures and other refugees from reality. “Throw all the technology into the ocean, and millions will starve. Throw all the philosophers into the ocean, and nobody will starve.” A trenchant exaggeration to highlight the importance of a partial truth, but a truth nonetheless.

Souls and brains which fail to provide for their digestive tracts will starve and perish, along with their digestive tracts. But what is often forgotten is that digestive tracts are important only because they serve and nourish higher appetites of mind, heart and soul.

In an integral perspective, ends and means are seen as parts of a single interrelated process. The one cannot do without the other. One is reminded of the perennial argument over which came first, the hen or the egg. Only Sri Aurobindo, as far as I know, gave the correct answer: “Both,” he retorted, “and the cockerel!”

There is so much we have, not to learn, but to unlearn. As a student teacher, forty years ago, I was fed on the theories of the British educational philosopher, Sir Cyril Burt. We were all duly impressed and took very seriously his pronouncement: "Learning proceeds by the analysis of wholes." And we proceeded to isolate cockerel, hen, and egg from each other, and to study each as though it was an independent phenomenon.

The proliferation of modern disciplines amounts to much the same thing. All-inclusive Reality has been recklessly cut up into innumerable slices, each slice studied in isolation from every other, and from the whole. Each discipline is, for the most part, resolved not to admit what cannot be neatly packed, labelled and docketed in its own system and formulas. The end product is the expert, who knows, or at least thinks he knows, a great deal about his own particular slice of reality, hardly anything about all the other slices, and is sadly indifferent or innocent about the whole. The most alarming end products are the presumptuous know-alls who believe they have managed to confine infinite Reality in their own fool-proof capsules of knowledge. For one, this may be an all-explaining economic or sociological doctrine; for another, an infallible political or religious ideology; for yet another eugenics *à la* the dubious modern discipline called sociobiology, and so on *ad nauseam*. A fanatic of opinion was once aptly described as "A man who does what God would do—If God only got His facts straight."

This is not to say that the slices of truth we have seized upon, examined, and explained by our science and our economics are all lies. They are not. Neither cockerel nor hen nor egg is a lie. Only, we need a change of vision, which will permit us to see every blessed subject and object as part of an infinitely vaster and more blessed whole. There is hope. Caterpillars do eventually become butterflies. And perspectives change. The limited linear vision of the caterpillar in its laborious undulation from leaf to leaf, from one tuft of grass to another, gives way to the unrolling perspective of the butterfly flitting over bushes and flowers and fruits in the garden.

Life escapes from all the formulas and systems which science and cybernetics strive to impose on it. It reveals itself as too complex, too variable, and too full of endless potencies to be browbeaten by the capricious human intellect. Evolutionary Nature is not as random and inconsequential as some of our scientists assume her to be. She is more profound than our mental logic, wiser than our computers and statistics. Sri Aurobindo's great lines in *Savitri* come to mind:

"This world was not built with random bricks of chance,
A blind God is not destiny's architect;
A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,
There is a meaning in each curve and line."

On my desk, next to my personal computer, lies a wondrous shell retrieved from the bed of a coral sea. Once the argent home of some long dead crustacean, its magnificently symmetrical and coloured spiral terminating in a finely pointed spire, leaves no doubt of the work of a conscious power, which did not rely on any human architect. They don't work underwater, at any rate. Life, in all its infinite complexity, is no accident in time. The biologist Edwin Cronklin put it sarcastically: "The possibility of life originating from accident is comparable to the possibility of the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a printing shop."

After all, over the aeons Nature did achieve, starting from primeval protoplasm, and proceeding through fish, reptile, bird, mammal, ape and the mind of man, the emergence in our own times of a Ramakrishna and a Ramanujam. And just as the reptile was a transitional phase of life, for it later developed wings to become the bird, and the ape was a transition to man, we ourselves may be a transit station to something as far superior to us as we are to the monkeys. One fervently hopes so Why? Because monkey tricks did not threaten to blow up the planet in the pre-human era, as human tricks do today. Adolescent pranksters are at play building nuclear stockpiles. And they are not sages who stalk the corridors of power in the capitals of the world

Be that as it may, at the end of the day we find ourselves obliged to unlearn what we first learned And the first discovery we make is that learning proceeds, not by the analysis of the wholes, but by the perception of wholes. Ultimately, perhaps, by the perception of **the whole**, which, if we go by the logic of the evolutionary imperative, may be *the fate and privilege of unborn men*, or whatever higher beings may succeed us in future. We have no idea how this may come about. Neither did the reptiles wallowing in primordial swamps have any idea that some of their descendants would one day grow wings and achieve the miracle of flight, nor did the apes swinging from trees some twenty million years ago appreciate that they were the early ancestors of Beethoven and Darwin.

Man is much more than his digestive tract. The founders of the great spiritual traditions knew what our politicians and manpower planners find so difficult to understand. The human being is neither a mere statistical digit nor just another factor of production to be fed into computers for economic programming. We have to perceive him or her as a conglomerate of body, life, mind and soul, indeed a being who is much more than the sum of his parts, and therefore sacred. The perceptions of our educational institutions are sadly different. They see the student only as a mind to be prepared for competitive examinations Cerebral excellence is the goal, not the integral development of body, heart, mind and spirit.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of June 1989)

IN observing the work of Sri Aurobindo we notice that his life was a continuous fulfilment of the Will of God. Before reviewing the sense of the above statement we must think of the practical factors that formed the fabric of his being and of the country from whose soil he sprang. The meaning of his life can be revealed by a probe into the important place it occupies in the historical development of India, and what significance it has for her future.

The Mother has mentioned in a talk dated 4 September 1957 that she had received a question about the phrase she had used on the fourteenth of August, the eve of Sri Aurobindo's birthday. She continued:

"I spoke of the birth of Sri Aurobindo—it was on the eve of his birthday—and I called it an 'eternal birth'.... Physically, it means that the consequences of this birth will last as long as the Earth. The consequences of Sri Aurobindo's birth will be felt throughout the entire existence of the Earth. And so I called it 'eternal', a little poetically.

"Mentally, it is the birth the memory of which will last eternally. Through the ages Sri Aurobindo's birth will be remembered, with all the consequences it has had

"Psychically, it is a birth which will recur eternally, from age to age, in the history of the universe. This birth is a manifestation which takes place periodically, from age to age, in the history of the Earth. That is, the birth itself is renewed, repeated, reproduced, bringing every time perhaps something more—something more complete and more perfect—but it is the same movement of descent, of manifestation, of birth in an earthly body.

"And finally, from the purely spiritual point of view, it could be said that it is the birth of the Eternal on Earth. For each time the Avatar takes a physical form it is the birth of the Eternal himself on Earth."

If a true history of India or even of the whole humanity is to be written we have to know more about the spiritual achievements of the different Rishis in the Satya Yuga. It is from these spiritual achievements that all manifestation of works has proceeded in the later ages. The Mundaka Upanishad says: "*Kavayah yāni karmāṇi mantreṣu apaśyan tāni tretāyām bahudhā Santatāni*, i.e., "Works which the sage beheld in the Mantras were in the Treta manifoldly extended." (Sri Aurobindo's *Eight Upanishads*, page 99). The Rishis exhort men: "Works do ye perform religiously with one passion for the Truth; this is your road to the heaven of good deeds" (*ibid.*).

What holds for the Satya and Treta Yugas is also true in principle, though with a change of form, for the two other succeeding ages: the Dwapara and the Kaliyugas.

The essential principles of the theory of Hinduism that govern the evolution and the growth of man through the cycle of the four ages of India's spiritual culture have been explained by Sri Aurobindo in his writings. Sri Aurobindo has not fixed the dates and durations of these ages, but it may be said in general that the cycle began with Rigvedic Rishis and ended with Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the fine flower of both Tantric and Vedantic worship.

Sisir Kumar Mitra writes: "Eighteenth-Century Bengal gave evidence of a definite deterioration in the practice of these cults (Tantricism and Buddhism). In fact, it had started earlier. There were corruptions in every walk of life, social, cultural and political. Bengal seemed to be slowly sinking into a morass of decay and degeneration. Not only in Bengal, this tendency prevailed more or less in the whole of India, and its evil crept into the entire life of the Indian people, the forms and institutions of which were either dead or dying. Yet in those days of gloom Ramprasad sang 'the glory of the Mother'."¹

Sri Aurobindo says: "... India still lives and keeps the continuity of her inner mind and soul and spirit with the India of the ages. Invasion and foreign rule, the Greek, the Parthian and the Hun, the robust vigour of Islam, the levelling steam-roller heaviness of the British occupation and British system, the enormous pressure of the Occident have not been able to drive or crush the ancient soul out of the body her Vedic Rishis made for her. At every step, under every calamity and attack and domination, she has been able to resist and survive either with an active or a passive resistance. And this she was able to do in her great days by her spiritual solidarity and power of assimilation and reaction, expelling all that would not be absorbed, absorbing all that could not be expelled, and even after the beginning of the decline she was still able to survive by the same force, abated but not slayable, retreating and maintaining for a time her ancient political system in the South, throwing up, under the pressure of Islam, Rajput and Sikh and Mahratta to defend her ancient self and its idea, persisting passively where she could not resist actively, condemning to decay each empire that could not answer her riddle or make terms with her, awaiting always the day of her revival. And even now it is a similar phenomenon that we see in process before our eyes. And what shall we say then of the surpassing vitality of the civilisation that could accomplish this miracle and of the wisdom of those who built its foundation not on things external but on the spirit and the inner mind and made a spiritual and cultural oneness the root and stock of her existence and not solely its fragile flower, the eternal basis and not the perishable superstructure?"²

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries "the country was getting enveloped more and more in tamasic ignorance and rajasic impulsion."³

It was an asuric age, when asuras fought with each other. Sri Aurobindo remarks:

"At the time of the Muslim advent, the widespread knowledge had already

begun to shrink and the Rajputs who were predominantly rajasic occupied the throne of India. Northern India was in the grip of wars and internal quarrels and, owing to the decadence of Buddhism, Bengal was overcome with *tamas*. Spirituality sought refuge in South India and by the grace of that *sattvic* power South India was able to retain her freedom for a long time. Learning for knowledge, progress of knowledge slowly declined, instead erudition was more and more honoured and glorified; spiritual knowledge, development of *yogic* power and inner realisation were mostly replaced by *tamasic* religious worship and observance of *rajasic* ceremonies to gain worldly ends.... Such an extinction of the national *dharma* had brought about the death of Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Assyria; but the Aryan race... was saved by the rejuvenating flow of heavenly nectar which gushed from time to time from the ancient source. Shankara, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Nanak, Ramdas and Tukaram brought back to life a moribund India by sprinkling her with that divine nectar. However, the current of *rajas* and *tamas* was so strong that by its pull, even the best were altered into the worst.... In the eighteenth century this current attained its maximum force.... Power was not lacking in the country, but owing to the eclipse of the Aryan *dharma* and of *sattwa*, that power unable to defend itself, brought about its own destruction. Finally, the *Asuric* power of India, vanquished by the *Asuric* power of Britain, became shackled and lifeless, India plunged into an inert sleep of *tamas*.”⁴

But it was the hour of God. A prophetic dawn came, when Sri Aurobindo was born amidst that gloomy period of Indian History.

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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ROMANTICISM AND HISTORY

A SURVEY OF SOME OPINIONS

(Continued from the issue of July 1989)

THE infinite promise of the French Revolution fostered in the Romantic writers the sense that their age was a great one of new beginnings and high possibilities. Major Romantic poets including Wordsworth, Blake, Southey, Coleridge and Shelley share the hope in the French Revolution as the portent of universal felicity. They would have sung in one voice:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.
But to be young was very Heaven.

“Hope” and “joy” as against “despair” and “dejection” was a central antithesis in Romantic poetry, and the reference is often to the promise and failure of the French Revolution. The collapse of the hope was cataclysmic in the mid-1790s and later. It was not only a political and social crisis but also an intellectual, moral and imaginative one which interpenetrated the great new literature of the age. “At one moment, all was hope and joy and rapture; the corruption and inequity of ages seemed to vanish like a dream.” But on a sudden all was changed; the sublime expectations were swept away. The outbreak and easy initial successes of the Revolution raised the hope that the human race was on the threshold of enduring felicity in a renovated world uniting the features of a restored paradise and a recovered Golden Age. But the hard shocks delivered by the successive events led to recantation, disillusionment and growing fatigue. W. H. Auden’s comment is picturesque:

Thus Wordsworth fell into temptation
In France during a long vacation,
Saw in the fall of the Bastille
The Parousia of Liberty—
But ended as the Devil knew
An earnest Englishman would do
Left by Napoleon in the lurch
Supporting the Established Church.

Hegel, like many of his fellow-students, followed with enthusiasm the early stages of the French Revolution:

It was a glorious dawn. All thinking beings shared in the jubilation of

the epoch. A sublime emotion ruled that age, an enthusiasm of the spirit thrilled through the world, as though the time were now come of the actual reconciliation of God with the world.

But soon he abandoned such millennial expectations and in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, the events of the Revolution are translated into the major crisis of conscience both of Hegel as an individual and of the collective mind of mankind.

Another conspicuous Romantic tendency, after the rationalism and decorum of the Enlightenment, was a reversion to the suprarational mysteries of the Christian story and doctrines. Romantic writers revived these ancient matters with a difference. They undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable. This is evident in all the writings of the major metaphysicians and poets of the period. The early writings of Schiller, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel retained what was valid in the myths by transplanting them into the concepts of speculative philosophy. Carlyle's phrase 'Natural supernaturalism' defines this cardinal endeavour of the Romanticists. The general tendency of the period was to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine. This is the reason why T. E. Hulme who had nothing but contempt for Romanticism, appraised the movement in the following words: "Romanticism, then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion". Wordsworth's primary motive was to exemplify a new way of perceiving the world by investing it with the modifying colours of imagination. His aim, in his poems, was to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural. Echoing the same view, Carlyle declared in his *Sartor Resartus* that the true use of his book was "to exhibit the wonder of daily life and common things" and to provide "the recognition that through every grass-blade, the glory of a present God still beams".

The Romantic preoccupation with oneself enlarged the subject-matter of literature. Such turning inward on the part of some romantic writers resulted in the birth of what may be called psycho-biographies or crisis-autobiographies. If the Classicist saw the individual in the universe, the Romanticist saw the universe in the individual. In Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, the spiritual history of the individual points to the outer history of mankind. *The Prelude*, which Wordsworth calls "his history of a poet's mind", combines in itself two innovations in prose fiction: the Bildungsroman since it is a poem on the growth of an individual's mind and the Künstlerroman, since it is a poem on his poetical education. It is not simply the story of an individual but of an exemplary poet-prophet who has been out to bring mankind tidings of comfort and joy. In Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*, the growth of the poet's mind turns on a crisis in which he achieves his poetic identity, incorporates the justification of

pain as indispensable to his coming of age both as a man and as a poet of suffering humanity, and involves the clarification to him of the great poet's high office as sage, humanist, and physician to all men. In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley himself asserts that Prometheus is the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature. Shelley's hero represents man or mankind, who happens to be the protagonist in the popular 18th century genre. In universal history "man" is the collective representative of the intellectual and moral vanguard among human beings, who develops through history toward his perfected human condition.

In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle sees the overall history of his protagonist in accordance with the Romantic model of stages of growth to maturity. The readers follow Teufelsdröckh through various stages of growth to the discovery that there had been a hidden design shaping his life toward the vocation of authorship as a divine calling. With its shifting perspectives, temporal oscillations and gloomy rhetoric, the work is a typical Romantic life history.

In the period between the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and the death of Charles Dickens, English literature was dominated by the spirit of Romanticism. Ironically, the Romantic Movement came to the Romance Countries (France, Italy and Spain) after it had gained a strong foothold in Germany and England. French Romanticism is more pronounced and prolonged than that of any other Romance Country. Italy and Spain form a Romantic bloc apart. Rousseau's influence in Germany was of a literary and pedagogical nature whereas his influence in Italy and Spain was largely political and social.

In England the Romantic period was a remarkable one rich with the poetical writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron, the novels of Scott, the essays of Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey.

In the development of European historiography, the Romantic age was a reaction against the 18th century intellectualism characterized by conceit and an infinite faith in reason. It was during this age that historiography came into close contact with literature. Nostalgic in character, Romanticist historiography gained its inspiration from the Middle Ages. Themes such as the life of chivalry, the Crusades, the Christian kings fighting against the Moors, the Gothic architecture and romantic adventure became the popular subject matter of historical writings.

The influence of Rousseau on the historians of this period is marked and evident. They felt strongly the force of Rousseau's paradox of civilization: that human progress in the sciences, arts, and social institutions involves a correlative decline in human happiness by imposing a burden of complication and instinctual renunciation. Thrilling the world with sentimental romances and revolutionary pamphlets, Rousseau declared that the heart has its reasons which the head can never understand. Culture is more of an evil than a good. Wherever philosophy arises, the moral health of the nation decays. "I venture to declare that a state of

reflection is contrary to nature and that a thinking man is a depraved animal.” Education does not make a man good, it only makes him clever—usually for mischief. “Instinct and feeling are more trustworthy than reason.”

But to Kant, the emergence from the state of nature and instinct to that of culture is gain not loss. For the “destiny” of the race “consists of nothing other than a progress toward perfection”. In his essay on the *Conjectural Origin of the History of Man*, Kant observes that the original state of man was innocent but this was the innocence of ignorance and of absolute obedience to instinct. In our present age the tendencies of nature survive in a condition of conflict with the opposed requirements of culture. There will be a higher third stage, a return to the initial condition of nature, but without loss of the values of the intermediate stage of art.

According to Schiller, the overall course of history can be figured as a circuitous journey out of paradise and back to paradise, which is a future condition in which free and rational action according to the moral law has itself become spontaneous. In Schiller, the concept of a fall, or historical decline, has been fused with the idea of progress so as to give history a spiral form. The way of the poet, the individual and mankind itself is seen as a journey from self-unity through multiplex self-consciousness back to self-unity.

This road upon which the modern poets are travelling is the same which mankind must take collectively and as individuals. Nature makes him in unity with himself; art divides and cuts him in two; through the Ideal he returns to unity.

(To be continued)

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THE TIDES

A NOVELLA

(Continued from the issue of July 1989)

“অদৃশ্য নিঃশব্দ তব জল
অবিচ্ছিন্ন অবিবল
চলে নিববধি”
(ববীক্রনাথ)

Silent and unseen
Flows Thy water
Incessantly and for ever ..

Rabindranath (Translation—Mine)

AT the outset I read out a few pages at random from Dipu’s diary to Bose-da, Alok and Archana. While I paused in my reading the children exclaimed, “Oh, why have you stopped so soon? Read on, we want to listen upto the end.” But the question is: where is the beginning and where is the end? Just as there is a beginning of the beginning, so also perhaps there is no end of the end. Therefore, let me begin with what happened before I read Dipu’s diary to Bose-da and his children.

I felt bored while sitting in the reception room of Allahabad University. The place was comfortable, the seat cosy, yet I was impatient. It had been nearly an hour since I sent a message to Prof. Manju Roy asking for a short interview. But neither she nor the messenger appeared. Students, both boys and girls, were moving about, too busy to spare a moment even. I dared not disturb them by asking anything. Presently I discovered a less-hurried pretty young girl of about twenty. She was moving in a calm and carefree manner not much away from me. I went to her and asked politely, “Excuse me, do you know if Prof. Manju Roy is here today?”

“May I know what she is wanted for?” Her grave, measured and authoritative words displeased me. However, I said gently, “If you don’t mind, please inform her that someone from Benares wants to see her.” “Will she consent to come without knowing who is that someone?” “Please tell her that an admirer intends to meet a promising writer.” With sparkling eyes she examined me with the same grave manner and said, “My name is Manju Roy.”

“Y..y..you are Prof. Manju Roy! You teach! You are not a student then! I am extremely sorry, I couldn’t guess.” “Never mind, many make the same mistake. I look much younger than my age. In fact I am above thirty. Now, what is your business with me?” “No business, simply I wanted to talk with the writer

of 'My Confinement', serialised in the monthly *Dharitri*. It is very well written." Immediately her attitude changed, she glanced at me piercingly. I felt guilty of saying something unwanted. How could my simple statement offend her? Helpless, I looked at her questioningly and then I heard her saying, "You have seen me. Do you still think that I am the writer of 'My Confinement'? Please tell the truth." I felt relieved, she had not been annoyed with me. Perhaps my doubt about the writer was not unfounded. I replied with confidence, "No, even before seeing you, I did not think you to be the writer. I am convinced that the writer behind the pseudonym 'Atanu' is a man." ("Atanu" literally means "one without a body")

"Why this conviction? Have you written it yourself?" Her look was clouded with doubt and mystery. I exclaimed nervously, "For heaven's sake, why should I be the writer? I am here simply to know and talk with the man behind the pseudonym. Please introduce me to him."

"How is it possible? He is Atanu, bodiless," her voice was sad, grave and subdued. I got shocked and murmured, "I am sorry, I did not realise that. When did he leave his body?" Her eyes gazed out of the window into the far distance and she muttered, "Don't know, he is atanu, bodyless. To see him in a body the writing was sent for publication." Suddenly she changed her mood and asked me entreatingly, "Please tell me, is it your writing?" The same question again! What does she mean? I mused and replied, "For what on earth should the writing be mine? What do you imply?" "Because you have taken the trouble to find out my address and come here from Benares!"

"I have already told you that. Still you don't seem to be convinced. Listen then. I subscribe to *Dharitri* and to go through the writing of a new writer is a 'must' for me. So while reading 'My Confinement' by Atanu I was struck by its style and manner of expression. It was simple and lucid but embodied the cry of a suffering soul. At the same time it occurred to me that the style was familiar to me. I had read similar writings somewhere else before. But when and where I could not recollect in spite of my dwelling long on the subject. Moreover, the name Atanu seemed to be shrouded with mystery and intrigued me. I felt that the man was not unknown to me. I wrote to the office of *Dharitri* and, after more than one reminder, managed to procure your address. Hence I am here."

"Oh, you know him, have read his writing before? Please tell me who he is and where he lives?" Her unreasonable entreaty like a little girl's for things of her desire astounded me. I was assailed by pity and observed smoothly, "How can I tell you that which I don't know myself? The writer simply seemed to be known to me. The circumstances I completely forgot. I groped within to detect a clue but failed. Miss Roy, why don't you be a little more explicit and divulge a bit more about the secret behind Atanu?"

She remained quiet, hesitant and gazed vacantly through the window for a long while. I patiently waited for her to speak. She turned to me and uttered

slowly, "It's already time to go to my class. Would you mind coming to our house today at about 4 30 p.m.?" She hurriedly jotted down her address on a piece of paper and, handing it to me, left the place even without waiting for my reply.

In the afternoon my curiosity about Atanu goaded me to go to the mentioned street in search of Manju Roy's house. After some time I stood astonished in front of a big and beautiful mansion with a name plate, 'Umashankar Roy, Advocate.' I went through the piece of paper and tallied the number carefully. "So this model of modern architecture is Manju Roy's house!" Astonished, I pushed open the main gate and half-heartedly headed along the brickway between an extensive green lawn and a big garden with colourful seasonal flowers of plants and trees. I looked around and appreciated the beauty and stillness of the place when a fair, grey-bearded and aristocratic-looking old man appeared from an unseen corner of the lawn and greeted me, "Come, come this side, please, and take your seat." We were in front of a round table placed on one side of the lawn. I dropped down in one of the chairs around the table facing the building and saw Manju Roy coming out of it followed by a servant with a tea-tray in his hands. She came and nodded at me while helping the servant place the tray in the right position. That done, she said, "Let me introduce you to my father." "We are already self-introduced mutually, ho, ho,..." the old man laughed heartily I was elated and looked at him and then at her in polite assent.

"Hope you haven't had any difficulty in finding the house," asked Manju Devi. "No, but I had to tally the number more than once. Oh, what a house you live in!" After serving tea to us she said, "My father's fancy. In fact only two of us stay here." "Why, your mother?" "She is no more. Come, let me show you the building." "Yes, a good idea," remarked her father and we three moved into the house. After seeing all the rooms and each nook and corner of the house we returned to the drawing room and then Manju Devi took leave and went in again. We two sat on a sofa to talk. I found that Mr. Roy was grave, thoughtful and indrawn. Perhaps the memory of his wife made him somewhat unmindful. In the meantime Manju Devi came back and handed me a beautifully bound book murmuring, "This is all that we have and know about Atanu."

The book had on its cover the word DIARY printed decoratively. But looking at a few lines written within, I understood that this was what was being serialised in the magazine *Dharitri*. Strange as it was, the name and address of the writer could not be found anywhere nor was there any date of the writing. "How, when and from whom did you get this diary, if it can be called a diary at all?" I asked. She hesitated and looked at her father.

"Yes, in a way I am responsible for the blunder," stated Mr. Roy. "A few years ago while on our way back from a Darjeeling tour we had to wait a long time at Howrah station for the train. While getting into the train we did not

notice that the coolies had brought a small extra suitcase along with our luggage which did not belong to us. When we grew aware of it, there was no means whatsoever to trace the owner; still we tried to do so as far as possible, by asking all the other passengers of the compartment. Back in Allahabad we tried to get the owner through press and radio but without result."

"You found the diary in the suitcase, I suppose." "Exactly so, we had to open the suitcase to see if there was any clue within it about the owner. But we got only this diary, a pen, a wrist-watch and a money-purse with some currency notes and coins and a railway ticket up to Benares." Instantly an episode flashed across my mind and I asked eagerly, "When were you out on a tour? Was it about four years ago?" "Yes, approximately," answered Manju Devi, adding, "The matter would have ended there itself had not my father taken renewed interest after some time and sent the writing for publication under the pseudonym Atanu."

"The subject is somewhat clear to me now. But in order to be dead-sure you have to allow me a little more time. If you permit me, I shall come again tomorrow at this time." "Of course, of course, please do come, we shall be anxiously waiting for you," Mr. Roy was earnestly vocal.

At certain times our memory plays hide-and-peek with us. Some past facts or events slightly appear to our mind and disappear at the next moment without leaving any exact impression. So it happened with me as I came down onto the street from Mr. Roy's. In spite of my pin-pointed concentration I could not recollect the correct place where I had kept the note-book written by my one night's stray and unusual guest. The thought of the note-book haunted me even when I was back at my hotel. "Well, had I kept it in my suitcase? Perhaps not, else I would have seen it while arranging the clothings occasionally. However, why not check again?" I brought out all the contents of the suitcase one by one and checked each item thoroughly but without avail. The brown paper at the bottom was clean and seemed to smile at me mockingly. Annoyed, I snatched it out roughly. Lo, the note book was there just pressed under the brown paper. Its pages had been discoloured but the writings remained quite distinct. Yes, as I presumed, the handwritten letters were more or less similar to those of the diary. Still to be definite both should be compared closely. But for that I had to wait till the next afternoon.

Reaching Mr. Roy's I hesitated because the fog-coloured window panes obstructed the interior view of the drawing room and unlike the previous day there was no one near about. Suddenly Mr. Roy appeared from nowhere and led me to the drawing room. "Please take your seat," he said and went away in the same way as he had come. I went on looking at the plain, simple and well-arranged furniture of the room. The glass show-case contained fine collections from different parts of the world. I went near and stooped to observe them.

“Namaskar,” somebody said. I turned round and saw Manju Devi standing in the doorway with folded hands, her face glowing, forehead sweating, hair dishevelled. I nodded and did not know what to say. “I’ll come back,” she said and went away. Now I started looking into the journals on the table. Soon my attention was disturbed by a light but delightful fragrance. Manju Devi returned after changing her dress and making a simple but effective toilet. The servant stepped in with a tray of tea and eatables. She took from it a plate of delicacies and placed it before me and said, “Please taste them and tell me how they are.” She poured tea into the cups. Mr. Roy came in and settled himself comfortably on a sofa. I took a chop and remarked, “So you had been busy preparing these so long, eh!” “Not busy exactly, rather practising lest I should forget what my mother taught me to do.”

“Now, please tell us about your discovery,” Mr. Roy changed the topic.

“Discovery? Oh no, it’s very simple. Here is a note-book, everything will be clear as and when you will go through it. But before that, Mr. Roy, please compare the handwriting of this with that of the diary and let me know if they are of the same person. “Oh yes, surely I’ll. Now, Manju...” She hurried to bring the diary. That done, Mr. Roy scrutinised the writings with the air of an expert. Suddenly putting both the note-book and the diary aside he relaxed on the sofa and taking a deep breath observed, “Yes, they are writings of the same person. The difference observed is due to the fact of their being written at different times and in different moods. But how and where did you get the note-book?”

“Yes, that is a question indeed. Unless I tell you the circumstances, simply the reading of the note-book will not perhaps help much. Let me narrate it in short. One Saturday evening, as it was my habit, I was out for a stroll by the side of the Ganges. The sky was overcast with clouds, it might have rained at any moment. Heedless of the weather I walked along as a matter of my Saturday-routine.

“The Ganges at which place?” Manju Devi interrupted.

“I am sorry, the Ganges at Ghazipur, before my transfer to Benares. I was posted there. However, my way was not easy. In fact at that time there was no regular road there bordering the Ganges. One had to find one’s way at every moment and there lay the charm and joy of taking a stroll by the river, at least it was so for me. I left behind the vast sand-dune, took many turns and twists, scaled and descended several ups and downs. And then it occurred to me that my time to return had long since passed. Still I headed forward as if impelled by some force. It was almost dark, the opposite bank became hazy. Yet I did not feel like returning. Finally I stopped in front of a huge old Ghat made up of stone-slabs. Nearby stood an ancient temple with a crooked-trunked banyan tree in front of it. The place was solitary and peaceful and enchanted me. I sat down on the parapet of the Ghat...”

“The silence was broken suddenly by the calls of monkeys from up the

banyan tree. Undisturbed, I looked straight in front at the heaving and roaring Ganges, its frightful current at the onset of flow-tide. The sun had already set but a faint twilight still persisted. At last I got disgusted with the monkeys' crying, jumping and shaking of the branches. I got up and prepared to return and then only the reason of their unusual action became clear to me. I saw in the turbulent water some floating object advancing very slowly against the current. That struck me, I halted and went on observing the object. I came to know shortly that the object was nothing but a human being swimming against the current. Finally he neared the lowest rung of the Ghat and lay down flat on it. Had he gone unconscious after his extremely tiresome plight? I was about to step down, just then he made a groaning sound, turned his body and slowly got to his feet. Then he stood up with difficulty and started scaling the steps very slowly. When he came up I called, 'Listen.' He got terribly frightened and turned to step down. I called again, 'Don't be afraid, please listen.'

He uttered suspiciously, 'Do you mean me?' 'Whom else? Where have you come from, where are you going?' 'Don't know, difficult to state in a word or two.' 'You can use more words.' 'No energy, dead-tired,' he hesitated a bit, then added, 'I have not eaten anything for the last two days.' 'My God! how could you brave such a sharp current then?' 'For the sake of life, when life is at stake no one knows from where the strength comes.' Without a second word I caught him by his hands and led him to my house, helped change his wet dress, made him sit beside the dining table and placed before him whatever food I had, some rice, dal and fish curry. The tall young man silently finished all that was given and murmured, 'I shall remain ever grateful to you.' His voice choked, he could not utter more.

"While washing his hands he asked politely, 'Are you alone in the house?' 'Yes.' 'Who cooks for you?' 'Why, I myself.' 'I have taken your food, what about your own dinner?' 'Oh, that's nothing. I am accustomed to go without dinner often. Rather, I am eager to know why your life was at stake?' 'That I shall let you know. First go to the kitchen, please, cook and finish your food. Otherwise I myself shall go to prepare your dinner.' He was adamant, I had to comply with his request.

"Back to my living room I found that the stranger was fast asleep lying on my bed. And on the table nearby lay a note-book scribbled in by him. I went through it hurriedly and looked for a long time at the sleeping man with awe, wonder and deep sympathy. What a strange story! Was it fact or fiction? I fell asleep while thinking about the means to unfurl the secret behind the episode stated in the note-book though I was not a detective and preferred not to poke my nose in others' affairs.

"Next morning I could not find him in the bed. I looked for him in the bathroom and all other probable places around the house but could not trace him anywhere. He had simply slipped away without leaving any trail behind except-

ing the note-book. The same note-book is with you now. Please read it carefully and see if it has got anything to do with the writer of the diary or the pseudonym 'Atanu'."

(To be continued)

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

RECEDING WAVES

DARKNESS left by receding waves
 Haunts
 By its deep-blue gaze,
 By its sheer mass—indifferent, proud—
 And by its silent whisper
 That drowns all thoughts
 By soft insistence.
 Something resonates in response
 Within my depths.

The waves advance, again and again,
 In bursts of frothy light
 That transforms the dark unknown
 Into a sudden shimmer of delight.
 But all too soon bubbles burst,
 Lights dissipate
 Absorbed by the mighty dark.

The waves recede and leave behind
 A dark laughter,
 A veiled brightness that haunts
 By its sight, its sound and its memory
 As something deep within me
 Resonates in recognition.

DINKAR PALANDE

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Gavesanā: Quest for Light. Editor Arabinda Basu. Published by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry. Price: Rs. 25/-

It is a truism that the extraordinary beauty of the southern sky can be experienced only by going to the south. But to know what actually goes to make up that extraordinariness, it is further necessary to climb to a blue infinity's wideness itself. Of course, there has to be first an intense urge towards that alluring wonder, because then only can this upward journey begin. To seek, hunt or search or inquire for, strive after, to desire fervently is the sense the Sanskrit word *gaveṣ* conveys for this esoteric march; in its most illumined manner it then becomes *gavesanā*, the quest for light. While in reality such a quest for light takes place under the guidance of that light itself, in the collective pursuit there can be a mutuality of effort helping the fellow-pilgrims in this austere and difficult progress. The Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education's new organ *Gavesanā* purports to fulfil such a role by conducting research in the Philosophy and Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

Edited by Arabinda Basu, the eminent philosophic thinker, teacher and exponent, the inaugural issue comes to our hands with a reassuring confidence that it is not going to be just a compilational type of presentation; it will take up matters and issues in their full spirituo-academic contents and discuss them at the highest level possible. The purpose of this Annual, as the Editor states, is to "suggest topics of research, give guidelines and answer questions from readers arising from a close study of the writings of Sri Aurobindo." Such a study will be all-comprehensive with the mark of a new integralism given to us by the Master-Yogi ushering in the Age of the Ageless. Be it the question of the Vedic origin of the theory of evolution, or Shakti Yoga combining ascent and descent, or the Impersonal or Non-Being of the Buddhist, or the Gospel of St John—"the most profound and mystical of the four Gospels of the New Testament"—or several manifestations of Vaishnavism, all these will find their luminous fulfilment in the Knowledge-scheme given to us by this Truth-Seer. The need for an in-depth study of these many aspects is therefore obvious; for instance, the role of the various Purushas of the Upanishads in the theory of evolution has not been expounded in its several ramifications. An intuitive plunge into *Savitri* will no doubt unravel the mystery of the working of these typical beings in the growth and unfoldment of the evolutionary consciousness.

Gavesanā 1989 contains a couple of significant studies pertaining to the contributions of tradition in the development of spiritual thought, the basis of world-integration as discerned in the Vedas, Shankara's theory of Illusion—a word that was not employed by him in his philosophy—*vis-à-vis* Sri Aurobindo, etc. There is also an excellent review by the late Ashit Gupta of a book entitled

Sri Aurobindo: The Perfect and the Good by Robert Neil Minor; the reviewer has convincingly shown that no interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy can be meaningful unless it is integrated with his spiritual experiences—a point the book has hopelessly failed to take note of.

In his long and inspired article on *Tradition, Renewal and New Tradition* Arabinda Basu brings out with great insight and force the fact that if Sri Aurobindo is a traditionalist steeped in the Vedantic ideas and manners, he is also a creator of new traditions. Sri Aurobindo's approach, quite acceptable to a free and open modern mind, has been well presented by the author when he discusses his statement "Even the body, if it can bear the touch of the supermind, will become aware of its own truth". Prof. Basu comments that "Sri Aurobindo is taking here a mystico-rational standpoint which he often does in his expositions of new and difficult ideas,—mystic because he is declaring a hitherto unknown and dynamic spiritual truth, rational because he is not dogmatic which he never is anyway" (p. 34). Has Sri Aurobindo created a new tradition? The author answers affirmatively and says that the Indian tradition has been "to create new traditions of new disciplines, novel experiences and previously unknown realisations without the developments being cut off from ancient moorings". To see "the world as living God" is that one "novel experience" in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

On a more socio-political level Jagannath Vedalankar, the learned Sanskrit scholar and Vedist, proposes to trace the roots of world-integration and peace in the hymns of the Vedas. Thus, according to him, Panchasheela, the five principles of International Conduct which formed the basis of Indo-Chinese relationship during the mid-50s, are already present in their essential character in the "preachings of the Divine in the Vedas". In his exposition the author gives the impression that he prefers the *apourusheya* rather than the *pourusheya* aspect—a propounding by the Divine and not by man—in the composition of the Vedic Riks. Be that as it may, one or two other points seem open to doubt. We may mention the statement (p. 42) that the supramental creation as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo "must" be preceded by an integral human unity or One World organisation. But the key to real human unity is in the supermind itself; it is in it that a million collectivities can live together without conflict or any discordant note. A collective integral life in perfect accord is after all possible only in the Truth-Consciousness.

Looking at the initial number as a whole we regret that an academic journal of this kind should have quite a number of proof-reading mistakes. Again, one would wish that the title on the cover were not merely in Devanagari script, leaving a hurried impression that it is some Sanskrit periodical. In passing we may drop a word of caution suggesting that the journal should not turn out to be a battle-ground for academia; while scholastic issues have a certain pertinence in the scheme of things, the touch of the spirit is always enlightening.

Gaveṣaṇā 1989 has certainly made an admirable entry in the Pantheon of fine research journals for which we may feel truly grateful. No doubt, a serious and extensive study of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy and Yoga has begun in right earnest. We are also pretty confident that future issues will be concerned as much with the Mother as with Sri Aurobindo. Her own Yogic sadhana leading towards the creation of the Truth-Body has not been well-explored and understood in its spirituo-academic depth. We shall therefore await with great interest and keenness these pursuits in the quest of light that is Gaveṣaṇā.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

Sri Aurobindo: the Poet and Thinker by *Professor Nirmalya Ghatak*. Published by Smt. Kuntala Bhattacharya, Howrah. Price: Rs. 50. Pp. 285.

Among Sri Aurobindo's literary works, poetry takes a very special place, perhaps the pride of place, because, as the author of this book reports, he was from the outset a poet. But it is not easy to understand and appreciate Sri Aurobindo's writings, particularly as it is difficult to draw a line between "literary" and "philosophical". Knowing this difficulty, a number of his admirers and disciples have written explanatory appreciations or introductory essays on his poetical and other creations. Each one has his own way of expressing his admiration for the poet-philosopher-yogi's literary gift to mankind. The book in our hands is another such attempt. It is well written and will interest various minds, including researchers.

It is not written by an ordinary reader but by one who has studied other poets of the world. He makes cogent references to some of them. Indeed, one has to study the world's great poets in order to fully understand and appreciate the master-yogi's poetic output. In this respect the writer of the book has qualified himself fairly well. By reading it one may spare oneself some of the labour which otherwise may be required.

Poetry is quite a complex matter. It has rhyme, it has its own reason—it has artistic form and philosophical substance. It has undertones, overtones and what we may call in-tones. Professor Ghatak has analysed the diverse aspects of Sri Aurobindo's poetry in a general way, in their broad outline, and especially dealt with the philosophy embodied in the poetry. For this purpose he has taken the trouble to study Sri Aurobindo's various other writings and also the words of the Mother. Expressing philosophy in prose is one thing and doing it through poetry another. While studying poetry one must learn to read between the lines and sometimes catch the background of the poem. To a fair extent this volume will be helpful on that score.

One reason why people in general find it difficult to like poetry, all the more

the kind written in modern times, is that there is a manifold image-building, a process of creating visuals which they may not be familiar with or attuned to. Sri Aurobindo's poetry is not always a simple play of imagination, it is often symbolic. The images and symbols are not exactly an open book for the layman to peruse. Here lies the importance of specialist essays in poetic appraisal. There is, I believe, much scope for them. Leave alone poetry's profundities, even two journalists don't understand or interpret an ordinary incident in the same way.

Not that the poets delight in writing in code language, but the deities of verse, the poetic afflatus, inspire them to write like that. A poet who pens lines from one level of consciousness may later change them or add to them when he lives in another state or slips into another mood. It is said that the Luv-Kush part of the epic Ramayana was added only later on by Valmiki.

For all these reasons appreciating poetry is a tough job for many. So our Professor's attempt is laudable and helpful. He makes it clear in his preface that the chief concern of the book is how the thought and mysticism of the seer-poet have been revealed in his poetry. But he has also referred a little to his other works outside that field, like *The Life Divine*.

The title of the book is justifiable because Sri Aurobindo's poetry is not only objective but also subjective. And in Sri Aurobindo we find that his philosophy expressed in prose is interlinked with, if not complementary to, his poetic thought.

One can write a whole volume on a short poem. Therefore it is obvious that only one such book is not enough to deal properly or even fairly with so vast a theme as Sri Aurobindo the Poet and Thinker. But to introduce broadly and create an interest in an otherwise impatient reader this posthumously published study serves its purpose.

The first chapter deals with Sri Aurobindo's relatively minor works which include blank-verse narratives. Though these are his early poems yet one can appreciate the opening of the visionary power which later attains to a peak in that grand epic *Savitri*. Speaking of Sri Aurobindo's versatility, the late Professor Ghatak points out that the Guru has not only composed poetry on serious or sublime subjects (like "Rose of God" on a small scale and *Savitri* on a colossal one) but also on lesser themes like "Dwarf Napoleon", "The Tiger and the Deer" or even on a humorous one like a cat in "Despair on the Staircase".

According to Sri Aurobindo, says the Professor, verse could be made by ordinary mental skill but true poetry must have at its origin some higher or divine inspiration. As a further clarification of this, the commentator elaborates the subtle difference that exists between a Rishi-Kavi or Seer-poet and a poet of the usual kind. But although the whole of the second chapter of the book deals with this matter, even then what the poet truly is remains a mystery to this day, as the author reminds us, adding that Sri Aurobindo has thrown much light on the matter. The Yogi's supernal realisation had—uniquely—enabled him to classify

the poetic inspirations of great poets according to the hierarchy of the Planes from which they issued.

The third chapter deals with Sri Aurobindo the optimistic thinker, who explores the complexity that is life and the problems of Nature and Supernature. The eternal question of sin and virtue is modified by the facts of evolution, by the emergence of knowledge and the prospect of the Truth-Consciousness which Sri Aurobindo holds out. The writer underlines how, unlike the religious leaders, Sri Aurobindo has not considered man responsible for life's bedrock of inconscience, nor does he approve of the ideas of sin, fear, etc. as being original or indelible in man.

Through many of his poems the Guru has described his experiences of the divine self and the cosmic self. Chapter Four explores how this highest spiritual realisation is expressed by the master-poet.

The lyrical value of his poetry is dealt with in the next chapter. Emotional power by brevity and condensation is an important characteristic of the pure lyric, says Ghatak. However, the truest lyricism means a direct and spontaneous expression of the soul's experience.

The sixth chapter informs us about another important principle of poetry, viz., Imagery, which is related to imagination. It is to be noted here that in the case of a seer-poet or Kavi-yogi the images are not poetic fancies or dreams but actual revelations from higher planes of consciousness. In imagery Sri Aurobindo surpasses Shelley, avers the critic.

Since chapter Seven concerns "Mysticism and Spirituality", it naturally would refer to the seer-poet's inner being, and that, admits the essayist, is a difficult task. He attempts it humbly with his own inner feelings and by taking help from the words of enlightened souls, the Mother being the chief of them.

It was the late professor's idea that *Savitri* has not been dealt with in any detail by anybody prior to him. So the whole of his eighth chapter is devoted to this great epic. I believe this is not correct. There are general lengthy appreciations of this poetic legend. But that does not annul the value of Professor Ghatak's.

Only out of admiration for Sri Aurobindo he has brought in, in places, quotations from the works of other world-poets in comparison, to assist the readers to understand or appreciate the position of Sri Aurobindo among the traditional masters of poetry.

In his "Conclusion" chapter, Professor Ghatak tells us that Sri Aurobindo is a futurist:

Nature shall live to manifest secret God...
This earthly life become the life divine.

There are two appendices. In the first, the researcher explains the meaning

of just a few important words in Sri Aurobindo. And from the huge list of books and articles in the second we come to know of the vast study that has gone into this book.

A few errors are met with, which could have been avoided if Ghatak or a good editor had carefully read the final MS or compared it carefully with the printed text. Considering the trouble undergone by the writer, it is not too much to expect such pains from the publisher. Many of the quotations need to be checked with the original for proper understanding.

In places both the way of thinking and the style of expression by the author are rather Indian, which would strike one as incorrect in a book written in English. This fault could also have been avoided if proper attention had been paid by the publisher. For example, on page 91, we read: "Far from being tiresome this is somewhat long poem, this is full of fresh images, colours," etc. I think what should have been said is: "Far from being tiresome, this somewhat long poem is full of..." There are a number of such awkwardnesses. The unfortunate premature demise of the author may be the cause of these errors. Perhaps no time was left for revision and correction. Otherwise, on the whole, the book is a good attempt, helpful and instructive for laymen no less than students of Sri Aurobindo. Hardbound, its appearance is also pleasing.

We are told in the introduction that Professor Ghatak worked under certain physical handicaps. Considering this, I cannot help admiring his labour. One learns also from the introductory page the cause of his urge to write the book. We are told that once he left Bengal to pay a visit to the Ashram at Pondicherry and it proved a boon to him. Inspired by that visit he evidently made his wide-ranging research.

DHIRAJ BANERJEE

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Sixty-fifth Seminar

19 February 1989

(Continued from the issue of July 1989)

THE MOTHER—CREATRIX OF THE NEW AGE

Speech by Srijita Roy

WE have assembled here today on the occasion of the 112th birth anniversary of the Mother. The topic of the Seminar is: "The Mother—Creatrix of the New Age." As I found the subject too vast to cover in its fulness within the short period at my disposal, I have chosen to speak on one particular aspect of it, which has roused my mental curiosity, if I may say so. This aspect is: "The Supermind and the Mother's role in its manifestation."

In the present world, it is often thought that man at the summit of his mental capacities is the last and final goal of evolution. Then the question of Supermind as a stage in evolution higher than mind does not arise. But if we believe that spirit is involved in matter and evolution is a process of the gradual manifestation of spirit in matter, then mind cannot be its final stage. As Sri Aurobindo says: "Evolution is the emancipation of a self-revealing Soul secret in Form and Force, the slow becoming of a Godhead, the growth of a Spirit."¹ Mental man is too imperfect to be the goal of such an evolution. So there must be a higher being than man, who will be fit to express the Divine. Sri Aurobindo observes, "The appearance of a human possibility in a material and animal world was the first glint of a coming divine Light, the first far-off intimation of a godhead to be born out of Matter. The appearance of the superman in the human world will be the fulfilment of that distant shining promise."²

But who will be this superman who will manifest the Supermind in evolution? What will be his nature? Will he be just a magnified mental being with a superior degree of human intelligence, knowledge, power, will, character, love and perfection? No, the superman will be a being altogether different from man. To make the difference clear, it can be said that when superman appears, man will be to superman, just as the animal is to man today. As Sri Aurobindo states, "The man who dwells in the higher or divine and now hidden hemisphere of his

¹ *The Hour of God* (1982 Edition), p 102

² *Ibid* , p 91

consciousness, having rent the veil, is the true superman and the last product of that progressive self-manifestation of God in the world, Spirit out of matter, which is now called the principle of evolution.”³ In brief, he will have realised integral identity with the Divine Self.

Sri Aurobindo further explains that to be the superman means “To be the master of thy mind, thy life and thy body; it is to be a king over Nature of whom thou art now the tool... It is to be free and not a slave, to be one and not divided, to be immortal and not obscured by death, to be full of light and not darkened, to be full of bliss and not the sport of grief and suffering, to be uplifted into power and not cast down into weakness. It is to live in the Infinite and to possess the finite. It is to live in God and be one with him in his being...

“Be free in Thyself... For the spirit is freedom.

“Be one with God and all beings... For the spirit is unity.

“Be Thyself immortal... For the spirit is immortality.”⁴

All these capacities we have within us, therefore we can realise them. Thus supermanhood is a new consciousness by rising to which humanity can exceed itself and achieve its divine perfection. And dwelling in that consciousness man “can determine his action in complete accord with an awareness which perceives all the forces acting in and on and around him and is able, instead of undergoing, to use them and even to determine.”⁵

Sri Aurobindo affirms that “The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness.”⁶ But the important fact about this change will be that, in this transition from man to superman, man will have to consciously participate in the transformation of his nature. So, for this change to come and for the supermind to emerge, what is required is the inner call of the sadhak along with the sanction of the Supreme. And the hour of this transformation need not be far away. Sri Aurobindo says, “If earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now for that immense and glorious transformation.”⁷ But he also adds that “The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence and power of the Divine Mother. The Mother’s power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life divine and the immortal’s Ananda.”⁸ The Mother is the divine Conscious Force that manifests the multiple Divine in the universe. At the same time she leads us back

³ *Ibid* , p 28

⁴ *Ibid* , p 9

⁵ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 22), p 474

⁶ *The Mother* (Cent Ed , Vol 25), p 40

⁷ *The Hour of God* (1982 Edition), p 95

⁸ *The Mother* (Cent Ed , Vol 25), pp 40-41

towards the Divinity, our origin. "If she seems to have plunged us into the Ignorance and Inconscience in pursuance of a plan we cannot yet interpret... yet it becomes visible before long that she is working for the development of the Divine Consciousness in us and that she stands above drawing us to her own higher entity revealing to us more and more the very essence of the Divine Knowledge, Will and Ananda."⁹ In fact, the Mother is always there guiding and supporting us and leading us through darkness into the light of a higher consciousness. And it is through her work that the world is getting prepared for the supramental manifestation. Sri Aurobindo tells us categorically that the Mother is behind all works and all things can be attained only through her. Here lies the supreme role of the Mother. The aspirant has to surrender to the Mother completely for, as Sri Aurobindo says, "Nothing can be here or elsewhere but what she decides and the Supreme sanctions."¹⁰

But if she always remained in her Divine Consciousness, she would have been too far from us, beyond our reach. So she had to take the appearance of humanity, to show men how to tread the path, and to lift them out of ignorance into light, out of suffering into the supreme Ananda. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life."¹¹ This is the great sacrifice of the Divine Mother and although she accepted all the limitations of the human being, yet she never ceased to be the Supreme Consciousness. I quote four lines from *Savitri* which give an appropriate description of our Mother:

"A miracle of the Absolute was born,
Infinity put on a finite soul,
All ocean lived within a wandering drop,
A time-made body housed the Illimitable."¹²

Although she is now not physically present amongst us, yet she continues her work ceaselessly, trying to perfect more and more the human receptacle, so that the Supermind may descend freely into it. But we, with our pettiness and limitations do not allow her to work in us unhindered. So the process becomes tardy. Instead, if we become more conscious, if instead of resisting we remain open and surrendered to her, she can work through us swiftly and easily. Thus by

⁹ *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 20), pp 116-17

¹⁰ *The Mother* (Cent Ed Vol 25), p 21

¹¹ *Ibid* , pp 24-25

¹² *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 28), p 101

a conscious collaboration with the Mother, we can hasten the advent of this new consciousness.

Let us take this occasion, then, as an opportunity to make our surrender more sincere and complete so that our Mother as the Creatrix of the New Age may bring down in our beings the supramental consciousness, for which she has been striving all through her life and still continues to do so

I would like to end my speech with a short extract from a prayer of the Mother in which this attitude of surrender is revealed in most moving words. I shall read out its translated version in English first, and then the original in French

“Oh, I would be before Thee, Lord, always like an absolutely blank page, so that Thy will may be written in me, without any difficulty, any mixture.”¹³
(20.11.1914)

“Oh je voudrais, Seigneur, être devant Toi toujours comme une page toute blanche, afin que Ta volonté s’inscrive en moi sans difficulté et sans mélange.”
(20.11.1914)

¹³ *Prayers and Meditations, Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 1, p 274