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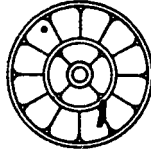
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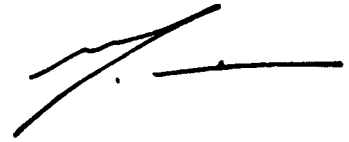


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth.

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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GUIDANCE FROM THE MOTHER

Does an individual mastery over desire suffice or is a general, collective mastery necessary?

AH! there we are.... Is it possible to attain a total personal transformation without there being at least a correspondence in the collectivity?... This does not seem possible to me. There is such an interdependence between the individual and the collectivity that, unless one does what the ascetics have preached, that is, escapes from the world, goes out of it completely, leaves it where it is and runs away selfishly leaving all the work to others, unless one does that... And even so I have my doubts. Is it possible to accomplish a total transformation of one's being so long as the collectivity has not reached at least a certain degree of transformation? I don't think so. Human nature remains what it is, one can attain a great change of consciousness, that yes, one can purify one's consciousness, but the total conquest, the material transformation depends definitely to a large extent, on a certain degree of progress in the collectivity. Buddha said with reason that as long as you have in you a vibration of desire, this vibration will spread in the world and all those who are ready to receive it will receive it. In the same way, if you have in you the least receptivity to a vibration of desire, you will be open to all the vibrations of desire which circulate constantly in the world. And that is why he concluded: Get out of this illusion, withdraw entirely and you will be free. I find this relatively very selfish, but after all, that was the only way he had foreseen. There is another: to identify oneself so well with the divine Power as to be able to act constantly and consciously upon all vibrations circulating through the world. Then the undesirable vibrations no longer have any effect upon you, but you have an effect upon them, that is, instead of an undesirable vibration entering into you without being perceived and doing its work there, it is perceived and immediately on its arrival you act upon it to transform it, and it goes back into the world transformed, to do its beneficent work and prepare others for the same realisation. This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo proposes to do and, more clearly, what he asks you to do, what he intends us to do:

Instead of running away, to bring into oneself the power which can conquer.

Note that things are arranged in such a way that if the tiniest atom of ambition remained and one wanted this Power for one's personal satisfaction, one could never have it, that Power would never come. Its deformed limitations, of the kind seen in the vital and physical world, those yes, one may have them, and there are many people who have them, but the true Power, the Power Sri Aurobindo calls "supramental", unless one is absolutely free from all egoism under all its forms, one will never be able to manifest. So there is no danger of its being misused. It will not manifest except through a being who has attained the

perfection of a complete inner detachment. I have told you, this is what Sri Aurobindo expects us to do—you may tell me it is difficult, but I repeat that we are not here to do easy things, we are here to do difficult ones. (3 May 1951)

*

Before undertaking any action one tries to know whether the impulse comes from the Mother or not, but generally one doesn't have enough discernment to know it and yet one acts. Can one know from the result of the action whether it came from the Mother or not?

One does not have the discernment because one does not care to have it! Listen, I don't think there is a single instance in which one does not find within oneself something very clear, but you must sincerely want to know—we always come back to the same thing—you must sincerely want it. The first condition is not to begin thinking about the subject and building all sorts of ideas: opposing ideas, possibilities, and entering into a formidable mental activity. First of all, you must put the problem as though you were putting it to someone else, then keep silent, remain like that, immobile. And then, after a little while you will see that at least three different things may happen, sometimes more. Take the case of an intellectual, one who acts in accordance with the indications of his head. He has put the problem and he waits. Well, if he is indeed attentive, he will notice that there is (the chronological order is not absolute, it may come in a different order) at first (what is most prominent in an intellectual) a certain idea. "If I do that in this way, it will be all right, it must be like that", that is to say, a mental construction. A second thing which is a kind of impulse: "That will have to be done. That is good, it must be done." Then a third which does not make any noise at all, does not try to impose itself on the others, but has the tranquillity of a certitude—not very active, not giving a shock, not pushing to action, but something that knows and is very quiet, very still. This will not contradict the others, will not come and say, "No, that's wrong"; it says simply, "See, it is like this", that's all, and then it does not insist. The majority of men are not silent enough or attentive enough to be aware of it, for it makes no noise. But I assure you it is there in everybody and if one is truly sincere and succeeds in being truly quiet, one will become aware of it. The thinking part begins to argue, "But after all, this thing will have this consequence and that thing will have that consequence, and if one does this..." And this and that... and its noise begins again. The other (the vital) will say, "Yes, it *must* be done like that, it *must* be done, you don't understand, it *must*, it is indispensable." There! then you will know. And according to your nature you will choose either the vital impulse or the mental leading, but very seldom do you say quite calmly, "Good, it is this I am going to do, whatever happens", and even if you don't like it very much. But it is

always there. I am sure that it is there even in the murderer before he kills, you understand, but his outer being makes such a lot of noise that it never even occurs to him to listen. But it is always there, always there. In every circumstance, there is in the depth of every being, just this little (one can't call it "voice", for it makes no sound) this little indication of the divine Grace, and sometimes to obey it requires a tremendous effort, for all the rest of the being opposes it violently, one part with the conviction that what it thinks is true, another with all the power, the strength of its desire. But don't tell me that one can't know, for that is not true. One can know. But one does not always know what is necessary, and sometimes, if one knows what is to be done, well, one finds some excuse or other for not doing it. One tells oneself, "Oh! I am not so sure, after all, of this inner indication; it does not assert itself with sufficient force for me to trust it." But if you were quite indifferent, that is, if you had no desire, either mental or vital or physical desire, you would know with certainty that it is that which must be done and nothing else. What comes and gets in the way is preference—preferences and desires. Every day one may have hundreds and hundreds of examples. When people begin to say, "Truly I don't know what to do", it always means that they have a preference. But as here in the Ashram they know there is something else and at times they have been a little attentive, they have a vague sensation that it is not quite that: "It is not quite that, I don't feel quite at ease." Besides, you were saying a while ago that it is the result which gives you the indication; it has even been said (it has been written in books) that one judges the divine Will by the results! all that succeeds has been willed by the Divine; all that doesn't, well, He has not willed it! This is yet again one of those stupidities big as a mountain. It is a mental simplification of the problem, which is quite comic. That's not it. If one can have an indication (in proportion to one's sincerity), it is uneasiness, a little uneasiness—not a great uneasiness, just a little uneasiness.

Here, you know, you have another means, quite simple (I don't know why you do not use it, because it is quite elementary): you imagine I am in front of you and then ask yourself, "Would I do this before Mother, without difficulty, without any effort, without something holding me back?" That will never deceive you. If you are sincere you will know immediately. That would stop many people on the verge of folly. (5 May 1951)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

TWO PERSONAL LETTERS

I CONSULTED all your recent notes and found a number of points apart from the dream of changing houses. First is the alleged remark by Shaw about Sri Auròbindo being the greatest brain on the planet. It is true that Sri Aurobindo has come to be known in various places where we would hardly expect it. But I doubt whether Shaw could have delivered any such superlative estimate. He once visited India. A very pushy Muslim lady, with a very obedient painter husband who let her claim that she inspired all his work, boarded the ship as it lay in Bombay harbour in the morning and pinned Shaw down to a visit to her place where she would be inviting notable people. Shaw went there and was "lionised"—but after half an hour he was suddenly found missing. Evidently he couldn't stomach the pretentious superficiality of the occasion. It was quite late in the evening now. A search was made in the dark compound of the house and he was discovered sitting quietly in a car parked there. He refused to come back to the meeting—and when the driver of the car had been located he went straight to his hotel room. Long ago I published in *Mother India* a letter he wrote to a friend about the richness of the Indian pantheon and how it provided satisfaction to every kind of religious temperament. So he was no ignoramus about India, but I haven't found any reference by him to any Indian of his time. Sri Aurobindo has a magnificent survey of Shaw's mind and personality in a long letter to Dilip apropos of the Irish character and he has some shorter remarks in a couple of letters to me. If Shaw had seen these letters, he would have been delighted as well as enlightened. And the comment on Sri Aurobindo he has been credited with would surely have been quite apt from his mouth. As things are, you are right in feeling it to be apocryphal.

It may interest you to know that the Mother also once gave an opinion on Shaw. It is being recorded here for the first time and you will be the first Ashramite to read it. The topic came up in one of the "Prosperity" evenings before the Soup Distribution. She said in effect: "Shaw is a very independent mind, free from all preconceptions and able to penetrate through appearances and get to the reality of the problems facing the ordinary life. Conventions cannot deceive him. I don't know if there is anything deeper beyond this powerful capacity."

You have referred to reading my poetry. Now that the galleys of my projected "Collected Poems" are pouring in, I find myself plunged in an intense fusion of past and present. Most vividly the visionary moments with their far-reaching resonances come back with a cumulative force. I realise how Sri Aurobindo was bent on my writing always at my highest. Though quite considerate about my less inspired efforts and patiently pointing out the precise

respect in which this or that line fell short either in imagery or rhythm, he never wavered in urging me to be dissatisfied with anything less than the *mot inévitable*. There is a sonnet entitled “Sky-rims” which he appreciated very much except for its last line which seemed insufficiently shot with the revelatory turn of sight and sound. To fill the *lacuna* I invoked the Muse day after day. Harin Chattopadhyaya was a close friend at the time and he too sportingly took up the challenge for me. Actually the fault of the non-revelatory line was that it ran:

To yet another revelatory dawn!

Sri Aurobindo found the adjective of my choice “flat and prosaic, at any rate here.” The best I could do at the end of several experiments was:

To yet another ecstasy of dawn.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment was: “It is better than anything yet proposed. The difficulty is that the preceding lines of the sestet are so fine that anything ordinary in the last line sounds like a sinking or even an anticlimax. The real line that was intended to be there has not yet been found.” I made one more attempt and wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “I have got Harin to put his head together with mine. He has come up with: ‘lambency of dawn’. A good phrase, no doubt—but I wonder if it suits the style and atmosphere and suggestion in my sonnet. After over a fortnight of groping I have myself struck upon: ‘To yet another alchemy of dawn!’ Do you like my ‘alchemy’?” Sri Aurobindo replied: “That is quite satisfactory—you have got the right thing at last.”

You have quoted Nolini’s generous remark whenever matters concerning poetry were at stake: “Consult Amal.” From the beginning he closely followed my poetic career in the Ashram. He had a fine aesthetic sense and an intuitive insight but perhaps was not sufficiently aware of technical subtleties connected with metre and rhythm. Besides, he knew how much time Sri Aurobindo graciously gave me, discussing the *minutiae* of poetic expression—and he was the only one privy, after the first week of absolute secrecy, to the immeasurable boon of *Savitri* in progress granted by the Master to this beauty-smitten mystery-haunted disciple who for all his limping spirituality was yet passionately panting for the “Overhead” Parnassus. Naturally Nolini thought of referring questions of poetry to me. This was part also of his humility: he did not arrogate to himself any role in which he felt he was not anywhere near being an absolute authority. His praise was unrestricted when he saw merit. Thus, after Sri Aurobindo had given extreme praise to the last eight lines of “This Errant Life”, I remember Nolini saying to Amrita that Amal had written something equal to Shakespeare. I had marked that delicate, exquisite, finely suggestive poems appealed to him the most. Apart from “This Errant Life”, I recall his happily appreciative

response to the sonnet "Devotee" and the two-stanza'd piece "Two Moments", all three of which you must have seen in the proofs coming to me at present.

Your meeting him so often at night is an enviable experience. Your dream in which he asks Anima to give you some homoeopathic globules for some ailment of yours seems certainly to have brought an ultra-physical influence and I am not surprised that your painful knee which had prevented you from attending the Playground Gymnastic Marching, for about twelve days was completely healed and you felt fresh and strong in the morning. I believe the sweet-tasting globules were symbolic of some aspect of the Divine Delight, Ananda, at work. This particular dream strikes me as a phase of sadhana. An unseen Power was in touch with you. Probably this Power keeps in contact with us all the time, even during our sleep, but it gets mixed up with a large variety of dream-movements which have nothing to do with our spiritual endeavour, and when it is at work, we may not be consciously receptive to it. You were perfectly aware of what was happening. And in your case I feel convinced that your sleep is a mode of sadhana in which the surrender to the unseen Beneficence takes place with more the baby-cat's self-abandon than the baby-monkey's clinging.

Your quotation from a Bengali poem is very much to the point in the matter of what is called "Grace". The translation proper to English should run: "Such is the Lord's inexplicable grace that a heart of coal changes into a diamond and a robber turns into a saint!" Your comment too is quite appropriate: "Magic has its own way—it need not follow any logic." But we must understand "magic" here to be supra-rational, not infra-rational. And when we go to the supra-rational, we approach the Aurobindonian "logic of the infinite". For, in it there is nothing which can be called capricious or arbitrary, born of a chaotic darkness. Everything there comes out of a Consciousness which is difficult for our human wits to penetrate by being the opposite of the chaotic and the dark: actually it is, as an old version of *Savitri* says:

Unseen because too brilliant for our eyes

and as a later version tells us with a greater spiritual immediacy, an example of how Sri Aurobindo lifted his poem again and again to a higher level of revelation:

Veiled by the ray no mortal eye can bear.

Even things other than "grace" in the divine order are never quite clear. For instance, Sri Aurobindo once wrote that X was a born Yogi: how then did it happen that he started to act queerly and finally left the Ashram? Maybe this too was grace: he was saved from the "disgrace" which might have resulted if he had continued being an Ashramite. Outside, he fitted well enough into the general

milieu and even won some credit for this nationalist work. On grace in general I may hazard two remarks. First, it is inexplicable because it does not seem to act in a manner fitting the present circumstances. But I conceive grace as taking into account all the secrets of the past and all the mysteries of the future—the two unknowns lying hidden in our own depths which are open to the Divine's all-penetrating gaze. They form to that gaze a part of the present—a store of possibilities at the bottom of the very stream running from moment to moment. Secondly, take that sweetest sign of grace: the Mother's smile. Sri Aurobindo once observed that by an irony of fate the subject of this smile had caused a great deal of misery. People moaned and groaned, thinking that the Mother didn't smile at them during Pranam because she was angry with them or because they were in a most depraved condition, even though they were not aware of any depravity! It has been explained that merely a smile does not show approval. It may be just formal. On the other hand, the absence of it may be due to the Mother's being absorbed in some inner working on the sadhak in front of her. Again, if there was an inner understanding the Mother did not need to show her approval by a smile. Thus I never saw her beaming to Nolini or Amrita. They never took much time over the pranam and I could see the lack of formality and the brief quiet intimacy that was sufficient on either side. But I also noticed that whenever there was on the part of the sadhak a leap of the psychic being, the Mother's face was invariably wreathed in smiles. I have a poem called "Grace" in which the psychic being is offering itself wholly and asking for no boon of greatness or good fortune and is ready for all privation from the worldly viewpoint provided it could have from the Mother the sure sign of her recognition of it and the supreme gift of her all-enrapturing all-enriching love:

Take all my shining hours from me,
 But hang upon my quiet soul's
 Pale brow your dream-kiss like a gem.
 Let life fall stricken to its knee,
 If unto lone-faced poverty
 You give your blessing's diadem.
 Make of these proud eyes beggar-bowls,
 But only drop your smile in them.

Here the inevitable link is flashed out between the psychic being's self-giving and the Divine's grace as manifested in that outbreak of plenary sweetness on the Mother's mouth, her smile. I may generalise that any time the deep soul in us cries out to the Divine, the Divine's grace unfailingly responds. One aspect of the supra-rational logic of the Infinite behind the Infinite's magic which exceeds our rationality is this spontaneous relationship between these two phenomena.

Let me offer a small incident from my own life to illustrate that relationship.

The period from the Mother's birthday on February 21, 1928 and Sri Aurobindo's on August 15 of the same year was for me a luminously crucial one. Although ostensibly an intellectual, I longed from the very start to have an opening in the heart-centre. The Mother, in order to make it easier for me, told me in what she considered terms most intelligible to me: "Think of or picture your heart as an open book." I somehow felt a little disappointed and said to myself. "What? Again a book? I am tired of being bookish!" As I had asked the Mother several times to let me have a profoundly emotional awakening to her divinity, a few months after her birthday a sudden opening took place. But it could not last. It even depended on whether I lay on my back in bed or on my side! Lying on my back used to pull shut the aperture. When I told this to the Mother she laughed and so did Sri Aurobindo on her telling him that my psychic being peeped or drew back according to the lying posture of my body! But one day, even though I was lying on my back, there was a tremendous opening. I could hardly bear the ecstasy. I was breathless with unbounded bliss. Depth beyond depth seemed to bring forth a heavenly state—an indescribable enchantment of laughing flame and living fragrance rising far and far towards some marvellous Beauty. Hours and hours were spent in a felicitous aspiration. One early morning the call was so sweetly intense that I had to go to the Ashram, climb nearly half the staircase leading from outside Amrita's office to the Meditation Hall upstairs. I stood on the first landing all alone, yearning with all my heart towards the first floor where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived. All the doors were closed, but my body felt inwardly like one big open door of devotion. A few minutes passed. Then all of a sudden the door to the Meditation Hall swung outward and the Mother stood on the threshold looking at me with a smile. "Would you like to come in?" she asked. "Of course, Mother," I cried out and quickly went up. She took me in by the hand and kept me with her for awhile. After this incident I could never dissociate divine grace from the soul's utter leap towards the Supreme Beloved.

Perhaps you are pretty impatient by now since I haven't yet touched on the topic which was supposed to be the main one in the letter you were expecting from me: your recurrent dream of you as well as me changing houses. What is the drift of such a dream? A person who is pessimistic—or should I say, with us in mind, "pessimistic"—might envisage a changing of "the house of clay" fairly soon. It would almost mean both of us quickly qualifying for rebirth hand in hand! Not a bad prospect for me. As Wordsworth said in connection with the daffodils.

A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company.

But, of course, rebirth is not the only result possible

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil.

We devotees of Sri Aurobindo would go to the subtle-physical plane where, according to the Mother, the Master after he had passed away would remain until his work was done. The Mother used the words “earth’s atmosphere” for the subtle-physical plane. You may remember that she employed the same words in speaking of the Supramental Manifestation on earth. The subtle-physical plane is the earth’s inner counterpart which may be said to mediate between the gross physical and the vital, the plane of the life-force. Once the Supermind in some form or other is there, it becomes a portion of earth-history and sooner or later is bound to emerge into the gross layer. In that world of rarified physicality—hence the term “atmosphere”—Sri Aurobindo, as the Mother has told us, has a house. People in the Ashram visit it sometimes in their dreams. Sehra did so on a few occasions and described something of it. Nirod too has been there at least once. So we, if we leave our present corporeal habitation in the near future, will get into contact with Sri Aurobindo’s house which is now the Mother’s as well, and not pass, with whatever vague interval somewhere between birth and birth, into another “house of clay”.

But this reading of your dreams is not compulsory. The house into which we move could very well be a new state of existence in the self-same body. Under the influence of that most holy house-agent—the soul in us—we may enter a better and ever better structure of mind, life-force and subtle-physicality which would ultimately affect our gross-physical itself and give it a finer presence, a richer ambience—some far-off yet genuine image of what a poem of mine visualises Sri Aurobindo to be like if he were moving amongst us:

Haloed with hush he enters, corona’d with calm he goes!

(2.6 1990)

*

I am extremely happy that your brother’s problem has been solved by the Divine Grace through an impossible-seeming event. He is a good man with true faith but sometimes the outer mind gets troubled and clouded. The Divine looks always deep inside and does not judge by surface realities. There is also the fact that your brother has the good luck of having for his sister one who is wholly devoted to the Spiritual Cause and, in spite of all difficulties, never swerves from the Light that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have brought to us poor wayward wandering human beings. I may add—taking my cue from the title of my own book of talks which introduced me to you—that you have cherished not only their Light but also their Laughter.

The Light shows both the true path ahead and the follies that have tended to

sidetrack us. It makes us aware at the same time of God's strength and man's weakness so that we may know that the help is ever there to carry us onward and that such and such are the impediments put by ourselves to our own progress. But knowledge is not enough. Though the mind is enlivened as the Divine's disciple, the heart is still not uplifted into being the Divine's child. Here the role of Laughter comes in, together with that of Light. The Laughter ringing out from the hidden heights and depths proves to us that the Supreme does not take too seriously the burden we create for Him and is confident that He can bear us along further and further. This also saves us from being weighed down too much by our own failings. Not only are we encouraged by the Bliss with which we are surrounded from above: we are encouraged too to find that we can cut ourselves free from the despair about our defects instead of thinking them unforgivable by God and ineradicable by man.

The Mother once said that the most powerful weapon against gathering darkness is a smile. I may say that the demons may persist against Light but they get puzzled and quite upset on seeing our eyes twinkle carefree and our lips curve happily as a prelude to a burst of Laughter. This devastating gaiety rises from the heart and is made possible by the second of the two attitudes Ramakrishna mentioned: the baby-cat's attitude as distinguished from the baby-monkey's. The baby-cat surrenders itself to its mother's mouth in a state of happy abandon while the baby-monkey makes an effort with its force to cling to its mother's belly. In the one the trustful joyous heart is acting, in the other the eager expectant mind. Neither of the two movements is to be neglected. But we as rational animals find it easier and more natural to be little monkeys. But then our anxieties do not disappear and an element of fear remains lest our strength should fall short of the demand of the Light. If we become baby-cats the fear vanishes, for a greater power than we can muster has taken charge: it laughs at the world's obstacles and is ready to do everything for us if only we let the golden bells of its infinite happiness find a silver echo in our tiny heart-beats.

The pure adhesion to the Divine Laughter is no easy thing. The human heart is sensitive and it is as much prone to grief as to joy. No doubt, it has the capacity of bubbling gaily, but blubbing grievously is also natural to it. Only with more and more faith, with ever increasing trust, with a development of deepening love does the art of happiness become the heart's constant practice. And then suddenly there breaks out what Sri Aurobindo terms the "psychic being", the true soul, the inmost core of the impulsive and emotional self, the spark of the eternal Ananda lit in the world of time as the centre of the Divine's evolution in the human. Once the secret soul has shown its face, its spontaneous rapture of the Supreme Presence will spread over all the parts of our life. Even in the midst of the mishaps and errors and ailments that cannot be avoided as long as we are not completely transformed by the Aurobindonian Supermind a taste of heavenly honey will be ours. And when this taste runs through all the varied

food and drink of pungent, bitter or pleasant experiences that come and go, it is possible that the mind which usually clings to the Divine, with an endeavour of its own, will find the baby-monkey of its sadhana turn into a baby-cat. A soft silence, a soothing peace, an up-gazing quietness will tend to replace the old seeking after the Light. A meditation forming a wide-spread mirror under some unknown immensity above the head will be the general state. Then no effort at seizing truth but a hushed intense receptivity with a face lifted upward will be there and truth will itself suffuse the intellect, and the thinker will grow into the seer. The brain-cells will open to hold what the ancient rishis would have called the nectar of Knowledge. In such a condition Light will come as a revelatory Laughter. Indeed the Light of the higher planes is best considered the aura of Ananda and this ultimate nature of it is realised best by the mind's putting its own individuality helplessly in the care of the Unthinkable, the Unnamable. The English language has a word which can very aptly suggest Light's being included in Laughter: the word "Delight."
(15 6.1990)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

A FLAME WITH A HEART OF GOLD

A FLAME with a heart of gold,
Purity burning to sky—
Gathered from sorrow ageold,
Deathlessness' ardent cry.

Azure winds and winter's snow
For tall green of the red-wood—
Already the stream a swift flow
Because of bright oceanhood.

Motionless as a bird's flight
When the level wings sag not—
A sudden love given to light
In wide hush by the word sought.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MODERN POETIC MILIEU

A BRITISH writer and critic of some standing has said recently:¹ “I don’t see Sri Aurobindo as a poet at all”, and added, “if you press the claim that Sri Aurobindo was a great poet.. you will only be detracting from his undoubted importance as a thinker and perhaps a saint. You will never persuade any Western poet or critic.” And this view is confirmed in general by other literati, among them William Irwin Thomson, who suggests that yogis should on principle be debarred from expressing themselves in verse, since they do it so badly.

That Sri Aurobindo’s poetry runs absolutely counter to the mode that is currently admired in the West is clear—as a brief quotation from a poem *The Musk-Ox* (1981), by one of the most highly-regarded of contemporary British poets, Ted Hughes, will exemplify.

“The stars are no company.
They huddle at the bottom of their aeons, only just existing,
Jostled by every gust,
Pinned precariously to their flutters of light,
Tense and weightless, ready to be
snatched away into some other infinity.

And the broken tree-dwarves in their hollow, near him,
Have no energy for friendship, no words to spare,
Just hanging on, not daring to think of the
sucking and bottomless emptiness of the blast
That grabs at their nape, and pounds their shoulders.

Both language and sentiments are about as far away from Sri Aurobindo’s utterance as possible. But does this mean that the English literati are right, and that Sri Aurobindo’s characterisation of himself as first and basically a poet, then a politician, later a yogi, and only incidentally a philosopher, and the response of all those who find bottomless wells of inspiration in his poetic works, are hopelessly mistaken? Surely not. It will be more instructive to enquire what it is in Sri Aurobindo’s work that prevents those who might be supposed best qualified to know, from recognising a supreme master of English poetic expression and the greatest innovator in this language since Shakespeare.

A first reason has undoubtedly to do with literary fashion, and the concomitant critical training which the poets of this last half-century and their admirers have imbibed. There has been a strong reaction against all that was

¹ Kathleen Raine in a recent correspondence with our Editor, which, with demonstration and counter-demonstration, forms a fitting sequel to the book lately published of an earlier exchange of letters *The English Language and the Indian Spirit*

considered 'poetic' in thought and expression, all the luxurious richness of imagery and sentiment which may indeed have been seriously overused or even insincerely exploited towards the end of the last century. The scientific world-view and the grim realities of the 20th century have led poets to seek for an austerer use of language, and for themes and images rooted firmly in the physical world—and that perhaps in its greyer and grimmer aspects Sri Aurobindo's vision and language tower so immensely beyond everything that has gained recognition as poetry in the present century—perhaps particularly in Britain; the Americans are a little more exuberant—that for most of those who live and breathe in that tiny air, he is simply out of sight. Can a termite appreciate the beauty of Kailash?

Another, less excusable reason, comes from a peculiarly British sense of exclusive superiority. How can someone who does not belong to the club—an Indian, and a mystic at that—be admitted to excel in the terrain of the élite? The thing is *a priori* inconceivable!

It is true that, as Mallarmé mischievously pointed out to Degas, poetry is made not with ideas, but with words—just as painting is done not with visions but with paints. This does not mean, however, that the aim of poetry is purely linguistic, any more than that the goal of art is purely formal. The words and the paints are means, and the end is the revelation, or at least the suggestion, of what lies beyond either sound or colour. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "It is because Art reveals what Nature hides that a small picture is worth more than all the jewels of the millionaires and the treasures of the princes."

This is what draws us to poetry with an irresistible fascination: the hints and glimpses of something richer and truer, more convincing and satisfying that lies behind the dull façade of everyday reality. We recognise a writer as a poet purely to the extent that, by his methods of word-music, image and suggestion, he can bring us into touch with some vividness and colour and truth our normal unpoetic perceptions miss. That is why for many in the last century who turned away from the emptiness and hypocrisy of conventional Christianity, the worship of Art and Beauty could fill their yearning for significance and deeper truth. In India there is a tradition that the *kavi* sees—and not just a little behind the veil, but into the very heart of things; and by embodying what he sees in inspired, truth-revealing speech, he brings closer to material manifestation the hidden verities that lie potential and preparing there, the true creativity. Of course in England there is no such tradition, no such intuition even. There poets have always had to struggle with the sense that perhaps their creations were mere 'fictions', perhaps even falsehoods, and to counterbalance this doubt they have anchored their images and their creations firmly to the 'realistic'. We are delighted with the infinite inventiveness of Shakespeare because he gives us 'real flesh-and-blood characters' whom we can imagine actually meeting and conversing with

So Sri Aurobindo, by fulfilling the Indian archetype of Kavi and Rishi, has done something absolutely unique in English literature. In this sense it is true to say that what he has done is foreign to the English spirit. But in doing this he has not done violence to the English language. On the contrary he has fulfilled something that was being striven for by its very greatest 'makers'. Something that they have strained for and touched momentarily at instants of peak-attainment, he has sustained and worked out and carried further.

Sri Aurobindo's ultimate poetic achievement is of course *Savitri*; and nowhere in *Savitri* is his use of language more powerful, complex and audaciously original than in the first half of the very first canto of Book One. Here Sri Aurobindo achieves, with unparalleled richness and power, what I believe has never been attempted anywhere else in world-literature. Certainly nowhere else in the history of the English language. The only parallel might be in the composition of the Rig Veda, where, as Sri Aurobindo has shown, an inner psychological sense is carried by an outer, physical and ritualistic. For in this overture to the mighty symphony of his epic, Sri Aurobindo fuses multiple layers of meaning—literal, psychological, occult and spiritual—in a single flow of incomparable music.

First we could examine the outermost layer of meaning, which here, as throughout the rest of the poem, rarely predominates, but is always discernible—a kind of fine skin of physical fact within or beneath which all the other multi-layered levels of meaning open up. On this level, *Savitri* is an epic in the classical Western sense: its vast length and complexity is held together by all three of the classical unities prescribed by Aristotle: the Unities of Place, Time and Theme. That is to say, the 'action' of *Savitri* takes place within a single 24 hour period, beginning with dawn on the day that Satyavan is destined to die, and ending just before the dawn of the following day; it takes place too in one small area, the hermitage of Satyavan's father and the forest around it; and there is only one 'plot' or story-line—that of Savitri and Satyavan and the debate with Death: there are no sub-plots involving minor characters. From this sparest and simplest of frameworks, by 'flashbacks' and inner explorations, the poem ranges over its vast extent of time and inner and outer spaces, and touches upon all the high themes that most concern the significance of human life in the universe.

The poem also fulfils the Greek convention of starting 'in the middle of the story'—not at the chronological beginning, but just before the climax of the action. The earlier parts of the story are then recapitulated, as Savitri sits beside her still-sleeping husband in the first light of that day which she alone knows to be so fateful, remembering all that has led up to this moment.

So, as Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) has clearly shown in his detailed discussion of this passage, 'Some Comments on *Savitri*' on pp. 143-154 of *The Sun and the Rainbow*, the 'symbol dawn' with which the poem begins, is, on this primary level of meaning, simply the dawning of that day on which Satyavan must

die; and similarly the night preceding it is, in the first place, the actual physical darkness occupying the world. To overlook this important fact is to miss an essential element of Sri Aurobindo's poetic technique—a technique which precisely reflects the unique quality of his vision. In English literature metaphor and simile have normally been used to illuminate the symbol—or sometimes merely to ornament or embellish it—but in any case to make something more graspable, living and vivid to our awareness in its explicit, outer aspect. But in this prelude to *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo is not using all these deeply reverberating and evocative epithets and images to make us see more clearly the physical, particular, night and dawn; on the contrary, they almost disappear under the weight of his images. If we concentrate on them, we can always trace their presence, as a background, or an undercurrent or, as I prefer to see it, an almost transparent skin, within and beyond which the real movement of the many-layered meaning takes place. Instead of using inner suggestion and suggestive image to enrich and vivify for us the physical reality, he is using the physical reality with which we are familiar, to make close and vivid for us its many other levels of inner significance. The exoteric, realistic, particular, even factual aspect, though present throughout, does not constitute the full 'burden' or meaning of the poetry. And it is precisely this that gives Sri Aurobindo's use of language here its originality, and makes it appear baffling, complex, over-abstract and unnecessarily prolix to critics familiar with a different mode, and totally unable to enter into the deeper significances with which Sri Aurobindo's symbol is animated

The hour at which the Gods awake, is, according to Indian tradition, four o'clock in the morning. In the essay referred to above, Amal Kiran puts it like this:

“What... Sri Aurobindo posits in

‘It was the hour before the Gods awake’

is a religio-mythical concept that has been part of India's temple-life for millennia: the daily awakening of the Gods.

“The Gods are the Powers that carry on the harmonious functions by which the universe moves on its progressive path. According to an old belief, based on a subtle knowledge of the antagonism between the Lords of Falsehood and the Lords of Truth, the period of night interrupts the work of the Truth-Lords by its obscuration of sight and by its pulling down of the consciousness into sleep. Each day, with the onset of darkness the Gods are stopped in their functions by the Demons: the Gods pass into an oblivious slumber. Each day, with the advent of light they emerge into activity and continue their progress-creating career. Traditionally the moment of their awaking, termed *Brahma-muhurta*, is 4 a.m. Every temple in India rings its bells and clangs its cymbals at 4 a.m. to stir the deities, no less than the devotees, into action. The ‘hour’ therefore, which *Savitri*

depicts at its start may be taken, if we are to be literal, 3 to 4 a.m. The termination of this hour is 'the divine Event' mentioned in the second line."

But at the same time, this particular dawn, at a particular hour of a particular day—the day of Satyavan's destined death—carries within it all the possible significances that are inherent in that potent ancient symbol. It is the coming of Light into Darkness at every possible level of meaning. As Sri Aurobindo puts it in one of his letters to Amal Kiran, quoted in the article mentioned:

"... here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality, and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised; here it is a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind the 'day' of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out."

This 'relapse into Inconscience' is, as Amal Kiran points out in his article, in some way figured each night by the earth's passage through darkness, and our—and the Gods'—lapse into the oblivion of sleep. But in the heart even of this unconsciousness some seed of consciousness remains, stunned, locked; despite its reluctance, its tamasic longing for total forgetfulness, there is an inescapable stir of aspiration, a longing for light, to which comes the responsive pressure of a searching light from above which compels 'renewed consent to see and feel'—and with the response comes the apocalyptic dawn of consciousness: a seed is buried in the hours, which the ages of the earth must labour to evolve to its fulfilment.

But this 'thing symbolised' is also multi-layered. One deepest level of significance, the Mother has elucidated in her talks to Huta *About Savitri*; but the symbol reverberates too with other meanings and can be experienced in other ways.

I myself have sometimes experienced this momentous dawn as the re-awakening to inner consciousness within myself. On another level, we can understand this passage as the condition of the earth before the coming of the Avatar—the embodied Dawn who can illumine mankind for a brief 'Hour of God' during which is almost disclosed 'the epiphany/Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares', but 'Only a little the God-light can stay'—after the divine messenger has passed, we are left to face 'the common light of earthly day'. The whole incident of Savitri's incarnation and debate with and triumph over Death can be seen as just such a 'splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light' at a very early point in human development, leaving a seed to be worked out in the 'day of ordinary human consciousness'—by implication, a forerunner in the dawn of human time of Sri Aurobindo's own transforming mission.

And these are not different 'readings' or 'interpretations', or 'possible senses' Part of the profound possibility of ambiguity in poetic language, as William Empson has pointed out, is that it allows several meanings to be present simultaneously in the consciousness of the reader And in Sri Aurobindo's poetry these simultaneous meanings are neither accidental-nor forced. They are all inherent in his vision of the symbol. At times one level may predominate, at others another, depending on the poet's intention of emphasis or the receptivity and need of the reader, or a combination of both. Writing from the very highest summits of vision and inspiration from which Spirit and Matter and all the intermediate planes of manifestation can be seen in a single gaze, Sri Aurobindo has found the mantric speech which enables all to be co-present on the page. To separate the various levels of meaning can only be an exercise of exploration.

As I suggested earlier, this method is just the reverse of the normal one, as Sri Aurobindo's yogic vision is the reverse of our normal human way of seeing. Poets may be—are supposed to be—more awake to subtler realities than the rest of us; but still for almost all of them it is the material and the physical which is the dominant reality Through and from the physical they get hints and intuitions of deeper realities behind But for Sri Aurobindo we live in a

'... world of fragile forms
Carried on canvas-strips of shimmering Time.'

Material phenomena have a reality, but they are most real simply because informed and animated by deeper levels of significance, as 'real symbols of inner reality'—an inner reality which to him is not fleetingly glimpsed and intuited, but solidly, concretely present, filling the 'outer skin of mortal fact' with deep meaning. In *Savitri*—in contrast to the wide-ranging story-lines of other epics—we have a simple legend which takes place entirely on earth, made into the vehicle for a comprehensive exploration of the inner worlds and all the levels of consciousness—and *this* and not the story is the theme. The story is merely its vehicle or, we could say perhaps, its embodiment. The tale is given significance by what it symbolises—and not the other way round

Precisely this is completely out of the experience of our friends the critics, a) because they have never seen language used this way before; and b) because their perception of what is being done, poetically, is hampered by the fact that the real theme, the real subject matter, is something they are quite unfamiliar with and unsympathetic towards.

Sri Aurobindo's letter to Amal Kiran continues:

"The whole of *Savitri* is, according to the title of the poem, a legend that is a symbol and this opening canto is, it may be said, a key beginning and announcement So understood there is nothing here otiose or unnecessary; all is needed to bring out by suggestion some aspect of the thing symbolised and so

start adequately the working out of the significance of the whole poem.”

In fact this first half of the first canto is like the Overture to a magnificently complex symphony, in which the themes which are to be worked out fully later are touched upon and hinted at and foreshadowed as a preparation for the coming whole. And at the very beginning of his poem, in a particularly compressed and concentrated form, he gives us too a foretaste of his poetic method. In these few pages of supreme poetry, now one aspect of symbolic meaning predominates, and now another, as if the total significance of these magic words were a circling sphere of innumerable illuminated facets: a gleam is thrown now from here and now from there, yet none is allowed to stand distinct from all the others: these are aspects of *one* Truth, the many meanings of one symbol, inseparably fused.

It is only natural that such a language should seem ‘vague’ and unseizable, even incomprehensible, to those who are used to straightforward narrative, clear symbol, transparent allegory, and who lack any key in their own experience or intuition—or even mental conception—to the profounder reverberations which these images evoke.

Nevertheless it is important for us to recognise that what has created in modern writers and critics an instinctive aversion to all rich resonant use of language, all suggestion of possible worlds and planes beyond the scope of earthly vision, is a certain scrupulousness, a salutary caution against empty pomposity, a distrust of high-coloured language veiling emptiness of thought or imprecision of conception, together with a sense that in this disillusioned century it is unsafe to soar too far from earth’s well-known if tawdry ‘realities’. This aversion must make it almost impossible for them to absorb the wondrous rhythms, imagery and word-magic of Sri Aurobindo with the silent receptivity that is needed to thrill to its deeper resonances; and we may pity this lack of receptivity, but should not take the critical strictures of the ‘moderns’ too seriously—as far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned: his vision justified such a magnificence of language. In the case of our own writings, we may benefit from a dose of the restraint and avoidance of over-colouring and fancifulness that is urged upon us by these sober-minded critics. If we seek to echo Sri Aurobindo’s poetic voice, without having shared the inspiration from which it flowed, we shall certainly be justifying their severest charges

SHRADDHAVAN
(ANNE MARGARET ROBINSON)

DIALOGUE

Soul

TURN to the Light, be a blossoming bud
Keep your consciousness high
Down in the nether world's horrible mud
Never lament and cry and sigh.

No use letting the vampire suck,
The sorcerer play his ominous game—
And inviting the torture of repeated attack—
A weak and sickly fragile frame!

Body

Radiant, conscious, wise and kind,
Thou art a spark of the Supreme Divine.
Gross am I, so brutal and blind,
Wantonly wallowing in the ravine.

Soul

Despair not ever—know for sure
In the darkest depth of this inert cave
He is involved to rise once more
To become the Master and free the slave.

Bare yourself and allow His climb
From thy bottomless abyss to know
Himself in thee in His rights sublime
And bridge the gulf between us two.

Body

What joy to feel this luminous stride!
Let it be so, O friend and guide!

SATADAL

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of September 1990)

SRI AUROBINDO continued: "And now, we will enter more fully into a discussion of politics, though I am not sure your innocent minds will really be able to comprehend its complexities and deviousnesses, particularly since the life in our Ashram is completely cut off from all political activity. Besides, I don't think you are much interested to hear about all that ancient history in detail, specially about the Independence movement."

"No, no, that's not true. We may not understand everything but we would certainly like to know. Our teachers have already told us quite a bit about the country and the revolutionary activities that led to its independence. Were you indeed one of the leaders of the revolution?"

(Laughing) "Oh! You have heard that, have you! But actually, it's not wholly true "

"How's that?"

"Well, I suppose I'll have to start from the beginning.

"When the *Induprakash* was forbidden to publish my articles and essays, I realised that the country was really led by the Moderates, by men who cared more for their own reputation and happiness than for the motherland. They would like to help the latter, but certainly not by jeopardising the former. And so they had no intention of clashing with or revolting against the authorities. They believed that if we Indians behaved like good children, obeying in all things the kind well-intentioned British Government, then it would surely offer us our independence on a silver platter. Not only were they completely unwilling to sacrifice their own interests, they were also quite capable of hindering the work of any true and idealistic patriot if they found that he came in the way of their personal interests. And they all loved power, so they clung to it with all their might.

"Certain things about my future course of action now became clear to me. First of all, the power must be snatched away from these older people, that is to say, the younger revolutionaries must take over the Congress Party. We must proclaim our aim to be complete independence, an aim that was believed to be a dream of fools in those days, since it seemed hardly likely for the great British Government to give us our freedom or for us to be ever strong enough to snatch it from them. Hence according to the older Congress members our best policy was to hope for their kindness and condescension to give us some limited powers. This was a clear instance of the slave mentality which characterised the thinking of many of those leaders.

“Secondly, a band of young men had to be trained in secret who could in due course rise up in armed rebellion against the Government. Actually, several such groups inspired by European ideas and books were readying themselves already for a similar armed revolt, particularly in Bengal and in Maharashtra.”

“But what could those small rebellions do against the mighty British Empire?”

“You know, success was not the only issue. It was also sacrifice, for sacrifice alone can give back to a moribund race its self-respect and confidence. And nothing as great as Freedom can be won cheaply. It demands its price of blood. Your arguments sound very similar to those of the older gentlemen of those days. Many others too thought like them, not only because they were afraid, but also because they lacked any real knowledge either of politics or of warfare. Perhaps your error stems from the fact that you are judging the situation of the time by today's standards of political and military power: In those days no nation on earth had the military armaments or organisation one commonly finds today. The gun, not even the cannon, was the chief weapon, and airplanes did not yet exist. Just think how vast India is! And this land was ruled from thousands of miles away by a nation that was a tiny fraction of its size. A handful of British officers and a few thousand soldiers—mostly Indians—kept our country under its yoke. One may say that Indian soldiers and Indian officials kept the country subject to the foreigner, a situation that has no parallel in the history of the world. Have you heard of the attack on the Chittagong Armoury? If only a few ill-equipped youths could cut the city of Chittagong off from the rest of the country, what could not have been possible if the whole country had possessed an organised network of rebels, all trained in guerilla warfare? Our huge country is an ideal setting for this type of warfare which Shivaji and the Mahrattas had used with so much success, attacking and destroying the Government's forces with silent, deadly stealth.”

“But what about the repercussions? Wouldn't the Government retaliate with renewed oppression?”

“That is just what was required, the excessive cruelty which alone would shake a slavish nation out of its passivity and torpor. It could also help to bind the country together. The belief held by our educated élite about British magnanimity and kindness, would be dispelled, and even the Indian armed forces would be roused to rebellion. Another thing that our leaders had insufficient knowledge of was the English character and its politics. The British Government, though it was imperialist, was quite different from Germany, Russia or Japan. Its politics had always been quite sharp and subtle while its practical sense recognised the fact that there are times when mutual agreement and compromise are necessary. Once it realised that the colonies would no longer accept the yoke of oppression and injustice at any cost, it would try to find a solution for getting out of the impasse with a minimum loss of self-respect. The

British don't usually kick you out of their house, they prefer to show you the door, though sometimes of course they may throw you out by the scruff of your neck. (*Laughter*) There have been Indians who felt elated at the news of Hitler's victories and some would have even welcomed Japan into our homeland, but they forgot the cruelty and inhumanity those nations are capable of. What Hitler did to Europe would have happened to India if he had ever taken over our country "

"But Japan is Asiatic, she is one of us. Many believe that if Japan had come to India, she would have helped us to win our freedom and to become a strong nation—after which she would have left."

"Oh! is that so! What an infantile notion! Do you not know the age-old dream of the Nippon Sun rising over the whole of Asia? If Japan had once managed to get a foothold in India, no force on earth, neither the I.N.A. nor Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement, could have succeeded in throwing her out. In comparison the British are infinitely milder. You saw how, having offered us our freedom, they slipped out of our country more or less quietly. It is extremely rare in the history of the world for a nation to win her freedom without bloodshed. Their behaviour tallied exactly with the conclusions I had drawn when I had made the analysis of their character during my stay in England."

"But today ours is a partitioned freedom with its terrible aftermath of bloodshed..."

"Ah! But we ourselves are responsible for that mistake. Anyway, let's shelve these discussions for the present and come back to our story. So there I was in Baroda. The next step in my political plan was to get a young man named Jatin Banerjee to join the Maharaja's army so that he might receive a military training."

"But why in Baroda?"

"Because the Maharaja was a patriotic man and quite independent-minded. Also because the British Government refused to accept Bengalis into the military on the excuse that the Bengali race was not a warlike one. The truth of the matter was that it did not trust Bengalis. Later when Jatin had finished his training, I sent him back to Bengal as my representative. By then, very many centres of physical training and several body-building associations had sprung up all over the state where boys learnt wrestling and boxing and other combative sports. These centres and clubs taught them not only how to strengthen their bodies but also how to ride and shoot. I wished at the same time to inculcate in them a spirit of oneness as well as to awaken the spirit of revolt. The young men were very receptive to these new ideas and the clubs multiplied very fast indeed.

"In the meantime I too joined the revolutionaries of Western India. I was sworn into the Party. When I went to Bengal I met P. Mitra and a number of other leaders to whom I spoke about this revolutionary society. Many of them decided to take the oath that would make them its members. Another of my aims

was to unite the various centres and associations fighting for our freedom into one single body. In that I did not succeed. But even this failure helped our cause, one may say, for all these small separate groups were very dynamic and the revolutionary ideals spread far and wide. My brother Barin whom I had already initiated into the Movement now became one of its most active workers. These young rebels gave the country the fire and force which were so evident just after the Partition of Bengal, and it was they who were the core around whom grew up the Extremist Party, a Party that rose up as a direct challenge to the Moderates ”

“But how did you manage to do two things at once—your job and your revolutionary activities?”

(*Laughing*) “The revolutionary in me continued with these secret activities while the professor diligently taught his students—what was so difficult about that? No one outside our Organisation knew about us and our aims and then, when the work required me to go to Bengal, I would ask for special leave of absence and go there.”

“We have heard that you even got married?”

“Why is that so incredible? (*Laughing*) Many people find it indeed hard to believe, because they are convinced that I was a Yogi from birth!”

“But isn't marriage a hindrance for one who has sworn to free his motherland?”

“Why should that be so? Most of the Swadeshi leaders were married and were heads sometimes of large families. For example, the father of your Tejenda was a great nationalist leader. Did his marriage come in the way of the sacrifice he made for his country?”

“Since you have raised the topic of marriage, let me tell you one or two stories. When I was to get married, the Brahmins asked me to shave my head, but I refused to do so. In fact I was unwilling to perform any rite whatever that they asked me to perform. You know, don't you, that orthodox Hindus were expected to do penance if they returned home after leaving the shores of India, particularly if they had visited Europe. When I refused everything the poor Pandits told me—‘Well, then, give us some money and we will perform all your penances for you!’ (*Laughter*)

“One fine morning after my marriage, my brother Barin unexpectedly appeared on our doorstep without any apparent rhyme or reason. His dirty unshaved face and filthy clothes reminded me of an escaped convict ‘Straight into the bathroom,’ I told him. ‘Wash yourself and get into something clean before we sit down to talk ’ He did this readily. After his Matric, Barin had been staying in Patna with our brother Manmohan where he had set up a tea-shop. Since he was no good as a businessman, his venture had failed and here he was! It was at this time that he started getting interested in Spiritualism and began reading a great deal about what happens to the soul after the body dies. His curiosity about this occultism grew and, seeking to experiment with these

phenomena, he began to practise planchette, table-tapping and similar exercises. I too would sometimes join him during these sessions. Some of the results they showed were truly startling.”

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN “EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of September 1990)

Some Letters of Sri Aurobindo

HERE I include the last three letters written to me by Sri Aurobindo in 1936 during my stay in Pondicherry, and the last one which he wrote to me after I had returned to Calcutta. These complete all the correspondence I had with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There was another beautiful letter written in Bengali touched with sweet humour. It is missing

Esha,

17-5-1936

Why have you written that we are annoyed with you? We never were nor are we now angry with you, there is no reason for annoyance, you haven't done anything wrong.

Did you not get my letter yesterday morning? I certainly wrote to you, about our love, also that you would attain union with us. Anyway, I am writing the same thing again, we love you very much and that love will always remain unimpaired. Don't be sad or give any quarter to hopelessness in your mind. Foster this firm faith always in the mind—"I shall certainly attain union with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, shall have their vision even though I stay far from them." Remember us always, look towards us always. Those who do so achieve unity with us, you will also do the same. And if you do this, it is very likely that there will be such a combination of circumstances that you will be able to come here and have our darshan. Come tomorrow definitely and see the Mother.

*

Esha,

I could not reply to your letters because till now I had work all day every day. It is the same even now, but there is a little respite today, it being a Sunday; that is why I am writing a few lines.

Why do you feel sad if you think of us or see us in dreams? It should be a matter of joy that the Mother came to you in a dream. Don't allow yourself to be sad because you will not see us now. Remain calm, believing that the Mother is remembering you, loving you, is near you always; wait for the right moment; what obstacles are there now will not be there always.

Remember the Mother at all times, rely on her. If there is constant remembrance, one day you will see her, see her within yourself too.

*

Esha,

Look, if I see you, will anybody else spare me? Won't they say, "You have seen Esha and you can't see us? What is this arrangement? Why this injustice? Aren't we also human beings?" And then when one hundred and fifty people will come crowding onto me, what will be my fate? Just think about it and tell me.

I have to write a long letter in Bengali? Have I got that capacity or the time? I am at the end of my tether trying to write this small one, the night also is over. All right, this time I have somehow written in Bengali, but I warn you that I shall not be able to do such an exercise again.

*

Esha,

I haven't been able to write to you for a long time—I wanted to but couldn't manage. This time more than seven hundred people have come for darshan—many came long before the 15th, many have stayed on even after that date till today, now they are departing. That is why there was a great deal of additional work. The Ashram work also increased a lot. It could not be finished in spite of working all day and night. That is why I couldn't write to anyone outside. Now it has eased a bit, I can therefore write this letter. But the decrease in work is very little. I still have a good deal of necessary work, can't finish it, can't find the time yet.

I can't understand why you haven't received Jyotirmoyee's letter and the flower sent by her—but you may have perhaps received the letter sent meanwhile, she must have given her own explanation.

I hope you are well. Even if you can't get fixed times to call the Mother, call her always and try to offer all your life and all your work to her.

*

There is another short letter written to Jyotirmoyee in 1931 asking her to forward it to Esha's Calcutta address.

You can tell Esha that we have never been angry with her at all. If I don't write, it is because it has been practically impossible for me to write letters outside. Even the most necessary and urgent correspondence has been left

unreplied for months together—this is due to a pressure I cannot avoid.

As for their coming here the Mother said that it was impossible to provide them with rooms in the Ashram. They would have to arrange outside. This is first because there were many difficulties last time, neither Maya nor Esha being accustomed to live as sadhaks here do and yet it is too difficult to make special arrangements, but also because Dilip's rooms cannot be used this time and there is no other place that we can spare.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

MOOT COURT HEARING ON SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OR EDWARD DE VERE?

Few readers of literature know of a recent event of great interest to the literary world. On September 25, 1987, the American University, Washington D.C., held a trial to decide a question that has vexed scholars for over three centuries. Mother India has the privilege to serialize the fascinating proceedings, thanks to the enthusiastic help of our friend Mr. William W Jones of Memphis, Tennessee, U.S.A

(Continued from the issue of September 1990)

BOYLE—With the court's permission, I will limit my rebuttal of the claim for de Vere to three specific points and three general ones. The specific points first. First, the lack of eulogies in the first folio, which my learned friend mentioned. We must remember that William Shakespeare died in Stratford-upon-Avon, which, in that period, in the Elizabethan era, was, really speaking, a long way from London. In terms of its communication, in terms of the ease of news flow, which is so amply demonstrated around us, Stratford-upon-Avon was not like Washington D.C. in the twentieth century, and it would have been very easy for people simply not to have known William Shakespeare was dead. Secondly, I would claim that...

JUSTICE—But on that point, wouldn't the executors of his estate, Heminge and Condell, have known about it? They were mentioned in the will. And they were involved later in the first folio.

BOYLE—That is correct. However, I think that one would need a greater number of people involved to generate the kind and amount of eulogies that were, for example, given to Burbadge or to Ben Jonson.

JUSTICE—Yes, but how about just one?

BOYLE—Well, in fact, there were two. Not one but two eulogies to Shakespeare shortly after his death. First, by John Taylor, the water poet, who may have known Shakespeare personally since he ferried people across the Thames in his boat to the theatres. And, secondly, by an undergraduate at one of the universities who suggested that Shakespeare should be housed in the traditional burying place of all great British literary men, Westminster Abbey. So I think we do have some eulogies even though they don't immediately follow on the death and I would suggest that we can expect no more until the work of the first folio has taken place, at which time it seems to me a memorial is presented which anyone would be proud of. Second, I would claim that it doesn't matter, contrary to my colleague's suggestion, who wrote the *Greene's Groats-worth of Wit*. Both

Henry Chettle and Robert Greene were closely involved in the work of the Elizabethan stage. Both of them would have had every reason to know if there was an imposture being carried out; thus whoever wrote it, and I would still claim it was Robert Greene, it doesn't matter if the testimony stands. Third, I would point out that as we get more and more into my learned friend's case, the assumptions about who were the conspirators, who were misled, who were merely lying, who had been paid to keep quiet become more and more numerous. I would claim that the point about whether Digges knew, whether Heminge and Condell knew, whether Jonson knew, whether they were conspirators or not, this brings out an essential weakness in my learned friend's argument. And this is the weakness to which I wish to devote my first general point of rebuttal. I think that if we are adopting today the principle of parsimony, the principle that we should seek the simplest explanation, it is clear which is the simplest explanation. The simplest explanation is that William Shakespeare wrote William Shakespeare. We need to assume in order for this to be true a few things. Let us say that we need to assume that William Shakespeare attended Stratford grammar school. Does this seem unlikely? On the contrary, for my learned friend's case to be true, we need to assume pseudonymous authors who can't decide whether or not they want to hide their authorship; who have no apparent motive to hide their authorship and yet they do so and then they change their minds and leave us hints throughout the works. We need to imagine enormous conspiracies. We need to imagine perhaps Queen Elizabeth, Burghley, Jonson, Digges, Heminge, Condell, all being involved in a gigantic conspiracy. This I would suggest is an enormous chain of assumptions. My assumptions, which are assumptions that are required for my case to be proved, I would claim are comparatively mild. Thus, under the principle of parsimony, under Occam's razor, I would claim that my case is shredded considerably less than is that of my colleague. Second, I would claim that illuminated by their historical context there is clear evidence that the records left by William Shakespeare prove he was the author. Here I would just like to reiterate a point I made in my earlier argument. Both the romantic vision of authorship which makes us think Shakespeare's legal records strange and the idea of lack of knowledge, for example about Stratford grammar schools' curriculum, the curriculum of Elizabethan grammar schools—these are simply 20th century assumptions. If we look at them with the eyes of historians the apparent inconsistencies disappear, and on this point it is notable, it's something which I think we should pay some attention to. Very few historians and literary scholars have embraced the Oxfordian view, almost without exception they have embraced the Stratfordian one. Here I suggest is the reason. Those who know about the Elizabethan period are less willing to make the assumptions required. Third, my final point. I would claim that there is a reason for this debate—there is a reason for the eternal search to find another author behind Shakespeare's

works. And that reason is that at the moment we know little of William Shakespeare's character. There is behind the works as it were an enormous question mark—we simply don't know what kind of a man this was, and we long to know what kind of a man this was. We long to know because in some sense when we look at these great plays, *Hamlet*, for example, we want to know: Is this a Freudian fable? Is this about Shakespeare's feelings for his mother? Is this about power struggles in the Elizabethan Court? What's it really about? And because of that, I would suggest, those that support the Earl of Oxford are led to say: "I wish someone about whom we knew a lot more had written these plays", and from the wish to the deed is but a short step. Thus they substitute Edward de Vere, about whom we know a great deal, for William Shakespeare, about whom we know practically nothing, and *voulà* we know who wrote the works and thus we understand them better! I would claim that this same idea that we need to limit the approach to the meaning of texts which come down to us, in part explains the current debates about the intent of the framers of the constitution. Here again we have an attempt to limit the meaning of an historical document. I would conclude by saying that the arguments in favor of William Shakespeare are overwhelming. I think that we should say with Ben Jonson: 'a good poet made as well as born, and such wert thou.'

BERENDZEN—The court will now recess until 3 o'clock and return here at that time. But may I hold you just one moment—On behalf of all of us at The American University, indeed all who care about justice, the law and literature, I should like most sincerely to thank all of the participants this morning. After hearing the two law professors and three justices my own faith in American jurisprudence is at an all-time high. We thank all of you.

I remind you again that the court will render its decision at three o'clock, and the justices have agreed to take questions about this morning's discussion. See you then.

BREAK

(To be continued)

THE FIRST INDIANS?

CONTRARY to all current scientific thinking, we may soon have to revise the established date of man's arrival in India. Man, they say, evolved in Africa around two million years ago (myr) and his journey out of Africa is placed at around 0.7 myr. But archeologists at the Deccan College, Pune, have new evidence that points to man's presence in India, near Pune in Maharashtra to be precise, about 1.4 myr and probably even before then. This 'creature', it is surmised, was perhaps *Homo erectus*, one of the early species of man.

How did they stumble on this? Two years ago a team of researchers from the Deccan College, Pune, found a two-metre deposit of fine angular glass shards within the deposits of the Kukdi river near the village of Bori in Pune District. These glass shards resembled those resulting from a volcanic eruption. The molten lava ejected from a volcano cools rapidly forming glass. The finer particles so formed are transported over long distances by the winds and are finally deposited on the earth, often far from the volcano from which they originated. The finding of such deposits, called tephra, in India was quite unexpected as there are no active volcanoes here. On the basis of similarities in chemical composition, the tephra found in Bori has been linked to an explosion of the Toba volcano in Sumatra, more than 3000 km away. Toba tephra have been found in ocean sediments in the Bay of Bengal, in the Indian Ocean and the Son Valley in India. That a volcano deposited a recognisable layer 3000 km away suggests that its explosion was extremely powerful, many times more powerful than any witnessed historically. At Bori, however, we have evidence that man witnessed the tephra fall because signs of human activity in the form of tools have been found in layers above and below the tephra layer. Tephra can be dated and so it can give us a date for man's presence in India.

How is tephra dated? Tephra contains potassium, a small proportion of which is radioactive. The radioactive potassium decays into argon which is an inert gas. When the tephra is thrown out during an eruption, argon being a gas is driven out by the heat of the molten lava and so at that point in time there is no argon in it. Subsequently, however, argon begins to accumulate in the tephra due to the radioactive decay of potassium which has persisted in the shards through its molten stage. Therefore by measuring the ratio of potassium to argon in the tephra the date of the volcanic eruption that created the shard can be found. This date can be an indicator of the age of the layers of sediments associated with it—those below it are layers that formed before the volcanic eruption, and the layers above it are those formed after the eruption. Potassium-argon dating of the Bori tephra was carried out at Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, and the date of the eruption estimated at 1.4 million years ago. This was the second surprise.

The evidence for man's presence at Bori when the tephra fall occurred

comes from stone tools found within the sediments immediately above and below the tephra. Prehistorians have certain criteria for deciding whether a stone has been modified by man. For most of man's career as a toolmaker, he was using stone as a material for making them. Tools were made by breaking one stone against another. The small fragments of stones—called flakes—have sharp edges and served as tools. Also, stone modules or large flakes could be shaped to make a larger tool.

Artefacts below the tephra come from three locations. In two separate wells where the tephra is the uppermost layer, a gravel occurs at the base of the well overlying bedrock. In this gravel a single flake has been found from each well. Considering that this gravel is the earliest deposit in the Kukdi river bed and has very limited exposure, this is quite important evidence. This year a large flake was found within the black clay which underlies the tephra layer. The flake was found about one-and-half metre below the tephra—a convincing evidence of man's presence here prior to the tephra fall. The tephra is overlain by a gravel which contains a fairly large number of stone tools. That makes it seem that man continued to occupy the site at Bori even after the tephra fall.

The man who witnessed the tephra fall at Bori 1.4 million years ago was a very different creature from us. In Africa, bones of man of this period have been found. This man, *Homo erectus*, had a small brain but walked upright like modern man. Prehistorians are very much interested in figuring out the nature of man at this stage of evolution, when stone tool making had first begun.

The earliest stone tools are 2 million years old in Africa, not very much earlier than the estimated date for the tools found at Bori. Further studies of the remains found at Bori may contribute to our understanding of this creature. As it is, the fact that man was in India at such an early age has tremendous implications for our understanding of how humans evolved. Previously, the oldest accepted evidence for man outside of Africa was only 0.7 million years.

The tools from the gravel overlying the tephra are called "Acheulian" tools and they first occur in Africa at 1.5 million years ago. So their occurrence in India 1.4 million year ago would be a very interesting find indeed. Scientists would also like to know more about the palaeoenvironment of man at Bori which can be understood better by studies of the stone tools and sediments found there.

The Deccan College team is still working at Bori and expects the work to continue for many years. There are still, however, many unanswered questions. We would like to date the tephra by other methods too just to confirm the accuracy of the results obtained so far. We have already made some progress on this. Another radioactive decay method, the thorium-uranium dating technique, which can be used for dating up to 0.4 million years, was attempted and it was found that the tephra is much older than that indeed. We have also measured the direction of the earth's magnetic fields in the tephra by its associated sediments and have found them to be reversed; this shows that the tephra is definitely more

than 700,000 years old. Therefore our estimate of 1.4 million years as the age of the tephra is probably correct. We would like to date the gravel overlying the tephra independently. If we can show it to have been formed immediately after the tephra fall, then we will have our best evidence for man in India.

SHEILA MISHRA

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“SATYAVAN MUST DIE”

A DISCOURSE APROPOS OF A PHRASE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of September 1990)

5. A Being so Rare

THE moment Savitri tells her father that she has chosen Satyavan for a husband, Narad, according to the Vyasa-episode, strikes a note of deep and painful concern. On being asked by Aswapathy, he tells him that Satyavan is a virtuous person and is given to high conduct of life.

विवस्वानिव तेजस्वी बृहस्पतिसमो मतौ ।
महेन्द्र इव वीरश्च वसुधेव समन्वितः ॥
सांकृते रन्तिदेवस्य स्वशक्त्या दानतः समः ।
ब्रह्मण्यः सत्यवादी च शिबिरौशीनरो यथा ॥
ययातिरिव चोदारः सोमवत् प्रियदर्शनः ।
रूपेणान्यतमोऽश्विभ्यां ह्युमत्सेनसुतो बली ॥
स दान्तः स मृदुः शूरः स सत्यः संयतेन्द्रियः ।
स मैत्रः सोऽनसूयश्च स ह्रीमान् द्युतिमांश्च सः ॥
नित्यशश्चार्जवं तस्मिन् स्थितितस्तस्यैव च ध्रुवा ।
संक्षेपतस्तपोवृद्धैः शीलवृद्धैश्च कथ्यते ॥

“Satyavan is bright like the Sun-God Vivasvan and has a sharp intellect like that of Brihaspati; and, while a hero-warrior like Indra, he is forebearing in the manner of the Earth. Like Sankriti, the son of Rantideva, he is munificent within the means at his disposal; and like Shibi, the son of Ushinar, he is a Brahmandevout and is a speaker of the truth. Like Yayati he is exceedingly generous and is beautiful like the moon; this son of Dyumatsena, strong in build, is handsome as if he were one of the Ashwinikumars themselves. He has subdued his passions, is soft-natured, is a youth of heroic deeds, is full of truth, and has regulated the senses; he is friendly to everybody, without envy, and is of a reserved, shy disposition, brightsome as he is. Those who have advanced in deep meditative practices and tapasya say briefly about him that he is straightforward and is steadfast on the path of duty and is well-established in fine qualities.” But, on being pressed by the King to tell if there are any blemishes, Narad adds that there is only one blemish in him and that lies in the fact that he is to die after one year on the same day as now. However, eventually, finding that Savitri is firm in her resolve to marry Satyavan, despite knowing this fate, Narad approves of it. He considers her resolve well founded in the precepts of the Dharma The sage

then blesses the royal hosts and, before taking his leave for his home in Paradise, wishes for them all propitious things of life and good fortune.

Not that it is Narad alone who speaks highly about the virtuous attributes of Satyavan. Even Yama, the stern governor of the mortal world, when he was asked by Savitri why he had come himself personally to take away his soul instead of sending his subordinates, tells her that Satyavan's soul is exceptionally beautiful consisting of very rare, fine and bright features and that it is an ocean of noble qualities, *gunasagara*; being fixed as he is in the Dharma, *dharmasamyukta*, his assistants would have found it impossible to pull it out of his body. Rishi Dhaumya also saw Satyavan to be rich in merit, and handsome, one with the marks of a person having a long life, *dirghayurlakshana*. It was on the strength of this merit that he was assuring his afflicted father Dyumatsena that, though it was late in the night for Satyavan to return to the hermitage, he must be alive and must be safe in the forest.

A faith in the complete efficacy of the Dharma in the most adverse circumstances of life, even in the face of death, is what we notice as extolled by Narad; but we are left in the dark about the reason behind the early and predestined death of Satyavan. We do not know why the Father-Creator Brahma should have allotted him only a short life-span when his soul is said to be so luminously bright, an ocean of noble qualities. It becomes a perplexing anomaly that the meritorious should be short-lived. For the ancients the matter was fairly straightforward. They knew, and accepted, that in the world what operates is the Law of Fate and that, in the highest sense, even the gods are subject to it. It is not possible for us mortals to ever come to know the reasons or the logic of this working: we cannot measure the ways of Fate which is some secret Knowledge-Will in action. All that we would be given to know is the fact of its occurrence and not the why of it. Fate, thus being the Will of the Wise in its world-activity, cannot be challenged. The Father-Creator in all his benignity has ordered things well for the good of the creatures and hence their wisdom should truly lie in accepting it, even if it should seem to be full of distress for them. Though perhaps hidden from him in various details, Narad sees Satyavan's fate, and Savitri's resolve too, as a part of this higher scheme; there is a certain appropriateness of these in the conduct of the Dharma. There is an implicit confidence that ultimately all shall turn out to be a miracle of happiness and fulfilment, as indeed it happened in the case of Savitri who finally received five boons from Yama himself. Dharma is always rewarding.

But this Dharma, the Law of the Truth, the Will of the Wise, can have its truthful finality only when it is accepted by the innermost soul of man. A choice is left for him. Sri Aurobindo's Narad is quite familiar with all parts of the complex enginery of Ananke. He has the power to look into "the unseen with seeing eyes". He knows therefore well who Satyavan is and what his death actually purports and why such an event must occur in the evolving steps of

Time. A far dimension larger than the cosmic is seen at this epoch-making juncture. Therefore Śatyavan, though belonging to heaven, accepts the ordeals of life here on the earth. Born in Time he is the joy of Eternity; untouched by the night he is a star of splendour in the dark emptinesses of the sky; unaffected by the turbidity of the pool's water he is a lonely blooming lotus white in its purity. What he speaks comes out with the potency of a secret mantra's truth. Perfect in beauty, noble and sweet and joyful, he attracts all hearts to live in his own. Tall like a heaven-reaching deodar and strong and well-founded like a golden temple tower, he is solidly rooted in the earth. "A being so rare, of so divine a make", that hardly could he be safe here, in the harshness of the error and the falsehood. Too great and noble to attract evil! Yet he is "A godhead quarried from the stones of life" and must fulfil himself in the world. In the words of Narad:

A marvel of the meeting earth and heavens
 Is he whom Savitri has chosen mid men,
 His figure is the front of Nature's march,
 His single being excels the works of Time.
 A sapphire cutting from the sleep of heaven,
 Delightful is the soul of Satyavan,
 A ray out of the rapturous infinite,
 A silence waking to a hymn of joy.
 A divinity and kingliness gird his brow;
 His eyes keep a memory from a world of bliss.
 As brilliant as a lonely moon in heaven,
 Gentle like the sweet bud that spring desires,
 Pure like a stream that kisses silent banks,
 He takes with bright surprise spirit and sense...
 The Happy in their bright ether have not hearts
 More sweet and true than this of mortal make
 That takes all joy as the world's native gift
 And to all gives joy as the world's natural right.
 His speech carries a light of inner truth,
 And a large-eyed communion with the Power
 In common things has made veilless his mind,
 A seer in earth-shapes of garbless deity...
 His sweetness and his joy attract all hearts
 To live with his own in a glad tenancy,
 His strength is like a tower built to reach heaven,
 A godhead quarried from the stones of life¹

This rare being of divine make has consented to walk in the doubtful ray of Nature and brave the hazards of wind and storm, of Time and Fate. There is

something inherently incompatible between “Heaven’s greatness” and this mortal life which he has accepted for turning it into God-life. As long as this something is not triumphed over, the travail must continue. Indeed, Savitri’s union with Satyavan cannot be fulfillingly complete until then. “To meet her Lord in the shadow and the Night” is the all-absorbing pursuit of her soul and it is that in which she finds the occultly packed meaning and purpose of Satyavan’s death. Of that love’s search Satyavan has become a symbol and it is as though to keep that symbol alive and ablaze in the folds of darkness that he has consented to die. It is to make in Savitri’s hand, or rather in her heart, that love stronger, and impervious to the contingencies of suffering and pain and death, that he has accepted subjugation under the yoke of the Ender of the worlds. Mortality’s quickest and finest approach towards the eternal Day seems to be by cutting across the kingdoms of Night where the all-swallowing figure of Death feeds himself on Life. To bear the pressure and impact of this lightless Void is to prepare and obtain here on the earth itself plenitudes of the triple Splendour. Only God-Truth and God-Force can withstand the onslaught and fury of the destroying power of that All-Nothingness; it is in the persons of Satyavan and Savitri that they take this ordeal upon themselves.

A portion of the *prajñā* consciousness of heaven, the causal will and light of things, the law by which the cycles of the stars are born and speed, the self-existent by which all live and in which all become, the one support of this vast universe whose end cannot be seen by human sight and therefore seems self-rapt—that is “the sleep of heaven” and it is that “sleep” which has taken a human shape so that it may experience across the travails of earthly time the presence of the Real and lead humanity to the gates of God. More than that. It shall also bring to humanity itself those gates of God as though to oblige the far Deity to step out of its secret dwelling to walk here in the gloom-filled regions. Then only could the transcendental meaning of the creation be consummately purposeful. Of this “sleep of heaven”, *suśupti*, the pure *prajñā* consciousness, Satyavan’s soul is a sapphire cutting gifted to earth. But, unfortunate as the ways of the world are, as things stand today, the gift is meant only for a brief hour. It will be soon snatched away by the Robber of the Night. And yet it has to be claimed back for humanity, which is Savitri’s task. In the process the Robber has to be overpowered and destroyed by the incarnate Force herself. That is the tremendous and awe-inspiring magnitude of her work. Satyavan who is in the forefront of humanity has now to cross the last ditch: death. He has to step into immortality on earth; for this crossing to be possible, Savitri herself has to become “a golden bridge”. Satyavan has been doing this difficult Earth-Yoga, the Yoga of Evolution, through the ages, silently and perhaps unknown even to himself. Now this Yoga has reached a stage when it must step into the light for progress in Knowledge. Its path must cut through Death because there is no other way out for it. Indeed, the path has to be newly cut and, while Savitri is

going to do it, she must also cut off the heavy dead Past; the Subconscient of the Earth is standing in the way blocking all progress. "The huge foreboding mind of Night" is the creation's obstacle across the path of the "divine Event" and has to be tackled and eliminated once for all. The "sapphire cutting", luminous in its calm intensity, must shine in that darkness's bosom so that "Death be dead". To adapt Shelley again: in that death a new race must begin, a race not of unbodied but bodied joy with all the riches of the sky.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

REFERENCE

- 1 *Savitri*, pp 429-431

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1990)

DURING the Renaissance period of India from the birth of Raja Rammohan Roy (1772) up to Sri Aurobindo's birth (1872) many great leaders, heroes and Rishis were born while the young brains of India were indulging in the coarse habits caught from inferior examples of European civilisation. There were Bankim Chandra, who was born in Bengal in 1838 and gave us "the reviving mantra" of *Bande Mataram*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak who was born in 1856 in Maharashtra and gave a new light to Indian Nationalism and declared "Swaraj is my birthright". Later Sri Aurobindo, co-worker of Tilak in the field of politics, preached total independence for India.

Bankim Chandra's Life and Work

Bankim Chandra came from the district of 24 Parganas, at Kantalpara, twenty-four miles from Calcutta. As his father, Jadav Chandra, was fond of English education, he took it up and side by side was put to learn Sanskrit from a Pundit in his early childhood. He imbibed the spirit and culture of India. At the same time he developed a rationalistic mind from his English education. So two streams of cultures joined in Bankim Chandra and formed a synthesis which helped his mind in the work of his country's reconstruction. He infused the spirit of patriotism in the Indian consciousness. He counteracted through his mighty pen the distorting effects of the Western impact upon the promising youths of the time. He inaugurated the literary Renaissance.

Nationalism grew from Bengali literature. "...This is quite clear from Bengali literature which made the greatest contribution to the development of national and patriotic feeling during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The name of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee stands foremost in this connection. His famous novel, *Anandamath*, contains the hymn *Bande Mataram* which had been the national anthem of India up to 1947. During the long and arduous struggle for freedom from 1905-1947, *Bande Mataram* was the rallying cry of the patriotic sons of India, thousands of them succumbed to the Lathi blows of the British police or mounted the scaffold with *Bande Mataram* on their lips. The main theme of the novel inspired the Bengali youths to supreme self-sacrifice during the hectic days of the Swadeshi Movement. The central plot moves round a band of sannyasis called Santanas or Children who left their hearth and home and dedicated their lives to the cause of their motherland. They worshipped their motherland as the Goddess Kali; they knew no other deity save the land of their birth, and no other religion except the service of their motherland. That is why they called themselves Santanas or Children (of the Mother). In their temple

they placed three images of the Goddess Kali representing the motherland. Mother that was great and glorious in her majestic grandeur; Mother that is wretched and grovelling in the dust and the Mother that will be, in her pristine glory”¹

Bande Mataram was a precious urn in which are guarded our brightest and noblest hopes. *Bande Mataram* was the guiding star which led the country through the encircling gloom to a far distant paradise.

Bankim introduced religious patriotism—a pattern which inspired Indian leaders to think a little more deeply than they had done. *Bande Mataram* was a vehicle of Bankim’s new idea for the upliftment of the national consciousness when the Indian thinkers were groping in a westernised trend of patriotism. Bankim felt that an imitation patriotism was far away from India’s true need and destiny.

In 1857 he completed his graduation with brilliant academical success and joined the Government civil services as Deputy Magistrate. That was the year of the Sepoy Mutiny. The role played by Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi made a strong impression on Bankim’s mind. He felt that a Divine Force was working behind the queen, when she waged battle against the British troops and faced innumerable odds and difficulties. In the field of battle British soldiers no less than her own army were astonished to see how she was getting inspiration by invoking Goddess Durga. The Rani of Jhansi appeared to him as a Vibhuti, a manifestation of Mother Durga. Bankim saw in India a living form and power of the Divine Mother. It was not merely a piece of land. Another major work of his, *Bangadarshan*, which brought a new vision and philosophy of Nationalism in the form of skilled literary activities, appeared in the year 1872, the year of Sri Aurobindo’s birth which incarnated a new saviour idea for India and the world.

Sri Aurobindo’s writings on Bankim will lead us to see how much Bankim’s literary activities contributed to develop the national consciousness of the Indian people:

“The Rishi is different from the saint. His life may not have been distinguished by superior holiness nor his character by an ideal beauty. He is not great by what he was himself but by what he has expressed....”²

“Among the Rishis of the later age we have at last realised that we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving Mantra which is creating a new India, the Mantra *Bande Mataram*....”³

“A great and vivifying message had to be given to a nation or to humanity, and God has chosen this mouth on which to shape the words of the message. A momentous vision had to be revealed; and it is his eyes which the Almighty first unseals. The message which he has received, the vision which has been vouchsafed to him, he declares to the world with all the strength that is in him, and in one supreme moment of inspiration expresses it in words which have merely to be uttered to stir men’s inmost natures, clarify their minds, seize their

hearts and impel them to things which would have been impossible to them in their ordinary moments. Those words are the Mantra which he was born to reveal and of that Mantra he is the seer. . .

“He was a great poet, a master of beautiful language and a creator of fair and gracious dream-figures in the world of imagination; but it is not as a poet, stylist or novelist that Bengal does honour to him today. It is probable that the literary critic of the future will recon *Kapalkundala*, *Bishabriksha* and *Krishna-kanter Will* as his artistic masterpieces, and speak with qualified praise of *Devi Chaudhurani*, *Ananda Math*, *Krishnacharut* or *Dharmatattwa*. Yet it is the Bankim of these latter works and not the Bankim of the great creative masterpieces who will rank among the Makers of Modern India. The earlier Bankim was only a poet and stylist—the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder.

“But even as a poet and stylist Bankim did a work of supreme national importance, not for the whole of India, or only indirectly for the whole of India, but for Bengal which was destined to lead India and be in the vanguard of national development. No nation can grow without finding a fit and satisfying medium of expression for the new self into which it is developing—without a language which shall give permanent shape to its thoughts and feelings and carry every new impulse swiftly and triumphantly into the consciousness of all. It was Bankim’s first great service to India that he gave the race which stood in its vanguard such a perfect and satisfying medium. He was blamed for corrupting the purity of the Bengali tongue; but the pure Bengali of the old poets could have expressed nothing but a conservative and unprogressing Bengal. The race was expanding and changing, and it needed a means of expression capable of change and expansion. He was blamed also for replacing the high literary Bengali of the Pundits by a mixed popular tongue which was neither the learned language nor good vernacular. But the Bengali of the Pundits would have crushed the growing richness, variety and versatility of the Bengali genius under its stiff inflexible ponderousness. We needed a tongue for other purposes than dignified treatises and erudite lucubrations. We needed a language which should combine the strength, dignity or soft beauty of Sanskrit with the nerve and vigour of the vernacular, capable at one end of the utmost vernacular raciness and at the other of the most sonorous gravity. Bankim divined our need and was inspired to meet it,—he gave us a means by which the soul of Bengal could express itself to itself.

“As he had divined the linguistic need of his country’s future, so he divined also its political need. He, first of our great publicists, understood the hollowness and inutility of the method of political agitation which prevailed in his time and exposed it with merciless satire in his *Lokarahasya* and *Kamalakanter Dapter*. But he was not satisfied merely with destructive criticism,—he had a positive vision of what was needed for the salvation of the country. He saw that the force from above must be met by a mightier reacting force from below,—the strength

of repression by an insurgent national strength. He bade us leave the canine method of agitation for the leonine. The Mother of his vision held trenchant steel in her twice seventy million hands and not the bowl of the mendicant. It was the gospel of fearless strength and force which he preached under a veil and in images in *Ananda Math* and *Devi Chaudhurani*. He perceived that the first element of the moral strength must be *tyāga*, complete self-sacrifice for the country and complete self-devotion to the work of liberation. . . Again, he perceived that the second element of the moral strength needed must be self-discipline and organisation. This truth he expressed in the elaborate training of Devi Chaudhurani for her work, in the strict rules of the Association of the "Ananda Math" and in the pictures of perfect organisation which those books contain. Lastly, he perceived that the third element of moral strength must be the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic work. The religion of patriotism,—this is the master idea of Bankim's writings. It is already foreshadowed in *Devi Chaudhurani*. In *Dharmatattwa* the idea and in *Krishnacharit* the picture of a perfect and many-sided Karmayoga is sketched, the crown of which shall be work for one's country and one's kind. In *Ananda Math* this idea is the key-note of the whole book and received its perfect lyrical expression in the great song which has become the national anthem of United India. . . Of the new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence, he is the inspirer and political Guru "4

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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PAVITA

A RECOLLECTION

I AM informed that Pavita (Margaret Auldwickle) passed away in Australia this month. Pavita had been at our Ashram for many years and lived where Kishore Gandhi now stays, in the rooms opposite to Nolini's across the road. She was quite a well known figure as she swept the pavements around her rooms with great regularity at night. Pavita was here even before Mona, I and our daughter Gauri came—that is, before 1937.

I understand that she had come to India as a Secretary to Paul Brunton and, after a visit to the Ashram with him, decided to stay on here. She was a good stenographer and typist and also a teacher. When Gauri was a small child and the only one at the Ashram, the Mother sent her to Pavita to be taught. We had no school of the Ashram then. Gauri did not like it, I know, but she probably did learn something which made her a teacher in her own time.

She had also a part to play when the war started in 1939. Sri Aurobindo took a very keen interest in the war. He saw it not as a war between nations but as a mighty struggle between the Divine and the Asura. So He and The Mother put a great spiritual force behind the Allies, particularly England, which was on the side of the Divine, perhaps without its even knowing it. The Mother told me that Hitler was fully possessed by the Asura whom She called The Lord of the Nations and that Stalin was an incarnation of the Asura. Because of Their work on the war, Sri Aurobindo wanted to be kept informed about the latest developments and had to have the latest news. We had no Radio transmission in India then and the only news we could get was from the English B.B.C. and this came at 9-30 every night. At that time we were living in a cottage at the end of Rue Dumas, diagonally opposite Parc-à-Charbon and I had set up a large 9-valve set with a high aerial to receive the broadcasts. This was before the transistors came. So The Mother had arranged for Pavitra and Pavita to come to our house every night to get the news, at 9-30. Pavita would note the news in shorthand and then go to her room and type out the whole thing and send it to Sri Aurobindo to read the very same night. This was really a very good service she did, as also Pavitra who always accompanied her.

It is quite a long walk from the Ashram to our cottage and so I suggested to The Mother to take my Receiving Set which I would fix up for Sri Aurobindo to hear the news Himself directly every night. The Mother categorically refused my offer and told me that there was a room in the Ashram where the daily newspapers were kept to be read and Sri Aurobindo had given to this room the name of "Falsehood". She said that She did not want an even greater falsehood to be brought into the Ashram. But later on, She did agree to have a set for Sri Aurobindo to listen in to and the whole programme of the Ashram became

adjusted to the times of the news broadcasts.

As I have stated, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother took a very keen interest in the progress of the war and put a great deal of Their force behind the Allies. There are many instances where this was evident as Churchill, who became a very open instrument of Their force, would do or say what Sri Aurobindo had decided he should do or say. Then there came the preparation for the great invasion of England when Hitler massed an enormous force of invasion which would really have succeeded as England had been so much devastated by the German bombings that they had nothing with which to resist except their will, and the great Churchillian will at that! In those days, one morning when I went, as usual to The Mother, She told me: "That fellow (She called the Asura thus) came to me last night boasting of how he would crush the English under his feet and I said to him, 'Now you will see. I will use the same trick on you as you do on us; I will use your own instruments to fight against each other and so finish them off.'" Then The Mother explained how She assumed the form and voice of the Lord of The Nations and went to Hitler and told him that he was in great danger from Russia which would stab him in his back when he was fully involved in his invasion of England. So, he should take care of Russia first. England was easy, he was told, it was Russia that was the great danger, so he should finish off Russia first. Then Hitler turned away from his invasion attempt to attack Russia and this finally finished him off. This fact is known to many but I give it here to stress that The Mother told me all this BEFORE it happened and so we can be sure that it was Her action that determined the result of the war.

I know that there were quite a large number of persons in India who were unhappy at the stand taken by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on the side of the Allies who included England. They wanted Hitler to win, feeling that we would get our independence in that way. What a foolish idea! If he had won, Hitler would never have given us our independence as did the English, quite voluntarily. Hitler despised the coloured peoples who, he felt, were only fit to be slaves of the great White Aryan Race.

UDAR

CALCUTTA'S TRICENTENARY

(Continued from the issue of September 1990)

THERE are at present 3 Universities, about 100 Colleges, 464 High Schools, 307 Primary Schools run by the Calcutta Corporation apart from other institutions like Indian Statistical Institute and Indian Institute of Management. Each college has 4000 to 5000 students in its roll. Some colleges run in shifts having many branches. In spite of the number of students having expanded to a great extent, as expected, the spirit of education has greatly dwindled. All concerned are mostly satisfied with degrees and diplomas. Business and politics have entered the field in a big way. Sanskrit has been almost bidden adieu and English is taught not earlier than in class VI in schools. Quiz type of questions are put in examinations to show the ability of students through the high marks given. High-ups in the society are sending their wards to good schools with English as the medium of education—a class is being created from the beginning.

The educationist and economist, Bhabatosh Dutta, has opined that politics entered the field of education earlier also (as during the period of the Swadeshi movement) but it was pure and free from corruption. But now it has become badly politicised so that corruption has been institutionalised. A black market in the shape of coaching classes has been created in the field of education which only guarantees a pass in the examinations. (*Desh, Vinodan*, 1989—Calcutta; pp. 145-46).

Dr. Rajendra Prasad in *India Divided* wrote—

“Bengal was the earliest Province to come under the rule of the East India Company. English education made its first appearance in that Province. The Bengali Hindus were quick to take advantage of it. The Hindus not only filled Government posts in all departments but also produced great reformers, great lawyers, medical practitioners, scientists, public speakers, writers and men who had drunk deep from the fountain of English literature...”

Henry Cotton wrote in *New India*—“The Bengalee baboos now rule public opinion from Peshawar to Chittagong...”

He also wrote—“The tour of a Bengalee lecturing in English in upper India assumed the character of a triumphal progress; and at the present moment the name of Surendranath Banerjea excites as much enthusiasm among the rising generation of Mooltan as in Dacca.”

Surendranath Banerjea was described as the father of Indian Nationalism and the uncrowned King of Bengal. He was a leader before the formation of the Congress. As the result of some of his remarks in his *Bengalee*, a weekly, Surendranath was jailed for two months in 1883. This evoked a popular reaction against the British which led to the organisation of the National Conference of the Indian Association of Calcutta wherein leaders from different provinces took

part. In fact, it was said to be the first stage towards formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885.

It is not that the fight against obsolete social systems, autocracy of the new rulers, their oppressions, was carried through lectures only, but journalism was a great means towards victory. Sri Aurobindo relied on his pen which was really mightier than the sword but it was at the beginning of the present century that his writings roused people, raised them to newer heights through the pages of *Bandemataram*, *Dharma* and *Karmayogin*; his associates being Bepin Chandra Pal, Shyamsundar Chakraborty and others. James Augustus Hikey first started his *Bengal Gazette* or *Calcutta General Advertiser*. The names of Missionaries, particularly William Carey's, should be written in golden letters in giving a start to modern Journalism and Education in Bengal. Among the Indians, Gangadhar Bhattacharya was the first to start publication of the Bengal Gazette in 1816 in English. In 1821 Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay started the publication of the first Bengali weekly—*Samachar Darpan*—the main contributor to which was Raja Rammohan Roy. Such journalists as Ramananda Chattopadhyay with his *Modern Review* and *Prabasi*, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay with his *Sandhya* are always to be remembered with *Bangabasi*, *Yugantar*, *Hindu Patriot*, *Soma-prakash*, etc. Not only in English and Bengali, but also in Hindi, Urdu and Parsi, papers were published from Calcutta. Bankim's *Bangadarshan* was a unique one. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and Rabindranath also joined in at different times. The journals put forward with all their force the characteristic quality of ancient Indian culture and its strength and its supremacy over others. All that was once glorious but forgotten was brought to the fore. There were clashes between modernism and orthodoxy—Pandits and learned men were ranged on both the sides. Some outstanding Englishmen also played a great part in them. It required the synthetic outlook and the wisdom of a vastly learned man like Sri Aurobindo to bring about a synthesis. B. G. Tilak did the same through his *Keshari* and *Maratha* in Maharastra. Through all turmoils, recoils and revolts a synthesis was being achieved and a newer life visioned—the country was getting prepared for freedom in the twentieth century when a newer leadership would emerge, which would get better grounds to stand on and forge ahead. The journalism of Calcutta is itself a unique history to be remembered always.

Calcutta being one of the oldest towns of Asia under the colonial power, people of all major religions of the world live in it though it has had all along a Hindu majority. Bengalees are the main inhabitants of the city. Among the Muslims 70 per cent were non-Bengali Muslims who had come and settled from other parts like upper India and Mysore. (After the defeat of Tipu Sultan his descendants settled here.) The city has a cosmopolitan character maintained throughout its life. As a result of these varied settlements there have grown different types and places of worship like the Synagogue of the Jews, the Fire Temple of the Parsis, the Buddha Vihar of the Buddhists, Jain Temples, Sikh

Gurudwaras, etc. apart from Churches, Hindu Temples and Muslim Mosques. According to a report, between 1900 and 1965, 500 temples were constructed. And there had already existed a few hundred And the number of mosques are also around 500 in Calcutta. Thakurbaris or the temple of the Vaishnavas are costly ones and commoner are the Shiva and Kali temples. Though the construction of the Kali temple of Kalighat was completed in 1809, the presiding Deity is of a very old origin. Even in the fifteenth century literature mention was made of this great pilgrim spot. The Armenian Church (1724) is said to be the oldest place of Christian worship in Calcutta The Old Mission Church is the oldest Protestant Church. 9 February 1843 became history as on that day Michael Madhusudan Dutta, the poet, was baptised in that church. There gathered an excited mob of thousands outside the church which had to be guarded by armed soldiers. Earlier he had taken asylum in Fort William.

(To be continued)

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

Feeding the Champions

PROTEIN is a very important element in our daily food, but not as important as is often believed, particularly among professional athletes such as body builders. Until the early 1980s a daily protein-intake of 3-4 grs per day per kg weight was recommended to sportsmen in the power disciplines, in other words about 250 grs for a person who weighs 80 kg. Prof. Michael Hamm, a nutritionist and sports scientist at Hamburg University, is convinced that these quantities are a thing of the past. Modern research suggests that 1.5 grs (rather than 3-4) are quite sufficient for hard training athletes, with 2 grs as the upper limit. Moreover, he says that protein from animal products such as meat, fish and cheese is not at all required in the usual quantities. "The contrary is desirable. Every sportsman profits from paying more attention to vegetable proteins, first of all bread." In fact, it is carbohydrates which are mainly responsible for increasing the body's power and endurance.

Accordingly, the menus of the German football professionals at the world championships in Italy were entirely changed as compared to past times. A typical meal included fresh salads with carrots and tomatoes (without fat mayonnaise), lobster crabs, vegetable-risotto, plum cake and fresh fruits—a real revolution on the athletes' plates. But this kind of meal helps to build a good store of "glycogens" which could be described as gigantic sugar molecules stored by the body in the liver and muscle tissue for emergency needs. If a sportsman reaches a point of collapsing with heavy sweating and a fit of dizziness, it is due to lack of these glycogens and not due to lack of protein. This knowledge is gradually spreading among sportsmen, although over-reliance on proteins is still wide-spread, also due to the suggestive power of commercial advertisements praising the effect of protein concentrates. But the German football champions had to adjust to the new line of food. Fritz Westermann, head cook of the Beckenbauer team, comments, "Those who are used to steaks only as their staple food, have to be gradually re-educated."

Predictably, the athletes of the future will be semi-vegetarians. Or perhaps vegetarians? Nothing can be ruled out, because nutritionists change their theories every few years.

Source: *Bild der Wissenschaft* (June 1990)

Sun-Glasses

The Mother has said somewhere (if I remember correctly) that wearing sun-

glasses may be more harmful than useful. This has been confirmed by a symposium of eye specialists in Hamburg. The doctors concluded that one out of three pairs of sun glasses fails to filter out the dangerous ultraviolet and short-waved rays, even while it reduces the light exposure of the eyes. The effect is that the pupils of the eyes remain relatively wide, with their natural protective mechanism cancelled, allowing a large exposure to those dangerous rays. According to the specialists, only more expensive glasses which filter out the harmful spectrum of the sun rays can be recommended for wearing, but certainly not the cheap models sold by the roadside in big cities all over the world.

Source: *Der Spiegel* (21-5-90)

THE STORY BEHIND TEARS

THIS year falls the 125th birth anniversary of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, the mighty son of Bengal who secured for his mother tongue its rightful place in the then Calcutta University. On this occasion the name of another most popular Bengali, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee comes to the forefront of my mind and I am impelled to write "The Story Behind Tears".

A Literary Association from outside Bengal once wanted me to write something for the Souvenir Book of Sarat Chandra. I was perplexed and did not know what to do. I had never read books of criticism on Sarat Chandra nor myself gone through his works critically. I had simply read and enjoyed them. I also did not know any significant feature of his life, nor even the exact date of his birth. So what to write? How to write?

Then one day I decided to make an attempt and headed towards the Sri Aurobindo Library which, I hoped, would provide me with the necessary materials for my purpose. But just as I stepped into the courtyard of the Library my attention was drawn to the small park on the left side where I found one of my friends, Mr. Khan, absorbed in reading a book. He was sitting on a stone slab under a big tree. I tiptoed behind him and exclaimed spontaneously, "I see, you not only speak Bengali but read as well!" In fact my acquaintance with him had started from the day I had seen him speaking fluent and flawless Bengali. He got startled, "Oh it's you! Come, sit here." He made room for me beside him. I marked that his eye-lashes were wet. "What brings tears to your eyes? What book are you reading?" I asked. "It's *Mej-di* by Sarat Chandra. Oh, Keshta's sorrow penetrated my...", his voice choked, he could speak no more. Clearing his throat he added, "Yes, I can read somehow but cannot write Bengali."

Instantly I remembered my boyhood days. I said, "Mr. Khan, your tears remind me of an episode of my past days." "Is it so? What was it?" I narrated my story:

"I was very young then. During the Puja holidays one of my cousins came home from Bombay. He was frank, free and very affectionate towards the children of the family. His sweet, soft, soothing words pleased us very much. Often he would give us sweetmeats to eat and, when time permitted, tell us interesting stories. So we would like his company and hang about him.

"One day I found him sitting silently with an open book in front of him. I moved up and down near him but could not draw his attention. So I went very close and looking at his face asked with surprise, 'Dada, why are you weeping?' 'Oh it's you! Come.' He drew me still closer with his hand. 'Weep?' He smiled softly, 'Oh yes, I weep for Mahesh.' He wiped his tears with the back of his hand. 'Who is Mahesh? What book are you reading, Dada?' 'What book? Listen then.' He read to me the story of Mahesh by Sarat Chandra from beginning to end. At that time I had just learnt how to read Bengali and could not clearly understand

the whole story. Still it became difficult for me to control tears of pity for Mahesh, the starving ox. That was how I was initiated into Sarat-literature. Henceforward, Dada instead of telling us stories would read stories by Sarat Chandra to us.

“Thus while listening to him we used to shed tears and laugh as well, laugh on coming across characters like Natun-da (in *Srikanta*, Part I). Our Dada also could not but laugh, he would remark amusedly, ‘You know, I have seen Natunda.’ We would ask him eagerly, ‘Have you seen him? How and where?’ ‘I mean, I have actually come across funny figures like him.’ ”

“Exactly so,” said Mr. Khan, “I also have seen Keshta, I know him very well.” His manner of expression suddenly brought home to me the central note of Sarat Chandra’s writings. I observed,

“You are right, here lies the speciality and uniqueness of Sarat Chandra’s creative genius. The source of your tears for Keshta was actually hidden somewhere in the depth of Sarat Chandra’s own heart and he infused them into your heart by the magic of his language, creation of characters and weaving of ideas, events and circumstances. He knew perfectly well how to make his own tears flow through the eyes of his readers. In this field his mastery and skill, talent and efficiency were exceptional and unparalleled.

“The key to this was beyond the scope of Bankim Chandra; Rabindranath did not get the clue of this secret, either. Needless to say that Bankim’s lofty genius and creative spirit were very vast and versatile and Rabindranath’s universality and many-sidedness immeasurable. Their contributions to Bengali literature were unforgettable. But perhaps they had not felt so intensely and absolutely like Sarat Chandra the mute pang, suppressed sigh and helpless cry of the neglected, depressed and frustrated men and women of society. Even if they felt them, they could not find the secret of expressing them. Or they did not bother or think it necessary to find that secret. Only in the writings of Sarat Chandra can we deeply feel and listen to the hidden message of the hearts of those who are supposed to be the scum of society. At least it was so at that time.

“Sarat Chandra had not seen life and society from a distance with a mental telescope. On the contrary he came down physically to the lowest rung of the social ladder and walked across dirty lanes and dark by-lanes only with the light of his heart’s love to guide him. This vagabond writer endowed with an exceptional power of observation discovered and brought to light glittering gold concealed in the mud and morass of human society.”

A sudden onrush of inspiration led me to speak in that vein to Mr. Khan, a non-Bengali reader of Bengali literature. But he interrupted me, asking, “Did Sri Aurobindo say anything about Sarat Chandra?”

I knew Sri Aurobindo’s opinion about Rabindranath but did he ever say anything about Sarat Chandra?... I fumbled, “I don’t know exactly, however, I shall look into my old papers. If I find anything I shall certainly let you know.”

Next day I found the following words in one of my old notebooks and read them to my friend.

Dilip,

What is stamped on Sarat Chandra's photograph everywhere is a large intelligence, an acute and accurate observation of men and things and a heart of sympathy for sorrow and suffering.

Too sensitive to be quite at ease with the world and also perhaps too clear-sighted. Much fineness of mind and refinement of vital nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

THE WOMAN

A SHORT STORY

Translated from the Tamil of Prapanjan by P. Raja

“THE cow must be sold.” Her words were final.

“The price is settled,” my mother said yesterday. “I am expecting the broker before sunset to take away the cow with him.”

I looked at the cow from where I stood.

It sat very leisurely in its shed and continued chewing the cud. By its side stood the bull calf and bits of hay lay helter-skelter on the ground. Unaware of the fact that it had been sold or that it had to go away once for all in a few hours to live in a new place encountering strangers and strange habits, the cow relaxed without the least sign of disturbance.

*

The day the cow was sent to us is still green in my memory. It was a gift from my father-in-law to his daughter, my wife. One evening the cowherd came leading the live gift to our house. Its eyes were tired-looking since it had covered a distance of more or less twenty miles. As its arrival had been intimated to us beforehand, we had grass, hay and cotton-cake ready with us. The cow drank water and munched its fodder and lay down on the ground.

We gathered around it and looked at it as though it was from another world. It straightened up its neck. As it was busily engaged in chewing the cud, it looked as though its mind was far away. It was wide-awake. But it was not disturbed by our presence. Perhaps it had lost itself in thought. Well, didn't cows have the liberty to think?

My mother was happy with the cow since it was a gift from my wife's parents. Even a cartload of eyeless needles can pass for a gift to make her happy, provided it came from my wife's house. She would make the best of a bad job.

The cow made my wife feel proud of her family. But she was also a little unhappy with the gift since the care of it would add to her routine duties as a housewife.

My grandfather always had a great desire to buy a cow, I was told by my mother. But she disagreed and said, “Look! I am the daughter-in-law of this house and not a cowherdess. I am in charge of the kitchen and not the cowshed.” My grandfather killed his desire.

But that was in the past. My mother, the one-time daughter-in-law, is now promoted to the status of a mother-in-law. And she has a daughter-in-law to answer her beck and call. Her daughter-in-law is expected to take care of not

only the kitchen but also the cow-shed. Who is there to dispute the rights of the mother-in-law? And won't her status be questioned if she did not ill-treat her daughter-in-law?

The cow was beautiful to look at. Spots of orange on its mostly white skin enhanced its beauty. Its eyes resembled jaumoon fruit. Its eye-lashes looked as though beautified with eye-tex. The white curl on its orange-coloured forehead looked like a pendant. Its mouth was like a palmyra fruit. It was a heifer. Yet its mother's milk was still on its lips. "It is of high breed," the cowherd informed us. Cows too belong to high and low castes.

My mother's elder sister came from the next door. Holding onto her finger came her little granddaughter. My aunt emerged from her house, the third one from ours, to have a look at the cow. Her grandchild was carried on her hip. My son's playmates too came to see the cow. All of them unanimously agreed that it was beautiful. My mother beamed with satisfaction. That was what she had expected them to declare. She always prided herself on showing off what others had no access to. And she found an incomparable delight in infusing into their hearts at least an iota of jealousy.

"A cow," says the ancient wisdom, "brings into any house the presence of Goddess Lakshmi." Hence my mother named the heifer Lakshmi. Then there arose a problem: Where to shelter Lakshmi? Since human beings construct houses purely for their own convenience, they are least bothered about other beings. And so Lakshmi was temporarily accommodated in one corner of our drawing-room.

Is there any hard-and-fast rule that Lakshmi was not expected to defecate? It did do it. My wife who came out of the living room on the morning of the next day was taken aback.

Lakshmi's dung was good enough to fill half a basket. A portion of it had dissolved in the urine and made its way in channels to reach the drainage canal. The drawing-room seemed to be sprinkled with it. Small blades of grass and bits of hay mixing with dirt and dust made the place loathsome. Above all, Lakshmi's thigh too was besmeared with dung. From that day onwards it had become the bounden duty of my wife to clean Lakshmi every morning and she had to begin her day's routine of work with that.

My mother volunteered herself to look after Lakshmi. And that was the only work she did. She delightedly immersed herself in such activities as promptly feeding the cow and bathing it in hot water on Fridays and beautifying its face with turmeric paste and kumkum. Many a time I have seen her at work. She was jubilant and looked beautiful because of the joy in her heart. Whenever Lakshmi bellowed 'ammaaa,' my mother ran to satisfy its needs.

Lakshmi too was fond of my mother. I still remember the earliest night it spent restlessly in our house. The place was new. The surrounding was strange. Throughout that night it stood impatiently shuffling its legs. 'Ammmaaa...

ammmaaa,' its cry was continuously heard. It had been happily spending its days with its mother and its fellow-calves. All of a sudden it had been separated from them to be herded into our house. The heifer was unable to bear the separation. Oh, how difficult it is to undergo the pangs of separation? Be it man or animal, the soul is one. It took a couple of days for the heifer to reconcile itself to its new life.

I am reminded of an incident that took place several days after Lakshmi's arrival. My mother was away at a relative's to attend a function. Two days later she returned. During the absence Lakshmi hardly cared to eat. Off and on, it tried to butt my sons. Its eyes were angry. Quite often it bellowed: 'Ammaaa.' No sooner did it see my mother return to the house with her bag, than it screamed and struggled as though it was using its brute force to sever the rope to which it was tethered. Like a wind my mother rushed towards Lakshmi. She hugged and caressed it. It took a long time for my mother to appease its anger. I was privileged to look at my mother at that moment. Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

That is real love. But that raises a doubt in me. How is it that my mother, whose mind is ripe enough to shower affection and love upon a beast, looks at a human being—her daughter-in-law—with nothing but hatred?

*

We got Lakshmi mated. It calved. A baby bull was our reward. Lakshmi lay exhausted but managed to lick the new-born into shape. The calf ventured to stand. It failed and fell down. But it didn't lose hope. It continued with its trial-and-error. It very much resembled its mother. One can't but admire the ravishing beauty of the new-born of all living things on earth.

The sight of a new-born fills us with compassion. The moment it completes its life-cycle in the womb and is delivered to this earth, it seems to be terrified. But soon the cloud of mystery disappears and it looks composed and serene. I have learnt this by looking at my children.

The calf disappointed my mother very much. She had expected a baby cow. She didn't have a female child. All three of her children were boys. I the father of two—they also are boys.

"This family is cursed by some woman. There is little chance of a female to be born here," my mother said. There is an old tale told of our family. The event took place some seven or eight generations before. It seems my great grandfather's great grandfather had killed and buried his wife. What happened was simply this. She had gone to the backyard on some work in the evening twilight. At that time the lad in the next house had climbed up the compound wall of his backyard to pluck leaves from a tree. His business was over. When he was about to jump down from the wall it so happened that the husband went to the yard.

He saw his wife there. He hadn't failed to notice the lad jumping down from the wall into his yard. The beast in him was stirred awake. He had the blood of a toddy-tapper in him and it boiled. His billhook severed her neck softer than a coconut spathe. "The curse of a chaste woman," my mother used to say, "will stand for many generations to come. No female will be born in this house. But if she is born, she will have to lead the life of a widow."

To my mother, Lakshmi had become an object of abhorrence, ever since it calved.

My wife was inconsolable on that day when she reported to me what my mother had commented: "I thought that only the daughter-in-law of this house is unfit to give birth to a female baby. But look, the cow too delivered a bull-calf." On the fourth month, the calf died of a swelling in its stomach.

Lakshmi soon calved again. The second one too was a bull as if everybody had anxiously awaited it. And my mother once for all renounced Lakshmi. Her hostility towards my wife too doubled. The quarrel began—subsided—but erupted again. My mother and my wife tested my patience beyond limit and I had a tough time with them.

All on a sudden I would hear a report that there was too much salt in the *chutney*... This doesn't taste like coffee. It's like sugar dissolved in water or is it simply rice-washed water?... Haven't I asked you to cook rice? Why on earth did you make it a porridge?... What a loathsome place this house has come to be!... We have to step only on dirt .. Have you decided to keep the house untidy?... What a great mistake I have committed in finding a wife for my kinglike son (that is me)!

My mother is an adept in blowing a frivolous spark into a conflagration. And as far as her skill in modulating for hours together on trifles is concerned, she is second to none in the world.

*

The more my mother became detached from Lakshmi, I too felt that I was moving away from my mother, mentally at least. It was indeed arrogant of her to have renounced Lakshmi. I was unable to understand the distressed state of the cow. At first when my mother didn't even care to come near Lakshmi, it went on bellowing 'Ammmaa' without stop. It became tired of fidgetting. Not only did it refuse to eat but looked at my wife as if she was a stranger and heaved a sigh when she went to feed it. The moment it saw my wife it stepped back and a cold shiver ran all over its body. It took a few weeks for Lakshmi to feed on the fodder with relish. Unlike human beings, animals once they become friendly and attached, never reconsider the relationship. Lakshmi was indeed sorrow-stricken.

It had changed very much in appearance. It looked like a middle-aged

woman withered by several accouchements and family burdens. It was not the same heifer whose mother's milk was still on its lips. Drained of love it showed no sign of joy. Of course, to be cross with human beings who give vent to their feelings in words, is fair. But I cannot understand why my mother was not on friendly terms with the ignorant and innocent Lakshmi.

The entire burden of looking after Lakshmi fell on my wife. Lakshmi's resting-place too moved from the house into the shed at the backyard. Whenever it happened to sight my mother it bellowed 'Ammmaaa'. But my mother turned a deaf ear to it.

Since the arrival of the second calf, my mother used harsh words and pulled faces that were hitherto unknown to us. She wept over the loss of my younger sister born many years ago and dead of small-pox at the age of five. She wailed and blubbered as if the death had taken place just the day before. She called back to her memory the date of her daughter's death. She had petticoats and blouses stitched and offered them to the goddess along with pongal. The garments then went to the children in the neighbourhood. The poor women were invited on such occasions. She gave away many of her saris to them. They were also given money. To crown all such philanthropic activities, she cooked for me many a sumptuous dish in spite of her old age. I was specially taken care of whenever my wife was away at a relative's. But I was not affected by her considerations. For I knew well that her love towards me was nothing more than another version of her hatred towards my wife.

What if men refuse to do their duty? Lakshmi gave in return what it took from us. It never hesitated to give us milk. As far as my memory goes, it never played any mischief with the cowman. When the cowman was absent, whoever was free in the house used to milk it. The milk always flowed freely, we sold the excess of it and utilised the money for the purchase of cotton-cake and grass.

My mother was addicted to drinking coffee. She drank it four times a day. But she had developed an aversion towards Lakshmi's milk since the day it had calved a second bull. She drank coffee bought from nearby hotels. That was the major reason why I disliked my mother. And at times her face looked so ferocious that it struck fear in our hearts.

*

The broker came that evening.

I was arguing with my mother since the afternoon that the cow need not be sold. But she did not seem to heed my words.

I felt that in a way it was better to send the cow away. I believe that my house was not the right place for beings like Lakshmi.

The broker went out holding the cow by the rope tied to its neck. The calf trailed behind its mother. Lakshmi must have already sensed that the two

strangers were trying to herd it away. Hence it glanced at me... then at my wife.. then at my children. Finally it looked at my mother and cried: "Ammmaa... Ammaa..." Even many hours after its departure its cry went on echoing in me.

My mother rushed into the house and wept. And certainly it was not over the death of my sister.

My mother after all was also a woman.

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

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WHAT IS THE TRUE MEANING OF FREEDOM AND HOW TO REALISE IT?

Speech read by Sucharu Rai*

THE subject of this Seminar can be dealt with from several angles. One of the most important of these is the metaphysical question of fate and free-will. Are all happenings in our life predetermined by an immutable fate, a destiny to which we are inexorably bound or are we free to determine them by our own choice? This question is so very tangled that the more we try to unravel it to find a definitive answer the more we get caught in an intricately bewildering maze from which we find no issue. In fact there can be no clear-cut answer to it because both destiny and free-will, which seem to us contradictory, are co-existent powers, as Sri Aurobindo says in a remarkable passage which I read here:

“Metaphysical questions are not so simple that they can be trenchantly solved either in one sense or in another contradictory to it—that is the popular way of settling things, but it is quite summary and inconclusive. All is free-will or else all is destiny—it is not so simple as that. This question of free-will or determination is the most knotty of all metaphysical questions and nobody has been able to solve it—for a good reason that both destiny and will exist and even a free-will exists somewhere; the difficulty is only how to get at it and make it effective.”¹

This knotty problem becomes all the more so because even those who believe in determinism and deny free-will point to different factors that determine our life. For example, the astrologers say that it is the stars that rule our destiny. The Buddhists, and generally all orthodox Hindus, believe in Karma, which life after life keeps us chained to the consequences of our past actions. The modern scientists speak of Nature or heredity or environment as the governing factors. For the Marxists the material economic forces determine

* Revised and enlarged

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed, Vol 22), p 467

human life and its evolution. For psycho-analysts the suppressed subconscious sex is responsible for man's life-pattern and behaviour. There are even those who maintain that the secretions of the ductless glands regulate man's character and development. (Someone has written a book titled "Glands of Destiny".) The religious believe that God or Allah or Jehovah is the sole Master and Ruler of the universe and each thing and event, from the smallest to the biggest, is governed by His will alone. There is also the doctrine of the Gita that it is Prakriti or universal Nature that determines our actions and the idea of free-will which we fondly entertain is a mere illusion. And there are several others too which promulgate the same view.

It is not my intention in this speech to discuss the relative merits and demerits of these views and doctrines. What I propose to do is to explain Sri Aurobindo's view of this problem at which I have already hinted in the quotation which I read before. But instead of doing this in my own words, I prefer to do it by reading a not very long essay of Sri Aurobindo's in which he has himself stated his view, taking into account some of the philosophic, scientific and religious views which I have just briefly mentioned. I prefer to read this essay because it is written in that very peculiar hermaphroditic style which Sri Aurobindo occasionally employs to convey his lofty philosophic views in a language which is simply fascinating for its unique combination of magnificent prose with marvellous poetry. I am sure you will all find it highly illuminating as well as deeply delightful. Here is the essay.

ALL-WILL AND FREE-WILL

His is surely a bounded soul who has never felt the brooding wings of a Fate overshadow the world, never looked beyond the circle of persons, collectivities and forces, never been conscious of the still thought or the assured movement of a Presence in things determining their march. On the other hand, it is the sign of a defect in the thought or a void of courage and clearness in the temperament to be overwhelmed by Fate or hidden Presence and reduced to a discouraged acquiescence,—as if the Power in things nullified or rendered superfluous and abortive the same Power in myself. Fate and free-will are only two movements of one indivisible energy. My will is the first instrument of my Fate, Fate a Will that manifests itself in the irresistible subconscious intention of the world.

All error, like all evil, is born of a division in the indivisible. Because God has a myriad aspects, mind breaks up His unity; it creates a violent opposition and vain attempt at mutual exclusion in the united family of the Ideas and Powers that are convergently busy with the universe. Thus our thought erects a mysterious Fate or an equally mysterious free-will and insists that this or that must be, but both shall not subsist together. It is a false and unreal quarrel. I have a will, that is plain; but it is not true that it is free in the sense of being a

thing apart in the world determining itself and its actions and fruits as if it alone existed or as if it could at all shape itself except as visible crest and form of an invisible wave. Even the wave is more than itself; for that too has behind it the tramp of the whole measureless ocean of Force and Time. On the other hand, there is no incalculable Fate, no blind, cruel and ineluctable Necessity against which the wings of the soul must dash themselves in vain as if it were a bird snared by a monstrous Fowler in a dim-lit and fantastic cage.

All times and nations have felt or played with the idea of Fate. The Greeks were pursued by the thought of a mysterious and ineffable Necessity presiding over the divine caprices of the gods. The Mahomedan sits calm and inert under the yoke of *Kismet*. The Hindu speaks of Karma and the writing on the forehead when he would console himself for calamity or failure or excuse himself from perseverance and masculine effort. And all these notions are akin in the general imprecision of the idea they shadow forth and the vague twilight in which they are content to leave its ulterior significance. Modern Science has brought in an equally formless and arbitrary predestination of Law of Nature and Heredity to contradict the idea of responsibility in a free, willing and acting soul. Where there is no soul, there can be no freedom. Nature works out her original law in man; our fathers and mothers with all that they carried in them are a second vital predestination and the dead generations impose themselves on the living; pressure of environment comes in as a third Fate to take from us the little chance of liberty we might still have snatched out of this infinite coiling of forces. The triple *Moirai* of the Greeks have been re-enthroned with other masks and new names. We believe once more in a tremendous weaving of our fate, but by the measured dance of immense material Powers. It is the old gods again, but stripped of intelligence and the chance of human sympathy, inexorable because they are conscious neither of themselves nor of us.

It is doubtful whether belief in Fate or free-will makes much difference to a man's action, but it certainly matters a great deal to his temperament and inner being; for it puts its stamp on the cast of his soul. The man who makes belief in Fate an excuse for quiescence, would find some other pretext if this were lacking. His idea is only a decorous garment for his mood; it clothes his indolence and quiescence in a specious robe of light or drapes it with a noble mantle of dignity. But when his will clutches at an object or action, we do not find him pursuing it with a less strenuous resolution or, it may be, a less childish impatience or obstinacy than the freest believer in free-will. It is not our intellectual ideas that govern our action, but our nature and temperament,—not *dhī*,¹ but *matī* or even *manyu*, or, as the Greeks would have said, *thumos* and not *nous*.

¹ These are terms of Vedic psychology *Dhī* is the intellect, *matī* the general mentality, *manyu*, the temperament and emotive mind

On the other hand, a great man of action will often seize on the idea of Fate to divinise to himself the mighty energy that he feels driving him on the path of world-altering deeds. He is like a shell discharged from some dim Titanic howitzer planted in concealment far behind this first line of trenches which we see thrown out by Life into the material world; or he is like a planet sped out from Nature's hands with its store of primal energy sufficient for its given time, its fixed service to the world-life, its settled orbit round a distant and sovereign Light. He expresses in the idea of Fate his living and constant sense of the energy which has cast him down there whether to break like some Vedic Marut the world's firm and established things or to cut through mountains a path down which new rivers of human destiny can pour. Like Indra or Bhagirath he precedes; the throng of the divine waters follow. His movement decides their course; here Indus shall flow, there Ganges pace yellow and leonine to the sea. Therefore we find that the greatest men of action the world has known were believers in Fate or in a divine Will. Caesar, Mahomed, Napoleon, what more colossal workers has our past than these? The superman believes more readily in Destiny, feels more vitally conscious of God than the average human mind.

A saying of Napoleon's is pregnant of the true truth of this matter. Questioned why, since he talked continually of fate, he thought it worth while to be always thinking and planning, he answered with just reason, "Because it is still Fate who wills that I should plan." This is the truth. There is a Will or Force in the world that determines the result of my actions as part of the great whole; there is a Will in me that determines, concealed by my thought and personal choice, the part that I shall take in determining the whole. It is this that my mind seizes on and calls my will. But I and mine are masks. It is All-existence that gives me my reality; it is the All-will and All-knowledge that, while I calculate, works in me for its own incalculable purpose.

For this very reason I am right in laying stress on my free-will. If a Necessity governs even the gods, yet is my will a daughter of Necessity with a right in the mansion of her mother; or even it is a face of the divine Necessity that in many forms plays with the world. If Kismet is the will of God, yet is that will active in my present moment and not only in the hour of my birth or of the world. If my past actions determine my present, my immediate action also determines the moment that shall be and is not utterly put off by a tardy mechanism to belated effects in a far-off life. If law of Nature and heredity and environment are powerful, yet do they depend on the individual for the use to which they shall be turned.

The fruit of my actions belongs not to me, but to God and the world; my action belongs to God and myself. There I have a right. Or rather it belongs to God in myself; the right is His, but I enjoy it. The Will that works in me is the indivisible All which only seems to separate itself from itself in my body and personality, *nāmarūpa*, as the whole sea throws itself upon a particular coast in a

particular surge of waves. The All and the I are at play of hide-and-seek with each other in a corner of an infinite universe.

I may play entirely at cross-purposes with the All-Will in me. That is when I lend my will-power to be a servant of the nervous part of my mind which, ignorant and passionate, adores self, openly or under many pretences, as its own god. It is this in me, this egoist, this hunger that feels upon it in the heavy hand of Fate the oppression of a tyrant or the resistance of a blind and unintelligent power. For always absorbed in its own need and viewpoint it helps the All by that friction and opposition which are so essential to the mechanism of the world. Therefore, it misunderstands the firm Teacher and His stern, yet loving compulsion in things and must progress by self-will and struggle and suffering because it cannot yet learn to progress by obedience. But also I may, by an intuition in my nature, an aspiration in my heart and a reason in my mind, put myself at the service of some strong ideal, some intelligent Force that serves God with or without knowledge of Him. Then is my will a true will; it does its share, it leaves its quota, it returns to its Master with its talent used or increased. And to a certain extent it is free; for a great liberty is this, to be delivered from the Animal and the Rakshasa in ourselves, free to choose the right or be chosen by it.

But how different a thing would it be if I could persuade my ego to break and emerge from the mould in which it has taken refuge from its divine Pursuer! The great antinomy would then be abrogated and not simply mitigated. My free-will would become God-will and Fate put off her mask. By consenting to be the mere slave of God and consciously but one instrument of That which is not bound by its instruments, I should know a freedom which sings on the harps of heaven, but which no speech of man can utter; I should be washed and rolled in the waves of pure puissance and pure ecstasy, the immeasurable and unfathomable ecstasy of all-being and all-life and all-force. I should see Fate illumined melting into Will and Will glorified passing into God.

SRI AUROBINDO

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