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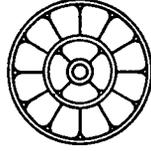
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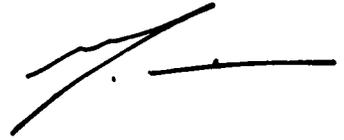
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to

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

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Editor K D SETHNA

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE AVATAR

A TALK BY THE MOTHER TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN
ON 28 MAY 1958

TODAY I have been asked to speak to you about the Avatar.

The first thing I have to say is that Sri Aurobindo has written on this subject and the person who has asked me the question would do well to begin by reading what Sri Aurobindo has written.

I shall not speak to you about that, for it is better to read it for yourself.

But I could speak to you of a very old tradition, more ancient than the two known lines of spiritual and occult tradition, that is, the Vedic and Chaldean lines; a tradition which seems to have been at the origin of these two known traditions, in which it is said that when, as a result of the action of the adverse forces—known in the Hindu tradition as the Asuras—the world, instead of developing according to its law of Light and inherent consciousness, was plunged into the darkness, inconscience and ignorance that we know, the Creative Power implored the Supreme Origin, asking him for a special intervention which could save this corrupted universe; and in reply to this prayer there was emanated from the Supreme Origin a special Entity, of Love and Consciousness, who cast himself directly into the most inconscient matter to begin there the work of awakening it to the original Consciousness and Love.

In the old narratives this Being is described as stretched out in a deep sleep at the bottom of a very dark cave, and in his sleep there emanated from him prismatic rays of light which gradually spread into the Inconscience and embedded themselves in all the elements of this Inconscience to begin there the work of Awakening

If one consciously enters into this Inconscient, one can still see there this same marvellous Being, still in deep sleep, continuing his work of emanation, spreading his Light, and he will continue to do it until the Inconscience is no longer inconscient, until Darkness disappears from the world—and the whole creation awakens to the Supramental Consciousness.

And it is remarkable that this wonderful Being strangely resembles the one whom I saw in vision one day, the Being who is at the other extremity, at the confines of form and the Formless. But that one was in a golden, crimson glory, whereas in his sleep the other Being was of a shining diamond whiteness emanating opalescent rays.

In fact, this is the origin of all Avatars. He is, so to say, the first universal Avatar who, gradually, has assumed more and more conscious bodies and finally manifested in a kind of recognised line of Beings who have descended *directly* from the Supreme to perfect this work of preparing the universe so that, through a continuous progression, it may become ready to receive and mani-

fest the supramental Light in its entirety

In every country, every tradition, the event has been presented in a special way, with different limitations, different details, particular features, but truly speaking, the origin of all these stories is the same, and that is what we could call a direct, conscious intervention of the Supreme in the darkest matter, without going through all the intermediaries, in order to awaken this Matter to the receptivity of the Divine Forces.

The intervals separating these various incarnations seem to become shorter and shorter, as if, to the extent that Matter became more and more ready, the action could accelerate and become more and more rapid in its movement, more and more conscious too, more and more effective and decisive.

And it will go on multiplying and intensifying until the entire universe becomes the total Avatar of the Supreme.

(Questions and Answers 1957-58, pp 332-334)

सूर्योदय — NEW DAY

AN ANCIENT SANSKRIT POEM

Look to this day
 for it is life,
 the very life of life.
 In its brief course lie all
 the realities and truths of existence,
 the joy of growth,
 the splendour of action,
 the glory of power.
 For yesterday is but a memory
 And tomorrow is only a vision.
 But today well lived
 makes every yesterday a memory of happiness
 and every tomorrow a vision of hope.
 Look well, therefore, to this day!

THE SPIRITUAL WORKING OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

A LETTER FROM AMRITA TO DAULATRAM SHARMA, 26.3.1926

I HAVE shown your letter to A.G.¹ and below I give his answer to it.

Your letter is very interesting because it shows that you have accurate intuitions which unfortunately your mind does not allow you to follow out. Your mind also interferes by giving your intuitions a mental form and mental consequences or conditions which are not correct.

You are quite right when you say that your sadhana will not open through the mind but through your psychic being. It is from there indeed that these guiding intuitions come.

Your intuition that in your case the effective impulse can best come from Mirra (you can call her Mirra Devi if you like but please do not call her madame!) is also perfectly correct. When she saw you from the window or the terrace on your last visit, she herself said to A.G., "This is a man I can change. *But he is not yet ready.*" But it was your mind that interfered when you thought it was necessary to sit in meditation with her in order to receive what she had to give. There is no such condition for her spiritual or psychic action and influence. It is true that she was not mixing with the sadhaks at that time, partly because they themselves were not ready to take the right relation and to receive her influence, partly because the difficulties of the physical plane made it necessary for her to retire from all direct contact with anyone, as distinct from any indirect contact through A.G. Always however she was acting with him on the psychic and vital levels to do whatever might be possible at the time. All that is needed to receive a direct touch from her is to take the right relation to her, to be open and to enter her atmosphere. The most ordinary meeting or talk with her on the physical plane is quite enough for the purpose. Only the sadhak must be ready, otherwise he may not be able to receive the impulse or may not be able to fulfil it or bear its pressure.

Also it will be a mistake if you make too rigid a separation between A.G. and Mirra. Both influences are necessary for the complete development of the Sadhana. The work of the two together alone brings down the supramental Truth into the physical plane. A.G. acts directly on the mental and on the vital being through the illumined mind; he represents the Purusha element whose strength is predominantly in illumined (intuitive, supramental or spiritual) knowledge and the power that acts in this knowledge, while the psychic being supports this action and helps to transform the physical and vital plane. Mirra

¹ A G for Aurobindo Ghose, the abbreviation popular at the time the letter was written. The Mother, in those days, was referred to as Mirra

acts directly on the psychic being and on the emotional vital and physical being through the illumined psychic consciousness, while the illumined intuitions of the supramental being give her the necessary knowledge to act on the right lines and at the right moment. Her force representing the Shakti element is directly psychic, vital, physical and her spiritual knowledge is predominantly practical in its nature. It is, that is to say, a large and detailed knowledge and experience of the mental, vital and physical forces at play and, with the knowledge, the power to handle them for the purposes of life and of Yoga.

A POET TO A POET

DEDICATED TO AMAL KIRAN, 25.11.1989

WHAT IS a day, a month or year?
 A poet lives ever in his song!
 And the crowded leaves of life fall sere
 To vanish into oblivion's throng.

Dead are old annals of hate and strife,
 Today's sweet songs of Love shall remain,
 To build a future with Hope rife
 To wipe away the past's black stain.

Sing, Poet, sing from out your heart,
 Sing of great Love from your deep soul,
 Let the Poet's deathless music start
 To show man his true godly goal.

Poet, let your white vision flow
 Unhorizoned over this universe.
 And in its gladdening golden glow
 Let Bliss her part rehearse.

THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

IN THE LIGHT OF HER *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

THE Mother had realised that the Yoga of “divine man-making” would continue without any interruption. Sri Aurobindo with his little group of consecrated and dedicated young people laid the foundation of the future edifice of “the divine centre” which would manifest the life divine and the earth’s transformation. There is a letter to Motilal Roy of April 1914 in which Sri Aurobindo wrote: “If God wills, I will take the field.” After that Sri Aurobindo put all his energies and time into the yoga of Life Divine on earth. The Mother had to go back to France for some time.

She left after she had completed her thirty-seventh year on 21st February, 1915. She boarded the Japanese boat, the Kamo Maru, at Colombo. The voyage was full of uncertainties and dangers because the First World War had already broken out some months earlier. She did not know whether she was happy or sad. The surface mind was a blank as if she had entered a dark tunnel. She felt hidden obscurities ahead in the complex life of France. Sitting in her cabin she wrote on 3 March 1915:

“Solitude, a harsh, intense solitude, and always this strong impression of having been flung headlong into a hell of darkness! Never at any moment of my life, in any circumstances, have I felt myself living in surroundings so entirely opposite to all that I am conscious of as true, so contrary to all that is the essence of my life. Sometimes when the impression and the contrast grow very intense, I cannot prevent my total submission from taking on a hue of melancholy, and the calm and mute converse with the master within is transformed for a moment into an invocation that almost supplicates, ‘O Lord, what have I done that Thou hast thrown me thus into the sombre Night?’ But immediately the aspiration rises, still more ardent, ‘Spare this being all weakness; suffer it to be the docile and clear-eyed instrument of Thy work, whatever that work may be.’

“For the moment the clear-sightedness is lacking; never was the future more veiled. It is as though we were moving towards a high, impenetrable wall, so far as the destiny of individual men is concerned. As for the destinies of nations and of the earth, they appear more distinctly. But of these it is useless to speak. The future will reveal them clearly to all eyes, even of the most blind.”

But next day all the emptiness and darkness and obscure uncertainties enveloping the ideals disappeared from her mind. She seemed as if she had been perfectly imbued with Light and Love. She could descend with that Love and

Light into the depths of the Inconscient She knew that she was the chosen instrument to work in the Inconscient She knew that the Divine was seeing to everything through her. She felt that she had to surrender to the Divine as a candid child depending on the arms of its mother She has expressed these ideas on March 4, 1915:

“Always the same harsh solitude . but it is not painful, on the contrary In it more clearly than ever, is revealed the pure and infinite love in which the whole earth is immersed By this love all lives and is animated, the darkest shadows become almost translucent to let its streams flow through, and the intensest pain is transformed into potent bliss

“. In the material actuality, tomorrow lies dark and unreadable; no light, not even the faintest, reveals to my bewildered gaze any indication, any presence of the Divine. But something in the depths of consciousness turns to the Invisible and Sovereign Witness and tells him: ‘Thou dost plunge me, O Lord, into the thickest darkness; this means that Thou hast established Thy light so firmly in me that Thou knowest it will stand this perilous ordeal. Otherwise wouldst Thou have chosen me for the descent into the vortex of this hell as Thy Torch-bearer? Wouldst Thou have judged my heart strong enough not to fail, my hand firm enough not to tremble? And yet my individual being knows how weak and powerless it is, when Thou dost not manifest Thy Presence, it is more denuded than most people who do not know or care for Thee In Thee alone lies its strength and ability If Thou art pleased to make use of it, nothing will be too difficult to accomplish, no task too vast and complex But if Thou shouldst withdraw, just a poor child is left, capable only of nestling in Thy arms and sleeping there in the sweet dreamless sleep where nothing else exists but Thou.’”

On March 7, 1916 her pen runs to describe how she was preparing to wait on God with patience and humility to work on this earth

“. No flight out of the world! The burden of its darkness and ugliness must be borne to the end if all divine succour seems to be withdrawn. I must remain in the bosom of the Night and walk on without compass, without beacon-light, without inner guide.”

She came to the end of her voyage with a certitude She writes on March 8, 1915·

“It is a pang as silent as it is cruel, a sorrow submissive, without revolt, without any desire to avoid or pass out of it and full of an infinite sweetness in which suffering and felicity are closely wedded, something infinitely vast, great and deep, too great, too deep perhaps to be understood by men—something that holds in it the seed of tomorrow ”

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

GOLCONDE: A LOOK BEHIND

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

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

SHRADDHAVAN

13. CONCLUSION

Golconde is often referred to as “a guest house of the Ashram”, but we have seen that it was originally intended to house permanent members of the Ashram. Thus the architects designed it as a “dormitory” or “hostel” Mrityunjoy notes

MRITYUNJOY As I said at the beginning, Golconde, today a guest house of the Ashram, was not originally intended for that purpose. The Mother wanted a big building to lodge some of her sincere and serious disciples. But circumstances changed that. Golconde turned into a guest house long before it was completed, during the middle of the Second World War when visitors began to pour in and many people wanted to settle in Pondicherry with their families to be under the protection of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There was not enough accommodation available in the Ashram houses for all of them and so a request was made to the Mother to permit the Reception Service to arrange to accommodate as many people as they could in the unfinished building of Golconde, by fitting temporary bamboo-matting as doors and windows. The Mother reluctantly permitted it, and once started it continued until the building was completed after the war. Then the Mother put Mona in charge, an English lady with a hospitable heart and an excellent organising capacity. She continues this work even today, and the maintenance and orderliness of Golconde under her personal supervision and hard work has gained a great reputation at home and abroad.¹

There is a nice story about how the Mother chose Mona to manage Golconde:

Mona was a model housekeeper. Datta (Miss Dorothy Hodgson), a sadhika, once visited her. She was very much impressed by her spotless house. When the Mother was looking for someone to look after Golconde, Datta told her, “I have been to Mona Pinto's house. She keeps her home spotlessly clean. She may be the one to look after Golconde.”

Thus Mona was asked by the Mother to look after Golconde. In fact at that time Mona had a problem in climbing staircases, and wondered how she would manage this three-storeyed building. But when the Mother gives some work, she gives the necessary power with it, and the problem did not trouble Mona any more.

Golconde's exceptional upkeep and maintenance impressed an engineer so much that he remarked, "I have never seen a building so excellently maintained" ²²

In this account, we have taken a look at different aspects of Golconde—the Mother's original conception, the architectural uniqueness of the building, some of the individuals through whom it came into existence, and the staff who maintain it as the Mother envisioned. Perhaps there can be no better summing-up than to give the full text of Sri Aurobindo's letter, which touches upon all these points:

GOLCONDE: A LETTER FROM SRI AUROBINDO

As regards Golconde and its rules—they are not imposed elsewhere—there is a reason for them and they are not imposed for nothing. In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond, Sammer and others. First Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living; secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things, and thirdly that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon or lose their full beauty or value; she feels the consciousness in them and is so much in sympathy with them that what in other hands may be spoilt or wasted in a short time lasts with her for years or decades. It is on this basis that she planned the Golconde. First she wanted a high architectural beauty, and in this she succeeded—architects and people with architectural knowledge have admired it with enthusiasm as a remarkable achievement; one spoke of it as the finest building of its kind he had seen, with no equal in all Europe or America; and a French architect, pupil of a great master, said it executed superbly the idea which his master had been seeking for but failed to realise; but also she wanted all the objects in it, the rooms, the fittings, the furniture to be individually artistic and to form a harmonious whole. This too was done with great care. Moreover, each thing was arranged to have its own use, for each thing there was a place, and there should be no mixing up, or confused or wrong use. But all this had to be kept up and carried out in practice, for it was easy for people living there to create a complete confusion and misuse and to bring everything to disorder and rumination in a short time. That was why the rules were made and for no other purpose. The Mother

hoped that if right people were accommodated there or others trained to a less rough and ready living than is common, her idea could be preserved and the wasting of all the labour and expense avoided.

Unfortunately, the crisis of accommodation came and we were forced to house people in Golconde who could not be accommodated elsewhere and a careful choice could not be made. So, often there was damage and misuse and the Mother had to spend 200/300 Rupees after Darshan to repair things and restore what had been achieved. Mona has taken the responsibility of the house and of keeping things right as much as possible. That was why she interfered in the hand-bag affair—it was as much a tragedy for the table as for the doctor, for it got scratched and spoiled by the handbag—and tried to keep both the bag and shaving utensils in the places that had been assigned for them. If I had been in the doctor's place, I would have been grateful to her for her care and solicitude instead of being upset by what ought to have been for him trifles, although, because of her responsibility, they had for her their importance. Anyhow, this is the rationale for the rules and they do not seem to me to be meaningless regulation and discipline.³

February 25, 1945

SRI AUROBINDO

What Golconde may mean to us today and in the future is strikingly indicated in a report by Udar. We conclude this essay with his words

UDAR: Someone wrote to the Mother asking for accommodation in the Golconde Guest House. When she received this letter she expressed herself very forcefully: "Golconde is *not* a guest house. It is a dormitory (*dortoir*) in which those who reside there can meditate and do their sadhana in beautiful surroundings, in very fine rooms and with many of the little daily jobs done for them, to keep them more free for their sadhana." Then the Mother added, "In the old days, the Rishis used to live in the mountains and their disciples lived in caves in these mountains. Golconde is the modern equivalent of the caves for the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo."⁴

(Concluded)

REFERENCES

1 *A Look Behind*, by Mrityunjoy Mukherjee unpublished ms with Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library

2 *Mother India*, Vol 40, No 10, Oct 1987, p 624

3 *Golconde a letter from Sri Aurobindo* (25 2 1945), pamphlet published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

4 *Mother India*, Vol 40, No 10, Oct 1987, p 620

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

THANK you very much for holding me so deep in your heart and so high in your mind. To be given such value might lead the common man in me to a swollen head, but as I have sought to serve the Divine it spurs me to look for all the defects that prevent me from deserving the compliment you are paying me. Your profoundly appreciative attitude sets me on the alert to shoot whatever “Clear Ray” (“Amal Kiran”) Sri Aurobindo has put in me to mark out and pierce the multitude of defects still lurking in my nature. Reading your letter was at once to feel extreme gratitude and to be made aware of so much that is necessary to realise in order to be worthy of your affectionate praise.

Suddenly my mind went back to a greater challenge in a somewhat different way. When the Supramental Manifestation in the subtle-physical layer of the earth, which the Mother named the earth’s “atmosphere”, took place on February 29, 1956, there were two effects. On the one side all that was turned towards the Sun of Truth sprang up like

A fire whose tongue has tasted paradise.

New powers within us came into view and a glorious goad was felt urging us to reach out towards what Sri Aurobindo has called

Still regions of imperishable Light,
All-seeing eagle-peaks of silent Power
And moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless Bliss
And calm immensities of spirit Space.

Not only was there a glorious goad; there was also a permeation of our selves by a force I may poetically term a laughing golden ease which swept away in many of us several obstructions we had been striving against for long.

On the other side, undreamt-of darknesses rose into our ken. Strange difficulties in the form of desires that seemed unnatural to the normal self confronted people. They learned of defects in themselves which had never before pestered them. The Mother was told of this weird counterpoint to the sense of exaltation and of heavenly help to deal with our life-problems and Yoga-demands. She explained that the new illumination could never cause them: it could only disclose what was already there, hidden from our usual sight. A more penetrating beam had fallen from on high upon our subconscious to reveal noxious matter crouching there and needing to be coped with some time or other.

Answering the question “Why have difficulties increased for quite a large number of sadhaks?”, the Mother brought up an additional aspect of the situation “There is yet another reason. When the Force which is at work is stronger, more insistent, naturally what resists, resists as strongly. And if instead—it is here I have to say something that’s not very pleasant—if instead of being hypnotised by your little difficulties, your little inconveniences, your small discomforts, your ‘big’ defects, if instead of being hypnotised by all that, you tried to see the other side, how much more powerful the Force is, the Grace more active, the Help more tangible, in a word, if you were a little less egoistic and less concentrated on yourselves and had a little wider vision in which you could include things that don’t concern you personally, perhaps your view of the problem would change.”¹

Most of us did follow the Mother’s advice. And after a while the frightening self-exposure passed. There remained only the wide quiet impression of a supreme gift from the Divine, a soft smiling security in the air around us as if the earth’s future were no longer ambiguous. Whatever the appearances henceforth, the path to perfection had been secretly laid across the ages to come. From the distant future the saviour arms of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were stretched out to us just as from the past they were gently pushing us forward and in the present upholding us with a loving word in our ears.

I remember the Mother telling me about the divine movement corresponding from the opposite direction to the manifestation of the Supermind. I had thought that the Supermind involved in the earth’s being, just as the life-force and the mind had been involved, had emerged even as they had emerged. The Mother proved me wrong but declared: “Now the emergence of the involved Supermind is certain. It is only a matter of time.”

Perhaps this too will take place first in the subtle-physical layer of the earth? And when it does, the manifested Supermind will triumphantly appear in the gross-physical along with the involved supramental consciousness emerging there. Then shall be seen on a grand scale—here, there, everywhere—in a most literal and ultra-Miltonic sense “the human face divine.”

Writing to me about my eighty-fifth birthday you have repeatedly wished me “a long life”. I can’t think I shall live long enough to see that great evolutionary consummation. Possibly, were I to achieve the feat of becoming a Parsi Methuselah to match the legendary Jewish patriarch who, according to *Genesis* 5:27, went on living for 969 years, I might look at a whole world of such faces with, at least partially, a “human face divine” on my own neck, too—provided, of course I sustain the Yogic aspiration over the centuries.... In actual fact, my life has been unexpectedly long as it is—unexpectedly because I was born rash and have taken all sorts of risks, at first with a deep-rooted confidence in an

¹ *Questions and Answers 1956*, p. 220

inexplicable vitality behind my own and later with an inner sense that the Divine would see me through every adventure. As you know, the Mother once told me: "We have saved you from all kinds of disasters and it is indeed good that you have so much faith, but don't go on exploiting our protection." This means that I must have more wisdom, more forethought, though not necessarily what is called worldly wisdom and fear of the future. I am doing my best to live long both because I am happy and can give happiness and because I want as much time as possible to go nearer to Sri Aurobindo's luminous Truth and the Mother's radiant Beauty. All the same I am ready to say "Hurrah" whenever they tell me, "Your time is up." (21 11 1989)

*

You have asked me to comment on differences of temperament in Yoga. I have known a pair in the Ashram, one of whom—the husband—happened to have an optimistic temperament, while the wife was rather serious-mooded. Not that she couldn't laugh, but there had to be proper times for it. Thus with a laugh she had forbidden her partner to crack a joke before she had had her morning cup of tea! Jokes would be quite out of place if she hadn't been rightly conditioned by that warming-up beverage. She used to wonder how the fellow could be chirpy even on just getting up from bed

Perhaps you'll imagine he was more in touch than she with what is termed the "psychic being" in our Yoga, the entity hidden deep within us which is constantly lit up because it is constantly in the Divine's secret Presence. You'll be wrong. Actually the wife was much more than he in the aura of the psychic being, for she had an intense love for the Mother, a rare self-giving devotion, so much so that the Mother once told the man that his wife's soul dwelt all the time in the Mother's own bosom! But she had a worrying and hypersensitive temperament. I am sure that if she had lived long enough, it would have been quieted down. But such a turn of nature doesn't easily develop a mental standing-back from the surface of things, undergo a determined discipline of detachment, studiously practise non-reacting to the impingements of the outer life. One has consciously to create conditions that may keep going in all circumstances whatever degree of the sunny psychic sense one may happen to have.

A special effort is to be made of what the Mother has called "Remembering and Offering". Here the most important thing is that the offering to her of those outer impingements must be immediate—before we start thinking of how we should respond. The temptation to give thought to them is great. Those who worry and are hypersensitive are liable to yield to it. A certain toughness of mind is required to resist it. And the habit of non-response has to become one of our main preoccupations. Activities which are usually supposed to be important

should be made merely occasions for us to remember and offer instead of returning all-too-human answers or else making reactions according to our personal idea of spirituality. Not that we have to be passive in our daily life. We certainly need to act at many points, but the acting has to come out of an initial inner passivity in the hands of our Gurus—without private grudges, grievances, frustrations in relation to our fellow-sadhaks.

Please don't run away with the fancy that the man I am speaking of is an unanimous paragon. At least once or twice a year he badly loses his temper for a second or two, generally over a trifle—and he feels profoundly ashamed for doing so. What I have tried to describe is a type of temperament in its perfection, towards which he strives hard because of a spontaneous affinity for it

(9.11.1989)

*

The phrase haunting you—"divine Aurobindo died"—from a poem of mine which you couldn't find has somehow been ringing in my own ears time and again during the last month or so. It is not only "stunning", as you say: it is also heart-shattering. It sums up in three climactic words the long tragedy of our untransformed world. And there is a concentrated art in it which drives it home with a terrible poignancy as if putting a final seal on the transience and unhappiness of the cosmic condition. The art lies in the consonance-assonance of the two words "divine" and "died" in the midst of diametrically opposite suggestions. And the art of this connection gets a secret support from the occurrence of the *d*-sound in the name "Aurobindo", a sound which subtly counteracts the four-syllabic length of the name dividing—triumphantly, as it were—those two suggestions. The horror and the hopelessness of the mutability of even the greatest factors—or actors—in the earth-drama are clinched by the three-worded phrase's position at the end of the many-visioned sonorous octave of the sonnet. Then comes the sestet's surprise—the conjuring up of the paradox of a death that is a breakthrough into a new life for a humanity that has always dreamt of the undying although faced everywhere with the passing of the most beautiful, the most lofty. Yes, "dreamt", but mortality has ever intruded to make the vision splendid fade, and the most disastrous touch came when the hope was at its highest—during the career of Sri Aurobindo, the Supramental Avatar. The sonnet appears on page 38 of *Altar and Flame*. Here it is:

Heaven's Light and Mortal Doom

The Parthenon's pillars built to upbear the sky
 Could keep not even an earthly roof, and all
 That colour kindled for the Eternal's eye
 In deep Ajanta fades; no rhythms recall

The two grand plays the terrible chisel-stroke
 Of the titan mind of Aeschylus set beside
Prometheus Bound: their power Time's brute hand broke
 Heaven's light passes—divine Aurobindo died.

But this one death where Heaven's own self gave room
 For dire eclipse of its eternity
 Has spent the whole blind force of mortal doom
 Against the soul's vision of a wondrous sod
 In which the Undying can work His artistry.
 Now Man breaks free to grow for ever God (25.3 1988)

*

The story of your experience on the staircase leading to the Meditation Hall on one of your birthdays in the 'sixties at a time when the Mother was not seeing people is most enchanting. I marked two or three points in it for comment. You wrote of sitting at "the foot of the stairs". I think it was a soul-instinct which made you choose the place, as if you were at your Guru's feet. The foot of the stairs which went up and up and the remembrance of the One who was at the top recall to me an early poem of mine with the name "Kanchinjanga" in its title. The name means "Golden Ganges". No appellation could be more apt for our Mother, the radiant fount of Divine Grace. Here is the poem

At the Foot of Kanchinjanga

I have loved thee though thy beauty stands
 Aloof from me,
 And hoped that dwelling in thy sight
 From dawn to dawn at last I might
 Become like thee—

Become like thee and soar above
 My mortal woe,
 And to the heavens, passionless
 And mute, from dawn to dawn address
 Thoughts white like snow.

The second point I marked was your phrase: "a force was descending in me." Now again the Ganges-suggestion was unavoidable. All of us know the wonderful story of Rishi Bhagiratha's invocation and the descent of the Ganges from heaven through the wide-growing hair of Shiva's head—Shiva who offered

his Himalayan head to bear the terrific impact of the heavenly river so that it might not fall directly and unbroken upon little earth and shatter it to bits. Here another poem of mine swept through my memory Let me quote it to you.

O Ganga of the In-world!

O Ganga of the In-world! luminous
 With the calm passion of the Master's Will,
 Celestial Grace, thou flowest unto us,
 Voiceful from the remote Inerrable—
 Pure in thy beauty, softening the might
 Of summits absolute for our valleyed ways,
 That like a wondrous yet familiar light
 Eternity may mingle with our days,
 And in thy deep melodious ecstasy
 Drowning all fear, our souls go fortified,
 Daring the ultimate peaks of destiny,
 Seeking the dazzling fountain of thy tide,
 To contemplate the illimitable form
 Of Shiva silent like a frozen storm!

Point three is apropos of the felicitously bold phrase with which you end your short account of the descending force: "It was so peaceful, so sweet, so delightful and at the same time so powerful that I felt my head would melt into honey!" I am reminded of Rishi Vamadeva's mystic words in his hymn to Agni.

"May we taste that honeyed wave of thine which is borne in the force of the waters where they come together."—

*Apām anike samithe ya ābhrtah,
 tam aśyāma madhumantam ta ūrmim. (IV 58.22)*

What you experienced was a touch of the divine Ananda which is no passive bliss but a dynamic beatitude What finer, what greater gift could one expect from the Mother on one's birthday?

You have asked me: "Did it descend from outside or did it emerge from deep within?" I should answer: "The soul in you which is deep within opened up to its own supreme potentialities which are hidden above in the empyrean of the Spirit. When they are on the verge of being realised, the within and the above grow suddenly one—or rather the secret truth of their oneness breaks forth, the inmost soul's aspiring consciousness turns into the sheer sparkling nectar that comes from the Spirit, dissolving all bounds."

It is true that I forgot the exact date of your “bonne fête” I forgot because you drew my attention to it too far ahead. If you had written to me about it a couple of days before the happy occasion, my still continuing preoccupation with the Finnish Indologist Asko Parpola’s thesis would not have covered it up from my sight. But, of course, you are always in my heart and mind. You have asked me whether I did anything on that occasion which would distinguish it? Well, my friend Madanlal, who recently recovered from a fractured “neck of the femur” and bravely carries on with his handicap and meets me with a smile every afternoon at the Samadhi, asked me in view of my rather secluded life: “Do you ever feel like going to the seashore or, if you can’t, do you feel sorry on missing the freshness and openness that are there?” Spontaneously I said, “Why should one? Within us there is a glorious self-sufficiency.” I meant, “If one lived in contact with one’s inmost being, one would miss nothing. One would have the sense of all journeys done—of having reached that home of oneself for which all journeys seek.” (9.11 1989)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

A WORD ON MRITYUNJOY

My friend of many years, Mrityunjoy Mukherjee passed away on 15 November 1989. He was born on 25 February 1908. Before coming to the Ashram he was associated with Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan. His life in the Ashram started on 26 July 1929. He worked intimately with Pavitra (Barbier St -Hilaire) for several years—one of his duties was to mix a salad for the Mother’s lunch under Pavitra’s supervision! During this period he came into close contact with the Mother. His friendly disposition made him a favourite with those who wanted to hear of the various stages of the Ashram’s past. Two notable contributions of his in writing are the detailed record of progress in the construction of the model guest house Golconde and the many-sided account of Pavitra’s life both before and after joining the Ashram. His own personal recollections of life in the Ashram are in a number of cassettes deposited with the “Archives”

K D S.

“DYUMAN—THE LUMINOUS ONE”

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

Here is the inspiring life story of a great servitor of the Divine whom Sri Aurobindo named “Dyuman—The Luminous One ”

To a certain extent it is the story of the growth of the Ashram, of “God’s Labour”, and the part taken in it by one to whom the Mother said, “You came down to serve.”

Compiler · SHYAM KUMARI

IN the beginning the food for sadhaks was being cooked by servants. Every midday the Mother would come to the dining room where food was kept ready for everyone. Then Tara and Lila arrived. Tara was only eighteen. She asked the Mother, “Mother, are they not my brothers and sisters? Can’t I cook for them?” And she started cooking for all the sadhaks, Charu and I would bring the food to the dining room in the Ashram Main building.

Tara cooked on an ordinary earthen *chulha*. She cooked the rice for ninety-three people in an earthen pot. She had to strain the excess water off. One day while she was straining the extra water from the cooked rice, the earthen pot broke and the rice fell on her. She suffered greatly from burns for one whole month. When she recovered she started cooking again. But by this time we had replaced the earthen pots with brass pots and we also stopped the straining of water from the cooked rice.

In 1927-28 when we were distributing milk in the dining room I discovered that though the Ashram was buying 750 c.c. per head per day the sadhaks did not receive even 600 c.c. I quietly set out to investigate how and where the milk disappeared. I found that firstly just after milking, the milkmen were measuring the foam with the milk. Secondly while boiling the milk the person in charge let it go on boiling and much milk evaporated. Thirdly in a spirit of *laissez-faire* some sadhaks were taking away milk at their pleasure.

I wrote to the Mother that instead of trying to give 750 c.c., 600 c.c. per sadhak per day should be given. Though I addressed all the letters to the Mother, sometimes the Mother would answer, at other times Sri Aurobindo. Now the Lord answered, “Dyuman, your cup looks small.”

I wrote, “Though we are taking 750 c.c. per head per day, we are unable to give even 600 c.c. Let us give 200 c.c. at each of the three meals per day.”

In the beginning we were giving half a cup of curd at lunch and I would give each sadhak as much sugar as he desired. But one sadhak was not satisfied even with seven spoons. When I reported this to the Mother she fixed a quota of eight,

ten or twelve spoons for each sadhak per day, one spoon being ten grms. of sugar. Some of the sadhaks said that twelve spoons were too much. The Mother said they could take eight or ten.

I put each person's sugar in a box with his name and gave it to him. He would return the empty box to me to be refilled. To stop pilferage the Mother asked me to seal each tin with cellophane tape. We used to finish this work sometimes at midnight.

At first Datta boiled vegetables and made salads for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Pavitra would dress them with olive oil, etc. Then sadhikas started to cook and send food to Sri Aurobindo. Sometimes they were not careful. Slowly Datta's kitchen developed and became known as Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's kitchen. Tara and Lila took charge of it. Later Nirmala joined them. Nirmala has passed away but Tara and Lila still work there.

In 1934 due to overwork I had a nervous breakdown. When I recovered, the Mother prescribed a unique medicine for me. I was asked to put on Pavitra's hat and walk at midday for half an hour in the sun. She also asked me, "If I give you an egg, will you eat it?" I had never eaten an egg before. Still I answered, "Yes, Mother." But though she said that she would give me eggs, she never did. Medicines were mostly discouraged in those days. We were asked to open ourselves to higher forces.

At that time we had no idea that the Ashram would grow as it has done. At the beginning the idea was that at the minimum there would be twelve people and at the maximum thirty-six. So thirty-six sets of enamel dining vessels were ordered from France. Thirty-six low tables, like those we have in the Dining Room now, were made. But it did not remain like that for long. The number went on increasing and by the time of the Second World War, we were already about a hundred and ninety.

Up to 1939 when the War started, our life went on without much difficulty, for we required only a small amount of money. There were just a few people. But with the war a large number of devotees came to seek shelter here. I was in-charge of food. Construction can wait, cement can wait but food cannot. One day I was extremely worried. Money was scarce. How to manage? I was on my way to the market. As I came near what is now Gandhi Road, in the street itself, I was taken in my subtle body to see Kubera's treasures. Kubera is the treasurer of the Gods. I was shown all his treasures and was told, "Everything is here. There is no need to worry." Even today after fifty years I remember the place where it happened. Since then I have never worried. I have gone through the whole of my life with this confidence that what was required would come by some means or other. Even if sometimes I did not receive any money from the Mother, I would manage myself.

I was deeply committed with her in this, very deeply. It was 1937 or '38. I was young. My access to her had come step by step. But somehow we got into

the confidence of each other. One day P, an old sadhak, asked the Mother for some money for his younger brother—about Rs. 300. The Mother came to me and said, “P has asked for money. I cannot give him from the general purse. People give me gold, now as he has asked I can utilise it. I want three hundred rupees. Can you manage it?” She handed me some twenty-four carat gold from Dara’s family. I went to the market and sold the gold, and whatever I received I gave to her. That was the first time I dealt directly with gold. Afterwards whenever jewellery or gold came, it came into my hands.

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo were clear and firm, “We will not go and ask for donations. If the Divine wishes the Ashram to continue, it will continue, otherwise we have to close down.” Along with those who came to Pondicherry as the safest place in the world during the Second World War, more and more children came and problems multiplied.

Dr. R. S. Agarwal came with his whole family and asked the Mother, “What about the education of my children?” The Mother was not yet ready to start a school. Dr. Agarwal said, “Mother, I will give all the requirements like paper, pencils, etc.” He supplied all these things when the school was still small. But here everything goes on growing and the Mother had to find regular means. But for the required money to come, the Ashramites had to have the correct attitude towards money, to use it rightly and to have the right attitude towards the Mother. It was not always there. Due to this the problems increased. The demands on the Mother increased. The expenses increased. Naturally there were difficulties.

She needed money, in big sums, to start the school (Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education). One morning she began to put together all her jewellery. I was not there. When I went to her she said, “Bring boxes to put all this jewellery in.” I felt so sad, you can understand what was happening within me but I had to comply with her orders. I went on filling boxes; when filled up they were stacked from floor up to the ceiling. Then she said, “I hand it all over to you. Do whatever you want. I need money.” So I brought a jeweller from the town. He and our Minoo Solena, who had been a jeweller, and myself, we three sat together for two or three days in a confined place and one by one we numbered, labelled and then weighed all the jewellery. We fixed prices according to the rates prevailing then. If those things were here today I would get one crore of rupees for them. But in those days the estimated price came to one lakh, seventy-five thousand rupees. The Mother said, “So little?” I answered, “Mother, I know what I want to give you.” Then I put fancy prices on the jewellery.

In that period there was a terrible pressure on the Mother. Satyakarma, the banker, would come and say he needed such and such a sum. I knew we didn’t have so much money in cash. In the evening I would take a piece of the Mother’s jewellery and go to the market to sell it or I would go to some friend and tell him,

“The market value is , but I want this much ” Then I would bring not the market value but the Mother-value, and then before she came down from her room, the required money would be there on the inside table

Thus our life went on. My confidence in this matter grew more and more. And much more than the market value was realised. Her complaint was, “Why do you give the jewellery to the Ashram people? I need money.” For I had given some of her jewellery to the Ashramites for almost next to nothing—the rings, the sari-pins, etc. I would answer, “All of them have given to you everything. Can’t they have something from you?” In former days the sadhaks kept nothing. Whatever they had, they would offer to the Mother I have kept a list of everything So if the day comes, I can go to these people and say, “Now we require the things back.”

So I put a price on every piece and I would tell my friend, a lover of the Mother, “The market value is five thousand but I want to have ten thousand from you.” Sometimes the person would say, “But just now I don’t have money.” I would say that they could pay me later on. But I would give the money to the Mother at once, it might be five hundred, one thousand or twenty-five thousand I arranged to always keep some money with me in reserve, for she might suddenly need it Of course, it was all her own money. But whatever was given to me for my work, I could manipulate as I liked and save on it.

Once on 29th March the cashier went to the Mother and said he needed a certain sum on the first of April for distribution. The Mother called out, “Dyuman, come here ” I went to her She got up and went to her cupboard, took out some jewellery, and said, “Sell this I need twenty-five thousand rupees, I want it now.” But knowing that at that time the market would not be open, I said, “Mother, please wait a moment.” I brought twenty-five thousand from my reserve fund in a few minutes and gave them to her. The Mother asked, “What will you do?” “Mother, I will sell the things and keep the twenty-five thousand and offer you whatever is left ”

Once she gave me a treasured silver time-piece given her by her grandmother. While giving me the time-piece she asked, “Dyuman, are you a sentimentalist?” I said, “No, Mother, not in the least. Give me whatever you want to give.” With a heavy heart I gave the time-piece to Laljibhai and decided to ask him to pay ten thousand for it. Next day when Laljibhai came to see the Mother, she said, “You have got my time-piece That is from my grandmother. Keep it carefully in your cupboard ”

The Mother had a gold crown set with rubies which we see in a photograph of her. She called it the Durga-Crown and treasured it. She said she would never sell it. But things came to such a pass that one day she took it out and said, “I give it to you to sell.” I replied, “Yes, Mother,” and decided then and there what I would do with it. I gave it to G who was there in the verandah outside I asked him to give me ten thousand rupees. I knew the true value of the crown for I had

got it made for Shankar Gauda, who had wanted to present it to the Mother. Then it had cost five thousand rupees. (The price of gold has increased a hundredfold since then.) The Mother asked, “What do you propose to do with it?” I said, “Mother, I’ll give it to G.” The Mother called G in and said, “G! look here, take care of this crown I value it If you behave badly, it will be a great disaster for you.”

People in the Ashram, much less outside, do not realise, do not understand, what she had to pass through, how difficult things were. I was the witness and participant in that struggle.

In the beginning the attitude of the sadhaks was to ask only for things that were absolutely necessary to live by and to cause the Mother the minimum of trouble, to lessen her burden. But then things changed, demands increased. And she was so generous. She simply went on giving. She would say, “Yes, yes, yes,” as much as she could. She used to say, “They don’t know what they are doing. If I am not there, they will understand what it was.”

There was a pearl necklace, which the Mother wore on Darshan days. Now a time came when she had to part with it. I gave it to F for two thousand five hundred rupees. Then the Mother asked to whom I had given it. This she asked so that she could put an inner spiritual formation around the thing.

People cannot imagine what I had to pass through. It was heartbreaking to watch her sell everything. One day we had no money. She asked me to go to Madras to sell off some jewellery. N came with me because he knew many people of the city. We went to the shop of Surajmal, a big jeweller. We reached there at 10 a.m. and sat upto 3 o’clock with nobody taking any notice. Then the jeweller came and said, “We can’t take it.” “Ok, then who can?” I told. We were told to go to Batalawala. There I mentioned a particular price. They refused it. I phoned a message for the Mother, “I am coming back with the things.” When I came back I saw the Mother in the Playground. She was furious. “Why have you brought them back? I need the money.” I answered, “Mother, I cannot sell at the price that they wanted to pay. I have fixed a price. I will give you double that.” I gave her the money and gradually sold the things, when I could get proper prices.

I wanted to celebrate 15 August 1947, Sri Aurobindo’s seventy-fifth birthday in a big way, in a very big way, from the evening of the 13th up to the 16th, each day with a different programme and good food. I planned to put one flag of the Mother on the terrace above my room and another on top of the Ashram. But first I wanted to buy something for the Mother, diamonds to be precise. I must offer her diamonds first, then would come the flags and food. Without this offering to her the other things would have had no meaning for me. I went and bought some diamonds and emeralds and asked her, “Mother, do you like them? If so, please accept them from me. Afterwards do whatever you want to do. I don’t mind. I offer them to you.”

People asked me, "If the need arises, would you be able to sell these diamonds and emeralds which you yourself have offered? Will you not feel anything?" I replied, "No, not in the least." And later I had to sell them.

Once we had no money at all. What was to be done? Originally all the money was kept in silver coins. A banker advised, "Don't do that Turn your silver into gold." At that time the value of one sovereign was thirteen rupees. So we turned all the silver into gold sovereigns. These coins were kept in a box. In 1949 the Mother said to me, "I have to sell my gold coins. But only on one condition. First hand over to me the money equivalent to the gold and then take the gold. How many coins can you take?" "Mother, I can take a hundred sovereigns." "Give me the money accordingly," she said. I went to her with the money. She took it and then said, "Count the coins and take them away." Thus her confidence in me grew day by day. Slowly I sold all the Mother's jewellery. She had to sell all that her grandmother and greatgrandmother had given her. Had people understood what she had to undergo, their whole attitude and lives would have changed.

I had sold everything of the Mother. Nothing was left. In 1949 when she said she would like to sell her saris, I was so shocked. You see, she had sold everything and now even the saris. I reacted very strongly. The Mother said, "I have got one thousand saris. If somebody brings me one lakh of rupees, I will give all of them away. But nobody should tell me, 'I will take a few, I will give only some money.' They should take them *en bloc* and give me one lakh." Though I tried very hard, that year I could not sell.

Every day, the things which were offered to her in the Playground would be brought to the Ashram and opened. She would ask, "What is this? What is that?" And I would answer accordingly—name the item and the donor. She would decide what was to be done with the thing. On 20th February, 1951 Chaundana Banerji had offered a sari to the Mother. When I showed it to her, she said, "What shall I do?" Then I remembered her desire to sell the saris. I said, "I could sell it." That very night I sent a letter to Navajata (Keshav Poddar). "Can you buy the saris?" I asked him. Immediately Navajata sent one lakh of rupees to the Mother and also wrote that though he was sending money for all the saris, he wanted to leave them with Dyuman so that he could sell them and offer whatever money he could get from this sale to the Mother.

(To be continued)

CONVERSATIONS OF THE DEAD

TRANSLATED BY SATADAL FROM THE BENGALI OF
NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

9

Savitri, Draupadi

Savitri

WOMAN pours out herself once for all, not twice. Woman can give herself up to one man only, not to two men. Woman's heart is integrally consecrated to the very same god in its every birth—the truth of a chaste wife can never be debased. What is the secret of your life then, Draupadi?

Draupadi

The secret of my life is the same as yours—in fact, the same mystery shrouds the life of all women, all chaste wives. My life and heart too are entirely surrendered to only one person for ever.

Savitri

How can you say that? Is the account of the five Pandavas a mere story? Then I must say that the poet's fancy has played a very cruel and unjust game with you.

Draupadi

It is not a story, not even the poet's fancy. I was the lawful wife of the five Pandavas.

Savitri

Do you mean to say, you were hypocritical? Secretly you had adored someone and openly you have sold yourself to some other one—not only to one but to many others, did you? Is this your spirit, your devotion—your womanhood? May I know, Draupadi, who was your beloved, your true lord? I have heard something like this in regard to Arjuna. Is that the truth?

Draupadi

My true Lord was not even Arjuna, none of the five brothers, Savitri.

Savitri

A moment ago you admitted that you were the lawful wife of the five Pandavas, and now you are telling me that none of them was your husband, it was somebody else! I am getting confused, please don't be enigmatic but let me hear the simple truth.

Draupadi

My heart's lord was the best of the Yadavas, Sri Krishna.

Savitri

What are you saying? Even then I don't understand anything. How could you be at the same time the wife of the five Pandavas?

Draupadi

It is very simple. I was consecrated at the feet of Lord Sri Krishna—I have followed only his directives. Whatever he has ordered me to do, I have unhesitatingly carried it out.

Savitri

The Divine is there in every heart. In one sense he is the lord of all, whether man or woman. But in life one who is my lord, the rightful owner of my womanhood, is a human being like me—in my life's mission he only is my living deity; if I realise God, it is in him and through him only.

Draupadi

My Sri Krishna too is human, the only rightful owner of my womanhood, my human god.

Savitri

Why then did that god of yours not accept you as his own? Not that he has not accepted anybody as his wife. Instead of doing that, he offered you five others—what sort of ethics, what sort of righteousness is here?

Draupadi

I did not take upon myself to discern that. I have abandoned all ethics and righteousness to his order. I know what is dharma, but I am not attached to it; I know too what is adharma, there again I have no apathy for it—I am carrying out whatever work has been entrusted to me by my in-dwelling Divine, Sri Krishna.

Savitri

You may escape like this. But my heart is unable to give consent to it. Even though God is beyond right and wrong, why should he give indulgence to wrong, and indulge in wrong himself? In Him is the supreme Law—

Draupadi

That Law is not of the petty human intellect but His own. That continues to baffle many a familiar human notion of *dharma*.

Savitri

Then, how will human society exist? Surely, God does not want society to be

destroyed? Are the laws that arise in society not sanctioned by God, not formed by God's own hands?

Draupadi

Is there any expression for a special law in society? Just see, how many diverse laws have found expression in it with the variations of time and space. If your words are justified, all these are to be accepted equally. Savitri! Why are you desirous of establishing the law you have realised as your self-law to be the sole law for everybody? It is not that there can be one and only one irrefutable relation between man and woman. This relation is being controlled according to the need of society. Different societies have different needs, accordingly the form of relation between man and woman is also different. Both the systems of monogamy and polygamy are the prevalent systems in human society.

Savitri

I admit. But there is in man's heart an ideal—one highest truth. Not all societies can grasp that ideal, that truth. The society which can do it is to that extent progressive, and the one which can't is backward, immature. The men and women who have embodied this ideal, this truth in their lives, are the best of humans.

Draupadi

Is it really so? Isn't it that you are giving the highest place to your own personal notion and the custom of your own society out of your earnest regard for it? If you speak of an ideal and if you admit that there is disparity between ideals, then is not God himself the supreme ideal of all?

Savitri

But who has seen God face to face, who can assert that this or that is His system?

Draupadi

I have seen God. I can assert that I have followed His system—possibly once a little bit of human weakness found expression in me, and for that I have had to visit hell also.

Savitri

As I can't do that, as I feel I am only a human, then I must give the supreme place to the truth, the ideal which has blazed in my heart and move unhesitatingly taking that only as God's directive.

Draupadi

Probably I am outside the arena of human society, Savitri. I don't ask you ever to follow in my footsteps.

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, 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.

PRESIDENT BERENDZEN—I am delighted to welcome you to this exceptional even unique event. A university is a place where ideas come together for exploration, for study, for analysis, for debate. Indeed universities do not so much provide answers as they provoke questions and then more questions, and that is what I believe this morning is really about—and it comes at an especially appropriate, even pivotal time. For the past several years, we have heard report after report about presumably the deplorable state of our educational system in this country; kindergarten through the twelfth grade and the closing of the American mind; the lack of a sheer common literacy across our land. And even only a few weeks ago, we all read with some sadness the story of the poor state of humanities education in the United States. It is, therefore, I believe exquisitely appropriate that we pause for a moment here on this lovely fall morning to examine a case of law and a case of literary history. And what better city is there to do it in—a city that's devoted to action, pauses for a bit to reflect on thought. We want today of course to be fair and objective, and we hope that the program has been set up to provide that. This afternoon at three o'clock in this same chamber, the justices will render their decision, and all of you are welcome back to hear it at that time. In order to examine today the humanities, but in particular to do it through legal reasoning, through the study of the law, we have two fine professors of the law. But before introducing them, may I remind you that it was in fact William Shakespeare who said, "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." In Washington, that would decimate the population. Well, I am very proud of both of these professors, and to introduce them, the dean of the university's Washington College of Law, Fred Anderson.

FRED ANDERSON—Thank you, Richard. We at the law school are delighted with the intensity of interest in this question. I almost want to make sure that you in the audience are not here expecting testimony in the Bork confirmation hearings, or a negotiation over the NFL strike. But, knowing that around Washington, the authenticity of Shakespeare's works is a question of great

interest, we and my colleagues endeavored to cooperate with the university and with David Kreeger to arrange the debate. The two colleagues of mine, two popular and most outstanding professors, who will be arguing the cases this morning are: for the petitioner, Professor Peter Jaszi, whom I can see through the microphones and cameras over there champing at the bit. Peter, if you'd stand. Peter is an expert in contracts law, but he has a particular interest and I might add, in light of these debates, a renewed interest in one of his scholarly subjects; that's the field of copyright. For Stratford, Professor James Boyle. Jamie Boyle is a Scot; that's a rare occasion, when a Scot defends an Englishman, and he has taught jurisprudence tort law. We're glad to have them both to have agreed to do this. Their briefs were brilliant; I'm sure that their oral arguments will be as well.

BERENDZEN—To hear this case, we have an extraordinary panel of judges who will be introduced by a remarkable man himself. He's a business executive, a musician, a connoisseur of the arts, a patron of the arts, a philanthropist for several decades; he's been Washington's modern Leonardo. He is a trustee emeritus of The American University, he's the organizer and the sponsor of today's event. I'm pleased to present, David Lloyd Kreeger.

KREEGER—President Berendzen, Dean Anderson, ladies and gentlemen, I would like briefly to explain the reasons for my involvement in these quite extraordinary proceedings. It begins with my love for the plays, sonnets and the narrative poems of Shakespeare. A love that was nurtured by reading the entire works in my early years after law school, during two hours each day that I spent on the Pennsylvania Railroad commuting to a law firm in Newark. And my reverence for these masterpieces quite naturally sparked a wish to know more about the genius who had created them. This invited further reading about the life of William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon who for more than three hundred years has been accepted, indeed taken for granted, as the author. Inevitably, I became aware of the doubts that have emanated from highly respected sources during the past century as to the validity of the conventional attribution, and I also became aware of the numerous alternative candidates for the mantle of authorship. During recent years, the dissenters from orthodoxy have focused increasingly on Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, as the author, writing anonymously, or under the pseudonym of William Shakespeare. From these readings I realized that the case for authorship, whether for Stratford or for Oxford depends to a very considerable degree on circumstantial evidence. And as a lawyer, I felt that this was an issue that might profitably be subjected to legal analysis and to judicial deliberation. President Berendzen and Dean Anderson agreed, and the result is these debates made possible with their whole-hearted cooperation. We are indeed fortunate to have two highly qualified professors of law to present the case for each side. It is an

event of truly historic proportions that three very distinguished justices of the Supreme Court of the United States have consented to hear the arguments and to render an opinion at 3:00 p.m. this afternoon in this church later today. I speak for all responsible for this event, when I express the hope that whatever the outcome, it will cast additional light upon a fascinating literary historical question. And that it will enhance the pleasure and the understanding to be derived from what may well be the greatest body of literature penned in human history. And now, ladies and gentlemen, will you please rise to the entrance of Mr. Justice William Brennan, Mr. Justice Harry Blackmun, and Mr. Justice John Paul Stevens. Thank you.

JUSTICE—Mr. Creeger thought of everything else but no gavel. This court is, may I just say? convened as you know as an appellate court. The unusual thing about it, is not that there is any violation of the religion clauses because we're convened here, but rather that there is no record of any lower court. Ordinarily as you know, we hear appeals from some judgment of some lower court. Here apparently we're on our own. And because of that, since the Oxford side has the burden of proving its case which is that de Vere and not Shakespeare was the author of the plays and the sonnets, I just want to emphasize that I think in the absence of any lower court, findings of facts, records or anything else, the burden is one of trying to establish his case by clear and convincing evidence, not simply by a preponderance of the evidence. In any event, if my colleagues dissent and think this ought to be by preponderance of the evidence, the rule will be clear and convincing and let them write the dissent.

JUSTICE—But, Mr Chief Justice, we're reviewing the work of the bard, which should be beyond a reasonable doubt

JUSTICE—I'm not that harsh. But nevertheless, in any event, it's a heavy burden, however we phrase it, because, as we know, not until 1781 was there any doubt expressed as to who was the author of the plays and the sonnets. The authorship was attributed always to Shakespeare of Stratford up'til that time. And I think that weighs somewhat as to the burden on Oxford to prove that no, it was not Shakespeare but he, who was the author. Now, I'm a little confused about how much time counsel had. Is this forty-five minutes for direct, and fifteen for rebuttal, or an hour total? Is that it? Alright. Mr. Jaszi, would you proceed if you're ready?

MR. JASZI—It is my pleasure to rise today on behalf of Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford who was born in 1550 and died in 1604. In his day, Oxford had a reputation as a poet and a dramatist, but because so little was published that can be traced to him few poems and no plays associated with his name are known today. It is my contention, however, that a body of work from

de Vere's pen does survive—the incomparable plays and poems conventionally attributed to William Shakespeare. In particular I will argue that Shakespeare was an emblematic pseudonym adopted by Edward de Vere, and maintained by others after his death to conceal the fact that de Vere had written poems for publication and plays for public performance, something the customs of the time effectively prohibited a nobleman from doing. When I refer to Shakespeare in my remarks today, I will be indicating the author of the plays and poems collected in the first folio of 1623 whoever he may have been in fact; I should emphasize that it is to this Shakespeare that the various tributes which the plays and poems received from contemporaries were addressed and not to William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. When I do refer to this Shakspeare of Stratford, I will be pronouncing his family name according to the spellings which appear in twenty-nine of the 30 relevant entries in the Stratford-Parish register, and in all three of the signatures to his will. Despite the prodigious scholarly efforts which have been invested in seeking his traces, most of what we know about this obscure historical figure can be summed up as follows: William Shakspeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and he died there 52 years later having achieved prosperity through wise investments and by other means of which we can only guess. We also know that he lived for a time in London and during those years his financial portfolio, so to speak, included shares in a London theatre company. This last fact does not give rise to any inference that he was more than a financial participant in that enterprise. Many sharers had little or no artistic role in the companies in which they claimed financial stakes.

The last judge to consider the question of this Shakspeare's authorship claims was Judge Wilburforce of the English Chancery division in a 1964 case called *Ray Hopkins Will Trust*. He stated that the evidence in favor of Shakspeare of Stratford as the author is quantitatively slight and he went further, stating that some find difficulty in understanding how a man with such antecedents and known character as Shakspeare of Stratford could have developed the literary qualities required to compose the plays. What Judge Wilburforce had in mind, I think, among other things, is the fact that the plays and poems of Shakespeare are rich in multiple classical references and other allusions, which reveal their author as a highly educated man, a man of wide culture, whereas so far as can be demonstrated by reliable evidence Shakspeare of Stratford never attended school a day in his life. His father was illiterate and, it seems clear, so were both of his daughters.

JUSTICES—Well, now, is that entirely clear? I had the impression that reading these voluminous materials that you've given us, that maybe Shakspeare of Stratford was not quite the ignorant butcher's boy that some proponents of the Oxfordians make out. His wife Ann and his youngest daughter Judith were perhaps illiterate, but the oldest daughter Suzanna was not, was she?

JASZI—Suzanna could, so far as we know, sign her name but she was unable after her husband John Hall's death to recognize his handwriting, a circumstance from which many have drawn the inference that, like many of her time, her literacy may have been effectively limited to the execution of her signature.

JUSTICE—Why do you assume that Shakspere did not attend school in Stratford?

JASZI—It is a matter not so much of my assuming that he did not do so as of pointing out that there is no affirmative evidence of any kind to indicate that he did so nor for that matter to indicate what he would have learned had he done so, since all of...

JUSTICE—Yes, but you assumed he was a successful businessman, was he not so?

JASZI—His father was a successful businessman, and Shakspere himself was in his turn.

JUSTICE—Isn't it fair to infer if he was just going to pursue a business career, he would take advantage of what education was available?

JASZI—His father's success as a businessman was in its own way qualified and during Shakspere of Stratford's youth, his father had fallen on relatively hard times. There was at least some reason to believe from the admittedly unreliable accounts of John Aubrey, that to the extent that Shakspere of Stratford ever attended the grammar school, he may have been taken out of it at an early age in order to participate in his father's business.

JUSTICE—We don't see any evidence that he was in fact taken out.

JASZI—I would repeat of course that apart from Aubrey's account, on which I would not like to place excessive reliance, there is no evidence that he was taken out of the grammar school, but there was no evidence whatsoever of the possibility that he ever attended.

JUSTICE—Incidentally, the grammar school of Elizabethan days was a different kind from the grammar school as we know it today, was it not?

JASZI—We know a great deal about the curricula of the great grammar schools of the Elizabethan period. About Westminster and Eton and the quality of education that would have been provided there. Those Stratfordian scholars who have counted on the Stratford grammar school to explain the wealth of allusions and other materials in the works of Shakespeare for the authorship of Shake-

spere have extrapolated from our knowledge about Eton and Westminster.

JUSTICE—But it is a fact that there was a grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon. And a grammar school that taught Greek and Latin and the kinds of courses that perhaps, if you get at all today, you get in college

JASZI—There certainly was. Now scholars, who are better informed in classical matters than I am, have pointed to various allusions in the plays of Shakespeare that do not appear to refer to authors who are among the set authors, even at Eton and Westminster, let alone at the Stratford grammar school about which we know so little. But it is certainly the case that such a grammar school existed. It is also the case that so far as we can tell, there is no record of Shakspere's having attended and there are certainly other possible explanations for how he might have spent his early years.

JUSTICE—But is it critical to your case that he did not even have any grammar school education?

JASZI—No particular fact taken individually is critical to the case I will make today.

JUSTICE—It seems to me it's a fair inference that if you have a school available, a young person growing up is likely to go to a school.

JASZI—Unless of course the calls of his father's business stop him.

JUSTICE—Yes, but that is pure speculation. That is pure speculation. You really don't have any evidence that he was unable to attend the school.

JASZI—That is correct.

JUSTICE—And in fact, there is evidence that the school was only 500 yards from his home. Easy walking distance.

(To be continued)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Jaszi, the advocate for de Vere, has said that "Shakspere" appears in "all three of the signatures" to the will of the man from Stratford-upon-Avon. But in fact the third signature reads "Shakspeare". There are three other signatures apart

from those to his will. They are “Shaksp, Shakspē, Shakspē”. What is notable, though not relevant to any controversy, is the absence of “e” everywhere after “Shak”. This has led scholars to the conclusion that the “a” was pronounced short by the writer.

As for the “relevant entries in the Stratford-Parish register” by other hands, it is not true that only one entry has “Shakespeare”. There are actually six: (1) 1583, 26 May. (2) 1597, 4 May. (3) 1602, Michaelmas Term. (4) 1605, 24 July. (5) 1613, 10 March. (6) 1613, 11 March. The most striking is the first one which marks the christening of “Susanna daughter to William Shakespeare”.

Passing to London, we may note that the first mention of a Shakespearian play in the Stationers’ register on 23 August 1600 runs: “Muche a Doo about nothings... Wrytten by master Shakespere”. And the first play to be published with the author’s name was Quarto 1 *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, “By W. Shakespere”.

Nothing significant can be made out of the differences of name-spelling. In Elizabethan days spelling seems to have been a creative art. One of the most erratic examples is in the Revels account: *The Comedy of Errors* is said to be by Shaxberd!

(Refs *A Shakespeare Companion 1564-1964* by F E Halliday, Penguin Books, pp 441, 443-445, 112)

ONE GLANCE

THOU roamest unwalled
 In measureless vasts,
 Helplessly prisoned in moments
 Our moth-minds beat
 Against thoughts’ bars.

We hold Thy feet
 And supplicate,
 “Open, O love, a little
 The casements of Time.
 Then the soul-bird
 Shall wing at will
 To creation’s unseen height
 And float in the ether
 Of Thy ecstatic Self-sight.”

SHYAM KUMARI

THE CHILD ETERNAL

DOWN came a voice from the ethereal height
And asked the earthly Child,
“Disclose your desire, O little one,
Where will you take refuge?”

Lifting in oblation the tender tiny arms
Replied the Child, “O Ordainer of the Voice,
Knowest Thou not my mission?
I am an undying Spark of the Supreme
Cast down into the domain of death
Charged with the purest love for the creation!

“Below lies the land mute and inert.
But its yearning ecstasy vibrates
In the sprouting plants and grasses
And the murmur of the dense forests!

“Above smiles the primal Consciousness
Cradled in the secret bosom of the Almighty!

At the mid-point I stand in the depth of things
Athirst to link the two into one perfect whole.
I have offered my immaculate body
For the highest to plunge below
And attract the lowest to the destined height!”

He stopped and an unearthly Touch
Imbued his body with a nectarous delight!
A fiery inspiration filled the cup of Life.
The strings of mind grew resonant
With hymnal words of the essential Truth.

When the effect of the celestial Touch waned
The Child-being became silent once more
And the great gift of the soul vanished!

O Eternal Child, now listen to the mortal prayer,
Arise, awake anew, come to the forefront
And aspire for even a greater Truth
To place humanity on the Sun-lit path
Towards the Life Divine.

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

SRI Aurobindo went on: "Do you not read the Mahabharata? You must have heard of the battle of Kurukshetra. Well, once, during that terrible battle, the boy Abhimanyu found himself surrounded by a close phalanx of the enemy kings and warriors. The young hero broke out of that mortal trap and single-handed began to smite the great Kuru lords. The teacher Dronacharya stood marvelling at the extraordinary courage displayed by the son of his favourite pupil, Arjuna. Soon Abhimanyu lost all his weapons, his horses, his chariot. Breaking off the wheel from his car the young man, bleeding yet radiant, rushed at Drona, his father's Guru. His superhuman daring forced those Kaurava masters together to charge at that lonely and fearless fighter until they killed him. Well, such instances of heroism are rare in the annals of mankind. One is here reminded of Achilles..."

"Our Pranabda too was very brave, even as a boy. He used to fight with the Government's police."

"Is that so? Why?"

"Because the police would often bully and threaten people wrongfully. Once there was a big football match in Dada's town, and he was asked to man the gate. When he found the Police Inspector trying to force his way into the field without buying a ticket, Dada stopped him. The inspector swung his arm at him, Dada swung back and knocked him down, flat. News of the boxing match soon spread and, in a little while, there were the turbaned policemen on one side and the boys from Dada's Sports Club on the other. The whole affair even went to court. Dada's lawyers explained to him why he mustn't admit to having hit a Police Inspector. But as soon as he was questioned about it he straightaway told the truth! Another time, he fought the military and Dada's eldest uncle, Motakaka, had to spend a small fortune to get him and his friends released. Of course, the soldiers too were punished.

"By the way would you tell us why we girls are so easily frightened? Bulls and dogs, even mice and cockroaches make us scream or run. The boys laugh at us. It is really too shameful. I often decide I won't be so easily scared, but when the time comes I find myself trembling."

"But the reason are those very boys! Right from the earliest dawn of history men have preferred their women to stay at home. They have treated them as pretty dolls to be petted and pampered at best. Look at the Greeks. They, who had such a magnificent civilisation, wished their women to sit only at home spinning wool and be the wives and mothers of brave warriors. They could not go

out into the world. They rarely saw the sun, the moon, the stars or other men's faces. Then, there is the story of Jeanne d'Arc who was burnt alive—for several reasons, one of them being that she fought in the battlefield dressed as a man! And then, with time, various notions such as—'Woman leads man to Hell, she is the cause of his downfall, she must be debarred from the spiritual seeker's path'—tightened the noose round woman. So the injunction of the Scriptures came to be that in childhood a girl should be governed by her father, as a woman by her husband, in old age by her son. As you know, in India, the word of the Scriptures has always been accepted with unquestioning obedience, with the result that woman has remained helpless and weak.

"But the world around has been slowly changing. The first great awakening was the French Revolution. Then, the literature of the 19th century gave us writers like Ibsen. Later came Shaw and many others who spoke against social evils and injustices. In Turkey, Kamal Ataturk freed women from the burkha. Indian history recounts the stories of many brave and illustrious women—Samyukta, Subhadra, Padmini. There are also the great names of Khana and Leelavati, of the queen of Jhansi as well as Rani Rashmoni, both of whom stood up to fight against foreign rule. In fact, many women in Bengal took part in the Swadeshi movement.

"Now they are beginning to find themselves, especially after the Independence of 1947, and to realise that they are portions of the divine universal Shakti. Unfortunate indeed is the land where women are downtrodden. And now the Divine Mother herself has come to our earth for the breaking of all bonds, including those of women in society. All of you, children of many lands, live here together, with one common ideal before you, don't you? Boys and girls work and play and study in friendship and the old strict conventions are starting to crumble. The girls must really forget that they are different—frail and circumscribed. But you spoke of fear—is that really so common even in the Ashram?"

"Sometimes, it is. But there are many instances of bravery too. The Mother herself spoke to us of one such happening. A young girl, as old as we, was one day riding her bicycle. Two local boys began to chase and bother her. When she found that she was unable to shake them off, she got down from the cycle and stood facing them. In her hand she swung the great big old-fashioned gate-key of her house.

"'Come closer and I'll smash your faces,' she said firmly. Terrified, the two boys rode off as fast as they could. Mother was very appreciative of her courage, but she was only a slip of a girl, rather thin and short, not the least bit muscular and strong-looking."

"Do you think courage is necessarily measured by physical strength? Why then did the two physically far stronger boys run away? Actually, strength is of the mind. People like those two fellows believe women are weak and can be easily bullied. But mental strength can scare them off."

“Speaking of strength of will reminds me of another story about another girl who also was exceptionally brave. She always dressed like a boy, spoke and behaved like one too. It was as if she had forgotten altogether that she was born a girl. Once she had gone to Delhi to visit her family and, while there, visited President Rajendra Prasad. After a while she told me he had said to her—‘There, in the picture gallery, are the portraits of the country’s great leaders. Go and look.’ She did so but did not find the one face she was looking for. She came back to the President and said, ‘Bapuji, most of the leaders are there, but not the greatest one of them all, the prophet of nationalism and liberty. His picture is missing.’ He asked—‘And who is that?’ The girl replied—‘Why? Sri Aurobindo, of course.’ The President was quiet for an instant. Then calling his secretary he asked for one of your pictures.”

Sri Aurobindo smiled.

“But, sir, did you ever have any reason to fear?”

“Does fear always have to have a reason? It’s a question of the individual’s temperament. It has its origin in the subconscious. I suppose it was there in me right from childhood. And I never learnt to be free, on my own, having always had many servants, like the Sahibs. Another cause may have been an experience at my school in Darjeeling. I was then just 5 or 6 years old. One night, after I had gone to bed, I saw a great dark shadow slowly enter me. Cold and motionless with fear, I could do nothing but look on with wide-open eyes. I continued to feel the pressure of that shadow during all my years in England. I found deliverance only when I returned to India, the moment I set foot on my native soil.”

“After returning home, were you never again afraid?”

“I don’t think so. Once, in Baroda, my life was in danger, but the incident did not disturb me one bit. I have referred to it in one of my sonnets.”

The word “sonnet” caused a small stir among the children. Some of them even asked “Which one?”

“It starts—‘I sat behind the dance of danger’s hooves.’—Have you read it?”

“Yes, yes, I have! It goes—

I sat behind the dance of Danger’s hooves

In the shouting street that seemed a futurist’s whim...”

Suddenly feeling shy, the child stopped reciting.

“Oh! You’ve learnt it well. Do you love poetry?”

“Yes, she does, very much,” answered another youngster. She’s always got your poetry on her lips. Your *Last Poems* or lines from *Savitri*. Even at night, if she can’t sleep, she begins to recite your poems. But, strangely enough, studies don’t interest her.”

The girl looked down. Shyly she said, “Your *Last Poems* has very beautiful things. The language is so simple and sweet. I did not know that English could be such a musical tongue. The images and rhythms of this particular sonnet have always drawn me. I never thought about the danger you had been in.”

“Why?”

“I never thought about it really. I don't understand poetry but read it because it is beautiful.”

“Do you mean to say that poetry is mere imagination?”

“No, it's not that,” she answered very embarrassed. “Will you please tell us about that experience?”

“It happened when I was in Baroda. I was sitting in an old horse-drawn carriage of the Maharaja's and calmly going towards the market when suddenly the horse, terrified by something, began whinnying, cutting capers. It was jumping so wildly in the air that the carriage was about to be overturned. The sound of people running and shouting from all sides frightened the poor beast even more. But while its hooves were thrashing frantically in the air, I willed that nothing should happen to me and at once the Godhead came out of me and did what I have described in the poem. And so, everyone saw me sitting calm and undisturbed. The poem describes the experience exactly.”

Everybody sat listening, raptly silent. Then someone very softly said—
“Could we listen to the poem?”

“But I do not remember it by heart.”

Just then Champaklal jumped up, went to the bookshelf and brought the book. Such an opportunity was certainly not to be lost!

Gently smiling, Sri Aurobindo looked for the poem and having found it began to recite it in his soft voice:

“I sat behind the dance of Danger's hooves
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist's whim,
And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature's grooves,
In me, enveloping me the body of Him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,
A face with the calm of immortality
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze,
The world was in His heart and He was I;
I housed in me the Everlasting's peace,
The strength of one whose substance cannot die.

The moment passed and all was as before;
Only that deathless memory I bore.”

They all sat spellbound. What an incredibly wonderful experience to hear Sri

Aurobindo recite—something to treasure in memory all their lives! On their way home, the children exchanged thrilled comments with one another.

“Did you hear the perfect English accent!”

“What a voice, deep and sweet at the same time! Every word was distinct.”

“Yes. And the rhythm that upheld the lines touched me to my very soul. I didn’t know recitation could be so beautiful, having heard only our own poor attempts!”

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

A Correction

The Sanskrit sloka, which was translated in the January instalment of “The Ashram Children and Sri Aurobindo’s Life”, p. 44, 2nd para, and ascribed to the Gita does not occur in the Gita but in the Bhagwata.

A GRAND OLD MAN

A grand old man passed away on 4 January 1990 at 10 a.m. at the Ashram Nursing Home. He was such not only because he had been born on 12 July 1899 and was 91 years old but also because of his large-hearted nature and the blend of simplicity and nobility in his day-to-day life. The whole Ashram was his friend ever since he joined it on 18 April 1953.

Even during his last short convalescence after an abdominal operation his quiet endurance and sustained cheerfulness will be remembered by all who visited him.

K.D.S.

SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN “EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

Childhood and Father's Teaching

DURING my childhood, I used to model dolls, particularly of gods and goddesses, out of mud and clay. One day I distinctly heard a voice telling me, “Don't play so much with water; you may catch cold and fall ill.”

I was taken aback and wondered whose voice it could be. I asked my mother but she couldn't answer my question. She merely said, “Whoever has said it, it is true; so often you catch cold because of your playing with water and wet clay.”

I understood later that it must have been an inner voice; I was hearing it for the first time, and it was after my first visit to Pondicherry.

At about the same time, when I was four years old or so, a severe earthquake shook Calcutta. Our entire building began to tremble. I was sitting on a stool when it happened, and fell down on the floor. All the residents of the house ran out and assembled in the courtyard. My mother took me in her arms and joined them.

“What is an earthquake, Mummy?” I asked her. “And what happens?”

She replied, “Houses fall down, trees crash, people and animals die.”

Hearing this, I knelt on the ground, put my hands together and began to pray, “Oh God, I don't want to die. I want to live!”

People all around were looking at me and, hearing my earnest prayer, began to laugh and enjoy the spectacle.

As I have previously mentioned, I had a lonely childhood. But I was my father's pet. One day, Father's spectacles were found broken. He asked all the servants whether they knew anything about it, but they all replied that they knew nothing. Then he asked me, and I answered that I didn't know either. But I wasn't a clever liar, and he quickly caught me out.

Afterwards he asked me, “Why did you tell a lie, my love? You know I never scold you or punish you. I love you so much, and still you told me a lie. Why? What were you afraid of?”

Later, however, on another occasion, he was not so gentle. It happened like this: My father was constantly in search of a companion for me. He wanted someone of my age who would live with us; she would grow up with me and my father would bear all her expenses. But for a long time no one could be found who was willing to part with a suitable child. Finally, a girl came to light whose parents were our distant relatives and who were dependent upon my father.

Both she and I were about five years old. She, however, had good health whereas I did not. We started by becoming good friends

Then one day, a curious thought caught hold of me I began to think that she was eager to please me in order to gain something from me. This baseless suspicion made me very ill-tempered, and for about a month I would often make her stand in a corner and beat her with a stick. She bore this treatment quietly, certain that there was no point in complaining, as I was the darling of my parents.

At the end of a month, she must have had enough, because she went to my father. He was sitting in the verandah reading a newspaper and, looking up, asked her, "What's the matter? Do you want to tell me something?"

Very hesitantly, she replied, "Y-y-e-s."

"Say it, then!" Father exclaimed.

Still hesitantly, she said, "Your daughter beats me."

"Beats you?" he asked, surprised. "You're such a grown-up girl and so much stronger than she is. How is it that she beats you?"

"Because I don't resist. I just bear it."

"How long has this been going on?"

"About a month."

"And you kept quiet for such a long time?"

"Yes, I was scared. I want to go back home."

"No, no, wait. Do one thing. Tomorrow, when she beats you, beat her back as hard as you can. Don't spare her, do you understand?"

She looked at him incredulously. "I mean it," he insisted. "Don't be afraid. I won't punish you."

When she came to be with me the next day, I started beating her as usual. But this time she turned around and gave me such a slap on my face that I fell down and blood started to come out of my mouth. I began to howl, and my parents ran to me. My mother was furious when she saw what had happened, but my father calmly told her, "She's got what she deserves. Take her away and don't give her any food all day."

Mother tried to argue, but Father was adamant, and I starved the whole day.

When I grew older, I realised that in all people there lurks a seed of inhumanity. It may come from our animal origins, or from inherited tendencies, but it can surface and cause harm even when we are children. My father's method of teaching may have been harsh but it was effective.

Now observe the other side of his nature. He always wanted me to be brave, and especially, not to be afraid of ghosts.

One day he told me, "My little mother, you see that pond over there where you go to play during the daytime? Can you go there alone at night?"

"Yes, I can," I replied.

"Very well; tonight, go there and come back," he said.

I was ten years old and all the more alone because Mother was in the hospital. Trying not to mind, I set out towards the pond. It was quite far and in the dark I was nervous in spite of myself. Suddenly I felt that someone was following me. I could hear footsteps in the bushes. As I stopped, so did the footsteps. I got even more nervous. Then suddenly Father's voice called out, "Are you scared, my child?"

He really did take good care of me, whatever lesson he wanted to teach me.

One day sitting in a rocking chair, I was singing to myself. It was a bright moonlit night and I was singing D. L. Roy's beautiful song: "In the blue sky of the Infinite, how wonderfully the moonlight spreads..."

I stopped abruptly, and heard a voice, "Why did you stop? Go on!" Most frightened, I ran to my father and told him what had happened. Father asked, "Did you really hear a voice?"

"Yes, Father," I answered "I heard it very clearly asking me to continue."

The next day, Father enquired about it from the neighbours and came to know that nearby there was a lady living all alone. They said she had lost her young daughter and, since then, had taken to sitting sad and forlorn by her window. It must have been she who had spoken.

Telling me about it, Father said, "See? We become afraid for nothing, and take to imagining ghosts. There are no such things. Do remember that from now on."

I had learned dancing from a famous dancing master, and at the age of ten I could dance quite well. Once, it was decided that my uncle who was a brilliant singer would sing, and I would dance in accompaniment.

My father, being ill, could not attend the performance. It was, however, a great success, and at the end there was tremendous applause. People rushed to my uncle, asking, "Who is this girl?"

In a proud and elated voice he replied, "Why, she's my daughter!"

Immediately I burst out, "I am nothing of the kind, I am my father's daughter!"

Of course, Uncle felt very small, and I shouldn't have put him to shame like that. But I did it because I knew that he did not get on well with my father. When we reached home, my mother accosted my father and said, "Do you know what your daughter did tonight?" Then she told him, and father was so moved he hugged me.

But on another occasion I did not spare my father, either. When my mother and I were coming to Pondicherry for the second time, Father came to the station to see us off. I was standing by the window of our compartment when he asked me, "My love, won't you miss me?" I shook my head because I knew I wouldn't.

Now talking about dancing, two other incidents come to my mind. My

mother used to visit Santiniketan where she would meet Tagore. Once she took me with her. After talking of this and that, Tagore said to Mother, "I hear your daughter dances well. I would like to see her dance."

"I would prefer not," Mother replied. As he insisted, she explained politely, "I am afraid to let her dance before you for two reasons. If you don't like her performance, her career may be marred for good and, if you do, she will get a swollen head."

Then Tagore said to me, "On such and such a day, I shall pass by your riverside garden in my boat. Stand there on the bank of the Ganga and, when you see my boat glide by flying a flag, start dancing. That way, I will be able to see you dance."

I was ready on the appointed day. But, although I waited long, the boat never came.

The next incident occurred before Mahatma Gandhi. My uncle had gone to sing for him and taken me along. I was duly introduced to the Mahatma and, after my uncle's singing, Mahatmaji asked me to dance before him. But for some reason I refused, in spite of my uncle's pleading.

Later, I took part in a dance performance in the Ashram, at Mother's bidding, during one of the annual functions.

(To be continued)

"SATYAM"

KRISHNALAL BHATT

Krishnalal Bhatt who had been a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram since 1934 passed away at 2.10 p.m. on 5 January 1990. He was 84.

Krishnalal studied painting at Santiniketan during 1932-33 and came to Pondicherry in 1933 to live in the Ashram. About 500 original paintings of his are in the Ashram Studio. He was honoured with the Gujarat State Award for art in 1976.

A delicacy of touch, coupled with a subtlety of vision, made one critic think of something Raphaelesque in general in Krishnalal's creations, especially when his gentle face and devoted manner were seen along with them.

It was a personal characteristic of him not to show his difficulties nor allow people to take trouble over his needs and his frequently poor health.

K.D.S.

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of December 1989)

INDIA is recognised as a land of Rishis. Throughout the ages it has been her spirituality that was holding up the spirit of civilisation. A succession of Rishis appeared on the soil of India in order to project a new vision and establish a new order. Indeed, every fresh endeavour in the social, cultural and even political field had at the back of it a spiritual awakening. Awakened India would mean an India awakened in the inherent strength of her soul through the centuries of her ups and downs. The medieval Rishis who had glimpsed the One Reality of life in all the diversity of forms, preached the “One Supreme Light”. They discovered the glory of that light within, irrespective of caste, creed or race by love, devotion and sincere aspiration. Some of them were Muslims, some Brahmanas and some belonged to a low parentage.

Prominent among them were Kabir, Nanak, Tulsidas. Almost all of their lives they had to suffer because of their spiritual convictions. Some modern Rishis were Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Dayananda, Sri Aurobindo.

Along with these, there were others who were more directly engaged in social or political work. They too served to wake India to the truth of her soul and to uplift her downtrodden masses. Among them stand out the reformers whom we know as Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Debendranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Vidyasagar, Ranade, Tilak, Subramaniam Bharati, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

About Raja Rammohan Roy Dr Karan Singh says: “The Raja was a man of unusual intellectual ability, a profound scholar of Sanskrit and Persian as well as a deep admirer of British culture. He was one of those who felt that India had everything to gain from contact with the West, and he strove to imbibe the best that the West had to offer. He took a leading part in founding English-medium Schools in Bengal—several at his own expense through which the youth of Bengal could acquire the most modern Indian education. In 1823 the government decided to support a new college for Sanskrit studies, and his famous letter of protest to the Governor General Lord Amherst showed how deeply he supported the introduction into India of Western learning. The communication, couched in superb English, later provided powerful ammunition to the Anglicists led by Macaulay in their struggle against the Orientalists. The life and career of Raja Rammohan Roy was extremely varied and interesting but the main act for which he is remembered was his founding in 1828 the Brahma Sabha, which eighteen years later was developed by Debendranath Tagore into the Brahma Samaj. This organisation marked the first deliberate attempt in modern India to reform Hinduism and, shearing off its unessential and often undesirable growths, to restore it to its pristine glory. In the Trust Deed of the Brahma Sabha the Raja

dedicated it for the worship and adoration of the eternal unsearchable and immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe. His reform of Hinduism was based on his own highly controversial interpretation of the Vedas and the Upanishads and, like Swami Dayananda after him, he strongly attacked idolatry.”¹

We should note that Swami Dayananda was also a remarkable figure in the history of India to whom Sri Aurobindo paid a great tribute: “I know not whether Dayananda’s powerful and original commentary will be widely accepted as the definite word on the Veda. I think myself some delicate work is still called for to bring out other aspects of this profound and astonishing Revelation. But this matters little. The essential is that he seized justly on the Veda as India’s Rock of Ages and had the daring conception to build on what his penetrating glance perceived in it a whole education of youth, a whole manhood and a whole nationhood. Rammohan Roy, that other great soul and puissant worker who laid his hand on Bengal and shook her—to what mighty issues—out of her long, indolent sleep by her rivers and rice-fields—Rammohan Roy stopped short at the Upanishads. Dayananda looked beyond and perceived that our true original seed was the Veda. He had the national instinct and he was able to make it luminous,—an intuition in place of an instinct.”²

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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SCRIPTURE AS LITERATURE

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *THE BOOK OF JOB*

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

IV

The Book of Job is sometimes said to deal with “a theme which is as old as man and as wide as the world, viz., the reason of human suffering, the why and wherefore of those afflictions that fasten not merely upon the guilty, but, as it often appears, upon the righteous and the innocent. This immemorial problem, the crux of theology and the darkest mystery of human life, is the subject of this book, where it is treated in the most brilliant manner.”

A different point of view has also been taken:

“It is often maintained that the book of Job was written in order to answer the question, ‘Why do the righteous suffer?’ But actually the ancient tale as well as the poem utilizes the problem of undeserved suffering for a higher purpose... the meaning of faith. This is in the strict sense of the word a theological matter, for it involves no less than man’s knowledge of God... Travelling into the theological unknown, he (the poet) was led unwittingly to imply the necessity of Christ, learned the sufficiency of grace, and was brought to the threshold of pure religion... Many scholars deny that the book of Job deals with a problem of theology properly speaking. They say that it is a protest of a “humanist” against the tyranny of a stultified orthodoxy, the revolt of individual conscience against organised religion, the claim of man against ecclesiasticism. It is true that the question of selfless piety upon which the folk tale is articulated (cf. 1:9) is never developed explicitly within the poem, which on the contrary concerns itself again and again with the dogma of retributive justice. The purpose of the poet, however, must be sought in the total context of the book, which ends not with the hero’s protest of innocence but the theophany and its subsequent effect upon Job. The poet’s use of the tale and his handling of the discussion between the hero and his friends must therefore be viewed in the light of the poem’s denouement—the immediate revelation of God and the hero’s response to the divine intervention. With a keen sense of drama and a profound sense of psychology, the poet withholds until the climax of the work the secret of his intention, which is to show the divinity of God, the humanity of man, and the specific nature of the relation between a God who is truly God and a man who is truly man—namely, one of grace alone apprehended by faith?”

It is needless to say that the second approach is truer to the Book than the first. Perhaps a third approach more comprehensive is possible.

But it is possible only when we forget all the traditional ideas about the

Book. We often assumed that the picture of Job in the Prologue is of a perfect man and that in the main body of the poem it is of a rebel. Even when he is not considered perfect in the usual sense of the term he is said to be "whole". Paul Scherer, who takes this stand, remarks, "Job is not represented as being endowed with divine perfection. He was neither blameless nor sinless. In the poetic discussion he acknowledged that even the angels were not pure in comparison with the purity of God. (13:26, 14:16 etc.) and he confessed the possibility of having committed sin (7:20-21; 13:23; 26: 14:17 etc.) but he was not conscious of sinfulness before God. Here is 'something' lacking. Job as a man, had nothing of which to repent. He did not ask for the mercy of God; he felt no need of it. He was in some measure ancestor of the Pharisee, with his faults and virtues (Luke 18:9-14)." In what sense is he called perfect, then? Scherer says, "Job was not only well-rounded, self-possessed, and balanced, he was also well-adapted to his social environment, upright (*Yāshār*), by practising straight-forwardness, and justice in dealing with fellow-men. Integrity and uprightness are complementary ideas... The narrator proves to be a master of psychology.... But he goes farther than modern psychologists when he indicates in another double expression the secret spring of all that mental equilibrium Job feared God and eschewed evil. Psychological unity and social adaptability depend upon religion and morality. Furthermore, religion is always-accompanied by morality (Prov. 3:7; 14:16), and morality is the direct expression of religion. (Ps. 15:1ff). It is the fear of God which gives man power to avoid evil."

This would not be satisfactory as an explanation were the Book of Job a work of literature of the common kind. How could it be true of a Scripture, a work that takes us far beyond our normal conceptions?

What is actually the meaning of the whole of the Prologue? God, the *Jagan-nātaka-sūtradhāra* (the string puller of the puppet show or the Manager of stage play of the world) starts a drama to evolve a soul. Job, to start with, is a perfect man according to the accepted standards of morality and religion. His conceptions are purely mental: Scherer's description, excellent and penetrating as it is, reveals a man who has not gone to the very depths of being: "... the hero's understanding of true worship was not confined to a superficial recognition of the divine demands upon man, nor was it satisfied with outward acts of devotion. Above and beyond the formal performance of a ritual or the correct enunciation of a theological creed, Job's religion penetrated to psychological attitudes and inner dispositions. He cared not only for the outward religiosity of his sons but also for what they thought of God in their hearts." But to think of what one may think of God in one's heart is also to live within "the known modes of being". The Lord wants Job to undergo an experience in which he functions in his mind and heart to the utmost limits of his faculties so that the subsequent silence in the mind prepares him for the vision of the Lord. From that state he may return to the normal life, to its comforts and delights and even the forms of religion. They

gain a new meaning after he has seen and heard the Supreme

Such a total shaking up of Job's personality which alone can prepare him to know that God is beyond all religion and morality is God's purpose in deliberately mentioning Job to Satan and driving him to do his worst, one step after another. When, therefore, the Lord tells Satan that his servant Job fears God and eschews evil he neither "gives his verdict" and "puts his seal" on his uprightness nor does he see in him the makings of a Pharisee. One remembers what the Divine says in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*.

I rend man's narrow and successful life
And force his sorrowful eyes to gaze at the sun
That he may die to earth and live in his soul.

The theme of the Book of Job, if "sought in the total context of the book, which ends, not with the hero's protest of innocence but with the theophany and its subsequent effect upon Job", is the deepening of Job's awareness from the religious and moral to the spiritual. Once this fact is understood the Question of the Prologue and the Epilogue not being consistent with the main body of the poem cannot arise. Samuel Terrien who argues for the presence of the inconsistency gives us one evidence against it, the only argument that really matters. He is talking of the Hebrew original; though we are concerned only with the English version, the reference to the Hebrew in this context is helpful because once we know there cannot be a quarrel about the language we are on safe grounds. "A linguistic comparison," he says, "of the prose narrative with the poetic discussion reveals an astounding number of affinities between these two sections of the book." He gives fourteen examples. He also refers to two German writers on the Book of Job in support.

The theme of the Book, seen aright, not only links the Prologue with what follows, as shown above, but also accounts for the movement and structure of the entire work. The hymn to Wisdom and the speeches of Elihu are often considered to be interpolations. There is also some confusion about the distribution of speeches towards the end of the last cycle of the debate. It is necessary to point out that it is not possible to deny dogmatically scribal or editorial additions and errors in connection with the hymn, the speeches, etc. as in the case of the Prologue and the Epilogue. If the Elihu speeches are an interpolation, they must have been added on very early, as has been accepted by scholars. One of the euphemisms introduced by the Sophorim in the Book of Job occurs in the speeches (32:3). Terrien who finds affinities in the language of the Prologue and the rest of the work in the original Hebrew finds a difference here and that is a strong argument for interpolation. Be it as it may, we are concerned with the English text in the Authorised Version. Also, the arguments about the logic do not hold water because in the passionate cries of Job and the cold

reasonings of the friends we see what could be called irrational and the purpose of the whole work is to make us think and feel now in one way and then in another so that a stage comes when our mind and heart fall silent and we are ready to see Yahweh and hear Him; His own speeches are not a logical refutation of Job's arguments. After proving Job wrong; He justifies him to the friends and makes him an intercessor on their behalf. One can never understand any true Scripture if one approaches it with our finite faculties.

V

The movement and structure may be briefly traced to show the justice of the above approach to the Book.

- I Movement—The Prologue (Chapters I and II).
- II Movement—The Debate between Job and his friends III to XI.
- III Movement—Speeches of Elihu (XXXII to XXXVII).
- IV Movement—The Lord speaks to Job (XXXVIII to XLI. 6)
- V Movement—The Epilogue (The rest of the Chapter, 7 to 17).

The Prologue begins with a brief description of Job's prosperity and piety, the prosperity that must be taken away in order to make the piety deeper and soul-based. The scene in Heaven that follows introduces us to the Lord who begins His drama using Satan for His purposes. The "ahaitukī Bhakti" ("Doth Job fear God for nought?") that Satan mouths is not impossible at a mental or emotional level and Job surely pursues a disinterested religion that is possible for the best human beings who live according to time-honoured values and ideals. In Hindu parlance he is governed by Sattwa Guna. But God wants him to soar higher He wants him to become 'Gunatīta'. That is possible only when Job's ideas of righteousness fail him. He must aspire to see God face to face, for whatever reason because reason does not matter. The sufferings inflicted on him in the two stages, through the instrumentality of Satan who—the more fool he!—believes he can have a wager with the Lord, drives him to the utmost limits of psychological and physical endurance.

In the debate that follows with the three friends, Job is certain of the extreme suffering which he does not deserve by anything he has done. His friends assume that he would not have suffered if he had not sinned. Both he and the friends err, as does Elihu, in trying to seek a reason for the suffering. The various ideas put forth in the debate come from a total ignorance of what the readers know:—God's plan.

But the debate itself evolves the character and personality of Job: that after all is the Lord's will. William A. Irwin, in an otherwise unsatisfactory account of the book, says, "From an initial theology not unlike that of his friends, he moves on under the spur of their taunts, first into deep pessimism and rebellion, then

into a dawning hope which through notable apprehensions of faith comes to clarity in his great affirmation:

“He knows the way I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold (23:10).”

It may not be a straight-line movement as it appears here nor can we say there is no further deviation from this. But the general movement is one of deepening. The one justification of Elihu's speeches is that we see Job is totally silent after his answer to the friends. A great critic speaks of the poetry of silence in Shakespeare. Here is a greater example of a silence than we can find in Shakespeare because here is a creative silence which prepares him for the Epiphany

What is the purpose of the Epiphany? God's answer seems “to be irrelevant to the subject. It is no explanation of the mystery of human suffering. And yet Job is satisfied. It brings him face to face with God.... In the vision of God, which has replaced the old knowledge of God at second hand, even more than in the exhibition of God's omnipotence, he enters into peace. The answer to his problems is not simply the manifestation of God's power but God Himself.” The infinity of God takes him to an awareness beyond the finite mind and heart.

Once the Lord has made Job see and know from his soul he shows that the friends were wrong in questioning his righteousness. He restores to Job all the former prosperity which he can experience with the new-born wisdom. The propriety of God's restoring Job's worldly prosperity is sometimes questioned. Some fail to see that God has nothing against our well-being and he “rends” our successful life only when that helps us to turn to our souls. The long life with which God blesses Job helps him to pursue the disinterested religion which is possible only now, having the soul as the centre of his life.

This great spiritual experience is presented from the standpoint of the Jewish faith of a particular period. The hero himself is an Edomite, not a Jew. The conception of God, though Jewish, is not perhaps totally so. And yet the local and temporal colour only helps to bring out the eternal and universal verities

(Concluded)

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

THE SECRET OF SECRETS: ITS MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE GITA

1. The Challenge

THE Gita, which is one of the three foundational texts of Vedanta, has won for itself a unique place among the scriptures of our country. One of the reasons why it occupies such an important position is that the light it sheds on the teachings of the Upanishads is indeed rare and remarkable. Unlike the Upanishads, which freely resort to “intuitive forms of speech” in which “implications of words are allowed to roll out into an illimitable wave of suggestion”, the Gita has chosen to communicate its ideas from the standpoint of the thinking mind. However, its words and phrases are sometimes no more than hints and suggestions. It leaves these words and phrases as they are without trying to explain them because it obviously expects the reader to discover in them the unspoken aspects of its teachings. The reader encounters one such challenge when the Gita describes its teaching as the highest secret, *rahasyam hyetad uttaman*, or as the secret of secrets, *sarvaguhyatamam*. One may get the impression that the description is a form of eulogy aimed at getting a total commitment to the teaching. But this is to set aside the description lightly without taking its real intention seriously.

2. The Apparent Meaning of the Word ‘Rahasyam’

The first reference to the secret occurs in the third verse of the fourth chapter: “The same ancient Yoga has been declared to thee by me, for thou art my devotee and my friend. This is the highest secret.”¹ The implication is that Krishna would have kept it to himself in different circumstances. From this we may surmise that the epithet *rahasyam* is applied to the teaching because it has been in the exclusive possession of a single person. In an earlier verse Krishna says: “I gave the imperishable yoga to Vivasvan, Vivasvan gave it to Manu, Manu gave it to Ikshvaku.” This verse clearly tells us that the teaching was not in the exclusive possession of Krishna as it was known to several other persons. A modified version is that the teaching is a secret because at the moment there is no one else except Krishna who is in possession of it. This sounds valid, but on another score it loses its validity.

Even if it is a fact that the teaching is known only to Krishna, it does not serve any meaningful purpose to affirm the fact again and again. Therefore the repeated reference to the teaching as a secret seems to indicate to us that the underlying intention of the Gita is wholly different. A third interpretation is that the teaching is said to be a secret because it can be shared only by persons who

¹ This verse and other verses of the Gita in the article are generally based on Sri Aurobindo's renderings

belong to the higher order of the society, *i.e.*, members of the royal family and not by common people. The following verse lends credence to this interpretation: "And so it came down from royal sage to royal sage till it was lost in the great lapse of Time" (4-2). But a verse in the subsequent chapter does not seem to support this interpretation. It says that even outcasts, persons born from a womb of sin, women, *vaiśyās* and *śūdrās* attain to the highest goal when they take refuge with the Lord of the worlds, *i.e.*, when they practise the teaching of Krishna with devotion (9-32). A fourth interpretation is that the teaching is spoken of as a secret because it must be given to none but those who have the necessary qualification or the proper frame of mind. There are two verses in the closing chapter of the Gīta which speak about the teaching to this effect: "Never is this to be spoken by thee to one without askesis, not to one that is not devoted and not to him who does no service; nor yet to him who despises and belittles me" (18-67)

In the same spirit the Gīta further says that the teaching must be declared among the devotees of the Lord: "He who with the highest devotion for me shall declare this supreme secret among my devotees, without doubt he shall come to me" (18-68). This is a valid interpretation, but not beyond a point. For this acquires a secondary significance when we notice elsewhere a more important sense put into the epithet. The closing verse of the fifteenth chapter says that he who knows this most secret teaching becomes a wise and an accomplished person, *buddhimān syāt kṛtakṛtyaśca bhārata*. This indicates that the teaching is described as a secret not so much in reference to the class of persons to whom it is to be given as in reference to the importance assigned to its content. Therefore it becomes evident that we have to search for the proper meaning of the epithet by going deep into the teaching of the Gīta itself.

3. The Teaching of the Gīta

The teaching of the Gīta is founded upon a central idea, an idea which is expressly stated in one of its closing chapters, but presupposed or alluded to in all the others from the beginning to the end—the supreme Purusha, *uttama puruṣa*, who is beyond the two Purushas, *kṣara* and *akṣara*.

The mutable Purusha, *ksara purusa*, is the Purusha manifest in Nature. All this mutable becoming, all this we find in the world proceeds from this Purusha. It is the animate and inanimate existences of this world. It is sun, it is star and it is flower. It is man and every living creature; it is forms and forces, qualities and powers. It is the gods and the multitude of souls in the worlds. It is all that exist in the worlds *ksaraḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni*. It is phenomenal Nature which is ignorant, divided and bound by the action of the triple *guna*, *aparā iyaṁ itaḥ*. It is essential Nature which is other than but superior to phenomenal Nature, *anyām prakṛtum viddhi me parām*. The essential Nature is other than the phenomenal because it

is conscious, undivided, and not bound by the three gunas; it is superior to the phenomenal because it exceeds the other as the eternal seed of all existences and as that which upholds this world. It is the fundamental truth of all becomings here. It supports the phenomenal Nature and gives it a spiritual and divine significance.

The immutable Purusha, *aksara purusa*, is the Purusha beyond all mutations and becomings of Nature. It is unthinkable, immobile, impersonal, unborn and imperishable. It is unthinkable because it is not like the forms grasped by our thinking mind; it is immobile because it is not in motion like the various things of the world; it is unborn because it is not subject to birth and death as we are here; it is imperishable because it is not like the composite entities which fall apart and perish. Lord and all-pervading impersonality, it supports and consents by its passivity to the works of Nature. All her modifications, all her becomings, all her ego-formations, limitations, perplexities, confusions, obscurities do not affect the immutable Purusha who is the unparticipating witness. But yet it is the unborn imperishable Self of all that exists in the world, *ajo'vyaya ātmā*.

Besides these two spirits, *kṣara* and *aksara*, the Gita speaks of a supreme Purusha also, *uttama purusa*. It says: "But other than these two is that highest Purusha called the supreme Self, who enters the three worlds and supports them, the imperishable Lord" (15-17). What then is the relation between this supreme Purusha and the other two? The Gita clearly says that it is other than the two, *anyaḥ*. From this we may conclude that the supreme Purusha is wholly unrelated to both the immutable and the mutable. But this goes against the repeated affirmation that as the omnipresent reality the supreme Purusha is one with the immutable as well as the mutable, *sarvagatam*.

Therefore it is not proper to take *anyaḥ* in its exclusive sense. Though this Purusha is one with the two, it is not limited by either of them or both together, *anyaḥ*. It is both and yet exceeds the two, *paraḥ*. That the supreme Purusha does not exclude but simply exceeds is made sufficiently clear by the two significant expressions that occur in the following verse, *atītaḥ* and *uttamaḥ* (15-18). This is how Sri Aurobindo takes the above verse (15-17): "He is both Akshara and Kshara, and yet he is other because he is more and greater than either of these opposites."¹

Such is the description of the Purushottama which forms the foundation of the Gita's practical teaching. We shall now present the spiritual potentialities of the individual in the light of the idea of the Purushottama.

The Jiva, which is a partial manifestation of the supreme Lord of all beings, *māmaiva amśaḥ* is capable of living in any of the three poises of the Lord and arrive at a corresponding level of consciousness and power. Exclusively identified with the mutable Nature it cannot see the Lord and itself and the world as

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (1972), p. 427

they are, and is unable to overcome Nature and her gunas, *kṣara*. It looks upon itself as one of the egos determined by the gunas and their workings. Its life here is one of ignorance and bondage because it functions as an ego and is incapable of getting rid of sin, suffering and evil from its embodied existence. Its world is a world of transience and unhappiness, *anityam asukham lokam imam*.

The soul is capable of withdrawing its exclusive identification with Nature and her gunas and entering into the immobile peace and freedom of the immutable Purusha, *akṣara*. This is described as becoming the Brahman, *brahmabhūtaḥ*. The soul is no longer ego, no longer troubled by the dualities of the gunas. It has passed beyond desire, grief and sin. It has become equal to good and bad, virtue and sin, happiness and suffering. It is established in the firm foundation of Brahman which supports the becomings of Nature, *brāhmī sthūth*. It is united with the one Self in all existences. It is a passive witness untouched by the workings of Nature, *ātmānam akartāram*.

The soul is capable of a further and greater step too. It can ascend to the highest Purusha and become united with Him, *akṣarāt api ca uttamah*. The soul is now one with all beings in the self and Spirit, in God and Nature. It sees that the immutable is He who supports all becomings of Nature; it sees that Nature is no longer an unpossessed power but His own power, *prakṛtum svām*, subject to his will and control; it sees that the Nature of the three gunas is only a secondary formation of His original Nature, *aparā*. By this perception the soul ascends into the highest and absolute freedom. When man goes beyond the workings of the gunas, *bhāvah*, and discovers his *svabhāva* in the spiritual Nature of the Lord, *madbhāva*, he is delivered from all ego. He who is thus delivered lives and acts as a soul, as a faultless instrument doing God's works in the world, *madkarmakṛt*.

The practical bearing of the teaching of the Purushottama upon man is therefore that he can realise his identity with the being and nature of the divine Purusha and act in this world, even as that Purusha acts, with complete freedom and mastery, because man is now but a spirit of the supreme Spirit.

(To be continued)

N. JAYASHANMUKHAM

THE TIDES

A NOVELLA

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

VIII

I REACHED Benares next day and went to the office forthwith to find a lot of work pending for me to clear up. I got myself fully occupied with it for several days. Only after about a fortnight I received a letter from Bose-da saying that he had already apprised magistrate Gupta of the patients of Hazigunj. As regards giving an advertisement he had thought it better to be more free, frank and candid. He would prefer to disclose personally the identity of Mr Roy in disguise of the Sadhuji to the elders of the village and the circumstance which led to it. He would also seek their advice as to how to know the whereabouts of the great patriot and, if necessary, he would gladly reward whoever could give the correct information about him. Finally he wanted to know my opinion on this new plan of approach.

I observed that Bose-da had overlooked one aspect of the advantage of giving an advertisement. That was the possibility of the patriot's coming across it and directly knowing the actual state of affairs. However, I wrote back to Bose-da approving and appreciating his proposal and requested him to let me know the outcome of it.

Surprisingly enough just the next morning a telegram came from Mr. Roy of Allahabad with only two words, 'Come quickly'. I could not make head or tail of it and was terribly perturbed at the thought of Manju Devi. Was there anything wrong with her? Her attitude was somewhat unusual at the time I saw her last at Ghazipur. I did not know what to do: should I go to Allahabad or not? Particularly the pressure of my office work stood in the way of my taking any quick decision. Moreover, there was no one nearby whom I could ask for advice or direction. With an unsettled mind I set out for the temple of Vishwanath which was not far from my place. A few paces away from it suddenly the image of Deepu as I had seen him emerging from the Ganges about four years before came distinctly to my mind. At the same time I felt an unusual yearning to see him in his normal condition and natural surroundings. Instantly I decided to go to Allahabad by the night train. I hurried to my office to adjust my affairs accordingly.

I was in front of Mr. Roy's big mansion next morning. On being pushed, the main gate gave way and I entered the garden to be greeted by the chirping of birds and the smell of dew-soaked soil, grass, plants and flowers. I approached the building without knowing what surprise awaited me inside the silent and

sleeping house. I pressed the button of the bell and waited for a long while. Then I raised my hand to press it again. Just then the door opened and Manju Devi in her night-gown was there.

She exclaimed, "Oh, you have come! We never expected you would come by the morning train. Thank you very much for your prompt arrival." She ushered me into the drawing room. While taking my seat I observed, "A very good specimen of expectation indeed after sending a telegram, 'Come quickly.' However, could you please arrange for a cup of hot tea for me? Oh what cold! I am almost frozen." Tea came in no time and I found Manju Devi happy and contented. But she did not disclose the reason for which the telegram had been sent nor did I ask her anything about it.

The matter became clear at the breakfast table when Mr. Roy gave me a letter which he had received from Deepu in reply to his. It ran thus.

Kakababu,¹

Your letter has reached me as a messenger of goodwill and unexpected happiness and made me muse for a long time about Him who from behind the veil leads us to ultimate good through various sorrows, sufferings, frustrations, anxieties and difficulties. That you want me to go to Allahabad is a matter of great pleasure and satisfaction to me. But before I do that I earnestly request you both to pay a visit to the 'Palli Ashram' here. Perhaps you have been out of Bengal for many years and Manju also practically knows very little about her native soil. So why not come to Mahanandapur for a few days? Hope the atmosphere will be congenial for both and make you enjoy yourselves and relax.

I am very happy indeed to know that you are acquainted with the gentleman who gave me food and shelter at a critical juncture of my life. The very thought melts my heart with unspeakable gratitude towards him. I owe him an explanation for leaving his house stealthily, without his knowledge. If possible please convey my invitation to him also to pay a visit to the 'Palli Ashram'.

With best regards to you and affection to Manju, Sincerely yours,

Deepshankar Roy,
Palli Ashram, Mahanandapur,
Burdwan, West Bengal.

The reading finished, I raised my head to find both Mr. Roy and Manju Devi looking at me expectantly. I said, "A very fine letter, but for this why a telegram to me?" "Because we are going to start for Mahanandapur tomorrow and you have to accompany us," replied Manju Devi.

"Accompany you, eh? Please don't forget that I am a service-holder and my going does not depend simply on my sweet will. To go out of station the

¹ My dear uncle

employer's sanction of leave is essential ” “But haven't you earned leave?” “Yes, I have, but the sanction? To earn leave is easy but to take it entails a lot of complexities, as you are supposed to know.” “Apply and I am certain you will get the leave. In any case you must come with us to Mahanandapur Deepu-da has invited you, so by whatever means please sort out things.”

It seemed to me a kind of coercion, I looked helplessly at Mr. Roy. But he uttered nothing to show me the way of escape. Rather he expressed his own helplessness saying, “I am also a victim like you ” I was taken aback and thought, ‘Is she forcing him to go against his will?’ I remained silent but Mr Roy continued, “Native soil! I know nothing about what happened to my own hearth and home, land, property, etc I have failed to trace my own brother and baudi, now I have to go to Deepu's ‘Palli Ashram’ to have the touch of native soil.” His face was unusually grave and thoughtful. The meaning of the telegram ‘Come quickly’ became clear to me to some extent

I glanced at Manju Devi to find that she was sad and her eyes were almost tearful. I guessed that there must be some difference of opinion between father and daughter about going to Mahanandapur To make the matter easy I remarked in a general way, “Mr. Roy, that we have come in contact with Deepu is by itself a matter of great joy and a precious gain for us which we should not forget.” Hardly had I finished when Manju Devi opened her mouth, “Papa, you never objected to any of my actions Why has your attitude changed abruptly? Perhaps you have not fully realised the impact of Deepu-da's letter on me. It has opened a new horizon for me I deeply feel that there is some significance in his inviting us instead of his coming here himself. Moreover, my heart leaps in joy to think of going to rural Bengal and stay there for some days in the lap of Nature ”

Mr Roy murmured, “Manju, lately I failed to follow your mother's moods and motives. It seems you are going to follow your mother's line. However, to satisfy you I shall be ready to do whatever you will like me to do.” Manju Devi's face brightened with a broad smile. She exclaimed, “Papa, you are really marvellous,” then she turned towards me and asked, “And you, please do the needful to have the leave granted. We are starting tomorrow ”

Human nature is shrouded in intricate mystery and there is no end to disguises to maintain it. Mr Roy, who had been quite reluctant to agree with Manju Devi's proposal, started pleading in favour of it to induce me to accept it. In fact I could find no excuse to refuse. Next day before setting out he was all joy and enthusiasm as if he had been anxiously waiting for this moment for years. But just as the train started he became as serious and grave as ever. He sat dumb, absolutely unconcerned with everything around him Manju Devi tried her best to bring him back to his happy natural state of mind but failed. Thereupon she herself also became aloof and indifferent, opened a book and apparently got absorbed in it

I felt ill at ease and thought it better not to poke my nose into their strange

psychology. Rather I looked out for other fellow-passengers and found those nearby busy talking within their own group. I then shifted my gaze out of the compartment and went on seeing the gliding panorama of nature till a station came. Amongst the busy crowd on the platform an extraordinary figure caught my attention. Even in this winter weather he had put on a milk-white silken dhoti and his upper body was almost bare excepting a folded chaddar across his torso. He was tall, healthy and muscular but his long half-grey hair made it difficult to guess his exact age. Slowly he approached our compartment and I marked that his eyes were large, deep and serene, his slightly parted lips and bright face seemed to bestow blessings and friendship on all. As expected he got into our compartment and casually took his seat near us. The train started and I tried to be in tune with his inner silence for a long while and at last asked him softly, "Sir, don't you feel cold?" "Cold! no," then after a pause he added with a smile, "One can overcome the attack of heat and cold by practice." Encouraged, I asked again, "Sir, are you going upto Howrah?" He did not speak but shook his head and assumed an attitude which avoided any more questioning. I resumed my previous occupation of watching the scenery outside. Time rolled by without my knowing it. At about 4 p.m. I felt like having a cup of tea and when a station came I was about to call a tea-hawker. Manju Devi opened her mouth after quite a long time, "No need to call him, I have brought tea in my thermos, let us finish it first." She opened the thermos and poured tea in a cup for her father first. He accepted it without a word. I received the cup from her with thanks.

No sooner had I sipped once or twice than the train gave a shrill and long-drawn-out whistle and then it finished by two quick puffs and slowed down. Perhaps the signal ahead was not up. However, almost instantly it increased its speed and moved on as before. Evening was fast approaching, the rays of the declining sun reddened everything inside the compartment including the milk-white dhoti of the strange man. Suddenly I appeared to listen to a soft and sweet voice. The man was singing in a very low tone. I became all attention to pick up the words. They were somewhat like this:

"Birds across the blue sky announce that there is no death, no death...
The world is vibrant with the melody of Love
And sorrows and sufferings have come to an end!"

As soon as the song stopped, Mr. Roy, to our surprise, asked the man, "Excuse me, may I know what makes you sing this song now?" "There is no why in it except that I felt like singing. Any objection?" "Objection? oh no, rather I am pleased, very pleased indeed, it is beautiful, very significant. I shall request you to sing it again a little more loudly." "I am very sorry, that is not possible. Had I known that you would catch it I would not have sung at all."

At this point Manju Devi intervened, "How far are you expected to go, sir?" "Upto Asansol," he said and then shut his mouth and was absolutely silent

as if we were non-existent. My curiosity to know more about him got a rebuff. But his silence seemed to have a language, 'Do not ask, try to feel me.' I felt his inner silence so much so that at first I started dozing and then entered into a deep and peaceful sleep.

Next morning I woke up to see the face of the new-born day covered with a black curtain. All around black smoke and dust were floating. Even inside the compartment everything was coated in black. I wanted to see the condition of the milk-white dhoti of the silent man but he was not there. Seeing me awake Manju Devi asked, "Will you please tell me why the name of the place is Ranigunj instead of Kaligunj?" "Oh, we have already crossed Asansol! Ranigunj? I don't exactly know why the name is such but can guess. Perhaps once upon a time the place was the pleasure garden of queens, with shadowy groves, flowers, fountains, beautiful cottages and what not. And then one day Nature grew violent and furious and took toll of everything, everything went underground by earthquake and out came dirty black coal or black diamond as they call it for its precious contribution to civilisation." "Your imagination is splendid and your expression is to the point. Now tell me how far is Burdwan from here?" "Yes, just the right question at the right moment, perhaps the next station is Burdwan. We must get ready to get down, please call Mr. Roy, he is still sleeping."

At Burdwan station we came to know that there was a bus-service upto Mahimpur. But nobody could tell us how to go to Mahanandapur from Mahimpur. Manju Devi did not care to know about this beforehand and we two were simply her followers so far as this journey was concerned. However, I went to the taxi-stand but could not be enlightened any further. Taxi-men were ready to go only upto Mahimpur, as they were not sure about the regular road upto Mahanandapur. After a little deliberation we decided to hire a taxi. Mahimpur was about fifty miles from there. In the taxi Manju Devi opened the breakfast packet I had purchased from the station and exclaimed, "What's this? On a winter morning you have brought cold rice for breakfast!" "Cold rice!" I was all surprise. "Ho, ho, ho ...," Mr. Roy burst into a hearty laugh. Instantly Manju Devi's face brightened with a smile, "Oh, I see, it's *Sitabhog* of Burdwan, I had heard about it from my mother but completely forgot."

Breakfast finished with luchi, sitabhog, sandesh, mihidana and tea at the end. From the running taxi Mr. Roy gazed at the huts and houses beyond the corn-fields on both sides and murmured to himself, "The villages are the mainspring of the country's prosperity but they remain as poor as I saw them years back, though India is independent now." I seconded with "Yes, you are right, but let us wait till the five-year plans are implemented." He added, "You know, I remember to have read somewhere, 'Depriving the whole body and accumulating the blood in the face only—that cannot be called real health. So also if the whole country is deprived and the wealth is accumulated only in the

towns and cities—that cannot be called real development and prosperity of the country.” “Yes, this is what Rabindranath used to say. But we are now going to forget the sayings of great men, not to speak of practising them.” Thus while we discussed subjects like agriculture, science, sociology and religion, Manju Devi remained silent looking at the distant villages. Meanwhile the taxi reached Mahimpur and parked beside a market place.

The driver asked one of the passersby about the way to Mahanandapur. He was overjoyed and answered excitedly, “Oh, you want to go to the Palli Ashram? Go and see, it’s really marvellous.” The driver repeated the question about the way “Why, you can go by taxi itself, the road is of course *kutchra*, but in winter there is no difficulty. Go straight and you will find the *kutchra* road on the left through the paddy field,” he answered. We thanked him heartily.

As directed, the taxi turned left and we entered into a new world, as it were, a realm of green all around. I had never seen such healthy and deep green paddy plants before. The sun was almost at the top of the cloudless blue sky and our sun-scorched eyes were soothed with the magic of a green balm and we gazed on as far as the eyes could go. The white car moved along with regular speed and resembled a motor launch amidst a boundless rippling green lake. After about an hour we reached the other end—to be greeted by a huge arched gate decorated with multi-coloured creepers on the top of which hung a board inscribed with bold fine letters, ‘PALLI ASHRAM, MAHANANDAPUR’.

Our taxi advanced along the brick-way through the gate and came across a very big pond with clear water and a few lily plants here and there. The Taxi-route ran by its western side, on its east there was a beautiful flower garden. On the south stood, like sentinels, rows of palm, coconut and betel-nut trees. Its northern side was open with a smooth and even lawn extending far to the foot of ranges of trees blocking the vision. And there near the pond were two nice-looking houses, one small and the other big and quite long. Our taxi stopped near the small house. Immediately two elegant young girls dressed in sky-coloured saris came out to receive us, “Hope, you have come to see the village, come, please come in. If you want to stay for a day or two you may pay off the driver.”

There was a regular office inside the house, tables, chairs, almirahs and bundles of files and papers. In the side-room a grey-haired old man stood in front of an almirah busy looking into some papers. One of the girls announced our arrival. He turned round and stepped out with folded hands, “Namaskar, you have come to visit our village Ashram but it is still far behind its true ideal, although many come to see it even at this stage.” I said, “First of all we should like you to tell us what important work your organisation is doing.” “It is difficult to describe in that way. Rather you may go through this,” he handed us a pamphlet and returned to his work. It began in the following way:

“Our adorable and ancient India with her great heritage is free now. She is

free from the yoke of foreign domination. Hindered, oppressed, distorted, downtrodden and poor India under an alien rule is independent and fit now to stand with head high amongst the free nations of the world. But a lot remains yet to be done. Innumerable obstacles still stand in the way of her becoming perfect and prosperous. The black breath of hatred, jealousy, ill-will, selfishness, violence and corruption from every nook and corner darkens her atmosphere. We have not seen yet the resplendent smiling figure of Mother India. Her invincible figure of grace, glory, strength, love and light is still behind a veil. But we hope and aspire that before long the cherished Sun will rise and reveal her true image of wisdom and beauty.

“Villages are the constituent units of India. The welfare of Indian society, its health, wealth, strength and progress, depend on the health, wealth, strength and progress of her villages and not merely on those of some special urban centres. Of course this is applicable not only to India but also to most other countries of the world. But our prime and main concern is with India and our aim and purpose are to reconstruct villages as models to show how they can be fully developed according to their intrinsic possibilities

“For this, our call for help and cooperation is extended to all, men and women, young and old, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and party, to scientists, sociologists, agriculturists and artisans, etc. Needless to say that there is no place here for party politics, we are above all 'isms

“A time was when Bengal was the vanguard during the struggle for India's independence. Now again the time has come when Bengal is expected to pave the way for establishing ideal villages for the ultimate and integral good of India as a whole....”

After this I could read no more. My mind got occupied with thoughts regarding the pros and cons of the ideal when I was shaken back to reality by Manju Devi's familiar voice, “Well, sir, does anybody by the name Deepshankar stay here? We have come in response to his invitation.”

The man, a little bent due to old age, stepped out again and intently looking at Manju Devi observed, “I am sorry, there must be some mistake somewhere. It is not our practice to invite anybody in that way.” Mr Roy's face betrayed annoyance, yet he said calmly, “But we were invited, if you want I can show the letter. By the way who is the manager here? May I know your name, please.”

“Yes, of course, my name is Kalishankar Roy.” We would not have been more surprised had the roof of the house abruptly broken and a meteor fallen on our heads. Good God, this is Kalishankar, the great patriot, the elder brother of Mr. Roy whom he had been trying to trace almost throughout his life! Instantly I decided to send a telegram to Bose-da enlightening him about the fact.

(To be continued)

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

A Panorama of Administration by *Amar Singh* Available at 39, Udyan Marg, Bhubaneswar-759 009, Orissa. Pages: x+236 Hardbound. Price: Rs 50/-

A HISTORIAN, a social critic, a keen observer and a thinker—we find all these different personalities in Shri Amar Singh as we go through his collection of articles—*A Panorama of Administration*. Written over a span of three decades and published in various journals and souvenirs these articles record the author's views on a plethora of subjects ranging from a natural calamity to the purpose of man.

“The devastation was unparalleled. Lives were mowed down, no matter whether it belonged to a man, woman, or child or an animal—cow, bullock, buffalo, goat, dog—or bird. Trees, plants and creepers were razed to the ground, no matter if they held a papaya, a brinjal, a rose or a paddy corn. The whole place became a sheet of water devouring up entire villages of the area and leaving no trace of life. Power boats were thrown to the banks. Buildings were pushed down to the shape of debris. House tops were blown off.” This eyewitness report of a cyclone that shook Orissa in 1971 can serve as an example of the author's simple but effective style that makes the book readable.

Several articles are devoted to Orissa and its history. We read about the Sun Temple of Konark, the interesting legends that surround it, the deluge and the power crisis in 1982 that upset the administration, the significance of the Orissa Day and the major developments in Orissa. We are introduced also to Dr. H. K. Mahatab, the Builder of Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa, to R. N. Singh Deo, the Maharaja and Ruler of Patna who became the Chief Minister of Orissa, and to Biju, a household name in the state of Orissa. A nutshell history of the small hamlet that gave birth to the gigantic city of Rourkela is also provided.

Shri Amar Singh lightens the problems of the pensioners by finding a number of solutions in four of his articles. If the pensioners follow his suggestions that are bound to remove their depression and frustration altogether, there won't be tears in the old people's eyes. The author criticises the lawyers and judges for their undue delay in handling cases. He finds fault with the teachers for going on strike, and with the students who go berserk. Through his personal experiences Amar Singh furnishes information on what is happening in different areas of administration pertaining to law and order, education and civil life.

Readers interested in the history and administration of Orissa will find delight in the book. Young and aspiring I.A.S. officers may find the book a useful guide. Common readers will find enough food for thought in this clearly-written and lively book. And the self-portrait of Shri Amar Singh emerging from the articles in the book remains as revealing as it is endearing

P RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

26th Annual Conference

13 August 1989

(Continued from the issue of January 1990)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SPIRITUAL REVOLUTIONARY

Speech by Srijita Roy

FOR this Conference, which we have organised to celebrate the birthday of Sri Aurobindo and also of free India on 15 August, the topic of my speech is: "Sri Aurobindo—the Spiritual Revolutionary".

In the past, various revolutions in different spheres—political, economic, social, cultural and religious—both in the East and in the West have attempted to change human life. It is true that they all have played important roles in the progress of humanity, but it is also a fact that they have not brought any decisive change in human life. Sri Aurobindo says, "Revolutions hew the past to pieces and cast it into a cauldron, but what has emerged is the old Aeson, with a new visage."¹ Let us take for example the French Revolution of 1789 which had for its watchwords: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. But none of these three ideals were realised by this great upheaval. In fact, immediately after it, came Napoleon with his tremendous appetite for power and possession. His dictatorial rule brought about law and order in France, but his rule was in opposition to the ideals of the revolution. From this viewpoint the revolution was a failure; though it cannot be denied that it brought forth new ideas of national self-consciousness and self-government. Similarly, other revolutions with their loud war-cries and immense bloodshed changed at the most some external superficial aspect of life. This was so, because they tried to remould man's physical, vital and mental nature, leaving out the spiritual element in him, his true being.

In contrast to these revolutions, if we study Sri Aurobindo's conception of Nationalism in his early career as the leader of the Nationalist revolutionary movement, we can mark clearly the central shift from the mind to the spirit. In all his writings and his speeches during that period, he told the Indians that it was their mission, their God-sent work to liberate Mother India, their spiritual Mother. He said, "What is needed now is a band of spiritual workers whose

¹ *Thoughts and Aphorisms* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 17), p. 108

tapasyā will be devoted to the liberation of India for the service of humanity.”¹ On another occasion he said, “Nationalism is a religion that has come from God. . Nationalism survives in the strength of God and it is not possible to crush it”² Yet again he said, “We must first ourselves be free in heart before our country can be free.”³ This was the spirit with which Sri Aurobindo as the leader of the revolutionary Nationalist struggle inspired all freedom-fighters in the country

But this was only the starting-point. After coming to Pondicherry he became the leader of a yet greater revolution—the Supramental Revolution of Integral Perfection. As the Mother says, “What we want to bring to the earth can hardly be called a *revolution*, although it will be the most marvellous change ever seen; in any case this cannot be compared at all with the bloody revolutions which quite uselessly tear up countries without bringing any change after them, because they leave men as false, as ignorant, as egoistic as before.”⁴

But this “marvellous change” of which the Mother speaks can be brought about only by a spiritual change. This spiritual change can be of two types; it may be that of the ascetics denying life and escaping into the passive silent Self; or it may be a change radically transforming all the parts of man’s being and nature by the dynamic Truth-Power of the higher divine nature. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga belongs to the second category. It does not reject the essential truth of any yoga, but goes beyond them all to the highest integral truth of the Supermind. Unlike other yogas it does not believe that Matter and Spirit are contradictory to each other; instead he affirms that they are the two ends of the same Reality. His yoga is not meant for escape into the supracosmic spirit or the heavens beyond, but takes for its field life itself. Besides, Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga does not seek individual salvation but aims at a collective realisation by bringing the Supramental Truth-Power into the life of humanity on earth. Here lies the newness of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. Previously, all yogas divorced Spirit from life, but Sri Aurobindo builds a harmony between the two and shows us a path more complete and perfect. As he says, “the one and the only aim we have before us is to bring down the Supramental Consciousness and the Supramental Truth into the world.”⁵

But one might still ask: how is this Integral Yoga a revolution? Revolution in its true sense is that radical change which entirely renews the life of the world. And Sri Aurobindo’s yoga, once fulfilled, shall bring the greatest change ever possible to the world, for it aims at transforming the whole human nature into the divine nature. Sri Aurobindo says, “I use transformation in a special sense, a

¹ *Bande Mataram*, March 1908 (Cent Ed , Vol I), p 765

² *Ibid* , pp 652-53

³ *Ibid* , p 853

⁴ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 16, p 153

⁵ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 22), p 112

change of consciousness, radical and complete.. A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive does not meet the demand I make on life and Yoga ”¹

But this revolution is not to be a repetition of the earlier inconclusive upheavals. It is very silent in its action and effectuation. In fact, it is no more a hypothetical probability, or a promise of the distant future. The supramental revolution has already begun. On February 29, 1956, the Mother declared: “A new light breaks upon the earth, A new world is born”² Since then, the work of transformation is continuing but, ignorant as we are, we cannot feel its subtle impact on life. With a gradual growth in consciousness and receptivity we shall perceive the supramental Truth at work, and only then shall the spiritual revolution take its full form. We have to prepare ourselves so that we can become the children of the new divine race. And this preparation is possible only by a total self-surrender into the hands of the Lord. Let us then aspire and pray to Him ardently for the work to be hastened and fulfilled.

I conclude my speech by reading a brief prayer of the Mother which best expresses what is required of us at the present moment. First, I shall read its translated version in English and then the original in French.

“Grant, I implore Thee, that all in my being may be identified with Thee May I be nothing else any more than a flame of love utterly awakened to a supreme realisation of Thee.”³

“Seigneur, je T’implore, permets que tout en mon être s’identifie à Toi et que je ne sois plus qu’un flambeau d’amour complètement éveillé à Ton activité suprême.”⁴

¹ *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), pp 106-107

² *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 15, p 204

³ *Prayers and Meditations of the Mother* (1941 Edition), p 32

⁴ *La Mère, Prières et Méditations* (1952 Edition), p 76