

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JULY 1990

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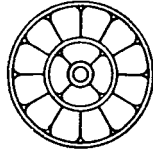
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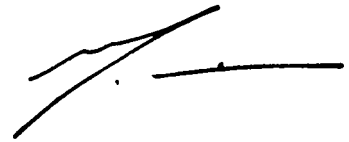


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled



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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLIII

No. 7

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"*

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## SOME TALKS BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN IN MAY AND JULY 1957

SRI Aurobindo had given me charge of the outer work because he wanted to withdraw into concentration in order to hasten the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and he had announced to the few people who were there that he was entrusting to me the work of helping and guiding them, that I would remain in contact with him, naturally, and that through me he would do the work. Suddenly, immediately, things took a certain shape: a very brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary detail, with marvellous experiences, contacts with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous. Experiences followed one upon another, and, well, things were unfolding altogether brilliantly and I must say, in an extremely interesting way

One day, I went as usual to relate to Sri Aurobindo what had been happening—we had come to something really very interesting, and perhaps I showed a little enthusiasm in my account of what had taken place—then Sri Aurobindo looked at me . . . and said. “Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn all events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed, ” and then he smiled and said: “It will be a *great* success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want, we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.”

With my inner consciousness I understood immediately. a few hours later the creation was gone . . . and from that moment we started anew on other bases . . .  
(10 July 1957)

\*

*Mother, will the transformation of the body come after the transformation of the mind and vital, or will it follow spontaneously?*

Usually this kind of transformation proceeds from above downwards, not from below upwards.

Obviously, if you are a thorough-going materialist, you will say that it is the development of the form which brings out new capacities, but still, this is not quite correct, it is not exactly like this that things usually happen, and I challenge you to transform your body before your mind has been transformed. Just try, let us see!

You cannot move a finger, say a word, walk one step without the mind's

intervention; so with what instrument are you going to transform your body if your mind is not already transformed?

If you remain in the state of ignorance—of perfect ignorance, I might say—which your mind is in at present, how do you expect your body to be transformed?

*Sometimes one finds a great resistance in the body. What is the reason? The mind does not interfere, but there is a resistance. The greatest resistance comes from the physical, there is a special resistance of the physical*

Where is the greatest resistance?... In your head. (*Laughter*) This is not a special case. Most often what refuses most to change is the physical mind—so obstinate, isn't it, in the conviction of its own competence, ooh!... In the love it has for its own ignorance, its own way of thinking, its own way of seeing, its own way of not knowing.

Is that all?... All right! Then we won't say anything more.

*I am asking for the remedy.*

Oh! Oh!... (*Long silence*)... There, that's the remedy.

(15 May 1957)

\*

We said that we were going to prepare ourselves methodically for the sadhana... There is one point on which I have already insisted strongly, but unfortunately without much result among you all. And I thought that perhaps it would be good to begin with that to prepare you for a future sadhana.

So, the subject of our meditation this evening will be this: "On the harm done by incontinence of speech."

Very often I have told you that every word spoken uselessly is dangerous chatter. But here, the situation has reached the very limit—there are things which have been said, said over and over again, repeated by all those who have tried to perfect humanity, unfortunately without much result—it is a question of malicious gossip.. of slander, of that pleasure taken in speaking ill of others. Anyone who indulges in this kind of incontinence debases his consciousness, and when to this incontinence is added the habit of vulgar quarrelling, expressed in coarse language, then that amounts to suicide, spiritual suicide within oneself.

I stress this point and insist that you take it *very* seriously.

(*Meditation*)

(9 July 1957)

## GREETINGS

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER WRITTEN IN 1513

*(Translated into modern English)*

I AM your friend and my love for you goes deep. There is nothing I can give you which you have not got, but there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in today. Take Heaven! No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. Take Peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it yet within our reach is Joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see—and to see we have only to look. I beseech you to look.

Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by their covering, cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard. Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendour, woven of love, by wisdom, with power

Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the Angel's hand that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, sorrow, or a duty, believe me, that Angel's hand is there: the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing Presence. Our joys too: be not content with them as joys. They, too, conceal diviner gifts.

Life is so full of meaning and purpose, so full of beauty—beneath its covering—that you will find earth but cloaks your heaven.

Courage then to claim it: that is all. But courage you have. and the knowledge that we are pilgrims together, wending through unknown country, home.

And so, at this time, I greet you. Not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem and with the prayer that for you now and forever, the day breaks, and the shadows flee away.

ANON

## THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

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

*(Continued from the issue of June 1990)*

THE Mother's work was in obscurity and ignorance. If it was necessary to descend into hell for the work of transformation assigned by the Supreme Lord to her, then she would do it without losing her divinity. While working in the gross physical she could still feel that the Power was there. She could alternate with ease between the action of ordinary consciousness and the divine depth of the immutable silence. She recorded such an experience in her prayer and meditation dated 4 December 1916:

“Thou hast willed, O Lord, that the being should grow wider and richer. It could not do so without entering once again, at least partially and temporarily, into ignorance and obscurity.

“This ignorance and obscurity it comes now to lay at Thy feet as the most humble of ordeals. I shall not ask Thee to bestow upon me continuously the Consciousness Thou grantest me in these moments of peaceful and pure communion. I shall ask Thee only to make these moments still more peaceful and pure, to fortify and enlighten the consciousness more and more, so that it may return to its daily task with renewed strength and knowledge.

“Thou remindest me through these brief moments of ecstatic identification that Thou hast granted me the power of consciously uniting with Thee. And the divine musical harmony captures the entire being.

“But the sounds gather in the head as behind a veil and not a word flows from the pen today.. ”

In her prayers during the month of December 1916 she reported as if she had entered into a sort of unexplored continent. The mind was completely like a chameleon, it took on whatever colour was needed in the prevailing circumstances. It was filled with light, but not transformed in a permanent way. When she went down into the unconscious she found in the heart of darkness the divine presence, the “Sun in the Darkness” or the “Black Sun” (*martanda*) of the Vedas. The Mother records such an experience in her prayer of 10 December 1916:

“I was spoiled by Thee formerly: Thou madest me live so constantly in Thy Presence ... But now it seems that Thou wouldst teach me to know the unchanging bliss even in darkness, and not to have any preference for either consciousness or unconsciousness.

“Beyond all desire, to be plunged in the condition of those who live by desire . strange!

“But the strangest thing is that this leaves me perfectly calm, peaceful and



content, and that in this darkness I see a great strength, and that in the depth of the night sublime celestial harmonies can also be heard.

“Each new step in Thy kingdom, O Lord, is a new cause for wonder!”

The Mother records a manifold universal vision in her prayer of 5 December 1916

“Thou hast granted me the grace of Thy repose in which all individual limits are dissolved, in which one is in all and, more clearly still, all is in oneself. But the mind, merged in this divine ecstasy, cannot yet find any power of expression.”

*(Factual notation of the experience)*

“ ‘Turn towards the earth.’ The usual injunction was heard in the silence of the immutable identification. Then the consciousness became that of the One in all. ‘Everywhere and in all those in whom thou canst see the One, there will awake the consciousness of this identity with the Divine. Look...’ It was a Japanese street brilliantly illuminated by gay lanterns picturesquely adorned with vivid colours. And as gradually what was conscious moved on down the street, the Divine appeared, visible in everyone and everything. One of the lightly-built houses became transparent, revealing a woman seated on a tatami in a sumptuous violet kimono embroidered with gold and bright colours. The woman was beautiful and must have been between thirty-five and forty. She was playing on a golden samisen. At her feet lay a little child. And in the woman too the Divine was visible.”

This vision of the Mother had an affinity with Sri Aurobindo’s Narayana Darshan in 1908 in Alipur Jail during the early weeks of his ‘ashramvas’ within its precincts. He said about it at Uttarpara: “I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned. No, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva, It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets .. and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies.”

Sri Aurobindo had this vision eight years earlier than the Mother.

On 7 December 1916, the Mother writes about her inner poise and tranquillity: “Apparently my life is as ordinary and banal as can be, and inwardly what is it? Nothing but a calm tranquillity without any variation or surprises, the calm of a something which has realised and no longer seeks itself, which no longer expects anything from life and things, which acts without reckoning up any profit, knowing perfectly that this action does not belong to it any way,

either in its impulsion or in its result, which wills, being aware that the supreme Will alone wills in it, a calm all made of an incontestable certitude, an objectless knowledge, a causeless joy, a self-existent state of consciousness which no longer belongs to time ”

On 8 December 1916 the Mother had a serious dialogue with the Divine. She had been asked to be ready for her assigned work for the earth. The mind and the vital were so much in doubt about themselves that they were apt to ask many questions. But the Mother gave a clear indication of the call of the Supreme Will. She said “Thou knowest, O Lord, that I am surrendered to Thee and that I try my best to be a faithful and pure intermediary of Thy supreme Will. But when I turn my gaze to the earth, I see that however great men may be, their field of action is always terribly restricted. A man, who in his mind and even in his vital being is as vast as the universe or at least as vast as the earth, as soon as he begins to act, becomes enclosed in the narrow bounds of a material action, very limited in its field and results. Whether he be the founder of a religion or a political reformer, he who acts becomes a petty little stone in the general edifice, a grain of sand in the immense dune of human activities ”

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

#### REFERENCE

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 2 p 4

#### CORRECTION

On p 372 of the June issue the paragraph beginning with “Love is nothing but ” should read as follows in its opening part

“Love is nothing but the tie that binds and holds together all the flowers of Thy divine bouquet. It is an unobtrusive role, modest, unrecognised, a role essentially impersonal, which can find all its utility only in this very impersonality

“Because I am becoming more and more this tie, this link of union gathering the scattered fragments of Thy consciousness and enabling them, by grouping them together, to reconstitute better and better Thy consciousness, at once single and multiple, it was possible for me to see clearly ”

## LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

### SOME PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

It is curious that I have somehow neglected your birthday on the 12th of March. You have drawn my attention to it more than once but I have acted as if I were unconcerned altogether. I know that birthdays have an importance. According to the Mother, one is more plastic than at other times to the Divine and there is a new chance each year on that occasion to bring one's soul to the front. But there are people who are constantly being re-born day after day, and for such people the official birthday is not of special significance. To me you are a person who is made "new" more and more in the image of the "true" every twenty-four hours. Your whole life is attuned to the Divine and each sunrise leads on to a finer harmony of the various parts in their turning towards the Infinite and the Eternal. Love of the Supreme leads in a pre-eminent degree to the state which the poet Tennyson, writing of love between humans at its best, conveys most memorably in those two lines:

Love took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords with might—  
Smote the chord of self that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.

Yes, from earliest girlhood you have felt called to the spiritual life. But you have something of an ascetic in your nature and this, coupled with the typical woman in you, has made your physical life too hard-working. All women want to keep their rooms spick and span—a worthy ideal but not to be followed over-ridgely if it taxes one's health. A little dust here and there, a bit of disorder in some corners can't do much harm, provided one's heart remains clean of egoistic desires and one's mind holds first things first—namely, remembrance of the Divine. Further, if one is not physically very smart in arranging things, one should have in mental sight the spot where one has dumped one's papers, etc. I remember the Mother once telling us of Sri Aurobindo's habits. Unlike her, he was not a paragon of tidiness. His papers seemed to be piled up or scattered carelessly. But, according to the Mother's report, he had a recollection of where exactly in his dumps he had pushed this or that manuscript. When he wanted any of them to be brought to him, he would indicate the precise place in his room and the precise heap where it seemed to have got lost. I am much of an Aurobindonian in this respect though after about three months my memory dims and I need to be newly careless and disorderly while keeping track of things in general in my mind.

About my environment I can afford to be easy-going because a devoted friend is there to keep things in good shape. If she were absent and nobody took up at least part of her work my rooms would certainly be cobwebby, even if they

might not resemble the state of things Omar Khayyam laments when thinking of the old Persia

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
The court where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep,  
And Bahram, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass  
Stamps o'er his head, but cannot break his sleep.

Yes, I would be in a sorry plight, but I may muster some energy to prevent the lion and the wild ass from feeling at home in my flat. The lizard is of course welcome. The Mother liked its presence since it serves to keep insects and mosquitoes away. Easygoing though I am, I have not yet come to the grand limit reached by Dilip Kumar Roy who once told me: "If I had to dust my rooms, I would rather commit suicide."

In addition to your spick-and-span complex you have assumed the burden of too much discipline in sadhana. Your spiritual programme seems to be very distinctly charted out. Possibly a slight relaxation now and again in view of your health will not come amiss. But habits die hard, and you will be happy—or at least satisfied—only if the pattern in which you have taught yourself to move Godward is upheld. Here too I am quite easygoing. Except for the visit to the Samadhi for an hour and a quarter every afternoon, nothing is solidly set for me. At the Samadhi too I have no fixed mode of spiritual behaviour. I shut my eyes or keep them open, looking at the diverse design of fellow-sadhaks standing or bending at the Samadhi or else I look upward at the bright patches of far blue through the varied intertwining of steady brown branches and tremulous green leaves of the spreading "Service Tree" and experience an intense relief to my small human body's earth-bound existence. I even dare to answer briefly some questions and get occasionally reprimanded for ignoring the notice "Silence"—reprimanded not by expressive signs as it should be, but with words as silence-breaking as my own! Once the notice was even taken off its hook and held under my nose. I must say it didn't smell nice.

Yes, I have no fixities in my life. A visiting Englishman, a researcher, who subjected me to a battery of questions on the spiritual pursuit was surprised on hearing from me that, unlike his other interlocutors, I didn't make it a point to plunge for some time into deep meditation soon after getting up in the morning! I sounded quite frivolous when I said that after washing my face I generally sat at my typewriter and thumped away till bath-time. I explained to him: "In my understanding, meditation is not meant to be a special in-drawn state divorced from one's outward active hours. It is a state in which whenever you feel so inclined you draw into a close quiet knot the various threads of your consciousness which, though outwardly oriented, are still to be held together in an easy manner at their starting-points in some happy sense of divine Presence

within your heart. Along these threads this sense sends out feelers towards the divine Presence around and above—the Mother's Love enfolding you, Sri Aurobindo's Light uplifting you. The act of typing need be no distraction from the soul's aspiration towards the archetype, the supreme model of each part of us, waiting in some depth of eternity, some height of infinity, to manifest in the moments of time, the configurations of space."

I can't say I am anywhere near a hundred-per-cent success at my unplanned sadhana. But my whole trend is towards finding the true secret of such a life. In order to occupy ourselves as the fancy takes us and to be able to occupy our minds in whatever way we want without ceasing to do Yoga, the Yogic centre has to be what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being. The psychic being, which in physical terms is felt behind the middle of our chest, is a fountain of spontaneous remembrance of the Divine and the mainspring of an automatic offering of ourselves and our doings to the Supreme. With that In-dweller awake, you can read or write or talk or carry on any other job without digression from sadhana, because you will not have to make any effort to concentrate on sadhana. The practice of God's presence will go on by itself just as the heart goes beating, but now there will be a joy beyond the mere *joie de vivre*: an ecstasy of expectation of the Eternal Beloved will render your life the prayer which a stanza in Sri Aurobindo's *Musa Spiritus* formulates:

All make tranquil, all make free  
 Let my heart-beats measure the footsteps of God  
 As He comes from His timeless infinity  
 To build in their rapture His burning abode

Or else there will be a constant cry as in Sri Aurobindo's *Bride of the Fire* to Her whom a *Savitri*-passage calls "Wisdom-Splendour, Mother of the universe" as well as "Creatrix, the Eternal's artist-bride"—a cry which culminates in that total appeal in the last stanza

Voice of Infinity, sound in my heart,—  
 Call of the One!  
 Stamp there thy radiance, never to part,  
 O living Sun. (9.4.1990)

\*

I received your card and read the message inscribed in it. Thank you for your affection for me. There is not only an affinity between us but I have a strange recollection of your bearded face as something familiar. Trying to trace surface-causes I see it as a very attractive blending of my father in his early days and of

my favourite Jesuit teacher at school Father Kaufmann, a Swiss German Kaufmann so influenced me that I even used to go about at times with a facial characteristic of his—knit eye-brows—as if I were angry! My desire to grow a beard was partly due to him and my father and partly to Bernard Shaw. Shaw's beard had become symbolic of his attitude to the follies of his time—an attitude which remained throughout his life so that an admirer of his, Gerald Bullett, could say. "The only difference between Shaw young and Shaw old is that his beard which was once red with anger is now white with rage!"

When I go behind surface-causes I feel from the way my own development has taken place in this life that I must have had a twofold contact with you in past lives. In the present life, at the beginning of my college-career, I was very much affected by Christianity. Even now I am tremendously interested in the earliest original form of this religion, the form which was prevalent in the time of Jesus himself as evinced from our earliest documents, the epistles of Paul who was acquainted with Peter and with "the Lord's brother", James. One of my 18 still unpublished books is on this form, directly or indirectly, waiting like the others for the finance to bring it into the light of day. What is most significant is that the Mother, on seeing my photos after the first year and a half of my stay in the Ashram when I had grown a beard and worn my hair a little long, exclaimed: "You look like an early Christian, one of those who used to go and live in the desert." I knew of those monks: they had fled the cities and made their home in the Thebaid, thinking the devil was among the crowds of men instead of within themselves. Perhaps you too were in that early ascetic group. Or else we may have been in some monastery later on, following especially a cult of the Virgin Mary. I wonder if there was any monastery in the places of Christian Europe with which I feel most familiar without ever seeing them in the present life: the Rhineland and, in the poet Longfellow's words, "the ancient town of Bruges, the quaint old Flemish city".

The second aspect of my touch of depth-on-depth with you emerges from the quick transition I made from my Christ-coloured student-days to the period of profound fascination by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda who served as a passage to the still wider call of Sri Aurobindo. This call with its "integral" earth-accepting Yoga conjured up as its background the age of the Rigveda when first what he has termed "Supermind, Truth-Consciousness, Gnosis, Vijnana, Mahas" was visioned and aspired after under the Mantric name of *Satyam, Ritam, Brihat*—"The True, the Right, the Vast". You and I may have been fellow-brahmacharis, with newly sprouting fluff on our chins, sitting at the feet of some grand old bearded Rishi chanting his superb experiences which, if couched in Sri Aurobindo's language, would reach our ears thus:

Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces  
Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings,

Thoughts that left the Ineffable's flaming mansions  
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow my heart-beats' rhythm like a giant hammer's,  
Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway  
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,  
Ecstasy's chariots.

So it is both by the Way of the Cross and by the Path which the Ancients of India laid out for the Gods to descend and for men to ascend that your shapely beard bristles so familiarly, so intimately to the imagination of my soul.

Now to another matter than ourselves. If your relationship with the monks is improving, how exactly do you read the improvement? Have they come to understand the ideals that you hold? It will be interesting also to know how they look at the stupendous changes in Russia and Eastern Europe? Do these changes strike them merely as the failure of materialism—a prelude to conventional Christianity returning in power? I wonder whether they can grasp what I was trying to say in my last letter to you which has been published in the April *Mother India*. Russia is indeed a country religious at heart, but, as far as I can see, the modern enlightened mind among its people is likely to turn towards a non-sectarian spiritual view such as their Indological studies have brought before them—the wide Vedantic vision emphasising the Divine within the world, the Divine manifesting in the human and, because of the secret Divine everywhere, the earth's developing destiny towards universality and oneness. (11 4.1990)

\*

I am always glad to hear from you but feel sad that all the news is not happy. There are two components here: one is the actual physical weakness, trivial thoughts, lack of normal sleep—the other is the worry about these things. Take them for brute facts without thinking. “How long will they last? Will they be there for ever? What other troubles will come in their wake?” When you write “My equipoise is gone”, you touch the real mishap. But this is not an irrevocable affair. Call for Sri Aurobindo's peace which is invisibly there all the time above you and around you and deep within you. Once he has accepted you as his own, he never leaves you. The same with the Mother's sweet grace. She can never be far and both she and the Lord hold you always in their arms. Try to be conscious of this fact and don't allow your heart to be vexed, your mind to be clouded, no matter how many outward “ills” (as Hamlet would say) “the flesh is heir to.” The Divine Presence has been established in your life: you have only to grow aware of it all the time. Once you realise that it is ever accompanying you, all those “ills” will be held securely in an inner calm, confined within their proper

limits—that is, the sheer physical sense of them and not permitted to overflow into the rest of your psychology I am telling you all this not out of a book of wisdom, I am reading out what is written on the pages of my own life So many bodily inconveniences and even aches are part of my days—and nights—and yet my eyes are filled with the glorious memory of Sri Aurobindo's serene greatness and the Mother's depth of love, and with this memory their actual beings are present with me from hour to hour and a far-away smile plays about my lips—far-away because I am inwardly taken to a dreamful distance from those inconveniences and aches. From that distance they look small, insignificant. The same can happen to your troubles, for surely you are as much a child as I am of His imperturbable immensity and of Her intensity of bliss. Remember also that I invoke their help for you every afternoon at the Samadhi and seek to make you remember the help which is unfaillingly with you

Why do you say the death of Suddhananda Bharati, renamed Radhananda by Sri Aurobindo when he entered the Ashram where he stayed for nearly 22 years, was not announced in any paper but mentioned only on radio? I read of it in the *India Express* and there was even a picture of him I knew him quite well He had a frank, friendly and cheerful disposition He told me that he used to believe he was the "Mahapurusha" ("Great Being") of the age but when he saw Sri Aurobindo he realised his mistake. He was a genuine Yogi with a versatile sadhana, including work on the Kundalini, but he was eccentric in his ways and those ways were often more laughable than impressive An entry on him (p. 44) in a recent publication—*Glossary and Index of Proper Names in Sri Aurobindo's Writings*, compiled with wide and generally brilliant research over years by Gopal Dass Gupta of the Ashram Archives—errs in my opinion by saying about Radhananda that "his austere looks and leonine movements make an unforgettable impression on the visitor". Evidently Gopal Dass has got this bit from some book by an admirer, a "lioniser", of Radhananda's Perhaps the impression was due to the fact that for a long time when his admirers came to meet him he would not come out of his room in the Ashram courtyard but talked with them in a few words through his window which may have had bars I am sure he did not growl or roar at them but his remaining confined to his room and his inaccessibility except across that aperture made them feel he was like a lion in a self-chosen austere cage I don't think anyone in the Ashram would have made the remark quoted by Gopal Dass who did not have the chance to meet Radhananda. It is true, as the entry avers, that Radhananda wrote profusely But some of his expressions were rather odd I recall from one of his most popular books—a compendium of Yoga—things like "Agitate not, vegetate not, only cogitate" and "the Supermind is the electric lift to the Supreme." Once a talk about him and this book took place in the Prosperity Room where some of us had the luck to sit in a semi-circle in front of the Mother before the evening's Soup Distribution The Mother was told that this book, from which I had quoted



to her, had been buried in the Washington Vault among other writings and objects for people some centuries hence to open and see what our time was interested in and productive of. The Mother smiled and said. "The Americans like somewhat fantastic things" But I may add that she is reported to have encouraged Radhananda when he wrote poems in French every day at one period.

In connection with the compendium of Yoga she spoke in general of writers who are prolific and those who are economical. The former do not always care to produce perfect pieces while the latter are bent on perfection. As the highest examples of the two categories she mentioned Victor Hugo and Gustave Flaubert.

Radhananda was multilingual and wrote English poems no less than French and Tamil ones. But a certain composition in English attributed to him in *Champaklal's Treasure* and reproduced with Sri Aurobindo's extremely instructive corrections was not his at all. It was a very early attempt of mine after I joined the Ashram.

Radhananda had the habit of coming late to the general meditation, inwardly absorbed and with his eyes half shut, and taking his way to his usual seat after putting one foot in the lap of whoever sat on the fringe of the group! Mridu, the usually vociferous explosive, often happened to be in that place. You can imagine her indignant state. But she had to keep mum as meditation was going on. Whatever his idiosyncrasies, the Mother once gave Radhananda the compliment that he was the only person in the Ashram capable of real Tapasya (severe self-discipline) and she on one occasion recounted the extraordinary concentrated manner in which he comported himself after a heavy fall on the terrace of the house where he had been put up before his transfer to the Ashram compound. Without that manner the fall might have had serious consequences to the internal organs. Yes, he had unusual modes of acting and behaving, both admirable and strange. One peculiarity of his was that after the Mother had given flowers at Pranam he thought of getting the utmost benefit of the spiritual power put into them by simply eating them up!

Now to another topic. You find it difficult to understand why, as related in "Dyuman—the Luminous One", Dyuman didn't look at Sri Aurobindo while fixing up something in his room. I may try to lessen your difficulty by relating one incident. After the Soup Distribution I used to go ahead and wait in the courtyard of the main Ashram building for the Mother to pass on her way to the staircase leading upstairs. Once I saw the silhouette of Sri Aurobindo behind the open shutters on the first floor. I felt very happy. When I told the Mother of it afterwards, she said. "It is better not to look at him since he does not want it." Obviously his retirement in November 1926 implied this along with other exclusions. The work he was doing on his own body during the years of his withdrawal was not to be interfered with by anyone looking at it. All vibrations,

however subtle, touching it were to be avoided. We know that his withdrawal did not mean cutting off all relationship with us or an aversion from world-affairs. He was in close daily contact with his disciples through letters—I used to receive two a day sometimes—and he kept himself informed of what was going on in the world. It was from physical relationship that he had drawn back—his body was being worked upon by the Supramental Force and it needed to be aloof as much as possible from even the intrusion of eyes with their curiosity and their claims.

Apropos of your experience of anaesthesia by ether as well as pentothal sodium you have asked me what operation under ether I have referred to in my letter. When I was two and a half years old I suffered an attack of infantile paralysis, whose pet name nowadays is polio. The heel of my left foot was pulled up so much that I had to walk with my hand on my left knee in order to press the heel down to floor-level. The knee-muscles were also affected. I could not lift up the lower part of my leg with their help. My father realised—all the more acutely because he was a doctor—that by walking bent all the time I would develop permanent spinal curvature. He was resolved to save me from it and let me have a fair deal in life. First he tried out the two treatments available in Bombay—massage and electric shocks. He realised they were inadequate and as nothing else was possible he took me, along with my mother, to London when I was almost six years old—which means the middle of 1910. In London he and I went from clinic to clinic in the famous Harley Street. He asked each surgeon his technique. Dr. Tubby's struck papa as the best. All the others had offered to do the work free, papa being himself a doctor. Tubby was greedy and demanded a big fee. But papa accepted him. There were two operations under anaesthesia with ether. They made me a straight fellow and in course of time I could indulge as I liked in that passion of mine—horse-riding—though with special manipulation of the stirrup-straps. In Pondicherry I could go cycling every day—until quite a late period—the early part of my second “home-coming” in 1954. I wasn't so handicapped as now—or if I may perpetrate a horrible pun, “leggi-capped”—until about ten years back—more acutely from 1985 or so. I think my outer life would have been greatly impoverished without knowing by intimate experience the glory of galloping horses. When the Mother told me that she hoped to cure my bad leg one day with the Supramental Power, my first thought was: “O I shall be able to have a grand white horse between my legs without any of the old abnormal arrangements to keep my grip and balance!” Later, when I studied Sri Aurobindo's *Secret of the Veda* I realised that my physical-seeming aspiration reflected the Vedic vision of the white horse named Dadhikravan which was the leader of the human march upwards—the steed which was said to gallop always towards the dawn, that symbol of the spiritual awakening. Then the secret reading of *Savitri*, which Sri Aurobindo graced me with, by privately sending me every morning a passage from the on-going composition of the epic, brought me the Yoga of Savitri's father Aswapati—literally, “the Lord of the

Horse". When I asked Sri Aurobindo whether this horse was Dadhikravan, he answered "Yes." My sense of affinity with that name became all the more vivid when I found that the white horse represented the purified life-energy. Much of my Yogic effort had been concerned with the rebellious vital force in me. Both the calm-moving mind and the pure-passioned soul had to be put at play in order to make the unruly varicoloured courser of that force learn to reflect the hue and harmony of the spiritual world. All my effort was now bent on turning into a living reality that line in a poem of AE's:

White for Thy Whiteness all desires burn .. (7 4 1990)

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

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## THAT STROKE

I was a piece of iron  
 Rotting in a remote corner  
 When heated and struck on an anvil  
 By a heavy hammer,  
 I cried and cried at the harshness,  
 And cursed your partiality  
 'O, why this cruel treatment, Mother?  
 I did no wrong, I just craved for Thee'.

But then a miracle happened.  
 A beautiful vase appeared in the place of this iron,  
 Holding the Flowers of Thy Grace.  
 'Pardon me, Mother', I weep.  
 Now I know, the time isn't far off,  
 When 'I' will be sucked into your bosom,  
 Oh, the Peace! Oh, the Joy!  
 Thank you, my dear Mother, for that Stroke!

S. SETHU

# THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

## A DREAM-DIALOGUE

*(Continued from the issue of June 1990)*

SRI Aurobindo said: "I remember one occasion when we were discussing the plight of subject nations. One of the undergraduates was loudly lecturing us about the Egyptians and their fight for independence. 'They stood up as one man,' he proclaimed impressively. When he had made this full-throated announcement for the third time, another member interrupted him saying, 'And how many times did they sit down?' " (*Laughter*)

"Did you make any friends at Cambridge?"

"Not really. I have already told you, haven't I, that I was never an easy mixer or an extrovert. But I had met many different kinds of people, particularly after joining the Majlis. I was its Secretary at one time, and often used to make rather eloquent speeches at those meetings. Many people knew me also as a very good student. Yes, I was acquainted with quite a number of people but I have never had very many friends, and certainly no English ones. It was not as though the English disliked me, on the contrary I think they looked up to me with respect. Perhaps if I had joined them on the playing fields—the British love sports—we may have grown closer. Some people even thought that I could not enjoy my life in England just because I was not fond of games. But actually in those days I believed that the British were indeed a race of shopkeepers, and that the French were far more truly cultured. And though I had never seen France, I was always very much drawn to it. Perhaps the main reason why I disliked the British was that they were our colonial masters. The resolve to free my motherland was constantly burning within me. This was why after the Majlis at Cambridge, I joined the 'Lotus and Dagger Club' in London."

"What a strange name!"

"Isn't it? Rather romantic; I thought. The fact was that my studies at Cambridge being over, we were again together, the three of us, my brothers and I. They were worried about what to do with me, but I was not disturbed at all about my future. In fact, I can't say that I have ever bothered my head about myself. Either others have done it for me, upsetting themselves terribly in the process, or I have quietly done whatever was to be done, without worrying at all. That is how I have worked for the country; that is how I am still working for you all. I have always been quick to realise where my duty lies, you may say that some kind of intuition reveals it to me, because it is neither intelligence nor thought which gives it. It was thus that I felt I shouldn't join the I.C.S., and you see I did not. I decided that my country must become free, and nothing else took precedence over that. It was in that spirit that I joined the 'Lotus and Dagger

Club' I had heard that the aim of this secret association was to liberate the motherland. Fortunately or unfortunately, I do not know which, the association was still-born. On the other hand, both my elder brothers were racking their brains trying to decide what to do with their younger brother. They had hoped he would join the I.C.S., and earn a substantial salary. Manmohan would then be able to continue at Oxford and so on. Now not only were their hopes shattered, there was no clear solution to the immediate financial problems. Where was the next meal going to come from? How long could one afford to be a 'swadeshi' or a rebel on an empty stomach? Or serve the country at one's father's expense? When these thoughts were foremost in my mind, I suddenly got a solution. We heard the news that the Maharaja of Baroda was in London. My eldest brother and myself turned up one day at his place with Mr. Cotton as our guardian. Mr. Cotton had been all along our great well-wisher and friend. I have already spoken to you of how both he and Mr. Prothero had earnestly, though unsuccessfully, tried to get me to join the I.C.S. He was a very fine person, courteous and kind, a true English gentleman. It used really to hurt him to think that three adolescent boys, living on their own, far away from their homeland and family, were suffering because they were short of money. The Maharaja asked me about myself and my studies and seemed very pleased with my answers. Ultimately I got a post in his State on Rs. 200/- a month.

"I heard that the Maharaja had later commented, 'Wonderful! For a mere two hundred rupees I've got an I.C.S. Officer. A bargain indeed!' So there you are, I had been tricked. But neither Mr. Cotton nor any of us three brothers were the least bit practical or knowledgeable as regards money, otherwise we might well have asked for three hundred rupees. As far as I was concerned, two hundred rupees could very well be four hundred; I didn't mind the difference."

"However, at least I had a job. I was getting ready to pack for home when an amusing incident intervened. A certain person I knew came down from Cambridge to see me. He was a tailor to whom I still owed £4. He had come to London to demand them. He was also acquainted with several other Indian students, but for a different purpose. I introduced him to Manmohan who got quite an elegant suit made for himself which he put on whenever he set out to visit his friends, Oscar Wilde and others. When the tailor asked me for money that I owed him, I told him, 'Look here, my dear fellow, you took me for a simpleton and charged me double for all the suits you made me during these last two years at Cambridge. You can take your £4 out of it, I'm sure. Anyway, I refuse to pay you one penny more'. And I sent him packing. But this was not the end of the story. More was to follow."

"Anyway, there I was with a job. The Maharaja must have been very pleased with himself that he had taken, in his employ, a rather young man, and an Indian to boot whom he could easily command to do his every bidding.

"Weren't you pleased?"

“Yes, of course, since it seemed to lighten the burden of my brothers’ worries.”

“Didn’t you have worries of your own?”

“I’ve told you that I never bothered over-much about myself. In England, I lived on a half-empty stomach for months on end, nor could I buy warm clothes in winter since Father did not send us a regular allowance. These difficulties never did weigh me down. I had learnt how to continue doing my duty, whatever the circumstances. To make a fuss about oneself and one’s needs had always seemed to me a poverty of spirit. You understand what I mean?”

“But unless one thinks about these things how can one carry on? Shouldn’t one make an effort?”

“To make an effort is one thing, to worry constantly about one’s affairs is quite another. I was always confident that whatever I needed would be given to me. And that is exactly how things happened.”

“How can you say that? Look how much you had to suffer.”

(*Laughing*) “How do you know that that was not necessary? And the moment it was no longer needed, I found a job waiting for me. Look at it this way. There I was sitting idle and unemployed, or sometimes making revolutionary speeches. Exactly at that point of time comes the Maharaja of Baroda to London, as if just for me. He meets me and right away likes what he sees. How did this happen? And you know, over and above that, I received a very big gift from the British Government, a gift of 150 pounds, that is to say 3000 rupees.

“Why? You were not selected for the I.C.S. post!”

“That’s just why I wasn’t selected, but I had done well in the written examination. Others too who had passed the examination but had not been selected for various reasons—for example, bad health—were also given such a grant. This was a government rule, we were told. For me, this money was really providential at that juncture—Mr. Cotton and my brothers had explained to me that I must try to make the most of this opportunity. I sent in the petition and the money was granted. With it I could pay my passage back home as well as help my brothers to an extent. I felt that I had become rich overnight, and all the memories of the poverty and hardship of the preceding few years simply dissolved, as if they had never been. What will you call this, chance, coincidence?”

“So then we too need never worry, and live merrily, careless of tomorrow.”

“Oh! I did not know that you were crushed under the weight of difficulties (*Laughter*) But truly speaking, becoming free of problems and worries is not as easy as it sounds. To remain equal in all circumstances, while a living faith flames constantly within—such is the basis for Yoga. And the Divine Himself will carry all the burden of the Yogi. This is what all of you have come here to learn.”

“But you did not believe in Him at that time, did you?”

“I can’t say that there was absolute disbelief, either. In any case, though I

may have lacked faith in Him, He had faith in me (*Laughter*) I also possessed self-confidence and equanimity.

"This reminds me of a small incident. Once my brother fell ill, and I was greatly perturbed by it. Then, in my sleep, I heard a voice tell me, 'Why do you worry so much? Remain quiet and all will be well.' Immediately my mind fell silent, of itself, my brother got well, too

"You see, behind every circumstance or event, there is a play of many forces. We only look at the incident, and think and judge and draw conclusions accordingly. To the ordinary eye, for example, my meeting with the Maharaja may seem a coincidence or a fortuitous event. But those who are not satisfied with such quick and easy deductions and look at life with a deeper insight may often discover hints of the real truth behind the outer veil of circumstances. I am absolutely definite that my long association of 13 or 14 years with the Maharaja could not have been founded on mere chance and my later life repeatedly proved me right. But the work I was given by the Maharaja was fundamentally the same as the one I might have been offered by the British Government—*i.e.*, it was a civilian's post all right. Only I had decided never to work for our colonial masters, and to that decision I stuck

"On the given date, I left England. I embarked on the S.S. Carthage to return home after a prolonged exile which had lasted almost as long as Rama's. I had left India as a child, I was returning as a man, with the beginning of a moustache. A brown Sahib, outwardly very Westernised—that is how I looked. My brothers came to see me off "

"Were you dark-complexioned?"

"You couldn't call me light-skinned or mistake me for an Englishman, though I was certainly not black as ebony "

"Weren't you unhappy to leave England?"

"Unhappy? Because I left my brothers behind, or because of the land where I had lived so long? As regards my relation with my brothers. I must tell you that among the three of us there had never been a very strong bond of brotherhood. The sense of oneness in a family, the very great closeness of blood-ties, all this is very often found in the East, in India, China, Japan. But it does not easily flower in the individualistic society of England. Perhaps Manmohan, being a poet, may have been sufficiently carried away to have written about fraternal sentiments (*Laughter*) And as regards my feelings about England, I think I have already told you that I felt little or no affection for it. Isn't it strange? The land I had lived in for so long, ever since childhood, and whose literature I loved so deeply did not draw me at all, whereas that other country which was unknown to me in this life bound me to herself with ties of an ever-flaming devotion. Perhaps I never really cared for England, not only because she had made India her colonial slave, but also because I never liked her trade-mentality. I remember that once when a classmate of mine in Cambridge proudly compared England to ancient Athens, I

objected to that, saying—‘Not Athens, but Corinth, a commercial state, would be a more apt parallel.’ Of course they never liked my frankness of speech. They may have also thought that for the lonely book-worm that I was, who never enjoyed fun, games or companionship, it was natural to think thus. Though, to be fair, they never really disliked me as a person.

“Napoleon anticipated my opinion of the English when he called them a nation of shopkeepers! (*Laughter*) Anyway, I left the land though not its literature, and sailed homewards, to a land that was still ruled by the foreigner. By then my father was no longer in this world. Before leaving it he had made plenty of plans for me. He had even engaged for his civilian son to work in Arrah; Sir Henry Cotton was to be my guardian, so that my entry into the glamorous British society would be smooth and easy. So many of his dreams were centred around me, and it was really a cruel irony of fate that a mere piece of wrong information hurt him mortally and he could not even live to see his son return from England. I suppose you know all this.”

“We’ve forgotten many of the details. Couldn’t you tell us the whole story?”

(*Laughter*) “Oh! Well, you see, till the end, my father believed that I had passed the I.C.S. examination and that I would return to India very soon. He took a month’s leave from his work and went to Bombay proudly to welcome me back and accompany me home. But at that time, even the date of my departure from England had not been fixed, and so, after a long wait, he went back from Bombay. Then, a few weeks later, the Steamship Agency sent him a telegram informing him that the boat on which his son was to have sailed had sunk. The shock of this sudden and tragic news was such that he died of heart-failure. But though I was to have sailed on that ship, last minute difficulties had made me change my plans. Thus the same hand of Fate that killed the father saved the son. The only thing for which I was later thankful was that he had never found out that I had failed in the I.C.S. examination. Later I read a letter he had written to my maternal uncle which made me realise what great hopes he had built around the three of us. In that letter, he confidently wrote. ‘My three sons will all be giants among men. I assure you, not only will your three nephews shine in the annals of your family, they will add splendour to the history of their motherland. Perhaps I will not live long enough to see this happen, but be sure that this will be so. Auro will belong to the proud élite of the nation—those who help to govern the land. Though I will never have the good fortune to see this happen, you will, and then you will remember my words. At present, he is at Cambridge, where his own merits and excellence have taken him.’”

“Did you notice that he has twice suggested in this letter that he was not for long in this world. And yet he had always been enormously self-confident. Evidently he must have had some premonition, some inkling, about the future.”

“One small bit of misinformation, and yet how catastrophic the result!”

“This is how things happen, have been happening for ages. Innumerable



instances can show you how apparently small mistakes can cause great harm. But if you go to the root of the matter you will find yourself facing a strange mystery. Every happening is part of a single causal chain. Neither my father's death nor my being saved was due to chance, though the ordinary mind may think so.

“Yes, it does seem so.”

*(To be continued)*

NIRODBARAN

*(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)*

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

## A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

*(Continued from the issue of June 1990)*

*This time we are breaking our sequence and offering a striking experience that occurred much later in the “extraordinary girl”’s life—after the passing of Sri Aurobindo.*

### Vision of Hell

ONE day as I was lying in bed, I felt I was going to die. All on a sudden my soul came out of my body and began to fly very high up. I used to have the experience of going out of my body in my early days, but what happened now was most memorable and significant. After I had reached a certain height I began to go round and round at a tremendous speed causing me unbearable pain. I began to cry out, “O Thakur, O Sri Aurobindo, save me, save me. I am dying. I can’t bear this excruciating pain. Do free me from this agony!” My cry was of no avail. The soul was turning and turning. Then I felt someone coming near and standing and watching. I felt it was Sri Aurobindo.

The circling soon stopped and the relief came. Then he said to me in a grave voice, “This pain of yours you suffered only for a while and you call it unbearable. Well, just have a look below.” As I did, my God, what a sight! Thousands and thousands of souls crowded, huddled together and pullulating like worms and crying, wailing, howling in extreme agony.

“Do you see these souls?” Sri Aurobindo said. “They have been in this condition for ages and they will go on, one doesn’t know for how long. Compared to their suffering, yours is a child’s peevish discomfort.”

I had no words to utter, so struck I was by what I saw. This was, I suppose, what goes by the name of suffering in Hell. Then Sri Aurobindo said, “This is the seventh plane—*bhūmī*—to which you have come. Now go!” He uttered these words with such power that I moved downwards. Suddenly a door with only one panel opened up and, gliding through it, I fell into a world of light. Light and nothing but light was there and I was bathed in that golden and blissful lustre. I remained plunged in it for a long time. Such indescribable joy, *ānanda*, it was.

These two polar conditions so markedly contrasted are beyond belief. I said to Sri Aurobindo, “I don’t want to go down into the world again. I shall live here for ever.”

“No, you have to go down,” he replied.

“When shall I be able to come back?” I asked.

“You have to take one more birth.”

Saying this, Sri Aurobindo vanished and I came back to my body.

*(To be continued)*

NIRODEBARAN

## THE SPELL OF THE MAHABHARATA

### REFLECTIONS ON SOME ENIGMATIC SITUATIONS AND CHARACTERS IN THE GREAT EPIC

MANY of those born after 1947 wonder how their parents and ancestors were used to a handful of Englishmen governing them. Indeed, it is not easy to enter the spirit of a bygone era. Yet, consciously or unconsciously, most of us indulge in measuring the strengths or weaknesses of characters belonging to as remote a past as the time of the epics, applying the yardstick of values by which we are accustomed to judge our contemporaries.

However, there are works, very few though, which can withstand such exercises of ours. Even if in our eagerness to set them in the Bed of Procrustes of our ideas we stretch a part of them or cut out another, they survive the operation, such is their vitality and such the power of their essential truth.

As it has been repeatedly said, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata highlight the ultimate triumph of the good over the evil. Such simplistic observations imply that the moral emerging from these great works is qualitatively not different from that of the fairy tale or the didactic story. Particularly in regard to the Mahabharata, in which the central conflict is not between clear-cut camps of men and demons but between men and demonic men, the moral lies imbedded in far too complex psychological situations. The “good” the poem stresses is not any puny moralistic virtue; it is the growth of consciousness which takes in its stride all the experiences good and bad, it is the progress the human soul makes through the darkness of ignorance so fondly nurtured by the ego. Hence the victory in the battle or the success in a prolonged endeavour does not throw the victor and the successful into a state where he rests happily ever thereafter, but continues his quest for light as symbolised in the great journey, the *Mahaprasthanā*, of the Pandavas with which the epic concludes.

#### Lessons at Two Levels

The lessons, which the Mahabharata imparts to its reader (or listener) in the light of this ideal of our soul’s progress, become helpful even as practical lessons in life for the relatively less enlightened. Take the example of the story of Sharmistha, the princess, and Devyani, the daughter of Shukra, the king’s guru. The two friends, along with a number of maids, go out into the forest and bathe in a lake. Upon their emerging from the water, Devyani, by mistake, puts on her friend’s garment. Unpredictable is the way of human moods. The princess falls into a tantrum. The two friends quarrel, Sharmistha claiming superiority over Devyani because of her status as a princess and Devyani claiming superiority because she was the daughter of the king’s guru.

But the princess has the last word—at least that is what she believes at the

moment—when she orders her maids to throw Devyani into a dry pit—and returns home. Apparently, she has won the victory. But situations too can be as unpredictable as human moods. Soon a young king, Yayati, is in the forest. He rescues Devyani and sends her to her father. When the injustice done to Devyani is known, Sharmistha's father, King Brisaparva, apologises to her, but nothing less than Sharmistha being reduced to the position of her maid would satisfy the aggrieved lady. Her demand had to be conceded.

Little could Princess Sharmistha have imagined that in her apparent victory in the forest the other day lay the seed of her future defeat. Now Devyani emerges victorious.

Soon she marries King Yayati. Her entourage, when she goes over to her husband's house, includes her maid Sharmistha. In due course the king is enamoured of the latter. They are secretly married. Now Sharmistha is victorious. In other words, in Devyani's apparent victory had lain in ambush her own future defeat. The lesson is, there is no unmixed victory.

Although the version of the Mahabharata we read is a third-hand narration by Santa Ugrasena Lomaharsini who heard it from Vaisampayan and who in his turn had heard it from Vyasa, it is credited to the last-named who is also the traditional compiler of the Vedas. In fact, the Mahabharata is referred to as the fifth Veda. Hence, some traits of the Vedas are bound to be found in this epic. One of them is leaving a lot unsaid. With the passage of time and the loss of the necessary perspective, the unsaid has become a gap, making certain situations vulnerable to moral challenges thrown by a different milieu such as ours.

### Ignored Aspect of the Episode of Ekalavya

A glaring example of this is the episode of Ekalavya, often projected as an instance of discriminatory conduct of the privileged towards the unprivileged. Ekalavya had mastered certain secrets of archery stealthily, through his imitation of and devotion to the illustrious teacher, Dronacharya. When Dronacharya discovered this, he asked the young man, as the teacher's due, for his thumb, thereby reducing Ekalavya's effectiveness as an archer.

No doubt the society of the time believed in the principles of Varna, the division of duty according to the nature and heredity of people, in view of the experience the soul needed during a specific incarnation in its long journey (through many incarnations in different Varnas) towards the ultimate realisation of Divinity. Needless to say, this concept of Varna has very little to do with the wretched caste system formalised in a later time. But the question involved in Ekalavya's case is not Varna as much as the welfare of Ekalavya himself. In his enthusiasm he has got hold of the physical and occult science of archery all right, but he knows nothing about the code of conduct that must temper this knowledge.

In emotionally citing his case, many in our time forget the bizarre situation in which Drona met him. Ekalavya had applied his archery on a dog which had the audacity to bark at him. He shut the creature's mouth with seven arrows. Reduced to dumbness, the dog ran to Drona and drew his attention to its plight. We have to remember the role of the guru of yore. His first concern was the soul of the disciple; a lesson had no value if it brought about a degradation in the disciple's consciousness, if it merely gave a boost to his ego. Even some of the Kshatriya princes like the Kauravas, well-versed in the laws of *Dharma*, went mad and tyrannical with their power. Where would have the knowledge of archery landed Ekalavya—if we are to make a guess from his maiden experiment with his power?

### The Enigma that is Draupadi

How much does the mind of today understand even the character of Draupadi is a question. An Indian scholar living in France was required to give an introductory talk on the Mahabharata during the Festival of India in France. The moment she described Draupadi as an ideal wife, her audience burst into laughter, thanks to a much acclaimed production of the Mahabharata story in that country.

But that, after all, was a French audience. What is amazing is, the transcreator of a currently best-selling (by Indian standards) edition of the Mahabharata detects three reasons that obliged Krishna to intervene when Duhshasana tried to disrobe her in the Kaurava court and they are: Draupadi is related to Krishna, she had once "bandaged" Krishna's wound tearing a part of her "expensive dress" and thirdly both Krishna and Draupadi were self-born, the latter being an emanation of *Shakti*. It would appear as if Krishna owned a godown of cloth and he just needed some arguments to come to the help of a relative in distress. Perhaps in a way it is symptomatic of the so-called intellectual state of India that the transcreator does not go anywhere near the essence of the incident—that it was the Divine's response to a devotee when everything else, all the expected human help, had failed her!

If the character of Draupadi has been a great source of strength to some, to most it has been merely intriguing, though fascinating. She is the lady with five husbands. This is the aspect of her life that readily comes to the minds of those who have known about her either through one of the numerous versions of the Mahabharata retold, or through a ballad or a folk or a stage play, or through references to her in different works. It is, however, impossible to appreciate the character of Draupadi without trying to dwell in the milieu the epic portrays, without continuously remembering the *raison d'être* of her existence.

Draupadi is *teja eva tu kevalam*, the flaming puissance incarnate, as the old king Dhritrashtra describes her. There cannot be a Mahabharata without

Draupadi The epic grandeur of the work, the *élan vital* of its dramatic development, would collapse without Draupadi's humiliation and her determination for vengeance; its spiritual significance would be much reduced if it is deprived of the message that emerges from Draupadi's traumatic experience—that the only true safety lies in the Divine's Grace; the human supports are unpredictable, everyone can fail a person in a moment of crisis—and none will lack in some respectable pretext for his failure. But only the Divine does not fail one if one turns to Him entirely.

Most of the episodes in the epics can be viewed at least from two planes, popular and subtle. At the popular plane of looking at things, Draupadi is won by Arjuna, but she marries all the five brothers because their mother, Kunti, has unwittingly said that whatever prize Arjuna has won must belong to all the five. Evidently, in the age of the Mahabharata, the position of the mother was unique. The character of Gandhari, the unfortunate mother of the Kauravas, and that of Kunti convincingly demonstrate that the institution of motherhood merited the respect it was given. And there were auspicious moments when instructions and words uttered by a father or a mother or a master had to be literally followed. For, however illogical they might sound on the surface, the utterances were believed to have originated from some higher inspiration.

But this is hardly any convincing justification for the unusual marital status imposed on Draupadi. This is an excuse at best. What must be remembered is the genesis of Draupadi. She is no human being, though she dwells in a human form. She is even different from the other two great female characters in our epic lore, Savitri and Sita. Though godly emanations, Savitri and Sita both grew up following the process chalked out for mortals. But Draupadi emerged from a Yajna, already *Samadhyama*—a maiden—in response to a specific prayer by King Drupad of Panchala. She was born with a certain power and a certain mission, ostensibly to destroy Drona, but really to destroy the Kauravas who were under Drona's protection.

Thus she was no woman to be judged by human standards, nor were the Pandava brothers, her husbands, human beings in any ordinary sense. They were emanations of gods, invoked by their mothers, all different aspects of the king of gods, Indra, one in essence.

In their human incarnation they had assumed different characteristics, though complementary to one another. But in order to constitute a force greater than the evil confronting them and humanity, they must be kept united, continuously reminded of their mission. This was done by Draupadi. They were conscious of the extraordinary nature of Draupadi and they owed an unbroken allegiance to her, born out of a spontaneous faith. She used this allegiance to fulfil her mission. At the end of their exile when the Pandavas decide to send Krishna as their emissary to the Kauravas, Yudhishthira, Bhīma and Arjuna are all prepared for a compromise. But when Krishna meets Draupadi, her decisive

words are “Damn Arjuna’s archery and Bhima’s strength, O Krishna, how do they forget that Duryodhana is still alive?”

Duryodhana had been vulgar enough to offer his thigh to Draupadi and Bhima had taken a vow to smash the sinner’s thigh. Draupadi was to dip her hair in Duhshasana’s blood, for he had tried to disrobe her. While time seemed to have softened the Pandava brothers, it had only strengthened Draupadi’s anguish. Her humiliation had not ended with her experiencing the barbaric behaviour of the Kauravas. She had to meet with Jayadratha’s impudence while in the forest, worse still, she had to deal with Kichaka, the tyrant in Virata’s palace. It is as if Providence saw to it that she did not defeat the very purpose of her emergence by developing any mercy for the evil. Her continued anguish was the element that moulded the wills of the five heroes into a single determination. With that alone they could fulfil their mandate.

What would have happened if the Pandavas had reconciled themselves to their fate? That would have meant their compromising with falsehood, their own fall from their *Swadharma*—the innermost law of their being—and depriving humanity of any hope for the triumph of the just, a hope that has, through the ages, helped sustain men’s enthusiasm for taking to the path of the truth as they knew it.

The Mahabharata war gathered all the Indian kings on one single field, either as friends or as foes. It put on record the territories that constituted India, after the travels of the Pandavas through many a land had already given an idea of the concept of the nation. The war also destroyed most of the potentates who had turned greedy tyrants, ushering in a new climate of freedom.

In her role as an uncommon wife, Draupadi followed an uncommon discipline. Did the discipline require her to be equally passionate and indulgent towards all the five husbands? Not so, for she was above passion and indulgence. In her answer to a question from Satyabhama whether it was through certain rituals or hymns or magic potions that she pleased her husbands, her reply was, such methods were adopted by ordinary women with dubious motives. Her secret was her conquest of lust and egotism. This is the clue to her character.

There are *Dharmas* and *Dharmas*—different codes of conduct for beings of different levels of consciousness. As long as one is a creature of physical lust or of passionate love at the best, it is imperative that one follows a certain moral rule. This helps one to exercise control over one’s ordinarily unruly impulses, a control indispensable for one’s inner growth. But this is not the highest *Dharma* for all. There are beings too evolved for this or beings who do not belong to the evolutionary process at all. Draupadi falls in the latter rare category. Draupadi was a divine instrument for accomplishing a formidable task. That is why she had a special relationship with Krishna. She was his *Sakhi*, his intimate friend.

Draupadi is exemplary for her wit, her sense of courtesy and her dignity. When she is summoned to the court by Duryodhana after Yudhishthira has

forfeited her in a game of dice, she demands to know if Yudhishthira pledged her before losing himself or after. If after, he had no right to pledge her. Her question remained unanswered. She is so courteous that at a moment's respite during Duhshasana's outrageous behaviour, she apologises to the elders for not having greeted them as soon as she entered the court. Her sense of dignity becomes evident when a nervous Dhritarastra, warned of the doom hanging over his dynasty because of Duryodhana's sins, offers her boon after boon, but she politely refuses them after obtaining the release of Yudhishthira and the other Pandavas.

It is an insult to Draupadi and the monarch of poets, Vyasa, to believe that she burst into a peal of laughter and commented that the son of a blind man was blind, when Duryodhana, while surveying the magical castle of the Pandavas at Indraprastha, mistook a pool to be a decorated floor and fell into it. Vyasa's Draupadi cannot and does not do anything like that. The part of the epic recounting this incident is evidently an interpolation—one of many that accumulated in the course of centuries.

Draupadi's is perhaps the most daring portrayal of a female character in the literature of the world. It is a tribute to the women of India that they adore her more through their intuitive perception of the character than through a rational evaluation of it.

### Bhishma's Action and Inaction

Vyasa's Bhishma is not the excited, restless character we see in different plays. He is a *Vasu*, a demigod, who is only temporarily on earth and who is much less attached to his earthly obligations than generally imagined. Bhishma is one of the few (the others were Rishis) who knew clearly who Krishna was. That is why he proposed Krishna to be given the prime seat of honour at Yudhishthira's Rajasuya Yajna. Why then did he side with the Kauravas? The answer, as those who have studied his character have pointed out, is, it is precisely because he knew who Krishna was! He knew that with Krishna on the side of the Pandavas, it mattered little even if a hundred Bhishmas were in the other camp!

The same does not apply to the other elders. Their silence over Draupadi's humiliation can be best explained by the observation: "It is impossible that a gold deer should ever be possible. Yet Rama runs after it. The fact is, at the approach of a moment of crisis, the genius of people gets dim!"

The characters of the Mahabharata or the Ramayana must be seen as Vyasa or Valmiki portrays them—in the context of the epic, not in isolation. We should not focus on any one aspect of an epic character and presume to interpret him or her.

The Mahabharata, as we find it, eight times greater than Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together, is a much enlarged version of the original text. But the



enlargement, being brought about by the addition of significant stories—epitomes of the spiritual and mundane experiences of the early twilight of an awakened civilisation, dialogues of philosophical import, etc —has been absorbed by the powerful basic plot. Over the centuries such stories—for example those of Dushyanta and Shakuntala, Nala and Damayanti, Savitri and Satyavan —have inspired great works of poetry and drama. The dynamism inherent in such stories is demonstrated in our own time by Sri Aurobindo handling the theme of Savitri and Satyavan and transforming the legend into a most profound symbol in his epic, *Savitri*.

Some of the dialogues in the Mahabharata are as psychologically sound today as they were at any time in the past. Take for example the series of questions put by Yaksha to Yudhishthira: “What is it by giving up which one endears oneself to all?” The answer is “Pride”. “What is it by shedding which one remains rich?” The answer is “Desire”. “What is the most surprising thing in the world?” The answer is, “Every moment people around us are dying. Yet those alive behave as if they were immortals.”

The greatest single contribution of the Mahabharata, of course, is the Gita, the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. But that is a subject apart.

MANOJ DAS

(By courtesy of *The Sunday Indian Express*, 31 December '89, in which this article, which is now slightly revised, was originally published as the cover story.)

# SRI AUROBINDO AND SRI KRISHNA

## A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

I WAS about 12 years old at that time I came across a book of stories of Child Krishna—*Gopalan Bala Leelaigal*—stories retold from the Bhagavata in Tamil for children (I did not know at that time that its author was the renowned Vaishnavite Tamil scholar Pī Śrī.)

From that time Krishna occupied a happy niche in my heart. He was not yet for me Lord Krishna Vasudeva who is All Even though in the book he was referred to, here and there, as the Supreme Being, this idea didn't register in my mind. He became that long afterwards when I read the Gīta; at the beginning he was just Krishna, Govinda Gopala, the Boy Cowherd.

Even after reading the Gīta and recognising in him the Supreme Lord, Purushottama, I never prayed to him, never asked anything from him, did not even meditate on him. (Perhaps because our people at home worshipped some other 'avatar' ) But I read avidly any stories of him, especially stories told by later-day devotees, bhaktas. Thus my bhakti for Krishna grew. (When I use the word "bhakti" it should be well understood that I don't count myself among the hordes of Krishna-bhaktas ancient and modern I use that word because I don't have any other that would exactly describe my attitude.)

From 1942-1944 I read Śrī Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and also Swami Sivananda's books and some other books on yoga. I wanted to join the Ramakrishna Muth at Madras, went to Sivanandashram at Rīshikesh to become a sannyasi—but that is a different story

Then in 1944 I was put in contact with Śrī Aurobindo and the Mother. The moment I read the Mother's *Conversations* and Śrī Aurobindo's *Yoga and its Objects*—the first books by them that I came across—I felt sure within myself that theirs was the path for me and Śrī Aurobindo and the Mother were He and She.

And when I came to live in the Ashram I heard stories of how a prominent sadhak and an equally prominent sadhika left the path of this yoga because even after accepting Śrī Aurobindo they could not give up Krishna or because they thought Krishna equal to Śrī Aurobindo or even greater than he. I was sure neither Śrī Aurobindo nor the Mother could have made their stay difficult. All the same, I tried to forget Krishna In spite of Śrī Aurobindo's assurance to a disciple that he needn't torment himself about his turning towards Krishna, that to give himself to Krishna was to give himself to him (Śrī Aurobindo), that Śrī Krishna was in the Ashram and that it was his work that was being done in the Ashram and that there were innumerable references by him to Śrī Krishna as being identical with the Divine, I had a nagging feeling, a sort of guilt consciousness, that I was straying away from the path and was not faithful to Śrī

Aurobindo and the Mother whenever I had feelings of bhakti for Krishna. I sought the help of some yoga-wise seniors in the Ashram. Being wise they gave me wise counsel, of course, but my dilemma of “Krishna or No Krishna” continued, sometimes coming to the front, at other times remaining in the background

A few months ago I bought a cassette of “Krishnanjali” by Pithu Kuli Murugados. The songs thrilled me, aroused in me a surge of bhakti for Krishna. Some time earlier I saw a picture of Bala Gopala at a friend’s place; I liked it very much and I said so to my friend. In a few days he got a replica made for me. These two things kindled my bhakti for Krishna and along with it brought the guilt consciousness as well.

As things were like this, a few days back—on the night of 5 March, to be exact—I saw Sri Aurobindo in a dream. He was standing in front of me and I was feasting my eyes on him. Then he drew my attention to a large mirror standing by his side and said, “Look!” I looked and there saw the reflection of Krishna with his luminous blue face beaming with a smile. Actually rays of light were coming from his whole head and face. I thought I saw even a streak of mischievousness in his smile. I looked back and there was Sri Aurobindo, to be sure. Again I looked at the mirror and again I saw Sri Krishna. Overwhelmed I fell at the feet of Sri Aurobindo, gratitude and bhakti welling up from my whole being—and I woke up in great joy, and wrote down the dream in the night itself.

S. MAHALINGAM

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

(Continued from the issue of June 1990)

THOUGH knowledge, works, and devotion are repeatedly spoken of by the Gita, there is a constant shift in the emphasis. Therefore it is very difficult to determine which of the three is favoured. Though many attempts were made to settle this question in favour of one of the three, it is Sri Aurobindo who has opened our eyes to the fact that the Gita's insistence is equally on all the three. Its intention is to synthesise knowledge, works and devotion. A constant shift in emphasis is the Gita's way of bringing out their complementary aspects and arriving at a final synthesis of the three ways. Without going deeply into the question, let us confine ourselves to one important point. Though the Gita does not explicitly state anywhere that knowledge, works and devotion must be turned into a triple means of reaching the Divine, its real intention comes to the surface when we notice the way in which it throws its emphasis on them. We may choose a striking example in order to bring home this point. In the closing verse of the eleventh chapter the Gita says: "Be a doer of My works, accept Me as the supreme being and object, become My bhakta, be free from attachment and without enmity to all existences; for such a man comes to Me, O Pāndava" (55). Here all the three ways of yoga are mentioned, each closely on the heels of the other, as the combined means of dissolving the ego from which arise attachment and hostility towards other living beings in the world and by which man is separated from God. By insisting on all the three ways simultaneously the Gita clearly indicates that they should be combined as inseparable aspects of an integral yoga the object of which is to become one with the great Lord in his entirety, *samagram mām*. This is the Gita's Yoga, the supreme Yoga, *yogam aiśvaram*.

By itself each of the three paths is capable of producing an independent result. But it is bound to be exclusive because it concentrates on one aspect of our being. If the aim is to possess the Divine in all ways of our being, *sarva-bhāvena* (15-19) none of them is self-sufficient. Unless they are combined into a harmonious system, it is difficult to arrive at an integral union with God. This explains why the Gita is interested in developing a comprehensive method out of the essential elements of the traditional systems of yoga.

### 5. The Secret of Secrets

What does the word *secret* signify? The Gita itself gives the answer when it says that the essence of secret things is silence (10-38). A thing is referred to as a secret when its truth remains unspoken. In other words, a secret is a hidden truth

which has not come to light. It is in this context that we have to understand the various expressions which the Gita uses to denote its teaching as a secret.

In the Upanishads the teaching about Brahman is generally referred to as a secret. The word *upanisat* itself stands for a secret teaching, as in the Taittiriya Upanishad. In some Upanishads the word *guhya* is also used. A glance at the Upanishads is enough to show that the Gita has adopted their familiar style, while describing its teaching as a secret.

In principle any spiritual teaching is a secret, because its truth is not on the surface for men to see or seize upon. In this sense any spiritual teaching is a hidden truth. Whenever the Gita refers to its teaching as a secret, it invariably uses a superlative expression such as *uttamam* or *paramam* or its equivalent. Its obvious intention is to emphasise that what it gives is not a teaching among other teachings, a truth among other truths, but something very unique which supersedes all other teachings and truths that are already in the conscious possession of humanity, *rājavidyā* (9-2).

To express a unique idea in the familiar idioms of metaphysics is a contradiction and a risk: it is a contradiction, because an original idea is to be presented through a language which deals with conventional ideas; it is a risk, because the uniqueness of this idea is likely to be lost in the confusions created by the conventional usage of words. In fact, the Gita is concerned to find a way out of this difficulty when it seeks to give verbal form to its original ideas. One of the methods it employs to surmount this linguistic difficulty is to use superlative adjectives at appropriate places. These superlatives, when rightly taken, serve as significant pointers to the real message of the Gita.

One of the aims of the Gita is to bring out the unique significance of the supreme Purusha in at least five important ways: in the Veda and in the vedānta as the Purusha in a triple aspect, *ato'smi .vede .purusottamah*; in active existence as the divine Nature of the Lord, *parā prakṛti*; in spirit as the Unborn who is seated in the heart of all and enjoys embodied existence in the world, *aham hr̥di sannivistah*; and in spiritual seeking as the Supreme who is sought in all ways of being, *sarvabhāvena*. But in this process the teaching of the Gita must be distinguished from other teachings that have gained currency in these areas, *jñānānām jñānamuttamam* (14-1), for otherwise it is likely to be treated as a species of the conventional knowledge.

If the Gita's interpretation of sacrifice gives us the true knowledge of the Veda and establishes that the all-pervading Brahman, the supreme Brahman extended in the cosmos and beyond the cosmos, is the true object of worship and sacrifice, then we are obliged to set aside the teaching of the Vedavadins. They teach that the gods are the highest object of worship and sacrifice and bestow upon man the benefits of the physical and supraphysical worlds—prosperity here and heavenly joy hereafter. On the contrary, if the all-pervading Brahman is worshipped with sacrifice, man reaches the highest in this very life, the supreme

spiritual status and freedom, *samsiddhim*. Since the Vedavadins are preoccupied with the gods and the benefits they get from them, they were unable to discover the One who is greater than all the gods, *tadekam devānām śreṣṭham*.

(To be continued)

N. JAYASHANMUKHAM

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### “WHO AM I?”

DEEP down within you  
 In the kernel of your body  
 Dwells dormant the dynamic  
 Motive power that moulded this universe.  
 That centre-core of your being  
 Contains the genesis of all existence.

Beneath the sparkle and glitter of your mind  
 Lies the eternal smouldering spark  
 Buried under the ashes of eons

Behind the throbbing thud-thud of your heart  
 Beats the eternal echo of the Infinite  
 Still your mind, empty out your thoughts.  
 Sip and siphon the Spirit's sweet nectar.

Plumb your depths,  
 Dive down for the soul-pearl  
 Embedded in the body's oyster shell  
 Lying amidst the stagnant morass  
 In the belly of the Self-ocean  
 And make it the touchstone of your life.

The key to the eternal conundrum,  
 The solution to the age-old riddle—  
 “Who is God? Where is God? What is God?”—  
 Lies in finding the answer  
 Within yourself,  
 By yourself  
 To the simple question  
 “Who am I?”

VIREN

## MOOT COURT HEARING ON SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OR EDWARD DE VERE?

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

*(Continued from the issue of June 1990)*

JUSTICE—Before you leave the first folio, would you comment on the fact that no one thought it worthwhile to save the manuscripts? Surely they must have been available when the first folio was printed?

BOYLE—Yes, I would, Justice Stevens. I think, and this is a theme which will reappear again and again throughout this case, that we have here a non-historical assumption. We now believe that anything which has been touched by the famous is somehow of great value, I have no doubt that the nameplates which you have in front of you now will be taken away by some souvenir hunter. In the Elizabethan period, that was not the case. We have clear references of other manuscripts such as those of Francis Bacon who was at the time much more famous than William Shakespeare, simply being discarded. People thought that they were of no use and it is simply a different assumption that we have today and we should not apply our assumption that ..

JUSTICE—But the people who were putting the first folio together must have seen some use for these papers

BOYLE—I think they used them in order to create the work and then once it was created they were discarded either by the printer or the people themselves. As I said, there is no record whatsoever of any manuscript surviving the traumatic action of going into a printer's workshop. This, I would suggest, indicates there was a general practice of simply discarding the manuscripts much in the same way as we discard the prior word-processor drafts which accumulate

JUSTICE—Then what was used for the second folio?

BOYLE—I think that the second folio was based in part on the first folio and that other corrupt or non-corrupt versions of the play were quarried for some of the missing parts, speeches which had been originally omitted. It is possible again that some of the manuscripts survived, but the more often that the manuscript returns to the printer the more often it is that it will be discarded

JUSTICE—Are the collected works of Shakespeare still undergoing revisions?

BOYLE—They are still undergoing minimal revisions. There are claims that new plays have been discovered and of course one of the planks of my argument is that we have discovered in this century the manuscript of a play which was written by a number of people, *The Booke of Sir Thomas More* and that one of the handwritings within the manuscript of that play are in fact William Shakespeare's, my client's. There is a great deal of debate on this issue on the so-called hand 'D' which was discovered in this play, *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*. There is a great deal of debate about whether it is or not my client's. However, there are a number of reasons for us to believe that it was. First, it appears to be in the same handwriting as the man from Stratford who signed the will. The "A"...

JUSTICE—That conclusion is based on one letter in the tenth line of a long page, is it not?

BOYLE—I believe that apart from the one letter, there are also other similarities of writing. Admittedly the spurred "A" does not occur often in the manuscript. To be honest, I couldn't tell you whether it occurs once or twice, but nevertheless, that together with the strange spelling, "silence" spelled s-c-i-l-e-n-s...

JUSTICE—But again, the spelling is just the same as that used in one of the plays and that would just prove that whoever wrote the plays also wrote hand 'D'.

BOYLE—Well, there I think we have a strong argument for my client because there's one thing an aristocrat like Edward de Vere would not have done. It is to be a paste-up artist who was trying to knock off a small segment of an already completed play. That I would submit is an entirely unreasonable assumption. Therefore, if somebody wrote that segment, I would submit that it would have to have been my client.

JUSTICE—As to the handwriting in the More documents, when I went to grammar school they taught us what was called the Palmer method, and in Elizabethan times at least, I'm told, that handwriting was a so-called secretary or Italian. Is that it, something like that?

BOYLE—The handwriting used in the Elizabethan period was generally the secretary hand. It changed after some time to the Italianic which we today refer to as the Italic. The change came either during or after Shakespeare's life. He himself used the secretary hand.

JUSTICE—I must say I tried to decipher it and I couldn't.

BOYLE—Neither could I, Justice Brennan. I think that here, if I may insert this parenthetically, we have a source of this debate. We have the reason that people start to wonder whether or not Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare. You look at these signatures and they look bizarre. They seem strange, they have little pot hooks attached to them, they look crabbed and cramped, and you think this could not be the handwriting of the immortal bard.

JUSTICE—Do we have any specimens of Oxford's handwriting?

BOYLE—Yes, I believe we have a number of



JUSTICE—And are they in the same form?

BOYLE—They are. Oxford tended, I believe, more towards the Italianic handwriting which would be much more decipherable to our present eyes. But the point I would make is: Why would someone doubt that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare? I submit that one of the origins of the doubts is that people look at these signatures and say, “This is bad handwriting.” What they don’t understand is that it’s handwriting within a different system. One might as well look at a secretary’s shorthand and say this is bad handwriting. It’s simply a different system of writing, and non-historical assumptions about how good it is tells us nothing about who wrote the plays.

JUSTICE—Plus I suppose there are people with bad handwriting who can compose intelligent English paragraphs.

BOYLE—I would certainly hope so, Justice Stevens. Since my own has been compared to the work of a four-year-old, I could only say, that that is my earnest belief.

If I may continue, apart from *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*, there is another piece of outstanding evidence: the scurrilous pamphlet written by Robert Greene which goes under the title, *Greene’s Groatworth of Witte: Bought with a Million of Repentance*. There is a great deal of debate about this pamphlet also. There’s debate about who wrote it; there’s debate about whether it was written by Greene or Chantle, but these things I think need not concern us. The question is, what does the pamphlet say? And it says one thing I think quite clearly. The pamphlet is addressed to a number of writers, presumably Marlowe and Decker, among others. And it tells the writers to beware of actors—‘Puppets that spoke from our mouths.’ It tells the writers that they in particular should fear ‘one upstart crow who glorified in the plumage that they have provided, thinks himself as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the rest of you.’ An actor who can trot out a line of beliefs, he can write a play as well as the other playwrights. This person is identified as my client quite clearly by two references. The first is Greene saying, ‘And he is in his own conceit the only shake scene in the country.’ This, I would claim, is the same kind of usage as Jonson’s earlier ‘to hear thy buskin tread and shake scene’ and the term ‘shake scene’ obviously seems to me a play on Shakespeare’s name. The second one is a quote from *King Henry VI*, by William Shakespeare whoever he may be, which is a ‘tiger’s heart wrapped in a woman’s hide.’ In Greene’s pamphlet it appears as a tiger’s heart wrapped in a player’s hide, that is an actor’s. In other words, Greene is telling us that the playwright is the actor. The two are one and the same, and he is attacking him. And I would claim that here hostile testimony is the best testimony. Greene was attacking Shakespeare; was trying to bring him down. If he had anything to throw at him he would have done so, and yet he identified the actor as the playwright, and this I would claim is very strong evidence on the part of my client since it identifies the actor and the playwright as one and the same.

JUSTICE—Yes, but it doesn't really deny the possibility that he just didn't realize that the actor's name was being used as a pseudonym.

BOYLE—I think that although that is possible, it is very unlikely, and it is very unlikely because Greene was embroiled in exactly the same world as William Shakespeare, the actor. Now, if we assume for a moment that Edward de Vere wrote the works under a pseudonym, and used Shakespeare as his front man, why would he use Shakespeare as a front man? The man who appears from my learned friend's account is an illiterate, rustic bumpkin.

JUSTICE—Let's put aside the bumpkin's characteristic, and assume that he was a reasonably intelligent, educated person, but yet not as talented as the author of these plays.

BOYLE—In that case, I would be assuming what, I think, would undercut much of my learned friend's case, but if I do assume that, Justice Stevens, I would find that Greene would still have known Shakespeare was not the author if in fact he was not. He would have known because he would have been privy to the inside gossip of the professional playwrights who after all engage in every stage of revision of their plays, who had to be present at all the rehearsals talking about what the lines meant, what could be cut and what couldn't be cut. Could Shakespeare carry this off? No! He would not be able to carry this off if he was not the author; therefore, the company would know and, if the company knew, I would claim it's reasonable to assume Greene would know. I have claimed that there is sufficient evidence: hand 'D' in *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*, the first folio itself and Greene's gross works of wit to identify my client, William Shakespeare, as being the actor and the playwright.

(To be continued)

## “SATYAVAN MUST DIE”

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

(Continued from the issue of June 1990)

### 2. A Parable

SATYAVAN'S death is an inexorable edict and there is nothing that can alter or counter that fate. It has to happen and even the high gods are helpless in the proceedings that are to follow. Very probably, he may later on get resuscitated but now there is no power that can prevent the failing of his breath at the predetermined moment; he must first die. If there is some mysterious occult necessity that has arisen in the scheme of a higher reckoning, then it can be worked out only through this process: the only escape is through the door of death. The Creator-Father Brahma himself has pre-ordained the event and Yama is simply following the Law whose guardian he is. The time, the place, the fatal stroke, all have already been seen and fixed: no will can question that Free-Will of the supernally Wise. It will be in time that the God of Love shall intervene and Savitri lose her heart to Satyavan; one year after this the two shall arrive under a green and gorgeous tree, for even the spot is chosen; soon Satyavan shall wield a happy joyous axe and the "hounds of pain" shall chase him and throw him in his beloved's lap, sunken and dead. Yama is without guilt in executing what he has been ordered to do. Does this event form part of a larger whole in which each line on the leaf, each cry of the bird, each turn of the hastening stream, puff of the wind, everything from the crawl of an ant to the contracting and expanding breath of the cosmos, all have already been arranged long ago in full detail and with the utter inexorability of a monopolist's dictum? Then there is no human choice and Time is a well-oiled machinery unrolling these pre-designed events and even what we call Chance is simply the working out of the several conflicting forces in this helpless mortal's world. Prārabhda, daiva, or karma is supreme and the soul submits itself to it meekly. It is as though it has a kind of conviction that everything is well-meant and is organised by the great and benevolent cosmic powers for its good, even the calamity in front of which death is simply a small or minor occurrence. Not fatalism but faith is the secret foundation of this resignation. The soul accepts to go 'neath the "layers of determinism" that seem to govern its fate. The order of the worlds must run and maybe there is some ultimate Good towards which all this travail is unknowingly or unconsciously speeding for its fulfilment.

In the extreme view of fatalism, all will have to be considered deterministically as pre-ordained in eternal space and time; in *Savitri*, however, there is the element of a creative supernaturalism operating in the complex dynamics of

the evolutionary process. Although Satyavan's death cannot be abrogated or bypassed, the destiny connected with it can be remoulded in terms of the transcendent realism through the action of the supreme Force that is Savitri here. For this to happen, she must do the Shakti-Yoga in the mortal world and harbour the great Might in her soul. In that sense her nullifying the "destined" death would, in the last analysis, prove that destiny is not completely irrevocable. Soul-Force acting in the full Truth-Consciousness is the real determinative factor in all the happenings.

Talking of the physical determinism, events that take place in a sort of routine mechanical manner on our material plane, the Mother gives an example of a young French military officer who got killed by an "accident". She narrates: "During the First War I knew a boy who had been told he would die of a shot (you know in war one dies easily), and he had even been given an approximate date. And that caused him such agony that he had succeeded in getting a long leave. He came to Paris on leave. He was an officer and had his pistol in his pocket. He jumped from a tram and fell down, the pistol went off and he was killed on the spot. He could not escape."<sup>1</sup> The Mother narrates another story, of an Arab, who was told that he would die in another two hours. He went to his master and asked for the fastest horse to run away from the place. But alas! Death was waiting for him, wondering how he would come in time, at the appointed place where he thought he had escaped from it.

King Parikshit died as a result of the curse of a Brahmin's son. Another layer of determinism came into prominence in this death. Even while he was in the womb of his mother Uttara, daughter-in-law of Arjuna and Draupadi, he saw an effulgent Being, no bigger than the size of a thumb, protecting him there. Ashwatthama's missile thrown to exterminate the entire race of the Pandavas had become ineffective. When the learned priests were asked at the birth of the grandchild, Yudhishtira was told that Parikshit would perform several Ashwamedhas, the horse-sacrifices proclaiming his suzerainty over distant lands and countries. Not only that; it was foretold that he would subdue Kali in the interest and welfare of Mother Earth. Finally, the priests indicated that he would, under the imprecation of a Brahmin body, die of being bitten by Takshaka, the king of the snakes. The horoscope was cast and the future was seen in all its clarity like the image of the lotus in a tranquil crystal pool.

Once the King went out on a hunting expedition to a forest and after a day's tiring pursuit felt very thirsty. Not being able to trace water anywhere to drink, he entered the hermitage of the famous Rishi Shamika who was deeply engrossed in meditation. The King asked for water and, finding that there was no response, flew into an uncontrollable rage. In that angry mood he put a dead serpent around the neck of the sage and left the hermitage for his capital. Having come to know of this indignity meted to his father, the sage's son Shringa hurled a thunderbolt in the form of harsh imprecating words. The King for the

impropriety of his conduct was, under this curse, to die on the seventh day of the incident. It was ordained that Takshaka would bite him and he would be reduced to ashes by the fire of that poison.

Though the curse was from a child of “unripe wisdom”, as his father addressed him later on, it had its full effect. The King took the utterance seriously and began observing a fast for the whole week. During this period the great sage Shuka, the Preceptor of the Yogis, narrated to him the glories of the Lord in the Song of Devotion, the Bhagavata. The King was now free from any fear of death. On the appointed day, Takshaka started moving towards the palace of the King when he met on the way a Brahmin named Kashyapa. As this Brahmin knew how to counter the effect of a snake-bite, Takshaka gratified him with some money and sent him home making sure that he would not heal the King. Then, himself assuming the form of a Brahmin, he went to the palace and accomplished his task by biting the King.

Not the *obiter dictum* of a thoughtless boy but a subtle-fine dimension of the supernatural is what we see in the Indian parable of the death of a bird. Several shades of the workings of Destiny emerge imperceptibly with a sort of haunting kindness in the inexorability of the Law, a secret acceptable harmony seems to sustain the worlds in their ceaseless movements; there is a joyous benignity because of which mortal creatures survive even in death.

Long ago, in the mythological age, once Vishnu went to Kailash to offer his respects to Shiva. Garuda, the divine Eagle, was waiting at the temple-gate for his Master to return after the worship of the Lord-of-the-Mountain. In the meantime Yama, the Deity of Destiny and Death, also happened to visit Kailash for the same purpose. But, while he was entering the temple, his eye fell on a little bird picking up insects and merrily chirping in the courtyard. Garuda was alert to notice it and immediately a thought crossed his mind that it was now the end of the little creature, though it was in the Lord’s temple where there is always protection. The question that troubled him was whether he should try to save it somehow. Finally, he decided not to be a passive witness to the tragedy but do something before his Master’s return from the temple. He lifted the bird on his wings and flew swiftly far to the South and left it in the Dandaka forests. Garuda accomplished his task and returned to Kailash when he saw Yama coming out of the temple much earlier than Vishnu. He then, emboldening himself, enquired of Yama why he had cast his glance at the bird rather pensively before entering the temple. Yama had actually forgotten all about it, but Garuda’s query reminded him of the little creature who was to die in a few minutes on being swallowed by a mighty python in the far Dandaka. Indeed, Yama was wondering how this was going to happen in such a short time, the forest being totally out of the flying reach of the doomed bird. But he was confident that surely it must have somehow taken place, for it was time for the little bird to die and take a new birth. Destiny had arranged everything to the last

minutest detail for the bird's death at the appointed time and place. The rendezvous with death is superexact in planning and execution.

Garuda was now in consternation, he had a guilty wonder whether he had not led to the killing of the bird. Did he do the right thing in picking it up and transporting it to the forest where coiled-up death was waiting for it? Was he not instrumental in bringing about the tragic end to it? And, then, were not the visits of Yama and Vishnu a planned coincidence in the little drama of life? Does Destiny arrange events so impeccably as if their interlocking is a pointer towards the utmost regularity and order upholding the world? Are such high powers involved even in this small death? Or was the new birth really the prime impelling force behind that death—the new birth the gift of the Lord-of-the-Mountain? Was death's cause at Kailash the way to immortality? Is not Garuda after all just a simple vehicle for his Master's journey, in service ever at his bidding and command?

*(To be continued)*

R. Y. DESHPANDE

#### REFERENCE

- 1 The Mother, *Questions and Answers*, 10 March, 1954, p 49

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of May 1990)*

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa generated a powerful current of fresh life in Hindu Society. He was not concerned with caste or creed, with empty ceremonies or shallow rituals. He was the apostle of divine realisation, one of those rare souls who appear from time to time and create a spiritual revolution.

Ramakrishna was not attracted by his contemporaries, but the young people of that time, who had lost their faith in the traditional Hindu culture and were groping in the midst of darkness and cynicism were attracted towards Sri Ramakrishna. Most of them were products of English Education. The greatest disciple of Ramakrishna was a young Bengali graduate named Narendranath Datta, who as Swami Vivekananda was destined to carry the message of his Master all over India, Europe and America. About him Sri Aurobindo says, "Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India, and we say, 'Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the soul of her children.' So it is with all. Not only are the men greater than their definite works, but their influence is so wide and formless that it has little relation to any formal work that they have left behind them."<sup>1</sup>

Narendra was born on January 12, 1863, in a Kayastha family in Calcutta. He got an English education in school and college. He was first attracted to the Brahma Samaj and then read deeply the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, Hume and Herbert Spencer, but he found no peace, his soul craved for something more. Towards the end of 1881, when he appeared for the Intermediate Arts Examination of Calcutta University he was persuaded by a relative to visit Ramakrishna at Dakshinesvar. The latter drew him aside and said with tears in his eyes, "Ah, you have come so late? You are the incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind." Narendra was taken aback and doubted the sanity of the saint. But he put the questions that had been agitating him for some time: "Sir, have you seen God?" "Yes," was the instant reply. "I see him just as I see you, only much more intensely. God can be realised. One can see and talk with Him as I am doing with you." After the interview Narendra summed up his estimation of the Master thus. "Even if insane, this man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint, and for that alone he deserves the reverent homage of mankind."

The second meeting was more interesting. Ramakrishna affectionately sat

with Vivekananda and suddenly placed his right foot on the latter's body. Narendra described the subsequent experience thus: "With my eyes open, I saw walls and everything in the room whirling rapidly away and vanishing into naught and the whole universe, together with my individuality, was about to be engulfed in an all-embracing mysterious void." Unable to bear this, he cried out, "What is it that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home." The Master laughed out aloud, drew away his foot and said, "All right, be at rest now."

Variouly the mind of Vivekananda turned towards Ramakrishna. From one instance we may notice how it leaned gradually towards the Monistic Vedanta. One day, some time in 1884, the talk drifted to the Vaishnava tenets. In the course of it the Master said, "This religion teaches its followers the practice of three things—delight in the name of God, compassion for all living creatures, and service to the devotees of Vishnu." Hardly had he finished when he fell into a trance. Then in a semi-conscious mood he said to himself: "Compassion, thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on the earth,—thou to show compassion to others? Who art thou to show compassion? No No, it is not compassion for others, but rather service to man, recognising him as a manifestation of God." All heard this but Narendra understood its implication. He has said: "What a strange light I have discovered in those wonderful words of the Master. How beautifully he has reconciled the ideal of Bhakti [devotion] with the knowledge of Vedanta [Monism]! I have understood from these words of wisdom that the ideal of Vedanta lived by the recluse can be practised at home and applied to all our daily concerns."

Sri Aurobindo has mentioned one quotation from a letter of Swami Vivekananda's, as giving the gist of his experience. "I have lost all wish for my salvation. May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls,—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and the low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols."<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo comments "The last two sentences contain indeed the whole gist of the matter. The true salvation or the true freedom from the chain of rebirth is not the rejection of terrestrial life or the individual's escape by a spiritual self-annihilation, even as the true renunciation is not the mere physical abandonment of family and society; it is the inner identification with the Divine in whom there is no limitation of past life and future birth but instead the eternal existence of the unborn Soul."<sup>3</sup>

Sri Aurobindo cites the sublime verse of the Bhagavata Purana: "I desire



not the supreme state with all its eight siddhis nor the cessation of rebirth, may I assume the sorrow of all creatures who suffer and enter into them so that they may be made free from grief.”<sup>4</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

REFERENCES

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- 2 *Ibid* , Vol 20, pp 257, 258
- 3 *Ibid* , Vol 17, p 258
- 4 *Ibid* , p 257 -

## CALCUTTA'S TRICENTENARY

WE know that India is a very vast and ancient country, many of its towns and cities are very old. Cuttack has completed its thousandth year of existence. Pataliputra (Patna), Tamralipta (Tamluk) and Varanasi (Benares) are notably ancient. Bombay and Madras have recently passed three hundred years of their existence after British settlements. Many more towns of earlier origin are there in India whose citizens have not remembered their past, at least none have celebrated their town's birth in a very enthusiastic way. And in a vast country like ours many burning problems are there to engage our attention. Why then are the Calcuttans celebrating their city's past on such a grand scale? Why is it patronised by the State and the Central Government?

Calcutta will complete its three hundred years of existence on 24th August 1990, a day when three hundred years ago Job Charnock finally decided to settle at Chuttanuttee, a village and market place, which later developed along with other villages as the Calcutta city. It is at Calcutta that the British merchants settled and spread their wares. As the foreigners settled, its inhabitants woke up with a jerk from their long slumber. In the course of time, under the influence of the incoming Western civilisation, Science and Education, in collision and cohesion with the traditional culture, there came the renaissance in Bengal through Calcutta and it spread throughout India. It was at Calcutta that the imperialists established their headquarters and it was that city again that took the lead and endeavoured with all its might to arrange a Go-back of the British. The city is still vibrating with reminiscences of many historical events and incidents, vibrating with the bygone emotions of oppressions, awakening, rejuvenation and new-creation. It is worth discussing the city's past. Its importance will reveal itself more and more as we proceed. Calcutta will speak for itself.

Before discussing the history of Calcutta we feel inclined to go through some aspects of her Geology and pre-historic past. Geologists have named the whole of Bengal, Calcutta in particular, Bengal Basin. Formation of its soil goes back to fourteen to six crore years. The lime stone formation at a layer of fifteen thousand feet is as old as five crore years. During 1901-02 while digging for a building at the Dalhousie Square area of Calcutta a big sea-oyster was found at a depth of five to six feet which was identified by the archaeologist of the British Museum as 'Ostrea Gryphoids Schloth'. Its antiquity was from 260 to 60 lakh years. Geologists have concluded that crores of years ago the whole of Bengal was sunk through a natural process under the sea. At a depth of 60 to 340 feet skeletons of animals, fossilized bones and fossils of trees and at lesser depths pits were discovered. At one time the whole of Calcutta was part of the Sunderban jungles. It was very swampy and damp through continuous rains. Among the tree-fossils some present day species were discovered. Some wild paddy and some sort of cultivated paddy was also found. According to Radio

Carbon dating these remains were some five thousand years old. Among other finds of later years gold coins and an image of Vishnu of the Gupta dynasty were found

To come to modern history—"The Governor and company of merchants of London Trading into the East Indies" or in brief, the East India Company got its charter from the Queen Elizabeth in 1600 A D. to do business in India. They opened their centres called factories in Surat, Madras and Balasore. Later their attention was drawn towards Bengal with its various resources and avenues for better business. India's Badshah at that time was Shahjahan and his second son Muhammad Sujah was the Subedar of Bengal. A doctor Bowton of the Company pleased both the Lords by his professional quality and in return the Company was allowed to do business in Bengal free of taxes. That was the year 1653. Later came Sahesta Khan as the Governor of Bengal. He and his deputies started to exact as much money as possible from the Britishers by different means. The Company was variously disturbed. They thought of a 'Fortified Settlement'.

Job Charnock came to this country in 1656 with a job carrying a yearly remuneration of twenty pounds in the Company's Cossimbazar factory. After many a vicissitude he became the Agent of the East India Company on 17 April 1686. By this time the British had their relations sufficiently embroiled with the Moghuls, and the authorities of the company in London decided to keep some soldiers and ammunition with the Agent Job Charnock was the first Agent to be provided with soldiers Through his long experience he decided to settle the issue with the Moghuls by muscle power. In October 1686 he won the local battle at 'Hooghly ' But he was afraid of the Moghul power and moved with all his men towards Balasore On the way he suddenly stopped at Chutaluttee or Chutanutee village on 29 December 1686 It may be marked as the beginning of beginnings of Calcutta Within a month they were chased away. Again they came with Moghul permission to Chutanuttee But the company again left the place The company's business in Bengal having closed, the then Moghul emperor, Aurangzeb realised the loss of revenue He sent Ibrahim Khan as the Governor of Bengal. At his invitation, Job Charnock, for the third and last time, came to settle at Chutanuttee on 24 August 1690. It was recorded in the company's book—"on board the Maddapolam, August 24, 1690—this day at Sankraul ordered Captain Brook to come up with his vessel to Chuttanuttee where we arrived about noon..." (*Desh, Vinodan*, 1989, Calcutta—p 22).

But this Chutanuttee was not Calcutta There was a separate place named 'Kalikata' which was referred to in several folk songs and other records from the fifteenth century onward. Job Charnock settled at Chutanuttee where the Company continued their existence till 27 March 1700. From 8 June 1700 its address was mentioned as at Calcutta

There have been many theories put forward to justify the evolution of the

word "Calcutta" or "Kalikata" in Bengali. Dr. Sunitikumar Chatterji's assumption was that 'kata' of 'Kalichoon' or heaps of lime for white-washing—that was often to be seen in all those areas—brought forth the name 'Kalikata' from which the English word Calcutta was evolved. This has been supported by the historian Benoy Ghosh. In any case, the name is Indian by all means.

Change of office address of the Company from Chutanuttee to Calcutta from 8 June 1700 does not mean that the address was the result of shifting from Chutanuttee to Calcutta. The village Calcutta might have been in the middle part of the city, which evolved with Chutanuttee at the centre, Gobindapur and other adjacent villages, to the present city.

In 1707 Aurangzeb died. A measurement of lands of the city took place in the same year. Calcutta had two parts—town Calcutta and bazar Calcutta. Its limits were Bowbazar street (present Bipinbehari Ganguly street) on the east, Tank square (later Dalhousie square) on the west, Dharmatalla street (now Lenin Sarani) on the south and Harrison roads (present Mahatma Gandhi road) on the north. Population was very scanty. Both the areas abounded in paddy fields, swamps, tanks, bamboo groves, waste lands, jungles, etc. In only 12% of the land people lived. The present Chowringhee area was Gobindapur village. Only 5% of its land was occupied by the inhabitants. Even during the first part of the nineteenth century this Chowringhee, as it was called even then, was considered to be a village. The Britishers first settled in the town part, around Tank square (Dalhousie square or present Benoy-Badal-Dinesh Bag).

Gradually their dwelling place spread in the Chowringhee area which became a Sahib-para or European area. And they gradually went southwards to construct Belvedere House, etc., in Alipur. North Calcutta with Chitpur was the proper Chutanuttee. Here also only 9% of the land was occupied by the inhabitants. Calcutta was from the beginning spreading with its centre in the Tank square and old fort, the first fort, the construction of which started from 1701. The Governor's place, called the 'Government House' was constructed inside the fort. Then came the Writers' Buildings—row of lodgings along the bank of the river Hooghly. The fort was in the area of the present post office and Tank square.

In the Chowringhee area at Middleton Street Sir Elijah Impey, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Calcutta (1774-82) lived in Loretto house which was formerly occupied by Mr. Henry Vansittart, the Governor of Bengal. This was a very big garden house bounded on all sides by high walls and guarded by sentries with rifles. Herds of deer were kept in the garden. The house was to be protected against decoits and tigers as well.

Around the eighties of the eighteenth century the value of land per cottah was between Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 in central Calcutta. In the heart of the city around Tank square the land was sold at a price of Rs. 600 per cottah. At present no land is perhaps available in Calcutta proper. Lands are generally sold and

purchased in greater Calcutta at least beyond the bounds of Calcutta of those days and a price between Rupees one lakh to one and a half lakhs is quite common

*(To be continued)*

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

# AN ACT OF MERCY

## A SHORT STORY

Translated from the Tamil of Prapanjan by P. Raja

KESAVAN never dreamt that he would be arrested at that hour.

This hour of dawn was suitable for nothing but to take a dip in the pond. Of course, the wind chilled by snow would make you think twice before you removed your garments. The ice-cold water in the pond would no doubt bite your legs. But muster courage and step into it and take a quick dip. Then who would ever think of getting out of the pond? Bathing in it is not to wash off dirt! Can anyone be cleansed of dirt by such a bath? Here bathing is simply for pleasure.

Like a huge and vast tome, the sky remained spread out before Kesavan. The stars were letters. At a distance stood the temple gopuram as if it had come to life with the stroke of an artist's brush dipped in Indian ink. He stood in chest-deep water. He felt his heavy heart was unburdening itself. Even the fear that gripped him and followed him like his shadow had left him.

Having no intention of getting out of the pond he playfully punched at the water. His play was distracted by the loose talk of women who had come to take a bath on the other side of the pond. He realized that it was already past dawn. From behind the temple gopuram the rays of the sun were fanning out against the sky. All of a sudden he noticed a few men, strangers to the village, dressed in white pants and shirts standing on the stairs that surrounded all the four sides of the pond.

Kesavan understood who they were. He realized that he had been trapped. And he decided to put into action what he had already determined to do.

He climbed up the stairs. He picked up his pants which he had kept on the topmost stair and slipped his legs into them. He wrung his towel and put it down. Then putting on his shirt, he picked up the towel and walked towards the two who stood staring at him.

The sun had successfully driven out the darkness.

"Aren't you Kesavan?" asked a pock-marked, sturdy fellow sporting a handlebar moustache.

"Yes, I am."

Before he could utter the last syllable, a cruel blow fell on Kesavan's face. After several days of hunger, he had eaten only two iddies, and that too a couple of days before. He fell with a thud to the sand.

"You should not have beaten him when once he has admitted his name," remarked the other man who looked like a chief. The sturdy fellow stood silent. The chief gave Kesavan his hand when the latter tried to get up. All the other

men who stood on the four sides of the pond collected there

The chief began to move. The others followed him pushing Kesavan forward. Kesavan was all the time wiping with his wet towel the blood that gushed from the corner of his mouth.

The police van was parked on the highway under the Rain tree. Painted in dark-blue it resembled a prison with iron-bars and doors. Inside the van two long cushioned benches had been set on either side. Kesavan moved towards a seat. But the moustachioed man ordered him to sit on the floor in between the two benches.

“No! Let him sit on the bench. Let two of you sit on either side of him,” said the chief. Then addressing the sturdy fellow he said, “Go and take your seat by the side of the driver.”

The chief sat facing Kesavan. The driver switched on the engine. On the floor lay the guns. As the van picked up speed, the guns jolted and dashed with one another and when the butt-ends collided they made an intolerable noise.

The chief had a closer look at Kesavan. He had a child-like face, with hair just sprouting on his upper lip and chin. To the chief who had seen only the unruly faces of criminals, Kesavan looked like an innocent schoolboy. He sincerely doubted if such a chap was capable of committing murders.

“How old are you?”

Kesavan who had forgotten himself in looking at the tamarind trees that stood like sentinels on either side of the road, the hills and the vegetation that garbed them, was suddenly pulled down to the world of reality. “Beg your pardon, Sir.”

The chief repeated his question.

“Next January, I’ll be twenty-three, Sir ”

The chief said to himself that Kesavan was younger than he by seven years... January might not come in his life. He might be alive for a couple of days more at the most. He would be handed over to Headquarters the next morning. Enquiry would go on for a day. In the name of enquiry he would be tortured—tortured to the core—with all the already available or freshly invented methods to bring out the truth.

‘Deva! I’m terribly hungry. Let us take food in the nearby village,’ said the moustachioed fellow, looking at the chief through the wire-mesh.

“All right,” said the chief. “What are you thinking about?” he asked Kesavan.

Kesavan thrust out two of his fingers before the chief and said, “Touch one of these two, Sir ”

“What for?”

“You just touch, Sir ”

He touched.

“Correct! Your name must be Devanathan!”

“No! Devakumar ”

“Oh! I have gone wrong. I thought your name must be either Devarajan or Devanathan,” so saying Kesavan laughed.

To Deva and others, the attitude of Kesavan looked strange. Criminals, once they were caught, usually thought of ways and means of escaping from the clutches of the police. Or they would be rehearsing in their minds what sort of cooked-up answers they should give to the thousands of questions that would be shot at them by the police officers. And no one would like to play games like that.

The driver jammed the brake. The van stopped. Everyone got down from the vehicle while Kesavan didn't stir.

“Who will guard him?” asked the moustachioed fellow.

“Let him also come with us,” said Deva.

“We run short of money and you want to feed the murderer.”

“But he too has a stomach.”

“Pshh...”

“Get down, Kesavan,” said Deva.

While all the others were trying to finish the first iddli, Kesavan had already swallowed three.

“When did you eat last?”

It took time for Kesavan to answer that question. “Today is Friday. Yesterday I ate nothing. But I ate on Wednesday afternoon. A comrade bought. .!”

Kesavan called a halt to his words. For a second he had forgotten the instruction that he should neither tell the name nor identify his comrades whatever might be the circumstances.

“Who?” asked the sturdy fellow.

“ . ”

“I see! Won't open your mouth, eh? Tomorrow the officer will ask you in the most fitting way. And your answers will gush forth like a torrent.”

They resumed the journey. Kesavan greatly enjoyed seeing the tall bushy trees that stood on either side of the road, as well as the passers-by. He had spent six months, completely cut off from society, hiding during daytime and walking at night. His only consolations were the comrades who met him and drew him into conversation. And it really gave him sheer delight to travel in the company of other men after a long time. He went on sightseeing with the joy of a child going to a festival.

Headquarters was situated in a tope a little distance from the city. Unless you knew it was there, you would not be able to see it.

“Shall we handcuff him?” asked the moustachioed fellow.

“He is not that sort of a chap,” replied Deva.

“Appearances are deceptive, Deva.”



"I know... you need not worry."

"What about handing him over to the officer tomorrow?"

"That's my duty... You need not worry about it."

"O.K."

There were many small wooden boxes in the room where Kesavan was put. Khaki shirts dangled from nails in the walls. Khaki shorts rested on the boxes.

Deva changed his dress. Kesavan looked at him dressed in light green khaki and said. "This uniform suits you very well, Sir."

Deva looked at him affectionately and said: "But I don't suit this uniform. Hm... It's fate "

Kesavan sat leaning against the corner of the wall. Deva left him saying: "I'll be back in a minute."

Left alone, Kesavan thought about himself. At last he had reached the place he deserved. He thought: "Enquiries will begin. There will be tortures galore whether I deserve them or not. I may be given a life-sentence or death by hanging. To remain behind bars for twelve years all the time living with the smell of urine is unbearable. Instead death is most welcome." A chill ran down his spine. His body became numb for a moment even in a room where wind had no access.

"Sumathi," murmured Kesavan. Whenever he thought of Sumathi, the image of a school-going girl, dressed in a dotted petticoat and dark-red half-sari, stood before his mind's eye. She looked like a big brass-pot carrying a smaller one. At the early morning hours she gathered the fallen flowers from the *Maghushampoo* tree. When she came across a pebble, she jumped for joy, took it, spat on it, cleansed it with the hem of her half-sari and imprisoned it in her rusted geometry box. The last time he had seen her was when he found her body thrust into the thorny bush under the pipal tree with her dress all disordered. There were several scars across her chest, thighs and cheeks, all bloody. Oh, what a gruesome scene!

"Sumathi. " Kesavan yelled.

"Who is she?" asked Deva who had returned. Kesavan felt ashamed of himself for shouting like that.

"She was my girl-friend."

"Oh, I see!"

It was sultry in the room. "Come. . Let's go out and sit," called Deva. Together they moved out and sat.

Behind that old building stretched the vast tope. Rows of aged trees stood adjacent to the compound walls. Margosa, mango, *Punnai* and many more varieties. The gibbous moon would be full in a couple of days.

Kesavan inhaled deeply and asked: "Is there a *thanga arali* tree?"

Deva raised his eyebrows and said: "Yes. There are a few "

"I can smell them."

“Do you like the *thanga arali* flower?”

“Sumathi liked it very much. But one should never smell it. The nose will start bleeding.”

“Who said so?”

“Sumathi.”

“Tell me something more about Sumathi ”

“Kesavan remained silent for a while. He then asked: “What are you going to do with me tomorrow?”

Deva turned his face in a different direction and replied: “Enquiry will go on.”

“What is that for?”

“To find out if you have murdered Thandapani.”

“Yes... I’ll accept the charge of murder. Even now I don’t deny it.”

“You should have done that six months before.”

“I was afraid at first. Then I decided to surrender. But my comrades...”

“Yes! Continue.”

“They stopped me from doing so. Somehow they came in search of me and introduced themselves to me. They said that what I had done was not murder but only social service.”

“Then what about the Melakkaveri murder case? What about the arson at Thiruvaiyaru ration shop? .. They are also social service, eh?”

“I am not connected with them in any way, Sir. They made use of my name as a witness to those deeds.”

“Where do they stay?”

“I don’t know, Sir ”

“That’s a lie.”

“I promise you, Sir, I really do not know. They never told me anything about their places of shelter. They only came in search of me. I have never been to them.”

Deva realized that Kesavan was not telling lies. His innocent face betrayed that he was incapable of them. But where was the guarantee that the enquiry officer would believe him tomorrow? He wouldn’t. He couldn’t. That was how he had been trained: “Doubt . doubt everything . doubt everyone ” That was their gospel. Deva heaved a sigh.

Tomorrow at about 2 o’clock in the afternoon needles would be thrust under Kesavan’s nails. Chilly paste would be smeared on the soft parts of his body. A sturdy ruler would be rolled on his thighs. Horse-shoe studded boots would crush his toes.

Kesavan sat leaning against the trunk of the almond tree. The moon was in mid-sky. Somewhere a few crows cawed, mistaking the moon for the sun.

“You shouldn’t have committed that murder,” said Deva.

“I too realized it, Sir. But I had no elder brother like you. Had I one, he

would have given me good advice and averted me from committing that crime. My friends only provoked me. No sooner did I see Sumathi flung into that thorny bush than I turned into an animal. My father had a finely sharpened knife that glittered like silk, which he had for cutting bamboo plants. It was of great use to me. I hid myself in the thorny wood for three days. The much-awaited opportunity came on the third day. Thandapani came to the thorny wood in the evenings to answer nature's call. He usually sat behind the *Erukkam* plant. On that evening too he did it. It was getting dark. I elbowed my way from the thorny bush and aimed the knife at his neck. But the rustling noise of the shrub frightened him. He turned back. He had noticed me. He guessed my intention. He began to run for his life. And I threw my knife at him. It missed its target but got stuck in his calf muscle. Screaming he fell down. I pounced on him .."

Kesavan bent down his head. Deva saw him shudder.

"Sir!" Kesavan continued. "I saw him breathe his last. His lips trembled and I know he wanted to speak out. Anyone at the hour of death will speak only the truth. He too tried. But before he could open his mouth, he became lifeless. Only at that moment I realized that I had no right to kill him. That fellow, no doubt, had committed a crime. But who am I to punish him? Anyhow I have committed an unpardonable crime. I wept before the dead Thandapani. I cringed before his body to forgive me. But who will pardon me?"

Kesavan cried into his palms. Deva waited till he had calmed down.

"Who else is there at home?"

"Only my father, Sir. Where is your family, Sir?" It was as if he had found a new friend in Deva.

"My parents are in Bangalore. I had a brother till last week. He was of your age. He was a college-student. He was a very good weight-lifter. When he lifted the heavy discs above his head, one of them got disconnected and fell on his head. He didn't say anything about it and we too didn't know. But he had always complained of headaches. We got him tablets. But one day he fell unconscious. The doctor diagnosed that he had an abscess in the brain. It was too late. He died."

"When did he die, Sir?"

"Last Friday.. I rejoined duty only the day before yesterday. That too to attend to your case."

"Sorry, Sir. My hearty condolences."

It was about to dawn. Kesavan slept huddled up.

Deva continued to look at him. He felt that the day was not dawning for Kesavan. He was quite sure that Kesavan wouldn't see sunrise the next day.

He thought of how the young man would be tortured the next day. "What no man is expected to do to any living being will be done to him." Deva shuddered at the thought. He felt that he had no right to think of justice and injustice. For a second, the idea of allowing Kesavan to escape flashed in his

mind. But what to do with a fellow who is good enough to accept his crime and has no mind to escape? He was terribly confused

All of a sudden the birds chorused and Kesavan woke up with a start.

“I fell asleep, Sir,” Kesavan said grinning. “I had a sound sleep today, after a long time. I died many a death every minute, I was expecting the police at any time. Sleep ran away from me when I was not quite sure of any escape.”

The sunlight began to spread and Kesavan wondered at the Edenic beauty of the tope with wide opened wonder. “What a lovely garden, Sir!” Kesavan said. At a distance adjacent to the privy house stood a tall grown *thanga arali* tree. He was able to see the space below the tree strewn with its flowers. He loved to go near and smell them.

“Sir! Shall I go there to fetch those flowers?”

“Yes! Why not?”

Kesavan stood up and started moving towards the tree.

An idea dawned upon Deva’s mind. He rushed to the room and came out with a gun. It was always ready to fire.

Kesavan stooped down and began to pick up the flowers. It took only a few seconds for Deva to take aim.

The birds in the trees fluttered their wings and flew for their lives at the sound of the gunshot. Kesavan fell dead.

“What?... What happened?” People came rushing to the spot.

“He tried to escape. I shot him dead,” said Deva

“Well done,” said the moustachioed fellow. “Had he escaped we would have gone behind bars ”

They all went to the *thanga arali* tree. There was no sign of life in Kesavan. Yet the sense of happiness he had while picking up the flowers still lingered in his face.

Deva heaved a sigh of relief

## *Students' Section*

### THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Sixty-seventh Seminar

18 February 1990

#### THE VISION AND WORK OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER FOR THE REALISATION OF WORLD-UNITY

Speech read by Auroflore Agarwal

THIS seminar has been organised to explain the great value of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's vision and work for world-unity which is an integral part of their life-mission.

Some forty years ago, when Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary was to be celebrated in New York on 15 August 1949, he was requested to give a special message for the occasion

The message that Sri Aurobindo then gave is directly relevant to the subject which has been chosen for this seminar because it states in very precise terms his conception of human unity in a brief outline.

Given by Sri Aurobindo himself, the message is so illuminating, that I propose to read it here. The other students who spoke before me have elaborated on the points mentioned in this message, taking in addition ideas from Sri Aurobindo's other works. What I will read gives his central ideas in a brief compass.

Along with Sri Aurobindo, the Mother also gave a short message for the same occasion. I will read it first and then read Sri Aurobindo's message

#### A Message to America

Stop thinking that you are of the West and others of the East. All human beings are of the same divine origin and meant to manifest upon earth the unity of this origin <sup>1</sup>

4-8-1949

THE MOTHER

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I have been asked to send on this occasion of the fifteenth August a message to the West, but what I have to say might be delivered equally as a message to the East. It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 387

these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but, for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference. East and West have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and even outwardly we move. There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics, the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live. East and West have always met and mixed more or less closely, they have powerfully influenced each other and at the present day are under an increasing compulsion of Nature and Fate to do so more than ever before.

There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers. It is no longer towards division and difference that we should turn our minds, but on unity, union, even oneness necessary for the pursuit and realisation of a common ideal, the destined goal, the fulfilment towards which Nature in her beginning obscurely set out and must in an increasing light of knowledge replacing her first ignorance constantly persevere.

But what shall be that ideal and that goal? That depends on our conception of the realities of life and the supreme Reality.

Here we have to take into account that there has been, not any absolute difference but an increasing divergence between the tendencies of the East and the West. The highest truth is truth of the Spirit; a Spirit supreme above the world and yet immanent in the world and in all that exists, sustaining and leading all towards whatever is the aim and goal and the fulfilment of Nature since her obscure inconscient beginnings through the growth of consciousness is the one aspect of existence which gives a clue to the secret of our being and a meaning to the world. The East has always and increasingly put the highest emphasis on the supreme truth of the Spirit, it has, even in its extreme philosophies, put the world away as an illusion and regarded the Spirit as the sole reality. The West has concentrated more and more increasingly on the world, on the dealings of mind and life with our material existence, on our mastery over it, on the perfection of mind and life and some fulfilment of the human being here: latterly this has gone so far as the denial of the Spirit and even the enthronement of Matter as the sole reality. Spiritual perfection as the sole ideal on one side, on the other, the perfectibility of the race, the perfect society, a perfect development of the human mind and life and man's material existence have become the largest dream of the future. Yet both are truths and can be regarded as part of the intention of the Spirit in world-nature, they are not incompatible with each

other: rather their divergence has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.

The Science of the West has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in this material world, but it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness: even, consciousness has been regarded as an incident and not the whole secret of the meaning of the evolution. An evolution has been admitted by certain minds in the East, certain philosophies and Scriptures, but there its sense has been the growth of the soul through developing or successive forms and many lives of the individual to its own highest reality. For if there is a conscious being in the form, that being can hardly be a temporary phenomenon of consciousness, it must be a soul fulfilling itself and this fulfilment can only take place if there is a return of the soul to earth in many successive lives, in many successive bodies

The process of evolution has been the development from and in inconscient Matter of a subconscious and then a conscious Life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then fully in conscious and thinking man, the highest present achievement of evolutionary Nature. The achievement of mental being is at present her highest and tends to be regarded as her final work; but it is possible to conceive a still further step of the evolution: Nature may have in view beyond the imperfect mind of man a consciousness that passes out of the mind's ignorance and possesses truth as its inherent right and nature. There is a Truth-Consciousness as it is called in the Veda, a Supermind, as I have termed it, possessing Knowledge, not having to seek after it and constantly miss it. In one of the Upanishads a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being; into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence. If that could be achieved as the next evolutionary step of Nature here, then she would be fulfilled and we could conceive of the perfection of life even here, its attainment of a full spiritual living even in this body or it may be in a perfect body. We could even speak of a divine life on earth; our human dream of perfectibility would be accomplished and at the same time the aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religions and spiritual seers and thinkers.

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessity, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve its riddle. East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest ideal, Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true reality and the hidden Reality in all things in the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

11-8-1949

SRI AUROBINDO

<sup>1</sup> *On Himself* (Cent Ed Vol 26) pp 413-16