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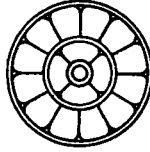
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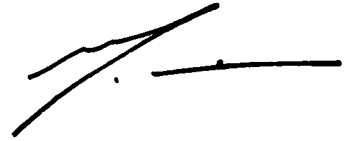
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

THE OBJECT OF OUR YOGA

EXTRACTS FROM A TALK ON 15 AUGUST 1926,
AS REPORTED BY A. B. PURANI .. 503

Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya

FORMULA GIVEN BY THE MOTHER FOR A
SUPRAMENTAL PROCESS OF ACTION ... 504

PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION . 505

The Mother

GUIDANCE FROM THE MOTHER ... 506

Nilima Das

THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE
IN THE LIGHT OF HER *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS* .. 509

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA
FIVE PERSONAL LETTERS ... 512

Pradip Bhattacharya

PETER BROOK'S *MAHABHARATA*—THE FILM ... 522

N. Jayashanmukham

THE SECRET OF SECRETS
ITS MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE GITA ... 528

Suresh Thadani

SHE (Poem) ... 530

Chunilamal Chowdhkiran

THE COUNTRY-PATH (Poem) ... 530

Dinkar Palande

SHADOWS .. 531

CONTENTS

Nirodbaran

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

... 532

VALEDICTORY SPEECH

TO THE TALKS ON *SAVITRI* BY DR. NADKARNI

.. 538

MOOT COURT HEARING ON SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OR EDWARD DE VERE?

... 541

R. Y. Deshpande

"SATYAVAN MUST DIE"

A DISCOURSE APROPOS OF A PHRASE IN

SRI AUROBINDO'S *SAVITRI*

. 545

Nilima Das

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

.. 549

Aju Mukhopadhyay

CALCUTTA'S TERCENTENARY

... 552

Shyam Kumari

A GLIMPSE OF THE TRUE INDIA

... 557

Prapanjan

SHOES

A SHORT STORY BASED ON AN HISTORICAL INCIDENT

(Translated by P. Raja from the Tamil)

... 563

Wilfried

NEW AGE NEWS

... 568

STUDENTS' SECTION

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

SIXTY-EIGHTH SEMINAR—22 APRIL 1990

WHAT IS THE TRUE MEANING OF FREEDOM AND

HOW TO REALISE IT?

Speech by Desikan Narasimhan

... 569

THE OBJECT OF OUR YOGA

EXTRACTS FROM SRI AUROBINDO'S TALK ON 15 AUGUST 1926,
AS REPORTED BY A. B. PURANI

THE object of our Yoga is the bringing down of a Consciousness, a Power, a Light, a Reality that is other than the consciousness which satisfies the ordinary being upon the earth—a Consciousness, a Power and a Light of Truth, a divine Reality which is destined to raise the earth-consciousness and transform everything here.

Remember that what are the objects of other Yogas are for us only the first stages or first conditions. In the former days of Yoga men were content if they could feel the Brahmic Consciousness or the Cosmic Consciousness or some descent of Light and Power, some intimations of the Infinite. It was thought sufficient if the mind got certain spiritual experiences and if the vital being was in contact with the mind. They sought for a static condition and considered that as the final goal and release the final aim.

To realise all this, to be open to the infinite and universal Power, to receive its intimations and to have experiences, to go completely beyond the ego, to realise the universal Mind, the universal Soul, the universal Spirit—that is only the first condition.

We have to call down this greater Consciousness directly into the vital being and the physical being, so that the supreme calm and universality will be there in all its fulness from top to bottom. If this cannot be done, then the first condition of transformation is not fulfilled.

The mind cannot be transformed unless the vital being is transformed. And if the vital being is not transformed, then nothing can be realised because it is the vital being that realises.

The whole change of the vital being cannot be done unless the physical being also is open and changed, for the divine vital cannot realise itself in an unfitting environment of life.

And it is not enough for the inner physical being to be changed if the external being, the external man, is not transformed. In this process of Yoga there is a whole totality and each part depends upon the others. Therefore to stop short may be a preparation for another life but it is not the victory.

All has to be changed before anything can be permanently changed.

FORMULA GIVEN BY THE MOTHER FOR A SUPRAMENTAL PROCESS OF ACTION

1. Remain absolutely quiet in all parts of your being.
2. Aspire and call.
3. You will get a response from above.
4. Place your problem before it and wait peacefully.
5. The direction will come from above.
6. Receive it and implement it through your mind, life and body.
7. There should be no likes and dislikes and preferences.
8. Help will come. The right man will come. The resources will come. The material will come and the right action will take place.

Note:

Absolute surrender, no personal reaction, no personal preference and absolute detachment, and have no fear whatsoever.

Observation:

Tried many times and found wonderful results.

PRANAB KUMAR BHATTACHARYA
February 26, 1990

PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION

Steps towards Transformation

1. Consciousness
2. Control
3. Mastery
4. Transformation

Steps towards Physical Immortality

1. Prolongation of youth and maintenance of the health and physical fitness of the body for a very long period to stop or slow down the process of deterioration
2. *Ichcha Mrityu*—death only when wished. Example of Bhishma in Mahabharat. He must have reached the first step also.
3. Physical Immortality.

The Process

1. The psychic contact—this is the very first step.
2. Putting the whole being under the psychic guidance.
3. The vital and the mind must not rule over the body. They spoil it by their ideas, their impulses and their desires; (their excessive demands spoil the body.)
4. Co-operation from the mind and the vital (a long process). They are a great force.
5. The body has to be protected and taken care of by an application of the knowledge of health, hygiene, physical exercise, preventive and curative medicine.
6. Growth of the body consciousness—the special role of physical education leading to a gradual control, mastery and transformation of the body.
7. Physical education can help a lot to get body consciousness. The body must be kept in a perfectly balanced state. Physical Sat-Chit-Ananda.
8. Integral progress. This is the aim of life,—which helps to keep one young; both inwardly and outwardly.
9. Ananda is our prime mover—is the rejuvenator and must saturate our whole physical being.
10. Love, which is the source of Joy, is pure and desireless. It gives freely without any demand or bargain. Hatred and jealousy, which destroy the body, have no part in love.
11. Each individual has to find out his own way. It is a dangerous pursuit and there is no set method. Utmost sincerity and a clear vision are the guiding and protective factors.

As I have learnt from the Mother.

PRANAB KUMAR BHATTACHARYA
April 15, 1981

GUIDANCE FROM THE MOTHER

Sri Aurobindo speaks of “the will to open and make plastic the physical consciousness and nature.”¹

BECAUSE the physical consciousness and nature are closed up and rigid—they are shut up in their habits, they don’t want to change them, they accept only one regular routine. There is nothing more routine-bound than the body. If you change its habits in the least, it is quite bewildered, it doesn’t know any longer what to do, it says, “Excuse me, excuse me! but that’s not how one goes about living.”

Those whose vital being is very active and dominating may succeed in awakening the body, and if they have the spirit of adventure (which happens very often, for the vital is an adventurous being), the physical obeys, it obeys the impulse, the inner order; then it consents to the change, the novelty, but it is an effort for it. But for the physical being and physical consciousness to be ready to receive the divine impulsions, they must be extremely plastic, because the vital uses coercion, it imposes its will, and the poor body has but to obey, while the Divine just shows the light, gives the consciousness, and so one must obey consciously and willingly—it is a question of collaboration, it is no longer a question of coercion. The physical being and physical consciousness must be very plastic to be able to lend themselves to all the necessary changes, so as to be of one kind one day and another the next, and so on.

Sri Aurobindo speaks here of the “stability of Light, Power, Ananda”.² But isn’t power always dynamic?

Well, there is a static power. How to explain it to you? Look, there is the same difference between static power and dynamic power as between a game of defence and a game of attack; you understand? It is the same thing. Static power is something which can withstand everything, nothing can act upon it, nothing can touch it, nothing can shake it—it is immobile, but it is invincible. Dynamic power is something in action, which at times goes forth and may at times receive blows. That is to say, if you want your dynamic power to be always victorious, it must be supported by a considerable static power, an unshakable base.

I know what you want to say... that a human being becomes aware of power only when it is dynamic; a human being doesn’t consider it a power except when it acts; if it doesn’t act he does not even notice it, he does not realise the tremendous force which is behind this inaction—at times, even frequently, a force more formidable than the power which acts. But you may try it out in

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p 7

² *Ibid*

yourself, you will see, it is much more difficult to remain calm, immobile, unshakable before something very unpleasant—whether it be words or acts levelled against you—ininitely more difficult than to answer with the same violence. Suppose someone insults you; if in the face of these insults, you can remain immobile (not only outwardly, I mean integrally), without being shaken or touched in any way: you are there like a force against which one can do nothing and you do not reply, you do not make a gesture, you do not say a word, all the insults thrown at you leave you absolutely untouched, within and without; you can keep your heart-beats absolutely quiet, you can keep the thoughts in your head quite immobile and calm without their being in the least disturbed, that is, your head does not answer immediately by similar vibrations and your nerves don't feel clenched with the need to return a few blows to relieve themselves; if you can be like that, you have a static power, and it is infinitely more powerful than if you had that kind of force which makes you answer insult by insult, blow by blow and agitation by agitation.

Does not surrender consist in offering one's work, like a good servant?

Work is a good discipline. But it is not this idea, it is not the idea of a passive, unconscious and almost involuntary submission. It is not that. It does not lie only in work.

The most important surrender is the surrender of your character, your way of being, so that it may change. If you do not surrender your very own nature, never will this nature change. It is this that is most important. You have certain ways of understanding, certain ways of reacting, certain ways of feeling, almost certain ways of progressing, and above all, a special way of looking at life and expecting from it certain things—well, it is this you must surrender. That is, if you truly want to receive the divine Light and transform yourself, it is your whole way of being you must offer—offer by opening it, making it as receptive as possible so that the divine Consciousness which sees how you ought to be, may act directly and change all these movements into movements more true, more in keeping with your real truth. This is infinitely more important than surrendering what one does. It is not what one does (what one does is very important, that's evident) that is the most important thing but what one *is*. Whatever the activity, it is not quite the way of doing it but the state of consciousness in which it is done that is important. You may work, do disinterested work without any idea of personal profit, work for the joy of working, but if you are not at the same time ready to leave this work, to change the work or change the way of working, if you cling to your own way of working, your surrender is not complete. You must come to a point when everything is done because you feel within, very clearly, in a more and more imperious way, that it is this which must be done and in this particular way, and that you do it only because of that. You do not do it because

of any habit, attachment or preference, not even any conception, even a preference for the idea that it is the best thing to do—else your surrender is not total. As long as you cling to something, as long as there is something in you which says, “This may change, that may change, but *that*, that will not change”, as long as you say about anything at all, “That will not change” (not that it refuses to change, but because you can’t think of its changing), your surrender is not complete.

It goes without saying that if in your action, your work, you have in the least the feeling, “I am doing it because I have been told to do it”, and there is not a total adherence of the being and you do not do the work because you feel it must be done and you love doing it; if something holds back, stands apart, separate, “I was told it had to be done like that so I did it like that”, it means there is a great gulf between you and surrender. True surrender is to feel that one wants, one has, this complete inner adherence: you cannot do *but that*, that which you have been given to do, and what you have not been given to do you cannot do. But at another moment the work may change; at any moment it may be something else, if it is decided that it be something else. It is there that plasticity comes in. That makes a very great difference. It is well understood that those who work are told, “Yes, work, that is your way of surrendering”, but it is a beginning. This way has to be progressive. It is only a beginning, do you understand?

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, pp 367-69, 372-74)

THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

IN THE LIGHT OF HER *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

(Continued from the issue of July 1990)

THE Mother during her stay in Japan was made conscious of her mission and a unique burden of responsibility, a burden that was also an existential delight. She found sometimes the outer mind fragile and ordinary, yet the Grace of the Lord was with her. Says the Lord to her: "Be confident like a child, art thou not myself crystallised for my work?" The Mother had only to love the Divine "in all things, everywhere and in all beings," and she would become the finished crystal and the Mother of Sorrow turn into the Mother of Light and be made a fit instrument to carry out the work of realising the Life Divine on the earth.

She was conscious of her deepest being, her mind and vital were enriched with a celestial joy and love, in spite of her outer being's struggle. She had a poignant prayer on December 30, 1916:

"Why, O Lord, does my heart seem to me to be so cold and dry?

"I feel, I see my soul living deep within my being, and my soul sees Thee, recognises Thee and loves Thee in all things, in everything that is; it is fully conscious of this, and as the outer being is surrendered to it, it too is conscious; the mind knows and never forgets; the purified vital being no longer has any attractions and repulsions, and more and more does it taste of the Joy of Thy Presence in all things and always. But the heart seems to have fallen asleep in a slumber of exhaustion, and the soul no longer finds sufficient activity within it to respond fully to its impulsion. Why? Was it so poor that the struggle could thus wear it out, or so deeply wounded that it has become quite stiff?"

The Mother's soul was alive within and one with the universal, and her mind knew conceptually the one reality, the purified vital had acquired equality and joy but the heart was weak in the state she described, but behind the heart there was a universal force sending forth the true wine of Love to all human beings, the call in the prayer was not for the human love but for the Divine Love.

In her prayer dated January 5, 1917 she was conscious of the Divine's generous love for her. She saw a role of love in the play of the universal forces: it is the great, the supreme, unifying force. She said:

"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 what love is in the play of universal forces, what its place and mission; it is not an end in itself but it is Thy

supreme means. Active, everywhere, between all things, everywhere it is veiled by the very things it unites, which, though feeling its effect, are sometimes not even aware of its presence.”

On 14th January the Mother again recorded the outflow of Divine Love from her heart:

“ ‘May all who are unhappy become happy, may the wicked become good, may the sick become healthy’. Thus was formulated the aspiration within me concerning the manifestation of Thy divine Love through this instrument. It was like a request, a request a child makes to its father with the certitude that it will be granted. For the certitude was in me when I asked: it seemed to me so simple and easy: I felt so clearly in myself how it was possible. To grow from joy to joy, from beauty to beauty, is this not more natural and also more fruitful than always to suffer and toil in an ignorant struggle unwillingly undergone? If Thou allowest the heart to blossom freely at the touch of Thy divine Love, this transformation is easy and comes of itself.”

On March 27, 1917 the Mother communicated a dialogue between her and the Divine, which she received during the meditation. The aspirant and the Divine stood face to face. A lucid and transparent living vision appeared before her and gave the mystic sign and symbol about the mission for her future work, which had been obscured and clouded. She realised that the mists suddenly disappeared, the sky cleared up and the sun shone gloriously. The voice said:

“Look: thou seest the living form and the three inanimate images. The living one is clad in violet, the other three are made of dust, but cleansed and purified. It is in the calm of silence that the living form can, by penetrating the other three, unite them in order to transform them into a living and acting vesture ”

The Mother said: “O Lord, Thou knowest that I am surrendered to Thee and that my being adheres with a peaceful and deep joy to all that Thou givest it.”

The voice said that mere surrender was not enough. It must be illumined and should be awakened with new consciousness. So it explained: “I know thy adherence, but I would increase thy consciousness, and for that awaken what still sleeps within thee. Open thy eyes to the light, and in the limpid mirror of the mind will be reflected what thou shouldst know....

Knock at the door of consciousness and the door will be opened to thee.”

The Mother answered: “The river runs limpid and silvery; its unbroken flow descends from the sky to the earth. But what dost Thou want to say to me that I must understand?”

The Mother waited for some time The voice again started saying:

“The fire of the soul must be seen through the veils of the manifestation; but these veils must be clear and distinct like words traced upon a luminous screen. And all this should be preserved in purity of thy heart, as the sown meadow is

shrouded and protected under the snow.”

The triple cage of the body, the vital and the mind seemed to be surpassed, and one appeared to be a sharer in the bliss of the universal. Then the Voice announced several blessings on the Mother. We may quote a few:

“Thy heart will use the returning strength.

“Thou shalt be the woodcutter who ties the bundle of firewood.

“Thou shalt be the great swan with outspread wings which purifies the sight with its pearly whiteness and warms all hearts with its white down.”

“Thou wilt lead them all to their supreme destiny.”

These four divine utterances strike me as depicting Mahakali, Mahasaraswati, Mahalakshmi and Maheswari. The Mother's four personalities and modes of activities are perhaps flashed forth in the following language of the prophecy, as caution and warning and revelation:

“Thou hast seen the hearth and seen the child.

One attracted the other: both were happy; one because it burned, the other because it was warm.

“Thou seest it in thy heart, this triumphant hearth; thou alone canst carry it without its being destructive.... If others touched it, they would be consumed. Do not let them come too near it. The child should know that it must not touch the dazzling flame which attracts it so much. From far it warms it and illumines its heart; too close, it would reduce it to ashes.

“One alone may dwell fearlessly within this heart; for he is the ray that has indeed kindled it. He is the salamander ever reborn in the fire.

“Another is above unafraid of being burnt; it is the immaculate phoenix, the bird come from the sky who knows how to return to it.

“The first is the Power of realisation.

“The other is the Light.

“And the third the sovereign Consciousness.”

The whole prayer is mystic and symbolic in nature. The dialogue between the Mother and the Divine Voice gives an insight into the resultant integration and transformation. This meditation of the Mother may perhaps point us to Sri Aurobindo's poem “The Bird of Fire” written on 15.1.1933. Sri Aurobindo himself commented on it: “The Bird of Fire is the living vehicle of the gold fire of the Divine Light and the white fire of the Divine Tapas and the crimson fire of the Divine Love—and everything else of the Divine Consciousness.”¹ Could we say that these three aspects of the Bird of Fire have an affinity with the Mother's categories of Light, Power of realisation and Sovereign Consciousness?

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

REFERENCE

1 Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol 5, p 78

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

FIVE PERSONAL LETTERS

YOU were a bit on the late side for me to send anything for Singapore's celebration of August 15. The next best thing that has happened is that I am writing this letter on the August 15 of Pondicherry. As I was meditating, my mind went back to my first August 15 here. Between February 21, 1928, the Mother's birthday, which marked my first *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo, and his own birthday-celebration which at that time was the next since there was no April 24 in the interval, a great deal had happened. At the first *darshan* I had watched Sri Aurobindo's outer appearance closely—his eyes, nose, moustache, beard, hair—and found him impressive enough to be accepted as my Guru! When a day later I met the Mother and asked her whether Sri Aurobindo had said anything about me, she reported: "Yes, he said that you had a good face." Quite a tit for tat! But before the next *darshan* my whole being had opened up, there had been moments of unbearable inner ecstasy and a general effluence of the deep heart had become a part of my daily life. I had grown a beard and my hair had been worn a little long. As the Mother had noted, I had the face of an early Christian of the Desert. When I knelt at Sri Aurobindo's feet he blessed me with both his hands. Before kneeling, I had looked at his face—quite differently from the first time—and he had kept gently nodding. Later in the morning I had the experience of a tremendous bar as of luminous steel entering my head from above and making me dizzy. The same afternoon, along with a number of fellow-sadhaks, I met the Mother. She took me into the *darshan* room from the outer hall, closed the door, sat down on a small stool while I knelt a second time in the day at her feet. She blessed me and said with an entrancing smile: "Sri Aurobindo was very pleased with you. He said that there had been a great change." I was moved beyond measure.

I think it was after this *darshan* I started writing poetry in the new vein—from the in-world or the over-world. Of course, all genuine poetic stuff hails from these domains, but it is not always couched in the very tongue of them—the fire-tongue that has tasted paradise: it is translated into the imaginative language of the reflective mind or of the passionate life-force. There is a whole bunch of poems by me of the pre-Pondicherry time which belongs to this category—intense in thought and with a sensuousness passing often into artistic sensuality edged with a topsyturvy idealism. Most of them are unpublishable now when people are on the look-out for a halo round my head! But perhaps two or three may pass muster and serve as samples of my juvenile *furor poeticus*. Towards the end of the period a semi-mystical afflatus came into play, prophetic in a vague manner of my future poetry. Two or three products of it may be added

to the other kind—after both groups have been touched up here and there on their technical side.

The “Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna”, to which you look forward, is still a far cry. I seem to have imbibed something of the general South-Indian motto which may be said to have been anticipated by Shakespeare in its suggestion of a satisfied slow-goingness and a happy postponing tendency, though his line in its proper context has hardly the same mood. Detached from Macbeth’s mouth, it is most apt with its emphatic

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...

Benjamin Franklin with his adage—“Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today”—would have been furious; but perhaps our mood is tinged with the Browningian sense of a hidden eternity in our depths:

... What’s time? leave now for dogs and apes!
Man has forever.

The theme of a hidden eternity is a good one to close with on a day of such profound significance as August 15.¹ (15.8.1987)

*

In the lines from *Savitri* (Centenary Ed., p. 537) you want me to clarify—

God must be born on earth and be as man
That man being human may grow even as God—

the second line’s “even as God” is equal to “even as God is” and not to your second alternative: “even as God grows.” But with “grow” before these words what we are told is: “become like God.” In the two preceding lines—

If one of theirs they see scale heaven’s peaks,
Men then can hope to learn that titan climb—

the sense seems to me to be simply the realisation of a superhuman or divine consciousness with whatever change it is bound to make in human nature. The specific idea of “transformation” such as Sri Aurobindo has put forth—namely, the permanent divinising of all our parts, ultimately even the body—is not directly there.

You have also asked whether the ascension of the heights has to be done

¹ The projected book referred to in this letter is now at last in the press (A K , 1990)

only by “evolutionary avatars like Sri Aurobindo” or also by “accomplished avatars like Sri Krishna”. No doubt, there is a distinction between the two types, but fundamentally every avatar has to do some ascension. If the Krishna, son of Devaki, who is mentioned in the Chhandogya Upanishad is the same as the Avatar Krishna of the later traditions, we see that he needed Rishi Ghora’s illumined touch to realise his own divinity to the full. An ascension was made, however rapidly or even instantaneously. The Upanishad’s Krishna was not born with the full divine consciousness: he was not, strictly speaking, “an accomplished avatar.” Apart from the picture presented in Vaishnava legends, I don’t think any avatar can be “accomplished” in the full sense. The veil of human birth has to be rent at some time or other, in one way or another.

The term “evolutionary avatar” has to be properly understood. It does not mean that avatarhood is achieved as something one was not born with. None can ever become an avatar. Avatarhood is preordained and is a state from birth. If we consider Sri Aurobindo an avatar, he was as much a born avatar as Sri Krishna. He did not evolve into an avatar. The born avatarhood gradually manifested in him in a particular way attuned to the intended harmony of human and divine to be played out in his life. This playing out is the sense of the epithet “evolutionary” we apply to his avatarhood. Further, being “evolutionary” does not stop with scaling “heaven’s peaks”, nor does living as “one of theirs” confine itself to sharing the common consciousness of men. The evolutionary avatar goes through the entire gamut of human experience. Some lines before those already quoted emphasise this:

The day-bringer must walk in darkest night.
He who would save the world must share its pain.
If he knows not grief, how shall he find grief’s cure?

Then we have the stanza from “A God’s Labour”, which Sri Aurobindo cited to Dilip before the poem was published:

He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.

In this stanza we have a hint which goes beyond a pointing to “heaven’s peaks”. It points to the work of bringing “the heavens here”. The phrase may be said to summarise the essence of Sri Aurobindo’s avatic labour. It connotes much more than realising God, much more even than establishing a spiritual *sangha*, a communion of saints. It implies the transformation of human stuff into divine substance—the counterpart to the ascent to the Supermind: the Supermind’s

descent and the permanent change of earthly existence into a divine life. This counterpart holds the true significance of the epithet “evolutionary”. A new species evolving from the human just as the human has evolved from the animal: such is the ultimate sense of the avatar’s being “evolutionary”. By his arduous manifold sadhana he exemplifies the supreme step of a process of Nature, which has, of course, always Supernature behind it. Sri Aurobindo is an evolutionary avatar in a spiritually scientific sense.

In the Age of Science—the post-Darwinian age, strictly speaking—the so-called “accomplished avatar” would be an anachronism. And, though it may surprise you, the “evolutionary avatar” is missioned to do much more than simply bring down superhuman powers to establish a divine life by altering the human state, not only in consciousness but also in material terms. For, this alteration may be possible by *imposing* on embodied existence an all-pervading godlike state: what in Indian nomenclature we would call a divinisation by a miraculous *siddhi*, a supernatural power of the highest kind. But this would not be truly evolutionary. Earth would be colonised by divinity: it would not be divine by native means. The Aurobindonian evolution implies that at the base of matter, in the very heart of the Inconscient, the Supermind lies “involved”. This involved Supermind has to evolve by its own push upward meeting the downward pressure of the free Supermind. When this co-operation between the concealed Truth-Light below and the unhampered Truth-Light above is complete, earth-life will be by its own right, as it were, godlike. And a total security will be there. Colonisation from above may come to an end: there can be no inherent security and hence no intrinsic permanence under it. Genuine evolution takes place only if divinisation is accomplished not by an imposed unearthly *siddhi* but by the earth’s own divine *dharma*, natural law of being, emerging into action. To evoke this *dharma* would be Yogically consonant with the *Zeitgeist* today. Sri Aurobindo is an “evolutionary avatar” exercising a Super-science which will bear total fruit one day from the supramental seed he has sown in a clay occultly in love with it and ready to make it germinate by means of the Eternal hidden in the hours

And Godhead pent in the mire and the stone.

P.S. Thank you for wishing me to live long. I may do so—at least in order to write long letters! (16.5.1990)

*

I appreciate the first point you make apropos of my letter of 16.5.1990: “You have used at the end the figure of the supramental seed sown by Sri Aurobindo. Of course this figure has its sense, but it appears to me that ‘Godhead pent in the

mire and the stone' is more properly the seed helped in its germination by the power brought down by Sri Aurobindo."

I grant that you are more accurate, for the "pent Godhead" is itself earlier hinted at in the poem "The Life Heavens" as

A red and bitter seed of the raptures seven.

So I should alter my nomenclature. What Sri Aurobindo brought down should be likened to the sun and rain which would make the buried seed of the involved Supermind germinate. Thank you for the correction.

You also write: "The distinction between the two types of avatars has not been clarified sufficiently. Does it merely consist in the thickness of the veil of birth and the time taken to rend it? Sri Aurobindo says about the Mother that she is divine because she had the awareness of her divinity from her childhood. Against this there is the scaling of heaven's peaks, which implies arduous labour."

It is true that the Mother was aware of her divinity in a way in which Sri Aurobindo was not. But even she had to progress and grow deeper, wider, higher and become full at a stage of her life far enough from the time of her childhood. Her more conscious sense of being divine did not preclude "a God's labour" at a later period, an arduous scaling of heaven's peaks.

There is also the evolutionary avatar's aspect of undergoing all sorts of human difficulties. Here too the Mother is on a par with Sri Aurobindo—she even goes one better! Sri Aurobindo¹ writes to a disciple: "We have had sufferings and struggles to which yours is a mere child's play...." Again:² "as for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure... hostile masses to conquer—a work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us. For the leader of the way in a work like ours has not only to bring down or represent and embody the Divine, but to represent too the ascending element in humanity to the full and experience, not in mere play or Lila but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled, hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the path." Finally, about difficulty and suffering and danger: "I have had my full share of these things and the Mother has had ten times her full share ... It is, in fact, to ensure an easier path to others hereafter that we have borne that burden."

I hope that now you do not find the Mother standing in any manner at odds with Sri Aurobindo in the matter of evolutionary avatarhood, and that my

¹ *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1963), p. 368

² *Ibid.*, pp. 369-70

distinction between the two types of avatars has been clarified to your satisfaction. (26.5.1990)

*

The pleasure of our meeting was mutual. I found you very open-minded and good-natured—the right condition to profit by a first visit to the Ashram. Here is a new life being experimented with and a new life demands not only a plastic mind but also a nature ready to take things with good grace. For, surprises both pleasant and unpleasant are bound to be in wait for one. You seem to have taken everything in your stride and are in love with what you have seen and experienced in the Ashram. A second visit is certain—and, of course, this means giving me the pleasure once again to meet you.

You have presented a rather strange but, I think, not quite unnatural situation:

“I have been reading *Savitri* daily, and have nearly finished it I find that I experience very strong emotions these days, in the sense that I react very strongly to everything. I am not a volatile person at all, but these days the smallest thing evokes an emotion that doesn't seem to have a bearing on my personality—at least the personality I know of myself. My anger is very volatile; upset, happiness, all emotions are very intense. Would this have any connection with reading *Savitri*? Please let me know whether you think there could be any connection. I would love to hear from you whenever you have a few moments to write.”

Reading *Savitri*, with a serious absorption in doing it, is bound to affect one deeply, for this poem is not just a literary creation. In fact no true poetry is just that. But most poetry comes from depths behind the usual psychological levels. *Savitri* comes from sources beyond those depths and carries the power to reconstitute one's being in the secret light of a Reality mostly unknown to our normal consciousness or even to our rare moments of an enlightening inwardness. But it throws a bridge between that Reality and the world we know—our inner world as well as our outer one. Else it would not be able to remould us. It is not a bewildering novelty like the products of Dadaism or Surrealism or even some less sensational attempts of the modern mind to strike novel attitudes in art. *Savitri* takes the traditional forms of image and word and rhythm and infuses into them a creative light and delight which may best be characterised in some lines from the poem itself about a class of Rishis among those the heroine of the poem met during her quest for a fit mate for her life:

Intuitive knowledge leaping into speech,
Seized, vibrant, kindling with the inspired word,
Hearing the subtle voice that clothes the heavens,

Carrying the splendour that has lit the suns,
 They sang Infinity's names and deathless powers
 In metres that reflect the moving worlds,
 Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.¹

When poetry such as the last line here summarises with a most living power, poetry in which mighty ranges of a superhuman consciousness are active, enters one's life, a great change in one's being is to be expected. At times a profound peace overwhelms one: at other times one begins to see new meanings in the life to which one has been accustomed: at still other times one's ordinary control on habitual movements may get suspended and one may not be at once able to act from the strange reaches to which one has been suddenly opened up. This last result would be rather exceptional, but it would correspond to the experience some people have when they first plunge into Yoga in the Ashram: the manner in which they were wont to act from the usual rational mind is taken away and to their own astonishment they find themselves queerly reacting to things and persons—mostly out of character. Gradually a new light of guidance emerges. If the action of Sri Aurobindo's consciousness and of the Mother's brings about on occasion such a result, I don't see why a massive epic in which Sri Aurobindo's highest realisations have been given revelatory expression should not have it in rare cases. What you report shows a conjunction too close to be accidental. The extreme sensitivity with which you received the influx and impact of the unknown powers articulated in the poem have taken away the old rhythm of responses to the everyday world and a new pattern of inner and outer answers has not yet set in.

Your phrase—"all emotions are very intense"—hits off accurately the new state in which you seem to lose your old bearings. Especially people who are very particular about practical details can be affected thus. Don't be frightened at this change. The fact that you are perfectly aware of it and want to understand it and get over it is a sign that you will soon be on the way to experiencing, in place of the negative side of the psychological revolution, the positive side which will produce the genuine life-counterpart of the fresh future that *Savitri* embodies in the sphere of poetry:

Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.

My advice is that you should start a second reading. Sit in silence for a little while to put yourself, however distantly, in rapport with what the Goddess of Inspiration did in the process of creating *Savitri*. From the poem itself we can gather the details of her work:

¹ Line 2 in this passage has been added from Sri Aurobindo's MS which is now under study by some of us for the projected "Critical Edition" of *Savitri*.

In darkness' core she dug out wells of light,
 On the undiscovered depths imposed a form,
 Lent a vibrant cry to the unuttered vasts,
 And through great shoreless, voiceless, starless breadths
 Bore earthward fragments of revealing thought
 Hewn from the silence of the Ineffable.

Then begin to read the poem audibly—let a soft voice feed the ear with it while the eye traces the pentameters on the page. Thus both the “revealing thought” and the “vibrant cry” of the Aurobindonian *vita nuova* will best be helped to go home to the budding aspirant for it that you are. All that has become abnormally “intense” will take its true shape when the “immense” that is coupled with the “intense” in *Savitri* enfolds you like a Divine Mother.

(17.5.1990)

*

Please forgive me for the delay in replying. The delay just happened. I can't spot the exact reason for it. I don't want to imitate that character in Proust's famous novel, who on being unable to attend a function sent the wire: “Impossible to come. Lie follows.”

There is no question of my misunderstanding or misjudging you. What you have written about the ridiculousness of “the well-meaning attempt of many to present the Ashram as a garden of spiritual delights and miracles” is correct. Not that the attempt has no truth at all behind it, but such propaganda does smack, as you say, “of the banalities American advertising agents go in for.” I am glad you realise that the Ashram life is inwardly a battlefield. I for one never induce anybody to take up Sri Aurobindo's Yoga as an escape from the trials of the ordinary life. Only if there is an intense call for it would I encourage them and then too after giving a balanced picture of how this Yoga is all the harder because it is practised as if under the conditions of that life. The conditions are such that we seem to be leading this life but without its inner facilities. We live constantly among people and work with them and are bound to have relationships with them and yet the whole attitude to social living is worlds apart from the one which would be natural in a similar context. Here is a life of loneliness in the midst of company, restraint in the thick of opportunities, peace in the heart of traffic, consecration to an invisible Presence in a milieu of crowding tangibilities, self-giving to a Great Another while pursuing one's own individual and apparently self-centred occupations, an unremitting search of One who ever draws us to exceed ourselves—like the “Spirit of Colour” in a Meredith-poem—

Because His touch is infinite and lends
 A yonder to all ends.

I am glad to find you saying: "If and when I do find my way permanently to Pondicherry, it will not be because I am assured of a comfortably lazy retirement in a balmy Caribbean beach resort but because I have to begin a new and probably more intense phase of my sadhana." Genuine sadhana is never easy and, when terms are set which are the very opposite of the conventional and traditional ones, extra courage is required, unless the so-called seeker is what a friend of mine used to call "Swami Bogusananda", one who has somehow got in and is only after external conveniences while pretending to be yogic. It is not for nothing that the Mother has said: "Victory is to the most enduring".

Talking of Swamis, I remember a half serious half ironic incident. An ochre-robed visitor earnestly desired to join the Ashram. He had undergone strict Sannyasi discipline, had won severe control over his senses, passed through plenty of bodily discomforts, renounced those famous temptations: *kaminikanchan*, which we may modernise as "glamour-girls and gold." What better qualifications for entering an Ashram of Integral Yoga? Sri Aurobindo did not doubt his achievements, but he foresaw all the difficulties he would meet with in living with men and women who went about their businesses like ordinary people, made no outer gestures of renunciation, wore normal clothes, had decently furnished quarters, imposed no fasts or even unusual restrictions in food upon themselves. Hence, very quietly he advised this old-world ascetic to go to his native village and live there like an ordinary human being and meet the common demands of life for some time. What was meant is that those who have shirked the difficulties of the world would not be able to cope with the paradoxical situation of the Ashram: the seemingly normal tenor of living and the utter inner self-dedication to the Divine, the complex preparation of a sustained divine earth-life under the aspect of humanity's day-to-day existence.

No doubt, there is the discovery here of a marvellous Innermost who in Rigvedic-Upanishadic language would be called the Immortal in the mortal, the Fire that is without smoke, the Eater of an eternal honey. If we hold that here too are in some form "the tears of things" that haunt the human heart, we must also realise that here in addition is (*à la* Amal)

The longing of ecstatic tears
From infinite to infinite.

Supporting the strenuous experiment of a life which is to all appearances like any other on earth and yet strives to be free from its usual shortcomings and deviations, we have had the all-calming gaze of Sri Aurobindo and the all-delighting smile of the Mother, and their presences are still with us not only in their uplifting consciousness-infused photographs but also as luminous guides acting at once from within, around, above. Even those who have never met them physically are soon made aware of His Light of Truth pointing them onward and

upward, Her warmth of love about which we can say with a slight alteration of the tense in those lines of *Savitri*:

A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,
Her inward help unbars a gate in heaven.

To use an image from the Taittiriya Upanishad: if their subtle ether were not all about us, who could breathe here for a single moment? But though the celestial ether is there, the air is yet terrestrial and the non-sannyasi acceptance of drawing one's breath in pain in this harsh world like some Horatio in the process of gaining a halo is always a fact.

Since you know very well both the "exultations" and the "agonies" in store for you, you are most welcome to join us in our unprecedented "adventure of the apocalypse".

(18.5.1990)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

PETER BROOK'S MAHABHARATA—THE FILM

SOME months back the four-hour film of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* was screened in Calcutta and I was asked to produce a critique. I refused, because what interests me is that epic which has inspired Indians over millennia. And that is not what I experienced through those four hours. However, John D. Smith's glowing review of Brook's eight-hour stage-adaptation in the *TLS* (reprinted in *Mother India*, May 1990) has made it impossible for me to keep silent any longer.

Let me begin with an excerpt from Smith: "It is magnificent—but is it the *Mahabharata*? The answer is a resounding Yes... This is not 'Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*'; this is the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, lovingly cast by Brook into a form which non-Indian audiences can share." Actually, to an Indian who is immersed in this greatest of all epics, the answer is a resounding No.

Brook's film is not a portrayal of a titanic clash between the forces of good and evil, which is the stuff of the epic. Nor is it even the depiction of the fratricidal struggle for Empire which draws into its vortex armies from outside India's borders, and spans far more than the land between the two rivers Ganga and Yamuna. It is not even a picture of a battle of princes. The crores of Indians do not hold dear to their hearts the story of the warring progeny of some rustic landlord, which is what we see in Brook's celluloid version. The grandeur of Indraprastha, that marvellous assembly hall created out of a wilderness which is the spark igniting Duryodhana's smouldering envy into a terrifying conflagration, is totally absent. And with it disappears the *raison d'être* of Duryodhana's deliberate denigration of Draupadi in public to avenge her public scorn of his floundering about in the assembly hall. Gone is the gripping tragedy of Karna's existential predicament: the agony of unknown parentage; the nobility of sacrificing loyalty to one's brothers and one's own life at the altar of friendship; the rivetting story of a self-made hero, devoid of any supra-human help, who voluntarily divests himself of whatever special protection he had been born with, to face the enemy purely on the basis of what he is as a self-made man. And that enemy is a son born of Karna's mother—a truth known to Karna but not to his brother. Therein lies the angst at the heart of this story, completely missed out by Brook.

Or take the simplistic manner adopted by Brook to resolve one of the most traumatic situations in the epic: why is it that Bheeshma, the eldest Kuru and the embodiment of virtue, watches unprotestingly while a queen and daughter-in-law of the dynasty is sought to be disrobed in public? Bheeshma's only reply to the blazing queries hurled at him by the anguished Draupadi is "The ways of Dharma are too subtle." It is the investigation of the different types of dharma which forms one of the major unifying threads holding the epic together: Bheeshma's ancient dharma against the wider, new dharma of Krishna; Dhritarashtra's dharma towards his progeny against the ancient tradition of

Bharata who adopted the Brahmin Bharadvaja as his successor instead of giving the kingdom to incompetent sons; the dharma of Yudhishtira which permits him to stake brothers and his own wife and theirs at dice, and not protest when Draupadi is being stripped and again when she is molested by Kichaka and Jayadratha; the dharma of Kunti who takes four husbands and insists on her daughter-in-law going one better, and takes to the forest with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari when her sons have won the kingdom; the dharma of the wives of the five brothers, who do not accompany their husbands into exile and leave Draupadi to be their sole companion; the dharma of Arjuna who would rather take on the challenge of the Trigarta monarch and be drawn away from the battle-field than protect Yudhishtira whom Drona has sworn to capture—Arjuna, that most puzzling of characters, who insists on exiling himself from Draupadi and has no hesitation in taking three wives in that interregnum; the dharma of the five brothers, not one of whom turns back to stay with their common wife when she falls down dying. Instead, we have from Brook a ridiculous scene of Yudhishtira climbing up a swaying rope ladder, presumably to Heaven!

Brook even manages to leave out the most poignant part of the questions put by the Dharma-Crane to Yudhishtira over the corpses of his brothers: what is the most amazing thing in the world? The answer is possibly one of the finest insights into the contradictions which make up the stuff of human existence—that at every moment we are surrounded by evidences of death, and yet we behave as if we will live forever!

Brook's panache for juxtaposing the grand and the ridiculous is unsurpassed. Amid the roaring of chariot-wheels on the field of Kurukshetra he suddenly produces the gaunt figure of Bheeshma atop a *charpoy* carried on the shoulders of bearers, aiming a lance here and there. And that *charpoy* when covered with arrows becomes that *shara-sajya* which is supposed to have stirred the hearts of millions of Indians over thousands of years!

Brook has this failing of mixing up the cinematic and the theatrical modes, leading to a confused audience-response. His tinkering with the text for this purpose is nothing new. His version of *King Lear* takes similar liberties with the text to show Lear and his entourage riding on and on through icy wastelands.

It is Brook's Krishna which is the most disappointing representation. His idea of conveying Krishna's presence is to show him suddenly in a very awkward imitation of the *tri-bhanga* posture, something which is wholly missing from the epic and is typical only of the *Bhagavata*. Instead of the discus, there is sometimes the flute, of which there is no evidence in the epic. And how does one get reconciled to a Krishna who is balding, with sunken cheeks, who suddenly tells Bheeshma that whatever is about to happen in the Kuru court with the dice game must happen, and he must not interrupt it at any cost? Bheeshma meekly nods, and therefore keeps quiet at Draupadi's anguished cry for justice and for

the protection of her honour. This is a wholly gratuitous and uncalled-for tampering with the text.

John D. Smith has high praise for Brook's handling of the Book of Virata, as "an interlude of pantomime". Pantomime it is assuredly not. What is there of pantomime in the abject roles which five princes and their queen have to perform: of a gambler, a cook, a eunuch, a cowherd, a groom and a maid-servant? The attempted rape of Draupadi is no part of pantomime. What this Book certainly does constitute is a foreshadowing of the great war to follow. Uttara, like Arjuna later, grows faint at the sight of the Kuru army. Arjuna, like Krishna later, forces him to fight and, as in the great war, all the Kuru champions are laid low and the five brothers take regal seats in the court, with their queen. It is Uttara's sister who bears in her womb Parikshit, the future king. To see this Book as a pantomime is to have missed the point completely.

Smith's comment that the central narrative conveys a "clearly readable" message, namely that the epic "is a highly fatalistic account of destruction visited on men by gods" shows a typical occidental mental make-up at work, incapable of apprehending the Indian situation. Whatever else it might be, the *Mahabharata* certainly does not depict the Pandavas as "pressed by the will of the gods into ever-worsening moral and physical conflicts, culminating in a cataclysmic war of annihilation." That, indeed, is what the *Iliad* is about and the *Nibelungenlied*. The very reason why the *Mahabharata* is still so gripping to Indians is precisely because it repeatedly brings home to us the truth:

In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be; passions spin the plot,
We are betrayed by what is false within.

Smith's idea, "But whatever he does, he will not avert the destruction the gods have called for" belongs wholly to the realm of Greek tragedy and is no part of the ethos of Vyasa's epic. Here it is the individual who shapes his destiny. It is Bheeshma who with deliberate intent sacrifices kingdom and progeny for his father's pleasure, and thus carves out a unique niche in myth and legend. It is Yudhishtira who decides, twice over, to accept the challenge to play at dice despite the pleas of his brethren, and accepts the exile that follows. It is Kunti who, having been told by Yudhishtira and the twins that Arjuna has won Draupadi, greets the returning trio of Bheema, Arjuna and Panchali with the order to share her equally; and again it is Draupadi who accepts this, it is not forced upon her. In all this, Krishna has nothing to do, contrary to what Smith would like to put across by writing, "the gods have sent one of their number Krsna to oversee events". It is the arrogance of the Pandavas in the tournament which turns Karna into an enemy (Yudhishtira the meek and dharmika never protests against the mocking of Karna here) and it is Yudhishtira's peculiar

dharma which leads to the release of Jayadratha after he has molested Draupadi, and this becomes the cause of Abhimanyu's death. Krishna does not and cannot prevent any of these events, each of which is critical in the shaping of the future plot. What Krishna does do is the setting up of Yudhishtira as the Emperor, through the killing of the tyrant Jarasandha and his follower Shishupala, and the performance of the "rajasuya" sacrifice. This is something which Brook overlooks, and it is a critical omission, for this is what excites the jealousy of Duryodhana and precipitates the dice-game.

One is further disappointed in the film by the depiction of Ghatotkacha and his mother Hidimba as some horrendous African cannibals, and Shiva as a Japanese kung-fu master, worsting Arjuna in martial arts. One of the most irritating scenes is one where Duryodhana uses black magic to find out where Arjuna is practising austerities. There is absolutely no justification for importing such mumbo-jumbo, possibly on the mistaken premise of India as the land of the rope-trick, etc.

Smith is way off the mark when he claims: "Unlike the *Ramayana*... the *Mahabharata* acknowledges its central god's identity with Viṣṇu from the start." This is simply not the case and what he cites as proof (5.22) is by no means part of the Ur-epic. Such Western *ad-hoc* criticism is the result of inadequate acquaintance with what remains the most thorough study of Krishna till today: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's *Krishna-charitra* (1886). Thanks to the M. P. Birla Foundation, it will soon be available to the English-knowing public. There Bankim has painstakingly collated all the available evidence on Krishna, sifted it, and come up with a picture of Krishna in the Mahabharata, which has nothing to do with the subsequent interpolations of Vaishnava cults identifying him with Vishnu.

It is, perhaps, symptomatic of the lack of sensitivity of the Occidental mind to the Indian ethos that Smith's glowing tribute to Brook has not a word to speak of the most outstanding performance in the film: that of Mallika Sarabhai as Draupadi. She brings to her role that fire and grace which befits one described by Vyasa as born of the sacred sacrificial Agni. One of the finest scenes in the film is that in which Mallika-Draupadi, at once revolted by Bheema's brutal killing of Duhshasana and impelled by the memory of his attempted stripping of her, approaches the gory corpse and in a single movement of ineffable grace kneels and casts her unbound tresses over the bloody entrails. Mallika herself felt cramped and dissatisfied with Brook's unwillingness to explore the agony of Draupadi, five-husbanded yet with no husband. And this impelled her to create her own production SHAKTI, in which she portrays on stage the plight of Draupadi through dance and recitation. At the other end of the spectrum lies the marvellous exploration of the psyche of Draupadi in Saoli Mitra's one-woman stage-production *Naathoboti anaathabat* in Bengali. When one sees such productions, one realises how distant from the Indian experience are theatrical

tours-de-force like Brook's, which are more of a showing-off of his brilliance as a director in getting together an international cast than a sensitive depiction of the heart and soul of India through that most merciless and traumatic of epics, the *Mahabharata*, in its relentless exposure of human frailty and heroism.

Brook successfully creates an abiding impression in the film through his remarkably evocative and haunting use of the figure of Amba. Casting her in the tradition of the avenging Erynnyes of Greek mythology, he has the unaging Amba relentlessly searching for a means to hunt down Bheeshma and appearing out of mist and fog in the Pandava/Kaurava camps. What strikes a jarring note is her encounter with the Pandavas during their exile, as in the text there is simply no such encounter, Amba having immolated herself long before their birth. However, the ominously haunting figure of Amba undergoes a fascinating transformation in the final scene of the shooting down of Bheeshma. Brook shows us here a woman unable to shoot the deadly arrows, wracked by an intense love-hate for Bheeshma. She stares in anguish, willing it and yet agonising over it, as Arjuna, from behind her, mercilessly pierces the non-combating Bheeshma through and through. This, indeed remains a signal contribution to the Mahabharata corpus of interpretations. It is worth noting that in Brook's vision there is no sex-change undergone by Amba into Shikhandin. Somehow, she lives on unageing, kept young perhaps by the sheer fury of her insensate, all-consuming desire for vengeance, while Bheeshma turns into the oldest of the Kurus.

Another peculiar departure from the text lies in Brook transposing the Hidimba-Bheema encounter from the post-Varanavata exile period to the post-dice-game exile of 13 years. Hidimba was the first Pandava bride and Ghatotkacha the first son. To have Bheema wed her after they have married Draupadi makes no sense, for it is the bachelor Bheema who is unable to resist her advances, and it is the Pandavas seeking allies undercover who eagerly seize any alliance coming their way. This would not hold psychologically true for them in the Book of Exile. The absence of Vidura is another glaring *lacuna*.

On the other hand there are brilliant insights such as Gandhari's cryptic reply, as the forest-fire nears, to Dhritarashtra's query as to why she bandaged her eyes. She asks, "Why did you not stop me? Why did you never ask me to remove it?" He does not reply, and they walk towards the flames.

At the end, it is good to look back and realise that the epic is, in a way, the autobiography of Vyasa, written in the third person by himself. It is he who watches and chronicles the annihilation of his own progeny. And the final question which rings out, echoing across the centuries, is the despairing cry voiced by Vyasa, a question to which no answer is given:

I raise my arms and I shout—
 but no one listens!
 From dharma comes success and pleasure:
 why is dharma not practised?

If we are to speak of “fatalism” with Smith, the only sign of this can be said to lie in a peculiar weakness of character passed on from generation to generation in the Puru dynasty. This flaw is akin to that tragic flaw which Shakespeare speaks of in *Hamlet* as destroying all the goodness in a man. It is heralded by Nahusha, elected as king of the gods in place of Indra, who is driven by his desire for Indra’s wife Shachi to perdition. His son Yayati becomes a classic symbol of the tragedy of lust, which consumes without satisfying. His descendant Shantanu is so blinded by lust that he allows the crown-prince to give up the kingdom. His son Vichitravirya dies of over-indulgence in the same passion. His wives, being tainted with that, are unable to accept Vyasa in a pure frame of being, and give birth to defective sons. Even Pandu dies of lust. Vyasa himself, indeed, is the product of the sage Parashara forcing himself upon the fisher-maid Satyawati. It is the supreme irony of the epic that the person who becomes the *de facto* ruler at the end is not any Pandava, but Yuyutsu, son of Dhritarashtra by a maid! No wonder Vyasa cries out in despair at the end of this epic at man’s deliberate rejection of salvation and the remorseless working out of the tragic flaw ingrained deep within, driving him on to destruction. Unfortunately, as far as Brook is concerned, none of this exists!

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

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

(Continued from the issue of July 1990)

If we take the clue from the Gita that the supreme Purusha is the true teaching of the Vedanta and work out the clue in the light of the Gita's own idea of the Purushottama, the result is amazing. The true content of the Upanishads unfolds itself gradually through various texts and finally culminates in the teaching of the Purusha or Brahman in triple aspect. This is in contradiction to the established view of the Brahmavadins who throw their exclusive emphasis on the immutable Brahman. For them the immutable Brahman is the ultimate reality and the whole message of the Vedanta, because it answers to their ascetic urge and aspiration for actionless perfection, *naiṣkarmyasiddhi*. As long as we subscribe to the view of the Brahmavadins, we can neither understand the unique significance of the Gita's teaching nor gain a true insight into the message of the Vedanta.

All actions proceed from the play of the three gunas of Prakriti, and since the gunas operate through the ego and its limitations, our active existence is in bondage to works, *karmabandha*. The Sankhya's solution to overcome the bondage is cessation from action and withdrawal into the inactive Purusha, *Karmasannyāsa*. This solution is based upon the phenomenal truth of works; but the essential truth is that works proceed not from the lower Prakriti of the three gunas, but from the higher Prakriti of the supreme Purusha, *prakṛtum svām*. If we rise into the higher Prakriti and put on the law of being of the Lord, we can act like the Lord, without bondage to works, *sādharmyam*. When the Gita proposes the ideal of *sādharmyam* as an alternative to that of *karma sannyāsam*, it places before us a unique possibility about which the Sankhya had no knowledge.

To live and act in the supreme Purusha is not only to grow into His law of being and nature but also to put on the law of immortality, *dharmyāmṛtam* (12-20). Though He is the unborn eternal beyond the world of mortal existence, he is seated in the heart of all beings and enjoys embodied existence in the world, *sarvasya ca aham hṛdi sanniviṣṭaḥ* (15-15). Even so, we must become immortal not merely by entering into the Unborn Purusha untouched by the law of birth and death; we must also possess Him in the very conditions of embodied existence upon earth, otherwise we fall away from the completeness of the goal of immortality, like the Brahmavadins whose attention was fixed only on the Unborn Self. The teaching of the Gita enables us to outgrow the limitation of the Brahmavadins and realise immortality by an integral union with the supreme Purusha.

The Yoga of the Gita has set before itself the goal of reaching the supreme

Purusha in all His essential aspects. In order to realise this high but difficult aim, the Gita insists on raising our entire being to the highest level of spiritual perfection. For an integral goal can be achieved only by an integral opening and seeking, *sarvabhāvena*. By itself none of the traditional yogas is capable of producing this integral opening, because it selects one part of our natural being to the exclusion of other parts and elevates it as a means of union with the Divine. Evidently, the Gita's Yoga is superior to all forms of traditional yoga, "the highest Yoga synthetic and integral directing Godward all the powers of our being"¹.

If the secret of Vedic sacrifice is to worship the gods, its highest secret is in going beyond them and discovering the all-pervading Brahman as the ultimate object of worship.

If the secret of Vedānta is to be found in the teaching of the immutable Brahman, its highest secret is embodied in the teaching of the triple Brahman or Purusha.

If the secret of active existence is to turn away from life and abandon works, its highest secret is in doing works for the sake of God, works without ego and desire.

If the secret of immortality is to be sought in the Unborn beyond birth and death, its highest secret is in enjoying embodied existence without ceasing to possess the unborn Self.

If the secret of yoga is to reach the Godhead through one of the powers of being, its highest secret is in lifting the whole being Godward and possessing him in his entirety.

This is the highest secret, the true message of the Gita. If this is the meaning and significance of the highly pregnant phrase, *Sarvaguhyatamam*, the Gita has certainly spoken the supreme word, *paramam vacaḥ*.

(Concluded)

N. JAYASHANMUKHAM

¹ *Essays on the Gita*, p 137

SHE

SHE sought me out—
My restless wandering self—
'Midst the faceless crowds
Of the city of noise,
And sent me a chariot
Of swift winged steeds.

I went racing to her
Across forest, field and town
Through rain, wind and cloud
With life's little 'Offering'
Of all that I had

She bade me welcome
At the Shrine of the Master,
Bathed me in a fragrance
Of earth's most exquisite flowers,
Fed me upon a plantain leaf
Food made for the Gods.

And then She led me
Towards that vast Silence
That contains all Creation.

SURESH THADANI

THE COUNTRY-PATH

THE spring-time sky is aflame with colours!
Where, O Country-Path, do you go, in search of whom?
Are you enchanted by the beauty of the blooms?
Whom do you want to entwine with your spiral arm?
O friend of the pilgrims of the Truth,
If you forget your self-law and are after wild palasas,
To whom then will the seekers take recourse?
The highway is built with bricks and stones.
It heads towards distant lands trampled by automobiles,
Announcing the tortured pangs of the inanimate engines
And ejecting poisonous gas of untold suffering...
But you! you have emerged from the soil,
Sanctified by the age-long sadhana of the initiates!
The crimson dawn showers on you the pollens of love,

The green crops mingled with the shadows of clouds
 Fashion the braid of your beautiful hair!
 Most you exult with the sacred touch
 Of the bare feet of minstrels and Krishna-lovers.
 Why then are you wandering in the wilderness, a victim of desire?
 O Path eternal, give up your mad pursuit
 And point your self to the ultimate goal of India—
 From ages past the destined redeemer of the world!

CHUNILAMAL CHOWDHKIRAN

(In answer to the Press's query about the poet's name, "What sort of a creature is this?", the Editor replied "Something like a Centaur, half man half horse—the inspired man Chunilal Chowdhury moving to his visionary goal with the help of that Dawn-seeking Vedic horse Dadhikravan represented by Amal Kiran)

SHADOWS

THE most dominating, persisting and continuing discovery started with seeing the shadows, shadows of branches of the tree, the patterns of thick concrete shadows remind us of bars of a cage, a cage filled with diffused light that makes it a symbol of ordinary life, life beautiful because of those shadows amidst diffused light.

The moment you realise that the bars are only shadows you can walk out, any time you decide to. The decision has to be yours and if you delay the greater darkness of the shadows slowly consolidates and becomes stronger, thicker, more concrete.

A "shadowless lamp" is one answer. Bring out the suns from the sparkles in the waters, in the bloom of those flowers, in the smiles. Oh of so many many wonderful forms of life and light that abound all around you. Bring out of its hiding the hidden sun within you and let your being *glow*. Your smile then will lighten the shadows and like a fog receding and dissolving as morning advances the bars of the cage will slowly disappear.

Beware! while the shadows are softening, mellowing, receding slowly into nowhere, getting increasingly illuminated they increase their appeal, they become as if alive pulsating with the light. Avoid the temptation to admire and fall in love with them, just smile at them for what they are, refuse the temptation. No more need then to walk out of the cage for there IS no cage, no bars are there.

How would the tree be when all of it, each and every branch and leaf and bud is simultaneously transparent to the light as well as absorbing all of it? When the whole tree becomes a living ever growing aspiration for light, it itself is light. Let me aspire to become that tree.

DINKAR PALANDE

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of July 1990)

SRI AUROBINDO went on: "When you will have grown up and can look back at your life, you may understand that there is no such thing as chance. An invisible Hand is guiding you from behind the veil of external incidents, particularly those who are born for a great purpose. . However, to pick up the thread of my story—I left England on board the Carthage. Though it was a storm-tossed journey, the ship didn't sink

"This life and this world of ours are very complex realities. So many forces are at work which you will understand only when you learn to look on them with the eye of Yoga. But this you must know that in all things, in their very substance, is the Divine. He is always there, whether overtly or secretly. This game of hide-and-seek that He plays, this *lila* of His is never easy to fathom, so Sri Ramakrishna used to say.

"No, indeed, mind cannot explain this huge universal mechanism that God has created. His workings are mysterious; of this I can give you a luminous proof. When my ship reached Bombay and I disembarked at the Apollo Bunder, and touched Indian soil, something miraculous happened, an experience that was unthought of and unbelievable. I felt a vast silence enveloping the earth and a deep motionless calm descended into me. Behind the hurly-burly of the city and its constantly shifting sea of sound, reigned this silence, in fact it seemed to uphold the noise. I was completely absorbed in this unmoving quiet. I myself was surprised at such an unexpected experience, but there was no room for disbelief, so concrete and real it was. I think I was then just 21 years old and I had not done any kind of sadhana before. I had read about the Self (Atman) in a book by Max Müller and had decided to find out what the Self was. That's all. I was not even certain that my experience was a spiritual one. I have told you that I used to be quite indifferent about God and religion. What I wanted most passionately was the freedom of my motherland. My country was my God. But this experience seemed to impose itself upon me. It was as though Someone was waiting for my arrival in India."

The children listened, entranced and wondering, to Sri Aurobindo's deep, soft voice. Then one of them said:

"What a strange and unusual experience! I've never heard anything like it before. We are often told about Yoga and attaining the Divine, but about an experience like yours, never. Does it have anything to do with realising God?"

"The Divine is the Infinite and manifests himself in infinite ways. What I had felt was the still motionless Self, that is all-pervading, like the ether. But I

myself did not understand at the time the spiritual quality of the experience. I only learned to look around me with new eyes. They were no longer the same ones which had till then helped me to see the world. My motherland welcomed me home by unveiling her true self before me. I had seen England, now I looked at India—there was a difference. This first experience taught me many profound truths. I realised that India was the land of spirituality, that many other new discoveries still awaited me. But all the same, all my doubts and reservations regarding the Divine did not even then disappear entirely.”

“The Mother also has said that there is a spiritual quality in this land of India—in its skies and its breezes. When for the second time she came to Pondicherry after her long stay in Japan, she saw from her ship a blue light covering Pondicherry, which extended even a few miles into the ocean. Was your experience a settled and permanent one?”

“No. It left me by the time I reached Baroda, but it was there in the background. You see, these perceptions are not very easily mastered. They come for a special purpose, as indications of the Truth. One must be truly an adept, a sadhaka indeed, in order to make them well-founded and permanent.”

“So it was to Baroda that you went on your arrival in India, not to Bengal?”

“Yes, because I was expected to present myself there by a certain date. I had told myself that after finalising the arrangements and conditions of work there, I would pay a visit home. Anyway, where was the hurry? My father was no more, neither was my mother, in a manner of speaking. You all know that she was already mentally deranged, don't you? As a matter of fact, it was quite some time before I could finally go home.”

“Did you teach at the Baroda College?”

“Much later. At first I worked in the Government office, as most I.C.S. chaps have to do. Like them, I too had to get acquainted with the various Governmental departments. It was bureaucratic work.”

“We're told that you did not enjoy that kind of work.”

“You have heard right. But little though I liked the work, I did it to the best of my ability. It was not that the work was difficult, only it was not to my taste. Of course, I continued with my readings and my writings which were to me a constant source of pleasure. Poets and writers have this great advantage over other mortals—they can lose themselves entirely in the world they create. That is why, perhaps, God has made them essentially lonely. .. Actually I did have a few friends. I also learnt to love my family, my relatives, whom I visited during the holidays. There were my maternal grandfather and uncles and brother and sister, and I used to long for the holidays, just like a child, so that I might go and live with them. The first time that I went home, that is to my grandfather's house at Deoghar,—since we didn't have a place of our own any more—and I met my family, what a joy there was all around! It was as if I was a king or a lord. Wasn't I 'England-returned'? In those days, anyone who returned home from England

was highly respected. Apart from that, I had left India in early childhood and was returning after a prolonged absence. Particularly my younger brother and sister were overjoyed. There was also another young girl, a cousin who was at school. Maybe they all were also a little nonplussed by me. For, when I arrived with my large trunks, they all crowded round me, hoping to find all sorts of presents, but were most disappointed when they found that I had brought a veritable bookshop!"

"You also ordered lots and lots of books from Bombay while you were in Baroda, didn't you?"

"Not quite, but I did order a good number of books. On seeing all my books, my relatives decided that I was a dry-as-dust bookworm and scholar. Of course, when they heard me tell stories, they quickly changed their opinion of me."

"What stories?"

"Oh, stories of my life in England, of how I almost became a Christian, of the Drewett household and how I failed the riding test. I also spoke to them about history and literature."

"You really sat and told them stories?"

"Why, don't you believe me, children? The older people in the Ashram always think of me as a stern schoolmaster, forever with a rod in his hand. And have they now converted you too to this belief? (*Laughter*)"

"No, no, they did not tell us anything of the sort. It's your books, they're so difficult that they make us believe that you are very serious and stern. Fortunately we have met you and seen for ourselves how you are."

"So the real culprits are the books?"

"Actually we had already started to understand you better after reading your Correspondence with Nirod-da."

"Thank God for those letters! Otherwise I would have had to live forever with this forbidding reputation!" (*Laughter*)

"Some say that you were quite awe-inspiring at the Darshan."

"Perhaps those who say this had already the fear lodged within themselves. Besides, I cannot always make a display of mirth during the Darshan, can I? (*Laughs*). No, no, all those notions about me are quite wrong. First of all, I am not a dried-up old scholar, never have been. Poets and writers deal with life, its essences of joys and passions. And one who has known the Divine, the very Core and Essence of all Bliss and all Life, *raso vai sah*, can he ever reject the joy of existence? Sri Ramakrishna was always God-intoxicated, was he not? And he was full of light and delight."

"But ascetics and sannyasis? They too have realised God."

"But they have turned away from the world, calling it an illusion. Their's is an incomplete Divine, since they reject His creation. This division and conflict is the root-cause of their outer joylessness. But the universe still exists in spite of

everything. It continues to survive just because it is upheld by a divine delight, what Nirod and Amal would call a luminous laughter. The English say that humour is the salt of life. And certainly human folly makes God laugh endlessly. My eldest maternal uncle too was full of a fine sense of humour. He laughed a lot and easily and could make friends with one and all. He used to tease me often, calling me "O my England-educated nephew, O greatest of scholars, O learned judge!" So much so, that when I used to visit them, I couldn't even satisfactorily indulge in my favourite pastime—reading. I had to wait for the rest of the family to go to bed before I could take up my books. In any case, I had always been a night-bird. In England I used to go to bed late and wake up late too, though not as late as Johnson, who never left his bed before 10 in the morning. I'm afraid I rarely followed the adage that I'm sure you all have been taught—"Early to bed, early to rise" and so on. (*Laughs*) Perhaps this was partly due to the cold climate. I mean, who would like to get out of a warm snug bed on a cold wintry day, specially if it was raining or snowing outside, and the sun rarely showing its face before eight or nine in the morning? In Baidyanath, at my uncle's house, of course the sun rose early, but I didn't follow suit. My uncle would sometimes jokingly comment apropos of the flower-suggestion of my name Aurobindo, 'The sun's rays have failed to disclose the lotus petals!' (*Laughter*)

"Of course, I knew how to get my own back and teased him just as much. I called my uncle by a name which made him immortal. Young and old from then on addressed him as the Prophet of Ishabgul."

"Why?"

"Because of his unswerving faith in Ishabgul as an infallible remedy. He would prescribe it for any and every ailment—whether it was cold, fever or indigestion! Anyway he understood that his nephew could give back as good as he got."

"What is Ishabgul?"

"Ask Nirod. At Baidyanath there was also another grandfather of mine, from my mother's side. He was very gentle and kind, and handsome too, with his silvery hair and beard framing his serene face lit by an inner glow. To everyone he was Rishi Rajnarayan. He used to tell me so many things about philosophy and religion, about my country and its past, its poets and its saints. A great scholar and sage, he was also a true patriot. Perhaps my brothers and I inherited many of our traits from him. My father may have been an atheist, but my mother was the daughter of a man of deep faith."

"Why don't you tell us anything about your mother?"

"I will, by and by. When I returned from England, I found that she was not well. Actually her mind had been unstable for years and this had been one of Father's biggest worries. He used to love her very much and did his best for her. He had taken a separate house just for her. When I went to see her on my return from England, she did not even recognise me. 'Is this my Auro?' she asked. 'No,

it can't be! Auro is just a little boy.' And then she added, 'My Auro has a scar on his finger.' It was only after she saw the scar that she took me lovingly in her arms. But there were other times when she was not so sweet and gentle. My father had tried every means possible, and spent enormous sums of money on her treatment, but to no avail. Finally she had to live confined, away from everybody else.

"Baidyanath was a quiet place, with green hills surrounding it. I used to wander among these hills, and sometimes even go out to practise shooting with Barin. Once, on our way back from one such shooting expedition, my aunt discovered our doings and angrily remarked, 'These two boys are surely going to hang some day.' Later, her words proved to be almost prophetic.

"My short vacation at the beginning of the year, so full of happiness and love and laughter, would seem to fly past and once again it was time to return to my dull joyless work in Baroda, to what in Ramakrishna's language would be like food without salt in it. According to him, a Godless life was like a bland dish lacking in all condiments. His similes are indeed extraordinary. But I was always reminded of Judas, then, not of God."

"Who is Judas?"

"He who betrayed Christ."

"Why were you reminded of him?"

"Poor fellow, his was indeed a pathetic life, just like mine in Baroda. As punishment for his betrayal of Christ, Judas had to burn in hell-fire the whole year round,—only on the first day of the year was he free to go to the cold ice of the North Pole to soothe his agony. I think even Hitler could not have devised a more cruel torture. If you read descriptions of Dante's Hell you may find similar descriptions of torture invented by Satan."

"But his body was cooled—"

"And can't you imagine what his feelings were when, after being cooled by the ice, he would have to return to that perpetual fire and be roasted?"

"Oh!"

"Well, to me too Baroda seemed ten times more Baroda after my short visits to Deogarh. (*Laughs*) I would come back from my uncle's happy home to the burning hot Maharashtrian food and the huge files of the Maharaja's office,.. to the life of a clerk!"

"It appears that the Maharaja asked you to look into a lot of his important affairs, even calling you to the palace sometimes for this reason—but he had given strict orders that no one should ever disturb your rest or your sleep."

(*Laughing*) "Who has made up these pretty stories? Yes, he would call me to the palace from time to time, even ask me to write some of his official letters for him—but the rest is all nonsense. The Maharaja may indeed have held me in some esteem, but the kind of respect your stories imply—never! I doubt if he treated anyone at all with that degree of honour. The pressure of the official

work in Baroda made the memories of the weeks in Deoghar even sweeter. But with time, my work had increased and even those few weeks of respite were sometimes shortened or cancelled.”

“Since you knew hardly any Bengali, what language did you speak during your holidays at home?”

“It is not quite true that I didn't know any Bengali, but I was not accustomed to speak it. In the beginning, therefore, I spoke English but a simple easy English so that even the children could follow me. English began to be widely studied in Bengal many decades ago, though maybe not as much as it is today. Actually it was amusing for me, for while I spoke to my family and friends in English, they answered me in Bengali. I would advise my sister and my cousins to hurry up and learn English so that they might not find it difficult to follow what I said. Later I learnt how to speak Bengali from a tutor in Baroda.”

“You paid a teacher, just to learn to speak Bengali?”

“One cannot learn to speak a language all by oneself, can one? And where in Baroda would I find friends who could speak to me in my mother tongue? Besides I had always found spoken Bengali quite difficult. Perhaps if, like you, I had had teachers, it might have been otherwise. But as matters stood then, my Bengali pronunciation and vocabulary resembled those of British priests and padres, a thing that my eldest uncle did not fail to notice. So there, in Deoghar, I rarely dared to speak in Bengali.” (*Laughs*)

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

VALEDICTORY SPEECH

TO THE TALKS ON SAVITRI BY DR. NADKARNI

in the Society Beach Office

Friends,

After a wonderful performance continuing for 12 days at a stretch, Dr Nadkarni's talks have come to a close. I am called upon to sing the farewell song in my brassy voice. I have been so charmed, just like all of you, that I fear my voice will break the magic spell cast upon us. Some words of thanks and gratitude, however, may not be quite unwelcome.

Dr Nadkarni's fame as an expositor of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* had reached us from Singapore. An occasion thereafter came to let us hear him in our School. I felt that the fame was genuine and it made me eager to listen to him. The chance was given. I was told that he was coming here to hold a study camp on *Savitri* for 12 days. It was a real piece of good news, for I had had no opportunity to hear any talks on *Savitri* so far

Imagine my surprise, however, when the Doctor himself paid me a visit and invited me to his talks, at least some of them, but particularly on the last day when I should give a valedictory speech, I agreed, though his last request puzzled me a bit.

I thought of attending some of the talks, for to attend all of them seemed physically impossible. But after the very first attendance my views changed and I began to come almost four times a day for 12 days. Some of you were surprised, I was told, to see me taking such an avid interest. I was dragged as it were by some Force and hurriedly came, occupied my special seat kindly offered by the Society, listened raptly and went away silently as a honey-laden bee. This was a daily occurrence.

As much as the talks it was the atmosphere created by them that was the magnet. I felt a Presence pervading the room. The reason that struck me for it, if any reason can be given for an occult phenomenon, is that, by the lecturer's own admission, *Savitri* was a madness and a passion with him. If that was so, the Aurobindonian "God-touch" was bound to be there. And the passion was felt in every word, each expression of his, either in interpretation or in elucidation or in reading of relevant passages. This made everything living. His fluent, spontaneous delivery with a masterly command over the language combined with his easy and simple manner accounted further for the Presence, and the great success resulting from it came extra graceful because of his handsome appearance

There was nothing extraordinary in all that he said, as he himself avowed. He did not open any magic casements on *Savitri*. He spoke of the usual themes:

the Divine's Love for humanity, of the Truth, Beauty and Felicity at the core of the universe, the great promise held forth by the Poet about the human race while notable thinkers were beset with gloom and saw nothing but absolute failure for it. All this he brought home to us with his unfailing energy and conviction.

One thing especially I learnt from his talk: that to enjoy poetry, one must read it aloud. Particularly great spiritual poetry like *Savitri*, full of mantric vibrations, cannot be appreciated by a mute reading. Sri Aurobindo, I am told, read aloud not only to the Mother but also to himself what he had written. Dr Nadkarni brought a fine ringing voice to his recitation.

I should stop my peroration here, but a few words are called for to dispel the element of surprise I have alluded to. I have already done it partially. What was playing at the back of your mind was probably the fact that my long association with Sri Aurobindo and especially the fact of being his scribe should have made me an authority on *Savitri* who would not need to seek for illumination from any other quarter.

Well, there are many factors that stand against your pious surmise. First of all, my age, my medical education and my ignorance of spiritual philosophy were the practical facts that deprived me of the poetic enjoyment of *Savitri*, though I perceived its supreme greatness. But there was an occult reason too which you may find interesting. Let me narrate it briefly.

One day Lord Vishnu called for Narada in Heaven. When he appeared chanting "Narayana, Narayana," the Lord told him:

"Look here, Narada. The world is in a big mess. I am constantly hearing appeals and prayers from people to come to their rescue. I have decided to go down; you will accompany me. I shall be born as a poet and compose an unprecedented epic whose mantric utterance will bring about a great change in the consciousness of the world and give it hope and courage. You will be my scribe. I shall put a veil upon your mind, even your soul, so that you may have only a vague perception of its greatness. Your duty will be to transcribe faithfully whatever I dictate to you. I shall also make you a sort of poet so that you may have some sense of English metre. But one important point. when the composition is over, I shall withdraw from the earth-scene leaving you in charge of the immortal treasure. You will hand it over to the authorities concerned to take the necessary action.

"I shall keep a watch on your development and withdraw gradually the veil upon your consciousness which will grow into Light till one day you will meet a remarkable person who, steeped in the lore of *Savitri*, will be spreading its message in the dark corners of the globe. He will seek you out and you will recognise each other as kindred souls."

Thus we came down. Lord Vishnu as Sri Aurobindo, Narada as Nirod, his scribe.

This is the occult truth. It was translated in the physical world almost as had been foretold. When after four years of strenuous labour at *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo's eyesight was affected, I was called by the Mother to do his literary work including *Savitri*. Our work proceeded in a desultory way for quite some time. Then suddenly the Poet made up his mind to finish it soon. From then on, we worked regularly and assiduously and finished it almost in a hurry, so to say, but never perfunctorily. In November 1950, the seal of completion was put on the incomplete masterpiece

He was contented.

You should now be satisfied with my apology and realise why *Savitri* could not become my passion.

But I have no regrets. For, I have been amply rewarded in other ways. Whenever I think of it, the scene that surges up before my eyes is the daily experience of sitting almost all alone on the floor close to His ineffable Presence, like a docile pupil and transcribing the verses flowing from his mouth in a slow soothing manner. This was an experience of abiding freshness. It was the intimate contact as between, I may say, father and son that is still vividly etched on my soul. The memory of his body of bliss, his occasional glance of serenity and his voice which many would have died to hear will go along with me from birth to birth.

A striking fact I recollect now and then and feel stupefied, yet elevated by it, is that he had already decided to leave his body. Yet he was dictating *Savitri* in absolute calm composure and attending to all the details with an eye to perfection.

This is what he has called freedom and independence of the Spirit.

Now, leaving aside all retrospections and ruminations, let me conclude with our heart-felt thanks to our friend Dr Nadkarni. He has made us enter into the divine beauty of *Savitri*. We shall wait eagerly to hear the wonderful Book II from his ringing voice in the near future.

NIRODBARAN

MOOT COURT HEARING ON SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OR EDWARD DE VERE?

Few readers of literature know of a recent event of great interest to the literary world. On September 25, 1987, the American University, Washington D.C., held a trial to decide a question that has vexed scholars for over three centuries. Mother India has the privilege to serialise 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 July 1990)

BOYLE (*Continuing*)—Now I think I'll deal with what to many is the most troublesome aspect of the case, and that is: Did William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon have the learning, have the capability to produce this great body of works? Scholars have pored for days upon days, for weeks upon weeks over the works, and have found in them all manner of learning—classical allusions, Latin, Greek, horticulture, landscape, gardening, sailing—we appear to be constructing a kind of six-million dollar playwright, and this indeed is what Edward de Vere is presented as, a man of enormous accomplishments. Can we really believe that this rustic from Stratford-upon-Avon who at best attended a grammar school, would have such knowledge? I think that all of these attacks depend on simple, non-historical assumptions about the time. Ben Jonson, who I would like to use as an example, was only educated at a grammar school, worked as a bricklayer, and still became the most classically learned man of his day. This is not the world in which one needs to go to a university in order to acquire classical education, we cannot apply our assumptions backward to that day. We have no direct proof that Shakespeare attended the Grammar School of Stratford-upon-Avon, but he lived within 400 or 500 yards of the place; it would have been free to him and it was an excellent school. If we assume he went there, it seems to me entirely reasonable to assume that he would have received intensive coaching in Latin and Greek.

JUSTICE—What was the faculty like?

BOYLE—We know that the faculty were educated at Oxford. In the period all through Shakespeare's childhood, there were five faculty members, all of whom had Oxford's degrees. In the period in which Shakespeare is likely to have attended, there were two particular faculty members, one I believe with an M.A., the other with simply a B.A. Both of them appear to be men of fair learning of the time, and I think there is no reason to doubt that they would have been capable of imparting to Shakespeare all of the education he required. We

have faculty members near that time who wrote Latin poetry.

JUSTICE—And assuming he attended the full number of years he could have, how many would he have attended?

BOYLE—I believe, although I'm not absolutely sure on this point, that he would have attended between four and six years. Leaving aside for a moment the classical learning, let me deal with some of the other issues raised about my client. I already talked about the handwriting and how our assumptions make the handwriting look illiterate. But if we look at some of the other references in Shakespeare's plays, if we look for example at the Italian locations, again this is used as evidence for Edward de Vere. Edward de Vere had been to Italy. Surely then we must assume that the person who wrote these lines went to Italy. No, again I would claim we must not. If you were a playwright of the time, and you wish to have plays which at least in some respect were vaguely critical of the upper classes, which in some respect were satirical, would you situate them in England? No, not if you were sensible, you would not. You would situate them in Italy. But how did Shakespeare get the learning required to situate them in Italy? Look at Ben Jonson. We have no evidence he ever went to Italy, but he also uses Italian locations. When we look at this learning, it is clear that it refers to something gleaned from books. His is the knowledge of a bookworm. Well, I would claim that Shakespeare is simply a better writer than Ben Jonson, and we all know that certain people can quarry from books and from their own imagination something which convinces others. One example—I think a particularly American example—is Hart Crane. In writing the great work, *The Red Badge of Courage*, he described a battle. Afterwards, he was in a battle, and he said, "I was amazed at how well I had written; my description was excellent. I was even approached by others who told me that I had captured the very essence of a battle." Yet up to that moment, he had never been there. And this I have to suggest is what Shakespeare's particular genius is, he is capable of doing this and this is one of the reasons he is such a great playwright. Turning to some other elements of specialized knowledge, which, it is claimed, disqualify my client, there are the legal allusions in Shakespeare's plays. Those who read only Shakespeare's plays, and those who know little of Elizabethan history, would think that this marks him down as a man with legal training. If one in fact goes back and looks at the other plays of the time, as has been done by Mr. J. M. Robertson, one finds that every single allusion that Shakespeare used is also used by other playwrights of the period, some of whom had no legal education. Again, apparently legal allusions were extremely popular during the Elizabethan period—Shakespeare's own father was in court 67 times. This was an extremely litigious society: hyperlexis is not an entirely modern illness.

JUSTICE—Well, there is some evidence, isn't there, that Shakespeare had several connections with the law, actual transfer of title of property and that sort of thing, and aren't the allusions in the plays limited to that sort of thing?

BOYLE—The allusions in the plays are generally concerned with exactly the kind of issues that Shakespeare would have had a personal connection with, either in such things as the Bellot-Mountjoy deposition, or in the various conveyances for his own properties.

JUSTICE—How about the domestic-relations rules of law involved in *Measure for Measure*?

BOYLE—There, I think, we have simply a reference to two things. First, the general knowledge of the time. Allusions to legal matters were, for some reason, beloved of the Elizabethans. In the same way perhaps as allusions to rock music were beloved of the novelists of the 1960s. Now if one looked back at the novelists of the 1960s a thousand years hence, one might think that these peoples must have all been musicians. Yet, of course, we know that this is not the case. This is simply something which was general knowledge. Secondly, I think there is also another possible source. Since everyone was so litigious and Shakespeare himself was involved in a deposition which concerned explicitly such domestic-relations matters, there is every reason to believe he had personal exposure to those rules of law. Thus I would claim that the legal allusions have turned yet another red herring, another thing which depends on a non-historical assumption about how one got and kept knowledge in the Elizabethan era. But there is more than simply an attack on Shakespeare's specialized knowledge contained in my learned friend's argument. He also argued that the record is inconsistent with the kind of life we would expect a transcendent playwright to live. When we look back at this man's life, it is mainly legal records that we find. He seems to spend a lot of time buying and selling properties, and this, it is somehow suggested, is too worldly, too commercial, too petty for the immortal bard to have engaged in. Here again I think we have two things: a non-historical assumption about authorship and a mistake about history. The second can be disposed of quickly. Which records are likely to survive? Legal records, lawyers, as we all know, guard their records with great care; thus the fact that those are the records which survive tells us little, if anything about Shakespeare's character. But even if we concentrate on these records, is there anything strange about Shakespeare's appearing such a man of commerce, such a man interested in property? Well, we believe that it's a universal and timeless truth that artists are somehow removed from worldly concerns. We believe it's a strange idea to imagine that artists would ever want to acquire property, but that is a notion which is not a universal and timeless truth: it is derived from the Romantic Movement in literature between the beginning and the end of the 19th Century. And I would suggest that since Shakespeare lived at least 100 years before that period, it is an entirely inappropriate analogy and an entirely inappropriate vision of authorship to apply to him. In other words, Shakespeare was not Byron, Shakespeare was not Proust. Shakespeare was a professional Elizabethan dramatist. He lived the life of a man of his time and he left the records we would expect and when people

look at his records, people with little or no other historical knowledge, they say this can't be the records of a great playwright, a great poet. What they don't realize is that they are supplying their own assumptions—those would not have been the assumptions of his day. I would claim I have proved today that the three questions I posed at the beginning of the case can all be answered in ways favorable to my client. First, is there any evidence that Edward de Vere would write these works under a pseudonym? I would claim there is no evidence that he had either the talent or the opportunity to write; neither did he have the motive or the means to conceal his authorship. Second, are there ample records to demonstrate that my client is Shakespeare of Stratford? I would claim I have demonstrated that there are: the first folio, Hand 'D' in *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*, and *Greene's Groats-worth of Wit*. And finally, do Shakespeare's background, his likely education, the records he left behind him, contradict the idea that he was the author of the plays? I would claim they do not, and only our romantic and non-historical preconceptions would lead us to such a view. Thank you very much.

(To be continued)

“SATYAVAN MUST DIE”

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

(Continued from the issue of July 1990)

3. *Did Narad do the Right Thing?*

NARAD knows about Satyavan’s death, everything to the last little detail on the human and the superhuman planes. He is, however, helpless: he cannot put his will or force to avoid it, he cannot set that death aside. Such a thing is entirely beyond his power or his means. In fact, he is quite limited in his scope of action to such an extent that he would not have been able even to make Savitri change her mind, to leave the doomed, abandoning him to his own fate. In a situation of this kind, fully aware as he was of the impending tragedy after the marriage, Narad’s silence could have been praise enough; but he seems to have preferred to focus sharply the calamity by giving to Satyavan’s death an utter definiteness and finality. Did he then precipitate some divinely urgent or noble issue by using the solution of human grief and suffering? He does speak to the royal parents, even before Savitri’s return after her successful quest,

...of the toil of men and what the gods
Strive for on earth, and joy that throbs behind
The marvel and the mystery of pain.¹

Did he therefore consider this calamity, this death-sharp disaster, to be the quickest process to unravel the mystery of joy hiding behind evil and pain and anguish? “Satyavan must die” is the cruellest sentence to pronounce and Narad, the heavenly sage, lends himself to utter it as if it were packed with some deep and tremendous significance in the context of the “toil of men”. There is some concern which he must impart to the concerned. True, the significance which the sage sees is hard to comprehend and harsher yet to bear. But to be asked to recognise and accept the necessity of pain for the earthly creature’s welfare after listening to the chant of the glories of the Name of Vishnu is extremely difficult, even baffling, to the ordinary sense. There are already tears for things in great abundance in life and Narad’s prophecy of doom makes them frightfully large and ominous. A mother’s heart must shatter into a million bits, losing all faith and confidence in the even justice and clemency of the high gods of the sky supervising the lives of men on this sorrowful earth. Narad’s visit is often considered to be a feared event, his coming portending some immediate misfortune; in the present instance he is actually carrying the Word of Fate that shall open doors for the death to enter in. The wondrous moment of celebration,

in which the discovery of love and joy was made by Savitri, is soon going to be turned into an expanse of Time stretching to desolate eternity.

If Narad had no control whatsoever over the events that were in any case going to happen, then why did he add to the helpless sufferer's anguish the poignant agony, the savagery of such a dire foreknowledge? If in the scheme of things there is an occult purpose in keeping the future hidden from view, why did he lend that vision to the blind and the driven? Was he not responsible for accentuating the peril and the gloom, making visible the Shadow that was anyhow advancing relentlessly towards the fated? The future eating into the present is like a burning shaft of woe deeply sunk into the breast of happiness and not letting the victim die in the comfort of oblivion. One thing, however, is fairly certain. While it is destined that Satyavan must die, Narad has no hand in it and he is simply impelled to make the Palace aware of this impending misfortune or disaster that in time necessary precautions be taken or a higher strength to meet it invoked. He is only the carrier of the edict of Destiny, the deliverer of the message. The first child of this rare marriage is death, but it is clearly and unmistakably seen that in this death there is the birth of a new creation. Even if Narad had not visited the Palace the ultimate outcome would have remained unaltered; Satyavan's death was not a contingent death and Fate would have found another course if this had to happen. Narad is not its initiator and certainly not its maker; he has not willed it. What is sagacious about him is that, being in the know of it, he does not sit quiet but opts to play a very positive role in the unfoldment of the momentous events that are going to occur on a vast cosmic scale. Granting for a moment that he had willed it, it is definite that his will would not have been effective against Savitri's will or choice; in fact, in such a situation, things would have been far simpler for her to tackle. She could have easily put aside that death had it been fixed by a lower power. Which means there are other dimensions, higher layers of determinism, than the present edict.

Narad announces that only "twelve swift-winged months" are given to the young couple to be together. Above the house of Satyavan hovers Evil, like a darksome hawk ready to swoop and strike with talons of irresistible strength. Satyavan knows nothing about it, but from a height far above the clouds of fear, Narad at once notices it and decides to visit Aswapathy. Making Satyavan or his parents aware of it would not have been of any avail as none could cancel his predetermined death. On the other hand, the only redeeming possibility is in Savitri's invoking in her intensest hour of grief the mighty Mother to claim him back from the very hands of the Spirit of Doom. Not just to warn, but to inspire preparedness for the eventuality is then the urgent purpose behind this heaven-swift visit to Madra. While therefore he carries the Word of Fate, he also brings a luminous might to strengthen the unearthly love's terrestrial choice. "To steel the will of Savitri" is the missioned intent, the noble motivating force, behind the long and arduous journey across soul-space he had decided to undertake. He

does not sit inactively, listlessly watching the drama of life from his heavenly abode, but with the Name of Vishnu on his lips he throws himself into the thick of the events. He refuses to be a passive witness to the doings of Fate and Time; he is not just absorbed and lost in the beatitude of the all-delightful Above. Narad's soul is intimate with the World-Soul and is in deep love with the Soul of Earth, Earth on her evolutionary path to God. Whatever little might he has he throws on the positive side in the world-dynamics. The forces that have gathered here, and which are now poised on the verge of a decisive battle, are either going to shatter and destroy the creation or else new-fashion it. It is in that working and conglomeration of forces that he adds his own too; it is a conation which has tilted on the side of God. The meeting of Satyavan and Savitri is a marvel of heaven and in that marvel is a new possibility, a flowering of the new order. This can emerge only when the Past standing as an obstacle is totally dissolved. And for this to happen all strengths have to come together. Narad's is a bit of that. The son of heaven sees far and wide and in that wisdom participates in the joy of creation moving towards god-kind. He delivers a most difficult message. To announce a foreboding most sombre a deepest love is needed and it is that love which on this occasion Narad pours in full abundance. In that process a certain need for the occult action is also fulfilled.

Imagine for a moment Narad cutting the long distances and coming to the Palace much after Savitri's return. She would have disclosed to her father about her meeting with Satyavan and her resolve to marry him, despite the desolate state in which his defeated and exiled parents were presently living. There would have been some reservation but perhaps not strong enough. Actually, the Queen had already reconciled herself with this choice of Savitri, as we notice from what she had told Narad:

A single spirit in a multitude,
Happy is Satyavan mid earthly men
Whom Savitri has chosen for her mate,
And fortunate the forest hermitage
Where leaving her palace and riches and a throne
My Savitri will dwell and bring in heaven.²

Aswapathy, ever righteous in conduct, would have consulted the royal priests and also the holy sages. They would have perhaps pointed out some lurking evil in the conjunction of the planets and advised propitiation of the gods. The King, accomplished in Yoga as he was, would have himself seen a shadow float over the name; but he also would have somewhat felt relieved on seeing the shadow being chased by “a sudden and stupendous light”. In fact he, “like one who ever sits facing Fate”, would have simply accepted it as a part of some high will and proceeded with the formalities. Savitri would have been taken to the hermitage

and left there, with her joy and with her grief, in the forest's wilderness. If Narad would have come and declared Satyavan's death now, somewhere at this point in the unfoldment of the events, then his mission would have lacked the full force in delivering with the Word of Fate a part of the redeeming might. His visit would have been less effective and would have made a still lesser impact. The will Savitri established in accepting and asserting her love at the very first knowledge of the calamity is the significant occult gain provided by his timely arrival and announcement.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

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SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of July 1990)

WHEN Sri Aurobindo was in Alipore jail, accused of conspiracy against the British Government, he received a book of Vivekananda's speeches: *From Colombo to Almora*. It came at a critical moment, for he was facing the possibility of the extreme penalty or at least of life-transportation to the Andamans. He used to open the pages and find peace, courage and light from them. Not only that, he invariably heard the voice of Vivekananda though he was engrossed in reading the Gita. He has narrated his experiences: "It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence... The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on the subject."¹

The life and vision of Vivekananda can be summed up in the mighty phrase of the Upanishads, *Nāyamātmā balahīnena labhyaḥ*: 'This Supreme Soul no weakling can attain.'

The gospel of strength that Vivekananda spread was very characteristic of the man. The passages which he proffered from the Vedas and Upanishads were magnificent in their poetic beauty, sublime in their spiritual truth, one can say in the grand style supreme. The consciousness that breathed out these mighty words, these heavenly sounds was in itself mighty and heavenly, "Awakening in you someone dead." Indeed it was the soul that Vivekananda awakened and stirred in humanity. Any orator, any speaker with some kind of belief, even if it was for the moment in what he says, by the sheer force of assertion, can convince one's mind and draw one's acquiescence and adhesion. He said: "Brahman is asleep in you, awaken it, you are the Brahman, awaken it. You are free and almighty. It is the spirit consciousness—Sachchidananda—that is the real man in you."

The two distinguishing factors in Vivekananda's life were, first, the God-intoxication of Sri Ramakrishna and, second, the modern rationalistic mind of Vivekananda whose searching soul was awakened by his Master towards his greater destiny.

Before the final departure of Ramakrishna he called Narendra (Vivekananda) to sit before him and looked at him and went into samadhi. Narendra felt a subtle force like an electric current passing into his body and then he lost his outer consciousness. When he recovered, Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "I have given to you all that I have. Now I have become a beggar. Through this power you will do great things." Then the Master and the disciple became one. They were not separate entities; they were completed by each other to do the work of the Mother as God-representatives.

About Vivekananda's and Ramakrishna's personalities Sri Aurobindo said:

“What was Ramakrishna? God manifest in a human being; but behind there is God in His infinite impersonality and His universal Personality. And what was Vivekananda? A radiant glance from the eye of Shiva; but behind him is the divine gaze from which he came and Shiva himself and Brahma and Vishnu and OM all-exceeding.”²

Sri Aurobindo also said: “It was in religion first that the soul of India awoke and triumphed. There were always indications, always great forerunners, but it was when the flower of the educated youth of Calcutta bowed down at the feet of an illiterate Hindu ascetic, a self-illuminated ecstatic and ‘mystic’ without a single trace or touch of the alien thought or education upon him that the battle was won. The going forth of Vivekananda, marked out by the Master as the heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it, was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer. Afterwards when the awakening was complete, a section of the nationalist movement turned in imagination to a reconstruction of the recent pre-British past in all its details.”³

Vivekananda never forgot to underline the idea that India was rising not for her own self alone but also for the vaster self of the world. Not only this: he felt for India’s sufferings and the poverty of her millions. Because to him they were Gods by serving whom, he said, India would be serving God which was the Vedantic basis of Indian nationalism.

Vivekananda spoke to the Atman in man, he spoke to the Atman of the world, and he spoke specially to the Atman of India. India has a great mission. He said:

“Man is higher than all animals, than all angels: none is greater than man. Even the Devas will have to be conscious of themselves. They do not know what they are, they have to be actually and sovereignly what they are really and potentially. This then is the life-work of every one.”

“First let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. ‘Be and make’—let this be our motto.”

“That is indeed the only way of securing a harmonious and perfected humanity.”

“Work and not abstention from work is the way, but not work for ignorant enjoyment.”⁴

These are luminous life-giving mantras for the humanity of today, which are the great need of the world. Vivekananda soon got an ideal opportunity to make use of his exceptional talents. After Sri Ramakrishna’s passing he made a pilgrimage not only all over India but also to the West. In 1892 he heard of the Parliament of Religions that was to be held in Chicago in 1893. In connection with the passage to America he faced numerous difficulties. Ultimately he succeeded. The main idea at the back of the Parliament of Religions was to prove the superiority of Christianity before the representatives of the religions of the world.

“The Swami spoke before the Parliament proper no less than five times.... In the opening address he spoke of the catholicity of Hinduism in whose dictionary the word ‘intolerance’ never found a place. His most significant address was his paper on Hinduism, which he read on 19 September 1893. Before reading the paper he made a few remarks which created a great sensation in the American press. As they are not to be found in the official proceedings of the Parliament or in biographies, but throw light on the trend of his political thought they are quoted below as reported in *Chicago Daily Tribune* of 20 September 1893.

“We who come from the East have sat here on the platform day after day and have been told in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because Christian nations are the most prosperous in the world, with their foot on the neck of 250,000,000 Asiatics. We look back into history and see that the prosperity began with Spain. Spain’s prosperity began with the invasion of Mexico. Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the throats of its fellowmen.”

His famous speech on the first day of the Parliament, in which he addressed the audience as ‘Sisters and Brothers of America’, created a sensation in the great assembly, and his subsequent speeches confirmed him as an outstanding religious preacher. Sri Aurobindo has mentioned: “The impotence of the civilised world was strikingly shown in the crisis of Russian despotism and at the time of the Boer War. Even were it otherwise, a London session of the Congress would only awaken a passing interest. In that respect the visit of Swami Vivekananda to America and the subsequent work of those who followed him did more for India than a hundred London Congresses could effect. That is the true way of awakening sympathy,—by showing ourselves to the nations as a people with a great past and ancient civilisation who still possess something of the genius and character of our forefathers, have still something to give the world and therefore deserve freedom,—by proof of our manliness and fitness, not by mendicancy.”⁵

1893 was the landmark in the history of India. When Swami Vivekananda went to America to spread the true sense of Vedanta, in the very year Sri Aurobindo after spending fourteen years in England went back to India to establish the Life Divine on the earth.

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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CALCUTTA'S TRICENTENARY

(Continued from the issue of July 1990)

It must be remembered that Calcutta city was growing under the auspices of the British, mostly for the business and economic interest of the East India Company under the Mughal imperialism, as permitted by them. But the British who certainly came at first as businessmen found other charms gradually and became interested in other matters. They wanted to rule and administrate, started politics with local Zamindars, Governors and others. The Banyas at the end of the night appeared as the Rulers—thus poet Tagore rhymed.

In 1717 by paying more than a lakh of Rupees the East India Company managed to get a firman from the emperor Faruksheer empowering to them the Zamindary of Calcutta without paying any tax. This gave them a better opening. Calcutta became the open competitor of Murshidabad, the capital and seat of Siraj-Ud-Daula the Nabob of Bengal. Not only did the Company start doing business without paying any tax but its employees also started doing the same on their own. They gave asylum to Krishnadas of Dhaka who earned the disfavour of the Nabob. And they constructed the fort and started collecting taxes from others. There were other nationals like the French, Dutch, Armenians, Portuguese who all behaved as merchants and like loyal subjects. But the behaviour of the Englishmen and their efforts to establish some sort of administration in the city enraged the Nabob beyond limit.

He proceeded and attacked Calcutta with soldiers, cannons and other munitions of war on 18 June 1756. The battle took place near the old fort which was captured by the Nabob. Calcutta was under his possession on 20 June 1756. "Orders were given out by beat of tomtom, that the town should not any longer be called Calcutta but Alinagar" (From narrative of the 'Loss of Calcutta' by William Tooke, as referred in *Desh, Vinodan*, 1989, Calcutta, p. 28).

The Englishmen fled to Falta. The Nabob wanted to establish the firm rule of Murshidabad. But he did not stay in Calcutta for a long period. He constructed one Masjid and appointed Manickchand as the Faujdar or ruler of Calcutta before he left. The Englishmen were very interested in coming back. All other big businessmen in and around Calcutta were also interested in their return to the city for their own business concerns. The Dutch council wrote from Hooghly to Batavia—"There now is that beautiful place, whose blooming and flourishing condition caused everyone to admire it and from which the English Company drew a great and princely income" (*Desh, Vinodan*, 1989, Calcutta, p. 29). With the loss of a considerable share of business with the Englishmen, the Nabob was also anxious to see them back to Calcutta. In the meantime Colonel Robert Clive and Admiral Charles Watson arrived on the scene with cannons and soldiers from Madras. They recaptured Calcutta on 9 January, 1757 and

committed arson in Hooghly town. Again came Siraj-Ud-Daula with his company of soldiers. Then there were all sorts of tricks played by the big merchants and their men with the Nabob, resulting in the 'Sulename' or truce being signed between Robert Clive and the Nabob on 9 February, 1757. Clive had already instructions to come to an agreement rather than engaging in a battle. So he was happy. But this was followed by the battle of Plassey. Clive's victory confirmed British imperialism in India. Alinagar was soon forgotten. Calcutta continued to grow as before under British administration. Of the names given by the Nabob, Alipur still remains.

The Englishmen gradually won supremacy over other places. The Company gained the Zamindari of the Twenty-four Parganas also. With Calcutta's commercial growth the people from the countryside were regularly coming to settle in the city. It was growing but very haphazardly. The foreigners had no conscious will to develop the town and its society. Many superstitious practices of medieval England were imported to Calcutta. People after remaining under the Muslim rulers for centuries came under another foreign yoke and culture. They did not know at the beginning how to move with them. Clever people managed to amass fortunes, others came and took whatever chance had to offer to them.

It all prepared the great change that would take place in the course of time. We may here, *en passant*, discuss a few practices imported during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries into Calcutta.

Punch houses, coffee houses and bars were established by the newcomers in their own fashion. Natives joined and enjoyed them at times. Duelling was openly practised here and there after the fashion of eighteenth-century London, where "It was the privilege of all gentlemen, from a Duke downwards to wear swords and to murder one another by rule" (*English Social History* by Trevelyan as referred to in the 'Chronicle of Calcutta' in Bengali by Benoy Ghosh, p. 93). Even the first Governor General of the Presidency of Fort William, Mr. Warren Hastings, was challenged to a duel by his colleague, a member of his council, Mr. Francis. On 7 August 1780 at Alipur near the jail the duel took place when Mr. Francis was injured. It is said, Mr. Hastings was so accustomed to such duels that he knew how to injure without killing. But killing was also frequent as per newspaper reports of the time. Such was the outcome of the duel between Sir John Macpherson, another Governor General of Bengal, and Major James Browne. The then newspapers and periodicals were replete with such information.

With the advent of the English and their administration, the Muslim power and the Judgement of the Kajis gradually receded. There appeared the British Judges to practise their peculiar savage laws imposed on this country from the seventeenth and eighteenth century England about which Trevelyan wrote in his *English Social History* (pp. 348-49). "Not only were horse and sheep-stealing

and coining capital crimes but stealing in a shop to the value of five shillings and stealing anything privily from the person, were it only a handkerchief. But such was the illogical chaos of the law, that attempted murder was very lightly punished though to slit a man's nose was capital."

But this was not applicable to the rulers themselves. In 1764 at Rangpur the black servants were informed by drum beat to speak the truth about an affair. It was also announced that anybody lying would have their ears and noses cut off. In 1761 it was requested to order the Faujdars "to fire off the mouth of a cannon the leader of the thieves who was made prisoner that others may be deterred." People including ladies were often hanged at the four road crossings for minor crimes. Hands were burnt for pilferage. To a man for the crime of stabbing the Supreme Court gave capital punishment with the words—"to be executed on Saturday, the 13th, at the four roads which met at the head of Lallbazar Street" (Benoy Ghosh, 'The Chronicle of Calcutta' in Bengali, p. 106). So was hanged Brajamohana Dutta for stealing a watch from a European's house. The famous Maharaja Nandakumar met his end in like fashion on 5 August 1775.

William Carey wrote, "Verily the crimes of forgery and theft were considered by the legislators of those days more heinous than that of man slaughter." The natives had never heard or seen such laws and their executions. A decoit was killed and his family members were sold as slaves.

Growth of the town coincided with the growth of business. From the eighteenth century onward the town with many new avenues for employment and with many new charms attracted the village population. More so, as the village economy was getting shattered to pieces slowly through the deliberate economic policy followed by the newcomers. While raw materials were collected and sent to England, manufactured goods of British mills and factories replaced the country-made products. Artisans and farmers were gradually finding their vocations unprofitable. They were rendered jobless in many cases as their products were comparatively costlier in the market, hence not sold. On the other hand the newcomers were attracted to the Nabob's life style. The East India Company and its servants found their income swelling. They followed the footsteps of their predecessors and the native rich people became the followers of the British whom they served in various capacities. Thus the luxury of employing servants for different indoor and outdoor services rose to great heights. 50/60 or more servants were employed by each such family at cheap rates of remuneration. Servants from villages came to Calcutta in large numbers. Another dark side of the then Calcutta was its slave trade. Slaves were in existence in ancient India and during Muslim rule the slave system was in vogue in a larger way. The Britishers had already been selling and purchasing Negroes from the sixteenth through the seventeenth century. When they came to India and found the existence of this system, they encouraged it for pecuniary gains. Not only were war prisoners and Africans slaves but new laws were framed

during Warren Hastings' time—the family of the criminal shall become the slaves of the state and shall be disposed of for the general convenience and benefit of the people according to the discretion of the Government. Such slaves were being sold and transferred to other countries also. The price for them was around 15 pounds, according to reports. Apart from this, during the administration of the East India Company, the entirely selfish policy of plundering this country and thereby increasing their own resources ruined the village economy. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries distressed people sold their kith and kin in many parts of Bengal. Such sales increased during a famine and such natural calamities.

Some Europeans of Calcutta had 100 to 150 slaves for their household work. It was easy to engage slaves for any work unlike servants. They were like commodities. They were generally treated very cruelly and many of them used to meet their ends at the hands of their masters. The wealthy natives also had slaves in their possession. Calcutta port became a big centre for slave trade. Sir William Jones, Justice of the Supreme Court, Calcutta, remarked among other things in one case in 1785—“Hardly a man or a woman exists in a corner of this populous town, who has not at least one slave child either purchased at a trifling price or saved perhaps from a death that might have been fortunate for a life that seldom fails of being miserable. Many of you, I presume, have seen large boats filled with such children, coming down the river for open sale at Calcutta. Nor can you be ignorant that most of them were stolen from their parents, or bought perhaps, for a measure of rice in time of scarcity” (*The Chronicle of Calcutta Town*, Part II, in Bengali by Benoy Ghosh, p. 130).

In England through continuous movements by such social reformers as Wilberforce the slave system was declared illegal in 1807. It was proclaimed illegal in many other parts of the British dominion in 1833 and in India in 1843. Yet it continued unlawfully for some years more and by the middle of the nineteenth century it may be said to have been abolished from the society.

In eating, drinking, sleeping, idling, taking the services of hundreds of menials, giving vent to all sorts of caprices apart from other luxuries, the Sahibs exceeded the life style of Nabobs. Their followers were the richer class among the natives, like the Rajas, Zamindars who equalled them or even exceeded them. An Advocate remarked—“Such a round of extravagance would ruin a Rothschild and disorder the liver of a Hercules.” Display of fireworks was another way of making an expensive show. Lakhs of rupees would be burnt in making elephants fight, creating volcanoes of fire, shooting up rockets which flower in different colours, and write on the sky, “God save the King”, “Long live the King”, etc.

With the expansion of the Company's establishments, they required English-knowing writers, as they called the clerks. The natives had shown much proficiency. They many times equalled the English writers and formed the

majority in the mercantile offices.

It was all right up to this point but their defects were elsewhere, in their black colour; though not always black they were non-European in complexion. Their average monthly salaries were from Rs 4 to Rs. 10. In some cases it was Rs. 8 to Rs. 20 per month. But their British colleagues received Rs. 60 to Rs. 100 for the same job.

(To be continued)

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

A GLIMPSE OF THE TRUE INDIA

FOR the last three years, each Sunday, at about 9 a.m a hush has been falling on the whole country. Before that on Sunday mornings children used to spill out on the streets of the cities and towns of India. They played hockey, gulli-danda or hide-and-peek, climbed trees, raided orchards or just walked with their arms around each others' waists, munching raw mangoes, guavas or roasted corn—the season's bounty.

The men-folk got their bodies massaged, went to Akhras (gymnasiums), lazed in their armchairs, read the Sunday papers. Women gave head-baths to their daughters and then washed their own long hair, which needed the whole noon and the afternoon to dry. Elderly ladies got their stores cleaned, or legumes ground. The elderly males went to listen to morning discourses in the temples or Arya Samaj Bhavans. For the body-builders it was an opportunity to do a hundred extra sit-ups, for the frivolous-minded Sunday mornings were meant for kite-flying. For the harried lower-salaried it was the day for marketing. The brown sahibs visited their clubs for a session of bridge or rummy.

Though the activities were varied, from the most frivolous to the highly idealistic, there was a thread of leisureliness running through all of them. The footsteps of young and old were equally unhurried and unharried. Today, Sunday's golden ambience has vanished. Now the families hurry to finish their chores before 9 a.m. The washerman is asked to take and deliver washing and to collect his bill in the evening. All the tradespeople are instructed to come another day unless of course they have come to watch the television. On Sunday mornings no television-owner would refuse a corner in his room to even the lowest menial to watch the programme. Children are hushed, cricket bats and gulli-dandas are kept for the afternoon, bridge sessions for the night. And if the nation could have its way, trains would be rescheduled, so that no guest may arrive from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

What has happened to make crores upon crores of Indians postpone and cancel even marriages and funerals in order to sit as if transfixed before the nearest T.V. set?

It is the strangest possible phenomenon which could only happen in this Bharatvarsha, in this holy land of India. The cultural consciousness of India which seemed to have become extinct under the overpowering influence of Western civilisation has raised its head again.

The credit for this phenomenon goes to the much-maligned former Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, who happened to remark that he would like the great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, to be serialised by Doordarshan. The Doordarshan authorities took the cue and producer-director Ramananda Sagar, a true devotee of Sri Rama, was invited to produce and serialise the Ramayana.

As with the advent of spring the landscape changes overnight, so as if at the touch of a magic wand the collective soul of the Indian people raised its head from the mists where it had lain dormant for a long time. And how, as the story of the Ramayana progressed, the hearts of millions of Indians beat in unison: how they wept and laughed at each turn of the story is itself a story too well known to need recounting.

The sublime Ramayana was followed by the glorious Mahabharata. The few, who had escaped earlier the magic of the Ramayana, succumbed to the power of the Mahabharata.

In the episode of 21st May, 1990, Kunti's sons, the five Pandavas, ask her to leave Hastinapura and return to their own camp. Kunti refuses on the grounds that before they were born she had another identity—that she was a member of the Kuru dynasty and that she could not leave her sister-in-law, the grief-stricken Queen Gandhari, the mother of their arch-enemy Duryodhan, in her hour of grief for most of her numerous sons had already died in the battle.

To the modern mind, to the young people of today, at best it seems inexplicable, at worst stupid, that Kunti should choose to live with Duryodhan's family, Duryodhan who had tried to kill her sons many times, who had won their kingdom by using loaded dice, who had tried to disrobe their queen in the open court.

In this age of self-centred single-family system—when joint families have mostly broken up, when brothers fight blood-brothers, when a sister's or a parent's plight leaves a man untouched—this great ideal of a joint family seems to the modern youth archaic, unsubstantial and unreal.

It was not always so. History has chronicled the ills of Hindu society, like Sati, child-marriage and the dowry-system and rightly too. But no mention is made of the great social ideals behind Chaturvarna and the four Ashramas—the Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa—stages which have upheld and kept alive the Hindu society in spite of the myriad attacks of that alien and invincible culture, Islam, which had engulfed and annihilated other ancient cultures like that of Egypt. These ideals have also given to India the power to hold on and rejuvenate itself from the short torpor and seeming death inflicted by the great levelling and all-engulfing Western culture.

How deep are the roots of Hindu culture, how all-pervading is its influence, how it made heroes and heroines of ordinary people, how a life-time's self-imposed austerity and self-abnegation were a common rule amongst even the common people, I will try to show.

When I was born both my paternal and maternal grandmothers were in their mid-forties. As I grew up I noticed that both of them put on only white dhotis with a half-centimetre-broad border. Not only they but the wives of the two brothers of my maternal grandfather also wore white dhotis, devoid of any

colour. With a child's understanding I assumed that ladies above forty years of age wore drab, white dhotis except for festivals when for performing Pooja they would put on their glittering brocade *dawans* (long petticoats) and would even put on a *bindi* (red vermilion dot on the forehead) as all married women do. But they would take away their finery as soon as the Pooja would be over. Unconsciously I must have pondered over these anomalies. But I lived very intensely, and a child has not much time for older people. Taking this as a settled fact, I did not delve till my sixteenth year into the reason, which the reader will discover towards the end of the article.

Now let me give a little account of my grand-parents. My maternal grandfather who even though a householder with many children, was a sadhak and lived in his daily life the ideals the Ramayana stands for. In the first decades of the century there were no banks. People kept their gold and valuables with some respected citizens. The one who guarded his neighbours' wealth bore this responsibility as a duty free of any charge. There were no receipts, only mutual trust. People had deposited with my maternal grandfather Lala Nihal Chand about 2500 tolas of gold ornaments for safe keeping. In those days there was no electricity. Men of the house slept at their business premises. Gates of the houses were closed early. One evening thieves stealthily entered grandpa's house and hid in the deep shadows of the entrance-chamber which the lone earthen lamp, put there in the evening, could not penetrate.

It was the height of winter. The ladies and children of the house were in deep sleep. The thieves did their work in a leisurely way. They even broke open the hole in the mud-cemented brick wall, in which my mother and maternal uncles had collected their savings in coins. The thieves sorted out the coins they considered false and left them behind. They cleared out all the gold ornaments of the family and the community. Only my grandfather's lame mother woke up once or twice and called to my granny, "You must have left the pot of laddus [an Indian sweet] open. Rats are taking them away." Tired after a day's work my granny called back, "Maji, let them eat a few. What does it matter?" and went back to sleep.

Early in the morning, at about 3 a.m., the main gates of the house were opened to let in the male servant who would draw water from the well for the day's chores. The thieves must have slipped out when there was nobody near the gate. Readers must remember that it was the second decade of the century. Piped water and electricity had not reached our homes.

When the theft was discovered my grandfather insisted on paying all those who had deposited their valuables with him, though neither ethics nor law demanded this. The people, whose gold had been lost, themselves protested against his shouldering the losses, but such was the high moral sense of conduct in those days that though it made him relatively poor, my grandfather paid back everyone.

From his youth grandpa was God-oriented. He made a Satsang Bhavan, a building where sadhus could stay and hold discourses on the banks of the local river Kali. He laid the bricks himself, and of course bore all the expenses. I have visited the place a few times. Whenever his old and lame mother would express the wish to bathe in the Ganges, he would take her there in a cart to give her a bath and fulfil her wish. Early in his youth he had declared that he would renounce the world after his mother's death and his daughters' marriages, for he considered the care of his mother and the marriages of his daughters a householder's duty. But after he had educated and provided for his sons, he felt no duty towards them.

He kept his word and soon after my aunty's marriage—his mother having died earlier—he left his home and with my grandmother went to live in the holy city of Rishikesh which is situated on the banks of the Ganges. He held the belief that sannyasis were a drag on the society. So he led a Vanaprastha's life. He made my maternal uncle pay him as rent of his shop a small sum per month. With this sum he fed sadhus, bought books, looked after the children and grandchildren who visited him from time to time and lived a life of balanced austerity. The owner of a Dharmashala had made him the manager of it. There he lived for the last four decades of his life. Once during my holidays I went to live with them. There he taught me the six systems of Indian philosophy, he made charts for me. I was only nine. These subjects were too dry for me. But I read avidly his Mahabharata and Ramayana. One day he gave me an abridged version of the Mahabharata of about 500 pages. I devoured it in a few hours and went to him and demanded another book. He could not believe that I had truly read the book. To make sure he tested me and when I answered his questions to his satisfaction, he was overjoyed and took me to the Gita-Press book-shop situated on the other bank of the Ganges at a place called Muni Ki Reti and asked me to buy as many books as I wanted. I think I bought more than 60 books costing about thirty rupees, or even less, because the Gita Press of Gorakhpur sold books at fantastically low rates. I loved to read again and again from these volumes the stories of devotees and sadhaks. After my maternal grandmother died, grandfather lived on alone, cooking his food in a coal-powered steam-cooker once a day. Only for the last few months of his life when he became too sick to be left alone, my mother brought him back, but he preferred to live in the Satsang Bhavan he had constructed in his youth. He passed away at about the age of ninety-five.

I cherished the glorious mornings when I accompanied him to a secluded mountain-girdled bank of the Ganges with a basket of flowers. He would take a bath and sit on the bank for an hour of meditation, while I would frolic in the water. First I would let the flowers float a distance, then would catch them, then float them again. The tree-decked hills seemed to watch me with a benign smile and the waves of the Ganges became my intimate friends.

My maternal grand-parents lived an ideal life and followed all the rules laid down by Hindu scriptures. Half a century back, such serene, selfless, pious, God-oriented souls were not exceptions in India. My grandfather's face reflected the inner divinity, my grandmother's face mirrored a pure and generous heart.

If the life in my maternal grand-parents' home was a little subdued, in my paternal grand-parents' home it was rich and full of intense activity, both secular and religious. A great lawyer, my paternal grandfather earned a lot of money and my generous paternal grandmother spent it all. She employed nearly a dozen servants, kept a horse-carriage and for some years a car. There was plenty in her atmosphere: like a large banyan tree she sheltered dozens of relatives, fed Brahmins and beggars. Above all she celebrated each Hindu festival on a large scale. On Deepavali a dozen labourers replenished the oil in a thousand earthen lamps till late, while most of the lamps of the city would be extinguished by then. For Holi *Tesu* flowers would be boiled overnight in huge cauldrons for colour. Poojas and Yajnas were a daily affair. The plenitude of our home is difficult to imagine today. I think that at least three hundred days of the year some religious celebration or other took place in our house. For us children it was a minor paradise. The most generous person I have ever met, Granny spent money so freely that in the last years of her life she had to face financial constraints. She often said that she heard the sound of the anklet bells of Sri Radha at night. She gave jewellery and saris lavishly to her five daughters-in-law and had the greatest contempt for the miserly. She would say, "Such persons are like snakes who guard their wealth, but never enjoy it." On each festival she ordered her daughters-in-law to discard their two dozen glass bangles even if they were brand new, and put on new ones.

Then why did she wear no *bindi*, no *sindoor* (vermillion powder in the parting of the hair, which all married women put for the welfare of their husbands)? Why was there only one simple bangle on each of her wrists, why no golden ornaments, while her daughters and daughters-in-law glittered with gold and, above all, why did she wear white dhotis with only a black or green border half a centimetre broad, instead of broad-bordered coloured saris?

By the age of sixteen this question became fully formed in my mind and I asked her the reason. The answer was an eye-opener. One of the younger brothers of my grandfather died at about the age of 30 leaving behind a young widow with three tiny tots. In those days widows in Hindu society had to lead a life of harsh austerities. They had to wear white borderless saris, could not put on *bindi* or *sindoor*, bangles or other ornaments, could not go to a cinema, could not dance during wedding functions nor could they chew betel nuts. They had to fast often and were expected to turn their thoughts towards God. Since the day my father's uncle died, granny had renounced all the above-mentioned things. She said to me, "If I, the oldest daughter-in-law of the family, indulge myself how would this young widow be able to control herself?"

In the same way, one of my maternal grandfather's younger brothers had died. So along with these two widows, from their mid-forties up to their death in their nineties, both my grandmothers voluntarily followed all the austerities stipulated by the Hindu Shastras for a Hindu widow.

Again I repeat that my grandmothers were not exceptions. In those days when medical science was not so advanced and young deaths were common, such self-control and life-long tapasya was not uncommon in Hindu joint families.

SHYAM KUMARI

SHOES

A SHORT STORY BASED ON AN HISTORICAL INCIDENT

Translated from the Tamil of Prapanjan by P. Raja

THEY stood like two well-fed bandicoots—this pair of shoes. They were brand-new and so well polished that one could very well use them as looking glasses to comb one's hair. They reflected the sunlight that fell on the courtyard of the house and sent back flash after flash.

Ponnuthambi Pillai looked affectionately at them as if they were babes—black twins. Maadan, the cobbler, had specially made them for him. A skilled craftsman, he made shoes only for the Whites in Pondicherry's White Town. Perhaps this was the first pair he had made for an Indian. Of course, the pair was a bit costly but nothing could be done about that. Ponnuthambi was quite sure that Maadan wouldn't take from him a paise less than what he usually charged the Whites. But he was very pleased with the workmanship of the cobbler. His long-cherished desire came to be fulfilled on that day. Educated like all his White colleagues, should he not dress like them?

Sitting gently and lightly in the chair for fear lest his starched and well-pressed pants should get crinkled, he picked up his socks. They too were brand-new. They were soft and shiny like a snake's sloughed-off skin. He pulled the pair of socks up his calves and proudly gazed at his legs.

He then picked up the shoes. Dusting them gently one after the other, he slipped his feet into them and laced up. Like the swords that disappear into scabbards, his feet disappeared into the shoes. He stood up and paced up and down.

Ah! What an unaccountable joy! It not only gave him pleasure to walk but also a majestic look. He felt as if he had grown seven to eight years younger.

Ponnuthambi Pillai's father sat on the *pyal* of the house and was looking at the roof immersed in his own thoughts. On hearing the footsteps of his son he stood up.

He was crook-backed. It was not due to old age. He had developed that hunch because he served as a butler in a Whiteman's bungalow for half-a-century, always stooping before his boss and his family members. And he said as usual:

"Be on the safer side, my son! Better be very careful. To move with the Whites is as dangerous as moving with the ghosts. No one knows for certain when the Whitemen will blow hot and cold. If you can't bend before them, you will break. Haven't you heard people say that only reeds can survive the storm but not the oak trees?"

Ponnuthambi as usual lent a deaf ear to his father's piece of advice and moved on to the street.

He always used a push-push to go to the court. But on that day he preferred to go on foot. He loved to listen to the squeaking sound the shoes made while they carried him. And the sound of shoes attracted the attention of everyone in the street. As he passed through the streets that led to the court, the people who sat on their *pyals* stood up as a mark of respect. They never knew who Ponnuthambi was. Yet they did so because who else but a high official is entitled to put on shoes. The passers-by too straightened up their backs and saluted him with both their hands.

The bushy portia trees that stood huddling close to each other on either side of Mission Street gobbled up the heat of the sun and provided the passers-by with shade. Unruffled, Ponnuthambi entered the court of justice.

The judge had already occupied his seat. The public prosecutor and the other advocates were in their respective seats. The proceedings had commenced. Somebody's case was in full swing.

The well-polished floor of the courtroom resounded to the fall of Ponnuthambi's shoes and the noise interfered with the arguments that were going on. It attracted the attention of the judge.

Ponnuthambi stood at the centre of the court, bowed before the judge and said in French: "Good morning, my Lord."

The judge's eyes stooped down and stared at the glittering pair of black shoes. Ponnuthambi stood embarrassed.

Immaculate white was the complexion of the judge. When he reached India he was exactly like a marble statue. But the Indian sun broke out tiny red spots on his face that looked like pimples. Ponnuthambi noticed for the first time the blue eyes of the judge turning red.

"Shoes?" asked the judge, his eyes still 'glued to the feet of Ponnuthambi. His voice was unusually loud and his tone harsh.

Ponnuthambi looked down at his shoes and said, "Yes, my Lord! They are shoes." He had pronounced the words in French in the same accent as the French judge.

The judge showed signs of disapproval. "You have upset me, Monsieur Ponnuthambi Pillai. I strongly object to your coming to my court with the shoes on."

Ponnuthambi looked at the legs of the judge. He had the same sort of shoes on. Another Frenchman, the public prosecutor, too wore the same sort of shoes. He was after all his colleague. Yet Ponnuthambi did not fail to notice his other Tamil colleagues dressed in dhoti and coat, standing bare-footed.

Ponnuthambi tilted his head up and looked into the eyes of the judge and said: "My Lord! I can't understand why you should object to my wearing shoes, when you and my colleague, the public prosecutor, have put on the same sort of shoes."

The white-marbled face of the judge turned red. His lordship thundered: "Monsieur Ponnuthambi Pillai! Do not forget that you are an Indian. We sincerely wish that you would dress like an Indian. Adhere to local tradition," poured out the judge.

Ponnuthambi was able to read between the lines. He retorted: "My Lord! I am sure that you don't come to the court as a Frenchman. Neither do I as an Indian. We come here to advocate justice. And I have come only in the traditional dress of advocates. Our court has never before set any rules about how the European advocates should dress and how the Indian advocates should. Hence I have not in any way disobeyed the rules of the court. And your objecting to my coming to the court with my shoes on is still a poser to me."

Ponnuthambi, an insignificant man from a slave country, had guts enough to raise his voice against an honorable judge who represented the great French empire, and that too *vis-à-vis*. He had marked a new epoch in history.

The judge jumped to his feet. The members of the jury followed suit.

"This is too much... This is too much," reprimanded the judge. "It is not only wrong to speak thus on the part of a citizen of one of our colonial countries, but also insulting. To compare yourself with the French is intolerable... I hereby command you not to come to my court with shoes on. And if you disobey, I'll have to cancel your registration as a practitioner of law. You can go now." The judge strutted away, followed by the public prosecutor.

Ponnuthambi and his two other Indian colleagues were left alone. Subramania Iyer caught hold of Ponnuthambi's hands with admiration and said: "Mr. Pillai! You have done something our land can feel proud of. In what way are we inferior to the Europeans? Aren't we equally educated? Don't we prove our mettle in arguments in the court? We should not withdraw from our stand. Let us stand united and fight to a finish."

Veerabaghu hugged the rebel and said: "Monsieur Pillai! You have paved the way for the writing of a new chapter in the history of French India. What you have done may be just a spark blown against racial discrimination. Yet I am sure that this spark will grow into a conflagration and consume the forest of discrimination."

The two advocates left. But Ponnuthambi didn't move. He felt that his legs were tied together. The insult he bore in his heart made it heavy and didn't allow him to stir out of the court. With great difficulty he managed to drag himself out.

The sun was scorching and the waves of the Bay of Bengal were murmuring. "Can I help you, Sir?" It was the rickshaw-puller. But Ponnuthambi was not in a mood to listen to him. With his hands clasped behind him, he strolled on the promenade of the beach towards his house.

The night brought him no relief. The moon was in mid-sky. Yet no star was seen. The sky looked like a school without children. The houses were shrouded in darkness.

Ponnuthambi paced up and down the terrace of his house. He couldn't get a

wink of sleep. Sleep flies away from men when their minds are at work. He felt as if he was stripped naked in public and some unknown force had given him a strong blow on his back. What has man done to man? Into how many sections has he classified himself? How many pitfalls has he dug for himself! Caste, religion, race, Europeans and Indians, Whites and Blacks, superiors and inferiors... and oh, how many more! Many were the great men and women who had talked and written against such pitfalls. But their words happen to be nothing more than lifeless books.

Somewhere a bird that had forgotten its nest warbled a note. Ponnuthambi climbed down the stairs to his room.

He sat in front of his writing desk and thought awhile. He then took a sheet of writing paper, dipped his wooden pen in the ink-pot and began to write.

Addressing the letter to the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court at Paris, he started narrating what had happened on that day in the court of Justice with not an iota of fiction added to the fact.

The concluding part of the letter read as follows:

“Is it fair on the part of the judge who represents a highly cultured country that has taught humanity the three great slogans—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity—to insult an advocate like me? Does your lordship approve of it?”

“Does the Goddess of Law differentiate between the Blacks and the Whites? Every country has its own characteristic features. Does your lordship permit the judge here to behave according to his whims and fancies and thereby put a stain on the reputation of France—the country of sophisticated culture and the cradle of diverse arts?”

“Most Respected Lord! I beseech you to permit me to attend the court with the dress and shoes that are permitted and also liked by me. And if you approve of the decision of the judge at Pondicherry, I hereby inform you that I would rather quit my job than attend the court without my shoes on. I know that Truth is deathless. I write this letter to you in the capacity of a man seeking nothing but equality.”

On the morning of the next day, he mailed the letter to his friend Jules Godin at Paris, an advocate and a thinker, with a request to forward the letter to the concerned authority. That night Ponnuthambi had sound sleep.

A long time passed—quite void of news.

“I expected it, you fool!” raved Ponnuthambi’s father. “Can you ever think of gambling with the king? The king can afford to stake even a hundred villages or a thousand cows? Can you compete with him? Do you have anything in hundreds and thousands? Even the hairs on your head may not count to that much?”

After a pause he added: “It’s already the end of December. If January comes, it will be full twelve months. Still there is no news from Paris. Instead of nurturing great expectations and simply idling away your time, better open a

betel and arecanut shop. Money would pour into your empty pockets.”

Ponnuthambi realised the truth in his father’s words. But before he could embark upon a new business-undertaking, an order from the Supreme Court of Paris permitted him to attend the court with his favourite dress and the shoes on.

Dressed like a European and with the controversial shoes on, Ponnuthambi entered the premises of the court. Subramania Iyer and Veerabaghu welcomed him with a big hug. Tears of joy trickled out of their eyes. Eminent men of Pondicherry like Nagu and Shanmuga Velayuda Mudaliar garlanded him.

“Mr. Pillai,” congratulated Shanmuga Velayuda Mudaliar, “your single-handed rebellion against the French has met with a grand success. France has shown herself a democratic country. The day is not far-away when we will get back our lost freedom.”

Ponnuthambi entered the court of justice. To his surprise he saw a new judge seated there. He was older and perhaps more mature than the previous judge.

“Good morning, my Lord,” wished Ponnuthambi bowing before him and the members of the jury.

The new judge too had a white face with red pimples. His eyes radiated happiness. With a friendly smile he looked at the grand rebel and said: “Monsieur Ponnuthambi Pillai! I am quite familiar with all the incidents connected with you. I would like to put before you the words of my superior: ‘France need not be blamed for the inhuman act of the ex-judge, for his words were his own and they do not in any way reflect the ideals of our country. I am a firm believer in equality and fraternity. To classify man as superior and inferior is against the law of nature. We are all men whatever may be the colour of our skin.’ Come. Let us stand united and love every man. Let us perform the duties assigned to us fearlessly and truthfully. My court welcomes you with a warm heart.”

The judge stood up and invitingly stretched out his hands towards the grand rebel.

Ponnuthambi caught hold of those friendly hands.

NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

Meeting the Mother

Miraculous Grace of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo by Kripavikshu Anil Mohan is a book which should not be read in a soft arm-chair, but rather on a hard bench or floor. This would be the minimum you could do for getting in touch with the content.

The author is an existentialist in his own way. There is not much scope for any philosophy except that of life, experienced under the scorching sun, in crowded Indian trains, in the hell of a jail, facing the tormenting choice of shivering in the winter cold or covering the body with a bug-infested rug.

But a stable spiritual aspiration is burning in his heart, in fact steadily burning away karma that prevents him from reaching his goal: meeting the Mother in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. His travails are accompanied by several remarkable and one exceptional experience when, according to him, he meets the Mother (though unrecognized as such at that time) in a physical form at a distant railway station, receiving the grace of her company for 10-12 hours, probably a unique gift in the history of integral yoga if it can be authenticated in full. (I say “probably” because not all sadhaks have recounted all their experiences.) At a later stage, after a large number of ups and downs he is admitted to the Mother’s Ashram in Pondicherry and meets her in her direct incarnate form.

K.A. Mohan lays everything open to the reader, speaks with undisguised naiveté about the most shattering defeats of his life. But he has a special gift of working out such defeats without hostile reactions. When his first visit to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram has ended in a fiasco due to several unfavourable circumstances, he returns home, facing immense difficulties on the way, and yet his mind remains focussed there in the South. Let it take months, years, decades. . Meeting the Mother is the only thing that matters to him.

This unusual book, originally published in Bengali and translated into Indian English, offers tremendous insight into many aspects of Indian life and psychology, the living conditions, social structures. The story is full of suspense, and if you skip some 10-15 pages where the author goes into irrelevant details (from my point of view), you can be sure to get more than 200 pages of truly interesting reading and quite a few valuable spiritual lessons.

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Sixty-eighth Seminar

22 April 1990

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

Speech by Desikan Narasimhan

FREEDOM IS, to echo Shelley's words: "One word too often profaned for me to profane it " It is said that even sages are bewildered in their attempt to resolve this tangled issue, *kavayo api atra mohuā*, as the Gita put it. It becomes therefore compellingly clear that we must first form a clear conception of freedom before proceeding any further in our deliberation on the subject.

Freedom, according to Sri Aurobindo, is "the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature, *dharma*".¹

This complex nexus of body, life and mind which we call "man" is clearly not free. His mind, however potent, still labours in its search after truth; his reason, however luminous and discerning, is still a fallible ray. Consequently, mind cannot act in man with any liberating influence. His life is always subject to the downward gravitation of vital desires, impulses and cravings and cannot therefore act freely from this lower station. His body is a dead resistance which impedes his progress with its incessant demands and instincts. As an instrument, even in the strongest, it is still subject to fatigue, disease, old age, decay and finally death. If these were the only terms that constituted man's being there could be no salvation; freedom becomes a chimera, bondage remains eternal. How can we then call man free, or, to use a hackneyed poetic utterance: "the captain of his fate and the master of his soul"? It is manifestly clear that man, as we have provisionally defined him to be, is perpetually subject to the laws and whims of Nature, and that free-will, which seems so much the initiator of his actions, is itself a creation of Nature, an illusion—a phantom free-will, a fantastic fiction. But if there is something within us which is free and lord, *svarāt*, superior to Nature, then our aspiration for freedom becomes a just and legitimate claim. As Sri Aurobindo pointedly exclaims: "Only if there is a soul or self which is not a creation, but a master of Nature, not a formation of the stream of universal energy, but itself the former and creator of its own Karma, are we justified in our claim of an actual freedom or at least in our aspiration to a real liberty. There is

¹ *The Human Cycle* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 15) p. 170

the whole heart of the debate, the nodus and escape of this perplexed issue."² But before we are ready to exalt ourselves to this state we must catch some faint glimmer or reflection of this Self on the level of the mind.

The Sankhya philosophy posits two independent principles, Purusha and Prakriti, whose interrelation is the cause of the universe. Purusha is the Soul or pure conscious Being, immobile, immutable; sitting above the workings of Prakriti as a *sākṣi* (witness) or *anumantā* (sanction-giver). Prakriti is active but mechanical in her workings and assumes the appearance of consciousness only by reflecting the light of the Purusha. "Prakriti is constituted of three Gunas or essential modes of energy; Sattwa, the seed of intelligence, conserves the workings of energy; Rajas, the seed of force and action, creates the workings of energy; Tamas, the seed of inertia and non-intelligence, the denial of Sattwa and Rajas, dissolves what they create and conserve."³ The only power of the Purusha seems to be either to give or withdraw his consent to Prakriti to obscure his own self. Creation is possible only as long as he sanctions Prakriti's play. If he withdraws the consent the gunas fall into a state of equilibrium and the Purusha returns to his original status.

The Sankhya way of liberation then consists in developing a searching discrimination, *viveka khyāti*, whereby Purusha and Prakriti are seen as two separate principles coexisting in an unhappy wedlock forged by the power of the cosmic Ignorance. But this is a solution which abolishes the patient along with the disease, since to be free while remaining in creation is logically inconsistent with its epistemological framework. This, however, does not discredit or denigrate Sankhya's pride of place among Indian philosophical systems, nor does it dismiss the value of a school of thought that has so powerfully held sway over the Indian mind. The Sankhya system of philosophy is an indispensable starting-point in unravelling the knot of freedom, but it stops short of the real and final solution to the problem. Real freedom, according to Sri Aurobindo, comes only "when we get away from the mind into the life of the Spirit, from personality to the Person, from Nature to the lord of Nature."⁴ This would suggest that there is a status where the Purusha is master, Ishwara, Lord of the works of Nature and intimately informing and governing all her movements. Thus man's pledge and quest for an absolute freedom is once again redeemed. As Sri Aurobindo says: "It is only when one goes behind away from Prakriti to Purusha and upward away from Mind to spiritual Self that the side of freedom comes to be first evident and then, by unison with the Will which is above Nature, complete."⁵

I am afraid I have had to drag the listener into the dry beaches of

² "Karma and Freedom" (Cent Ed, Vol 16), p 135

³ *Essays on the Gita* (Cent Ed, Vol 13), p 65

⁴ "Karma and Freedom" (Cent Ed, Vol 16), p 144

⁵ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed, Vol 22), p 475

metaphysics but let us now plunge into the full flood of Sri Aurobindo's poetry in order to comprehend psychically what is meant by true freedom. The poem I allude to is the sonnet entitled "Liberation". Here, Sri Aurobindo translates a profound spiritual experience into mystical language. I quote the sonnet in full below:

I have thrown from me the whirling dance of mind
 And stand now in the spirit's silence free;
 Timeless and deathless beyond creature-kind,
 The centre of my own eternity.

I have escaped and the small self is dead;
 I am immortal, alone, ineffable;
 I have gone out from the universe I made,
 And have grown nameless and immeasurable.

My mind is hushed in a wide and endless light,
 My heart a solitude of delight and peace,
 My sense unsnared by touch and sound and sight,
 My body a point in white infinities.

I am the one Being's sole immobile Bliss;
 No one I am, I who am all that is.⁶

To conclude my speech, I propose to read a luminous passage from *Essays on the Gita* which sums up in a brief compass the main ideas contained in my speech.

"Only when we cease to satisfy the ego, to think and to will from the ego, the limited 'I' in us, then is there a real freedom. In other words, freedom, highest self-mastery begin when above the natural self we see and hold the supreme Self of which the ego is an obstructing veil and a blinding shadow. And that can only be when we see the one Self in us seated above Nature and make our individual being one with it in being and consciousness and in its individual nature of action only an instrument of a supreme Will, the one Will that is really free. For that we must rise above the three Gunas, become *triguṇātīta*; for that self is beyond even the sattwic principle. We have to climb to it through the Sattwa, but we attain to it only when we get beyond Sattwa; we reach out to it from the ego, but only reach it by leaving the ego. We are drawn towards it by the highest, most passionate, most stupendous and ecstatic of all desires; but we can securely live in it only when all desire drops away from us. We have at a certain stage to liberate ourselves even from the desire of our liberation."⁷

⁶ *Collected Poems* (Cent Ed., Vol 5), p 133

⁷ *Essays on the Gita* (Cent Ed , Vol 13), pp 212-13