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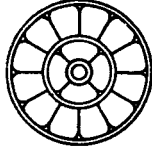
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

CONTENTS

A TALK BY THE MOTHER TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON DECEMBER 21, 1950	... 577
<i>Nilima Das</i> THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE IN THE LIGHT OF HER <i>PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS</i>	580
<i>Shyam Kumari</i> THE ABYSM AND THE MOON (Poem)	... 583
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i> LIFE—POETRY—YOGA PERSONAL LETTERS	... 584
<i>Nirodbaran</i> THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE A DREAM-DIALOGUE (Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)	.. 592
<i>Arvind Habbu</i> MATURITY (Poem)	... 597
<i>Nirodbaran</i> SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN "EXTRAORDINARY GIRL" A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION	... 598
<i>Sisir Kumar Ghose</i> "THE FUTURE POETRY"	.. 602
MOOT COURT HEARING ON SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OR EDWARD DE VERE?	... 611
<i>Romila Thapar</i> WHICH OF US ARE ARYANS?	615
<i>R. Y. Deshpande</i> "SATYAVAN MUST DIE" A DISCOURSE APROPOS OF A PHRASE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S <i>SAVITRI</i>	.. 624

<i>Udar</i>		
GEORGE NAKASHIMA—"SUNDARANANDA"		628
<i>Aju Mukhopadhyay</i>		
CALCUTTA'S TERCENTENARY		629
<i>Wilfried</i>		
NEW AGE NEWS	..	632
<i>P. Raja</i>		
THE PROFESSOR		
A SHORT STORY	...	634
THE "IDEAL" SERIES ON THE MARCH	..	640

STUDENTS' SECTION

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION		
SIXTY-EIGHTH SEMINAR—22 APRIL 1990		
WHAT IS THE TRUE MEANING OF FREEDOM AND		
HOW TO REALISE IT?		
<i>Speech by Hema Shah</i>	..	641

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A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 21 DECEMBER 1950

“O Consciousness, immobile and serene, Thou watchest at the confines of the world like a sphinx of eternity. And yet to some Thou confidest Thy secret. These can become Thy sovereign will which chooses without preference, executes without desire.”

Prayers and Meditations, 10 November 1914

THIS immobile Consciousness is the “Mother of Dreams”,¹ the sphinx of eternity who keeps vigil on the confines of the world like an enigma to be solved. This enigma is the problem of our life, the very *raison d'être* of our universe. The problem of our life is to realise the Divine or rather to become once again aware of the Divine who is the Universe, the origin, cause and goal of life.

Those who find the secret of the sphinx of eternity become that active and creative Power.

To choose without preference and to execute without desire is the great difficulty at the very root of the development of true consciousness and self-control. To choose in this sense means to see what is true and bring it into existence; and to choose thus, without the least personal bias for any thing, any person, action, circumstance, is exactly what is most difficult for an ordinary human being. Yet one must learn to act without any preference, free from all attractions and likings, taking one's stand solely on the Truth which guides. And having chosen in accordance with the Truth the necessary action, one must carry it out without any desire.

If you observe yourself attentively, you will see that before acting you need an inner impetus, something which pushes you. In the ordinary man this impetus is generally desire. This desire ought to be replaced by a clear, precise, constant vision of the Truth.

Some call this the Voice of God or the Will of God. The true meaning of these words has been falsified, so I prefer to speak of “the Truth”, though this is but a very limited aspect of That which we cannot name but which is the Source and the Goal of all existence. I deliberately do not use the word God because religions have given this name to an all-powerful being who is other than his creation and outside it. This is not correct.

However, on the physical plane the difference is obvious. For we are yet all that we no longer want to be, and He, He is all that we want to become.

How can we know what the divine Will is?

¹ “The Mother of Dreams”, a poem by Sri Aurobindo *Collected Poems*, p. 67

One does not know, one feels it. And in order to feel it one must will with such an intensity, such sincerity, that every obstacle disappears. As long as you have a preference, a desire, an attraction, a liking, all these veil the Truth from you. Hence the first thing to do is to try to master, govern, correct all the movements of your consciousness and eliminate those which cannot be changed until all becomes a perfect and permanent expression of the Truth

And even to will this is not enough, for very often one forgets to will it.

What is necessary is an aspiration which burns in the being like a constant fire, and every time you have a desire, a preference, an attraction it must be thrown into this fire. If you do this persistently, you will see that a little gleam of true consciousness begins to dawn in your ordinary consciousness. At first it will be faint, very far behind all the din of desires, preferences, attractions, likings. But you must go behind all this and find that true consciousness, all calm, tranquil, almost silent.

Those who are in contact with the true consciousness see all the possibilities at the same time and may deliberately choose even the most unfavourable, if necessary. But to reach this point, you must go a long way.

Should preferences be neutralised or forgotten?

One should not have them!

When the mind becomes silent, when it stops judging, pushing itself forward with its so-called knowledge, one begins to solve the problem of life. One must refrain from judging, for the mind is only an instrument of action, not an instrument of true knowledge—true knowledge comes from elsewhere.

If one refrained from judging, one would arrive at an ever more precise knowledge of the Truth and nine-tenths of the world's misery would disappear.

The great disorder in the world would to a large extent be neutralised if the mind could admit that it does not know.

“When we have passed beyond enjoyings, we shall have Bliss. Desire was the helper, Desire is the bar.”

Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Glimpses, Cent. Vol. 16, p. 377.

...according to the stage where you are.

Naturally, I speak to those who sincerely want to become conscious of their true truth and to express it in their life.... I think this holds true for all who are here.

And I tell the teachers that they must teach more and more in accordance with the Truth; for if we have a school here, it is in order that it be different from the millions of schools in the world; it is to give the children a chance to distinguish between ordinary life and the divine life, the life of truth—to see

things in a different way. It is useless to want to repeat here the ordinary life. The teacher's mission is to open the eyes of the children to something which they will not find anywhere else.

(*Questions and Answers, 1950-51*, pp 1-3)

What does Sri Aurobindo's phrase "Mother of Dreams" mean?

When he speaks of the "immobile and serene Consciousness", Sri Aurobindo often uses poetic terms which are very suggestive. He has used the term "Mother of Dreams" because he has put himself in the place of one who is below, one who sees, perceives something mysterious, altogether wonderful, inaccessible and almost incomprehensible; but if you look from another point of view, you may say that it is the creative Consciousness, the Origin of the universe, the universal Mother, the creative Power, and so on.

(*Ibid* , p 10)

AN IMPORTANT FACT

In the series "Dyuman—the Luminous One" in the *Mother India* of February 21, 1990, there is a reference to the sale of a "Crown" belonging to the Mother. An important fact connected with it has been brought to our notice by the buyer Gautam Chawalla.

"While giving the Crown the Mother said: 'No one should ever wear this Crown. I want it to be kept in a hall where people meditate, because it was when I last wore this Crown that Durga made her surrender to the Supreme.' "

THE MOTHER WHOM WE ADORE

IN THE LIGHT OF HER *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1990)

THE Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* may very well herald a new and a better world, "a new heaven and a new earth". She saw a new world emerging from a new man, a new level of spirituality aiding to advance the world integrally towards an all-round manifestation of the Divine Consciousness. In her prayers the Mother never spoke in terms of philosophy, she plainly put her experiences and realisations in them.

In the long course of evolution there have been at crucial stages previous manifestations to bring down the Supreme upon earth. We know Sri Rama came to evoke the Law of the *sattwik* mind, the enlightened mentality, Sri Krishna came to manifest the Overmind consciousness. Ages have passed and now the moment has come to manifest what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind or Truth-Consciousness, not as an individual *siddhi* which the Vedic Rishis appear to have tried to attain thousands of years ago, but as something for the entire collectivity, a fixed power permanently on earth. This object got clarified in the *Arya*, the monthly journal Sri Aurobindo carried on before the Mother joined him permanently in Pondicherry in 1920 on April 24. The Mother also has spoken of the Divine Consciousness in her *Prayers and Meditations*. So both he and she announced their plans. With an aim in common with Sri Aurobindo the Mother came for permanent settlement to collaborate with him in his vision of the future.

Her diary attests to the manifestation of the Grace of the Supreme coming down to share humanity's burden of suffering and striving in order to enable it to achieve the victory over the forces of darkness and falsehood. We may make some selections from her *Prayers and Meditations* to show her work for the earth.

March 9, 1914

Blessed was the day when I came to know Thee, O Ineffable Eternity.

Blessed among all days be that day when the earth at last awakened shall know Thee and shall live only for Thee.

August 21, 1914

O Lord, Lord, the whole earth is in an upheaval; it groans and suffers, it is in agony...

September 4, 1914

Darkness has descended upon the earth, thick, violent, victorious.... I have become the purifying fire of Thy love. O Lord,... that Thy reign may come, Thy light triumph over darkness and death.

April 13, 1914

O Love, divine Love, spread abroad in the world, regenerate life, enlighten the intelligence, break the barriers of egoism, scatter the obstacles of ignorance, shine resplendent as sovereign Master of the earth.

February 5, 1913

Thy voice is heard as a melodious chant in the stillness of my heart, and is translated in my head by words which are inadequate and yet replete with Thee. And these words are addressed to the Earth and say to her:—Poor sorrowful Earth, remember that I am present in thee and lose not hope; each effort, each grief, each joy and each pang, each call of thy heart, each aspiration of thy soul, each renewal of thy seasons, all, all without exception, what seems to thee sorrowful and what seems to thee joyous, what seems to thee ugly and what seems to thee beautiful, all infallibly lead thee towards me, who am endless Peace, shadowless Light, perfect Harmony, Certitude, Rest and Supreme Blessedness.

July 22, 1914 •

O Divine Master, let Thy light fall into this chaos and bring forth from it a new world. Accomplish what is now in preparation and create a new humanity which may be the perfect expression of Thy new and sublime Law.

June 14, 1914

It is a veritable work of creation we have to do: to create activities, new modes of being so that this Force, unknown to the earth till today, may manifest in its plenitude. To this travail I am consecrated, O Lord, for this is what Thou wantest of me. But since Thou hast appointed me for this work, Thou must give me the means, that is, the knowledge necessary for its realisation. We shall unite our efforts: the entire individual being will concentrate in a constant call for the knowledge of the mode of manifestation of this Force, and Thou, supreme centre of the being, Thou wilt emanate the Force fully so that it may penetrate, transfigure and overcome all obstacles. It is a pact Thou hast signed with the worlds of individual life. Thou hast made a promise, Thou hast sent into these worlds those who can and that which can fulfil this promise. This now demands Thy integral help so that what has been promised may be realised.

June 9, 1914

Lord, I am before Thee like an offering aflame in the blazing fire of the divine union....

And what is thus before Thee is all the stones of this house and all it contains, all those who cross its threshold and all who see it, all who are connected with it in any way and from one to another the whole earth.

From this centre, this burning hearth which is now and shall be more and more permeated with Thy light and with Thy love, Thy forces will radiate over all the earth, visibly and invisibly in the hearts of all and in their thoughts...

Such is the assurance Thou givest me in answer to my aspiration for Thee.

An immense wave of love descends over all things and penetrates all things.

Peace, peace upon all the earth, victory, plenitude, wonder...

O beloved children, unhappy and ignorant, O thou, rebellious and violent Nature, open your hearts, calm your forces, for here comes the sweet omnipotence of Love, here is the pure radiance of the light that penetrates you. This human hour, this earthly hour is beautiful over all other hours. Let each and all know it and rejoice in the plenitude that is given.

O sorrowful hearts and careworn brows, foolish obscurity and ignorant ill-will, let your anguish be calmed and effaced.

Lo, the splendour of the new word arrives:

"Here am I."

*

Sometimes the dialogues between the Mother and the Divine in her prayers move on a very high plane of being, in which brilliant flashes of revelation break forth. Sometimes she looks upon the earth and returns to it in order to accomplish her divine work—the creation of a new world.

Sri Aurobindo said about the Prayers: "It is the Mother in the lower nature addressing the Mother in the higher nature, the Mother herself carrying on Sadhana of the earth-consciousness for the transformation" (21 August 1936)

She descended into the earth-consciousness and put on herself the "cloak of obscurity". So her prayer dated November 24, 1931 runs thus:

"O my Lord, my sweet Master, for the accomplishment of Thy work I have sunk down into the unfathomable depths of Matter, I have touched with my finger the horror of the falsehood and the inconscience, I have reached the seat of oblivion and a supreme obscurity. But in my heart was the remembrance, from my heart there leaped the call which could arrive to Thee. Lord, Lord, everywhere Thy enemies appear triumphant; falsehood is the monarch of the world; life without Thee is a death, a perpetual hell; doubt has usurped the place of Hope and revolt has pushed out Submission; Faith is spent, Gratitude is not born; blind passions and murderous instincts and a guilty weakness have covered

and stifled Thy sweet law of love.... Lord, give the command to conquer and victory will be there. I know we are unworthy, I know the world is not yet ready. But I cry to Thee with an absolute faith in Thy Grace and I know that Thy Grace will save.

“Thus, my prayer rushed up towards Thee; and, from the depths of the abyss, I beheld Thee in Thy radiant splendour; Thou didst appear and Thou saidest to me: ‘Lose not courage, be firm, be confident,—I COME’.”

(Concluded)

NILIMA DAS

THE ABYSM AND THE MOON

AN opaque half orb,
 Like an old woman's lustreless face,
 Hung in the sky, a morning moon—
 Unsung by the poet,
 Unadmired by the searching gaze.
 Inert, insipid, dull—thus stagnate our lives.

When gathers around a massive darkness
 Before whose advent falters the fearful heart,
 Sure no longer of its daily path,
 Stands out a radiant moon—
 Bright source of all Beauty,
 Delight of the singer, the lover's boon,
 A jewel of God on the brow of night.

Lord! If darkness be needed
 To bring out the fullness of Thy Glory,
 On my knees I accept the abysm of that gift.

SHYAM KUMARI

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

PERSONAL LETTERS

YOU unpredictable wonderful little girl of fifty odd years, what is all this sudden lamentation and shedding of tears and self-doubting? The Divine Mother is always with you and has accepted you and given you not only good relatives and friends, dear and near ones, but also an elder soul-brother out of the blue who though physically far is ever close to you inwardly and never forgets you even when he delays writing letters. You must hold your soul in peace. We are devotees of Sri Aurobindo who said that his Yoga is founded in equanimity, a wide solid calm, which can sustain all the extraordinary experiences which he can give to his children. If there is no tranquil base, marvellous experiences may come but won't remain as part of one's being. If the foundation keeps shaking, how can a superstructure be established? Towers may soar up but they will topple if the ground is not steady. And there is a further reason for serenity. Let me come to it by way of a voice of wisdom from the past.

Dante wrote in Italian one of the most inspired lines in all poetry, the English of which would simply be: "In His Will is our peace." It means that our hearts can rest only by putting themselves in tune with whatever God wills for us. To accept inevitable circumstances, however hard they may seem—to carry on necessary work no matter how difficult or incongenial—to take with quiet gladness whatever lot appears to be ours as though divinely fated—to feel God's hand in all that is given us by the world's common or uncommon movement through time: such is the message of Dante's *mahāvākya*, his great revelatory word. But perhaps something more may be added to complete the visionary drive behind his utterance.

If "in His Will is our peace", we may also consider the other side of the human-divine relationship, the traffic of truth between the Supreme Spirit and the aspiring soul, and deliver the message: "In our peace is His Will." This would mean three things. First, a natural state of peace in us would be the sign that God's Will is working in us. Secondly, with peace settled in our heart and mind we shall best know what God wills us to do. It is in the midst of an inner serenity that the urges from on high to right action will most easily arrive. Thirdly, the proof that right action has been done is that the after-glow of an action is peace within us.

At this point you are likely to ask: "How am I to get hold of peace? Will there be peace if I just say, 'Let there be peace?'" To the second question I have to answer both "No" and "Yes". On asserting peace in yourself you won't at once become peaceful. Perhaps the exact opposite would result—so paradoxical is our nature. But a persistent command—with a patient force in it—is bound to bring about, sooner or later, a subsidence of jarring and warring elements. And

in this command we must have the sense of God's peace being called into us. Such a sense would imply that already a marvellous eternal peace exists and we do not have to manufacture it. What we have to do is to imagine it intensely and exert our will to draw it near: a prayerful power has to be exerted. A situation of this kind suggests another permutation and combination of the Dantesque *mantra*. It may run "In our will is His peace." By means of a prayerful power, a strongly willed supplication aided by a constant resolve to practise detachment which would save us from sudden acute reactions of our nerves to the impact of events, we shall get closer and closer to the condition in which Sri Aurobindo pictures Savitri's father Aswapaty in those lines which I have often quoted to my friends.

A poised serenity of tranquil strength,
A wide unshaken look on time's unrest,
Faced all experience with unaltered peace

I hope you don't feel upset by this long endless-seeming discourse on not getting upset. It may remind you of what was said of Carlyle: "In 28 volumes of manifold eloquence he preached the virtue of silence." But possibly Carlyle was not as absurd as people might make him out. Silence is so rare a virtue that people may not realise the value and the need of it unless a gifted orator dings them into their ears. Again, if Carlyle had the capacity of silence in his own self, his words would have the capacity to evoke the sense of it in other people's minds. And surely Carlyle did know how to keep silent. There is the famous story of his visits to the poet Tennyson. The two friends would often sit at opposite ends by the fireplace, puffing at their pipes. After a couple of hours of absorption in their own thoughts, without the exchange of a single word, they would get up to part. Carlyle would say to Tennyson: "What a fine evening we have had!" One may wonder what was going on in them during those two hours of keeping mum. A hint lies in Carlyle's general comment on Tennyson on one occasion: "He is a great fellow given to deep silences spent in cosmicising the chaos within him."

To cosmicise the inner chaos may be regarded by us as the true object of our Yoga. The process would be not only to bring the various parts of our being—often in conflict with one another—into a general harmony. The process would also be to introduce into our being a principle wider than the individual self. Something of the universal, the cosmic, has to come into play, taking us out of our limited ego. In this way something more than a concord within us would be achieved. There would be a happy attunement of ourselves with the world around us—both human creatures and the vast realm of Nature. A mighty Omnipresence would be felt, giving us the power to create peace wherever we go by a touch of the One God who is in the depths of all. But at the same time that an immense reconciling Oneness is evoked there is no loss of the multiplicity

held in the unity. An intimate concourse of persons would be a recurring note. While the single Spirit pervading all would be the basis, the rich element of varying personality would play infinitely upon it. For in the cosmicising act we bring into our ordinary nature two secret agents: the Self of selves on the one hand and the inmost individual soul who is a sweetness flowing out to fellow souls and a light which reveals them as brothers and sisters, inseparable children of the same Divine Parents who complete each other:

Calm husband, master of all life—
Radiant incalculable wife.

The Self of selves is the cosmos's truth of underlying and overarching eternity. The individual soul is the truth of the universe's endless time, the thread running through the ages, on which birth after birth is hung.

That's enough of Yogic philosophy and poetry for the present!

(29.4.1990)

*

Your two letters refer to some very important matters. First, the inner *darshan* of the Divine Mother on 6.5.81. Your reply to her offer to grant boons is exemplary: "I want only You and Your will." Of course, this is the most wonderful gift God can bestow: one who receives it will look on nothing else as worth having. It can fill the whole heart with an absolute sweetness, the sweetness of a Perfect Being's presence, and with the light of a Guidance that is unerring. But having such a Marvel enshrined within us must prepare us to stand with equanimity all that happens in our lives. For, just because the Eternal Beauty is lodged in our heart our days are not assured of smooth sailing. We are in a world of complex forces, chequered movements, which are natural to the limited mind, the restricted life-energy, the hampered and unstable body we possess. Difficulties, sufferings, failures are unavoidable—until the glorious hour in the future when what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supreme Truth-Consciousness, the all-transformative Supermind, descends in its fullness and evokes the same Godhead lying deep-hidden in each of our parts and the two by their combination begin a new race.

Religious people often complain: "We say our prayers regularly, we visit the temple on the right occasions, and yet many of our efforts prove fruitless, our bodies frequently fall ill, even some of our dear ones die out of due time. Why all this when we are God's worshippers?" Whatever may be the causes of the mishaps these people meet with, they do not realise that their worship is not the soul's pure leap to its Maker: it is done with an ulterior motive—the desire for their own success, happiness, prosperity. God may grant appeals for personal benefits, but He also may not, and when selfish supplications are made He is not

bound to respond to them. But what about his true devotees?

It is their misfortunes that raise the real question. But, as I have said, they too live in a world of imperfection and they too are themselves imperfect in their human parts. I remember once telling the Mother during a visit to the Ashram from Bombay: "Please arrange things so that everything may go harmoniously and no obstacles come in the way of my relationship with people and of my ultimate passage to you." The Mother replied: "Do you want the laws of the universe to change for your sake?" This did not mean that her blessings were not with me. But it meant that I, a mere human, who lived in the context of common existence, could not expect everything to happen according to my wish and convenience: even my path to the Divine would not necessarily run uncluttered. However, if one's inmost heart has been given to God and one feels that His wide wisdom and His beatific warmth are always with one, all untoward events will be intuited as happening with His knowledge and with His shaping hand secretly at work in them with care and love and the touch of a perfecting purpose. All unavoidable ill-luck will still serve His ends. Even at times He may grievously shock us into a rapid seeking of greater depths within us of intimacy with His infinite peace and His all-enfolding power. In any case, we shall have His company in the midst of every contretemps and recognise His hidden grace at each step across hurting stones. We shall hear Him saying like the Master-Sculptor imagined by a disciple of Sri Aurobindo:

Pain like a chisel I've brought to trace
•The death of pain upon your face.

Or else His message will come to us in Sri Aurobindo's own words:

Bear; thou shalt find at last thy road to bliss.
Bliss is the secret stuff of all that lives.

Best of all, we shall find the Mother saying to us as she did in response to a disciple's prayer:

"I am always with you. I shall never fail you in prosperity or in adversity, even when you sink I am with you—I sink with you: I do not stand on the shore and merely look at you from a distance. I sink with you, I am in you: for I am you "

You say that on 9.5.81 you saw a vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with your eyes open. As you know, it is the inner eyes that project their vision as if into physical space. But I would like to know how exactly the two figures fitted into the material surroundings within which they stood. Were they transparent, with their background showing through their bodies? Or did they assume a three-dimensional solidity of form in their own subtle substance and seem to be a

natural part of the earthly scene? Was the impression such as to make you feel that you could have touched their bodies?

You have asked me how you should study *Savitri*. The chief thing is to enter into its revelatory atmosphere. Read it so that your ear and not only your eye takes the poetry in. This means you must read it audibly. Further, try to receive the impact of the poetry as though the sound came from above your head and at the same time emerged from what the Rigveda terms the heart-ocean. This twofold arrival is the way of the Mantra. And the impact will tend to be received thus if you approach the poem with as hushed a mind as you can manage. Then within the mental stillness the sense will take shape and the inner eye will follow and distinguish the various contours of the vision-bearing thought and the inner ear will vibrate with the spiritual life-thrill accompanying that thought. Am I talking abracadabra? (21.5.1990)

*

Your letter, as usual, is a long soliloquy—but it is not just X chatting with X but X communing with the Divine Mother whom he is nestling deep within him and with Amal whom he holds in some warm wideness of inner being.

The increasing apathy and detachment you speak of is basically the distance you feel from the old fellow you used to know as yourself. That fellow was full of responses and reactions and now he is not the whole of your being but a small part while the major space is occupied by One whom you can address most meaningfully with those lines of Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's elder brother.

Augustest, dearest, whom no thought can trace,
Name murmuring out of birth's infinity ...

The other presence who edges out your usual X-hood is nothing so lofty or so enrapturing but is ever an aspirant after the largeness and light which he dreams of as the poet's ambience so that some day it may be said of him in a phrase by your friend:

Far-visioned with the homeless heart he sings.

Your preoccupation with trees and flowers reminds me of a little experience I have been having these afternoons of visit to the Samadhi. Nowadays, owing to the increasing infirmity of my legs, the trudge from the Ashram Gate to the chair kept for me opposite the Samadhi is quite a strain. But the strain of the body tends to vanish into a strain of music within me as I go looking at the several pots of plants ranged all along my passage. The continuous green of the leaves wafts to me a sustained heart-ease while the many-coloured and many-shaped blossoms seem to spring at me like fillips of sudden joy instilling an energy that is at once a light and a laugh.

This experience started as an occult answer to my need two weeks back. After each walk to the Samadhi courtyard my heart began to miss beats very closely, creating a marked discomfort in the chest. On returning home the same abnormality continued. Dr. Raichura, who verified it, was quite concerned. He got three cardiograms taken, one immediately after my homeward rickshaw-drive. All were most disappointing: they showed the heart throbbing away quite normally! The trouble, however, continued. I noticed that during those days there was a great diminution of the radiance I habitually feel in my mind and heart. Sorbitrate tablets, either swallowed or sublingual, were tried to promote better blood-circulation. But they acted only to cause a mild intoxication and a slight headache which went on for more than an hour. Dr. Dalal too lent a hand. He gave me the homoeopathic adaptation of Tincture *Crataegus Oxyacantha* (Hawthorne Berry), a heart- tonic once used by allopaths but now totally abandoned by them though much praised still by Hahnemann's followers. This tincture is a long-term treatment. No immediate result was noticed.

Then suddenly I had the experience of a big Shadow lifting from my head—and all was peace and brightness at once! For a day or two the miss-beats continued but I didn't care. One afternoon I completely forgot to take my pulse. The next day I found it normal. Both the doctors were glad to feel the heart running a steady course. Now, steady or not makes no difference. And I realise that my "illness" was really the attack of an occult hostile force to which I had somehow laid myself open.

I recalled that just before the abnormal phase I had been appealing to Sri Aurobindo, because of some vague unease, with that line from his poem *Musa Spiritus*: "All make tranquil, all make free". Somehow I had to pass through what the Bible terms "the Valley of the Shadow" (luckily not "of Death", as the Bible has it) before my appeal was answered.

It seems rather relevant in the cardiac context to note the whole stanza from which I had culled that line. It runs:

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

May I fancy that somehow my heart missed those footsteps again and again or else that they became too light, too airy, to be measured? Perhaps the best thing to say would be: "There was not alertness enough on my side to match all the possible ways in which the Eternal's love responds to the call of Time's heart."

The experience of the sudden lifting of a Shadow reminds me of what happened 17 years ago. I have written of it to a friend and I may repeat it here. I was in Bombay and had a peculiar fever with a most unpleasant feeling in the

stomach as if a little ogre were sitting there and being most capriciously choosy about nourishment. No medicine worked. Late one evening, after a week during which there was just a passive waiting on the Mother, I inwardly saw a fist come down with force somewhere at the back of me and immediately the ogre jumped out of my belly and I was perfectly normal. The fever disappeared and the same night I had a most vivid meeting with the Mother in a dream. My whole heart seemed to leap towards her with such emotion as I have rarely felt. She was still in her body at that time, though incommunicado—towards the end of October 1973. (4.5.1990)

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My health is fine except for the legs which are not very willing to do their proper job, arguing from the strain they undergo that a person who lives so much in his head does not need them very much. But somehow I persuade them to make it possible for me not to try going to the Samadhi on my head! I spend an hour and a quarter there happily lost in the in-world, though often enough my eyes are fully open, mostly to take the out-world's splendour—the wide-spreading "Service Tree", the various sparkling flowers on the Samadhi as well as the lavish plant-arrangements in the Ashram-courtyard—as a flame to kindle further the aspiration towards the Divine Dweller of the depths and the heights. Occasionally some distractions take place, some small communications with other souls and at times even odd incidents.

Once when I used to sit just outside Dyuman's room and not as now under the clock opposite the Samadhi, a fellow came and asked me, pointing to the room: "Can I buy T-shirts here?" God knows what gave him that outlandish idea. Could he have seen sadhaks wearing T-shirts coming out of the room? Another chap put me the question: "Where is the Samadhi?" He had his back to it. I said: "Just turn round to see it." Evidently he was a serious seeker, but I suppose he mistook the actual Samadhi to be a little garden of an original kind set up to prepare the devotee's mind for the paradisaal atmosphere of the actual location where the bodies of the Master and the Mother had been laid to rest. A third visitor on another day inquired with a very concerned face: "How to meditate when it is so hot?" I replied: "Very simple. Just take your shirt off." His eyes widened as if a revelation had been made. The next day he appeared on the scene in a joyous state of shirtless spirituality. One day a lady acquaintance from Bombay came up to me and asked: "Are you any relative of Amal Kiran?" I said: "Not at all." She looked amazed. Then I added: "I am Amal Kiran himself." Her face showed still greater amazement. It seemed to her strange indeed that instead of being my relative I should be myself. I have rarely seen a mystic so mystified.

One more anecdote, now with a profound significance. A sincere soul

complained to me: “I have a great difficulty.” “What is it?” I sympathetically inquired. He answered: “I like to come to the Samadhi again and again.” “That’s ideal,” I commented. He looked distressed and said: “I come here to look at all the pretty girls putting their heads on the Samadhi.” “Well,” I remarked, “don’t give up coming, but offer to the Mother all the charming faces you like to look at. She’ll be quite pleased with such a bouquet of devoted flowers. She doesn’t mind what you dedicate to her. She is interested to see that you follow her master-formula of Yoga to us: ‘Remember and offer.’”

The man who had been distressed smiled with relief. He moved away and stood on the other side of the Samadhi. When he turned his eyes to the young heads bowing, I sensed a sort of distance in them. Some phrases of the poet Meredith’s glided into my mind, far exceeding the occasion but not quite irrelevant. They are those in which, according to Sri Aurobindo,¹ “the metrical sound floats and seems always on the point of drowning in some deep sea of inner intonation” and which he considers to be “a description which might well be applied to the whole drift and cause of this spiritual principle of rhythm”. Meredith speaks of the Spirit of Colour who leads

Through widening chambers of surprise to where
Throbs rapture near an end that aye recedes,
Because his touch is infinite and lends
A yonder to all ends.

(12.6.1987)

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AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

¹ *The Future Poetry and Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1972), p 164

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THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1990)

THE children asked Sri Aurobindo: "How long were you in Baroda?"

"About 13 or 14 years "

"Did you work in the State Office all that time?"

"No, certainly not! I would have turned into a madman or a ghost if I had! (*Laughs*) Going through those huge dusty files, checking the accounts and preparing dry official documents—do you think a poet can ever love all this? To cap it all, word would come, periodically, from the palace, that I should acquaint myself thoroughly with the whole Railway Time-Table of Europe! And apart from the Official duties, I was expected to attend the royal functions and gatherings and durbars as well as to whisper sweet flattering phrases in the Maharaja's ears. Well, I had never mastered these arts and gradually I convinced him that I would be much more useful and effective if I worked in the Education Department. Soon after, I became a professor in the Baroda College I started by teaching French. Only later did I teach English."

"French? Why French, in those days?"

"The Maharaja was a liberal-minded and refined scholar. He greatly admired French culture and wished to make it possible for the students from Baroda to pursue their higher studies in France. But, unlike you, those boys did not seem keen about French. Of course, you have the great privilege of studying French with the Mother herself."

"You also taught French to Nolini-da, Amrita-da and several others, didn't you?"

"Who told you that?"

"Everybody knows about it. Not only that, the first books that they read were the works of Racine and Molière!"

(*Laughs*) "They were already so learned that I could hardly start by teaching them the Conjugations of Verbs. I believed that once they had learned to love the beauty and sweetness of French literature, they would master the grammatical rules of the language by themselves."

"Didn't you teach English Poetry at the Baroda College?"

"Not just poetry, but English literature in general "

"It appears that the students greatly enjoyed your lectures."

"Lectures?"

"Your classes, that is."

"Oh! Well, that was their affair But perhaps they liked the way I taught them It was different I made them think for themselves. Usually what passed

for education was a systematic cramming of notes in order to pass examinations, which was the main aim. There was no independent thinking required. Therefore this faculty remained undeveloped in Indian students—it was a terrible deficiency. Otherwise they were in no way inferior to their counterparts elsewhere in the world. And the professors too, once they began to teach, were so satisfied with what they knew that they never sought to increase or improve their knowledge.”

“Was that why you used to study so much?”

(*Laughing*) “In order to be able to teach better? Oh no. Thank goodness I never had the desire to be a teacher for the rest of my life! To tell you the truth, being a professor was a kind of excuse or an apparent justification for continuing to find time to learn. Actually I founded the rest of my future life in India on those years in Baroda. I not only spent my time there in teaching, I also acquired knowledge of politics as well as, in a small measure, of leading the life of a householder. It was also the period when I began to follow my spiritual discipline. All this began in Baroda.”

“Did you then realise what your mission in life was going to be in later years?”

“Why, have I not told you of my vow to make India free? But since I had no clear notion then as to the means or the ways of achieving this, I was at first preparing myself.”

“In what way?”

“To begin with, I decided that I must know my country—her civilisation and culture, her religion, her literature and her history. Of all these I must have a close and intimate knowledge. To this end, I began to study Sanskrit.”

“But is it necessary to know Sanskrit in order to liberate the motherland? Aren't there many leaders who love the country yet do not know Sanskrit?”

(*Laughter*)

“What do you call the motherland? A piece of earth? No, she is the fount of your life, she is your mother. It is her love and tenderness which give her children their energy and their dynamism. Sanskrit is her language in which have been expressed all our Scriptures and Art and Poetry. Our religion and culture are founded on the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the streams of whose thought and philosophy are flowing through our veins. In spite of the various invasions and calamities that she has undergone, down the centuries, India still stands today only because her life is founded on this Culture. Therefore in order to know and understand my country truly I had to study Sanskrit. For unless you know the truth of something, you can never love it completely. I had made a very close study of Western civilisation and culture, but in the final analysis it was akin to me. And I had till then never had the occasion to come close to what was genuinely mine—my language and my culture. So now I gave myself entirely to this pursuit. It is my knowledge of

Sanskrit that has helped me write books like *The Secret of the Vedas* and *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. I have already described to you my first spiritual experience which I had on disembarking at the Apollo Bunder in Bombay. Perhaps that was the first pointer I received which indicated to me that I ought to plunge myself into the study of our ancient Scriptures.”

“But Sanskrit is a very difficult language. Its grammar and syntax are not at all easy to master. Did you find a teacher to help you?”

(*Laughing*) “No, not at all, I have never had to learn any language with the help of a teacher. And though the grammar is indeed somewhat difficult, the beauty of its sound and rhythm is exceptional.

“While I pursued these studies, I continued writing poetry. Until then I had drawn my inspiration from Western, often Greek, sources. But now the literature of my country—the Mahabharata, the dramas of Kalidasa and other Sanskrit masterpieces—opened up new creative possibilities for me. For example, *Love and Death*, *Urvasie*, *Savitri* are all drawn from episodes of the Mahabharata.”

“Did you then spend all your time working, reading and writing? Did you never take part in the social life of Baroda?”

“Hardly ever. I am not the gregarious type. I was much happier with the handful of close friends that I had all through my years in Baroda. Dinen Roy, who helped me with my Bengali, sometimes asked me the same question. I told him that I did not enjoy social life. That is because my way of life and my aims were very different from those of the people around me. This reminds me of my brother Manmohan who used to wonder how I continued to have the same friends, though few in number, year in year out, with no quarrels or arguments. His friendships were always short-lived and had rather dramatic endings” (*Laughter*).

“But weren’t you close to your students even?”

“We were on friendly terms, but not intimate except with a few. I was temperamentally rather reserved, somewhat English if you like, but in spite of that I think they liked me. I was the President of their Debating Society. They always invited me to their functions and festivities. The company of young students and that of the ordinary householder are as different as limpid water is from a muddy pool. If you had read Sri Ramakrishna’s Talks, you would know that he would always prefer to keep householders at arm’s length because, said he, their minds were mainly focussed on worldly matters.”

“Dinen Roy writes in his book that you were completely indifferent to matters such as food, clothes and so on. But we are not like that. We love to wear fine clothes, and enjoy good food, while meeting friends and chatting with them makes life sweet for us.”

(*Laughing*) “Is that so? Well, there is no harm in wearing beautiful clothes so long as one is not attached to them. In fact there is not much room here for

luxury Of course, we must never forget the aim that we have put before ourselves and that itself will shape the nature and character accordingly. For me it was a little different: my habits and preferences were not like those of most people."

"Money did not mean much to you either, did it? You earned quite a deal of money and yet, by the end of the month, your coffers were empty, so goes the story. But you were never extravagant or wasteful. So how do you explain this state of affairs?"

"I have had to keep track of my expenses and accounts in later years, paradoxically, at a time when my life was taking an increasingly spiritual turn. But until then, I was never interested in money nor did I bother about the details of the expenses, provided my daily needs and requirements were satisfied. And I had so many other things to attend to Also, I grew progressively more involved with my country's problems; add to them my own spiritual life. Each problem was complex, and most of them quite urgent. In fact, if I begin telling you about my political activities my stories will resemble the Arabian Nights! And I am not sure whether you children will begin to grasp or even enjoy the twists and turns of politics."

"But we love the Arabian Nights!"

"Ah! But there the Emperor was forever keen to behead his queens, whereas here, in my story, other heads were rolling. All right, I'll tell you about all that at the right time."

"You mustn't omit anything, we want to hear the whole story. Actually, how is it that you joined politics? We have heard that civil servants cannot take part in political activities."

"I know, but still I managed to, rather cleverly. You see, in the beginning I did not openly participate in politics I began by writing articles. A friend of mine owned a newspaper and he requested me to contribute articles to it and I did so, using a pen-name. In those days, our Congress Party was controlled mainly by the Moderates, that is to say those who were wealthy, well-connected and generally well-respected. They were its leaders. They believed that in order to help our fellow countrymen, we must never displease or annoy our rulers. On the contrary, we should beg favours from them by sending them humble prayers and petitions, that is to say, follow a mendicant policy. I wrote several articles strongly criticising this attitude. They were published under the heading 'New Lamps for Old'. Our leaders, on reading them, were very disturbed. Who is this firebrand? Whose unripe mind has written these articles? they wondered. The great Ranade himself sent for my friend and sternly forbade him to publish any more such writings if he did not wish to be thrown in jail and the paper banned. When he found out that I was the author, a mere twenty-two-year-old youth, he said to me: 'Look here, young man, you write well but your language is exceedingly sharp and hot. Instead of being so critical of both us and the

government, why do you not make a better use of your keen talents? Write constructively. For example, you could suggest ideas for improving the lamentable conditions of our jails, or other similar themes of social improvement' What a piece of advice! But indeed I have often been given advice such as this by our 'moderate' leaders. Some of them used bitter or sarcastic language, others a sweeter turn of phrase—but the intentions were the same. Perhaps the Lord sent me later to prison partly to fulfil Mr. Ranade's good counsel, to acquire a direct knowledge of jails! This was how I was initiated into politics."

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

MATURITY

I HAVE longed to hold your face, Great Mother,
Before my inner eye,
And keep it ever steadfast there
Like a beacon from Your sky.

How many days have come and gone,
How many fruitless years!
Yet even this day I lose not hope
Amidst life's countless fears.

To behold You always is perfect bliss,
A worship beyond all pain:
To touch Your radiance whole and clear
When Ignorance is slain!

I will not believe my cause
Is hopeless, utterly lost!
Nor will I strive as in early days
To pay with life-blood the cost

For Your moveless Presence; rather
Now in absolute stillness await
Your absolute advent, or unshakably
Front my fate.

Agitation is forever gone from me,
Its nervous energy's stilled;
Only a pure and passionless depth,
An immobility filled

With calm, a knowledge from destiny's store
Is present there:
A formidable Power studded with Your light
Everywhere!

ARVIND HABBU

SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN “EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of July 1990)

IN the June issue we said that Esha came to visit the Ashram in 1934 for the third time and stayed on perhaps till the middle of 1935. She had struck up an intimate friendship with a sadhika named Jyotirmoyee, whom she came to call ‘Auntie.’ This friendship was encouraged by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, as Esha had no companion of her own age at the time. Jyotirmoyee, having developed such a fondness for the little girl, took particularly good care of her, her only failure being her inability to make her take any interest in studies. Esha was more interested in her inner life even though she was only ten years old. Her main concern was to write letters, mainly about sadhana, to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. She wrote to them in Bengali, then eagerly waited for their answers.

A few of their responses were published in the June issue. Now more letters written during 1935 are given below. The correspondence went on even after Esha had left the Ashram for Calcutta. Since these letters from Sri Aurobindo speak for themselves, I shall refrain from commenting on them.

It is not necessary that one should leave home in order to call the Mother. One can do it remaining at home. Besides, the Mother doesn’t like what you want to do in this connection. Because you are very young, you’ll not be able to do it but you’ll only suffer. And the Mother doesn’t want you to suffer in any way.

No, it’s much better that you remember the Mother within you, call her, in all circumstances, whether happy or unhappy, pray for her nearness, her help, her protection.

If you do that, then everything will be achieved.

10-5-1935

*

I don’t know when you’ll be able to come again—perhaps your father won’t let you return so soon, don’t be sad about it. Remember the Mother always, she will be always with you. Let this firm faith be awake in you that she is always with you and protecting you. You will try for three months, and if there are no results after that you will give up: that’s not right. The main thing is: remember her and

call her, however long it may take; as you go on doing it you will become conscious, feel that she is with you, and also see her.

13-5-1935

*

I am replying to your letter in Bengali. From now on I will do so. It is difficult to say what will happen in the future, but I hope that circumstances will be such that you will be able to come back to have darshan before long. Till then remember us and wait. The closer our inner relation becomes, the greater will be the possibility of your life being fulfilled

14-5-1935

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It is better for you not to go to a house where no one calls the Divine. But if you are sent there, even then call the Mother. If you can't do it any other way, do as you do now, silently in your mind—in such a way that nobody will understand or know. Then you will get the result of your calling the Mother.

17-5-1935

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One letter starting with, “I am not sending you away...” has already been quoted in the last issue. Esha obviously wanted to stay on, but her parents insisted on her return. Then Sri Aurobindo wrote the following letters to her in Calcutta

I have got three letters from you, but as I was busy with many things I couldn't answer them—today I am answering all the three together. It was known that it wouldn't be possible for you to come for darshan this time, it can't be easy to come twice within this short time. Don't be sorry, remain calm and remember the Mother, gather faith and strength within. You are a child of the Divine Mother, be tranquil, calm and full of force. There is no special procedure. To take the name of the Mother, to remember her within, to pray to her, all this may be described as calling the Mother. As it comes from within you, you have to call her accordingly. You can do also this—shutting your eyes you can imagine that the Mother is in front of you or you can sketch a picture of her in your mind and offer her your pranam, that obeisance will reach her. When

you've time, you can meditate on her with the thinking attitude that she is with you, she's sitting in front of you. Doing these things people at last get to see her. Accept my blessings, I send the Mother's blessings also at the same time. From time to time Jyotirmoyee will take blessing flowers during pranam and send them to you.

28-5-1935

*

I've got your two letters. Remember what I wrote to you when you were here and remember the Mother with a calm mind, call her. At the beginning one sees the Mother by shutting one's eyes, can hear her words within oneself, but even that does not happen easily. Man sees the external form, hears external words and sounds—only what he sees and hears with his outer senses, that alone he sees and hears. To see or hear anything else is difficult for him, but the capacity for inner vision and hearing has to be opened, one has to try for it, it takes time. If it doesn't happen in the beginning, don't be sad. The Mother will always love you and remember you, one day you will have her vision and hear her voice. Don't be sorry, invoke the Mother's peace and force within you, you will feel her nearness by that.

16-6-1935

*

No, why should we be angry with you? I was very busy, there was no time to write. Even now I am indeed very busy because it is a darshan month. This time many people are coming for darshan. I hope your health will be better than it is now. You have written that you were ill twice recently—see to it that you keep good health. You have written that you will go to Ranchi. When will you go and for how long will you stay there?

Don't be anxious or sad because of the present condition. Remain calm and content, relying entirely on the Mother, wait for better times. One day you will certainly see her. Those who rely on her firmly and call her, they reach her at the end. There may be many obstacles and many upsets in life in this world, it may take time, but even then they will achieve nearness to the Mother

•4-8-1935

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I haven't been able to write to you though I wanted to. Work doesn't become less, in fact there is always more of it,—if there is less work of one kind, other kinds pile up. While I'm trying to finish all this the night is already over; after that there is no time left to write letters [to anyone] outside the Ashram. It's the same today also, still I'm writing.

I see that both you and your mother have been very ill. I hope this won't happen again and all that has come to an end. This has happened in many places, here and also in the case of many sadhaks in Bengal. It hasn't been easy to control the situation and bring it to an end

No, I am not angry with you, why should I be? Our love for you is undiminished, it will always remain so.

There is no time to write anything more, I shall do so later. Accept our blessings.*

26-12-1935

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

* A propos of this letter, Esha says "It was written by Sri Aurobindo to me when I was suffering from typhoid fever at Calcutta I was about ten years old Typhoid was at that time a very serious disease and it had practically no effective treatment My father was much worried He consulted a famous astrologer who said after much deliberation, 'I don't see any premature death of your daughter Be consoled ' But father was not to be consoled My uncle, it seemed, informed the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about my condition But there was no improvement One day I am reported to have said, 'Why is there so much darkness in the room? Open all the windows ' Hearing which my father cried like a child, for it was bright daylight Fearing my end had come, he could not control himself The doctor also had given up hope and left me in my delirium My mother said to my father 'Go to our Thakur's room and pray to him ' He obeyed though he had no faith in God I recovered after all and received this letter from Sri Aurobindo It seems he said to someone that with much difficulty he had saved me "

“THE FUTURE POETRY”

I

A CRITIQUE of Sri Aurobindo is still to be written. Perhaps the time is not yet. In a way, he is the despair of all commentators. The exposition is so full and varied and suggestive, so fair to other points of view and other possibilities that there is little left for the critic to add or to take away. Also, he likes to present his own point of view in the form of a hypothesis. Let me give you an example. Says Sri Aurobindo: “The issues of recent activity are still doubtful and it would be rash to make any confident prediction, but there is one possibility which... is at least interesting and may be fruitful to search and consider. That possibility is the discovery of a closer approximation to what we might call the *mantra* in poetry.... Poetry in the past has done that in moments of supreme elevation; in the future there seems to be some chance of its making it a more conscious aim and steadfast endeavour.”¹ You can hardly quarrel with so modest a proposal!

From time to time this or that aspect of his works has been held up for admiration, dispute or discussion. But few have gone to the heart of the matter, or remarked on the unity and relation between his different works, or tried to see the workings of that genius steadily and see them whole. This essay does not pretend to any superior insight nor does it set out to supply that missing critique. Its aim is much simpler. I propose to take up one of his not-so-well-known books—from which I have already quoted—and try to give an outline of its contents and suggest, if I may, its place in the group of works with which his name is associated. My aim in all this is to find some reader or readers who will look at it with fresh eyes. A detailed criticism or exposition is not my present aim, it is also beyond my capacity.

The book is not one of yoga or philosophy but of literary criticism: *The Future Poetry*. Serially published in the *Arya* from 15-12-1917 to 15-7-1920 it first came out in book-form much later (August 1953). However little known for the present, Sri Aurobindo’s work as a literary critic is of such importance, and agrees so well with his general view of life, that no apology is needed for drawing attention to it. And of his literary criticism the pith is, surely, in *The Future Poetry*. *The Future Poetry* is not an appendage to his major works. It is itself a major work and in its own way quite as essential. Perhaps the one original contribution to the subject of aesthetics in our times, these essays have as their theme the “now vital question in this cultural evolution” in the midst of which we find ourselves. The vital question is whether modern man is to go ahead or fall back, and what poetry can do about it.

His other works, such as *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, are all

¹ All the quotations in this article are from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Future Poetry*

taken up, one way or another, with this vital question. The expansion of consciousness, its levels and integration which are implicit in these works suggest the possibility of purer perceptions, a new vision, of self and the world. Here, in *The Future Poetry*, he examines and asserts the *rationale* of that unitive vision as well as of the inspired word. That is, of poetry as the leader of human evolution. The nature of his faith demands this defence of poetry. And now that *Savitri* has been published, we may well look upon these essays as a link between his other works and *Savitri*. That, briefly, is how *The Future Poetry* stands in relation to his other major works. It is a vital relation.

To believe our author the question of the future of man and his mind is part of the problem that is poetry. Poetry, properly understood, is the key to the future. This means, naturally, a somewhat new theory of poetry, very different from the ones we now hold. Or if the theory is not quite new, the manner of statement and application certainly is. What is this view of poetry like? The essence of poetry, its peculiar intensity, says Sri Aurobindo, “comes from the stress of the soul-vision behind the word, it is the spiritual excitement of a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery among the magic islands of form and name in these inner and outer worlds”. Also, “poetry and art are born mediators between the immaterial and the concrete, the spirit and life. This mediation between the truth of the spirit and the truth of life will be,” says Sri Aurobindo, “one of the chief functions of the poetry of the future.” Again, “mankind satiated with the levels is turning its face once more towards the heights, and the poetic voices that will lead us thither with song will be among the high seer voices.” If it is a fact that, behind the surfaces of the present crisis, “the human intelligence seems on the verge of an attempt to rise through the intellectual into an intuitive mentality”, then “the aesthetic mind, whether it take form in the word of the illumined thinker, the prophet or the seer, can be one of the main gateways”. And since what the age will aim at will be a “harmonious and luminous totality of man’s being”, “therefore to this poetry the whole field of existence will be open for its subject, God and Nature and Man and all the worlds, the field of the finite and the infinite. It is not a close, even a high close and ending in this or any field that the future offers to us, but a new and higher evolution, a second and greater birth of all man’s powers and his being and action and creation”. Such is his notion of poetry, poetry as a power for truth, for fullness of life and for the future of man to be. Between this and most other prevailing theories of poetry—“oh! the difference to me ..”

II

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These essays have, then, a thesis or a hypothesis. They are, you might say, essays with a purpose. Simply put, they are a plea for poetry as *mantra*. But what is *mantra*? Let our critic explain: “What the Vedic poets meant by *mantra* was an

inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation, to use the ponderous but necessary modern word, of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm.... The ancient poets of the Veda and Upanishads claimed to be uttering the *mantra* because always it was this innermost and almost occult truth of things which they strove to see and hear and speak and because they believed themselves to be using or finding its intimate soul rhythms and the sacrificial speech of it cast up by the divine Agni, the sacred Fire in the heart of man. The *mantra*, in other words, is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite." This may sound—the author is himself aware of it—a somewhat mystic account of the matter, but substantially there could hardly be a more complete description. Along with his own poetical works, especially the later poems and *Savitri*, the essays of *The Future Poetry* form a *mystique* of the *mantra*. They are the theory and practice of the *mantra*, the *mantra* which is "the future poetry". And—pleasant surprise—the theory or thesis is supported with the help of the history of English poetry, from Chaucer to the beginning of the twentieth century. There is also a subsidiary suggestion that for the work in hand the Indian mind may have a part to play.* And when it is Sri Aurobindo who chooses to play the double role—as poet and critic—we may be sure that the result will be rewarding.

III

The whole thing started almost casually, began as a review of James H. Cousins' little-read and now well-nigh forgotten *New Ways in English Literature*. But Cousins was, we may safely presume, but an occasion and we hear little of him during the rest of these essays. In Sri Aurobindo's mind, crossed with lightnings from beyond, this slender book with its examples from 'recent' poets raises the question of "the future of English poetry and of the world's poetry", indeed, "the whole question of the future of poetry in the age which is coming upon us, the higher functions open to it—as yet very imperfectly fulfilled,—and the part which English literature on the one side and the Indian mind and temperament on the other are likely to take in determining the new trends". Or, as he explains a little later, "Taking the impression it [Cousins' book] creates for a starting-point .. but casting our view further back into the past, we may try to sound what the future has to give us through the medium of the poetic mind and

its power for creation and interpretation.”

But before we can talk of these “higher functions” open to poetry and the “new trends” one needs to fix in one’s mind the true nature or, as our author calls it, the essence of poetry. It is this that sanctions his speculations, the expense of spirit in these elaborate and exalted expositions. In other words, before one can speak about the future of poetry one must first know what poetry is and why it is that it must have a future or rather this kind of future. It is only when we have known what poetry is—or has been—that we can say what it may be. The future is not a fiat, but the working out of a law or a line of development, an inner necessity. As Sri Aurobindo puts it quite early in his inquiry: “It will not be amiss to enquire what is the highest power we demand from poetry, or—let us put the matter largely and get nearer the root of the matter,—what may be the nature of poetry, its essential law, and how out of that arises the possibility of its use as a *mantra* of the Real.”

Here we must guard against two common enough errors. One of these looks upon poetry as “nothing more than an aesthetic pleasure of the imagination... a sort of elevated pastime”. The other thinks of it as “mainly a matter of a faultlessly correct or at most an exquisite technique”. Sri Aurobindo suggests a much higher function, based on a belief in poetry as Logos or the revealed Word, the *mantra*. As he puts it, “The privilege of the poet is to go beyond and discover that more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance, in which there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountain-heads of the spirit within us. He may not always or often find it, but to seek for it is the law of his utterance and when he can not only find it, but cast it into some deeply revealed truth of the spirit itself, he utters the *mantra*.”

This is what he believes, his *idée fixe*. And yet it is not so much a fixed idea as a dynamic notion. Sri Aurobindo’s ideas are, if nothing else, evolutionary. “Poetry, like everything else in man, evolves,” says Sri Aurobindo. And he puts it “that from this point of view the soul of man like the soul of Nature can be regarded as an unfolding of the spirit in the material world. Our unfolding has its roots in the physical life; its growth shoots up and out in many directions in the stalk and branches of the vital being; it puts forth the opulence of the buds of mind and there, nestling in the luxuriant leaves of mind and above it, out from the spirit which was concealed in the whole process must blossom the free and infinite soul of man, the hundred-petalled rose of God”.

The evolutionary is also a psychological view of things and implies a special analysis and knowledge. The sense of these mysteries, known to earlier times, has been lost since then. As Sri Aurobindo presents it, it is a triumphant recovery, an extension of an ancient truth. But the theory is true not because it happens to be traditional but because it is living and whole, because it explains

the facts better than others do. The right view of things is always the inner view. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "poetry is a psychological phenomenon, the poetic impulse a highly charged force of expression of the mind and soul of man, and therefore in trying to follow out its line of evolution it is the development of the psychological motive and power, it is the kind of feeling, vision, mentality which is seeking in it for its word and idea and form of beauty and it is the power of the soul through which it finds expression or the level of mind from which it speaks which we must distinguish to get a right idea of the progress of poetry."

In simple language, "the poetic vision, like everything else, follows necessarily the evolution of the human mind and according to the age and environment, it has its levels, ascents and descents and returns". That is, "the work of a poet depends not only upon himself and his age but on the mentality of the nation to which he belongs and the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic tradition and environment which it creates". Even if "it is not to be understood by this that he is or needs be entirely limited by this condition or that he is to consider himself only as a voice of the national mind or bound by the past national tradition and debarred from striking out a road of his own," "still the roots of his personality are there in its spirit and even his variation and revolt are an attempt to bring out something that is latent and suppressed or at least something which is trying to surge up from the secret all-soul into the soul-form of the nation".

The reference to the nation-soul and its utility helps Sri Aurobindo to pass on to the character and course of English poetry which, in spite of some severe limitations, he chooses for his main text. This is because English poetry has, on the whole, "covered the field that lies before the genius of poetry by successive steps which follow the natural ascending order of our developing perceptions". The following sketch—there are a few more of the kind, brilliant *aperçus*,—shows how. According to Sri Aurobindo, English poetry "began by a quite external, a clear and superficial substance and utterance. It proceeded to a deeper vital poetry, a poetry of the power and beauty and wonder and spontaneous thought, the joy and passion and pain, the colour and music of Life, in which the external presentation of life and things was taken up, but exceeded and given its full dynamic and imaginative content. From that it turned to an attempt at mastering the secret of the Latins, the secret of a clear, measured and intellectual dealing with life, things and ideas. Then came an attempt, a brilliant and beautiful attempt to get through Nature and thought and mentality in life and Nature and their profounder aesthetic suggestion to certain spiritual truths behind them. This attempt could not come to perfect fruition, partly because there had not been the right intellectual preparation or a sufficient basis of spiritual knowledge and experience and only so much could be given as the solitary individual intuition of the poet could by a sovereign effort attain, partly because after the lapse into an age of reason the spontaneous or the intenser language of spiritual poetry could not always be found or, if found, could not be

securely kept. So we get a deviation into another age of intellectual, artistic or reflective poetry with a much wider range, but less profound in its roots, less high in its growth; and partly out of this, partly by a recoil from it has come the turn of recent and contemporary poetry which seems at last to be approaching the secret of the utterance of profounder truth with its right magic of speech and rhythm”.

Substantially, this is, I think, a right account, whatever one may think of this approach to English poetry and the use made of it. To this account Sri Aurobindo adds a note on what he calls recent poetry, from the works of such poets as Meredith, Stephen Phillips, Carpenter, Whitman, Tagore, A.E. and Yeats. Unequal and uncertain as this poetry is, “not always very clearly envisaged even by those who are most active in bringing it about”, it contains “certain original indications which may help us to disengage the final whither of its seekings”. That “final whither” is of course the coming of “the poet who is also a Rishi, master singers of Truth, hierophants and magicians of a diviner and more universal beauty”.

IV

At the end of the survey he takes a pause, considers the question of “New Birth or Decadence”. “A collapse to the lower levels which may bring human civilisation with a run to a new corrupted and intellectual barbarism... the possibility of such a catastrophe is by no means absent from the present human situation.” “The hope of the race in this crisis lies in the fidelity of its intellect to the larger perceptions it now has of the greater self of humanity, the turning of its will to the inception of delivering forms of thought, art and social endeavour which arise from these perceptions and the raising of the intellectual mind to the intuitive supra-intellectual spiritual consciousness which can alone give the basis for a spiritualised life of the race and the realisation of its diviner potentialities.” There will no doubt be grades of this vision, different degrees of its potency. But at its highest, the ideal spirit of this poetry will “voice a supreme harmony of five eternal powers, Truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and Spirit”. Appearances notwithstanding, it is towards this that man is moving. The result will be “a new great age of his creation different from the past epochs which he counts as his glories and superior to them in its vision and motive”. A deeper Nature poetry and “a larger field of being made more real to men’s experience will be the realm of the future poetry” “This change will mean that poetry may resume on a larger scale, with a wider and more shining vision the greater effect it once had on the life of the race in the noble antique cultures”. “These new voices must needs be the result of the growth of the power of the spirit in the mind of man which is the promise of the coming era”. And this power, when it arrives, is bound to bring a change in the existing forms of poetry—the lyric, the drama, the narrative, and even the epic—“at least some subtle and profound alteration”. The recent voices

we already have are early, if imperfect, indications of this coming change. The assured speech is yet to be found. And “it is possible that it may be rather in eastern languages and by the genius of eastern poets that there will come the first discovery of this perfection: the East has always had in its temperament a greater constant nearness to the spiritual and psychic sight and experience and it is only a more perfect turning of this sight on the whole life of man... that is needed for the realisation of that for which we are still waiting”. But which nation leads is not so important as that the thing be done. The poets of whatever tongue and race who most completely see with this vision—“a clearer and more inspiring vision of the destiny of the spirit in man”—and speak with “the sure inspiration of its utterance are those who shall be the creators of the poetry of the future.” So says Sri Aurobindo.

V

This, in brief, is what the essays have to say. That poetry which is “the rhythmic voice of life” follows the curve of the human evolution. That the way to look at both—poetry and evolution—is from within. That the example of English poetry and the present crisis strongly suggests that there is going to be a change and expansion of man’s self-vision and world-vision. This the poetry of the future will reflect—as does the ‘recent’ poetry—more than that it will reveal it too, and this will be its chief glory, its real service to the life of an evolving humanity.

Such is the thesis, to be “read and more than once reperused with a yet unexhausted pleasure and fruitfulness”. And this quite apart from the fact whether we agree with its findings or not, whether the evidence from English poetry strikes us as being relevant or not. The findings are, at first sight, a bit unusual, the tone, the theme and the manner of illustration prove that at every turn. But that it is a consistent view, at least provocative, it will be idle to deny. This is a view of poetry of the peaks, passionate, profound, prophetic. Once admitted it may change one’s entire perspective, it is truly a transvaluation of all values.

With these general observations we may now venture upon some comments of our own. First about Sri Aurobindo’s competence to write on the related topic of poetry and human evolution, and to write as he does. This none will deny. Only Sri Aurobindo could have written like this, and only he has. The superb assurance with which he embraces transcendental views is backed by a rare sensitiveness to poetic nuances which makes one regret that there is so little of it. The easy eloquence, the lucid exposition and the subtle appreciation are beyond the reach of reason and formula. He speaks with authority and his tone is one of perfect justice and persuasion. The happy blending of critical and visionary powers is a constant miracle.

And though he has his own ideas on the subject, indeed a master idea, this is

not a dogma but a revealing hypothesis. He states a principle and not a system. Throughout the essays this central idea is used in the manner of a refrain or a *leitmotiv*. But in this he is careful of distinctions and qualifications. There is nothing arbitrary or exclusive about his poetics. His many-sided knowledge of levels makes him patient of every variation. That is why even though his emphasis is his own, even if he does not write anything that cannot be related to his insight, the point lies in the relations he establishes and not in the emphasis alone. This is the very opposite of the one-track mind or being imprisoned by a phrase of a theory. Much rather is it a proof of the theory that it explains and relates all known data much better than any other principle of recovery and reconciliation put forward so far and does far less violence to the facts. Like his exposition of yoga, the theory explains and is the secret of all variations and the goal of all progress. That the critical activity could be so exciting we would not have believed had we not heard Sri Aurobindo “speak out loud and bold”.

The theory put forward here may be called the theory of essential criticism. In his *Three Philosophical Poets* Santayana speaks of the highest poetry as the “poetry of essence”. If anything, Sri Aurobindo extends Santayana’s description even further.

But this doctrine of essence is based on certain assumptions or presuppositions. It implies, for instance, a theory of knowledge, a special world-view. Essays with a purpose, they presume that purpose. A subtle sense of levels and motives, a theory of crisis and an emergence of new faculties, or new modes of insight, are all part of this view and this purpose. All this gives his essays an unusual sweep and sublimity, the background of a vast evolution. It is poetry in a new light, the light of a cosmic correlation.

His scholarship—which he wears lightly—and his insight are at their best and a rare thrill runs throughout the pages. The soul of poetry and humanity are a reality to Sri Aurobindo and he makes them real to the readers as well. This is no small gain. At the first blush this “in-view” of poetry, especially English poetry, may appear somewhat strange but in the long run it stands out as the most satisfying one. This is not because he flatters us with pleasing possibilities but because this is a view of things that satisfies both faith and reason, satisfies the human urge for a knowledge that sees all sides of the question in the light of a reconciling vision. Also because it offers a point of mediation between the East and the West. Like the poetry he speaks of, his own criticism offers a “new reconciling and fusing vision”.

Sri Aurobindo, we have said before, is concerned with the essence of poetry and evolution. But the essence, naturally, pre-exists. Pre-exists, in a double sense, both metaphysically and historically. In other words, *mantric* poetry is not only a possibility of the future but it has been an actuality in the past. That which is to be has already been. *Prajñā prasrta purāni*. Or, to put it a little differently, “the goal of evolution is also its cause”. The *mantra*, the archetypal pattern, is

the source as well as the end of that “rhythmic imaginative self-expression” which we call our poetry

The essence pre-exists, but it also evolves through existence. Else we would not know of it. The theory of evolution is the key to much, if not all, of Sri Aurobindo’s thought and analysis, not only about poetry and its future but about most problems of human destiny. The fact that the *mantra* has already existed in the past gives his evolutionary account a cyclical rather than a unilinear character. In his own words, for our critic is extremely self-conscious and there is nothing we can tell him that he does not know. “This is a theory of poetry, a view of the rhythmic and creative self-expression to which we have given that name, which is very different from any that we now hold, a sacred or hieratic *ars poetica*, only possible in days when man believed himself to be near to the gods and felt their presence in his bosom and could think he heard some accents of their divine and eternal wisdom take form on the heights of his mind. And perhaps no thinking age has been so far removed from any such view of our life as the one through which we have recently passed and even now are not well out of its shadow, the age of materialism, the age of positive outward matter of fact and of scientific and utilitarian reason. And yet curiously enough—or naturally, since in the economy of Nature opposite creates itself out of opposite and not only like from like,—it is to some far-off light at least of the view of ourselves at our greatest of which such ideas were a concretised expression that we seem to be returning. For we can mark that although in very different circumstances, in broader forms, with a more complex mind and an enormously enlarged basis of culture and civilisation, the gain and inheritance of many intermediate ages, it is still to something very like the effort which was the soul of the Vedic or at least the Vedantic mind that we almost appear to be on the point of turning back in the circle of our course.” The wheel has come full circle. In our beginning is our end. To the *mantra* we return.

Such an idea of evolutionary recurrence may not be everybody’s cup of tea. But even bolder is his suggestion about the *mantra* in a modern language and in modern times, the return of the Rishi. The base of his theory may be orthodox but the rest is progressive, indeed revolutionary. This meeting of the East and the West, of the old and the new is perhaps a sign of the times. This, his creative experiment, is his challenge and contribution to modern thought. Let us not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments. As our author puts it, “Much has been done by the art of rhythmic self-expression; much remains to be done.” East or West, there is hope for poetry, the hope of “a song in the ears of men yet to be born”.

Vers l’avenir!

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SISIR KUMAR GHOSE

MOOT COURT HEARING ON SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OR EDWARD DE VERE?

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

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1990)

JASZI—May I ask one question? As I suggested earlier, my basic contention is that in the absence of direct evidence bearing on the attributions of the plays, their assignment to the Earl of Oxford is simpler and more intellectually efficient than their attribution to Shakspeare of Stratford. If we wish to treat Shakspeare as the author, we must explain or assume away for example, his lack of educational background. Now, in Professor Boyle's remarks, an analogy was made to Ben Jonson, to support the notion that somehow...

JUSTICE—Excuse me, Professor. In light of the evidence in the roots I gathered, his attendance at grammar school and the kind of grammar school that has been described for us, can you say that beyond a reasonable doubt, by clear and convincing evidence, it appears that he did not have an adequate education?

JASZI—It would seem to me that although the general burden of demonstration of de Vere's authorship lies with me, the proof of a specific fact such as Shakspeare's attendance at the Stratford Grammar School, or of the more controversial issue still that is the consequences of such attendance would in justice lie with my opponent. Surely in citing the analogy of Ben Jonson, he took that burden on, and on that analogy I would like to speak.

JUSTICE—Well, I'm not persuaded that he has any burden at all. You're the one who suggested that the reputation Shakspeare, however you pronounce it, had over two hundred years as being the author of the plays and the sonnets puts on your challenging it the burden of proving the contrary.

JASZI—As I earlier conceded, I cannot demonstrate to a certainty that Shakspeare of Stratford did not attend that grammar school, nor can I say to a certainty that if he may have attended, he might have learned there some or all of what he would have needed to know to write the plays. But I can, I think, demonstrate that there is a qualitative difference between his educational experience and that of Ben Jonson, cited by my opponent. Ben Jonson attended Westminster, one of the grammar schools about which we know a great deal, one of the great

educational institutions of that period, and he attended under the specific patronage of the great William Camden, who was his particular teacher there. We don't have to speculate about William Camden's learning or what he might have had to impart to a pupil. We know that he was among the greatest antiquarian and classical scholars of his day. Jonson, moreover, had an association with St John's College, Cambridge, although he never matriculated there in later life. Whether that association took the form of a different one from that of Shakspeare of Stratford is to be assessed. Similarly with respect to the issue of legal learnings, I believe that Professor Boyle's argument fundamentally misses the point of what Oxfordians have claimed with respect to Shakspeare's legal knowledge or Shakspeare's lack thereof. The claim is not merely that legal terminology is used in the plays, but that the plays reflect a thoughtful, even deep understanding of legal issues and concepts of the day. It was Justice Stone who wrote that often in listening to *The Merchant of Venice* it had occurred to him that Shakespeare knew the essentials of the contemporary conflict between law and equity, that conflict which would ultimately be resolved in the Cook-Elsbere dispute in the year of Shakspeare's death, 1616. Edward de Vere, who had attended Grey's Inn, would have been well situated even though he never practiced at the bar to understand at a conceptual level such matters. Shakspeare of Stratford may have known a great deal about mortgages and domestic relations but I would suggest that the understanding of legal concepts displayed by the author of the plays is of a different order. Similarly, in order to make Shakspeare our author, we must explain away his lack of the social standing that would explain the characteristic attitudes toward class conveyed in those plays. We must explain away his lack of interest in the plays, their publication, their legal status, their fate. We must explain away the lack of manuscript materials of a literary nature relating to them. It was said correctly that very few play-scripts survive in their entirety from the period. But there is no shortage of literary materials surviving from the period. Poems, portions of plays, even letters survived from many literary men of the day. And in the case of the great figures of the period, Spenser and John Donne and others, significant quantities of material survive. From the hand of William Shakespeare we have nothing except, it is argued, this contested portion of folios 8 and 9, the hand 'D' and the play of *Sir Thomas More*. I am not an expert in the secretary hand any more than is our learned colleague, nor are the members of the bench. The issue of the handwriting in *Sir Thomas More* is one of the most roundly disputed not only between Oxfordians and Stratfordians but among Stratfordians themselves. Ranged against the attribution of hand 'D' to Shakespeare, there is, among others, Samuel Tanenbaum, the late Samuel Tanenbaum, one of the greatest authorities of Renaissance handwriting. The issue of the spelling mistakes in the *Sir Thomas More* fragment could as easily be explained by assuming that the handwriting in question was not the work of any author but of a transcriber

employed by, for example, the Lord Chamberlain's men, who might have been engaged in transcribing both the plays which contain those spelling errors in their printed portal form, and the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript. To draw conclusions or inferences from this kind of controverted and controversial piece of evidence, it appears to me is beyond possibility. To make Shakspeare the author, we would have to explain away the lack of recognition in life and in death that he would have received as such an author in London or in Stratford. No obituaries marked his death in 1616, no public mourning, no note whatsoever was taken of the passing of the man who, if the attribution is correct, would have been the greatest playwright and poet in the history of the English language. And such fragments as do exist, like *Greene's Groats-worth of Wit* to which my colleague, Professor Boyle, referred, are in and of themselves highly controversial. This *Groats-worth* is almost certainly a contemporary forgery, the work not of Greene, but of Henry Chettle and that in and of itself limits severely its probative value. Moreover, the allusion or reference in *Groats-worth*, to which Professor Boyle referred, is in fact entirely consistent with my claim that the works in question were the works of Oxford and that Shakspeare in some form or manner acted as a front for Oxford's authorship. The accusations contained in *Groats-worth* can be understood as referring to a minor player holding himself forth as an author of something which in fact he was not. Obviously, there are considerable leaps of faith and massive reliance on untestable assumptions that are involved in taking Shakspeare as the author of the plays. I would submit that where Oxford's authorship is concerned on the other hand the path from the works to their attribution is relatively straightforward. Lying in the way are only a few apparent contradictions which my colleague Professor Boyle has pointed out and which I would argue strenuously are no contradictions at all. There's no contradiction between an Elizabethan nobleman's wishing on the one hand to write for posterity, and on the other hand wishing to conceal the fact of his authorship in light of the possibility of loss of status or political reprisals which could have followed his disclosure. Nor is there any inconsistency in his descendants wishing to continue that process of concealment. It's not at all improbable that the first folio could have been a project of the Herberts and of Ben Jonson for the purpose just described. And the involvement of Heminge and Condell in the preparation of the first folio is, I think, a matter about which we can only speculate. Certainly, by their own words, Heminge and Condell raised suspicions that they didn't know what was going on. When they speak of how the Shakespeare manuscripts came to them with scarce a blot, they are describing something which in the world of Elizabethan drama, as Professor Boyle described it, would never have occurred in fact. The likelihood, therefore, that Heminge or Condell are not the real authors of the dedicatory epistles attributed to them, seems to me one that we must consider.

JUSTICE—What about Digges? •

JASZI—Excuse me?

JUSTICE—What about Digges' poem in there?

JASZI—Digges, I think, could well have been himself misled. Digges was...

JUSTICE—Wasn't he an executor or...

JASZI—He was the executor of

JUSTICE—... the estate...

JASZI—Shakespeare's will. He was a Stratford man. He lived in Stratford where the curious monument to which there was reference earlier had recently been erected. We have no information as to how much or how little knowledge of the London scene Digges could have had. It is entirely possible that Digges, like the other contributors to the first folio, could have been himself misled into believing in the identity between the pseudonymous author or the author William Shakespeare on the one hand, and the Burgher of Stratford William Shakspeare on the other. I do not think Digges need be assumed to be in the know in order for my account of the first folio to be a plausible one. In summary, it seems to me the burden that I have attempted to carry today has been met. What has been demonstrated in my view is that it is more intellectually efficient, more likely, and more probable that the celebrated works in dispute today were the work of Edward de Vere XVII, Earl of Oxford, than that they were the work of that obscure historical figure, William Shakspeare of Stratford.

(To be continued)

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WHICH OF US ARE ARYANS?

This article by Romula Thapar, a prominent contemporary historian, published in "Seminar 364-December 1989" is an eye-opener in several matters connected with so-called "Aryanism" and a good resumé of current archaeological and linguistic opinion. It is here reproduced by courtesy, with some editorial notes of ours where the writer appears to be markedly mistaken or else insufficiently supported.

THE theory of Aryan race arose out of European preoccupations and pre-conceptions and was applied to the early Indian past during the period of the colonial interpretation of Indian history. It does not have its roots in Indian views of the past. Nevertheless it has been accepted and has become an axiom of Indian historical interpretation. Whereas scholars working on the European past have questioned this theory, we in India hold fast onto it and those who attempt alternate interpretations of the sources are few and far between.

The European search for its own identity gained momentum in the 18th century. This was in part the result of a groping towards the nation-state which made it imperative that there be individual identities for the various states, although stemming from a common origin. In looking at the past, the roots of European civilisation were taken back to what was regarded as the miracle of Greek culture, but even the origins of this were sought from earlier cultures. Nationalist thinking searches for origins in antiquity and the age of a civilisation is constantly sought to be pushed further back.

The discovery of the Orient had been expressed at the popular level through the writings of European travellers, merchants and missionaries. Gradually, classical scholarship added to this the views garnered through the writings of earlier Greek and Latin authors, for whom the Orient was the epitome of luxury and of mythical beings and actions. In the colonial age the interest shifted to those who were using languages and the origins of languages as a method of arriving at the common ancestry or the roots of European culture, a mood which was captured in the Romantic movement in German literature. Thus when, at the end of the 18th century, William Jones declared that there was a similarity in the structure and vocabulary of Sanskrit and Greek (an idea which had been floated even earlier), it fell on fertile ground and became the basis for a large number of theories regarding the origins of European and Indian culture.

In the 19th century therefore, the Indologist (a term used originally for non-Indians studying India) came into his own. Using comparative philology as the method for obtaining the data, a common original language, Indo-European, was proposed as the source for a group of related languages which included Sanskrit, old Iranian, Greek, Latin, Celtic and various other European languages. Comparative philology became important to the reconstruction of the

Indian past. Having arrived at a common language, it did not take long for the language to be seen as the expression of a common race, the Aryan race.

The equation of language with race is not particular to the Indo-European and Aryan situation. It has been extended to other regions as well, such as the equation initially made between Bantu speakers and the supposed Bantu race in Africa. There is of course no basis for such an equation and there is no support for the argument that those who speak an Indo-European language must belong to the same Aryan race. It is equally difficult to define, with even a remote degree of precision, what the Aryan race might be. In the latter part of the 19th century, the fallacy of equating language with race was realised and despite statements to the effect that the two cannot be equated, the idea had caught the imagination of people and could not be dislodged by scholars.

In the mid 19th century, Gobineau expanded on the idea of the Aryan race which he identified with the European aristocracy. His influential book on the inequality of human races had a natural appeal, particularly to the aristocracy which was in decline in Europe, and also to groups gradually replacing this aristocracy but wanting nevertheless to be regarded as having a special status. Gobineau argued that the fairer races were pre-eminent because they were instrumental in creating and spreading culture largely through the conquest of others. But conquest, because it required settling in new areas, led to the mixing of races and hence to decline. This theory had disastrous consequences in Germany in the 20th century.

Comparative philologists and those working on the early Sanskrit texts, such as the *vedas*, read the word *arya* as having a racial connotation. For example, Max Mueller's discussions using the Vedic texts encouraged the idea of a superior Aryan race subduing the inferior indigenes and settling in India. Although at a later stage he argued that race and language were separate, it was by then too late to make the distinction, for the theory of Aryan race was becoming the established explanation for much of the reconstruction of early Indian history.

Language groups were now equated with races and there were references to not only the Aryan but also the Dravidian and the Austro-Asiatic races, based on the various languages spoken in different regions. Even the origin of caste society was explained as an attempt at racial segregation where, ideally, each caste constituted a different race and racial purity was sought to be maintained by forbidding intermarriage. Thus it could be further argued that the upper castes, and especially the brahmins, were lineal descendants of the Aryans.

It was, however, in the reconstruction of early Indian history that the theory of Aryan race had its biggest impact. It was argued that the foundations of Indian civilisation were laid by the coming of the Aryans. This took the form of an invasion of the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent to begin with and the subjugation of the existing populations often described as Dravidian. The

Aryans were seen as conquering northern India and coming into the peninsula, pushing the Dravidians into the south and leaving pockets of the Austro-Asiatics in central India. Cultural history involved the spread and establishment of the Aryan race over the subcontinent.

The term *arya* is more frequently used in the Vedic and Buddhist texts to refer to one who is respected and regarded as an honoured person.¹ Gradually it came to refer to those who spoke Sanskrit and observed the *varna* regulations. But in the 19th century reading of the *Rig Veda*, the counterposing of the *arya* with the *dasa* was interpreted as a racial demarcation and since the *dasa* is differentiated, among other characteristics, by physical differences as well, it came to be argued that the term *arya* was a reference to those of the Aryan race and the *dasa* to those of the indigenous races. The pre-eminence of the *arya* was explained by reference to their being the conquerors. The term *varna*, which literally means colour, but which is used in a symbolic sense as is evident by the colours of the castes as listed in various texts, as for example, white, yellow, red and black, was nevertheless taken literally to refer to skin colour and this, in turn, was sought to support the argument that caste was a form of racial segregation.

Society was depicted by those who were sympathetic to Indian culture as living in idyllic village communities characterised by harmony and a lack of aggression. Such descriptions, frequently found in the writings of Max Mueller, were also extended by him to contemporary 19th century India. Part of the reason for this depiction of ideal communities was that such village communities were also seen as identical with the village communities from which the peoples of Europe had originated. The Indian present was seen as reflecting the features of Europe in its infancy.

The history of early India therefore became a channel for propagating European views on the origins of peoples and cultures and even the culture of non-European societies was conditioned by the prevailing debates in Europe. This was in part an aspect of Orientalism where the use of knowledge as a form of power was implicit. Recent studies of Orientalism, such as that by Edward Said, have sought to demonstrate this aspect. The re-creation of a colony's culture and image of itself in terms of the Orientalist paradigms was a mechanism of control by the colonial power. Thus Lord Curzon speaks of the furtherance of such scholarship and knowledge as 'the necessary furniture of empire'.

The interpretation did not have to be reductionist in terms of the colonial framework but it tended to conform to the essentials of the framework and there is little attempt at any critique of this framework among earlier Orientalist scholars. Much of the detailed scholarship on early India, which was a legitimate means of discovering many aspects of the past, came from those who were

¹ In the Rigveda the term implies a spiritual culture, or a follower of Light and Truth, or co-operation with Gods and Goddesses representing these spiritual values or facts

employed as officers by the East India Company such as William Jones, James Mill, H. T. Colebrooke, H. H. Wilson and James Prinsep and, later, by Her Majesty's Imperial Government such as Alexander Cunningham and Vincent Smith. As such, therefore, they were unlikely to question the interpretations arising out of this scholarship.

Even when nationalist historians in India began to question some of the colonial paradigms, the theory of Aryan race was not among these. It could be argued that since the majority of the nationalist Indian historians came from the upper castes (*brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *kayasthas*) and from the middle class, the theory of Aryan race appealed to them as it supported their claims to social superiority and also suggested that Sanskritic Indian culture sprang from the same roots as that of the colonising power. According to Keshab Chandra Sen, the coming of the British to India was symbolic of the meeting of parted cousins.

Even those who were opposed to what they regarded as upper caste interpretations of the past, also accepted the theory, but turned it to their own use. Thus the members of the non-Brahmin movements maintained that the lower castes were the original inhabitants of India and that the upper castes, descended from the Aryans, were foreigners. Once again it was assumed that the speakers of a particular language constituted a different race from the speakers of another language. In spite of the denial of the equation of language with race by scholars, this equation was firmly embedded in both European and Indian views of the Indian past.

The questioning of the theory of Aryan race has arisen both from new evidence and from new methods of analysing the evidence. The new evidence comes from archaeology and linguistics and the new method is demonstrated in the manner in which caste has been studied in recent years.

The major new discovery in archaeology relates to the Indus civilisation. The chronology of this civilisation, the third to second millennium BC, would place it earlier than the Vedic texts which are generally dated from the mid-second to the mid-first millennium BC. If the texts are dated earlier, as some believe, then they would coincide with this civilisation¹ But the societies reconstructed from archaeology and from the texts are different from each other and therefore the texts cannot be taken as descriptions of the civilisation. The Indus civilisation was urban, used a script, had a copper technology, was unfamiliar with the horse² and had trading contacts not only with central Asia,

¹ Why should they coincide? They could be fairly earlier, with the Indus civilisation at once a derivative, a development and a deviation from the Rigveda

² This is a point which could be seriously disputed. Surkotada, an important site of the Indus civilisation in Kutch, has horse-bones from the lowest to the top levels. It is unthinkable that Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, the two most famous sites, should be unconnected with this town which bears all the signs of their typical culture. Besides, the cultures underlying both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro are akin to a culture of Baluchistan—Rana Ghundai and Perano Ghundai—which has evidenced knowledge of the horse. And both these cities are known to have been in contact with Baluchistan

Afghanistan and eastern Iran but also with the Gulf and with Mesopotamia. The Vedic texts depict a society which is pastoral and agrarian but is unfamiliar with urban centres and commerce, knows no script, appears to have used an iron technology,¹ gave considerable functional and ritual importance to the horse and contacts were largely confined to Afghanistan, eastern Iran and central Asia.

What is equally important is that if there was an Aryan invasion it would be reflected in the archaeological evidence, either in the decline of the cities or in large-scale devastation at a later time. Some decades ago, Mortimer Wheeler maintained that the Indus cities declined because of Aryan invasions which he summed up in his phrase, 'Indra stands accused'. But the more extensive and detailed evidence now available points in an altogether different direction. The decline of cities is no longer attributed to a single cause, since their decline was not simultaneous.

Further, the evidence points to environmental changes (such as massive flooding at Mohenjo-daro, and possible climatic changes in other areas affecting agricultural production on which the cities were dependent), being the major factors in their decline. It is likely that with further analysis the decline of these cities will relate more directly to changes in the political and economic structure as well. There is virtually no evidence for any large-scale invasion in the north-western part of the subcontinent during the second millennium BC.

If central Asia and eastern Iran were areas occupied by people speaking Indo-European languages as is generally held, then contacts between Baluchistan and central Asia are evident from the archaeological data. But the artefacts suggesting these contacts do not occur in the Punjab, Haryana and the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, that is, the area where the major part of the Vedas were composed. It is equally difficult to argue that the Aryans originated in India and spread to west Asia as this is not supported by archaeological evidence.² The archaeological culture subsequent to the Indus civilisation, which is known as the Painted Grey Ware, located in northern Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and eastern UP, and which is often regarded as the archaeological counterpart to the later Vedic literature, does not go beyond the Indus.

¹ *Ayas* in the Rigveda is now generally considered to refer to metal as such or, if it is specific, to a reddish metal, either copper or bronze, most probably the former

² There is no indication in the Rigveda that its composers came from outside India nor any indication of the route by which they might have come from the north-west to the Saraswati valley where much of this scripture seems to have been composed. Again, the Rigveda refers time and again to older Rishis without associating with them a different locale. To judge from the Rigvedic evidence, the people concerned appear to have been for all practical purposes a race native to the soil. And if the Rigveda fairly preceded the Indus civilisation, it goes into an antiquity which strongly suggests a practical autochthonism. Recent excavations at Mehrgarh at the Bolan Pass in Baluchistan have suggested a general continuity from nearly 7000 B.C. there to the subsequent ancient cultures in the subcontinent. These could include, at an early stage, the Rigvedic culture and, at a later, the Indus civilisation. In the absence of any unchallengeable theory of an "Aryan cradleland" outside India, one may venture to suppose on initial archaeological evidence that the Aryans originated in the region which includes Baluchistan, Afghanistan and Northwest India.

The linguistic evidence does, however, cross borders. There was an affinity in language between the speakers of Vedic Sanskrit and Avestan in Iran, an affinity which was recognised many decades ago. It is possible therefore that small groups of migrants from Iran came into proximity with people settled on the borders of north-western India and through a process of mutual exchange evolved into a variety of communities, among which were the speakers of Indo-Aryan. Such communities can only be identified by speech, using the literature which survives and, therefore, in referring to them the correct form would be not Aryan, but Aryan-speakers, meaning, speakers of Indo-Aryan

The debate on the language which might have been spoken by the people of the Indus civilisation brings the evidence of linguistics into the general problem. The debate as it stands currently is substantially between those who support a possible Proto-Dravidian language and those who are in favour of its being an Indo-Aryan language. None of the actual readings in either of these languages has met with acceptance among scholars. If the script remained a pictographic script with little indication of marked evolution and change, it is possible that there was more than a single language in use.

Recent linguistic analyses of Vedic Sanskrit suggest a rather different picture from the one which prevailed earlier. Non-Aryan vocabulary and syntax are now recognised in the earliest of the Vedas, the *Rig Veda*, and these increase in the later compositions. For example, the word *langala* for plough is non-Aryan and it is also known from archaeological evidence that plough agriculture goes back to the period just prior to the Indus civilisation. The non-Aryan influence on Vedic Sanskrit could suggest symbiotic relations between speakers of Aryan and non-Aryan languages, possibly even some bilingualism.

That Sanskrit itself underwent change is well established. The existence of etymological works in relation to Vedic Sanskrit—contemporary with the Vedic corpus—would point to the language changing. The grammar of Panini, generally dated to the late 5th century BC, is another indicator of change. There is evidence of dialects or varieties of Sanskrit at this time. Such changes can be explained by the evolution of the language in use and by non-Sanskrit speakers using the language. Thus even in the process of its spread, Sanskrit as a language was constantly adapting itself to local linguistic forms.

Studies of caste formation have come a long way from the simplistic notions of caste being separate racial entities. The origin of caste in the theory of the four *varnas* as expounded by brahman authors in the Vedic corpus appear to have been symbolic explanations of social differentiation. It is unlikely that a social system as complex as a caste society began with a simple, fourfold division of society into *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* and *shudras* with the untouchables added on as a fifth category. Possibly the *varna* system, reflecting social stratification, was nevertheless an idealisation of this stratification. Caste looked at as *jatis* suggests other avenues and emphases in caste society.

Jatis evolve from the intermeshing of a variety of factors such as location, environment, technology, access to resources, differences in the patterns of social observances, and the ideology of ritual purity. A caste society is characterised by hereditary groups ordered hierarchically, associated with particular marriage and kinship relations and often viewed as performing services for each other. The social historian therefore has to trace these factors over time and in relation to historical changes. History provides evidence of the importance of kinship patterns and occupation to caste identities, as well as evidence of transition from what has been called '*jana* to *jati*' (generally translated as tribe to caste).

Another important aspect is the adaptation to Sanskritic culture. What is regarded as 'Sanskritic' changes over time, for although on some occasions the Sanskritic assimilates the local non-Sanskritic culture, sometimes the process is reversed and there is more of the non-Sanskritic in the 'Sanskritic' although the veneer of the Sanskritic may be retained. Similarly practices also change over time and definition of what constitutes correct behaviour for a particular caste may be reversed from earlier periods. Thus the Vedic corpus makes clear that the good brahman could consume the flesh of a sacrificed animal such as the cow and, as part of certain sacrificial rituals, he was required to drink *soma*, which if not an intoxicant was certainly a hallucinogen. Yet in a later period, from the point of view of the good brahman, it was regarded as heretical to eat meat and consume intoxicants, even on ritual occasions.

The assertion of the purity of race among upper castes tracing ancestry back to early times cannot be upheld, given the fact that physically castes have greater regional affinities than pan-Indian. Nor is this surprising for there was conversion into castes at local levels and the fitting of these castes into a hierarchy, where inevitably attempts would be made to reach as high as possible. Regional variations, even in the broader structure of caste, do make it difficult if not impossible to maintain that there was a dissemination of the pure race which retained its purity and its status through time. Even among scientists and anthropologists today the concept of race as defined in the 19th century has been largely discarded. Identities are based on other factors and claims to race are no longer tenable, although the word continues to be used in popular parlance.

The theory of Aryan race therefore is not supported by historical evidence. What the historian is concerned with is not the spread of a race but the spread of a language. We know from many examples all over the world and from many periods of history that it was perfectly feasible for people of different racial origins brought together through migration, trade, conquest or persecution, to find themselves ultimately using the same language. Thus the historian of early India has to explain how the Indo-Aryan language became current in northern India in the first millennium BC. Those who spoke this language were the Indo-Aryan speakers and could well have been from a multiplicity of racial stocks.

The important question is why the language was adopted by elite groups in northern India. In the absence of widespread and evident conquest other factors have to be considered. Was the language associated with a superior technology, such as the use of iron and of horses and chariots, which would have attracted elite levels of society? Did those who spoke the language introduce new calendrical knowledge (such as a more precise solar calendar) which might have improved the agrarian cycle?

The Vedic corpus emphasises the importance of the violent destruction of the enemy and many of the hymns and rituals are in praise of the destroyer or are the means towards the ultimate triumph over the enemy. The identity of the enemy is however not certain in every case. There are occasions when the enemy is referred to as the *dasas* or the *dasyus*, but there are equally many occasions if not more when the enemy is of another clan but of the same culture.¹ Such internecine raids and battles among clans are characteristic of cattle-keeping societies as also of those in the process of clearing and settling land for agriculture, as was the case among the people referred to in the Vedic corpus. Competition over access to resources was intense and did at times benefit from marriage alliances and the intermingling of various groups. Thus, some of the most pre-eminent among these clans, such as that of the Purus who were ancestral to the protagonists of the Mahabharata war, are described as being descended from an *asura rakshasa* and speaking a faulty Sanskrit. Yet the Purus are often regarded as pure Aryans by modern scholars!

The empirical evidence as we have it today, from archaeology, linguistics and various literary sources, does not support the theory of Aryan race. But this is not merely a matter of interest to the historian. This theory has been used by many others and has come to be seen as fundamental to the understanding of the identity of modern Indians. It is here that its greatest danger lies: the upholding of a theory supposedly explaining our origins, when the theory is in fact false. The question of identity is particularly important to the Indian middle class in the process of change from caste to class. The theory was eagerly appropriated by those who were in this condition of mutation over the last hundred years.

This is of course not peculiar to Indian society, for such theories of racial

¹ This is incorrect. Most of the references are to Dasa-Dasyus, with the Panis as a subsection. And, as universally admitted, in many of the references there is no doubt that non-human demoniac beings are meant. It is also certain that in no reference is there an indubitable implication of human beings. As Keith observed long ago, we have no way to distinguish the human from the demoniac. What applies to the latter is applied to what may seem human. If the demoniac interpretation is open to us in some degree or other everywhere whereas the human interpretation is in several cases impossible, the logical conclusion would appear to be that the demoniac reading holds in all places. Thus a spiritual-symbolic view like Sri Aurobindo's of an inner adventure against occult hostile forces strongly recommends itself. The few references in which the enemy is termed Aryan call for a special understanding. We must note that in a number of texts the superhuman beings opposed to the demons are themselves designated Aryan. When some of them serve as checks to a spiritual growth beyond them, they are taken to have turned enemies and become in an extended sense the allies of the Dasa-Dasyus.

origins and identities have been known to other societies undergoing similar mutations. It has been plausibly argued that the uncertainty of social change and the expansion of the middle class in the early 20th century in Germany was one of the root causes of the rise of fascism carrying with it the Aryan myth. This experience, so close to us in time, should make it obvious that theories of origins and identities have to be handled very carefully; else they may explode in a manner which can devastate a society. The historian in these situations has to be alert to the way in which historical ideas are abused by the larger society in the name of history.

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“SATYAVAN MUST DIE”

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

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1990)

4. *Destiny is Set Free*

Now while it is fated that Satyavan must die, it is Narad who sets Destiny free by making an announcement in the palace of King Aswapathy:

Then cried the sage piercing the mother’s heart,
Forcing to steel the will of Savitri
His words set free the spring of cosmic Fate.
The great Gods use the pain of human hearts
As a sharp axe to hew their cosmic road:
They squander lavishly men’s blood and tears
For a moment’s purpose in their fateful work
This cosmic Nature’s balance is not ours
Nor the mystic measure of her need and use.
A single word lets loose vast agencies,
A casual act determines the world’s fate
So now he set free destiny in that hour ¹

The Queen had pleaded that “To know is best, however hard to bear” and Narad, while giving the truth claimed by her, not only makes her know about Satyavan’s death but also does something more than that, something heavenly, luminous and grand for the long good of the earth. His coming is therefore not just for delivering Fate’s message to the blind and the driven, just to put them on the alert about what is soon going to pass. He could have come, simply informed the royal couple about the impending doom, and gone away without doing anything else or without justifying the ways of high Destiny to the mortality-bound mind of man. But here he is seen to take the opportunity of the Queen’s pleading to enlarge the scope of his immediate mission; he has preferred to become an active participator in workings and operations of the great cosmic and supracosmic agencies themselves. Until now Destiny had remained locked and, for the incarnate Force’s action, it had to be set free. Thus he becomes, by his own free-will’s choice, a fine willing instrument for the work of the Avatar. Savitri’s will, still of the nature of the human Savitri, has to emerge fully and firm up in the secret truth of her own soul. To carry this will farther is the very labour of the Gods and it is towards that that Narad too adds his own little will and might. He votes openly in favour of the transforming Power and sets Destiny

free, Destiny until now held in the grip of Chance and Circumstance. By that singular act he also climbs to yet another height of collaboration in the miraculous divine possibility knocking at the doors of a wonder-cherished victory. Not so much Satyavan's death as rather a greater danger of total extinction is what he sees; it is this danger that the missioned Force, while standing on the last verge when all Nature's means fail, has to address and it is she who has to win the occult battle for the Supreme. Narad brings out most assuredly the transcendental dimension itself in this death of Savitri's lover and life-companion.

True, Savitri was all the time protected by the mighty Mother: "Heaven's tranquil shield guarded the missioned child." True also that all the suns were conscient in her birth and that the shining hordes surrounded her always with their luminous presence making the gloom of night less dark and less frightful. Yet it is certain that the woe of the entire world was quintessenced in her single woe. Savitri had to face, on extinction's verge, the God of Death poised to extinguish the flame of her love, love immortal that carried in it the splendour-seeds of a new divine creation. While the imperative is this love's conquest, a full play of forces is the free dynamism allowed here by the great undaunted Spirit of the World in its thousandfold working. The Voice that commands and guides Savitri in her sadhana, Narad's prophecy to catalyse her spiritual mission, the vision of Aswapathy of a dark cloud floating over Satyavan's name and that cloud being chased by a sudden and stupendous light, the Queen's intense human emotion, frail yet insistent, rejecting the Word of Fate, the designs of the God of Love to touch in time and assure the meeting of the lovers in the Shalwa Woods, are all indeed immediate signs of a very high involvement in this world-stirring tragedy of the Divine Mother herself. Against her is pitched the terrible Adversary "born of old". Narad's declaration about the inexorable death is therefore more aimed at bringing out its far implications, rather than in just stating in a simple way the fact of its occurrence. His action of releasing the spring of cosmic Fate is in full conformity with the grand scheme of a mighty Working. In a certain sense, then, it may as well be said that, in the fluidity of events, he actually fixed it in the full and complete knowledge of ultimate things; his vision was wide enough to embrace in its totality the functional need of Satyavan's death.

According to Narad there is a special meaning in this fast-coming albeit precipitous event. Something luminously charged with a divine possibility is what he sees in it from his home high up there in paradise. The mighty Mother has already taken a decisive step to eliminate for good all time-barriers that hinder the establishment of the Law of eternal Truth in the material creation. In such a transcendental logic of action the Queen's mourning about Satyavan's death is human and meaningless and hence is also vain. The slayer of love has to be quickened by the alchemy of love. The slow and laborious step-by-step evolu-

tionary march has to be changed into the wide-winging flight of a rapid golden Eagle sweeping across the pure sky of light and love and bliss. There is as though a conspiracy of love and death towards the grand fulfilment of heaven-beatitudes in the earth-life. In the person of Savitri, as one of the master-builders, Narad sees a divine opportunity and hence hastens to make sure that it is not lost; precarious Fate ought to become a God-given occasion

Not by hugging and holding the Past can this happen. It is indeed the death of the Past which is signalled by his visit and more by his pronouncement. The subconscious forces of Nature ever cancel life's golden truths and grip tightly the aspiring soul of man; it seems as though, strangely, he himself is in love with them; his efforts to pull himself out and be master over them have always been painfully futile. Satyavan's death is nothing but an aspect of that pain. Only one who is above it can bear it. Man is too small and weak for that. In fact, even if he were to make a superhuman effort to get out of the horror of that subconscious's sway he may break down; in the violence of a sudden action for which he has not been prepared he may prove himself mortally too frail and fragile to stand against it. Therefore this struggle with the subconscious is doubly dangerous: there is the strong adverse hand of night strangling his soul and there is the crushing weight of intense light reducing him to smithereens. Narad recognises all this but he also sees in the presence and person of Savitri a God-sent redeeming possibility. And Savitri is too well aware of the fact that man cannot bear this twofold agony; but she is not asking him either to bear it. She herself is going to do it for him. And her method is direct, her action decisive. Savitri has taken upon herself the burden of man's fate, the dead load of his death and mortality:

The mortal's lot became the Immortal's share.²

It is in that process, and more significantly when lost in the finest hour of love's union, she discovers the godlike Pain eating into the soul of the earth; that is the mortal's lot and she makes it now her business to deal with its cause straightway. She is not going to deal with the subconscious difficulty of man, which is but the task of the slow evolving Nature who is working it out only in the measures of long Time; she is going to deal with the godlike Pain himself directly, the one who is the source and fountain-head of all these million sufferings, wherefrom ever arise all these ceaseless dark energies swallowing up the boons that heaven has been constantly showering. Savitri's concern is the Inconscient. Now that she has taken birth here as the incarnate Force, Death, as one embodying Inconscience in his person, must snatch the soul of Satyavan, the living spirit of the love divine on earth, and bring to nought the splendid purpose of her mission. Although the script is illegible and only the hour shall reveal its full contents, Narad knows the issue involved and the magnitude of the problem; he also

knows the very danger the Incarnation has to face. Narad's declaration is therefore made with the purposeful and pointed intention of waking up the human Savitri; it is necessary that she should now thrust aside this veil and rise to her full stature of divinity to deal with the godlike Pain. The hour of death is soon approaching and she must prepare herself for it. By becoming the first announcer of her Avatarhood he, in that whole process, sets the spring of cosmic Fate free. If on such a tremendous scale are seen the results in the sequel of this event, surely then Narad's action must have been with the sanction of the Supreme. There is no gainsaying that to all appearance God has forgotten the world and that Fate is all. In the *Savitri*-episode His intimate concern comes out unequivocally through the action of Narad. The logic of Infinity is everywhere in His active and participative presence.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

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- 2 *Ibid* , p 7

GEORGE NAKASHIMA—“SUNDARANANDA”

GEORGE Nakashima passed away on the 15th June at his home “Minguren” at New Hope, PA. in the U.S.A. He had been given the name of “Sundarananda” by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, when he had been here in 1936/37, as a member of the team of Antonin Raymond who had given the scheme of the plan for Golconde. George became very well known in the U.S.A. as a Master Woodworker.

He had gone to Washington to receive an award from the University there and had only just returned home. He was in his Japanese bath when he passed away very quietly and peacefully without any sign of suffering. His wife Marion found him in his bath tub. His daughter, Mira, wrote to me at once the next day as George and I were old friends, from the time he was first here and through all these years during which we kept in touch by letters. He had come here very recently, on a visit with his son Kevin, and visited Auroville in which he was very much interested. He had had a very deep inner union with our Ashram and The Mother and had even once contemplated joining us as a disciple, when he had been here before.

George had only just celebrated his 85th birthday on the 24th of May. His family had thrown a small party and he was quite in good health. So his end was rather unexpected.

George was born in Spokane, Washington, U.S.A. He graduated from the University of Washington. Later he went to Japan and joined the team of Antonin Raymond and so came to work on the Golconde project. He made all the first drawings of the building and did most of the preliminary work on the foundations, etc. at Pondicherry. He made a scale model of the building and worked on the one model room that was built here.

George made a name in the United States as a Master Woodworker, and his furniture, in exotic and original styles, was highly valued. He married and had two children. His daughter Mira was named after the Mother. She has two sons and a daughter who came here very recently. Maria came with a friend Lawrence and we were very happy with them. They were travelling somewhere and could not be informed of George's passing.

Now here is an interesting thing which shows the way that The Mother works. George and Mira had written to me the day before his birthday, on the 23rd May. I had replied on the 4th June, and felt (by The Mother's guidance) that I should send him not only a birthday card but a packet of The Mother's Blessings, which I had not ever done before. This letter reached the family just in time for the funeral and so the card and The Mother's Blessings packet went with him in his casket.

I have written at once to Marion and to Mira and have explained, in brief, what happens after death, as Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have shown us. This will help them to bear better their sense of great loss.

UDAR

CALCUTTA'S TRICENTENARY

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1990)

No industrial revolution as in England and other countries took place in India as the rulers' efforts were in the opposite direction. It may be said that the industrial revolution in England was at the cost of de-industrialisation of traditional industries in India. However, with the march of time some simple machinery for rice hulling, oil milling, wheat crushing, tailoring, etc were imported into the city from 1826 onward. And roads were made to pave the way for horse-movement from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Innumerable horse-carriages called by different names like Kranchies, Phaetons, Landows, Victorias, Broughams (pronounced Brooms) were introduced, drawn by one to 10/12 horses, thereby heightening the prestige and aristocracy of the owners. Coach-building factories, garages and workshops had to be started as a consequence. Displaced persons from villages, not only of Bengal but of other neighbouring provinces, came to Calcutta, generally not as factory-workers but as coolies. Palanquins also existed side by side with the horses and horse-drawn carriages. Construction-work of Fort William, Writers' Buildings and other buildings required a large number of coolies. The price for human labour was very meagre as compared to even that of horses. While the rate for hiring a horse was rupees five for 14 hours a day, the charge for a palanquin-bearer for the same hours was only 4 annas. It was once written about coolies of Calcutta in one of the communications—

“Hundreds of them are waiting in the streets to be hired, .. they are careful carriers and generally trustworthy. I had all my furniture removed to another house, three miles distant, by one hundred coolies, for whose service I paid twenty-five rupees.”

Although these labourers were very poorly paid, yet they had to part with a portion of their remuneration as commission to the head coolie or broker. Naturally they moved from place to place and they were in scarce supply at times. The Government in such cases would send its men to collect coolies even by force from the countryside. Horses and horse-drawn carriages replaced the age of palanquins and they continued till the end of the nineteenth century after which the autos were introduced. The Renaissance in Bengal took place during this period which has been named the 'age of the horse-drawn carriage' by Benoy Ghosh. Pioneers like Rammohan, Vivekananda, Dwarkanath, Derozio, Vidyasagar, Dakshinaranjan—all moved in horse-drawn carriages. The words of Lewis Mumford may be echoed—“If the fowls no longer cackled at dawn, the restless stomp of a high-bred horse might be heard at night from rear windows, the men on horseback had taken possession of the city.” Conscious effort for the development of the town commenced from the beginning of the nineteenth

century. Great credit was given to Lord Wellesley, who wrote in his proposal of 16 June 1803—

“The increasing extent and population of Calcutta, the capital of the British Empire in India, and the seat of the Supreme Authority, require the serious attention of Government. It is now become absolutely necessary to provide permanent means of promoting the health .. of this great town ..” (*Chronicle of Calcutta Town*, Part II, in Bengali by Benoy Ghosh, Calcutta, p. 165).

A committee of 30 persons was formed according to Wellesley’s proposal. It was perhaps abolished in 1914, and in 1917 a Lottery Committee was formed which carried out the job for a long period. Calcutta Corporation came into existence later. And Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority or CMDA is of recent origin. It looks after the development of Calcutta with its extended part called Greater Calcutta.

Apart from its physical, social, economic and political developments the most glorious part of Calcutta’s history is its educational, literary and journalistic developments. In 1787 Warren Hastings established the Calcutta Madrasa, a Muslim educational institution—the oldest modern educational institution of Calcutta. Then came the Fort William College established with the idea of imparting Indian languages to the Britishers. Krishna Kripalani wrote in his *Literature of Modern India*—

“The era of Modern Indian literature may be said to begin in 1800 when the East India Company established the Fort William College” (p. 25). Then came the Hindu College in 1817 and the Sanskrit College in 1829. Michael Madhusudan Dutt and others of the revolutionary young Bengal group were the products of the Hindu College and Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was the product of the Sanskrit College, admitted to it at the age of nine years. Calcutta University came into existence in 1857. Among the two students considered to have passed B.A., the first graduates of the University, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was one. The university had its jurisdiction from Lahore to Rangoon. For women’s education the Bethune School was established in 1849 and it was upgraded as a college in 1882 to pave the way for graduation of two women, Chandramukhi Basu and Kadambini Basu. Rammohan Roy, a great man and learned educationalist, was the pioneer, of whom Krishna Kripalani wrote—“Rammohan Roy, the most learned and patriotic Indian of his generation, had pleaded with the Governor General Lord Amherst for the official sponsoring of English education in the country” (*ibid.*, p. 18).

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is known as the father of the Indian Novel and about Michael Madhusudan Dutt it has been written—

“To his adventurous spirit we owe blank verse and the sonnet, our first modern comedy and tragedy, and our first epic. He is the pioneer of our new (*i.e.*, Westernized) poetry and our new Drama” (*ibid.*, pp. 35-36).

Sir Ashutosh Mookherjee, the eminent educationist, made a great contri-

bution towards the development of Calcutta University. He was a member of the University's syndicate from 1881 to 1924 and its Vice-Chancellor from 1906 to 1914. Among his recruits as professors in the University there were such renowned personalities as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Sir C. V. Raman, D. R. Bhandarkar, Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, R. C. Majumdar and others. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was educated at Calcutta University.

In 1906 another important institution—the Bengal National School and College—was established under the Principalship of Aurobindo Ghosh as per the policy of the National Educational Council framed as a sequel of the activities started by the Dawn Society of Satish Chandra Mookherjee. The College was finally metamorphosed to the present Jadavpur University in 1955. There were other great educational and research institutions established. The Asiatic Society was founded on 9 January 1784; it was the second of its kind in the world. Fort William College got changed to Calcutta Public Library, then to Imperial Library and finally to the present National Library. The Calcutta Medical College was established in 1835 without any technical aid. Only two human skeletons were imported from England at a cost of Rupees 1500. On 10 January 1836 Pandit Madhusudan Gupta with four courageous students under the guidance of Professor Goovid carried out the dissection of a dead body. This was done in secret in an outhouse adjacent to the College building. It is said to be the first occasion when an orthodox Hindu dissected a dead body like a scientist, disregarding all barriers of religion and custom. It may be said to be a red-letter day in the annals of modern medical education in India.

The Hindu College later became Presidency College which was the nucleus of Calcutta University. Among other famous institutions of educational and civic importance, we may mention the Supreme Court established in 1774, the Calcutta Mint in 1791, the Calcutta High Court in 1872, the Alipur Observatory in 1875, the Indian Museum in 1875, the Alipur Zoological Garden in 1876, the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science founded by C. V. Raman in 1890.

(To be continued)

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

“Sonic Bloom”

ALL kinds of chemical means are used in agriculture and animal-breeding for achieving higher productivity. But we also find that there is an increasing urge for organic farming and the development of alternative methods. One of the more recent inventions is sound treatment for plants.

For long, many farmers in Western Europe and America had known that it is worthwhile installing expensive loud speakers in the stables and treating cows to a good low-volume concert of classical music. It has been established beyond doubt that the cows, obviously pleased at this cultural entertainment, yield more milk under such conditions. Similar methods are now also being applied in agriculture. Radio WCSN (Christian Science Monitor, Boston, USA) reported in a broadcast (20-11-89) that there was a small farm in Boulder, Colorado, which still harvested flowers and vegetables outside on the fields in late November although there had already been snow and frost several times. The secret: Paul T. ., the manager of the farm, gives sonic treatment to his lettuce, gladiolas and tomatoes. The sound stimulates the circulation in their systems and makes them absorb up to four times more nutrients than normal from ground, water and air. The result is the “sonic bloom”, with tomatoes, for instance, growing to an extraordinary size.

The sound has to be chosen with special care. Anything hectic or stressful like rock music is to be avoided, says Paul T. . Preferably, it can be music which has some elements in it such as occur in Nature, mimicking in a way birds, crickets, etc. Furthermore, it must emanate silent strength. In practical research it was found that music by Vivaldi (take, for instance, the concerto in C for recorder, strings and continuo, a fine example of “psychic” music) provides an ideal stimulus to plants in the field. Another favourite of the vegetal world turned out to be Sitar music by the Indian maestro Ravi Shankar. If such sweet melodies reach the plants’ invisible ears, reports Paul T. ., they are so pleased that after a few hours of music they are all turned towards the loudspeakers rather than the sun.

Detoxicant Plants

There are many reasons why we may keep a plant in our room, or perhaps no reason at all, if it is a matter of natural inclination and love. Now, 19 years’ research of the American Space Agency Nasa has shown that we may also do so on a scientific basis: plants have the ability of virtually cleaning the air and

detoxicating it. It was found that about one plant per 10 square metres space is sufficient to prevent health problems due to air pollution

This is relevant especially in modern buildings which are constructed with a maximum of isolation for the purpose of energy conservation in heating. Moreover, modern materials such as artificial fibres or detergents, glues and sprays emit toxic substances. A great number of these substances can cause not only allergic reactions and headache; but also, in some cases, serious disease. A study of the Dutch Labour Ministry shows that among 14 million Dutch people one million workers and employees are suffering from physical problems due to the unhealthy air in buildings.

The detoxicant effect of plants is based on the process of photosynthesis by which they ensure a constant exchange of gaseous substances. Normally, the plant absorbs carbon dioxide and emits oxygen and water vapour. However, the Nasa studies have shown that plants also clearly reduce dangerous substances in the air such as formaldehyde, benzol and carbon monoxide.

Source: *Badische Neueste Nachrichten* (9-11-89)

THE PROFESSOR

A SHORT STORY

THOSE who enter the house of Professor Thasan would take it for a public library. Shelves of various heights proudly hold the classics of the world, both ancient and modern. One can't but wonder at the huge amount of money that has gone into the making of his library. "Only one-tenth of what I earn every month," he would casually remark. His one-tenth is a little more than three hundred rupees which would make any other easy-going professor take a deep breath and wince. "My profession is teaching and if I do not read what will I teach?" he would say and then add, "I can't walk into a classroom with my pockets stuffed with jokes." True to his words, he spent eight solid hours in his library poring over the books.

As a professor of English literature, Thasan did his best to inspire the students. Spellbound they sat when he lectured and he had opened to them vistas of world literature through English. His students at the undergraduate level knew not only about the schools of Metaphysicals and Pre-Raphaelites but also about the school of lemon-squeezers. And at the postgraduate level they knew how to read e.e. cummings' poetry of typographical eccentricity and were quite conversant with the works of Kafka, Lorca, Hesse and Kazantzakis which some of the illustrious colleagues of the professor would not have even heard of.

Such a dedicated professor had a great drawback. His memory quite often failed him.

Inside the department he would sit glued to his chair and conveniently forget himself in a book, unaware of fleeting time.

"Professor Thasan! You have a class now," one of his colleagues would pull him back to the world of reality

"Now?... I don't think so," that was Professor Thasan's usual reply.

"If you believe in the department time-table, you have a class now "

"Is it so?... What day is today?" he would ask tapping his head.

"Wednesday."

"Wednesday!... So yesterday must have been Tuesday," Professor Thasan would coolly remark. Then he would pull out a drawer of his table and look at the time-table half the size of a postcard pasted to its inside "My class is only in the second period," he would say as if his colleague had been at fault and had inconsiderately disturbed his reading

"Yes. It's already the second period... Five minutes have passed." He would hear his fellow-academics at leisure shout in a chorus, their faces lit with mischievous smiles.

Professor Thasan would rise to his feet in a hurry, pull out a couple of books from his satchel and tuck them under his arm. "Attendance register and a piece

of chalk to room no. 28," he would shout to the attendant in the department and rush out.

Thereafter it was the headache of the attendant. He had to find the right attendance register after looking at the general time-table and then rush with a few pieces of chalk to the said room, only to be disappointed.

Packed with eager students the classroom would await Professor Thasan. When the attendant entered to hand over the attendance register and chalk he would only blink at the absence of the professor.

"Where is professor Thasan?"

The students would shoot from various spots at the attendant: "He has already left the department... That was five minutes back."

"Is this room no. 28 or...?" The attendant would ask with a grin.

"Yes. You are in the right room. But where is the professor?"

As the attendant would scratch his head to find an answer Professor Thasan would scurry into the classroom only to confess with a characteristic grin, "I'm sorry, boys. I went to room No. 82 by mistake."

Once in a while Professor Thasan would pull out his handkerchief from his pocket to mop his brow and slip it back into its place. At times he would place it on the table and absent-mindedly use it as a duster to rub clean the blackboard. And when a watchful student reminded him he would say, "Anybody can make a mistake. Even Homer nods. Don't you know, my boy?... But it is better to put my hanky into my pocket." Minutes later students would be giggling, for he would have used the duster for his hanky and thereby created comic relief.

He would walk into the General Library of the college and, standing in front of the Shakespeare Section, call the peon and ask him to open the almirah. The peon too would sincerely rush towards the key-rack and search for the particular bunch. Meanwhile the professor would lose patience and go on calling the peon to hurry up. The peon would go half-mad and return to tell the professor about the missing bunch.

"What?... Missing?" Professor Thasan would shout and slap his right thigh as usual in anger. The keys would clink from his pants pocket. The peon would force a smile and the professor would grin and say: "Oh! The keys are here. Yes, I remember to have taken the bunch from the rack and slipped it into my pocket when I came to this section."

Professor Thasan quite often confused the undergraduates with the post-graduates. He would shout at an undergraduate for not presenting a paper in the seminar and at a postgraduate for not writing an exercise given in the composition class.

He always had difficulty in remembering the names of his students. Once he was busily engaged in valuing the answer papers of the half-yearly examination conducted for the final-year postgraduate students. When he was going through the last answer paper he saw a girl of that class pass through the verandah.

“Lakshmi,” he shouted to attract her attention and said, “Come in for a minute.”

Lakshmi felt her heart go pit-a-pat as she entered the department and slouched towards Professor Thasan

“What happened to you? You didn’t fare well in the examination,” he said while trying to single out her answer paper from the bundle.

Lakshmi was shocked. She pressed her hand against her breast and held her breath

The professor spread the answer paper and continued: “See for yourself. What have you scored?... Two out of twenty. Just two... eh! That makes only ten percent. At this stage you can’t dream of getting your degree.”

“But I answered all the questions and well enough, too, Sir,” Lakshmi’s voice was quivering. Her eyes were brimming with tears.

“Then am I a fool to give you just two marks? Let me read out what you have written.” The professor was about to begin when Lakshmi peered through her thick glasses at the answer paper and said, “Sir! It doesn’t resemble my hand. Must be somebody else’s.”

“What? Aren’t you Subbulakshmi?”

“No, Sir,” she giggled, wiping her tears with the back of her hands, “I’m Varalakshmi.”

“Oh, you Lakshmis,” Professor Thasan yelled tearing his hair. His colleagues and the students had their laugh for a month.

At home too he was the very same professor. He would knock on the neighbour’s door, calling aloud the name of his wife. Sometimes he would use his right hand to knock on the door and the other to tap his head to recollect the name of his wife. To his neighbours he was a pleasant nuisance.

It was customary of him to go to Pillayar temple every Friday. He would leave his chappals with the poor guard at the entrance and take a token from him. On his way back home from the temple he would go barefoot. It needed a sharp stone or a broken iron nail that lay on his way to make him remember his chappals. In the absence of such natural reminders it would take even a week for him to remember his chappals, that is when he got ready to go to the temple on the next Friday for he used a special worn-out pair for his Friday prayers.

He would take an evening stroll with his friends, all the time cracking jokes and having hearty laughs. But suddenly he would call a halt to his steps, close his eyes and tap his forehead with the tip of his forefinger and utter the monosyllable, ‘Ah.’ The next second he would disappear. His friends knew that the professor had forgotten something but no one knew for certain what and where. And when the inquisitive friends reminded him on the next day and probed the matter, Professor Thasan would take several minutes to search his memory only to say, “I don’t remember.”

One evening his wife heard a knock on the door and opened it to a police constable.

“Is this Professor Thasan’s house?” asked the constable.

“Yes.”

“Am I speaking with Mrs Thasan?”

“Yes.”

“Your husband is at the police station under our custody. I have come to inform you. Someone is needed to bail him out.”

Mrs Thasan felt a shiver run through her body. She gulped down the spittle that had collected in her mouth and then asked, “What has he done?”

“Stolen jewels. That is what the report says. He is held up at the Bazaar Police Station.”

“What? Stolen jewels? That can’t be... But what about the boy?”

“What boy?”

“The two-year old child he took with him to the bazaar.”

“I don’t know. No child was seen with him,” so saying the constable went away.

The next moment Mrs Thasan briefed the matter to her male neighbour and sought his help. The two hurried to the police station.

What had really happened was that Mrs Thasan had told her husband to go to the market to fetch vegetables, to which he had grudgingly agreed.

“Do not forget to get your new pants from the tailor. Today is the due date,” she reminded him.

Professor Thasan got ready. He took a red-coloured bag with zigzag lines on it in white, a fashion of the day created by the roadside vendors at the Sunday market. When he was about to kickstart his scooter, the two-year old grandson who was with them wanted to accompany him. Hence he put the child in the leg-space of his scooter and drove to the market.

Parking his vehicle very near to the tailor’s shop he took his grandson by his hand and went to the vegetable market. After the purchase he came back, put his grandson on the pillion seat of the scooter and told him to wait. He then took quick steps towards the tailor’s shop.

Four to five customers were in the shop. On seeing the professor, the tailor said: “Your pants are ready, Sir. I have sent them for pressing. They will be here any moment.”

The professor sat on the sofa, kept his bag on the floor to his left and then began leafing through the magazine that was at hand. Seconds later the tailor’s assistant delivered his new pants in a paper bag. He pulled out his purse, paid the stitching charges and tucked the parcel under his arm. He took a red bag and went out. Hunger pinching his stomach, he forgot all about the scooter and his grandson. He walked towards the newly opened open-air restaurant.

He ordered two iddies and a cup of tea. And it was only when he began

pouring the hot tea into the saucer that he heard someone shout: "That's him, constable. That is my bag."

The professor turned and saw a young man rushing towards him followed by a police constable.

"Whose bag is this?" the police constable cried snatching the bag kept on the table.

"Mine. Why?" replied the professor.

"What do you have in it?"

"Only vegetables."

The constable flipped open the bag and said, "Look. There are jewels and silk saris in cardboard containers."

The professor was taken aback. "Then. . . Then where is my bag of vegetables?" he blabbered.

"We'll find it for you... Now to the police station," the constable said in an authoritative tone.

When Mrs Thasan and her neighbour entered the police station they found the professor confessing his poor memory and pleading innocence before the Inspector who was patiently listening to him.

"Where is the boy? Where is the boy?" Mrs Thasan was agitated beyond words.

"What boy?" The professor asked his wife.

"My God! Our grandson whom you took with you to the market."

"Ah! I remember," said the professor with his face lit as if by a 100 Watt bulb. "The vegetable bag must be at the tailor's."

"Hell with the vegetable bag... Where is the boy?" Mrs Thasan yelled impatiently.

"Now rush to the tailor's shop to get back the bag of vegetables. I remember to have parked my scooter very near to the tailor's shop. And the boy must be sitting on the scooter," the professor said at one stretch.

Mrs Thasan hurried out of the police station in search of her missing grandson. She was followed by a police constable.

The child having felt the long absence of his grandpa must have leaned against the stepney of the scooter. The cool evening breeze must have lulled him to sleep in that position.

Mrs Thasan was all smiles when she saw her grandson. She took him in her arms, hugged and kissed him. Carrying the half-sleepy child on her hip, she headed back towards the police station.

The constable who had witnessed the sentimental drama had gone back to report to the Inspector.

The Inspector was convinced. The professor's neighbour too had his share in convincing the Inspector. The young plaintiff too taking pity at the plight of the professor decided to withdraw his complaint.

“Professor! Is this your bag?” asked the Inspector showing him a stuffed red-bag in one corner of the station.

“Yes. That’s mine, provided there are vegetables in it,” said the professor with glee.

“Check it and then speak.”

The professor checked and double-checked. He then declared: “Must be mine. Appearances are very deceptive, Inspector ”

“Had you checked your bag at the tailor’s shop, you would not have landed in difficulties.... This young man—he is getting married shortly—was also at the tailor’s shop. When the tailor finished with him after taking the measurements for a shirt, he found to his great horror that his bag had been taken away and all that he found was yours with vegetables... Look, Professor! How many you have put into difficulties today! Consult a good physician,” advised the Inspector.

Heaving great sighs of relief they came out of the police station.

No sooner did they reach home than the professor’s wife went to the pooja room. She prayed loudly and the professor heard her pray thus: “O Lord Vinayaka! May I not live to hear my husband ask me: ‘Who are you?’ ”

P. RAJA

THE "IDEAL" SERIES ON THE MARCH

From Pradeep Puranik M Sc F C A , Sr Manager (Finance), D-2, Machna Colony, Shivaji Nagar, Bhopal

Dear Shri Keshavji,

I offer my grateful thanks for sending me a copy of *Ideal Parent* along with your letter

At Bhopal we have started an education Centre with a few children We are planning to distribute *Ideal Child* to students, *Ideal Parent* to their parents and *Ideal Teacher* among teachers First preference of language is Hindi If the translated copy is not available you may send *Ideal Parent* or *Ideal Teacher* in English

You are requested to kindly send the booklets as follows

Ideal Child—200 copies, *Ideal Parent*—200 copies, *Ideal Teacher*—100 copies

Please let me know the amount I should send With kind regards

**

From Family Planning Association of India, 18/3, Uma Bhavan, Kunjan Nadar Compound, Jawahar Street, Ramavarmapuram, Nagercoil - 629 001, Kanyakumari District
Grams FAMPLAN Tel 3527 Ref BP/255/90

Dear Sir,

Date 28 5 1990

This has reference to your circular dated 12th May 1990, Ref No 669 regarding the publication of the booklets—*Ideal Child*, *Ideal Parent* and *Ideal Teacher* We would like to have the following for our project
1 *Ideal Parent* (Tamil) 1,000, 2 *Ideal Parent* (English) 25, 3 *Ideal Teacher* (English) 25, 4 *Ideal Child* (English) 25

Please inform us about the despatch details with actual bill at the earliest We will settle the amount by Cheque, after receiving the booklets and bill

Yours sincerely

K Saratha, Administrative Assistant

**

MUNDRA PATHOLOGY LABORATORY

Dr Rajendra N Mundra, M D (Path & Bact), D C P Consulting Pathologist

'Brijnath', Near Gujrathi High School, Vazirabad, NANDED - 431 601 (M S) Phone 3883

Dear Sri Keshavji,

15 5 90

Sadar Pranam I reciprocate with thanks the acknowledgement of your letter dated 28 4 90 (ref 565) I was greatly touched by the contents therein and was inspired to contribute to this great humanitarian task my small humble share by freely distributing a copy each of the THREE IDEAL BOOKS to children, parents and teachers I would therefore need, to begin with, 100 copies each of the following booklets *Ideal Child*, *Ideal Parent*, *Ideal Teacher*

I am enclosing a Demand Draft of Rs 240 00 only towards the remittance of the payment in advance I am myself very keen and eager to go through the pages of these illuminating booklets Kindly manage to send the same (*Vide supra*) at your first convenience Thanking you in anticipation Yours with truly loving regards

**

R P Shah, Advisor, Jamnabai Narsee School, Narsee Mongi Bhavan, N S Road No 7, J V P D Scheme, Bombay-400 049

Dear Shri Keshavji,

8th may, '90

Thank you very much for sending us the specimen copies of *Ideal Child*, *Ideal Parent* and *Ideal Teacher* We shall thank you to kindly book our order for the following

Ideal Child 2000 copies, *Ideal Parent* 3000 copies, *Ideal Teacher* 500 copies

It may please be noted that we need the English Edition The Bill may kindly be prepared in the name of Jamnabai Narsee School Kindly-let us know when we can expect the delivery

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 Hema Shah*

THE subject of this Seminar—"What is the true meaning of freedom and how to realise it?"—has deeply interested and puzzled the human mind through the ages. Several thinkers, philosophers, scientists, men of action and others from all fields of life, in the past as well as in the present, have viewed this problem from different angles and provided different answers to it according to their divergent outlooks and predilections. The problem being of fundamental importance both for thought and life, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have also given their answers to it. In my speech I shall try to explain them briefly.

The Mother, when once asked: "What is true freedom?", replied in her own characteristic manner in a compact phrase: "Freedom from the ego". And to a further related question: "And how to attain it?", she replied: "Get rid of the ego".¹

The Mother's answers, which provide the key to this perplexing problem in a negative manner, have their positive counterpart in Sri Aurobindo's statement: "One can be free only by living in the Divine"², for one can get rid of the snares of the ego only by living in the Divine.

Ordinarily, by freedom we mean freedom from all external regulations and compulsions. In the political sphere, for instance, the individual demands certain basic liberties from the authority of the State. In the larger social life, in his relations with others, he claims the right to live and act as he likes without any check or control by others. But this claim, if it takes an exclusive egoistic form, cannot be accepted as legitimate because it seeks to justify the individual's demand to satisfy his own desires and interests without any restraint and in complete disregard of the needs and interests of others. Human nature being predominantly egoistic such a claim would create only a competitive society in which each one would try to live at the cost of the others. Any kind of just and

* Revised and enlarged

¹ *The New Age*, edited by Kishor Gandhi, p 151

² *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed., Vol 22), p 318

harmonious collective life would become impossible if this egoistic demand is allowed its uncurbed expression.

The real meaning of freedom, or self-determination as it is often called, is, according to Sri Aurobindo, "this that within every living human creature, man, woman and child, and equally within every distinct human collectivity... there is a self, a being, which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to make its life a full and a satisfied instrument and image of its being"¹

Thus the true sense of freedom is the right to live and grow according to the law of one's own self. But the important question that arises here is: What is one's true self? Our present self is the ego, but in any of its forms it is not our true self, and therefore if the right to freedom is interpreted to mean the individual's right to express his egoistic propensities without any control, it would lead to a falsification of the true meaning of freedom. For, the ego, especially the vital ego in man, is by its inherent nature aggressive and seeks to expand, grow and develop by encroaching upon the freedom of others. Self-assertion and self-aggrandisement, even at the cost of others, is its very nature and if it is permitted to express its tendencies unhindered it will invariably create conflicts and clashes with other egos by its competitive struggle for supremacy over them. Sri Aurobindo characterises "this great parasitical excrescence of unbridled competition" as a "giant obstacle to any decent ideal or practice of human living".²

For the ego, either of the individual or of the group or nation, disregards or ignores the truth that human life for its sound functioning must be based on two complementary principles: freedom and harmony or unity. For the individual or the group does not live in isolation but in an organic interdependence with other individuals or groups, and therefore if it claims the right to satisfy its own needs, interests and desires, it must also grant the same right to other individuals and groups. It must learn to accord its interests and desires with those of others in a spirit of mutuality and harmony. The demand for freedom must therefore always go hand in hand with the need for harmony. There must always be a balance and equilibrium, an adjustment and concord between the rights of individuals and those of groups if a just and progressive structure of life is to be created because freedom and harmony are its twin pedestals.

Egoistic expression of freedom therefore always needs to be controlled when it reaches a point where it encroaches upon the freedom of others. Recognising this necessity, if the individual learns to control himself voluntarily from within, then no external regulation is necessary. Self-discipline alone can dispense with external discipline. He must learn to obey an inner law before he can outgrow the necessity of external compulsion. In social and political life therefore an enlightened individual will recognise and follow this truth, and that

¹ "Self-Determination" (Cent Ed, Vol 15), p 601

² *The Human Cycle* (Cent Ed, Vol 15), p 188

will enable him to live in full freedom and harmony with others without any need of external control.

But here a deeper and more fundamental question arises: Is such an enlightened person living a free life harmoniously with others *really* free? For even if he is enlightened and does not misuse his freedom to encroach upon the freedom of others, he still lives in his ego-self—and can ego, however enlightened, have real freedom? The Gita teaches us that the ego is a creation of the lower nature, always bound to her by her three gunas or qualitative modes, and the sense of freedom that it has is altogether an illusion. Even the enlightened *sattwic* ego is as much her bond-slave as the two lower rajasic and tamasic egos. Real freedom comes by transcending the lower nature, by finding our true spiritual self, which is an eternal portion of the Supreme. For this, “Sattwa must be transcended as well as Rajas and Tamas, the golden chain must be broken no less than the leaden fetters and the bond-ornaments of a mixed alloy.”¹

Political and social freedom therefore, however necessary for man, is not real freedom, for it still involves a bondage to the lower ignorant nature of which he is an unconscious tool or instrument. As Sri Aurobindo maintains:

“At best we have only the poor relative freedom which by us is ignorantly called free will. But that is at bottom illusory, since it is the modes of Nature that express themselves through our personal will; it is force of Nature, grasping us, ungrasped by us that determines what we shall will and how we shall will it. Nature, not an independent ego, chooses what object we shall seek, whether by reasoned will or unreflecting impulse, at any moment of our existence.”²

I am tempted here to quote another passage from Sri Aurobindo which presents the same idea in a more vivid fashion:

“The apparent freedom and self-assertion of our personal being to which we are so profoundly attached, conceal a most pitiable subjection to a thousand suggestions, impulsions, forces which we have made extraneous to our little person. Our ego, boasting of freedom, is at every moment the slave, toy or puppet of countless beings, powers, forces, influences in universal Nature.”³

Now I come to the second part of our subject. How to realise true freedom? The answer to this question is obvious from what I have said about the first part, for if our ego, which is a tool of the lower Nature, is the root-cause of our bondage; then true freedom can only come by abolishing the ego and finding and

¹ *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 20), p 226

² *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 20), p 88

³ *Ibid* , p 53

living in our true self, our soul, which being an eternal portion of the Divine is, like the Divine, eternally free. That is why Sri Aurobindo says, as I have already mentioned before, "One can be free only by living in the Divine."¹

To live in the Divine, we must unite with Him and obey His Will. True freedom therefore can only be attained by surrender and obedience to the Divine's Will which alone is free. The freedom that we attain by the discovery of our true self is not anything separate or different from the Divine Will. It is the same Will freely expressed in and through us by our complete surrender to it. I recall a remark of Sri Aurobindo which is most appropriate to quote here:

"What is meant by free activity? With us the freedom consists in freedom from the darkness, limitation, error, suffering, transience of the ignorant lower Nature, but that also in a total surrender to the Divine. Free action is the action of the Divine in and through us; no other action can be free."²

What Sri Aurobindo says in the above passage seems like a paradox, for it may be asked: How can we be free if we have to submit and obey the Divine? For us freedom and submission, freedom and obedience are contradictory things. But in the spiritual life that is the only true meaning of freedom. The Divine, the Supreme Lord, alone is free and man can be free by surrendering to Him and participating in His freedom. So long as man lives in his ego, he is a slave of Nature; when he finds his true self and unites with the Divine he becomes a slave of the Lord. Spiritual freedom, which is the only real freedom, is nothing else but a willing slavery or submission to God. In this sense the word "freedom" itself assumes a different significance, for it means a choice between two masters—Nature or God.

How to make this choice? To begin with, we must constantly repeat this mantra given by the Mother and try to make it a living force guiding our life:

Supreme Lord,
Eternal Truth
Let us obey Thee alone
and live according to Truth.

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed, Vol 22), p 318

² *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed, Vol 22), p 130