

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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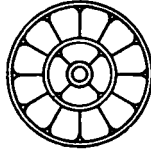
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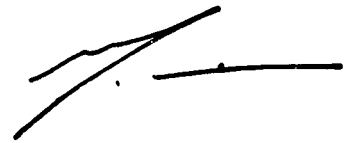
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"*

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## TOWARDS LIBERATION, REALISATION, TRANSFORMATION

### POINTERS FROM *WHITE ROSES*, LETTERS TO HUTA

YES, my dear child, the nature can change, completely change with the practice of yoga—nothing is impossible for the Divine Grace—it can transform a being so totally that all that seemed for it completely impossible becomes not only possible but done. That is what I want to do for you—so that all your difficulties will become like unreal nightmares and vanish in an inexistent past.

The Grace is there working for that transformation. (14.7.1956)

The duty of the mind, the life and the body is to become and to live what the Soul knows and is. (23.2.1958)

If you are not satisfied with what you are, take advantage of the Divine's help and change. If you have no courage to change, submit to your destiny and be quiet.

But to go on complaining about the condition in which you are and to do nothing to change it, is sheer waste of time and energy.

The cure from all difficulties can come only when the egoistic concentration upon one's desires and conveniences, ceases. (12.3.1958)

My dear little child,

I have received and read your letters.

In the last one of the 11th I retain your prayer to be freed from the ego on your birthday; that is to say to be born to the Truth on that day.—This is a big demand and I answer by a big Yes; I am ready to make that gift.

But you must know one thing.

To be only aware of the gift, you must have first the receptivity and then the assimilation. Without these two things you will not even know that the new consciousness is given. Then, when you have received and assimilated, to enjoy the new consciousness you must keep it constantly in front, in your active consciousness. Then you will become a new person and feel free, happy and strong.

I tell you all that, so that you may prepare yourself; useless to add that my help is always with you; but you must avail yourself of it. (12.5.1963)

The “active consciousness” is the usual consciousness, that one of every day and every circumstance—the one in which and by which you live and act in the ordinary life.

You say “the Ego and the physical consciousness are not me.”

It is your soul who can say that in truth. Certainly your soul is not the ego and the physical consciousness; but the mental, the vital and the physical beings have been formed by the ego and it is through the ego that they express themselves, it is through the ego that they get in contact with the others and react to these contacts. This is the difficulty, this is why it is almost impossible to get rid of the ego without a Divine intervention.

It is always to your soul that I speak and your soul never misunderstands me; it is the ego that misunderstands and gets vexed

It is always for your soul, the freedom, the peace and the happiness of your soul that I act and your soul knows it quite well and never misunderstands me or gets hurt or sorry. It is the ego that feels hurt and gets sorry.

This which is an absolute and true fact can give you the measure of the mixing of the ego in your consciousness. The ego cannot be destroyed, but it can be overcome by a constant and complete separation from it. This is the necessary preparation I spoke of. The Supreme does not work by tricks and magic, because they are not true. The Supreme does not obey the individual desires, because in that case He would be a slave and not the Lord.

He says, this will be done under these conditions. And what He says is done.

Now to make you fully understand, I shall explain something more—all the elements of the human consciousness which gather and organise themselves around the soul form, through thousands of lives, the psychic being. This psychic being when well constituted becomes the conscious intermediary between the soul and the physical being.

It is your psychic being who wants the Truth and Truth alone, your psychic being who has brought you here and keeps you here; it is in answer to the aspiration of your psychic being who is ready for it, that I give the assurance of the liberation.

When the psychic being gets this liberation, it feels the ego and the physical consciousness, merely as movements of the universal Nature outside itself, quite foreign to itself; and these movements can no more affect the psychic being in any way.

So it will be in the measure of your remaining consciously one with your psychic being that you will be aware of this liberation. And when you will live constantly in the psychic consciousness, then you will enjoy all the happy consequences of this liberation. (27 5 1963)

You ask what is the difference between the liberation and the realisation.

The realisation of the soul is achieved when the whole being (including the physical consciousness and the ego) has got under the control of the soul through the psychic being, when all the activities of the being including the physical are governed exclusively by the soul in peace and quietness. This is the first step

towards the Transformation which is the divinisation of the integral being and may come only after ages.

You also say that the realisation and the ego cannot go together. This is quite true and from the time of the realisation the nature of the ego is so much changed that we can say in truth that there is no more ego, although nothing is lost or wasted of what it represents in the evolution.

But all this needs a very patient endeavour. (6.6 1963)

There is nothing to be disappointed about.

The soul's liberation for which I have said a big "yes" is going on steadily and it will take place.

But from the very beginning I have warned you that to be simply aware of this liberation your collaboration was needed, because you had to keep a conscious contact with your soul.

Do not try to ignore this condition because it is imperative. And never forget that any wrong movement which interferes with your conscious contact with your soul, has inevitably some bad effect. Among these movements impatient desire, revolt and mental arrogance are the most dangerous.

When you will have understood this point certainly things will become smoother.

My help is and will always be with you, but my help also cannot do everything—you must add your sincere collaboration. (17.6 1963)

If the transformation you are asking for depended on me alone it is long since it would have been done.

With all my heart I want it for you. But the whole world is One and interdependent and this creates a situation that alone the Supreme Lord can alter. (28.7.1964)



# THE PSYCHIC BEING, THE DIVINE, THE SUPRAMENTAL CHANGE OF THE BODY

ONE OF THE LAST TALKS OF THE MOTHER: 8 FEBRUARY 1973

*This talk was between the Mother and some teachers of our Centre of Education. In the version given here, slight editing has been done for the sake of straight and smooth reading by omission of the few unfinished sentence-openings which did not lead anywhere but were retained in the transcript of the tape-record for a natural impression of the talk.)*

*A: What is the best way of preparing ourselves, until we can establish a new system?*

NATURALLY, it is to widen and illumine your consciousness—but how to do it? If you could find, each one of you, your psychic and unite with it, all the problems would be solved.

The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That's it, you see—the Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you but you are not fully conscious of it. It acts now as an influence rather than as a Presence. It should be a conscious Presence, you should be able at each moment to ask yourself how the Divine sees. It is like that: first how the Divine sees, and then how the Divine wills, and then how the Divine acts. And it is not to go away into inaccessible regions, it is right here. Only, for the moment, all the old habits and the general unconsciousness put a kind of covering which prevents us from seeing and feeling. You must lift that up.

In fact, you must become conscious instruments...conscious of the Divine.

Usually this takes a whole lifetime, or sometimes, for some people it is several lifetimes. Here, in the present conditions, you can do it in a few months. For those who have an ardent aspiration, in a few *months* they can do it.

*(Long silence)*

Did you feel anything?

Be completely sincere. Say whether you felt anything, or whether there was no difference for you. Completely sincere. Well? Nobody is answering. (*Mother asks each person in turn and each gives his or her reaction.*)

*B: Sweet Mother, may I ask you whether there was a special descent?*

There is no descent. That is another wrong idea: there is no descent. It is something that is always there but which you do not feel. There is no descent: it is a completely wrong idea.

Do you know what the fourth dimension is? Do you know what it is?

*B: We have heard about it....*

Do you have the experience?

*B: No, Sweet Mother.*

Ah! But in fact that is the best approach of modern science: the fourth dimension. The Divine, for us, is the fourth dimension. It is everywhere, you see, everywhere, always. It does not come and go, it is there, always, everywhere. It is we, our stupidity which prevents us from feeling. There is no need to go away, not at all, not at all, not at all.

To be conscious of your psychic being, you must once be capable of feeling the fourth dimension, otherwise you cannot know what it is.

My God! For seventy years I have known what the fourth dimension is...more than seventy years!

*(Silence)*

Indispensable, indispensable! Life begins with that. Otherwise one is in falsehood, in a muddle and in confusion and in darkness. The mind, mind, mind, mind! Otherwise, to be conscious of your own consciousness, you have to mentalise it. It is dreadful, dreadful! There.

*A: The new life, Mother, is not the continuation of the old, is it? It springs up from within.*

Yes, yes...

*A. There is nothing in common between...*

There is, there is, but you are not conscious of it. But you must, you must... It is the mind which prevents you from feeling it. You mentalise everything, everything.... What you call consciousness is the thinking of things, that is what you call consciousness: the thinking of things. But it is not that at all, that is not consciousness. The consciousness must be capable of being totally lucid and *without words*.

*(Silence)*

There, everything becomes luminous and warm...*strong!* And peace, the true peace, which is not inertia and which is not immobility.

*A: And, Mother, can this be given as an aim to all the children?*

All ..no. They are not all of the same age, even when they are of the same age physically. There are children who are at an elementary stage. If you were fully conscious of your psychic, you would know the children who have a developed psychic. There are children in whom the psychic is only embryonic. The age of the psychic is not the same, far from it. Normally the psychic takes several lives to form itself completely, and it is that which passes from one body to another and that is why we are not conscious of our past lives: it is because we are not conscious of our psychic. But sometimes, there is a moment when the psychic has participated in an event; it has become conscious, and that makes a memory. One sometimes has a fragmentary recollection, the memory of a circumstance or an event, or of a thought or even an act, like that: this is because the psychic was conscious.

You see how it is, now I am nearing a hundred, it's only five years away now I started making an effort to become conscious at five years old, my child. And I go on, and it goes on. Of course, I have come to the point where I am doing the work for the cells of the body, but still, the work began a long time ago.

This is not to discourage you, but. ..it is to let you know that it does not happen just like that!

The body is made of a substance which is still very heavy, and it is the substance itself which has to change for the Supermind to be able to manifest.

There you are.

# LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

## PERSONAL LETTERS

I HAVE been hearing from certain quarters time and again that our Yogic work at present is to divinise our physical cells. No doubt, the divinisation of the body, so that it becomes immune to disease, decrepitude and even death, is the crown of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga of the Supramental Descent and Transformation. To keep this climax in view and to create an eagerness and readiness in the body for it, so that the physical cells may open to the transformative Supermind, is nothing in itself to be scorned as mere fantasy and megalomania. But can their divinisation ever be achieved without first enlightening our narrow prejudice-ridden mind, our ambitious restive lust-gripped egoistic life-force, our greedy self-regarding habit-driven ensemble of brain and nerve?

The true soul in the evolutionary milieu—the psychic being, as Sri Aurobindo terms it—has to emerge and suffuse the rest of our nature with its sense of surrender to God, its sweet calm and its comprehensive compassion, its spontaneous insight into all problems, its constant offering of all work to the Divine. And at the back of this flowering of the deep heart should stand a wide tranquility of consciousness, an ether of colossal clarity, an all-embracing warmth of wisdom, an ample reservoir of serene strength.

If we haven't got something in us of these states, how can we hope for a divinisation of our cells? We have radiantly to act on them, but how shall we do so except through some light caught from the smile of the inmost soul and from the blissful silence of the universal Spirit, both of them transmitting the glory and grace of the transcendent Supermind? Our chief concentration has to be—as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother never tired of saying—on realising the Divine in our consciousness and on invoking His Will to work in us everywhere. (9.2.1991)

\*

Some thoughts and experiences have lately been in some prominence with me and I feel like giving words to my outlook on them. I believe they will have a general bearing and not be solely applicable to my own little concerns.

When anxieties, resentments, frustrations—all leading to obsessive tensions of mind and nerves—are found to persist in spite of our attempt to impose some calm on ourselves, the most natural way to deal with them is to offer them from deep inward to whatever figuration we may have of the Divine. How do we do this? First, a movement outward to the Divine as standing in front of us—a sincere gathering of all the tensions and putting them as if into the hands of a Superhuman Presence. This Presence may be felt as at once a luminous being and a living fire.

In both aspects we are drawn out of ourselves—on the one hand into a beloved Beauty and Power which is a towering reminder to us of unknown summits and, on the other hand, into a golden rapture-rage, as it were, accepting all our dross and carrying it higher and higher without end in an act of purification. We grow aware that our offering, while it begins with an outward flow of mind and heart into some soothing Perfection, fills with the sense of an empyrean overhead from where this Perfection has descended into our midst. Then we feel directly the upward pull. The outward is no longer separate from the upward.

The experience now is not only of a Perfection that soothes: it is also of a Plenitude that simply swallows up our anxieties, resentments, frustrations and completely dissolves them. An entire release, an utter tranquillity, a total loss of the aching self, a freedom without the least drag of what we may poetically term sublunary life are the result. There are no problems any more and we await with a serene smile all that the future may unfold—or, rather, all that will be worked out by this “voiceless white epiphany” (to use an Aurobindonian phrase) across earth’s vicissitudes. (26.7.1991)

\*

You have asked me for the best way to approach Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the great Darshan days. According to the Mother’s own advice, we must do so with a quiet happiness. This creates a spontaneous receptivity. The state of being quiet makes for a sort of waiting void to fill up with the celestial charity, and the happiness is a sign of being the trustful grateful child of the Divine Light and Love. When we are in this condition, the Divine Light and Love can do what they want and not have to adapt themselves to the half-knowledge we have of our own nature’s need. (29.7 1991)

\*

I’ll write to you after a while apropos of your own communications. At the moment I am putting down a most recent experience of mine. I have spoken of its beginning to only one person so far. The whole of it is recorded here for the first time.

On August 3 I was on my way to the Samadhi in the afternoon. The car passed under the Mother’s old balcony—the one on the first floor where she used to appear every morning before she permanently took to her second-floor room and would come to a high-up balcony only on special occasions. Looking at the old one I suddenly received a tremendous sense of life’s emptiness. It was like a knock-out blow. The physical absence of the Mother whom I had daily seen on this balcony was driven home to me like a cosmic catastrophe. Life seemed

utterly meaningless without her bodily presence. Never in all these years in the Ashram had such a feeling of desolation come over me. Everything grew worthless. All the literary work I had been doing lost its value totally. Sadhana itself gave the impression of a vacuous process, a plodding on across a desert with only mirages to console me. I said to myself: “Sri Aurobindo went away. Then the Mother left us. Why carry on the burden of a life on an earth where there is no longer that mighty peace and plenitude which was the visible form of Sri Aurobindo, that all-enveloping warmth and blessedness which the Mother’s palpable figure brought us?”

When I reached the Ashram, I found that the easy passage across which I had daily gone to the Samadhi was under cementing and therefore blocked. So a detour had to be made: a number of hurdles lay in the path of my poor legs now, quite difficult to get over. Friends helped me negotiate them. I accepted the risks because I did not want to accept defeat and go back safely home. “Here is one more setback,” I said to myself, “and it makes more pointed the difficulty of facing my life. But, of course, even without any new difficulty, what’s the use of breathing in a vacant world?” I remembered a phrase in an old poem of mine which had won Sri Aurobindo’s admiration:

Thwarted, alone,  
We struggle through an atmosphere of stone.

The way back from the Samadhi was less of an obstacle. I came out by another gate. I reached home a little soothed after the hour and a half at the Samadhi. Still the void left by a world bare of the Mother no less than of Sri Aurobindo lingered on, deep inside me. Talking to a close friend who is eager to look after me and who had accompanied me, I realised that in a special sense the vanity and inanity of the earth must strike forcibly one who has experienced Nirvana. Nirvana would be a grand emptiness, a stupendous disappearance of limitations, an indescribable freedom from the common world, rendering that world barren of significance, a mere spacious shadow in spite of all its teeming contents. In order to know the universe to be a phantom without getting hurt and obsessed by its voidness, must I turn my being to that giant Zero that is yet All? This seemed a desperately splendid remedy. But why jump to such an extreme? And am I capable of it? Is there no other means of getting over the recoil from life? Doubtless, an easy way out would be to answer with some analogue to the “bare bodkin” suggested by the famous situation that faced Hamlet:

To be or not to be—that is the question!

But I am not a violent nature. Besides, as the Mother has said, self-undoing does not—in a perspective of rebirth—solve any problem. Actually, my problem had

no particular shape and was not caused by any sharp confrontation of life's hardships. Except for my infirm legs I had nothing to complain of, so far as my own personal day-to-day was concerned. So I went on through a couple of days as calmly as I could. The acute stage had subsided, but the general disappointment did not disappear: it just simmered.

It goes without saying that the first thing I had done when the blow had fallen was to offer to the Mother what I may call my vast world-wound—as I do everything that befalls me. At times the answer from her arrives more swiftly than I can imagine. At other times I have to wait quietly for the untying of whatever knot has formed. Now there was no response from her that I could discern. Nearly 48 hours had gone since the heart-felt call.

In a most unexpected manner the response came. And it dissolved the knot at one stroke. I was reading some matter given me to edit—part of the series telling how people came to the Ashram. Out of the new story three words stole into my being like soft yet all-sufficient and decisive music and I was wholly my old self again. They were about the Ashram. They simply said: “This divine place ”

Like a master-mantra they filled the entire infinity of my loss with the presence of the Mother. Their childlike note of direct truth evoked in my mind a superb *sloka* of the Mundaka Upanishad translated by Sri Aurobindo:

“The Eternal is before us and the Eternal is behind us and to the north and to the south of us and above and below and extended everywhere. All this magnificent universe is nothing but the Eternal.” (4 8 1991)

\*

Your enlargement of my coloured photo was received with much interest. It is the biggest picture of me I have seen so far and I can mark in it some minute features even. Of course, a mirror would also show them but I rarely halt before a mirror except when something abnormal crops up on the face for special attention. Using an electric shaver I don't need to watch myself regularly every day. Now with your gift immobilising my appearance in a big way in front of me I can't help making a close study. What sort of person is here? Not a strikingly handsome fellow, to be sure—yet perhaps with some particularities plus peculiarities on which one can make significant observations—a general character-reading for your amusement and possibly advantage.

When I ask myself why at all I should bother to make any character-reading, I remember my first darshan of grand Sri Aurobindo, implying also his first darshan of minuscule me! This was on February 21, 1928. I may have recounted the occasion to you already, but here it is appropriate to bring it in. I was a novice in spiritual matters and looked at the Master of the Integral Yoga mainly with the outer sight. I examined his eyes, nose, moustache, mouth, beard and decided that here was a Guru worth accepting. The next day when I met the

Mother I eagerly asked her if he had said anything about me. She replied: "Yes. Sri Aurobindo says that you have a good face." I was quite disappointed at having my aspiring soul completely ignored. But later I said to myself: "What else can I expect? I was examining his face and he was examining mine. Indeed tit for tat!" Now glancing back I realise that Sri Aurobindo's remark was the first sign to me of his compassion no less than his humour. He had not refused to give a bit of countenance to my spiritual future: he had granted me some possibility to make good as a disciple of his in however remote a way to come. In any case, is it not a memorable thing for my raw 23-year-old physiognomy to be dubbed favourably in general by the greatest Seer of all time? So, no matter if it lacks striking handsomeness, it may not be deemed undeserving of a passing probe.

To begin with: I note that around the pupils of my eyes the not uncommon ring of dark brown fades away into a broad circle of blue. This unusual combination in the iris seems to give the face a twofold look, at once attentive and far-away, earth-tinged and sky-touched—apparently whatever of the poet I have in me and whatever of the Aurobindonian Yogi I strive to be: the visionary of mysterious distances who yet has to be precise in dealing with the many-shaped multi-mooded procession of terrestrial objects. By the way, I must not forget to mention that at the age of eighty-six and nine months my eyes, though bespectacled because of deficient sight, are yet unaccompanied by either "crow's feet" or "bags".

The nose is neither too short and self-involved, as it were, nor too long and inquisitive of others. It has a somewhat curved moderate intrusion into the outer world. Within a bit fleshy rather than elegant knob, the nostrils are a little on the large side, freely breathing the earth's air. Between the nose and the upper lip intervenes a more-than-ordinary space, appearing to suggest that the dip into, and interchange with, the earth's air do not easily affect the mouth's possible disclosure of thought and feeling: the thought and the feeling have a certain independence of traffic with external agencies. The mouth, like the eyes, has a twofold expression. It presents somewhat thin lips, slightly pulled in at the same time that they are faintly smiling, as if there were a self-control which is not so much a discipline as the sense of one's self placed consciously in the power of some blissful Love which can guard and guide. The chin has nothing special about it. It has no particular strength and normally might even betray a tendency to go easy and not be sufficiently assertive or individualistic.

At the other extreme of the face is the fairly high forehead which has become somewhat Shakespearian by a receding hair-line. However, I have escaped what Shakespeare describes as his lot in his sonnets which were surely written at the latest in his 'forties since he died at fifty-two:

Against my love shall be as I am now,  
With Time's injurious hand crushed and o'erworn;



When hours have drained his blood and filled his brow  
With lines and wrinkles...

I see hardly any creases across my forehead. At my age I should be expected to speak like Confucius who, when asked how his brow could show such three deep furrows, answered: "The first reminds me of the gross defects with which my nature was marked from birth. The second recalls the track of great follies across my life. The third represents the stamp on my memory of the terrible ingratitude of friends." Not that I was born less defective in nature or haven't exceeded that master of mandarins in ghastly mistakes or never had cause to cry out like Shakespeare's Amiens in *As You Like It*:

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,  
Thou art not so unkind  
As man's ingratitude...

But, having put my brow at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Divine Mother, all the lines cut by Karma, my own or those of others, have tended to get wiped off and the being has tried to move assiduously, as near as my frail nature allows, towards the state Sri Aurobindo describes:

I have heard His voice and borne His will  
On my vast untroubled brow.

A leap from the sublime-seeming to the ludicrous-looking I have to make in remarking on what the picture discloses on one side of the forehead. The single ear visible because the face is semi-front does not create any regret in me that I can't gaze at its duplicate. If any Mark Antony were to address me as he did the Roman populace and say, "Lend me your ears", I would gladly part with them and not charge the least interest on the loan as there is nothing interesting about them. I hope that what the Upanishads call "the Ear behind the ear", the hidden listener to the universe's subtle hints, the undertones and overtones of cosmic existence, has a prettier configuration.

Enough of comments on "the counterfeit presentment", as Hamlet would have said, of what modern slang would term my "mug". Let me turn to more congenial topics. Apropos of my train of thought following your mention of "Plato's writings" in connection with my letters to you, you refer to my intense liking for Plato and observe that your favourite is Socrates rather than Plato. May I point out that I spoke of Plato's *Socratic* dialogues? It is the Plato permeated by and suffused with Socrates that has been gloriously close to my mind and heart ever since my school-days. There is also the question: "Can we separate Socrates from the young Plato?" Do we know any substantial Socrates

apart from those early dialogues? No doubt, there was Xenophon's report of him, but if we had only this report we would hardly have the wonderfully wise personality whose intellect ranges over all the heights and depths of reality, confronts the acutest problems of human conduct with a smiling keenness, hearkens to the voice of the mysterious *daimon* within him, a voice from the innermost heart coming as if from a godlike spirit concealed there and so mingling with the movements of the intelligence that the latter's lines of clear-cut thought run in hidden harmony with the former's spontaneous divinations. Not only Socrates the master-dialectician but also Socrates the revealer of mysteries mounting from visible beauty to the ultimate ineffable Loveliness present to the high-uplifted contemplative consciousness and also the Socrates who built up before the Athenian judges the amazing "Apologia" for his right to die for truth and virtue—where except through the eye and ear of Plato does he come alive to us down the ages as the ideal philosopher and the archetypal moralist? We have to speak of the Platonic Socrates no less than of the Socratic Plato. Thus, in the final perspective, you and I may be seen as standing together and when you by way of praise compare my writings to Plato's you really mean the writings of Plato as the door through which Socrates in all his inspired unity and diversity walks out into our midst as he did into the market-place of Athens in the 5th century B.C.

Of course, the Socrates of my "Platonic" writings is Sri Aurobindo. It is he who moves in and out when I write letters to you and others. To quote from my poem "Soul of Song" the last line:

Haloed with hush he enters, corona'd with calm he goes.

Luckily for the world, unlike Socrates he has communicated with it independently of whatever Plato may mediate his message. I say "luckily" not only because direct interaction is possible but also because nothing can transmit the magnificence and mercy of his light as does his own Word. What we can do is to pass through our disciple-selves some living sense of that light as it operates in one form or another of our human smallness. A friend or stranger who happens to resemble us may find advantageously focused this or that aspect of the light which may most concern him. Through such an aspect he may get an easier approach to the solar centre of the omnipresent grace that is Sri Aurobindo. All may not be able to face that apocalypse at once. Therein lies the *raison d'être* for little kindlings like us to help fellow-aspirants. But always our aim should be to direct all eyes towards the sovereign blaze of revelation and benediction which is—to use Rigvedic language—like a great golden Eye turned from the heavens upon our suffering and our striving. And this aim cannot be truly carried out unless we are more than mere thinkers setting forth to be interpreters: we have first to feel in as many moments as possible a turn towards the Master and the

Mother in our little hearts as an exquisite ache that is sweeter than all the throbs of pleasure the earth can give. (6.8.1991)

\*

The inner life lately has been as usual a series of brights and vagues and fortunately no darks except one of an uncommon kind which had nothing to do with my own shortcomings but came like a gigantic thunder-cloud: a sudden overpowering realisation of the Mother's physical absence. I have already written of it to a friend and you'll come to know of it through an instalment of my "Life—Poetry—Yoga". Let me make you the first recipient of a written account of something really fine that happened yesterday—the 17th August—during my afternoon visit to the Samadhi.

Unlike other days, this day found me a little listless. But at about 5.15, without any preparation a great quiet took possession of my body and a non-descript sound was heard coming from far away and surrounding the still body. Then the body's borders seemed to thin and become open to permeation by a vast Outside. I would call them "transfluent" on the analogy of "translucent", for now not light but a flow passed right through me—a flow which appeared to be an inwardly audible passage of the whole universe's movement through my form. The form did not lose its identity, but it was not barriered against the rest of the universe. It was essentially continuous with a huge Existence, a wide Presence of One World steadily advancing—rather an infinite Living Space advancing in Time with a steady faintly heard rhythm. What a sense of freedom and serenity!

Automatically all thinking stopped: no ideas, no images. The universal flow was felt most in the region of the chest, although it was perceived as if at a slight distance in the head as well as in the abdomen. I had to do nothing except sit in-drawn to this enormous flux which bore my embodied being onward to an unknown but fully trusted future.

Along with the open feeling within to an unlimited uniform sound, there was a kind of effortless isolation from the immediate environment—save for a calmly sympathetic shadow that was the Samadhi. That is why I use the word "in-drawn". And yet this very environment was, without its knowing it, part of the universal flux. It is that lack of knowing, which my body was guarding itself against with an utter ease born of commingling with the tranquil majesty of the flowing Immense into which I had been partly taken up.

When I look back on that rapt quarter of an hour—5.15 to 5.30—I am reminded of the tradition of a sound in which the cosmic consciousness exists: the mantra OM. What I sensed was inseparable from an eternal-seeming rhythm sustained on all sides. Perhaps I would best characterise it as an infinite honeyed hum. Does OM echo this hearing?

(18.8 1991)

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

# THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

## A DREAM-DIALOGUE

*(Continued from the issue of October 1991)*

“ISN'T it strange that though you were there in Chandernagore for a whole month, neither the police nor anyone else ever found out anything?”

“You seem to forget all the time the fact that God had taken my life into His charge and it was His will that I should go to Chandernagore. So, eager though they may have been to capture me, the police obviously could not do so, since such was His will. You do believe that He is somewhat more intelligent than they are, don't you? Of course, that did not mean that, once there, I was free to roam about the town making speeches and attending political meetings. Evidently, I had to remain constantly on guard all the time taking every precaution so that nobody might find out about me. If you believe that just because God is protecting you, you need not follow any of the rules and norms of rational conduct and those that good common sense requires, you are being totally absurd.

“Only one or two people knew of my whereabouts. Also I never went out. I remained all the time indoors, though it was not always the same house where I stayed. During that month, I moved two or three times. But it was mostly Motilal who looked after me.”

“We hear that the rooms where you stayed were not even very clean?”

“Well, there were no carpets or arm-chairs, as there are here. *(Laughter)* But I was not really concerned with my comfort. What I required were solitude and secrecy, and I got both.”

“How did you spend your time?”

“Just as I did when I was in jail. If I could stay in a cell alone for a whole year, except for a couple of months or so, should living by myself for a month in a room be difficult?”

“But in Chandernagore, you had to stay behind closed doors night and day! Did you do a lot of reading?”

“No, I just sat quietly in my room. Sometimes when Motilal came with many eager questions about Sadhana, we would talk.”

“So you were all the time busy doing your sadhana? You sat with closed eyes and meditated?”

“To meditate with eyes closed is against my nature. I always meditate with my eyes open.”

“Yes, yes, so we have been told. Could you please say something more about that?”

“Would you understand me if I did? Well, anyway... At that time, I had

reached a high degree of realisation. I was completely indrawn, totally unconcerned with all that surrounded me, with where I was or what I ate. Much later I came to know that the house I lived in was filthy, full of bats and cockroaches, but at that time I was not aware of any of those things. For I used to have wonderful visions then, see figures of Vedic gods who visited me in my hours of meditation. They brought with them strange messages, writings of which I tried to understand the meaning. I was in a state where my own separate existence or my own individual will had ceased to exist. Here I am talking to you but it is not I, I lift my arm but it is not I, when I eat or walk there is no I. Everything is the Divine. It is He who wills, who moves, who is all. I discussed some of these truths with Motilal and helped and guided him in his yoga. Inspired by me, he later established a Society which grew very big."

"Why did you leave Chandernagore?"

"Do you really believe I was born to live my life in secret, locked all my days within a single room? (*Laughing*) Moreover, I could not stay too long in the same place. The authorities were bound to find out some day and the police would certainly arrest me once again. That prospect did not at all appeal to me, particularly since I had just recently regained my freedom after having been under their "care" for a long year. Word reached me that some Calcutta papers had published the news that I had managed to escape to Tibet where I was now living with the saints and sages in the Himalayas, engrossed in philosophical and spiritual discussions."

"Goodness! Really?"

"Didn't you know that, according to the Theosophists very many sages live there, one of whom is Kuthumi."

"Oh yes! You have a poem called 'Kuthumi'. Have you met him?"

"Of course not! (*Laughs*) That poem is pure imagination. In the end, our paper, the *Karmayogin*, had to publish an official denial of these reports about my escape to Tibet. It added that I was living in seclusion for spiritual purposes, and that for the same reason I was no longer working for the journal.

"You know, human imagination is endlessly inventive. Take, for example, my going to Chandernagore. It gave rise to what an extraordinary variety of rumours and stories and opinions! And these were even printed in authoritative books! Some said it was Nivedita who finally decided, after long deliberations, that I should go there. Absolute nonsense! Apart from two or three people, nobody knew about my decision to leave for Chandernagore. We need not go into the other, more fanciful versions and rumours. And again, so many colourful reasons have been given about my retirement from politics. One explanation is that it was due to fear of the police. Another states that I withdrew from politics because I failed to find success in that field. Well, if I had been afraid of politics I would never have become a revolutionary and I don't think success eluded me entirely! People who judge everything by outward appear-

ances alone draw such superficial conclusions. To tell you the truth, by then I had left politics far behind me and was wholly absorbed in the spiritual life.

“My progress on the spiritual path had to proceed unhindered, and that is why I had to leave all political activity aside. But before doing so I had already had the inward perception and certitude that the lines along which I had been working for the country would end in success. I knew that the leaders of the next generation would be able to obtain that result for which my physical presence among them was no longer necessary. It was not at all out of any sense of frustration or despair that I had retired from politics nor had I ‘escaped’ from it. I left because there was a greater work awaiting me, for which God had called me. That was why I came to Pondicherry, though even that decision was not mine. Just when my friends in Chandernagore were beginning to worry about my future, anxiously wondering whether to send me out of the country, to France for instance, there came again that same command, that ‘adesh’—‘Go to Pondicherry’.”

“How strange! And you, you had no plans of your own?”

“Haven’t I told you that ever since my Vasudeva experience I had stopped thinking of myself or of my future? In fact this had started even earlier—since my Nirvana experience. From then onwards I had always followed the Voice of the Inner Guide. He took me to Chandernagore, brought me to Pondicherry.”

“How exactly did you come? Do tell us! It must have been very difficult, since you were in hiding and Pondicherry is a long way off from Bengal! How did you manage to make the arrangement?”

“Since He had asked me to come here, obviously it was up to Him to make the arrangement! However, this is how it was worked out.

The moment I was told, ‘Go to Pondicherry’, I asked to see Motilal. We discussed the matter and I suggested that he send a young Nationalist who worked with me. Suresh or Moni, as we called him, was sent to Pondicherry straightaway so that he might make all the necessary arrangements for my stay there. In the meantime, my maternal cousin Sukumar was asked to prepare for our journey by boat to Pondicherry. Naturally, all these preparations were done in the utmost secrecy, but then I trusted these young men fully and knew they would work things out as perfectly as possible. So there I was once again crossing the Ganges by boat at night. We took a horse-drawn carriage to reach the place from where we would embark for Pondicherry. But we arrived just a little late, that is to say, when we reached there, we saw that the British doctor had left. The doctor had to give every passenger a health certificate after examining him, only then could the passengers sail. So we had to rush to the doctor’s house. I told him that I had recently had a bout of malaria, and that I very badly needed a change of air. The gentleman was very impressed by my English accent and asked me where I had been educated. When he heard that I had been brought up in England, he was so pleased with me that he gave me the necessary paper. He

never realised that I was Aurobindo Ghosh, the revolutionary for whose capture the Government had spread a net far and wide. It was ironical, wasn't it, that an Englishman helped me to escape that net just because I spoke with such a fine English accent!" (*Laughter*)

"But didn't he recognise you by your name?"

"Do you think I went up and introduced myself to him, saying—'Here I am, Aurobindo Ghosh!' Isn't such saintliness too much to expect in this Kaliyuga of ours? Actually, there is one particular rule that all revolutionaries follow—one never reveals one's name. I had been a revolutionary leader for so long, yet very few people called me by my name—of which I had several! However—"

"Then how did you introduce yourself to him?"

"I told him very politely that I was Jatindranath Mitra and that my friend Bankimchandra Basak and I were travelling to Colombo." (*Laughter*)

"But .."

"You think it was wrong to tell an untruth? Perhaps...but can't you imagine what would have happened if I had revealed the truth? The doctor would have informed the police right away and, amid general rejoicing, the Police Commissioner would have clapped me in irons and led me back to jail. The next day's papers would have carried dramatic headlines, such as 'Midnight Arrest of Aurobindo Ghosh while trying to escape' (*Laughs*) Isn't that so? Mahatma Gandhi may have admitted the truth, but then the Government treated him with a great deal of respect even in prison, a place which he must have got used to. But I was in such a state that even the hope of seeing Vasudeva there again, a second time, would not lure me back to prison. In fact, if I had gone there, you wouldn't have been sitting here listening to me, for there would have been no Ashram here. Mother would have been obliged to establish it in France.

"Tell me, does it strike you as very strange that a great Yogi should have taken recourse to falsehood? You see, there is such a thing as spiritual discernment, which is far above strict moral codes. And it is that which indicates what one should do or say in any particular situation. Of course, this does not mean that one should misuse this spiritual power to justify unethical conduct. You don't really understand me, do you? Indeed it is true that the behaviour of a yogi cannot be judged by the ordinary mind which finds itself completely in the dark when it tries to understand such situations. Anyway, let me end today's session on a lighter note.

"I have already said, haven't I, that since we were late for the boat, we had to rush to the doctor's house. We took a carriage. There were three or four of us in it, as well as a porter whom we took along with us because he swore that he knew where that gentleman lived. He had also added that he was a very good friend of the latter's servant who was sure to help us to meet the doctor. In exchange for these favours he naturally expected a big tip, he being a poor man. All my friends had felt extremely relieved at this turn of events, for it was their

responsibility to see me safely on board. We had to hurry and get the doctor's certificate before the ship sailed and yet everything had to be discreetly done so that the police might get no wind of it. So there we were, riding in the carriage to the doctor's house, my friends growing more and more apprehensive by the minute, while I sat beside them, calm, undisturbed. We reached the house and while we were waiting in the carriage outside, the porter came up to me, and whispered: "Don't be afraid, sir. He's a very good man." Then, putting both his hands on my arms, he shook me hard, to give me courage, I suppose. My friends laughed, so did I. But he did help us, he and the doctor's servant, and we got to see the doctor quite easily. When we reached the ship, it was almost eleven o'clock at night. My friends put the two of us on board, touched my feet and took their leave after passing me a big wad of notes.

"We arrived safely in the French colony of Pondicherry on board the Dupleix, a French ship, on the 4th of April 1910. The journey had been uneventful. The Lord had seen to everything."

"But weren't you supposed to go to Colombo? You said that .."

"That, naturally, was a red herring to put the police off my track!"

*(To be continued)*

NIRODBARAN

*(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)*



## **SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”**

**A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION**

*(Continued from the issue of October 1991)*

### **More about Dance and My Uncle**

LAST time, I described how I came to Pondicherry for a long stay in 1949-1950, and how I took part in a December dance programme. What I forgot to mention was the following significant incident concerning my husband. During my stay, it occurred to me to ask Sri Aurobindo about him. Perhaps Sri Aurobindo could change his nature and turn him towards the right path, I thought. And so I invited my husband to visit Pondicherry. But when my uncle came to know of it, he asked me whether I had taken the Mother's permission. I answered him somewhat proudly, saying that I did not need any permission. Consequently, my uncle himself reported the matter to the Mother.

I never learned what passed between them, but one day Sri Aurobindo asked Nirod-da to get from me a photograph of my husband. I found a very old one of his taken with me, and sent it to Sri Aurobindo, then waited eagerly to hear his reaction; but no word came. Meanwhile I had also hoped to receive an answer from my husband. But it was only long after that he wrote, "Your Guru doesn't want me to come to Pondicherry. The day I bought the ticket some peculiar eruptions appeared all over my body. My elder brother who, as you know, is an eminent physician, examined me thoroughly but could not diagnose the trouble. I had to cancel my ticket, and as soon as I did, the eruptions began to subside. This made it clear to me that I was not welcome there." Upon reading this, I was overwhelmed with gratitude towards Sri Aurobindo. How considerate he had been in saving my self-respect before others by acting in this indirect way.

Now to return to my dancing. From an early age, I had learned dancing from the famous Sambhu Maharaj. This came about because one day my parents and their friends saw me dancing in my childish way before my idol of Krishna. My father quickly decided to engage a good teacher for me. Later, he made a condition that for any public performance I should dance only in accompaniment to my uncle's singing.

Years later, after I was married, my uncle came to Calcutta with the idea of holding a programme to raise money for the Ashram. The function was to be held at Ranchi where we happened to be staying along with my husband and his parents. Uncle, instead of asking me directly to take part in the performance, began to remark to friends in a taunting and aggrieved tone that while he was

working so hard for a noble cause, nobody was coming forward to assist him. When I came to know of this, I felt at once that all these jibes were aimed at me. I took him aside and explained to him that I was not a free person any more. I was married and a mother, and my husband's family were so conservative that surely he knew they would never consent to have me perform in public. Otherwise, I assured him, I would gladly have taken part in his show, particularly as it was meant to help the Ashram. He then asked me if I had even approached them for their permission. I replied that I had not, knowing them as I did. But when the story did reach the ears of my in-laws, they somehow readily gave their consent, much to my amazement. The show turned out to be a great success. Uncle had the power to attract large crowds of cultured people, and my name, added to his, must have had its effect. The audience cheered my performance enthusiastically, and wanted me to make one curtain call after another. Uncle refused to allow more than one. But there was no doubt that he was delighted with the response to my dancing.

On another occasion, my uncle gave a private performance in which Amala Nandy danced in accompaniment to his singing. Uday Shankar was present, as also my guru Sambhu Maharaj and myself. After her dance was over, Uncle asked me to dance to his singing. Hesitantly I looked at my guru for his permission, but he made a gesture with his head implying his disapproval. I could not disobey him and refused, despite my uncle's repeated entreaties, which naturally irked his vanity. But much later on, he did appreciate my position and spoke highly of my obedience to my guru's wishes.

Some days later, at his suggestion Uday Shankar and Amala came to my house to see me dance. My guru was most flattered to have them. Uday Shankar was very pleased with my dancing and offered me an attractive job as a dance-teacher at his institute in Almora. I needed some diversion at the time as I was feeling quite lonely, and so was inclined to accept. But Uncle intervened and made me change my mind. Similarly, another handsome offer came from one P. N. Talukdar's Centre in Calcutta, but Uncle had me refuse that too.

After the death of my father, Uncle arranged that, in order to give some solace to my mother, we should take a trip to Kashmir. When we arrived in Lucknow in the course of our journey, we stayed with Uncle's most intimate friend who was a barrister and a fine singer himself. He was delighted to have us and found it an excellent occasion to arrange a private show where Uncle and I would perform. Hashi, a young and talented girl-disciple of Uncle's, also took part and sang a Hindi bhajan to which I danced in accompaniment. Once again, the audience was a knowledgeable one and included a particularly well-known yogi friend of our host.

Here too the show turned out to be a great success. The yogi claimed to have seen Sri Krishna's presence all the time I was dancing, and it is a fact that whenever I danced, I myself was always conscious of it.

We next stopped at Lahore. There again Uncle was the guest of a high-ranking friend. Curiously enough, my guru Sambhu Maharaj happened to be there at the same time. My uncle and his friends decided that a public performance by Sambhu Maharaj would be an excellent idea. Maharaj agreed but stipulated that he be paid a big sum in advance. The money was handed over to him, but before the performance could take place he sent word that he was not well and would not be able to appear. The resentment of the public can be imagined.

The truth was that on receiving the money, Sambhu Maharaj had spent most of it on drink and other bad habits, and was in no condition to perform. Nevertheless, some people went to him and begged him to save the situation. He grudgingly consented to do only one very short dance, and was literally dragged to the stage.

Once there, however, he became a transfigured man. He portrayed a single incident depicting Krishna's visit to Radha, in which Krishna merely appeared, gave Radha his darshan, and then departed. As Krishna approached, marvelously transformed from Sambhu Maharaj into a god, Radha, palpitating with expectation, was weeping with one eye while the other beamed with ecstasy. He was indescribable. Then after that one miraculous moment he withdrew, leaving the audience spellbound. Such was the magic of Sambhu Maharaj. Poor man, his end was miserable as is so often the case with artists. Impoverished and suffering from cancer, his last days in the hospital were taken care of by Indira Gandhi.

A number of years later, Uncle came to Calcutta from Pondicherry to once again raise funds for the Ashram. This time he took the help of a lady belonging to the Tagore family. Their project was to depict Bharat Mata in a dance tableau—Bharat Mata as she was now and as she had been in her pristine glory and splendour. But where to find a suitable dancer to represent her? Uncle suggested that he had a niece who could fill the role admirably. He asked the lady to see me and form her own opinion without letting me know the reason for her visit. Sure enough, she came on a brief courtesy call, and returned fully satisfied with me, as it turned out.

Soon after, Uncle spoke to me about the performance and the role he wanted me to play, and I agreed to do it. In fact, my part consisted only of standing perfectly still like the statue of a goddess, while another performer danced. There were a number of rehearsals in one of which my eyelids fluttered slightly, and I was told that would not do. After this I took great care not to make even such a minor mistake.

On the day of the performance, the lady dressed and adorned me as a goddess, and none could have done better, for she was a connoisseur in the art of beautiful costuming, belonging as she did to the Tagore family. Then I took my stand to one side of the stage in the posture of a goddess with my right hand raised in a gesture of benediction and protection, and kept the pose for about

half an hour until the dance was over. Enthralled, the entire audience watched the show in utter silence. Judging by later comments, it seems that I really had looked like a goddess.

After this, the years slipped by, and the day came when Uncle arrived in Calcutta on his last visit. He had become old and lost most of his sight, hearing and even voice. Yet he was scheduled to give a public performance. I heard that he had already sung at the Calcutta Sri Aurobindo Bhavan but that the programme had not gone well. Though a distance had come between us in our relations, I felt sorry to hear this and evinced a desire to attend his next show. So I asked a common friend of ours if he would accompany me to it. He was only too pleased, and said he would go and inform 'Dada' straight away. "He will be so glad!" he enthused. But I told him he must not say anything to Uncle, and that we would simply go together, occupy front seats, and quietly slip away after the performance was over. "As you wish," he concurred with some surprise.

When we reached the auditorium, we found it full to overflowing. Nevertheless there was complete silence as Uncle appeared. He had become flabby and infirm, a shadow of his former magnificent self, and had to be supported by friends as he walked onto the stage. Worse, when he began to sing I realised that what I had heard was true—his voice had lost its magic and his singing was often off pitch. In the end, he abandoned himself to uncontrolled emotion and began to chant *দেখা দাও, দেখা দাও* (Show Thyself, Lord, show Thyself) like god-intoxicated Ramakrishna or Ram Prasad. Tears flowed down his cheeks, and his cry was heart-rending. He seemed on the verge of losing his senses when someone shouted, "Drop the curtain! Drop the curtain!"

The audience was thrilled as well as overawed, then slowly began to melt away. The atmosphere was surcharged with the Presence, I myself was entirely overcome and determined to go to Uncle. My companion led me onto the stage and exclaimed, "Dada, Dada, look who has come to see you. Your niece Esha!"

"Esha, Esha! Where? Where?" Uncle stammered, unable to see me.

I did pranam at his feet and he embraced me at last with a love that held back nothing.

*(To be continued)*

NIRODBARAN

# LABOUR OF LOVE

by

HUTA

*(Continued from the issue of October 1991)*

I RECEIVED from the Mother a letter dated 22-10-56 before she came to arrange my apartment:

“This afternoon at 3.45 I shall come to ‘Huta’s House’ because such will be the name henceforth.

With my love and blessings along with the constant presence of the Grace.”

Now the work of renovation was over. I completed three years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on 10th February 1958.

That day Nolini, Amrita, Dyuman, Champaklal, Udar, his wife Mona, Mamiben, some others and myself were waiting for the Mother at the gate of “Huta’s House”.

The Mother’s car arrived driven by Pavitra with Pranab beside him.

She asked Pranab to remain seated in the car. Along with all of us the Mother climbed the long red staircase. She turned the key which was in the Yale lock, declaring my apartment open. The door led to my studio. The Mother sat on a white revolving chair and did my portrait on a canvas board placed on the easel. Her skilful hand finished it within no time. Underneath it she wrote:

“Bienvenue dans la belle maison. Bonne Fête pour le 3e fois.”

10.2.58

The Mother

Recently I gave the chair to “Shree Smriti”—The Mother’s Museum.

The Mother regarded her work with an amused sparkle in her eyes, then remarked:

“Ah! in this sketch your head looks like a philosopher’s head.”

Her pleasant laugh rang out and set us all laughing.

She scrutinised each thing with great interest.

Then she asked people to wait at the gate downstairs. Now she and I were alone in my meditation room. After a short concentration she promised me:

“Child, Sri Aurobindo and I will be here for all twenty-four hours. Whenever you feel lonely, miserable and sad, just sit here and you will be all right.”

The same day we met once again in her playground room. She said enthusiastically:

“Child, I really like your house. It is so peaceful and quiet. I will come to your apartment every night in my subtle body.”

She has kept her promise.

\*

21-2-58—The Mother’s 80th birth-anniversary.

Everybody in the Ashram was in a festive mood.

In the morning after the general meditation, at 10.30 a.m. we received a message from the Mother’s hands in the Meditation Hall upstairs.

That evening in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Theatre, the programme was packed with various items. When I was back home, on my mind’s screen the picture of these efficient dancers, actors and versatile people slid past one by one. I then considered myself a sheer duffer and a perfect country-bumpkin without any aim in my life. I thought that only doing sketches and paintings would not lead me to my supreme goal.

I was perturbed, a bitter jealousy twisted through my heart. I believed the Mother did so much for bright, brilliant people. They would certainly reach their destination and I would be left in the maze. Tears of sorrow that I could not explain to myself began to run down my cheeks.

During the night I thought long and hard. It was indeed silly to weep about nothing, and that was what I was doing. I told myself this over and over again before finally I fell asleep.

*(To be continued)*

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# COUNOUMA

## A PERSONAL MEMOIR

COUNOUMA was a Malayali and came from Kerala. His father taught French to his mother so that they could speak French at home. When he was eleven his father sent him to stay with his friends in Pondicherry for schooling. He stayed back there for the rest of his life. That's why many mistook him to be a Pondicherian. He always stood first in his class. His father died when he was 18 years old and financial constraints made him a school teacher for three months in Aryankuppam. Later he became a lecturer in Colway College and went to France to get his degree in law. He was still young when he held high positions in the Government. He was a collector and a judge in Karaikal. In Pondicherry he was acting mayor, revenue minister and held the lucrative post of the "Conservateur des Hypothèques" (Registration Officer) which made him the next highest paid officer in the government after the Governor. He held office in his own house. But he was not attached to money. He refused the French pension and took the Indian pension instead and even that he offered to the Mother. He used to take part in politics and the Mother even encouraged him to do so. He would joke, "Maybe Mother wanted a big local man in her pockets!"

His relations with the Ashram developed from 1935 onwards. The Mother saw him somewhere and told Amrita who was then manager of the Ashram, "I want to see that boy in white coat and black tie. Ask him what time is convenient for him." Amrita used to go to him to take legal advice in Ashram matters. So when he went this time and told him that the Mother wanted to meet him, Counouma said, "How can I give a time to Mother? I'll come immediately!" It was about 10.30 a.m.. This time would be set aside by the Mother to meet him every day. When they met first the Mother shook hands with him and made him sit on a chair. When he went to Her the second time he pushed aside the chair and sat at Her feet and She blessed him. That was the beginning of his Ashram life. The Mother would give him a bouquet of double coloured roses every day.

One day when the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were giving Darshan, Counouma was fast asleep in his room. The Darshan was over and yet they seemed to wait for someone. The Mother remarked to a person near Her, "Hasn't Counouma come?" The latter went and woke him up in his house. Counouma came running and panting for breath. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo laughed at him and everybody else there joined in the fun. He was very close to the Mother. Whenever he went out for Ashram work the Mother would wait for him until he came back.

He had to go once as a deputy to the French Parliament. The Mother permitted him and went to Sri Aurobindo to ask for His darshan. Sri Aurobindo said, "Has he not enough of name and position here that he has to go now

abroad for it?" When the Mother told this to Counouma, he cancelled his trip and gave away even his newly made suit to the Ashram.

When Sri Aurobindo passed away, the Mother called him and told him that She wanted the Master's Samadhı in the Ashram courtyard. He said that the permission had to come from France and that would take some time. The Mother repeated firmly, as if She had not heard what he had said, "I want the samadhı here!" Counouma immediately arranged for it with Governor Baron and got the permission later from France.

The Mother told him, "You were once Janaka and I was your daughter. I also was your mother once. Whenever I came to earth you were with me."

In 1968 he was appointed a Trustee and in 1969 the Managing Trustee. Much of the Ashram property was bought through him. The Mother called him one day and told him that She wanted the Marrée Garden. By evening he had arranged for the purchase and went to the Tennis Ground to inform Her. On seeing him She stopped playing tennis and was very happy to hear the news. That was the way he worked, always saying "Yes" to whatever the Mother told him to do.

He was never in good health. Dr. Nripen once tested him and found high sugar in his blood. When the Mother knew about it, She said, "You cannot have high sugar. How can they say that? Go and test yourself outside." When he had himself tested again there was no sugar at all. The Mother was very pleased with the report.

I joined Counouma's office as a typist in 1970. After seeing me the Mother told him, "She will be very very useful to you." He was then my boss. I was afraid of even speaking to him. Typing errors were not tolerated. I had to be always on time in the office. All the other offices closed on Sunday except ours. He would sit from 7 a.m. and attend to the problems of all who came there. He would listen patiently to each one and then speak. Even if somebody shouted at him in anger he would remain unperturbed and calmly give them an appropriate answer.

About two months before the Mother passed away, She called him and tied two or three garlands of Patience flowers on his wrist. She told him, "You know why I am tying this on you? This is not ordinary patience. It is My Patience! I am giving you My Patience!"

The Mother gave him more and more work from 1971 and his responsibilities increased day by day. He was consulted for even matters in Auroville.

One day something interesting happened. It was about four o'clock and he had some urgent work in a government office. I gave him tea and was just handing over his bunch of keys when it slipped and fell down. It simply disappeared! It was closing time so he told me to look for it and went away. He finished his work and came back and I hadn't still found it. He told the servant to sweep the floor of the adjoining room. The keys were below the almirah of that



room! "How could that be?" I thought with surprise mingled with fear. When he went the next day and reported it to the Mother, She said, "It is the mischief of small beings who want to disturb your work. Sri Aurobindo intervened and saw that you got back your keys. You have to be always alert in my work."

Another incident. This happened after the Mother's passing away. I used to go to him at five o'clock in the morning and give him breakfast. I tidied up his bed and folded the mosquito net and found his shawl very dirty. I thought of washing it but as I was afraid to ask him about it, I only prayed to the Mother and kept quiet. The next day I found another shawl there! I went and asked whether he had bought another shawl. A little displeased he said, "Why do you ask me that question? Somebody else also asked me the same question yesterday evening." The next day I found the same old shawl again, this time nicely washed and folded! The new one was no more there! On asking him he said coolly, "The Supreme has washed my shawl!" Many such extraordinary things happened in his house.

After he bought his house, the Mother came and said, "It is really like a minister's house!" He never hid anything from the Mother. When he was a minister he would always inform Her whenever he had any guests and She would personally select the food and the wine which had to be served to them.

The Mother gave a photograph of Hers to his office. She said to him, "Keep this in your office. Whenever you are in difficulties, turn this photo towards the person sitting in front of you so that he can see it. I will do the rest!"

On the 22nd of February 1982 Counouma fell down in the Ashram courtyard and fractured his leg. He had to be operated on and a doctor was specially called from Calcutta. Everybody said that an operation was necessary. Only Nolinida didn't approve of it. When the doctor came Counouma had high fever and the operation was postponed. Instead the doctor made him take fruit juices and meat soup. His diet had been very meagre before. It was as if he had been living on the Mother's Grace His health deteriorated. Sri Aurobindo appeared to him in a vision and granted him further life. The fracture joined without an operation and his leg became all right. From then my typing work decreased and I was busy all day giving him medicines and fruit juices. When I gave him food he would say, "Matru hastena bhojanam!"

In 1988 he was in a critical condition. Doctor Datta said always, "Only a miracle can save him! We cannot do anything!" At that time I saw a dream. Counouma was standing near the Samadhi. I and a few others were also there. From inside the Samadhi the Mother spoke firmly, "Counouma, you have to live a little longer!" Counouma responded immediately, "Yes, Mother!" When I went and told him about this, he said, "It's not just a dream; it's a vision. Whenever Mother would ask me something, I said, 'Yes, Mother!'" He got then a new lease of life for two years.

The last three months of that period he was not keeping well. He would

always call me, “Amma! Amma!” like a small child. I could hardly go anywhere else. In spite of his extreme weakness, he worked to the last. Finally like Bhishma waiting for the equinox on his bed of arrows, he died after three days of intense suffering on the “ekadashi” of 10.2.91. He gave me the love of a son to his mother.

Somebody saw in a vision the Mother taking him up with both Her arms. Two days later I similarly saw him well dressed and sitting at the Mother’s feet. He had lived calmly without any binding attachments or relationships.

It is significant that Counouma’s birthday was on the same day as that of the Mother’s passing away, the 17th of November, and the twelfth day after his death coincided with the Mother’s birthday, the 21st of February.

Whatever I have recounted here is true, i.e., as witnessed by me or related to me by Counouma himself. There is nothing imaginary. I finish here with my pranams to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

SAMYUKTA REDDY

*(Translated by Raman Reddy from the Telugu)*

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKLET

### *A Fragrant Flower of Cambridge*

*(Sri Aurobindo—and His Contribution to Humanity)*

WE are happy to publish our booklet No. 2 of a talk given by Mr. Gopal Bhattacharjee and the subject is Sri Aurobindo's contribution to humanity.

From time immemorial in the field of spirituality and mysticism India had contributed immensely towards humanity and Sri Aurobindo's contribution towards it has been vast and expansive. It is beyond the understanding of our ordinary human intellect but Sadhakas (Seekers) who delved into it could give us some guidance and Mr. Gopal Bhattacharjee, a Sadhak, International Secretary, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, has just done that in his lecture, titled "A Fragrant Flower of Cambridge: Sri Aurobindo—and his Contribution to Humanity".

It was an historic occasion when Mr. Bhattacharjee spoke on that subject in Cambridge. It was historic because exactly one hundred years ago in 1891 Sri Aurobindo was a student in King's College, Cambridge, and until now it has not been possible by persons visiting here from Pondicherry to hold a meeting there to talk about Sri Aurobindo. It was a glorious spring afternoon, the 27th April, 1991, when Cambridge welcomed Mr. Bhattacharjee with a symphony of colour and sound and students from various colleges of the University of Cambridge and some faculty members assembled at Keynes Hall, King's College, to hear him. Mr. Bhattacharjee was inspired and in his usual extempore talk with extensive quotations from *The Life Divine*, *Savitri* and other works of Sri Aurobindo made the occasion a memorable one. The audience was spellbound and some members commented after the meeting that they had never experienced a lecture like this before.

Because of the distortions in some places in the recording of the speech and the limited time Mr. Bhattacharjee had at his disposal, he had to make certain changes here and there in the whole talk after we had prepared the typescript. We are fortunate enough to be given permission by Mr. Bhattacharjee to publish it in booklet form on behalf of Sri Aurobindo Society (U.K.).

The members of Sri Aurobindo Society (U.K.) have been trying to scale the heights of spiritual progress slowly but steadily with the great help of Mr. Bhattacharjee. We are indebted to him for his unfailing love and affection in helping members of our society, individually and collectively, every time he visits us in the U.K.

Our first public meeting celebrating the Mother's birth anniversary was a great success. Then in August 1987 in the presence of Mr. G. Bhattacharjee we celebrated Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary at Conway Hall, London WCI, when nearly four hundred people attended the memorable meeting and it was

reported in the local newspapers.

With the help of Mr. Bhattacharjee Sri Aurobindo Society was established in Germany in 1988. In 1989 when Mr. Bhattacharjee was invited by the Society in Germany to attend the birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, nearly five hundred German people assembled in Heidelberg to listen to him. The meeting was reported in local newspapers as well. There are many centres of the Society now operating in the United Germany.

During his current visit this year, after attending the meetings in U.N.E.S.C.O. as a standing committee member, in the N.G.O., Mr. Bhattacharjee toured extensively all over Germany. He also visited Poland where he was invited by Dr. Jasinsky, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Warsaw to enlighten them about Sri Aurobindo and he conducted a well attended Press Conference there. In the U.K., besides having a very successful meeting in Cambridge, Mr. Bhattacharjee gave a series of talks in our centre and also in Sheffield. The meetings we had were full of spiritual insight, growth and progress. Those of us who were present felt how immensely helpful it would be if we could take even a little of what we had heard and put it into practice in our day to day life

It is hoped that this booklet will rouse more interest about Sri Aurobindo and his immense contribution to humanity.

SOUMENU K. DATTA,  
Chairman Sri Aurobindo Society (U.K.)

#### A COMMENT BY K. D. SETHNA

Mr Datta's Introduction conveys effectively the enthusiasm with which Mr. G. Bhattacharjee's activities in the U.K. and Europe were received. Before he left Pondicherry he came to see me and I could feel the dedicated seriousness with which he looked forward to his extraordinary mission. I say "extraordinary" because nobody so far had had the privilege to be invited to address the very institution where Sri Aurobindo had studied in England and first blossomed as a poet, started on his wide exploration of world literature and history, dreamed of India's freedom from foreign rule and striven to catch a hint of her spiritual secrets. I appreciated the humility with which Bhattacharjee looked forward to his foreign visit and the eagerness he showed to get helpful suggestions from me about some of the momentous topics he hoped to touch upon in the course of his lecture. I was glad to give whatever little assistance I could to such sincere as well as simple-hearted zest to serve his great Master. I bade him Godspeed and I am glad he has been so successful.

# HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

## 1. The Prodigal Poetic Promise (B)

*(Continued from the issue of October 1991)*

THE bent of anguish which disengages itself from the various velleities of Chattopadhyaya's verse brings with it an intellectual confrontation of the world-problem. Not, to be sure, a logical arguing in poetry; a mental strength is what I mean and a faculty to catch, more often than before, intuitions through the aesthetic sensation. The old exoticism remains—accompanied by a more contemplative force, since there mingles with his acute experience of world-pain a longing to solve its great riddle. Faith, too, keeps its old fervour and thus the new philosophical temper in him accepts pain with open arms like an inscrutable beloved with whom he has to wrestle to the point of death before he can earn a surrender of all-transmuting bliss. Suffering is a sacred privilege to him: he is pushed by it not to blaspheme or even doubt, but nearer and nearer the goal he seeks. Though, like William Watson in the "Crow"-stanza, he can be puzzled by the spectre of discord haunting the world-ditty, he utilises the invasion of his being by it to raise to yet intenser a pitch his aspiration towards the ideal harmony "Give me the sorrow that shall take me to the Holy of Holies," he seems to cry: "welcome grief and tears and heartbreak—if the sharp agony rend the inner veil, the salt tears corrode my chains, the heartbreak fling wide open a door to the All-Beautiful." He even regards pain as an indispensable means for attaining the godhead, since the sum of impurity in human nature is so massive that a burning sacrifice alone can destroy it to the full. A characteristic expression of this mood is in these twelve lines:

O pain, I love the lonely wine-red gleam  
Within your deep and ever-wakeful eyes:  
Old Arab in the dark tent of my dream  
Under the burning skies.

Excess of ecstasy, immortal pain,  
Comrade of love, companion of desire,  
Lone Bedouin riding through life's desert plain  
A camel of red fire.

Most splendid traveller of eternity  
In whose first footfall the wide world began,  
A holy Mecca in the heart of me  
Awaits your caravan.

The poetic quality here is striking, but it is possible to overlook the implications which certain phrases have and which make that quality singularly rich for its thought-stuff. The eyes of pain are “deep and ever-wakeful” and “wine-red” not only because they have become sunken and blood-shot with sleeplessness; there dwells an unobscurable profundity in them and their red gleam reveals some hidden joy behind, a relish as of some rare wine that induces a mystic self-awakening. For this pain is the biting disappointment with things that pass turned into intense longing for the Eternal—a longing which by the splendour of its vision and the arduousness of its effort is miraculously bitter-sweet: just because the splendour is so great, the arduousness necessary to compass it is gigantic—the excess of the ecstasy causing the unbearable travail. The line “In whose first footfall the wide world began” adds a shade broader to the conception by envisaging the entire time-process as a difficult movement from eternity to eternity through the immortal Spirit’s self-separation and self-pursuit, a long cyclic pilgrimage each individual can hasten in himself if he directs life’s pain to a sacred end, “a holy Mecca” of prayer—that is, if he invites it to perform a mystic worship through his inner consciousness.

Another remarkable poem tinged by the same mood is “Challenge”; it has, besides, a more personal note:

You have done well  
 By having hurled me into such deep hell,  
 Since from its fires which burn my heart and eyes  
 I shall ere long arise  
 Like brave sweet incense to the peaks of time  
 Your feet could never climb!

Star in your high estate,  
 Who share not now the darkness of my fate!  
 Some sudden night you will begin to be  
 A nursling light in my eternity,  
 Since in deep sorrow I am being bent  
 To an unfathomable firmament.

The idea of suffering spiritualised is presented vividly by the similitude of incense rising self-offered to the Divine from a holocaust of human life: the epithets “brave” and “sweet” convey the exact psychological experience of sorrow accepted as a means to direct the soul of desire to a sacred end. A subtler and more powerful imagination leaps from the second stanza. By addressing his tormenter as “star” the poet not only suggests her once-idealised loveliness now standing aloof from his misery in cold disdain, but also enhances to an utter transcendence the mysterious “peaks of time” which he has declared unscalable

by her feet. For, even star-height seems too poor compared with the altitude his soul has felt as its inevitable destiny. And what is this altitude? "An unfathomable firmament" wherein constellations are lost and light-years dwarfed into a negligible span—a lofty God-consciousness before which all other exalted states are nothing, but which the poet links up to "deep sorrow" by the apt word "bent". The metaphorical feat here has wellnigh no parallel in poetic literature for profound novelty, though others have figured the sky in language felicitous or striking. We have Blanco White's fine and adequate

This glorious canopy of light and blue—

there is Baudelaire's *recherché* exclamation,

Le Ciel! couvercle noir de la grande marmite—

and its less hectic counterpart in Fitzgerald's Omar,

And that inverted bowl we call the sky  
Whereunder crawling coop't we live and die—

Shelley has an unforgettable image in speaking of Byron,

The Pilgrim of Eternity whose fame  
Over his living head like Heaven is bent,  
An early but enduring monument.

The last idea would be the most original as well as the grandest, if Chattopadhyaya did not exceed it by a further subtlety of boldness: to have pressed the optical illusion of the sky's bend into service of a condition of torture fraught with immense spiritual possibilities is *felicitèr audax* to a supreme revelatory point. It represents to my mind Chattopadhyaya's summit in his young days in what I have distinguished as the capacity to receive intuitions through the poetic intelligence, just as the lines about the dancing peacock we have emphasised earlier are his climax through the aesthetic sensation.

The philosophy of suffering embodied in the two poems quoted above is not the sole expression given by him to his developing poetic intelligence. He does not become insensitive to the waves of beauty that in his earliest period flooded his being; the old joy remains despite the new sorrow, for all beauty seems to him the conquest won by the Spirit over the obstacles in the way of its universal manifestation, it is the constant sign of God's emergence and increase. The pain-motif brought in a certain ache for the supracosmic; and the theory of Maya, with a stress on some featureless light and peace beyond, plays a perceptible

though not very prominent role henceforth in his verse. He has moods when the issue of suffering turned soulwards appears to be an escape into a "white hush" far from earth's panorama of change and even the beauty and delight possible here a path to a perfection behind the temporal and the manifest, behind also the larger occult planes that form earth's immediate background and from which the poets draw the multi-hued stuff of their dreams. At such times his colourful poetry becomes like the pictures of the young Andhra artist whose premature death he commemorates in a series of sonnets:

In the deep red, sweet yellow, quiet green  
 We see the gorgeous striving of your mind  
 Towards the perfect ultimate serene  
 Vision of Love which strikes all colour blind.

The main trend, however, of his muse is to sing the Spirit as realisable within the time-process, so that the movement from eternity to eternity may mean the suffusion of each hour by the secret Splendour:

What do I seek beyond the golden edges of the earth?  
 Here is the Image clothed in light and mystery and fire.  
 In conscious hours our restless human hands can bring to birth  
 All that the Spirit may desire.

The glories of beyond are here, the destiny of skies  
 Is being fulfilled on earth; the fate of every silver star  
 Is hidden in a seed. A sudden vision in my eyes  
 Plucks all the radiance from afar.

Where do you wander, restless heart? All that you seek is born  
 Each moment in you, though you know it not, since you are blind.  
 See, I am clothed in regal gold and purple cloths of morn  
 And mantled in the scented wind.

This cry, twelve lines long like much of his best verse, is a fitting note on which to end a survey of Chattopadhyaya's genius before its self-consecration for a couple of years to Sri Aurobindo's yoga in the Ashram at Pondicherry. But there are some other peculiarities of his work deserving notice. Here the aesthetic sensation and the poetic intelligence are openly allied, the lines

A sudden vision in my eyes  
 Plucks all the radiance from afar



being again a phase of the latter in an intuitive crystallisation of considerable power.

The seventy and odd sonnets, too, that we have from him during his early years illustrate more or less the same alliance; they give a very mature ring and they point to a rather prolific future in the genre, for he writes them with an inspired ease not usually to be found where a firm yet flexible tone and structure are requisite for success as in the Italian form, and Chattopadhyaya's penchant is for that: even when the sestet is English *à la* Shakespeare, the octave he generally builds with a Petrarchan punctiliousness of rhyme. The muscular energy other sonneteers employ is almost absent: instead, a nimble quickness executes the complexities—a magician and not a master-builder rears up the flawless fabric. There is no dearth of force whenever that is necessary, but it is of a man surefootedly leaping up difficult edges rather than strenuously climbing them. Alfred Douglas has written a sonnet with a curiously phrased sestet of great strength—

Only to build one crystal barrier  
Against this sea which beats upon our days;  
To ransom one lost moment with a rhyme  
Or if fate cries and grudging gods demur,  
To clutch life's hair, and thrust one naked phrase  
Like a lean knife between the ribs of Time.

Critics might, like grudging gods, demur to the slightly histrionic shade, but the compressed aphoristic magnificence of the traditional sonnet-language is in ample evidence. Now listen to Chattopadhyaya:

One perilous moment wherein must be told  
All the deep-hidden mysteries which lie  
Within a lifetime's darkness like pure gold:  
One moment lent to utter the great cry  
Of love, which lost, Time greyly passes by  
And leaves the world broken and bent and old.

The technique leans on a subtle urge, a widening out to fill the form and not a packing in as by Alfred Douglas, but the strength is there and as if to give conclusive proof of it the inverted foot made by "broken" violates the metre by a highly effective jerk emphasising the sense.

Taken ensemble, Chattopadhyaya's accomplishment in the sonnet-medium—before Sri Aurobindo's series of sonnets in 1939—is perhaps the most notable in our century by its sustained poetry. Rupert Brooke has been awarded the palm by English critics but his work is too scarce and the highest inspiration

peeps out just once or twice, whereas Chattopadhyaya has in almost every sonnet some genuine flash. The former has, however, one feature which is very striking and worth emulating—a vivid quaver and restless beauty expressed technically by anapaests and an unusual overrunning from line to line. Chattopadhyaya's vividness is due to colour and image, while the feeling-tone depends on the shortness or length of sentence, grammatical staccato or suspense. It is difficult to choose the very best when so much merit is scattered throughout: perhaps the following catches the typical accent in more than one variety:

Clouds close and clash across the starry deep  
 And darken every corner of the sky.  
 Holding their breath under a sullen sweep  
 Of sudden rain, the lakes and meadows lie....  
 Loud wind and storm have hushed the croak and cry  
 Of frog and cricket. Lightning flashes leap  
 Like amber serpents from the grey-black sleep  
 Of clouds, and earth seems like a blind man's eye!

But tranquil dreams the sky behind the storm  
 And the clear stars burn with a fleckless flame  
 Beyond the veils which the dim clouds have drawn  
 Across them, as the dreams serene and warm  
 In me though storm-clouds cover up Thy name  
 At times between the weeping dusk and dawn.

Chattopadhyaya's performance with the sonnet has in a particular context disclosed a quality not represented in the above—a quality which is neither the poetic intelligence nor the aesthetic sensation, but can only be described as creative insight: the rhythm and the language, though not superior as art to what is done elsewhere, are then of a kind eminently desirable by one who seeks to utter the Spirit from increasingly authentic sources, for the word-music bears upon its surge an experience, or at least the reflection of an experience, proper to occult planes not easy of access. Chattopadhyaya has not written any poem woven all of this rare light, but in places it breaks through and we have a magic and an intonation practised by only a few poets in their most spiritual moments. I shall give three examples, two occurring outside the sonnet-sequences. He sees once the twilight fall like some great benediction of quiet from the sky over "the ripening gold of ricefields"—yet there is no quiet in his own heart and the "black storm" raging in it threatens to destroy for him the spell:

What lips are these which strive with shadowy breath  
 To extinguish the rich flame upon the height?

In the words and the music of these lines the atmosphere of the very spell and the weird darkness opposing it enters: it is not just explained or imaged—the veil has been stirred aside from across mysterious regions. On another occasion he writes of “plying swift oars of inwardness” in “a dim boat of dreams” and passing beyond all time and change until he reaches

the city of old sleep  
Where the lone ways are crowded with white peace.

The whole occult picture is made to grow real, one feels oneself actually in that unknown place—the poetic suggestion from there has come out pure and sheer, helped by the vovellation, the trio of spondees and, in a line of monosyllabic slowness, the significant dissyllable “crowded” as if by its single occurrence to enforce the fact that it was only with aloof calm that the ways of the sleep-city were packed. Four lines in one of the sonnets upon the young Andhra artist’s death reflect the most intimate mystic revelation intuited by Chattopadhyaya direct on some inner plane:

Departing, you have left a track of light  
Over the solitary ocean-deep  
Of my dark soul across which day and night  
My body voyages like a boat of sleep.

The vision and the experience emerge by degrees, gather more and more concrete fulness until in the last line the native vibration of them flows out. The total effect is a highwater-mark of creative insight.

At this point I might have said:

“If the faculty of creative insight develops side by side with the exotic and the mental strain of Chattopadhyaya’s genius, we must have, as a result, work of unprecedented depth as well as exuberance and power. Already in 1934, when he has joined Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram, the bulk of his work is sure of a permanent place in English literature: he will hardly lie on a lower level than AE and Yeats; but they have come to the fading hour of life, all their triumphs lie behind them—Chattopadhyaya is still in mid-career and his future is big with a versatile fruition to which it is hard to assign cautious boundaries. There is a flow in his riches that is prophetic of diverse self-fulfilment on a grand scale with regard both to the swelling number of individual poems and to work executed in large proportions. Among shorter poetic forms one kind strikes us as hardly exploited elsewhere by his published books. In them we come across rhapsody bejewelled with sense-colour, reflection alive with apposite simile and metaphor, vision vibrating with imagery of truth—but the personal emotion-cry of a lyric directness is not often heard. Lyricism is present, yet rarely direct and personal

as for instance in Shelley, and when the peculiar mood is felt it is not with the mystic touch discoverable in all places. Chattopadhyaya has responded to the Divine as a presence suffusing Nature, haunting the kingdom of thought, sweeping down strange curves of world on unfamiliar world other than this; what he has not awakened to is the Divine as a person, an archetype of the human nature—face and lips and hands and feet that are perfect and at the same time like ours by a close warmth.

“Shelley and Yeats mix the ideal and the real in a manner that is mystic by imagination, not by experience: Emilia Viviani was in fact nothing save a fancied symbol of the Soul within Shelley’s soul, and the woman with odorous twilight about her tresses and about her mouth is a mere shadow hinting by gesture here and there the Rose of all Roses enshrined in Yeats’s heart. But the personal emotion burns none the less, joining its heat to the light of high dreams: in Chattopadhyaya the two elements fall almost apart as if he could not somehow adjust a blending of the human shade and the divine substance—except on a couple of occasions and then too not in the finest vein. The purely human love-poems, though not negligible, suffer by comparison with the unstrained fire in the mystic pieces: only one stands out, altogether non-mystic yet steeped in witchery, to indicate his potentialities if ever he were to fill himself with a passion for God as a spiritual body, an archetype of the human. This extraordinary lyric should take its place beside Robert Bridges’s ‘Awake, my heart, to be loved, awake, awake!’ Bridges’s stanzas have ranked with the supreme cries of English lyricism by an exalted sweetness, this poem of Chattopadhyaya’s is a more simple rapture but just for that simplicity works perhaps a more intimate magic:

My love and I will meet each other again,  
 O joy, it is going to be soon and very soon.  
 And when we meet we will kiss each other’s pain,  
 Kiss each other’s pain away under the moon.

•

Though I have wounded my love she will come to me,  
 For she, my love, is generous, she is so kind.  
 Pour more goldenly, light of day, on the tree!  
 Touch the leaves at twilight more tenderly, wind!

Though I have spoken to her unbeautiful words,  
 Though I have broken her heart she will come again.  
 Sing more sweetly at dawn, O beautiful birds!  
 Slip more silverly over the stones, O rain!

The spontaneous technique is beyond praise: the varied tremolo of glide-anapaests, the effective truncation of initial feet in the more ecstatic lines, the

euphonious surprise of other less usual stress-arrangements—and running through all these modulations a play of long vowels and ringing liquids and lapsing sibilants. It is a pity we do not have more of this impassioned imaginative delicacy in Chattopadhyaya's verse—but that may be because its complete outflow has waited for the true bent of his personal emotion to manifest itself: that is, in the mystic way, as all other parts of his nature have done.

“A second line of development is towards creations of long breath, poems or poetic dramas conceived and constructed largely, bold sweeping canvasses whereon the full-blown prolificity of which he seems capable if signs can be believed shall paint some story of the soul with occult planes of forces and personalities and godheads as its theatre. The plays he has produced ere now are fine poetry but the blank verse tends to be a rich monotone because of a lack of strong variations in style and rhythm; besides, they are too brief to claim a royal afflatus of idea and craftsmanship. That he would write short poems in abundance enough to put him on a par with any other English poet who has done the same is certain. But to deal out a generous quantity of excellent quality in small and separate outbursts is not the sole factor determining poetic rank; the decisive factor which lifts one clean to the top is the gift of designing a spacious, a palatial, a multitudinous unity. By this time, the 'thirties, we know only one attempt to make mightily; but Hardy's *Dynasts* is a sprawling greatness. Though its plan has behind it an intention more intricate and extensive than the *Iliad*, it lacks the organic control the latter, for all our vagueness about its single authorship, exhibits so lucidly to the mind, and it suffers also by an unsteady poetic fire in the various parts. If Chattopadhyaya makes something even less colossal yet large and poetic enough, if he fashions a new *Prometheus Unbound*, essays and finishes another *Hyperion* or rebuilds a *Paradiso*, in terms of a fresh and mature mystic originality, he will stand like a giant in the dawn of a new era, his masterpiece gathering its lines of light from a creative Sun beyond both our day and our darkness.”

(*To be continued*)

K. D. SETHNA

## THE GREAT ON THE GREAT

BERNARD Shaw wrote: "With the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely as I despise Shakespeare when I measure my mind against his."

Then there is Goethe who is reported to have told an Italian that he thought the *Inferno* of Dante abominable, the *Purgatorio* dubious and the *Paradiso* tiresome. Landor thought that perhaps one-seventieth part of Dante was good, but that the *Inferno* was "the most impious and immoral work that ever was written".

Landor also told Crabbe Robinson that most of Homer was trash. Bentham thought it was worse. And in our own day, after translating the *Odyssey* Lawrence of Arabia decided that it was a poor poem after all—"Bother the *Odyssey* and all manufactured writing! Only the necessary, the inevitable, the high-pressure stuff is worth having"—"The *Odyssey* is a creeping work".

Wordsworth thought Goethe an immoral and artificial writer. Coleridge agreed and he held him far inferior to Schiller; de Quincey foretold the decline of his reputation to its just level; Landor put him below Madame de Genlis!

Wordsworth said Byron's poetry was "not English"; Byron thought Wordsworth "the blind monarch of the one-eyed". De Quincey accused Keats of trampling on the English language "with the hoofs of a buffalo".

Shelley considered Michaelangelo lacking in "moral dignity" and felt the paintings in the Sistine Chapel to be "deficient in majesty".

Blake wrote of Titian, Rubens, Correggio and Rembrandt: "If all the Princes in Europe like Louis XIV and Charles I were to patronize such blockheads, I, William Blake, a mental Prince, should decollate and hang their souls as guilty of mental high treason".

Malherbe regarded Ronsard's style as not even French. Chapelain pronounced that he lacked art; de Fontaine that he was harsh and without taste; Arnaud that his poetry was pitiable; Voltaire that he was unreadable; Marmontel that the Graces took to their heels at the sight of him. Even the Romantic Michelet called him a deaf maniac.

Robert Bridges could see nothing in the poetry of Hardy; and Lionel Johnson accused Francis Thompson of doing "more to defile the English language than the worst American newspapers".

A. E. Housman said of T. S. Eliot the Poet: "He is milking the bull."

ANON

## MATTHEW ARNOLD AND ROMANTIC POETRY

(Continued from the issue of October 1991)

In his letter of 1849, Arnold writes to Clough, "What is Keats? A style and form seeker, and this with an impetuosity that heightens the effect of his style almost painfully." Again and again he deplores Keats's and Shelley's revival of the sensuous images of Elizabethan poetry. But we see that there is the direct influence of Keats upon at least four important poems of Arnold. *The Scholar Gypsy*, *Thyrsis*, *The Strayed Reveller* and *Empedocles on Etna*; the "Ode to a Nightingale" stanza is adapted in *The Scholar Gypsy* and *Thyrsis*; many verbal echoes in *The Scholar Gypsy* indicate Arnold's responsiveness to Keatsian imagery. And yet Arnold writes in a letter:

"Poets who seek centrality and sanity may fail and yet be 'good citizens enough', but those who follow Keats, Tennyson and those damned Elizabethans generally go to the dogs failing or succeeding."

In his "Preface of 1853," he mentions that Keats's longer poems suffer from the weakness of construction: "*Endymion*, although undoubtedly there blows through it the breath of genius, is yet as a whole so utterly incoherent, as not strictly to merit the name of a poem at all." "*Hyperion*, fine things as it contains, is not a success." *Lamia* is ignored and excluded from Arnold's selections for Ward's *English Poets* and *The Eve of St Agnes* is not mentioned in the criticism and only the last 18 stanzas are included in Ward's book. In his Preface, he selects *Isabella* as an example of deficiency of modern poetry in the virtue of architectonics. "This one short poem contains, perhaps, a greater number of happy single expressions which one could quote than all the extant tragedies of Sophocles. But the action, the story? The action in itself is an excellent one; but so feebly is it conceived by the poet, so loosely constructed, that the effect produced by it, in and for itself, is absolutely null. Let the reader, after he has finished the poem of Keats, turn to the same story in the *Decameron*; he will then feel how pregnant and interesting the same action has become in the hands of a great artist, who above all things delineates his object; who subordinates expression to that which it is designed to express."

Arnold's choice of *Isabella* for this kind of attack is very unfortunate. If you want intrigue or plot you may prefer Boccaccio's version. Keats's strength consists in the treatment, in the texture of the poem. Boccaccio is primarily a story-teller, Keats is a poet first and foremost.

Arnold's famous tribute to Keats occurs in the essay on Keats:

"He is; he is with Shakespeare." Arnold is all admiration for Keats's diction. In the essay, *On Translating Homer*, he speaks of the modern inheritor of Spenser's beautiful gift—"the poet who evidently caught from Spenser his sweet and easy-slipping movement, and who has exquisitely employed it; a

Spenserian genius, nay, a genius by natural endowment richer probably than even Spenser; that light which shines so unexpectedly and without fellow in our century, an Elizabethan born too late, the early lost and admirably gifted Keats". In *The Study of Poetry*, Keats is grouped with Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton as "one of the great inheritors of the tradition of the liquid diction, the fluid movement, of Chaucer". Keats, like Shakespeare and Wordsworth, possesses natural magic. In his *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Arnold speaks of natural magic: "Magic is just the word for it,—the magic of nature; not merely the beauty of nature,—that the Greeks and Latins had; not merely an honest smack of the soil, a faithful realism,—that the Germans had; but the intimate life of Nature, her weird power and her fairy charm." But Arnold accuses Keats of lacking in moral interpretation. Apart from Arnold's puritanism, a misunderstanding of the odes of Keats might have also been responsible for such a conclusion. In the 19th century, the import of the major Odes of Keats was not properly understood. They were wrongly considered as poems of escape. If the central theme had been rightly understood as the message that 'Ripeness is all', Arnold would have credited Keats with moral interpretation also.

After reading the letters of Keats, Arnold wrote to Clough, "What a brute you were to tell me to read Keats's letters!" He was terribly upset by Milnes' *Life and Letters of John Keats* and called the letters to Fanny Brawne the 'underbred, unrestrained love letters of a surgeon's apprentice'. Arnold illustrates from Keats's letters to his brothers and friends the strength of his character and the clearness of his judgement. Keats is a man who has 'flint and iron in him' as well as an acute and sensitive intelligence and extraordinary poetic gifts. Keats's passion for beauty is not a passion of the sensitive sensorious or the sentimental poet. It is an intellectual and spiritual passion. In spite of his sensuousness, he is a man capable of detachment and even coldness in his attitude toward women.

Arnold's essay on Keats is entirely personal, and suffers from his moralising attitude. "Seven-eighths of the essay is devoted to Keats's character and only a few paragraphs at the end to his poetry."

Arnold was strongly influenced by Shelley's poetry. His indebtedness to Shelley is mentioned by Swinburne, Quiller-Couch and Mrs. Oliver Campbell. According to Swinburne, Arnold has written at least one poem ("A Question") "exactly after the manner of Shelley." Mrs. Campbell exaggerates the similarities between the two. According to her, both might be called "philosophical poets. Both were mainly concerned with expressing the longing of man's spiritual nature, and his discontent with earthly life. Both wrote some very personal, almost one might say egotistical poems. Both were inspired by Greek models and wrote dramas based on them with choruses and lyrical passages, and between *Empedocles* and *Prometheus Unbound* there is more than a superficial resemblance. Both wrote love poems—mainly of restless and unhappy love. Each wrote a famous elegy". (*Shelley and the Unromantics*, pp. 3-4).



Shelley's belief in poetry as an instrument of moral good working by indirection on the emotions and the imagination is shared by Arnold. Yet in spite of this indebtedness, he attacks Shelley in his essays on "Byron" and "Shelley". In the first essay, he says that Shelley, with far more loveliness and charm than Byron, suffers from "the incurable want, in general, of a sound subject matter, and the incurable fault, in consequence, of unsubstantiality." Here he makes a ridiculous prophecy that Shelley's essays and letters will live longer than his poetry. It is in this essay that the phrase, "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain" occurs for the first time. In "Maurice de Guerin," he says, "I will not now inquire how much Shelley achieves as a poet, but whatever he achieves, he in general fails to achieve natural magic in his expression. I will not deny, however, that Shelley has natural magic in his rhythm; what I deny is that he has it in his language. It always seems to me that the right sphere for Shelley's genius was the sphere of music, not of poetry; the medium of sounds he can master, but to master the more difficult medium of words he has neither intellectual force enough nor sanity enough."

His essay on "Shelley" is an uninspiring review of Dowden's *Life of Shelley*. Here he proposes to mark firmly what is ridiculous and odious in the Shelley brought to our knowledge by the new materials, and then to show that "our former beautiful and lovable Shelley nevertheless survives." There are 23 pages giving an account of Shelley's life up to his marriage to Mary. The next 8 pages are an outburst, beginning with a description of Shelley's world. The last few pages discuss Shelley's virtues—his generosity and refinement. In the first part of the essay Arnold shows clearly that he is annoyed by Dowden's adoration and special pleading. But he has very little to say about Shelley's poetry, though in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse", he speaks of it briefly:

What boots it, Shelley! that the breeze  
Carried thy lovely wail away,  
Musical through Italian trees  
Which fringe the soft blue Spezzian bay?  
Inheritors of thy distress  
Have restless hearts one throb the less?

To him, Shelley's poetry is sad, evanescent, musical, infantile and ineffectual. Shelley tried to be both prophet and singer and had failed at both. Arnold thought many of Shelley's ideas were naive, shallow and repugnant. Shelley's revolutionary idealism is dubbed "nonsense about tyrants and priests". He found Shelley deficient in command of thought and of language. As Oliver Elton puts it, in his estimate of Shelley, "Arnold is wrong beyond recovery, and without qualification."

It is surprising to note that Coleridge is the one major English Romantic poet on whom Arnold does not have a separate essay. Specific echoes of

Coleridge are very rare in Arnold's poetry. In his notebooks, there is no direct quotation from Coleridge's writings. Lionel Trilling points out that in Bible interpretation Arnold's guides were the two men who had in many other ways influenced his thought—Spinoza and Coleridge. J. D. Kump claims that in making education a responsibility of the state Arnold was following his own father and Coleridge and Burke. In his essay on Byron, there is a specific comment on Coleridge's poetry: "There are poems of Coleridge and of Keats equal, if not superior, to anything of Byron or Wordsworth; but a dozen pages or two will contain them, and the remaining poetry is of a quality much inferior". In "Joubert", which was first entitled "A French Coleridge", he mentions only once that Coleridge was a poet. It is a study in similarities between the two religious philosophers: Both were renowned talkers, desultory and incomplete writers, passionately devoted to reading and thinking off the beaten line of their day; both studied ardently "old literature, poetry and the metaphysics of religion; both were students of language; both were conservative in religion and politics; both had from Nature an ardent impulse for seeking the genuine truth on all matters they thought about, and a gift for finding it and recognising it when it was found." But then Arnold makes bold to say that Coleridge's work is so full of defects: "How little either of his poetry, or of his criticism, or of this philosophy, can we expect permanently to stand!" To Arnold, Coleridge was one who was "wrecked in a mist of opium" and had no morals. The picture of Coleridge that Arnold gives is one of a rambling disorganised eccentric and premature initiator of modern ideas. His judgement of Coleridge is, to say the least, very harsh. The reason is not far to seek. Coleridge's temperament was vastly different from Arnold's. And Coleridge was too metaphysical for Arnold's comprehension. Nowhere does he show an awareness of Coleridge's complex theory of imagination.

Arnold's ranking of the major English Romantic poets is highly controversial. Perhaps F. R. Leavis is the only great critic who is in complete agreement with Arnold's relative evaluation. His underestimate of Coleridge and Shelley is unpardonable. Blake's claim to a place by the side of Wordsworth is too strong. Arnold's personality, temperament and moral preoccupation were largely responsible for his ambiguous attitude to the Romantics. But René Wellek is right when he says that even if we disagree with Arnold's ranking of the poets, we have to concede that he accomplished the main task of a practical critic: "the sifting of the tradition, the arrangement or rearrangement of the past, the discrimination among currents, major and minor". Another merit is Arnold's prose which is highly attractive and enjoyable and which, unlike many of the critical works of modern writers, is delightfully free from any disgusting jargon.

*(Concluded)*

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# KRISHNA IN THE MAHABHARATA

## A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

THIS is apropos Dr. R. N. Pani's "A Note on Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata" (*Mother India*, June, 1991).

There are two aspects to Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata. One is the Divine, the other is the heroic human. Rishi Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya noticed this over a century back, and determined that the supernatural portions were accretions authored by later redactors. The very Song Celestial is a supreme example of the descent of the Divine Afflatus into the Vibhuti/Avatara. The validation for this view is found in Sri Krishna's own words in the Ashvamedhika Parva. Replying to Arjuna's demand that he repeat the advice he had given him on the battlefield (viz., the Gita), as he has forgotten it, Krishna berates him for having such a weak understanding, and states that he is unable to reproduce that experience because then he had been in yoga and the occasion which had drawn down that supreme inspiration had been unique. Hence, he presents the "Anu Gita", an inferior composition. If Sri Krishna had been the Supreme Himself, there would have been no problem in his replicating the Gita-experience. It is the human Vibhuti/Avatara who has to subscribe to the human constraints.

Again, after the death of Bhishma, when Yudhishtira wishes to abdicate and retire to the forest, Sri Krishna repeats the Gita's advice to conquer "ahamkara", in what is known as the "Discourse on Desire":

"It is the quelling of desire which is true dharma and the seed of liberation, beyond doubt."

Yet another telling instance is an extremely revealing confession made by Sri Krishna to Narada in the Shanti Parva, which is worth reproducing in substance;

I live listening to the bitter comments of kinsfolk, despite having given them half my wealth. As the person anxious to obtain fire keeps rubbing the kindling materials, similarly my kinsmen are constantly scorching my heart with their harsh words. Despite all such persons (as Baladeva, Gada, Pradyumna and the Andhakas and Vrishnis) being on my side, I am passing the time helplessly. Ahuka and Akrura are excellent friends of mine, but if I show affection for one, the other becomes furious. Hence, I do not express affection for any. And because of friendship it is very difficult to discard them...whoever has Ahuka and Akrura on his side is miserable beyond compare, and he whose cause they do not espouse is also immeasurably sorrowful...O Narada! because of the need to control them, I am suffering."

The wholly human nature of Sri Krishna's dilemma does not, surely, need any gloss.

Sri Krishna himself states in the Udyoga Parva, chapter 79.5:

*aham hi tat karisyāmi param purusakāratah/  
daivam tu na mayā śakyam karma karttumkathañcana//*

("I can express human prowess to the utmost; but I do not have the slightest power to alter what is fated.")

This is where the epic Sri Krishna is radically different from the deity of the *Bhagavata* and the *Harivamsa*.

It is the very human-ness of Sri Krishna which is part of the secret lying behind the irresistible fascination he exercises over millions even in the closing years of the twentieth century.

The political scenario of the Epic shows the grasping hands of Magadhan imperialism under Jarasandha reaching out to engulf one independent state after another, and creating a circle of like-minded tyrants in Shishupala, Kamsa, Dantavakra, Kalayavana, Jayadratha, Paundraka, Naraka. Duryodhana and the Dhartarashtras share in this asuric nature. That is why the unknown Pandavas are espoused by Sri Krishna as the instruments for setting up a state founded upon the ancient principle of the "rājā" being the person who ensures the welfare, the happiness, of the people.

However, the bringing of all principalities under one empire, as stated by Dr. Pani, is not an achievement which is testified to by the epic. To take a simple instance, when the King of Kashi is approached for the hand of his daughter for Janamejaya, he enquires who the prospective bridegroom is! If Janamejaya had been the inheritor of the "empire" ruled over by Yudhishtira and handed over to Parikshit, this could not have been the query of a ruler located a few hundred miles down the river from Hastinapura. There is no evidence in the epic that "the great war saved the *Kshatrateja* of the other parts of India." On the other hand, Arjuna's journey with the sacrificial horse for Yudhishtira's post-holocaust Ashvamedha is a revealing account of a country largely bereft of its fighting youth, while those still left refuse to accept the new Pandava hegemony, regarding them as parvenus. So much so that when Arjuna comes to Dvaraka, the Yadava youth set out to attack him and have to be restrained by Ugrasena and Vasudeva! The most telling instance is when Arjuna comes to the Sindhu country, and his cousin Duhshala, Jayadratha's widow, approaches him carrying her infant grandson to report that her son Suratha suddenly expired on hearing of Arjuna's arrival with an army. Duhshala begs him to forget Duryodhana and wicked Jayadratha, and spare this infant. Arjuna, ashamed, leaves. Everywhere he fights sons or grandsons of his opponents in the Kurukshetra War, who will

not accept the Pandava hegemony without being worsted in battle, despite the superior forces attacking them. Yudhishtira sorrowfully remarks to Sri Krishna that wherever Arjuna has gone he has had to meet opposition. This is a telling commentary on the Pandava Empire of Righteousness said to have been established as a result of the Kurukshetra holocaust.

There is no evidence, either in the epic or in the puranas, about this empire established by Sri Krishna lasting for two thousand years, as claimed by Dr. Pani. Janamejaya having dwindled to a non-entity a mere generation after Yudhishtira's departure is evidence to the contrary. His only conquest recorded in the epic is to the north, of Takshashila, not southwards down the Ganga and Yamuna. Even earlier, the inability of Arjuna to use the Gandiva after the passing of Sri Krishna, his failure to prevent the rape of Sri Krishna's wives and the Yadava women by petty Aheer bandits armed with "lathis", provides irrefutable evidence of the absence of a strong central government with effective law-and-order administration. The abdication of the Pandavas is out of a sense of acute disappointment with the fruits of their pyrrhic victory. The assassination of Parikshit by a Naga to avenge the enmity born of the Khandavaprastha holocaust is another bit of evidence. Most telling of all is the fact that Janamejaya was unaware of how his father had died till Utanka told him of the assassination! One concludes that the advisors of the Hastinapura monarch did not consider the kingdom strong enough to avenge the murder of their king (by no means an emperor) by taking on the Nagas.

Moreover, to speak of "the unity of India" in the 15th century B.C. (taking 1446 or 1415 B.C. as the death of Krishna, as proved by K. D. Sethna in his *Ancient India in a new Light*) is rather naive. Although the warring monarchs in Kurukshetra include references to the southern regions, the overwhelming emphasis remains on North and North Western India throughout the epic. The Pandava hegemony did not extend beyond this part of the country, and had shrunk severely by the time of Janamejaya. Even here, within a few centuries, city states were flourishing by the time of Mahavira and Buddha (born c. 1248 B.C. as calculated by Sethna, *ibid.*). Within a thousand years of the passing of Krishna, Sakas are in power in Sind and found the Saka Era in 551 B.C. (Sethna, *ibid.*). Two centuries later Alexander invades India. Hence, there is no evidence of the Kurukshetra War having ushered in a "dharma samrajya", and certainly none at all of India united as a nation.

Dr. Pani's comments regarding the rebirth of Angada as Jara, etc., belong to the realm of the *Bhagavata Purana* and its ilk, which are considerably later compositions, and are products of the Bhakti Movement, on which we cannot draw to explain away material events in the ancient epic narrative.

As for Dr. Pani's closing question, should we not recall Jesus Christ's pronouncement that he was taking upon himself our sins? Every realised soul, every guru, has spoken of this taking on himself the illness or the pain from

which the disciple is suffering. On a symbolic level, the arrow in Sri Krishna's foot represents the obstinacy of the physical consciousness, refusing to be transformed, and posing the irremovable obstacle, unconquered by all avatars so far.

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of October 1991)

As a translator Sri Aurobindo holds the sound unorthodox view that translations are not bound to the exact word and letter of the originals. All his verse translations are not mere translations, they are poems in their own right. The translations from the original Sanskrit and Bengali, from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Gita*, *Kalidasa*, *Bhartrihari* and the mediaeval poets Vidyapati, Chandidas, etc , stand in a class apart. Sri Aurobindo writes: “I think it is quite legitimate to translate poetic prose into poetry; I have done it myself when I translated *The Hero and the Nymph* [Kalidasa’s *Vikramorvasie*] on the ground that the beauty of Kalidasa’s prose is best rendered by poetry in English, or, at least, that I found myself best able to render it in that way. Your critic’s rule seems to me rather too positive; like all rules it may stand in principle in a majority of cases, but in the minority (which is the best part, for the less is often greater than the more) it need not stand at all. Pushed too far, it would mean that Homer and Virgil can be translated only in hexametres. Again, what of the reverse cases—the many fine prose translations of poets so much better and more akin to the spirit of the original than any poetic version of them yet made? One need not go farther than Tagore’s English version of his *Gitanjali*. If poetry can be translated so admirably (and therefore legitimately) into prose, why should not prose be translated legitimately (and admirably) into poetry? After all, rules are made more for the convenience of critics than as a binding law for creators ”<sup>1</sup>

As Sri Aurobindo spent his early impressionable years abroad in the study of classics of the West, it was natural for him to make poetry out of their myth and legend. He brought a new accession of the spirit to them. In the early years at Baroda he developed a keen association with Sanskrit literature and his immense scholarly knowledge of Western literature was now annexed to his deep intimacy with the classics of India. Greek and Sanskrit legends and myths held a fascination for him throughout his life. In order to give a new significance and a new depth of poetry, a new language and a rhythm were needed “His earliest poetry is a lyrical impulse surging up as a joyous reaction to the beauties of Nature and the grace and charm of human feelings; the reaction of a fresh, pure poetic sensibility when youth only half opens itself to the world around; reminiscent of the early lyrical Milton, Spenser, the sensuous Keats, the Shelley of unpremeditated strains.”<sup>2</sup>

We receive the impression of his early inspired phase in his “*Songs to Myrtilla*”, a poetic dialogue between Glaucus and Aethon. They extol the glories and delights of earth and the beauties of nature. The following lines of sensuous imagery make a review of this world. Glaucus says:



“Sweet is the night, sweet and cool  
 As to parched lips a running pool;  
 Sweet when the flowers have fallen asleep  
 And only moonlit rivulets creep  
 Like glow-worms in the dim and whispering wood,  
 To commune with the quiet heart and solitude.”<sup>3</sup>

And Aethon replies:

“But day is sweeter; morning bright  
 Has put the stars out ere the light,  
 And from their dewy cushions rise  
 Sweet flowers half-opening their eyes.”<sup>4</sup>

About the majority of poems in the opening verses of the volume to which “*Songs to Myrtilla*” gives its name, an English reviewer once remarked: “No native of India, so far as I have ever seen, has caught the English diction, atmosphere and outlook so completely as this writer, and the early poems especially are so essentially English as are those of any University graduate of the land.”<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo himself affirms: “What these poems express is the education and imaginations and ideas and feelings created by a purely European culture and surroundings—it could not be otherwise. In the same way the poems on Indian subjects and surroundings in the same book express the first reactions to India and Indian culture after the return home and a first acquaintance with these things.”<sup>6</sup>

K. D. Sethna speaks of “spontaneity and finish being stamped almost everywhere in *Songs to Myrtilla*”. But, as Sethna adds, Sri Aurobindo “was not satisfied, since it was not only Art but also life that he wanted to make glorious in a supreme unflickering fire of beauty. His Muse was no mere goddess of poetry, but a secret cosmic Spontaneity of beautiful creation, a plenitude of Power whose words are worlds. He aspired to live poetry as well as write it; and his failure to discover in the hopes and loves and labours of ordinary life anything final to rest upon, cast a painful shadow over his art, gave his sweetest songs a lingering note of sad hopelessness, making him feel that the highest in him stood unliberated and inarticulate.”<sup>7</sup>

In “*Songs to Myrtilla*” we find Sri Aurobindo in his early workshop, reminiscent of Spenser, the Elizabethans and the Romantics. But, as Sethna avers, “Whether...we find him moved to joy or touched to melancholy by the hues and harmonies of life, there is, without the least doubt, that unanalysable quality in him which proves that here is the first utterance of an exceptionally gifted mind.”<sup>8</sup>

One of his early works is *Urvashi*. It is a narrative poem of approximately

1,500 lines, divided into four cantos, written in 1893, soon after he returned to India, and published in 1896. "He recreated the eternal nymph of the *Rigveda*, the story of a Goddess won to mortal arms, Urvasie, 'the flower self-bloomed without a stem,' as Tagore described her, has fascinated him. The nymph of Heaven, according to the age-old story, is enamoured of a mortal, the hero Pururavas. The hero and the nymph lived for many years together, but their love did not wane and Urvasie did not return to resume her duty in the celestial sphere. When the discontented Gods made her return, there followed the agony of Pururavas and his long wanderings in search of her and finally their union. The union, however, was now conditioned by many limitations. But the intensity of the hero's love, the strenuous penance he was ready to undergo—and Urvasie's response—compelled the compassion of unwilling Gods, and the lovers were rewarded the boon of permanent natural union."

Canto I is an effective exposition of the event—the heroic rescue of Urvasie by Pururavas from the hands of Cayshie, the demon. The poet has admirably described the kidnapping of the nymph and her rescue by Pururavas, the first stirring of love in his heart for Urvasie. Canto II gives us the thrilling aspects of the legend—the scene in Paradise, the dance of the Apsaras, Urvasie's banishment to earth and the leaping and engulfing joy of the fulfilment of love. Canto III is an absorbing account of Pururavas' home-coming with Urvasie and their welcome and later on his leave-taking of his subjects after giving the throne to his son, Ayus. Canto IV remarkably depicts love's desolation with brilliant flashes of Nature poetry. Undoubtedly it is a creditable achievement.

To quote Jesse Roarke: "It is a lush and impetuous romantic work like nothing else in English poetry, a rich and beautiful blank verse of astonishing expressiveness. It may be immature in some respects, but it is still both a finely inspired work and a more than respectable example of the poetic art."<sup>9</sup>

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks: "*Urvasie* is the work of a young man; if it has youth's boldness, idealism, intuition of romantic imagery and feeling for language, it has also something of youth's excess.... *Urvasie* is Sri Aurobindo's *Endymion*, but an *Endymion* transferred, by sleight of hand, to Aryasthan and presented in terms of immemorial Hindu thought. By rendering the age-long Urvasie legend on an epic (at least mini-epic) scale, Sri Aurobindo has dyed it with shining indelible purpose and crowned it with racial and prophetic significance. Its wealth of sensuous elaboration, its luxuriance in colour and sound, its high-arching epic similes, its resounding polysyllabic proper names, its subtle fusion of personal and national perspectives, its forceful delineation of the drama of man's temptation and fall, its suggestion of the filiations between earth and heaven—these divers 'marks' of Sri Aurobindo's *Urvasie* make it no small achievement in the difficult genre of Romantic Epic."<sup>10</sup>

With *Urvasie* Sri Aurobindo started his adventure in the narrative realm and seems to be preening his wings for a mightier flight. Iyengar observes: "Sri

Aurobindo evidently desired to treat the story of Pururavas and Urvasie on an epic scale almost, and also to underline what may be called its 'national' significance; he accordingly made certain departures from the purely dramatic unfolding of the theme in Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasie*. The *Urvasie* myth has indeed shown an easy adaptability and a limitless flexibility through the ages."<sup>11</sup>

Lionel Johnson acknowledged some poetic merit but said that "it was a repetition of Matthew Arnold"; and Sri Aurobindo adds: "But Lionel Johnson, I was told, like the Vedantic sage who sees Brahman in all things, saw Arnold everywhere."<sup>12</sup>

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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## ON PERSONALITY AND WORLD-PEACE

WORLD-PEACE! Has there ever been a durable peace in the world during the long history of the world? Naturally the answer straightaway is in the negative. Leave aside the events of the long past, even recently, during the first half of the present century, we have witnessed two devastating world-wars. And even while the horrible picture of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is fresh and vivid in our memory a third one is constantly knocking at our door. Although hectic attempts are being made to avert it the outcome is uncertain. Luckily the Gulf-war has run its course, but what state of affairs the world will assume after it we cannot predict. However, presumably it will not be unworthy or out of place now to look into the subject from a deeper level of vision.

A little of meditative introspection reveals that a pure and profound love with its harmonising will is constantly at work in the marrow of existence. And this power is responsible for keeping the world-play going. But for it the world would have been shattered into fragments under the disintegrating shocks and destructive blows which have been inflicted on it ever since the beginning of history.

In fact, dispute and discord are in the very texture of terrestrial nature. It is as if the whole earth and air were vibrant with the pulsation of this force. Starting from the subhuman type it has extended its sway up to the level of today's civilised man. But, indeed, there is variation, at least in appearance, in the mode of its germination. The kind of quarrels amongst wild animals, barbarous tribes and even conflicts between two hawkers in the street, can in no way be compared with the attitude and action between two or more disputing persons or parties of a better position. But at times eruption takes place and molten lava comes up from the cavern of the disputants' hearts, with a dark, destructive and poisonous vapour, and covers the sky. The basic nature of all is exposed and the same picture is found within the small and the great, the learned and the illiterate.

Now the question is: since war is no longer a biological necessity in man as in the animal, nor is it an unpredictable natural calamity like earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions, is such a turn of events with the growth of such a picture inevitable? Cannot the circumstances be changed into a happy and delightful life on a durable basis? Seen from a particular angle of vision it appears that probably it cannot be done. The exponent of the theory of 'Struggle for Existence', may try to prove it by definitive reasoning. But that is beyond our present purpose and scope of observation. What we can do is to point out here a negative evidence of facts.

If the circumstances could have been changed, why then is the history of humanity strewn with the records of warfare through and through? Not only that, mythology speaks of war even amongst the gods. However, the effort for peace and brotherhood has been continuing from time immemorial, so to say.

The message of compassion and nonviolence of the Buddha, the tireless and extensive practice and preaching of the Emperor Asoka and the teaching and self-sacrifice of Christ for the cause of a better living could not bring about the end of war. So the natural tendency is to conclude that struggle and conflict are an inseparable adjunct of life, and that a permanent state of living without them is perhaps impossible.

But the question crops up: What then of the long cherished ideal of a golden age or *Satya-yuga* and the ultimate purpose of Love which secretly works within each object and in all beings? What of that spark of soul which burns deep within and shows with its unfailing light the way towards sympathy, synthesis, rhythm and harmony—that eternal and original delight of being which emerged by breaking the walls of separation set up by ego and ignorance, preference and partiality, and which gives full recognition and response to the prophetic words, “The realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and manifestation by all of the inner divinity which is one.” (*Words of the Mother*)

No doubt the possibility of this emergence depends on a great deal of spiritual effort, practice and perseverance. To come in contact with one’s real ‘I’, one has to penetrate, as it were, the crude region of one’s nature which spreads out wrath and fury, jealousy and hatred and, above all, the motives of falsehood, hypocrisy and selfishness. Still it is also an undeniable fact that the urge towards this penetration and perfection is an immensely powerful and eternally active phenomenon in human nature. And once this realisation is attained one no longer remains a puppet in the hands of wayward forces but becomes what one essentially is. So it appears that we are not only what we apparently are, but what we ought to be and that is our true personality. Just as in the case of an individual so also in the case of a country or collectivity; it has its true personality or soul status. But to describe what this personality or soul status is like is a very difficult job. The following lines from Rabindranath Tagore may help us have an idea of its true character:

“What it is in man that asserts its immortality in spite of the obvious fact of death? It is not his physical body or his mental organisation. It is that deeper unity, that ultimate mystery in him; which from the centre of his world radiates towards its circumference; which is in his body, yet transcends his body; which is in his mind, yet grows beyond his mind; which, through the things belonging to him, expresses something that is not in them; which, occupying his present, overflows its banks of the past and the future. It is the personality of man conscious of its inexhaustible abundance.” (*Personality*)

Now let us listen to the words of the Upanishads about more or less the same Truth.

“बृहच्च तद् दिव्यमचिन्त्यरूपं सूक्ष्माच्च तत् सूक्ष्मतरं विभाति ।  
दूरात् सुदूरे तदिहान्तिके च पश्यत्स्वहैव निहितं गुहायाम॥”

“Vast is That, divine, its form unthinkable; it shines out subtler than the subtle; very far and farther than farness, it is here close to us, for those who have vision it is even here in this world; it is here, hidden in the secret heart.” (Mundaka Upanishad)

The above quotations give us an idea about personality and the divine Truth. But to have an idea and the actual attainment of the Truth are two different affairs. While we can get the former with the help of our mind, the latter requires an altogether different means of approach. Let us listen to the voice of aspiration towards this approach from the lips of Sri Aurobindo in the following lines, “...when you break my earth and release the energies; when you turn my pride into power in your hands and my ignorance into light, my narrowness into wideness, my selfishness into a true gathering together of forces in one centre, my greed into a capacity of untiring search after the truth for the attainment of its substances, my egoism into the true and conscious instrumental centre, my mind into a channel for you to descend, my heart into your hearth of pure fire and flame, my life into a pure and translucent substance for your handling, my body into a conscious vessel for holding what of you is meant for me; then, O Mother of Radiances, my aim in life now and hereafter will be fulfilled in the true and right and vast way. Aspiration wakes in me. Achieve in me all that I flame for.” (*The Hour of God*)

Let us not fail to appreciate that this aspiration is not confined to any individual being. It is pronounced on behalf of the whole of mankind and of manifested nature which strives to reach its goal, to achieve its fulfilment. It is the call of the flute of the divine flute-player and a tongue of the flame of the mystic fire.

By now two aspects of existence are clear to us: one, division, conflict, hatred, war and death; the other, love, peace, harmony, cooperation and life. But we have not received any definite reply as to whether war will remain as a permanent factor and, if so, which side will dominate in the long run: light and creation, or darkness and destruction. At the present juncture of human history the question is of immense importance and deserves a deep-sighted treatment. It seems that the entire issue rests on the goodwill and efficient handling of the world situation by the leaders and guardians of the world's peace, security and liberty. As for ourselves we can do nothing better than simply quote excerpts from prophetic and mystic minds.

In connection with the extremely disharmonious condition of the world Sri Aurobindo says, “War and violent revolution can be eliminated, if we will, though not without immense difficulty, but on the condition that we get rid of the inner causes of war and the consequently accumulating Karma of successful injustice of which violent revolutions are the natural reactions. Otherwise there can be only at best a fallacious period of artificial peace. What was in the past will be shown still in the present and continue to return on us in the future.”

(*War and Self-determination*) He again points out, "So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return." (*War and Self-determination*)

But let us not be disappointed at that. The means of remedy and the words of hope are also there in his sayings, "A cosmos or universe is always a harmony, otherwise it could not exist, it would fly to pieces. But as there are musical harmonies which are built out of discords partly or even predominantly, so the universe is disharmonious in its separate elements—the individual elements are at discord with each other to a large extent; it is only owing to the sustaining Divine Will behind that the whole is still a harmony to those who look at it with a cosmic vision. But it is a harmony in evolution, in progress—that is, all is combined to strive towards a goal which is not yet reached, and the object of our Yoga is to hasten the arrival to this goal. When it is reached there will be a harmony of harmonies substituted for the present harmony built up on discords." (*Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, Second series)

But so long as the condition remains unattained what should be our attitude towards the upheavals of sudden upsetting circumstances? Here is Sri Aurobindo's answer to that—"There is a higher secret Will transcendent behind the play and will of the cosmic forces—a play which is always a mixture of things favourable and things adverse—and it is that Will which one must wait upon and have faith in; but you must not expect to be able always to understand its working." (*Ibid.*)

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

# THE MOTHER OF A MURDERER

## A TRUE STORY

THESE days when all human values seem to be lost, when honour and truth are ridiculed, when the few good men and still fewer idealists are being pushed to the wall, I'd like to tell a story which will strengthen our faith.

A few years back the newspapers were full of a murder case. In the absence of his master a teenage domestic servant had strangled his master's wife and had then decamped with her jewellery. The readers sighed and shuddered for it could have happened to any of them. On returning home the husband found his wife lying dead. He told the police about the young servant whom they had employed only a few days before. The police could find no trace of the young man at the address given by him. The newspapers and magazines kept up the story for a few days because the murder of this innocent young wife had touched even the blasé public and the hardened reporters.

After his cruel deed this young man went back to his native place Lansdowne and started working as a domestic servant with one of my relatives. A model servant, he worked for a few months without rousing any suspicion.

He was the only son of a widow. Both of them were living in a dingy room, his meagre salary their only means of sustenance. One day the lad's mother was rummaging under a heap of sacks and rags when she discovered a locked tin. She was very curious to find out what was in the tin, for surely they didn't have anything of value. Also these hill people used to be very honest and trusting and did not lock anything in general. So her suspicion was roused. When her son went to work she managed to open the tin and was shocked to see the glittering ornaments.

Even she had heard of the Delhi murder. Now she remembered that one day her son had most unexpectedly returned from Delhi near about the time of the murder saying he had been forced to leave his job due to some reason. Now she realised that her son who was her only support might be guilty of murder. This poor, illiterate woman never hesitated. Straightaway she went and informed the police, who at once arrested her son for murder. He was taken to Delhi where the husband of the murdered lady identified him and the ornaments. Faced with overwhelming evidence he confessed, and was awarded the death penalty.

On the day of the hanging somebody asked his mother, "Today your only son will die on the gallows. Don't you regret informing the police? By remaining silent you could have saved him."

With dignity this illiterate woman of India replied:

"My son died on the day he committed the murder."

Alas, nowadays we make celebrities of criminals and murderers and forget the unsung heroes and heroines who hold high the torch of Truth.

SHYAM KUMARI



# NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

## Hybrid Cars and Bikes

VISITORS entering the gigantic freeway system of the city of Los Angeles in California can easily see the main cause of the enormous pollution in that metropolis: there are up to six lanes in one direction at certain junctions, all of them crowded with cars caught in an eternal rush hour. Some of the strictest environmental laws on earth are nowadays being passed in this State in an effort to limit the ecological disaster and eventually overcome it. Thus, it has been decided that from 1998 two per cent of all new cars admitted to traffic must be totally "clean", without any exhaust gas, and five years later ten per cent. This is the hour of the electric car, because no model with conventional petrol engines can fulfill those conditions. The three major American car companies have therefore planned to spend jointly around one billion dollars for the development of a high-tech battery, the main element of an efficient e-car.

The best available batteries today allow a range of up to 200 km, which is too little for a large number of drivers.\* Therefore, as a temporary compromise, General Motors is developing a hybrid, the HX3, which combines the e-car with the petrol engine. This model is basically an e-car getting its energy from batteries, but the latter can be recharged at any time, also while driving, so that the range is practically unlimited. The petrol engine is designed to work with a constant speed of 2500 revolutions per minute (which reduces the emissions) and feeds the batteries providing energy for two electric engines fixed at the front wheels. 60PS can propel the car to a maximum speed of 160 km/h, although its weight is no less than 1800 kg. The feeling of driving is said to be similar to that in a tram: there is no gear shift, no clutch, no idle running. Whenever the brake is applied, the energy generated is fed back into the batteries. This model still has toxic emissions, but their level is so low that it might be well below the limit to be fixed in future by several U.S. States.

\*

The bicycle is naturally the best vehicle, from the ecological point of view, although for many users it has a limited range and causes strain in long-distance riding or hillside areas. The Hercules company, Nürnberg, has created now a hybrid which looks exactly like a bike, but has a battery in a small basket fixed above the front wheel as well as a tiny, covered motor, hardly visible at the rear wheel. You have a choice of either moving the pedals or riding with battery

\* See also my article on "Solar Cars" in the issue of November '90

power or combining both of them. The battery by itself can take you to a distance of about 25 km and will be recharged within 4½ hours. Whatever procedure you choose, the vehicle operates without emissions and is also relatively inexpensive in energy costs. In Germany, 8 complete re-chargings would cost about 0.40 DM, the price of a roll or bun in a bakery shop. In fact, this bike could be the ideal two-wheeler for many Aurovilians making frequent trips to Pondy: in the morning you can go pedalling, as a good exercise, whereas returning in the noon heat you take support from that little power package fixed right below the handle-bar. And if you do the re-charging with solar energy, your eco-conscience will be as clean as can be.

Sources: *Der Stern* (25-4-91); an advertisement of HERCULES "Electra", Postf. 3336, 8500 Nurnberg.

## A PLANNED LIFE\*

### A REVIEW ARTICLE

MANY books have been written about Albert Schweitzer. The most notable in English thus far has been George Seaver's, which was published in 1947. James Brabazon, in his *Albert Schweitzer: A Comprehensive Biography* has one considerable advantage over Mr. Seaver, and he makes full use of it. He is able to give an account of the last twenty years of Schweitzer's life, and this account is notable because it deals with two extraordinary phenomena. The first was the second and tremendous flowering of the already great Schweitzer fame after he had been isolated from the world by the Second World War. This flowering culminated in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953. The second was what Mr. Brabazon calls the "crack in the myth" which began also in 1963 with the publication in the *News Chronicle* of three critical articles by James Cameron.

Then followed the great debate, which has continued, though with less intensity, to the present day. What sort of man was Schweitzer? Did he love humanity and dislike people? Was he the most self-centred of men? Was he, who had devoted his life to the service of Africa, really anti-black? How did he reconcile his reverence for life with his often expressed contempt for black people? Was his hospital inexcusably dirty, or was he right in thinking that chromium plate and stainless steel had no place in the life of the people of the Gabon?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Rabbi Leo Baeck, one of the heroes of the Nazi concentration camps, who powerfully affected me when I met him in 1946, said that Schweitzer's greatest achievement was his own personality. He was, like Knut Hamsun's Isak in *Growth of the Soul*, a "barge of a man". He was indeed like a barge, massive, powerful, lacking in grace, not easily manoeuvrable. His self-containedness could be overwhelming, even terrifying. Yet he could charm too. He could not only charm, he could command devotion.

His two "archangels", Mathile Kottman and Ali Silver, worshipped him. Mathile worshipped him for forty years, and she was no ordinary woman. When his end was drawing near, Ali Silver moved into his room "to be near him at all times". She was no ordinary woman either. And this somehow proves that he was no ordinary man.

One is attracted and one is repelled. One admires and condemns. Yet neither will do for a judgment. How can one remain repelled by a man who as a boy was put by nature into an ecstasy? who gave up the popular sport of baiting the Jewish pedlar Mausche? who had his own private prayer for "all things that have breath"?

He was intensely reserved, but as a boy decided that reserve was incom-

\* James Brabazon *Albert Schweitzer*, 509 pp., Gollancz £ 6 95

patible with his convictions about the unity of all life. He actually set out to be warmer. His pent-up nature found ecstatic expression in music.

Although he never really broke through the reserve that separated him from his mother, as a schoolboy he gave coaching in mathematics in order to be able to send her and his sister for a holiday to Switzerland. If any young man ever planned his life, it was he. He decided that for all the good things of his life "he owed something to somebody". At the age of twenty-one he decided to live till thirty for art and science, and after that to give himself "to the direct service of humanity".

Rabbi Baeck certainly came near to the truth when he said that Schweitzer's greatest achievement was himself. Even if one did not always like this achievement, one had to admit that it was considerable. And it was made all the more so because it achieved the reconciliation of incompatibles within an undoubted kind of integrity. Schweitzer once said of himself that he had "the heart of a dove inside the hide of a hippopotamus".

Mr. Brabazon calls him a religious genius. I would not go so far. But he boldly rejected the hallowed dogmas of Christianity, even the belief in Christ's resurrection, yet claimed that his spirit lived on. Schweitzer did what many Christians have done; he held on to his belief in a spiritual power, but rejected all attempts to prove it. He said: "There are two sorts of Christians—the dogmatic and the undogmatic. The latter follow Jesus and accept none of the doctrines laid down by the early Church or any other Church. That's the sort of Christian I am." He put all this into striking words in Amsterdam in 1927, fourteen years after he had gone to Lambarene. "Why did I go to Africa?" And after a pause he gave the answer: "Because my master told me to." He knew that faith is childlike.

In June 1913 Schweitzer, now a doctor of philosophy, a licentiate in theology, a doctor of medicine, and an authoritative interpreter of Bach, married Nurse Hélène Bresslau, and they set sail for Cape Lopez in Africa. After misgivings about his theology, the Paris Mission Society had accepted him as a medical missionary. He undertook not to preach, to be as dumb as a carp. From Cape Lopez they sailed 100 miles up the Ogowe river, to the village Lambarene, meaning "Let us try". Then they travelled an hour by canoe to Andende, the mission station, on the edge of the primeval forest.

Schweitzer was entranced by the sound of the children's evening and early morning hymns. But the heat was stifling. It was a country that had been made spiritless by heat and cannibalism and the slave trade. There was every disease except cancer and appendicitis. The people flocked to the new doctor but there was no hospital. Schweitzer started his work in a hen-house. He wanted buildings, but the idleness of the builders infuriated him. He took the spade himself and the "foreman lay in the shade of a tree and occasionally threw us an encouraging word".

But he did not go back to Europe in despair. Instead he wrote an essay, "Social Problems in the Forest." The African would not work, not because he was lazy, but because he was a free man. He did not need money, but if he did, then he would work. Away from his family he degenerated. Educated Africans became alienated from their people. Education should start with industry and agriculture, not books. Polygamy suited the conditions and was not to be condemned. Schweitzer did not envisage social equality, and coined the formula: "I am your brother, it is true, but your elder brother." Mr. Brabazon says that Schweitzer was running a hospital, and needed authority; but he adds that Schweitzer needed authority everywhere. "His paternalism, if we must use the word, was not towards the blacks only, but towards everyone."

Here is one of the astonishing paradoxes. James Cameron later said that Schweitzer spoke of the Africans "like a Kenya settler". Yet no one has written more penetratingly about colonialism. He wrote that the trader and the planter in their search for profit

are for ever dependent on men who cannot share the responsibility that weighs on them, who only give just so much return of labour as the others can force out of them.... In this daily and hourly contest with the child of nature every white man is continually in danger of gradual moral ruin....

As Mr. Brabazon says, "beyond the blame is the tragedy".

It was in 1927 that Schweitzer burst into world fame. He was showered with honours, his presence had "terrific impact", women were ready to devote their lives to him. In 1929 H el ene returned to Europe. Her health was bad, and the deference shown to Schweitzer began increasingly to exasperate her. She had to pay the price of her husband's self-containedness. The fame flared up again after the Second World War. *Life* speculated that he might be the "greatest man in the world", which made him furious. The Bostonian Arnold wrote in the Lambarene visitors' book that he was the "greatest soul in Christendom" and Schweitzer crossed it out. But he shouted at his splendid nurse Trudi Bochsler, "Don't you know you're talking to Albert Schweitzer?"

After the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953 came the "crack in the myth". James Cameron of the *News Chronicle* said that the hospital was a "place of surpassing ugliness", that it was "even dangerous, existing solely as a frame for his immense ego". Cameron said Schweitzer had behaved badly to H el ene and to his daughter Rhena. Mr. Brabazon dismisses this as "hearsay reporting", but he says much the same thing himself.

Mr. Brabazon describes many of the books about Schweitzer as hagiographies, but his own book is not without that kind of bias. He says that Cameron's understanding of Schweitzer "was far from complete". But John Gunther made similar criticisms. He described the hospital as "the most unkempt place of its kind I saw in all Africa". Dr. Stanley Browne, an expert on

leprosy, pronounced it a disgrace. Mr. Brabazon ascribed his criticism to the fact that leprosy was his speciality and that Lambarene "was not concentrated on that one thing".

Mr. Brabazon's defence of Schweitzer's treatment of his labourers is another defect in a biography good enough for such lapses to be regretted. He defends Schweitzer's occasional blows with the argument that it is not the visitor's reaction that is important, but the reaction of the blacks, and "they knew. . . that the ability to give or take blows without rancour is a mark of comradeship". Mr. Brabazon does not say where he learned this particular dogma Schweitzer said, and truly, that the doctors and Nurse Kottman "are really so overwhelmed with work that the humanity cannot come out properly". Behind this blame there also appears to be some element of tragedy.

Mr. Brabazon's defence of the hospital is more soundly based. Schweitzer refused many gifts of expensive equipment. Many eminent mission doctors have agreed with him that the hospital must not seem an alien world to the humble sick. Their happiness is more important to their recovery than any hygiene. Dr. Anthony Barker, of the famous Charles Johnson Hospital in Zululand, did not mind a bit of honest dirt, but the operating theatre had to be spotless.

More difficult to understand is Schweitzer's rejection of the request of his pathologist daughter Rhena for running water. And why did he not train any nurses in fifty years? Were the girls of the Ogowe untrainable? Would the training of nurses not have been a gift to Africa even more important than the treatment of leprosy?

It must not be supposed that these criticisms affect the claim of the book to be a comprehensive biography. It is not only comprehensive, it is an indispensable addition to the Schweitzer library. Mr. Brabazon has placed us all in his debt.

One could not conclude without reference to the phrase that suddenly "flashed upon" Schweitzer's mind in 1915—"Reverence for Life". It supplied for him what evolutionary theory lacked—a morality. It offered a way out of the insoluble predicament, that one could not reconcile God the Father with God the Creator. Mr. Brabazon says that reverence for life now took for Schweitzer the place of Christianity.

A lover of Francis of Assisi would readily accept reverence for life as a sublime principle. But he would find it difficult to allow it to replace the great commandments. Francis knew as well as any that there was a wound in the creation, and he prayed to be made the instrument for its healing. In his own way Schweitzer did the same, but he would not have set himself up against Francis. He had a reverence for the Buddha but said of him, "He was no Francis of Assisi." And he certainly would have said that neither was he.

John Gunther's account of Lambarene closes with an account of how one night he watched Schweitzer play his battered old piano in the silence of the

jungle, and he wrote, “this crusty old Bismarck of the spirit, this magnificent tyrant with a heart of gold” Bismarck, yes. But “heart of gold” does not seem an adequate way to describe the interior workings of this barge of a man.

ALAN PATON

(With acknowledgments to the *Times Literary Supplement*, December 24, 1976, p 1603)

# WHEN A POET TALKS ON POETRY\*

## A REVIEW ARTICLE

K. D. SETHNA, a great living mystic poet, has also written prose of a rare status. Now as the *Talks on Poetry* is out, another facet of his talents is revealed to us. The book is high teaching and high poetry-criticism rolled into one. The *Publishers' Introduction* rightly claims: "Talking on poetry is best done if the talker is not only a critic but also a poet." That is why K. D. Sethna was appointed lecturer in poetry soon after the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education had been founded. When Sethna expressed his wish to teach according to his inspiration the Mother said: "Then I shall be with you." He taught for nearly two years without opening a single book in the classroom or consulting any notes. The talks were meant for a group of students starting their university career. However, Sethna had asked the Mother to let him admit anyone who wanted to attend it. The Mother consented. As a result visiting professors dropped in, students from other classes came whenever possible, adult Ashramites had also had access to the class.

Linguistics, a misused theory, is a dangerous disease in today's literary criticism. There are other serious dangers in the frame of structuralism, deconstruction and other theories which threaten to computerise literary criticism. Sethna for the first time shows how an acceptable linguistics can be fused with the study of rhetoric. The book is a model blend of the two principles.

The teacher as critic clarifies Sri Aurobindo's view that there is a poet in each of us. He tells the aspirants that poets have often to live on other poets. "And most poets draw a quickening spark from great poems when their own creative fire sinks a little."(3-4) He believes that there are a hundred ways of seeing and feeling and the intuitive way creates poetry. The practising poet tells us about the secret process of creation "The beautiful vibrations result by virtue of an inner harmony seized by the poet, a special thrill of experience, a special movement of the being in the shape of inner vision and inner emotion: that thrill and movement translates itself, in a successful poem, into the sound-arrangement of words, the powerful yet measured music of verbal rhythm."(13)

Poetry is produced by a cumulative, collective effect. Although fully aware of his high status as a poet, Sethna exhibits his broad outlook when he says, "Poetry is of an endless diversity and we shall lose much if we are too choosy." (20) He links up some phrases of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* to vivify for us the principles of high poetry—and sums up. "Poetry is primarily a speech of the soul—not the mind's exclamation, not the cry of the life-force, not the lifting of the body's voice" (22) He clarifies further his Master's statements on Words-

\* *Talks on Poetry* by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1989 Price Rs 110



worth, stressing how the teacher affected the poet Wordsworth. (67-68)

The book contains interpretative criticism of the highest order. Let us see his comments on the opening of *Savitri*.

The hour is of dawn-break, when the mind hovers as if on a meeting-point of the physical world and some wonderful Beyond whose secret seems to shine upon us for a while till common day glares out again. Sri Aurobindo describes the slow tentative process of light taking a revelatory shape in the dim sky. (82)

But this is not the very best. That comes when Sethna explains the rose symbol from page 142 onwards. Perhaps there is no greater critical prose after Sri Aurobindo in the Indo-Anglian scene. A sample from the illumined portions will show why we, who have read Sethna a little, speak so exuberantly about his prose and poetry. "This marvellous inner reality, this flower of flawlessness rooted in a depth of dream and adoration, is hurt by the varied cruelty, clumsiness and carelessness marking so many processes of time." (142) The whole discussion of Sri Aurobindo's *Rose of God* is a masterpiece of intuitive criticism. The linking with Yeats is very apt and illuminating. Sethna experiments with an intuitive language which has a kind of logic. "What about the Rose of Life? If we may go by the suggestions in the poem, it is not something unrelated to the Roses of Power, Light and Bliss. It is characterised as divine Desire that has a smiting drive and comes incarnate: it is also a multiform movement of colourful collectivity and a creator of concordances in a Time-existence made deathless. The smiting drive towards deathless incarnation connects up directly with the infinite force and might and the piercing diamond halo spoken of in the preceding stanza about the Rose of Power, as well as with the 'image of immortality' there." (154)

Much awaited was Sethna's own comment on his famous poem *This Errant Life*. Readers acquainted with his poetry will be interested to see the process of its creation. (97) The characterisings of Piquancy (110, 116), Melopoeia (105), Phanopoeia (195), Logopoeia (272) and Aposiopesis (281) are not just informative, they speak of the perceptive critic who is also a scholar. The talk on pure poetry includes Mallarmé's and Verlaine's ideas of pure poetry. In a listing style Sethna informs us of Sri Aurobindo's characterising of the planes from which poetry originates. (362) The fresh look on the poetry of *Macbeth* is an added attraction of the book.

At quite a few places Sethna combines rhetoric and linguistics in a remarkable way (see pp. 25, 28, 77, 78, 79, 108 and 109).

The unusual verb "incarnadine" is, of course, the centre-piece here. It signifies: "to dye flesh-coloured or crimson." It has a strongly melodious

effect on the ear and creates a vivid impression on the eye. But its purpose goes far beyond all this. Macbeth has let his imagination soar. He has put, in rivalry with the bloodiness of his human hand, the power of "all great Neptune's ocean", and he has increased the audacity of his counterpoise by throwing into relief the greatness of the ocean with the help of the thirteen-lettered epithet "multitudinous".... (77)

Sri Aurobindo once said that laughter is not forbidden in heaven. He was also afraid that this earth was already imbalanced because of the lack of it. Sethna's book is full of humorous anecdotes, references and suggestions (pp. 19, 40, 44, 60, 61, 85, 86-87, 90, 116). Once an editor of a newspaper received a piece bearing the title "Why do I live?" The editor replied under the title: "Because you sent your poem from a safe distance and did not personally hand it to me."

Such books have become so rare in the literary world that people have forgotten their taste. One wonders why the leading magazines of India do not highlight the works of K. D. Sethna.

GAUTAM GHOSAL

## *Students' Section*

### THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventieth Seminar

21 April 1991

“WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN  
SRI AUROBINDO'S YOGA AND OTHER SPIRITUAL PATHS?”

Integral Yoga and Tantra (2)

Speech by Srijita Roy

*(Continued from the issue of October 1991)*

I HAVE already explained in a brief outline the main points of similarity and difference between the philosophic principles of Tantra and of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. I shall now make a comparison between the practical methods followed by these two systems to achieve their aim. Some similarities and differences between their methods are indicated in the passages already quoted by me. I shall now detail some more

As Sri Aurobindo has stated, the Tantric system itself is partly synthetic; so it includes in its methods some of the processes of Hathayoga, Rajayoga and the triple Path. But its main preoccupation is “to raise nature in man into manifest power of spirit”<sup>1</sup>, and for this purpose the chief process it employs is the awakening of the Kundalini, the secret energy of Nature, and raising it upwards through the six chakras till it joins with the Brahman in the seventh centre at the top of the head. Sri Aurobindo has described this process in very vivid terms. He writes:

“The whole energy of the soul is not at play in the physical body and life... But all the while the supreme energy is there, asleep; it is said to be coiled up and slumbering like a snake,—therefore it is called the *kundalinī śakti*,—in the lowest of the chakras, in the *mūlādhāra*. When by Pranayama the division between the upper and lower Prana currents in the body is dissolved, this Kundalini is struck and awakened, it uncoils itself and begins to rise upward like a fiery serpent breaking open each lotus as it ascends until the Shakti meets the Purusha in the *brahmarandhra* in a deep Samadhi of union.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 21), p 585

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* , pp 515-16

I am tempted here to read some lines from *Savitri* in which Sri Aurobindo has depicted this whole process in unforgettable words:

“Out of the Inconscient’s soulless mindless Night  
A flaming serpent rose released from sleep.  
It rose billowing its coils and stood erect  
And climbing mightily stormily on its way  
It touched her centres with its flaming mouth:  
As if a fiery kiss had broken their sleep,  
They bloomed and laughed surcharged with light and bliss;  
Then at the crown it joined the Eternal’s space ...”<sup>1</sup>

To put it in less symbolic language, this whole process “means that the real energy of our being is lying asleep and inconscient in the depths of our vital system, and is awakened by the practice of Pranayama. In its expansion it opens up all the centres of our psychological being in which reside the powers and the consciousness of what would now be called perhaps our subliminal self; therefore as each centre of power and consciousness is opened up, we get access to successive psychological planes and are able to put ourselves in communication with the worlds or cosmic states of being which correspond to them; all the psychic powers abnormal to physical man, but natural to the soul develop in us. Finally, at the summit of the ascension, this arising and expanding energy meets with the superconscient self which sits concealed behind and above our physical and mental existence; this meeting leads to a profound Samadhi of union in which our waking consciousness loses itself in the superconscient.”<sup>2</sup>

This is the chief method of the Tantra and the results obtained by its practice. In the Integral Yoga all these results are achieved in its process of transformation but not by following any set fixed mechanical method as in Tantra. The Integral Yoga develops its own forms and processes. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

“The process of the Kundalini awakened and rising through the centres as also the purification of the centres is a Tantric knowledge. In our yoga there is no willed process of the purification and opening of the centres, no awakening of the Kundalini by a set process either. Another method is used, but still there is the ascent of the consciousness from and through the different levels to join the higher consciousness above; there is the opening of the centres and the planes (mental, vital, physical) which these centres command, there is the descent

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 29), p 528

<sup>2</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 20), p 516

which is the main key of the spiritual transformation. Therefore, there is...a Tantric knowledge behind the process of transformation.”<sup>1</sup>

Some more points of similarity and difference between the Tantric method and the method of the Integral Yoga are mentioned by Sri Aurobindo in the following passages:

“In our yoga there is no willed opening of the chakras, they open of themselves by the descent of the Force. In the Tantric discipline they open from down upwards, the Muladhara first; in our yoga, they open from up downward. But the ascent of the force from the Muladhara does take place.”<sup>2</sup>

“The ascension and descent of the Force in this yoga accomplishes itself in its own way without any necessary reproduction of the details laid down in the Tantric books. Many become conscious of the centres but others simply feel the ascent or descent in a general way or from level to level rather than from centre to centre, that is, they feel the Force descending first to the head, then to the heart, then to the navel and still below. It is not at all necessary to become aware of the deities in the centres according to the Tantric description, but some feel the Mother in the different centres. In these things our sadhana does not cleave to the knowledge given in the books, but only keeps to the central truth behind and realises it independently without reference to the old forms and symbols. The centres themselves have a different interpretation here from that given in the books of the Tantriks.”<sup>3</sup>

It is thus evident that the process of transformation which forms the basic method of the Integral Yoga includes in its scope all the results of the Tantric discipline but obtains them by a freer and more flexible working and carries them far beyond to their highest achievement.

We can also with full justification say that the Integral Yoga does with the Tantric system what it does with the Vedic and Vedantic systems, both of which separately represent two aspects of the One Truth. To put it in Sri Aurobindo's words:

“Veda and Vedanta are one side of the One Truth; Tantra with its emphasis on Shakti is another; in this yoga all sides of the Truth are taken up, not in the systematic forms given them formerly but in their essence, and carried to the fullest and highest significance. The Vedanta deals more with the principles and essentials of the divine knowledge... Tantra deals more with forms and processes

<sup>1</sup> *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed, Vol 22), pp 73-4

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p 74

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp 74-5

and organised powers—all these could not be taken as they were, but the ascent of the consciousness through the centres and other Tantric knowledge are there behind the process of transformation to which so much importance is given by me—also the truth that nothing can be done except through the force of the Mother.”<sup>1</sup>

The last sentence in the above quotation—“nothing can be done except through the force of the Mother”—states the central point of similarity between Tantra and the Integral Yoga. All the Vedantic schools of Indian philosophy and Yoga, including the Gita, mostly emphasize the Purusha aspect of the Divine and give little or subordinate importance to the Shakti aspect because their aim is complete liberation from Nature. But Tantra does the opposite and emphasizes the Shakti aspect and tries to arrive at the highest realisation by mastering Nature. Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga admits both these principles as equal aspects of the One Reality but, even in doing so, it insists on complete surrender to the Divine Mother because that alone can bring the complete realisation of integral transformation. In this way it corresponds to the Tantric emphasis on Shakti without, of course, raising her to a status higher than that of the Purusha as the Tantra tries to do. In the Integral Yoga both are equal and complementary aspects of One Reality indispensable for manifestation and transformation.

I end my speech with a few lines from *Savitri* which reveal the central importance of surrender to the Divine Mother in the Integral Yoga:

“Lay all on her; she is the cause of all.

.....

If this is she of whom the world has heard,  
Wonder no more at any happy change.  
Each easy miracle of felicity  
Of her transmuting heart the alchemy is.”<sup>2</sup>

(Concluded)

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* , p 73

<sup>2</sup> *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 29), p 723