

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JULY 1991

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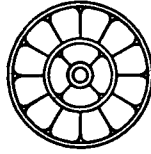
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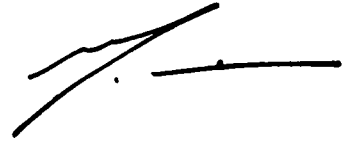
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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TWO IMPORTANT STATEMENTS BY M. ANDRÉ MORISSET, THE MOTHER'S SON

(Here are the concluding portions of the letters the Mother's son wrote to a couple of non-Ashramite friends several years after the events to which they refer. We are reproducing them from photocopies in which André Morisset's signature appears. The photocopies were kindly sent from Switzerland to the Editor of Mother India by his friend Herr Carlo Schuller. They throw authoritative light on two events that have been topics of discussion for a long time, particularly the topic of the Mother's departure from amongst us on 17 November 1973.)

J'ajouterai simplement que j'ai vu Mère tous les jours depuis mai 1973, quand elle a cessé de voir les autres et que j'ai assisté à son retrait qu'elle avait décidé depuis le mois de septembre. septembre 28, 1978

(I shall simply add that I've seen the Mother daily since May 1973 when she stopped seeing others and that I have been present at her withdrawal which she had decided upon since the month of September.)

Ce que Mère a dit à Satprem en 1967 et 1973 m'a été aussi dit en des termes presque identiques et j'ai la conviction d'avoir bien suivi ses instructions au moment où elle a quitté son corps. Par conséquent pour moi la question est close et tout réveil de cette question est simplement la manifestation d'un esprit insuffisamment informé. novembre 23, 1979

(What Mother said to Satprem in 1967 and 1973 has also been said to me in almost identical terms and I am convinced that at the moment when she left her body I've followed her instructions well. Consequently the question is settled for me and all revival of this question is simply the manifestation of an insufficiently informed mind.)

EDITOR'S NOTE

My friend Carlo Schuller has written to me while sending the above passages: "Around October 1973 a French disciple quoted André as having told him: 'Mère déjà n'est plus parmi nous.' ['The Mother is no longer amongst us.'] A Swiss disciple remembers André having earlier expressed his respect for Nolini as the most advanced yogi of the Ashram and strongly suspects that André shared his knowledge about the Mother's decision with Nolini. For obvious reasons the two men kept their knowledge to themselves. Had they breathed even a single word, it would have raised a tremendous commotion before the Mother's passing as well as after. In fact it was only a full five years later that André made his only known statement about what the Mother had confided to him "

THE YOGA, THE DIVINE, THE REVERSAL OF CONSCIOUSNESS

FROM THE MOTHER'S TALK TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON
8 JUNE 1955

Sweet Mother, here it is written [by Sri Aurobindo]: "This liberation, perfection, fullness too must not be pursued for our own sake, but for the sake of the Divine " But isn't the sadhana we do done for ourselves?

BUT he stresses precisely that. It is simply in order to stress the point. It means that all this perfection which we are going to acquire is not for a personal and selfish end, it is in order to be able to manifest the Divine, it is to put at the service of the Divine We do not pursue this development with a selfish intention of personal perfection; we pursue it because the divine Work has to be accomplished.

But why do we do this divine Work? It is to make ourselves...

No, not at all! It is because that's the divine Will It is not at all for a personal reason, it must not be that It is because it's the divine Will and it's the divine Work.

So long as a personal aspiration or desire, a selfish will, get mingled in it, it always creates a mixture and it's not exactly an expression of the divine Will. The only thing which must count is the Divine, His Will, His manifestation, His expression. One is here for that, one is that, and nothing else. And so long as there is a feeling of self, of the ego, the person, which enters, well, this proves that one is not yet what one ought to be, that's all. I don't say that this can be done overnight but still this indeed is the truth.

It is just because even in this field, the spiritual field, there are far too many people (I could say even the majority of those who take to the spiritual life and do yoga), far too many of these who do it for personal reasons, all kinds of personal reasons: some because they are disgusted with life, others because they are unhappy, others still because they want to know more, others because they want to become spiritually great, others because they want to learn things which they may be able to teach others; indeed there are a thousand personal reasons for taking up yoga. But the simple fact of giving oneself to the Divine so that the Divine takes you and makes of you what He wills, and this in all its purity and constancy, well, there are not many who do that and yet this indeed is the truth, and with this one goes straight to the goal and never risks making mistakes. But all the other motives are always mixed, tainted with ego; and naturally they can lead you here and there, very far from the goal also

But that kind of feeling that you have only one single reason for existence, one single goal, one single motive, the entire, perfect, complete consecration to the Divine to the point of not being able to distinguish yourself from Him any longer, to be Himself entirely, completely, totally without any personal reaction intervening, this is the ideal attitude; and besides, it is the only one which makes it possible for you to go forward in life and in the work, absolutely protected from everything and protected from yourself which is of all dangers the greatest for you—there is no greater danger than the self (I take “self” in the sense of an egoistic self).

This is what Sri Aurobindo meant there, nothing else.

Mother, you said just now that we must do everything for the Divine.

Yes. .

But why does the Divine want to manifest Himself on earth in this chaos?

Because this is why He has created the earth, not for any other motive; the earth is He Himself in a deformation and He wants to establish it back again in its truth. Earth is not something separated from Him and alien to Him. It is a deformation of Himself which must once again become what it was in its essence, that is, the Divine

Then why is He a stranger to us?

But He is not a stranger, my child. You fancy that He is a stranger, but He is not, not in the least. He is the essence of your being—not at all alien. You may not know Him, but He is not a stranger; He is the very essence of your being. Without the Divine you would not exist. Without the Divine you could not exist even for the millionth part of a second. Only, because you live in a kind of false illusion and deformation, you are not conscious. You are not conscious of yourself, you are conscious of something which you think to be yourself, but which isn't you.

Then what is myself, Sweet Mother?

The Divine!

There is an enormous wastage. All that I receive from you is lost all the time. Apparently everything is all right, and this continues, and it can so continue eternally. But if it has to change it will be a revolution, immediately, and that is why one doesn't want to risk it. There is hypocrisy: everything is all right,

*but it isn't true, there is an enormous loss of consciousness.
Is it possible to change this at once, change this consciousness?*

Change?...

(Pavitra) *Change this, change this consciousness at once?*

Immediately?

(Pavitra) *In a few minutes. One feels that it will be a revolution to change that.*

Yes, but a revolution can occur in half a second; it can also take years, even centuries, and even many lives. It can be done in a second.

One can do it. Precisely, when one has this inner reversal of consciousness, in one second everything, everything changes ..precisely this bewilderment of being able to think that what one is, what one considers as oneself is not true, and that what is the truth of one's being is something one doesn't know. You see, this should have been the normal reaction, the one she had, of saying, "But then what is myself? If what I feel as myself is an illusory formation and not the truth of my being, then what is myself?" For that she doesn't know. And so when one asks the question like that...

There is a moment—because it is a question which becomes more and more intense and more and more acute—when you have even the feeling, precisely, that things are strange, that is, they are not real; a moment comes when this sensation that you have of yourself, of being yourself, becomes strange, a kind of sense of unreality. And the question continues coming up: "But then, what is myself?" Well, there is a moment when it comes up with so much concentration and such intensity that with this intensity of concentration suddenly there occurs a reversal, and then, instead of being on this side you are on that side, and when you are on that side everything is very simple; you understand, you know, you are, you live, and then you see clearly the unreality of the rest, and this is enough.

You see, one may have to wait for days, months, years, centuries, lives, before this moment comes. But if one intensifies his aspiration, there is a moment when the pressure is so great and the intensity of the question so strong that something turns over in the consciousness, and then this is absolutely what one feels: instead of being here one is there, instead of seeing from outside and seeking to see within, one is inside; and the minute one is within, absolutely everything changes, completely, and all that seemed to him true, natural, normal, real, tangible, all that, immediately,—yes, it seems to him very grotesque, very queer, very unreal, quite absurd; but one has touched something

which is supremely true and eternally beautiful, and this one never loses again.

Once the reversal has taken place, you can glide into an external consciousness, not lose the ordinary contact with the things of life, but that remains and it never moves. You may, in your dealings with others, fall back a little into their ignorance and blindness, but there is always something there, living, standing up within, which does not move any more, until it manages to penetrate everything, to the point where it is over, where the blindness disappears for ever. And this is an absolutely tangible experience, something more concrete than the most concrete object, more concrete than a blow on your head, something more real than anything whatever.

This is why I always say...when people ask me how one may know whether he is in contact with his psychic being or how one may know whether he has found the Divine, well, it makes me laugh; for when it happens to you it is over, you can no longer ask any questions, it is done; you do not ask how it happens, it is done.

(Questions and Answers 1955, pp. 191-96)

SOME COMMENTS BY SRI AUROBINDO

ON HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA'S POETRY WRITTEN UNDER HIS INSPIRATION IN THE ASHRAM FROM 1933 TO 1935

Harin,

I didn't find the particular influence of any English poet; the critics are always trying to make these rapprochements but I think there is very little truth in it. You resemble Shelley only in the spontaneous lyrical flow, and in the mystic tendency but your temperament is different from his and your mystic tendency is of a different kind, so too in you the power of poetic vision has no resemblance to his. The only point of resemblance to Keats is the richness of colour, more orientally bold and vivid in your poetry than in his but here again there is no true similarity in the temperament or the vision. Blake you resemble only in the fact that you have the opening on occult planes and receive freely their images, that at once produces the fundamental likeness which the intellect feels so easily between all such poetry, but once again the worlds he was in touch with and the worlds from which you receive are not the same, these comparisons are critical pot-shots that go wide of the real mark and hit something else.

You are being made an unusually effective instrument for the expression of spiritual truth and experience in poetry—which fulfils the prediction I made about you in reviewing your first book.

It is very seldom, I should think, that one who has fulfilled himself as a poet takes the useless trouble of doing the same thing over again, in his next life ..so with great musicians, great artists etc. Of course it does happen sometimes, but only for some exceptional reason. A poet who has not fulfilled himself in poetry may of course return to it, once, twice or more often till it is done. One already fulfilled, if reborn, would perhaps have the faculty, but he would either not care to use it, or it would be only a byplay or one side of his life—the main stream would run in a new direction. The soul in rebirth does not repeat itself *ad infinitum*. It grows, it develops, it tries new things in order to attain more and more fullness of expression and means for manifestation of the spirit.

*

The lyrics of the *Dark Well* reach the extreme of lyrical beauty. The vision seems to have reached so much perfection that it expresses itself in words that appear not so much a form given to it as its natural body. They seem to exist or be self-born rather than to have been written

*

The poems for the *Dark Well* have the quiver of the light that comes from the depths of inner vision.

*

The spiritual poet is, indeed, there in you firmly seated in the seat of inspiration and becoming more and more perfect in a many-sided way.

*

It seems to me that your poetry is on a rising curve which draws it nearer and nearer to some predestined summit of strength and beauty.

*

These poems create a very distinct advance on the earlier ones in the *Rose of God*; those carried a slight sense of seeking and uncertainty, a new inspiration still feeling after its right diction, force of expression, rhythmic movement, finding them on the whole, but not altogether. Here is in all these respects an assured handling and full values. The new manner is very different from the *Bird of Fire's*—in place of the rush and volume there is a subdued but very full richness of substance and word and phrase. This creates a quite different colour, tone and atmosphere.

*

The poems today are extraordinarily beautiful. To all the qualities that give a sustained level to the other poems there is added that something more which is unanalysable and gives the effect of something absolute—a victorious perfection.

*

These poems are extremely fine. It is an expression always more developed, precise and full and a substance more and more rounded and firm in a sort of concise amplitude that is coming into being. A growing towards a full poetic maturity on a high level is the promise.

*

You succeed almost always in keeping a high level of image, colour and language and it is always expressive of something, not mere word and verse. The only difference is that sometimes it keeps that level and sometimes shoots up into a

strong and clear-cut inevitability. The one positive defect is that sometimes the syntactical construction trails a little, or gets involved and it takes two or three readings to seize the precise significance as a whole

*

Magnificent poems! The idea of “Onward” is most original and beautifully and powerfully worked out. As for the “Master Soul” I do not know how you could think of scrapping it. I have seldom read more noble stanzas than these four
Apart from such lines of exceptional vision as

Where the stars dwindle and time-lustres dim

or

The molten gold of realised dream

and others, all the stanzas are cast in the style of a great nobility and power

These, indeed, are the new qualities that are emerging in your poetry. Beauty and light and colour were there before; but not this sculptured force and height of diction! When all meet together as in “Onward”, the effect is remarkable.

*

Arjava writes most often from the plane of inner thought and occult vision (the plane indicated in Yoga by the forehead centre). As for Harin, I can't say, he varies and most often writes from several planes at a time—so it is impossible to define
(2 12 1933)

*

As for Harin, I never object to what he may invent in language or in grammar, because so much mastery of language carries with it a right to take liberties with it. But I am more severe with myself and others
(25.9 1934)

*

I say that inspiration in poetry is always an uncertain thing (except for a phenomenon like Harin).

*

I do not know to whom you refer as great men here; but Harin is certainly a great poet. So what is the difficulty in recognising his greatness? (2 4.1936)

*

ON HARINDRANATH'S BOOK OF VERSES ENTITLED *HOMEWARD*

There is a sudden and remarkable change in the style, substance and colouring. What strikes me is a rapid flowering of what may be called full ripeness and maturity. An easy and strong mastery of the expressing of the thought, the thought itself striking as something deep and realised, a similar ripeness in the expression of feeling as of one who is no longer subject to his feeling but above it and larger than it. There is also a combination of clear line and fullness of colour and substance that was not there before—not always or with such an assured mastery.

EACH TRYING HARD

EACH trying hard to somehow last
Himself through children left behind
Or works of art or music sweet
Or records made on running feet,
Inventions with a life complete
Or charity to prove him kind.

No man has yet composed a piece
And signed the name of his dearest friend
Or gifted someone else the fame
Of his own record—'twould be fraud!—
Our customs keep us gently awed.
Invent! Survive!—Though life should end.
See hospitals and schools of great acclaim
Charity was—of course—the only aim;
But scan the stones and you will find a name.

But I will do what living *now* demands
And think of nothing to outlive my scene;
And what though I should cease to be
I will have been.

ANON

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

THREE PERSONAL LETTERS

YOUR long-distance call was a unique event in the history of *Mother India*. Never before has any voice from beyond Pondicherry come precisely in reponse to my work in our Monthly Review of Culture with such an irrepressible joy. In more than the sense of sheer surprise the call seemed to arrive “out of the blue”. It was as if Sri Aurobindo, from another world which is yet mindful of earth’s aspiration and effort, had found on earth a receptive soul to transmit his still continuing appreciation of what a child of his had been trying to do ever since February 1949 for a periodical about which he had once said when a carping critic had doubted the authenticity of the views expressed in its pages: “Doesn’t he know that *Mother India* is my paper?”

I have mentioned “Sri Aurobindo”, but I should add “The Mother”. For, the sense of both of them glowed in my being as soon as I realised the wonder of the far-away, along with the happy thrill in the admiring voice. There was not only the communication as of a light of understanding from some height: there was also the communication as of a delight from some depth. And by a coincidence which yet seemed most natural, the voice identified itself as “Aditi”! The grandest conception in the Rigveda—greater than that of Mitra-Varuna or Indra-Agni or Surya-Soma—is the one in which the Rishis bring close to our souls from a rapturous all-ruling remoteness the Mother of the Gods: Aditi, the personification of the Illimitable, the Ultimate. Appropriate here would be those lines from Sri Aurobindo’s poem, “Bride of the Fire”:

Voice of Infinity, sound in my heart,
Call of the One!

Thank you, sweet human namesake of that Mightiness—twice “thank you”, for in the wake of the congratulation on the phone came the letter in symbolic colours: white envelope, pink notepaper, reminding me of that phrase of Sri Aurobindo’s in his poem “Flame-Wind”: “the white and rose of the heart.” Indeed expressive were they of the heart’s inmost qualities—“light and sweetness”, purity of perception and intensity of affection. I am not using these words idly. They correspond to the reality and hit off exactly your letter’s contents. You have not only liked the general sweep of my writings but savoured specific individual parts of them and quoted the turns of phrase that struck you as most true to the various movements of the inner life. Here to be “true” is to be “beautiful”, for the inner life has an enchantment which cannot be caught in language unless the language has a felicitous form. That is why poetry whose concentration is on beauty is best able to convey the richness and harmony

distinguishing spiritual truths. In addition to the acuity of discernment in your letter, there is the wide warmth of it, typical of the soul's gesture which is always in tune with the universal Krishna, the omnipresent Vasudeva who is at once at play with myriads while being felt as each one's special beloved.

It was good to meet your father. Years of distance did not prevent us from getting close immediately. We are running neck and neck in the race to nonagenarianism. I was amazed at the long list of books you had ordered. And it is typical of the bibliophile such as Southey celebrates in the poem from which you have quoted two lines, that you should be happy I increased your list. Three books of mine are still missing because these are out of print: *Sri Aurobindo—the Poet*, *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo* and *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare*. The last one has gone in for a second edition, with an added appendix giving two references I had somehow missed.* This book has been rather popular. I remember that on a visit to Bombay many years ago I had called at a bookshop to inquire how the sale of my productions stood. The owner told me: "One of your books is creating a lot of interest." I asked: "Which one?" He answered: "*Shakespeare on Sri Aurobindo*." I exclaimed: "No wonder! It must surely be the most original book I could ever have written." He nodded with an innocent smile.

I was glad to know of your love of flowers. Lately I have opened in a very concrete way to the influence of leaves and blooms on our mind and heart. The leafy greenery conveys great ease to my heart when trudging with my poor legs from the Ashram gate to the Samadhi puts a strain on me. And the many-coloured many-shaped flowers shoot into me little bursts of joy, bringing a smile to my tense face as it looks forward to my seat in the Ashram courtyard.

I am grateful to Dr. Roerich for the warm regards he has sent through you. I reach out to you with the deepest affection. (10.5.1990)

*

You have been in my heart all these days even though I haven't been able to put my heartbeats in rhythm with the eager play of the typewriter keys.

The lovely feeling of joy rising in you in response to my letter and making you wonder how it comes, "wave after wave, never-ending, ever-growing, from no dramatic outward event, only an inner exultation, an inner celebration"—there cannot be a truer description than this of the authentic soul-movement. That movement is non-effusive yet most intense and does not depend on anything outward, it springs from an eternal source in the infinite self-existence of the Divine in our depths and goes forth to the same limitless reality in the manifested world. A special mark of it is that what is a universal light is known

* Editor's Note: The new edition was out in the middle of last April.

by it also as an individual form of enchanting beauty and ineffable love, a pulsing personal centre whose happy aureole is a light fanning out in all directions. From the very beginning of my stay in the Ashram I have sought to quicken to the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the core of my heart. Although I came to them with a mind keenly interested in spiritual philosophy what had brought me was an inner urge I hardly understood and only knew as something strange within my chest which yearned for an Unknown surpassing every object of my senses and my thought and making nothing worth while unless that Unknown were first found. Again and again I asked the Mother to put her hand on my chest and open up what dimly and dumbly quivered, deep inside, to meet in full the mystery of the endless warmth I felt within her eyes and the vast wisdom I glimpsed within Sri Aurobindo's.

A peculiar sign of "the imprisoned splendour" (Browning's phrase) was that every time I closed my eyes to meditate I got a vague pain in my chest as if something wanted to come out and was balked by a barrier. I spoke to the Mother about the pain. She said. "Don't worry I know what it is. It will pass." A few months later, suddenly I had the sense of a wall breaking down in my chest—and there was instead a shining space, as it were, within which indescribable flames and fragrances sprang up and a wide happiness without a cause pervaded my whole being. I was resting in bed in the afternoon when this opening took place. I lay breathless for a while. The ecstasy was more than one could bear. And when I could cope with the explosion I wished it would go on and on. Of course it could not continue at that pitch. But from that time onward the soul, which had acted from the background and influenced me indirectly, became a part of my conscious life. It used to play temporary hide-and-seek but never more was there a wall between me and this delegate of the Divine. Not that I never went astray. Various parts of my complex being demanded their satisfaction and my will could waver and my steps leave the "sunlit path". This is a strange phenomenon—the unregenerate parts clamouring on one side and on the other the little steady glow exposing their falsity—

A flame that is All,
Yet the touch of a flower—
A Sun grown soft and small.

The last line here reminds me of Newman's hymn which you like so much. The soul could be from day to day the "kindly light" showing us the one step forward needed on our path to perfection. My own favourite hymn is "Abide with me." I remember showing the Mother a combined miniature photograph of her and Sri Aurobindo which I used to carry in my wallet and on the back of which I had written: "Help of the helpless." The Mother was quite interested at this unexpected inscription. But the words expressed my attitude precisely and I

told the Mother that my lame leg made them all the more appropriate. Perhaps I should have quoted those lines of *Savitri*:

...Mind, a glorious traveller in the sky,
Walks lamely on the earth with footsteps slow;
Hardly he can mould the life's rebellious stuff,
Hardly can he hold the galloping hooves of sense.

Anyway, do you know the hymn from which I wrote those words behind my pocket-photo? Three couplets have impressed themselves on my memory:

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide—
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide. ..

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me....

Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Perhaps you know this hymn already? If you don't, get hold of the record giving—as far as I recollect—Dame Melba's or Clara Butt's recitation. It is a very haunting and moving tune.

The temper and tone of the hymn breathe intense aspiration. If the result of such aspiration is to be sought in any words inscribed by a God-worshipper I would pick out those which Longfellow has given us, called "Saint Teresa's Bookmark", evidently a translation of that Saint's own writing:

Let nothing disturb thee,
Nothing affright thee;
All things are passing;
God never changeth;
Patient endurance
Attaineth to all things;
Who God possesseth
In nothing is wanting;
Alone God sufficeth.

When I am with expressions of profound moods—either an exquisite religious urge or a settled mystical state with outflowing benedictions to those who need it yet have not reached its shelter—my mind keeps racing towards analogous utterances. One which Saint Teresa's sense of the all-satisfying plenitude of

God's eternity suggests to me at the moment is a stanza I recall from Emily Bronte. Here we have in a concentrated form a philosophical dictum swept into poetic vision with a passionate severity of what I may term intuitive thought:

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

Perhaps I may round off these literary-spiritual recoveries from my memory with two more. First, a harking backward to the Chāndogya Upanishad's summing up of the human heart's ultimate experience: "There is no happiness in the small. Immensity alone is felicity." Then as the *grand finale* that Mantric line from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, a quintessential pointer to the end of all travail:

Our life's repose is in the Infinite.

Not irrelevant in this context is your question about "longing" and "attachment." It is a crucial question and cuts down to the very first principles of Yoga. Short of doing Yoga, all you say is nothing to be contradicted—and actually you have a natural affinity to the psychic being's turn towards the Divine—one of the prominent signs of its working is a longing for the Beautiful everywhere. You are also on the right track when you say: "Why is attachment to be given up? Isn't the important thing what we are attached to and not attachment itself?" But it is necessary to define "attachment" as well as "the Beautiful". Referring to a line of Sri Aurobindo's poem, "Bride of the Fire", you ask: "Why should 'longing' be sacrificed?" But the whole stanza reads:

Beauty of the Light, surround my life,—
Beauty of the Light!
I have sacrificed longing and parted from grief,
I can bear Thy delight.

The Beauty invoked is that which is a blissful harmonious manifestation of a Supreme Consciousness free from all the shadows and shortcomings of the common objects of human love. Not that these objects are to be disdained and rejected, but the usual way they are approached and valued has to change. They are approached with a "longing" which is bound up with "grief" because they are loved by the divisive ego in us for the limited ego in them and not by the leap of the soul to the sheer soul. There is expectation on our side and, if it is not fulfilled, grief will follow for us—and, if our demand cannot be met by the person whom we love, this person too will grieve, feeling as he must that he has

fallen below our expectation. Wherever any grief is bound up with longing, the joy obtained is limited and non-lasting. There is a greater joy to which Sri Aurobindo points, a joy whose ideal intensity and immensity are not easy to come by and cannot be reached unless we set aside the lesser joys by giving up the all-too-human longing which is intertwined with the ego's suffering grief or inflicting it. More intense and immense, this joy involves not only a higher attuning in us but also a capacity to stand the loss of ordinary joys. Hence the phrase: "I can bear thy delight."

No doubt, Sri Aurobindo does not order us to abandon God's multiple manifestation. There is a value in it and we have to cherish that value, but we have to learn—as the famous exquisite lines of Yeats's have it—to see

In all poor foolish things that live a day
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way.

We may even go further and affirm with two lines of Amal Kiran in a super-Yeatsian mood:

The Eternal Beauty is a wanderer
Hungry for lips of clay.

But now an important qualification comes in, which is hinted at by your query: "Isn't the important thing what we are attached to and not attachment itself?" Here the thing to be attached to is not "all poor foolish things" in their transience or "lips of clay" in their earthiness but the Eternal Beauty itself in its own direct substance, its own intrinsic form recognised as being at the same time those short-lived moulds and beyond them. If the sense of the "beyond" does not suffuse the sense of the "within", we have not felt wholly and truly the "longing for the Beautiful". And here the point about "attachment" gets rightly answered. To be attached to the Eternal Beauty must imply a deep degree of non-attachment to its temporary or restricted manifestation. That is why in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, much stress is laid on what he terms "equality", which we may ordinarily designate "equanimity". By equanimity we have an equal attitude towards all events—a facing of everything with an unaltered peace. No reaction of a personal nature to any impact from outside—no excited rejoicing, no upsetting distress, no impulsive anger. By this constant composure we acquire a distance from the entire play of time and, while discerning the Divine everywhere, remain uncaught by the *nāma-rūpa* under which the Supreme manifests. The grip of "name and form" loosens and we are free to meet the Reality transcending them. Equanimity in the Aurobindonian Yoga does not dry up the heart. Against a background of vast illumined tranquillity the heart keeps functioning but now serving like a centre of pure light and a core of clear warmth

to that background. Only thus can we be human with all the tenderness possible, all the attention needed by the call of earth and yet know the inner liberty without which we are ill-equipped to experience the touch of the Eternal Beauty and be its instruments in a fallible and mutable world.

As for your inquiry about “the breath of a sevenfold noon” in Sri Aurobindo’s “Flame-Wind”, I suppose the adjective “sevenfold” which puzzles you is an intensive word, signifying “multiple” and suggesting “plenary” in a concrete fashion. In the ancient world-vision, “seven” was an important number there were seven planes comprising the whole creation and there were seven rishis covering the whole gamut of possible acquisition of wisdom. A noon of power raised to the *n*th degree is brought by the breath. Passion, dynamism, *éclat*, the mind and the vital force in extreme action are conjured up, overwhelming whatever the heart may have to say, the heart with its quiet yet profound “rose and white” of love.

I am glad that Dr. Roerich is interested in my comments. Did I write to you that I was a great admirer of his father and have seen his own work with deep pleasure? Both father and son possess considerable insight into the hidden soul of things. I had a passing acquaintance with Dr. Roerich’s wife Devika Rani when she used to act in the early Indian films. I remember her as a rare beauty.

(7 6.1990)

*

It’s been a longish time since I last wrote to you. I have been busy with a lot of matters. The main preoccupation was to read and revise the typescript of a certain book of mine which at last I have decided to send off to a publisher in Holland who has lately been bringing out researches in Jewish subjects. My book—don’t gasp at the title—is called *The Beginning of History for Israel*. The subtitle is: “How long did the Israelites stay in Egypt?—When was their Exodus?—What was the Period of their Conquest of Palestine?” and a general pointer to the work done by me is called “A Reassessment of Historical, Literary and Archaeological Evidence ” One may wonder why I wrote this book, which has entailed an abundance of meticulous research and cannot be of much interest to the Indian public. There were two reasons. The Mother is known to have remarked that it was Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt (one of the Mother’s own past incarnations) who was the princess said in the Old Testament to have asked her maids to pick up the basket in which baby Moses had been left on a river’s brink. This gave me the approximate date of the birth of Moses. From it I could work out all the other necessary dates according to the numbers given by the Bible. This series of dates differed by nearly a century and a half from the chronology currently accepted by scholars and even by the State of Israel—with small variations here and there. That chronology stems from the greatest authority on

the subject William Foxwell Albright. So I was faced with the job of demolishing him in favour of the scheme inspired by the Mother. Just the fact that he was the great Panjandrum in this sphere made me feel like the war-horse in the Bible neighing "Ha-ha" at the smell of the battlefield. "The fascination of what's difficult," as Yeats puts it in a poem, drove me on through months and months of close study to complete a book of 231 double-spaced typed pages. It has been lying among my still 18 unpublished works for several years. Now I have pulled it out to cross the *t*'s and dot the *i*'s before packing it off to Mr. Brill of Leiden. All publishers have their Readers who estimate the typescript received I hope the Reader who deals with my thesis has an open mind and William Foxwell Albright has not already imposed his erudite Will on him and Foxed him Well into believing that the current theory is All Bright!

Now let me turn from me and my antiquity to the living moment and you. I have before me the photographs you have sent. Each has a disclosure to make to me of my newly found friend's many-shaded being. The one with "little Sheetal" on her birthday in your office-room brings home to me several "truths" of your life. The way you hold her in your arms and the expression you wear on your face tell me that though you have to do with a lot of children as pupils you do not lose the individual child in the midst of the group. Each child is a special revelation to you and you deal with it with a "dream" of the future proper to it alone—a future in response to its soul's present with the unique possibilities you have intuited in its budding beauty. Your slightly smiling face shows by its blend of joy and calm an affectionate ardour playing around a poise of patience—a poise charged with understanding of the child's depths along with the pleasure in its changing momentary moods. Further, your patience prevents you from getting easily irritated—or, if by any chance, there is any irritation it passes quickly and does not flare up into anger. Your office is quite tidy and tastefully decorated. It speaks of a gift for artistic order. The epithet "artistic" is important. For there can be an order which is mechanical or conventional. Also, the epithet implies that one is not a slave to a fetish. If one is orderly, it is only with an artistic turn—that is, by following an inner sense of accordances which expresses an originality of vision. But the capacity of artistic order does not compel one to follow that sense always. It leaves room for a spontaneous care-free condition at times which does not mind a degree of disorder. To act from within outward is not to be bound down to anything. Whatever is non-mechanical, non-conventional is admissible. And under that category one may list even "wild Nature" which can differ from all man-made creation, however artistic, and yet have a ravishing loveliness. When one goes from within outward, one's eye for beauty can be multi-sensitive, alert to all forces at work in the human domain or the natural world.

One of the pictures catches you, as you say, "between verdant earth and azure sky, a happy state of being". It is not exactly a scene of "wild Nature" but

there is enough of Nature's presence, not only varied but ample, to make you look a glad escapee from so-called civilised schemes and regulations. What strikes me in addition to this is that you are alone—almost a speck in the expansive panorama, yet in entire tune with it as if the spirit of the expanses were itself concentrated in that little human body so that in spite of its apparent tinyness it holds an intoxication with distances and rejoices in being alone, cut off from the crowd which would be a largeness of excited egos. Such a crowd would be quite contrary to the spacious impersonality of the green and the azure that is Nature's—a milieu in which one sees no end, one seeks no halting-place, one feels secret after secret delivered from some infinity to unplumbed depths in oneself. In this environment a poet could say about a poet as in a line of my own:

Far-visions with the homeless heart he sings.

Mention of poet along with mention of Nature reminds me of sending you a short piece I wrote many years ago. Glimpsing the flower-vase and the flower-painting in the photo of your office-room I am led to lay before you the picture of Amal the Gardener, now deep-sighted rather than "far-visions":

Eden Ever-present

O the dew-dipped delicious drudgery
 For red and blue and white and yellow pomps
 Reigning with perfect petals over the dust!
 Back bent, I serve them and on grateful knees
 Touch with a mighty worship the frail kings.
 One careless finger is their empire's doom—
 Yet on my thoughts their pollen strews a blessing
 And every breath of scent is a command;
 For, each round tuft of quiet colour pricks
 A flawless hole in some enormous veil—
 A light shoots up and lays bare all my flowers
 Small and precarious by brief difficult
 Thrustings of paradise through clods of clay!

(If you find the construction of the last three lines a little obscure, put "as" or "to be" before "small". This kind of compressed expression, though dubious by common grammatical rules, is a poetic licence for the sake of direct felicitous effect.)

Now back to your series of photos. The one in which you are, as you write, "at Mahabalipuram, a splendid legacy of the past", appeals to me particularly for two reasons. First, you are again all by yourself. A number of people would

have spoilt the impression of quiet happy communion with the spirit of the antique monument. Superficial tourism would have been suggested. Secondly, though at first glance your bright orange dress is a bit of a shock against the grey massive ruined artistry of the immobile stones, you have stood by some artistic instinct in front of a dark aperture which seems a background of mystery from which your vivid colour and living personality emerge in the most natural way. At the same time the loud-looking present is subdued and the silent-seeming past springs to life and finds the secret of its creative urge bodied forth from old times in a living "Now", disclosing, as it were, the joyful soul which worked out its dream of grandiose response to the infinite Spirit whose mighty Ananda has structured the multiform unity of the cosmos.

Finally, the snap of you and the well-known artist Dr. Svetoslav Roerich, at the back of which you have written: "With a friend whom I revere with all my heart." Your fine feeling comes out well in the picture. There is a warm nearness combined with what I may call a sweet submissiveness as to someone who holds great depths in himself. From the far-away contemplation of an unreachable Beauty the eyes of Dr. Roerich look at once most gently and most penetratingly into the human condition and strive to seize in terms of art the pleasure and pain, the shine and shadow of its varied aspiration. His work comes nearer to common humanity than that of his father Nicholas, though I must add that the latter's work was not really "cold" in spite of its preoccupation with the Himalaya any more than one can consider as really cold the presence of that mighty mountain that is like a vast guardian of the land that lies at its foot. If I have to talk in ultimate language, I may aver that his father's art conveys, knowingly or unknowingly, a sense of the benevolent transcendent Godhead, the Supreme who is above and yet not aloof, while his own art inspires, consciously or unconsciously, a sense of the compassionate immanent Godhead, the Supreme who is always with us because He is within us.

This letter has become very long I'll stop now with love to you and all the others of the wonderful family.

(26 7 1990)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of June 1991)

SRI AUROBINDO went on: "I have told you that on the 2nd of May, I, along with many others, was arrested and put in prison for a whole year. You must have read or heard about that episode."

"Yes, we have heard something about it, but to hear of it from your lips, sitting in front of you, that is an exceptional grace. Was it indeed very painful, your stay in jail? The food and—"

"Yes, the first few days were hard. But it was not so much the mere physical difficulties of food and lodging, since these external problems had never really disturbed me. I don't remember having suffered much, even in London, when I hardly had enough to eat and had no warm coat in winter. In jail, the hardship was psychological at first, though there was on several occasions a great deal of fun and enjoyment. Do you want to hear about it?"

Cries of 'Yes, yes' rang out from all sides, while Sri Aurobindo sat smiling.

"Listen, then. I have told you already, haven't I, how well I was sleeping that early morning after a long night's work, when suddenly the police barged in."

"Did they handcuff you?"

"Yes, and also tied a rope round my waist with which they pulled me behind them. But that was later removed at the insistence of the Moderate leader, Bhupen Basu."

"Why don't you start the story from the beginning? Why did the police suddenly decide to arrest you?"

"It was not sudden at all. They had suspected all along that it was I who was the leader of the revolution. Only they lacked sufficient proof to be able to arrest me. But after the bomb explosion at Muzaffarpur, they grew desperate. They decided to arrest me, proof or no proof."

"So there I was, that morning, at my table in the Bande Mataram office, when I received a telegram announcing the bursting of the bomb at Muzaffarpur which had killed two English ladies. The Police Commissioner then announced in the papers that he knew who the culprits were and that the latter would soon be arrested, though I had no idea at the time that I was their target. And so that day while I was enjoying a most peacefully guiltless sleep, my sister ran in, terrified, and woke me up. I opened my eyes to find my small room filled with red-turbanned police. One of those brave fellows, the Police Superintendent, was even pointing his pistol at my sister's breast. I sat up, my eyes still heavy with sleep. The Superintendent curtly asked me, "Are you Arabinda Ghosh?" The

moment I answered 'Yes', he shouted, 'Arrest him.' Then he continued, 'Aren't you ashamed to live like this, you who have passed your B.A. examination in England? Look at this room! It doesn't have any furniture, not even a bed, you are sleeping on the floor...' 'Why should I be ashamed?', I cut in. 'I am a poor man and I live like one.' The police chief was not very bright, maybe dealing with thieves and scoundrels had dulled his mental perceptions. He was unable to grasp the greatness of poverty. So he shouted, 'Is it because you wish to be rich that you have done this crime?' I did not find it necessary to answer him.

"So they began to search my house very thoroughly.... It lasted from five-thirty in the morning, right up to eleven-thirty."

"Six hours!"

"Yes, they examined everything, notebooks and letters, poems, essays and plays. But probably they felt bad at not finding what they were looking for."

"What did they hope to find?"

"What a silly thing you are," broke in a small irritated voice. "Guns, of course, and bombs..." (*Laughter*)

"How should she understand that? Girls don't usually think about bombs and bullets. Oh yes! that reminds me of something rather interesting that happened. There was a small box in my house, in which there was some soil from Dakshineswar. The Superintendent thought, 'Aha! this must be some dangerous explosive or gunpowder.' But after a long and close scrutiny he had to admit, disappointed, that it was nothing but a heap of earth."

"Why did you have this soil in your house?"

"Haven't you heard of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, where Sri Ramakrishna had lived and done his sadhana? It was there that he had his vision of the Mother, there that he used to converse with Her."

"Certainly we have. We have even seen films about him."

"Then you should understand about the soil. When Mother gives you flowers, don't you put them away, carefully?"

"Of course!"

"Well, soil and sand contain the same powers as flowers do. You follow?"

"Yes. And what happened after that?"

"I have written all about these things in my 'Karakahini'."

"But that's written in Bengali! And a very hard book to find, nowadays. In any case, books are not satisfactory because, if they raise questions in our minds, there is nobody to answer them. Whereas when you explain, with the help of examples, everything seems so simple."

"So then, we were taken to the police station, and later to the lock-up. All the while, the police were trying their level best to make me admit my guilt. They were ever so sweet in their speech and their manners, so full of good friendly advice, believing that I wouldn't see through them! Anyone in my place would have; however, I needn't darken your little minds with details of their crooked

wives. The fact remains that I spent three nights in the lock-up.”

“And didn’t you eat or sleep?”

“They did bring me a little bit of something to eat, but it was completely inedible. And as for sleeping, there was the floor. Did you think we would be provided with lovely beds covered with thick mattresses and feather pillows, as if we were the guests of the King?”

“In the morning, I found that there were a few others who had been arrested too, some of them as young as you. I guessed that they had been captured at the Manicktolla Gardens.”

“Were the two of you—you and Barin—arrested on the same day? Your family must have been indeed very worried.”

“Naturally. But I sent them a message asking them not to be anxious on my account, that my innocence would soon be proved and I would be released.”

“How were you so sure?”

“Because I had a strong faith.”

“But didn’t you feel any fear at all?”

“During the first few days, the mind was a little disturbed, though I wouldn’t call it fear. At that time I was still not quite aware of what the Lord intended for me. Feeling hurt, I complained to Him, ‘Why did You allow me to be locked up in jail on false charges before my work was finished?’ On the third day came the answer. An inner voice told me, ‘Be patient. You will soon find out.’ The mind grew quiet and the trust returned. I was then taken from Lalbazar to Alipore and put in a small empty cell for a month. Solitary confinement.”

“Even you?”

“Why not me? I was not Sri Aurobindo then that people should treat me with special respect, the way you do. In the eyes of our colonial rulers, I was a dangerous criminal, do not forget that. You can’t imagine how tiny the cell was, there was no window, just an iron-barred door. It would have been more correct to have called the cell a cage; in fact, it was worse than the cages reserved in the zoos for the large wild beasts. Those are roomier, more airy. Men come and go, there is life and movement all around. I had none of those things. That a man should go mad even after a couple of days there is perfectly understandable.”

“And you stayed there a month?”

“At first, yes. There were also very many other ‘inconveniences’, but I shall not go into them here. Let me only tell you that it was inhuman. We are so proud to call ourselves civilised human beings, but one who has been unfortunate enough to see what prison-life is will never be sure of that. Do you remember Ranade asking me to write about prison-reforms instead of political articles, when I was in Baroda? I had found his request quite ridiculous at the time. Perhaps it was to correct that attitude that God made me experience imprisonment.”

“We would like to hear about this experience in more detail, please.”

"Then you should all go to jail, one after another, though I do hope independent India has radically improved the living conditions there."

"You have told us nothing about the arrangement for food and rest. We have seen prisons only in the movies."

"Were conditions there truly as barbaric as they depict?"

"They were certainly not any less barbaric. In jail all that one is given are two coarse blankets, prison-woven, in fact. They had to serve for sitting or sleeping on, in winter or in summer. A blackened rusty iron plate and a similar bowl which seemed to have been dug out of the bowels of the earth, served for both eating and washing purposes. If they were scrubbed for two or three hours, maybe they would sparkle a little. I regarded the bowl to be a representative of the British Civilian. Just as an I.C.S. man was capable of filling several roles simultaneously, being at the same time judge, police officer and various other officials, so also my iron bowl. Sometimes it was used for my meals, at others I drank water out of it, yet again I used it for my bath or my toilet. Can you imagine something having such a multifaceted personality? Or fulfilling so many purposes? It could even be looked at as an aid in Yogic discipline, since it helped one to transcend shame, repulsion and attachment. In many other ways also my life in prison could be described as a kind of spiritual retreat."

"Didn't the authorities feel any pity for you?"

(Smiling) "They were not my parents or well-wishers, so why should they?"

"They could at least give you clean plates and cups."

"But the Government did not consider Indians civilised enough, perhaps, or had not expected well-educated people to become their guests! What they wanted was for us to remain their slaves, eternally. And has anyone ever treated slaves with respect? Besides, the English are not known for treating their enemies with any gentleness or sympathy. Although, I must say, a few small concessions were indeed shown to me. For example, I was given a little extra water, so that I could have a bath. I was also allowed to walk outside my cell for a little while. I was even given a little milk."

"What was the food like?"

"Oh marvellous! Enough to put you far on the way of ascetic detachment. Thick rice made out of rotten old grains, rendered yet heavier by stones, worms, hair, dirt, even a rat or two boiled in it now and then."

"Rats? They give you rats to eat!"

"Not intentionally! They were not quite so inhuman. But since rice had been left lying in sacks for a long long time and was cooked without being washed, in the dim light of dawn, the rats that were in the sacks were duly thrown into the cooking-pot, along with the grain! And the vegetables that were given to us! Another masterpiece of the culinary art! It consisted of old, rotten inedible roots and leaves that passed off as spinach and drumsticks so hard that while being cooked they had to be beaten with iron rods in order to soften them.

We were given something else too, that was called 'dal' or lentils, but I think it should more correctly have been called 'dal water', so thin and watery it was. And we received this treatment in spite of the fact that we were political prisoners, all of us came from well-do-do families, some of us were even aristocrats, not one of us in any way inferior in blood or nurture to the finest of English gentlemen. But the Government made no distinction between us and the other criminals and thieves. We were all treated alike. As a matter of fact, this helped me enormously. I lived with the lowest of the low—murderers, bandits and thieves, eating and sleeping and suffering with them, and I realised that we were all children of the same Mother. Not just I, all the other boys too felt the same, and they cheerfully ate that disgusting food day after day. I remember how the father of one of the youngsters, a zamindar, wept when he came to visit his son. And yet the boy, who had been brought up on milk and honey, now told his father that he was perfectly happy with whatever he was given in jail."

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

(Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali)

POETS MEET

WHEN poets meet
Then more than words should flow—

Love, certainly;
But best could grow
A common flame of sacrifice, to call
True inspiration down
In rhythms powerful and sweet

To fuse us all
Into one offering
At the Master's feet.

SHRADDHAVAN

SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of June 1991)

My Marriage

I DESCRIBED last time how the astrologer's predictions about my life came true almost word for word. About my marriage he had said I would marry the young man I had met briefly in his own house, though I had never seen him before nor known anything about him.

I was ignorant of exactly how the marriage was arranged. Since I was a girl and little more than a minor, I was neither consulted nor informed. But I believe it was my mother who undertook the responsibility for conducting all the negotiations. I was merely told that I was to be married into a family which was one of the oldest and most aristocratic of Calcutta, and consisted not only of great zamindars and strictly orthodox Brahmins, but also of highly cultured people. My prospective husband, moreover, was considered at once very handsome, and brilliant in his studies. But as I have already mentioned, when we first exchanged glances at the astrologer's place, he did not particularly appeal to me.

The day of the wedding arrived. My mother had informed my uncle, who lived in Pondicherry, about it, and he arrived on the appointed day, though his contribution to the proceedings could not have been more awkward, as I recounted in the last episode. But when, after the ceremony, he came to know the kind of family into which I had been married, he reacted still more violently. He raged at my mother, accusing her of condemning me to a life of marital unhappiness. Did she not know that the sons of zamindars were given to every kind of indulgences? Had she never heard that, spoiled by their excessive wealth, they had no higher aim than that of a frivolous life? Everyone knew the history of zamindars and their life-style; so how could she forget it? I had also heard a voice telling me, "Don't marry." But I did not listen, as I was intent on having the experience.

Actually, quite contrary to my uncle's way of thinking, I believe my mother contracted the marriage precisely *because* of the family's wealth and aristocratic lineage.

Interestingly enough, when the negotiations were in progress I came to know that my future husband had an elder brother. He was a highly qualified medical man with a foreign degree, and held a senior post in the Indian Army. He was not only known to have a spotless character, but was universally

admired. It struck me that I would much rather marry him, and so I asked one of my friends to approach him on my behalf. But fate was not on my side, for he had left for Europe just before my friend could meet him.

I realised soon after the marriage that my husband's home, where I was taken to live, was no better than a prison. Nothing could have been more incompatible with my former way of life than that of his family. It seemed to me as though guards were watching my every move from morning to night. The position of prison superintendent was filled by the matriarch of the family—the grandmother—whose word was law in all matters pertaining to the household and its members. A woman of few words (with the presence of a queen mother), her ubiquitous influence imposed itself on everyone. She particularly saw to it that the women and girls had no freedom, nor any contact with the outside world. Even our letters were censored. Each one had to be given to the darwans who routinely passed them on to the grandmother for her scrutiny before posting them. Hence, no letter of mine ever reached my family. A day came when in desperation I wrote to my mother begging her to somehow take me away from this penitentiary, for otherwise I was sure I would die. This letter fell into the hands of my father-in-law. One day he was reading the Chandi-Stotra as was his habit, and I was listening to him from a distance. Suddenly, he called me near him and said, "Little mother, Mother Kali has told me you have complained to your mother against us. This is a serious offence of misdemeanour, and we have no choice but to deal with you in an exemplary manner."

The manner which he had in mind was to starve me for a whole day, denying me even water. As a young girl of twenty, well-bred and well cared-for all my life, I could not look upon this treatment as anything but barbaric. To heap insult upon injury, I was made to break my fast at night by eating with the servants! I submitted myself to this humiliation. As for Mother Kali having told my father-in-law of my 'transgression' while he read the Chandi-Stotra, it was nothing more than hypocritical bluff to impress the gullible members of the household.

Equally demeaning was the occasion on which the grandmother, in her role as queen mother, charged with upholding the family propriety, summoned me and scolded, "It seems you and your husband were sitting together in the open verandah. You were laughing, joking, and shamelessly amusing yourselves in broad daylight. What kind of family have you come from? Haven't your parents ever taught you manners or decency? Has no one ever told you that behaving in such a frivolous and cheap manner is a sign of low breeding? Understand once and for all that you will not be permitted to carry on like this in my house." Here too I did not utter a single word in protest.

So this is what my life had been reduced to. In my misery, I concocted plan after plan to escape from this death-trap. Finally Providence in the guise of my husband's younger "cousin-brother" came to my rescue. I could not hope for any such consideration from my husband, for he, like the rest of his family, cringed

like a pygmy before the Amazon grandmother. But the younger "cousin-brother" who became very fond of me had the courage to stand up for me. He told his family, grandmother included, that if they were intent on persecuting me, he would himself escort me back to my parental home. And that is exactly what he did but he had to resort to much ingenuity and deliberation to carry out his plan. Thus ended my married life in my father-in-law's house. I lived only for about three months in the family, though subsequently I kept up my relations with my husband.

What is curious in retrospect, is that some members of my husband's household, including my mother-in-law, had the objectivity to remark, once I had gone, that I was an altogether different type of girl—too individual and bright—to be moulded into a subservient pattern, though outwardly I kept myself meek and obedient. In fact when after the marriage, my husband and I were presented before a superior kinsman, as was the custom, he said at once: "This marriage has been a fatal mistake. The girl is too high for our accustomed way of life."

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

LABOUR OF LOVE

by

HUTA

“Life’s secret sense is written within, above.”

—Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*

ON 10th February 1955 when I came to stay near the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I never dreamt the Mother would teach me painting professionally and would take my consciousness to unknown worlds.

For several years I worked in the Mother’s private Stores. In the early months of 1956 the Mother asked me to decorate the idols for an exhibition which was to be held in November 1956.

I sent the first image to her from the Stores. She wrote:

“The idol you sent is Mahalakshmi—you can give her a pale green sari with roses painted on it.”

But I had never held brushes—never had colour sense. How could I paint? Mahalakshmi became the symbol of my spiritual life and artistic work.

The Mother assured me:

“Child, you have capacity to paint and it is a splendid gift. I also did many paintings and exhibited them in Paris. I love to paint but where is the time?”

After I had painted the sari of Mahalakshmi the Mother expressed her wish that I should paint blue birds on her own dress. It was done. She exclaimed:

“This is very good. If I teach you how to paint systematically, will you learn from me?”

I agreed.

She said joyously:

“Very well, but first you must see my paintings in order to get certain ideas. I will call you one day in the morning and then we shall see them together.”

The Mother reassured me:

“Indeed I shall show you how to paint and I shall be glad if you learn well.
 One day I shall call you and do a painting in front of you.
 With my love and blessings, always.”

In fact, the Mother knew my love for Beauty. She sent me a card with a quotation from herself:

“It is through Beauty that the Divine manifests in the physical, in the mental through Knowledge, in the vital through Power and the psychic through Love.”

On the same card she added:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta, who is a true lover of Beauty, the Divine aspect of physical life.
 With my love and blessings, the Grace is always with you ”

The Mother was preparing my consciousness:

“Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence. The manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps its greatest part.”

Then she wrote:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta who loves beauty and works for it.
 With my love and blessings always.”

Thus she sowed a seed of New Creation in my being.

*

The evening of 22nd July 1956 the Mother met me in her Playground room and explained to me in detail all about painting.

The following morning she promised:

“Yes, I shall teach you all I know about painting and feel sure you will learn well.”

On 31st July I received a letter from the Mother:

“I am sending you herewith the list of requirements for oil painting. The address of the company is on the top; it is from their catalogue that the list has been made and it is to them that your brother must go

All these things have been carefully chosen and will be useful. So it is better if he buys everything.”

I sent the list to East Africa to my family. My fourth brother Maganbhai happened to visit London. He bought the painting materials from Windsor and Newton Company and arranged to get them sent through our agent there.

*

Occupation of my mind was necessary. So I embroidered a huge ship on a cloth which was to be fixed on a wooden frame designed by the Mother. She used it in Sri Aurobindo's room on his birthday, 15th August 1956

When she retired to her rooms on the second floor in 1962, she kept it in the entrance of her music-cum-interview room.

After her passing away, it went into her private Stores.

Finally the screen was placed in “Sree Smriti” the museum where the Mother's things are displayed as a mark of remembrance.

Recently I got its photograph taken.

I gave the information about the ship to the people concerned there. All this matter has already appeared in *The Story of a Soul*.

*

The Mother saw and corrected my notes in the diaries which she gave me every year.

On 24th August she sent me a painted card depicting the Snap-Dragons—*Antirrhinum Majus*—with these lines:

“Here is the power of expression to help you in your writing ”

I used to jot down what she had told me about art and spirituality.

To uplift my spirit she wrote:

“Indeed, yesterday I was quite pleased with the way you remembered what I had told you and I will be glad to correct what you are writing—consequently it will be better to put it in a general way as you propose to do.

It is good that you have a good and correct memory—it can be made quite useful.

With my love and blessings in the Grace always with you.”

*

On 15th September the Mother called me to see her paintings in the Meditation Hall upstairs. She introduced each of her paintings with eagerness and enthusiasm. I have recounted the matter in *The Story of a Soul*, which has come out in *Mother India* 1982.

Krishnalal and Vasudev asked from me an offprint of my article to keep in their record. Later Vasudev gave it to Jayantilal for a certain reference regarding the Mother's sketches and paintings.

*

When the Mother taught me how to draw, she did many pencil sketches. Sometimes she used crayons. She drew a few portraits of me.

At the end of 1961 we started the painting of *Savitri*. The Mother made many sketches so that I might acquire ideas of the higher worlds. On this basis the whole of *Savitri* was later expressed in multi-colours to accord with the twelve dimensions known to occultism.

Unhappily one of the Mother's sketches which was printed in the Fourth Volume of *Meditations on Savitri* was taken for a book-cover without my knowledge and permission.

The Mother disliked such a thing to happen. Her view was that it would be best if these sketches and paintings were left alone. It would be more effective if they appeared only in the series of my books.

Here I recall an incident. The Pathmandir in Calcutta took one of my paintings from the Third Volume and used it as a card. Underneath, it was inscribed in the Mother's hand: "Cling to Truth."

I did not know anything till the Mother wrote to me on 7th January 1966:

"Huta, my dear child,

These cards have been printed by the Calcutta Pathmandir without asking my permission or informing me about it.

Herewith I am sending you five of them

You will have to write to them yourself to tell them that they ought not to have taken a Savitri picture without your permission.

With all my love."

I acted on her suggestion. She read my letter, forwarded it to Nolini Kanta Gupta who then sent it to the Pathmandir.

The secretary of the Pathmandir apologised and assured me that they would not commit the mistake again. The Mother was very pleased after reading the letter.

*

The Mother asked me to clean her two carved cupboards which are opposite to her high-backed chair in the Meditation Hall upstairs. They are packed with *objets d'art*, old and new, from all over the world.

At that time I did not know that she would send things for me to paint from these cupboards.

On 12th October I received from the Mother a card showing a vase with flowers—Phlox—along with these words:

“Here is ‘skill in work’ which you deserve so well. Indeed you did your cleaning work as well as could be.”

Yet another painted card of flowers and her encouraging words.

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta,

Here is some skill in work which expresses so nicely the special capacity of your nature.

I send it with all my love and my blessings with the assurance of the constant Presence of the Divine’s Grace.”

*

I gave finishing touches to the idols. The pocket money my father was sending me every month was spent for the purpose. In enervating heat I went to and fro between Golconde and Cottage Industry to get the thrones and other things made for the images.

Unfailingly the Mother heartened me:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta,

With all my confidence in the work she is doing so thoroughly and carefully

My love and blessings along with constant Presence of the Grace are always with you.”

The afternoon of 24th November 1956 the Mother saw the exhibition. The next morning she wrote on a card:

“Bonjour to my very dear little child, to my very sweet and loving Huta,

I send this hand-made picture as a token of my admiration for the truly excellent and remarkable work you have done in the ‘Doll’s exhibition’. The Temple which is your work is indeed a piece of art and will be long remembered among the Ashram activities. I especially appreciated the quiet and concentrated atmosphere created by the ‘Temple’ which gave a very fine impression.

With all my love and blessings I keep you in my arms, and the Divine Grace is always with you.”

*

On 10th December the painting materials arrived from England. The Mother said enthusiastically:

“Ah, now we shall soon start painting and play with colours as children do.”

It was a nice day, 14th December. The Mother spent in the Meditation Hall upstairs more than two hours teaching me how to use colours on a board with various sizes of brushes—how to give different strokes to bring out the expected result in the painting of a white Hibiscus—“Divine Grace”.

After I had finished the whole of *Savitri*, the illustrations of selected poems from Sri Aurobindo and numerous other paintings the Mother gave this painting of hers as a token of her appreciation.

*

She handed me three flowers of Spanish Jasmine—Psychological Perfection—to paint. I could paint only one flower on a tiny board with great difficulty.

Then the Mother started giving me a series of flowers and some objects to paint, which I did in sweet and sour moods.

I wrote to the Mother that until and unless I learnt perspective perfectly and knew how to use colours correctly I could not go any further in painting. Since she had not enough time I wanted to attend the art classes in the Ashram School. She answered:

“Indeed, it is very good that Jayanti will help you and I am sure you will progress very quick and do very nice things

My love and blessings and the Presence of the Divine Grace are and will always be with you.”

Well, I was not such a blockhead not to sense a touch of sarcasm in the letter. I really felt ashamed and gave up totally the idea of learning from anybody.

I informed the Mother. She smiled and said.

“Splendid! you see, nobody here in the Ashram has seriously and strictly taken up oil painting in a systematic and professional way. You are the first to do so. In the Ashram School the children paint only with water colours and they are all amateurs. Our grown-up artists also use water colours and pastel colours. So there you are!

Oil painting is an art in which you can give only an impression. All the beauty and charm depend on how you develop your consciousness. With the growth of consciousness, hands and eyes become sharp and skilful. They recognise exactly what can be done in painting. Automatically and spontaneously the thing takes shape and becomes vivid and full of radiant vibrations.

You will learn painting according to my will and vision.”

On a card dated 24th December, which depicted a vase full of fine carnations of red and white colours, she wrote.

“Here is a nice vase of ‘collaboration’ for indeed we shall collaborate to do nice things and express in painting a higher world and consciousness.

Truly the Divine Grace is over you to lead you to an exceptional realisation. Along with it my love and blessings never leave you.”

I was not at all satisfied with my painting work. I was longing to know all about the Divine Life—I aspired to reach my goal—the Supreme Lord.

The Mother sent me a card illustrating flowers—*Poinsettia*—with the significance:

“The Divine’s love manifested in the vital.”

And these lines followed:

“Yes, my child, I will teach you not only *what is* Divine Life but also *how* to live it so that you will realise in yourself that true divine life.

My love and blessings and the presence of the Grace are constantly with you.”

(*To be continued*)

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SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM IN THE ROMANTIC AGE

(Continued from the issue of June 1991)

AMONG the critics, De Quincey and Leigh Hunt emulated the example of Hazlitt; among the poets Keats became his disciple. De Quincey's *Knocking at the gate in Macbeth* (1823) has elicited a very high tribute from T. S. Eliot—"the best known single piece of criticism of Shakespeare that has been written."³³ It is a splendid record of personal response to a magnificent scene in *Macbeth*, charged with mystery and tension. The impression of awfulness and deep solemnity which 'the Knocking at the Gate' produced upon him from a boy has yielded the finest romantic criticism. His tribute to the great poet at the end of the article is worth quoting:

"O mighty poet! thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hailstorm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!"

It is well known that Keats and Shakespeare were alike in certain qualities of mind and art. "He is; he is with Shakespeare." But unfortunately Keats has not left much of Shakespeare criticism. He was not a professional critic, though he wrote one review, published criticism of two performances by Kean, left some marginalia in copies of Milton, Shakespeare, and Burton and gave his views on poetry and poets in his private letters. For many of his views he was dependent on Wordsworth and Hazlitt. He had great regard for Hazlitt, attended his lectures on Shakespeare and annotated a copy of the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. And he wrote, "I said if there were three things superior in the modern world, they were *The Excursion*, Haydon's pictures and Hazlitt's depth of taste."³⁴

His letters indicate Keats's realization of two fundamental truths about Shakespeare. The first is the intensity of Shakespeare's art and the second is the negative capability of Shakespeare's character. In his letter to Georgiana and Thomas Keats dated December 21, 1817, he says

"The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth—Examine *King Lear* and you will find this exemplified throughout;.. several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement especially in literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean negative capability, that is when a man is

capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

In his letter to Richard Woodhouse dated October 27, 1818 he points out that the poetical character “has no self—it is everything and nothing.... A poet is the most unpoetical thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually informing and filling some other body.”

The nine volumes of Shakespeare, which for years had been used by Keats, indicate his delight and admiration as well as his close attention to the words and phrases employed by the great dramatist. Spurgeon who brought these volumes to the notice of the world observes that the marking and the wear of the paper clearly prove that *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet* were his favourites. His markings make it clear that he appreciated Ariel's songs and the elaborate stage directions in *The Tempest*. He loves the fairy poetry and songs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and is not excited by the comic part.

In his review which appeared in *The Champion* dated December 28, 1817, he makes his attitude to the historical plays clear:

“They are written with infinite vigour, but their regularity tied the hand of Shakespeare ... The poetry is for the most part ironed and manacled with a chain of facts, and cannot get free; it cannot escape from the prison house of history, nor often move without our being disturbed with the clanking of its fetters.... Again, the poetry of *Richard, John* and the *Henries* is the blending (of) the imaginative with the historical: it is poetry!—but oftentimes poetry wandering on the London Road.”

We have got evidence of Keats's views of Dr. Johnson's criticism of some of the plays. The edition of Shakespeare which Keats was using has short remarks selected from Johnson's criticism, printed at the end of every play and Keats has expressed his opinions of these chiefly by quotations applied in a characteristic way. For instance, Johnson's condemnation of *Macbeth*—‘it has no nice discriminations of character; the events are too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions, and the course of the action necessarily determines the conduct of the agents’—is rejected by Keats, who crosses and scratches it out and writes under Johnson's name:

Thou lovest Labour—
As the hare the Lion³⁵

In *The Tempest*, I, ii, 100, Keats suggests an emendation for a controversial line. The reading in Keats's edition is, “Who having unto truth, by telling of it” Keats suggests, “Who loving an untruth”, which has the advantage of making sense and of adding no extra syllables or letters.³⁶

He disapproves of Johnson's judgment of *Titus Andronicus* as spurious and writes at the foot:

Ye blocks, ye stònes! Ye worse than senseless things,
Knew ye not Pompey?³⁷

In his letter to Reynolds dated November 22, 1817, he mentions his admiration for the sonnets of Shakespeare: "They seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally—in the intensity of working out conceits."³⁸ The marking in the volume of *Poems* used by him indicates his appreciation of their exquisite verbal music.

Some of his letters and the above-mentioned volumes of Shakespeare which he used serve as an authentic record of the passionate ardour and acute critical judgment with which Keats studied his master.

The limitations of Shakespeare criticism in the age have been pointed out by many. To Croce, the romantic critics were exclamatory in their attitude. It was more idolatry than criticism; it was worship and not judgment. Walter Raleigh's charges are also the same: "There is a taint of insincerity about romantic criticism, from which not even the great romantics are free.... When they are inspired by their divinity they say wonderful things; when the inspiration fails them their language is maintained at the same height, and they say more than they feel. You can never be sure of them." It is true that in their over-enthusiasm to avoid the dogmatism of the 18th century critics, the romantic critics hurried to the other extreme and "initiated a worship of Shakespeare, without leaving room for standards of judgment."³⁹ But the positive merits of their contribution cannot be ignored.

Their criticism, stimulating and enticing though incomplete, has influenced modern critics like A. C. Bradley, L. C. Knights, Wilson Knight, Spurgeon and others.

(Concluded)

P. MARUDANAYAGAM

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MEGHADŪTA: A STUDY OF THE INTERPLAY OF “DARK” AND “BRIGHT” IMAGES

(Continued from the issue of June 1991)

Metaphorical Texture: *Varnana*

It has been argued by Indian theorists as well as modern Western critics that poetic experience cannot be conveyed by discourse which is analytical conceptual language, which lacks the ‘poetic presence’. “The perceptible object,” writes Yves Bonnefoy, “is *presence*. It is primarily distinguishable from the conceptual by one act, namely its presence”.¹ The poet has to invest language with that presence and shape it into a metaphor of the poetic experience. Along with the faculty of seeing, of perception, *darśana*, the poet has the other dynamic faculty of presentation, of “description”, *varṇana*

Before we proceed further we should try to understand what “description” means. We have already used the word in view of the tripartite division of *Meghadūta*, but there we have not laid any emphasis on the poetic quality. Its use is rather vague without any reference to poetry. Description is a verbal representation of objects and scenes, differing from narration in that it has no temporal or dramatic development. Narrations, strictly speaking, are “representations of actions and events” and descriptions are “representations of objects and characters”,² whereas *varṇana*, the power of description which we are now speaking of, has no inherent psychological relationship with representation. Here “description” is “presentation” that is to say, the poem is a metaphor of the poet’s world. Borrowing the expression of Wimsatt we can say there is a “total metaphoric relation between a good poem and () reality...”³ It is the power of *varṇana* which establishes this metaphorical relation. And this is done with the help of both sound and sense, *śabdārthau sāhītau*

In an exhaustive study of any of Kālidāsa’s works—or, for that matter, of the work of any poet—the student cannot neglect either the metaphorical elements of sound or of sense. Our object is not such an exhaustive study, we want to limit ourselves to the visual exploitation of language, and this too, in a very limited field, namely that of colours and words associated with and directly evocative of colours. Kālidāsa, no doubt, knows the magic and the art of sound;

¹ “L’objet sensible est *présence*. Il se distingue du conceptuel avant tout par un acte c est la *présence*” *L’Improbable* (Paris 1959) p. 28

² “ des représentations d’actions et d’événements, qui constituent la narration proprement dite, et () des représentations d’objets ou de personnages, qui sont le fait de ce que l’on nomme aujourd’hui la *déscription*” Gérard Genette, *Figures II* (Paris 1969) p. 56

³ Vide, Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (New York 1959) p. 89, for the discussion on “presentational symbol”

⁴ Quoted Marcus B. Hester, *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* (The Hague, Paris 1967) p. 79

he exploits with great mastery the potentialities of sound, but it is in the creation and presentation of visual images that he is unsurpassed. “In continuous gift,” writes Sri Aurobindo, “of seizing an object and creating it to the eye he has no rival in literature ”¹

Kālidāsa presents or “creates to the eye” through the medium of words what he has seized of reality. We have the poem, the “metaphor” or the “presentational symbol”. How are we, as readers, going to approach this metaphor? We may look at it with open eyes so that the impressions enter our mind.

Or else we may approach it more actively, with a discerning and searching mind, trying to understand and interpret consciously. Perhaps for a pure enjoyment and an intuitive experience of the poet’s world, this second approach is not essential; yet, if we, as critics, wish to communicate our enjoyment we have to extract and analyse those elements which, by a certain process of interaction, evoke or convey the aesthetic delight, *rasa*. Ogden and Richards also speak of two kinds of approach to a poem or a picture. “We can submit to it as a stimulus, letting its colour-qualities and form-qualities work upon us emotionally. Or with a different attitude we can interpret its forms and colours (its words).”²

Our attitude here is mainly the second one, which is not altogether independent of the first one, though It is because the stimulus has emotionally affected us that we wish to go further and interpret the action of that working. We shall here consider the “colour-qualities” of *Meghadūta*. When we read the poem and submit to the stimulus not only with our senses but also with our intuition and intellect, we find that the emotional experience we undergo is that of love in separation, *vipralambha śrngāra*, of Indian poetics. It may be true that our experience is not altogether free, that it is directed and modified by our knowledge of the Indian tradition of *rasa*-theory, or by some personal factors of our individual life. The second attitude, we believe, can correct in some ways the possible errors of the first

Meghadūta is a poem of *viraha*, separation of lovers. Among the various means by which the poet has given form to the pangs of separation, one is the tension and interaction between the images related to darkness and those related to brightness Images and words have also cultural associations, non-verbal associations which the poet cannot altogether ignore, and which influence the significance of images. In this context we have to remember that “darkness” is not an antithesis of “day”.³ This cultural association of the significance of night and day, or dark and bright, goes back to the very origin of Indian culture, as can

¹ *The Age of Kālidāsa*, in Birth Centenary Library Vol 3 (Pondicherry 1972) p 223

² C K Ogden and I A Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 10th ed (London 1966) p 236

³ Vide, my article ‘Night’ and ‘Day’ in *Kumārasambhava* an investigation into the suggestive meaning” (In press)

be gathered from the Rgvedic hymns to Dawn and Night. Night is not the absence of light: night holds light within its apparent darkness. But the word *tamas* has often a negative meaning, it is an antithesis of light. Thus RV 10 127 2 says that Night,

jyotiṣā bādhatē tamah!

“destroys darkness with her light”.

Here, *tamas*, darkness, is negative but not night. Likewise, Kṛṣṇa, the divine Lover is portrayed dark. Kālidāsa himself remembers and makes use of this in the poem:

*yena śyāmam vapur atarām kāntim āpatsyate te
 varnēva sphurita-rucinā gopa-veśasya Viṣṇoḥ! [15]*

...which (rainbow) will make your dark-hued body lovelier still as the resplendent peacock-feather made lovelier the body of Viṣṇu incarnate as the Cowherd (i.e. Kṛṣṇa).

Thus culturally the association of absence, pain or desolation, of emptiness are not strongly associated with darkness. But the word *tamas* has the negative association, as in the Rgvedic hymn. About Alakā, the poet writes: (The verse is, however, considered spurious by Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha)

nitya-jyotsnāḥ prathata-tamo-vrtti-ramyāḥ pradosāḥ! [26]¹

.. where everlasting moonlight checking the course of darkness makes nights enchanting.

Also in another verse *tamas* has been depicted as an obstruction to love's union, the darkness covers the roads which women have to take to reach their lover's house:

ruddhāloke nara-pati-pathe sūei-bhedyais tamobhiḥ! [37]

.. on the king's highway where dense darkness,—so dense that a needle-point might prick it—veils the sight.

Therefore, “dark” (except *tamas*) cannot suitably function as a symbol for separation, for *viraha*, neither “bright” for union, *mulana*. Neither of the two are

¹ This verse is considered spurious by Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha though the latter comments upon it Hultzsck gives it in the Appendix [VI]

negative, they are not antithetical. How can these images then present, make concrete, the emotional experience? The poet does not emphasize in the metaphorical texture the opposition between separation and union with the opposition of colour-qualities. In both union and separation two parties are involved. the lover and the beloved, the masculine element and the feminine element. What the "dark" signifies is the masculine element; what the "bright" signifies is the feminine element. *Milana* is the meeting of the two elements, *viraha* their separation. And it is indeed through the interplay of these two elements that Kālidāsa has built up the whole metaphorical texture of the poem.

But one question remains—a question which is not essential to our interpretation or understanding but which will lend support to our assumption. Is this structure intended by the poet?

A poet does not write with the express intention of using a particular metaphorical structure. The structure suggests itself in the process of composition. The intention of the poet lies in the acceptance or the rejection of the suggested structure. If there were any means of knowing the images that a poet rejects, we could find by comparison the intention and the norm behind the acceptance of the expressed images. Such a study is possible with the works of modern poets, from the rough drafts and the corrections of their works we can get an idea of the rejected images. But for the earlier poets we can only study the work as it has come down to us and see if here is a significant pattern, a coherence in the metaphorical structure. The problem may be made complicated by the inclusion of interpolated verses where the later poet has mechanically used some metaphorical elements without having caught the poet's intention. On the other hand the study of the metaphorical structure may help to detect some interpolations.

It is then evident that we have to look for the poet's intention within the poem itself. Modern critics have shown that the poet's intention reveals itself most strongly in style. And metaphors—living, original metaphors, not the dead conventional hackneyed ones—always bear the mark of the poet's will. Therefore, if we find a definite structure of the metaphor, if we can recognize a significant purpose there, we can safely conclude that it was intended.¹

In Sanskrit literature we find quite a good amount of dead metaphors within a poem. Some of them had, quite early, lost all suggestive value. a face compared to the moon or the lotus does not mean anything more than a "lovely face". Therefore, it is quite difficult to find the mark of the poet's intention in such metaphors. But when we consider the whole poem as a metaphor we have a new ground, and in that the images, descriptions as well as internal metaphors, are the elements which constitute the metaphorical relation. And that relation bears the poet's intention.

¹ For the opinions of some modern critics, vide, Marcus B. Hester, *op cit*, pp 147-50

But the elements of these metaphorical relations are often determined, at least partially, by some choice that the poet makes as the focal point of his work. This focal point can be the plot, or a character, or an event or a scene or even a mood. Here, as we can easily see, this focal point is the Cloud.¹ And the choice of the cloud as the messenger, as the Yakṣa's spokesman, throws the Yakṣa into the background; he is hardly a part of the poem, he retires, so to say, outside of it into the position of, as we have earlier shown, a second poet, except in the lyrical part when the poet's *persona* reappears.

The choice of the focal point determines and demarcates to a large extent the metaphorical field. The images which then surge up in the poet's mind are not free, they are organically related to the focal point, in this case to the cloud.

In the poem itself Kālidāsa directs our attention to the aspect of the cloud which is most significant in the present context: separation of lovers. The poem ends with the following line:

mā bhud evaṁ kṣaṇam api ca te vidyutā viprayogaḥ/ [111]

May you never, even for a moment, be thus separated from the lightning.

This closing benedictory line shows us clearly that the poet establishes consciously a link between the pair Yakṣa—Yakṣa's wife, and the pair Cloud—Lightning.

The cloud is not just the messenger of the Yakṣa, it is his image, his other self. This is suggested by the qualification *antar-vāṣpaḥ*, used for the Yakṣa.

*tasya sthītvā katham api puraḥ....
antar vāspaś cīram anucaro Rāja-rājasya dadhyau/ [3]*

Standing with difficulty in front (of the cloud) Kubera's attendant (i.e. the Yakṣa), his heart filled with tears brooded for a long time.

Here the cloud and the Yakṣa are placed face to face. And in this confrontation Kālidāsa uses skilfully the meaning of the word *vāṣpa*: tears, vapour. *Antarvāṣpa* would be a very appropriate description of the cloud but here its being used for the Yakṣa suggests indirectly the identification of the two. Thus there is no difficulty in accepting the metaphorical transfer from one couple to the other. This association indicates to us as it indicated to the poet himself the linking of the "dark" of the cloud to the "bright" of the lightning. The poet specially draws our attention to the darkness of the cloud in the very first introduction:

¹ In more complex works there may be several such focal points varying in intensity

...megham āśliṣṭa-sānum
vāpra-kridā-parinata-gaja-preksaṇīyam dadarśal/ [2]

(the Yakṣa) saw a cloud embracing the peaks, lovely to behold as an elephant when it bends down to strike playfully a river's muddy bank.

This comparison of the cloud with the elephant points on the one hand to the size, on the other hand to the colour. The dark colour is further brought into prominence by showing us the elephant dashing against a mound of earth; we thus imagine it covered with mud.

We discover a series of images where these two colour-qualities are brought together. But the intensity and the significance of the imagery are not equal in all the parts: the descriptive part, as it is to be expected, develops most fully the metaphorical texture. Also, the images have not always a very implicit relation to the mood of separation, *vīraha*, but only act to create a certain atmosphere of beauty, as if to show the interaction of darkness and brightness, to show that union is the most normal thing in nature where we find at every side the intermingling of the dark (male) and the bright (female).

In order to prove our point we shall study the imagery under different sections.

(A) IMAGERY IN THE NARRATIVE-DESCRIPTIVE PASSAGE

- (i) in the purely narrative passage,
 - (ii) in the description of the Cloud's route,
 - (iii) in the description of Alakā and the Yakṣa's home,
 - (iv) in the description of the Yakṣa's wife;
- and

(B) IMAGERY IN THE LYRICAL PASSAGE.

(To be continued)

RANAJIT SARKAR

GREY

For long the thread
Lay tangled and soiled.
I had to steep it
In the heart's acid;
I had to dry it
In the heart's heat;
I wound it round
And round on the spool
Of the heart.
Now I weave the cloth.
It is not white
As the driven snow;
Nor black, the colour
Of new mourning
But grey, the ash,
All that's left
After burning.

The day is failing,
I work by heart
In the light-grey dusk.
A shadow glides
Across the window-pane;
The angel of mercy
Is passing by?
It will take long,

To make a shroud
For all who died
In the Warsaw Ghetto.
One is given time
To hate, to forget
And to learn the work.
Greyness remains;
The stuff in my hands
Is grey like smoke
On the evening air.

Weaving and stitching
Are womens' tasks.
Rich tapestries—
Unicorns and flowers.
Swift hum of machines—
Girls earn their living.
The rough and gay skirts
Of peasant women,
Weaving their lives and dreams
Into cottons, silks, satins.
I weave this pall of words,
Long seams of thoughts,
The night has come,
A whirling shroud
About my head.

MARTA GUHA

“SATYAVAN MUST DIE”

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

(Continued from the issue of June 1991)

14: Satyavan Must Die

“WE are wretched things and the gods who have no cares themselves have woven sorrow into the pattern of our lives”—so tells Achilles to Priam. The Argives fought and the Trojans fought, because the immortals willed it to be so. And yet the universe, where prophecies however dire and cruel come true, is ruled by a secret logos whom even the gods and goddesses obey. In the All-Wisdom there is a reason, a perfect rationality, and what seems harsh destiny just becomes a part of its working. This All-Wisdom or the supreme Logos is not a distant and impersonal Someone decreeing ultimate things only; the concern is in the day-to-day too. Zeno called it *logos spermatikos*, the animating force that is always working towards producing Good. Its immanence is an invisible hand ever operative in the least crawl of an ant as much as in the swift motion of a far-receding galaxy. It even allows in its wide Truth-rhythms a play of the individual free-will. Thus while there is the divine determinism at the highest level, man, through the zig-zags of life, can accept it or reject it. In that sense Sita's wish to commit suicide in her extreme state of anguish was unfortunate; she wanted somebody to give her poison and go to Yama even without the company of her husband: *kshupram Vaivasvattam devam pascheyam patinā vinā*; her role was only the subdued shadow of the luminous dynamism of her Lord. Cleopatra, on the other hand, was right when she declared that “we make those fates ourselves”. The *Mahabharata* goes one more step farther when it asserts: “Fate without human action cannot be fulfilled.” In *Savitri* also we have Narad's statement: “Man can accept his fate, he can refuse.” Talking about the truth-will, Sri Aurobindo describes it as follows: “The spiritual will is the Tapas or enlightened force of the conscious being of the spirit effecting infallibly what is there within it, and it is this infallible operation of things acting according to their own nature, of energy producing result and the event according to the force within it, of action bearing the fruit and event involved in its own character and intention which we call variously in its different aspects law of Nature, Karma, Necessity and Fate. These things are to the mind the workings of a power outside or above in which it is involved and intervenes only with a contributory personal effort which partly arrives and succeeds, partly fails and stumbles and which even in succeeding is largely overruled for issues different from or at any rate greater and more far-reaching than its own intention. The will of man works in the ignorance by a partial light or more often flickerings of light which mislead as

much as they illuminate. His mind is an ignorance striving to erect standards of knowledge, his will an ignorance striving to erect standards of right, and his whole mentality as a result very much a house divided against itself, idea in conflict with idea, the will often in conflict with the ideal of right or intellectual knowledge. The will itself takes different shapes, the will of the intelligence, the wishes of the emotional mind, the desires of the passion and the vital being, the impulses and blind or half-blind compulsions of the nervous and the sub-conscious nature, and all these make by no means a harmony, but at best a precarious concord among discords. The will of the mind and life is a stumbling about in search of right force, right Tapas which can wholly be attained in its true and complete light and direction only by oneness with the spiritual and supramental being." In this play of the wills, the play of the high Will works itself out. Savitri has chosen and willed to marry Satyavan despite Narad's prophecy. That will arose from her very soul, the depths of which are ever one with the supreme Chit-Shakti herself

My will is part of the eternal will,
My fate is what my spirit's strength can make,
My fate is what my spirit's strength can bear.²

What we therefore see is the freest will which is yet governed by a divine determinism in the play of the Chit-Shakti in a terrestrial circumstance. To this will of human Savitri, Narad the heavenly sage adds his own that it may be firmed up, "steel"ed, in the course of events. Multiple dimensions have come into play.

"It is decreed that Satyavan must die"—thus runs the edict with the irrevocability of the highest pronouncement where no other counsel can now prevail. It is not just a foretelling or an advance warning to the concerned about what is going to happen at the end of a certain stipulated period. In this Word of Fate Narad is not simply bringing and delivering through it to Savitri a message of the impending doom; his concern is that in her new life, which is soon to begin, she should get ready for a direr or mightier task. True, Fate is irrevocable and ever remains hidden from us, but it is also possible to change it when revealed; its determination can be altered by our invocation to a higher power. There need not be always the helplessness Toru Dutt laments of:

And each shall suffer as he acts
And thinker—his own sad burden bear;
No friends can help—his sins are facts
That nothing can annul or square.

In the case of Satyavan's death, however, it is not simply a matter of Fate; it is an

inerable Decree that has come into play. Something very exceptional, with a deliberate intention, bearing far-reaching consequences, something loaded with the supranatural, is hinted to be operative; there appears to be the shaping of a goldenly bright “spiritual Will” of the highest order, a Knowledge-Force set in motion hastening a new Advent. It is indeed the dimension of the Transcendent himself emerging for a cosmic play, with the purpose to deal with the power of the Annihilator of the Worlds. Thus it is the “decree” and there is the “must”, showing the infallibility of its execution. The fell sentence speaks of a divine determinism poised for a world-transforming action, making the preordained event a means to achieve and establish something of its own in this unconscious creation that is ever helpless and death-bound. “Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals without a curse,” said Sophocles—and the curse is: “Satyavan must die.”

What we have to note in the fell sentence is not only the irrevocability and utter finality of the decree; most significantly in it is the specificity about the death of Satyavan. Narad had declared earlier that twelve swift-winged months were given to the young couple to be together; this could have meant the death of either of the two partners. Why not then the death of Savitri, instead of Satyavan? Why is the writ against this poor soul whose only fault was perhaps to have espoused the fiery Madran? Or was it due to Savitri’s birth on *amāvasyā* which is supposed to portend calamity to the husband? But then why her birth on this day?

Savitri is not only a legend, a legend of the past but also of the future, it is, as the Mother says, a “symbolic work” describing a great occult event in the spiritual history of the terrestrial life. In it “the death of Satyavan becomes the symbol of the earthly creation”. It is the unfinished biography of the evolutionary soul in the travails of Time that must step into beatitudes of Eternity. It is a symbol being perfected in death where the luminous immortality is not only possible but must be a breathing fact of joyous life.

Though eternally one, Satyavan and Savitri belong to different orders of existence. Savitri’s birth is a descent of the divine Shakti in the process of evolving time. She has come here because a “world’s desire compelled her mortal birth”; a master-prayer “Brought down to earth’s dumb need her radiant power.” She, the Force of the Supreme “at work to uplift earth’s fate”, has condescended to accept the human mould in order to complete her unfinished task. Again, she is here to lead man on the path of the Divine. Love that cannot be slain by Death is for her the single key to open doors of delight. She must wrestle with the last Adversary to claim it back that its law be founded here. For this to happen she must vanquish Death and fulfil the *Corinthians*’ expectation: “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” There is no way out other than that. The Mother³ states it as follows: “After all, as long as there is death, things always end badly. It is only victory over death which will make it possible for

things not to end badly; that is when the return into the Inconscience will no longer be necessary to allow a new progress." That is Savitri's unfinished task. She comes time and again for this purpose with love as her sword of conquest. But Satyavan is a permanent Avatar in the cycles of evolution. It is he who is subject to death and suffering, exposed to the wild buffets of wind and storm. He has accepted Inconscience as a *modus operandi* for a new manifestation in the domain of darkness, the Void which is thicker than the Night. He is the soul of the Supreme who climbs from nescience to the worlds of supernal Knowledge, Power, Truth, Light; "a godhead growing in human lives" to a life illimitable, he moves towards the Ineffable's bliss. In the Vedic image he is Martanda, the eighth son of Aditi left by her here in the folds of Inconscience that he may reach her back and join his seven brothers in the solar realms. Aditi herself becomes Savitri and her own son's wife to lift him up to the original skies in a joyous union.

The unseverable union has taken a form of the Satyavan-Savitri love in Time, the ephemerality of which must now turn into its eternity. This can happen only with the death of Satyavan. According to Death "Love is expendable" and Satyavan is only her "bribe of joy"; but Savitri rejects such a distorted version and asserts that he is the "captain of the fancies of her soul". Savitri's divinity, though in the human form, cannot accept or brook any challenge to her power of loving which, by its native right, ever remains unmutated. But the focus of love that is in the figure of Satyavan is a proposition altogether different from the infinite source of love that is the immortality of Savitri. Hence in this possibility his death is a planned accident. The quarrel between Chance and Necessity has got to be settled in favour of the latter, Necessity that works for the Good. What if Satyavan had married someone other than Savitri? But Love in time saw to it that it should not happen otherwise. Indeed, Love is *karmātit*, past all laws and governing factors of this world. Precisely, therefore, it falls in the hands of Death. Satyavan's death, as much as his life, is this Love's subjection to the great Cosmic Law. To break it is to initiate a New Order. The death in the forest envisions this miraculous possibility in the Creation.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

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SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of June 1991)

SRI AUROBINDO served in Baroda under the Gaekward from 8th February 1893 to 18th June 1906. The period of service covered 13 years and four months. He was twenty-one years old when he joined the work and left it when he was thirty-five. During these years he acted in several capacities. His life is connected with five different fields: (1) service in various state departments; (2) College teaching, literary activity, reading and study of the history, traditions, achievements of his native land, growing in its spirit and preparing himself more or less consciously for his future role; (3) increasing interest and involvement in political matters and contribution to the paper *Indu Prakash*, visit to Bengal during vacations for a revolutionary purpose; (4) spiritual life; (5) family life.

He first served in the Survey Settlement Department on a pay of Rs. 200/ per month, and was asked to get acquainted with the procedural formalities of the Department. From here he went over to the Revenue Department in May 1895 and the Stamp Department, then to the Secretariate, drawing up important despatches. His first role in the College was in January 1897, as a lecturer in French, but this was for an hour only, the rest of the time being given to the Vahivatadar's office. In February 1898 he was appointed Extra Professor of English. Other work was added in the year 1900; he was appointed, on the strong recommendation of Principal Tait, permanent Vice-principal on a pay of Rs. 550 per month. From March 1905 to February 1906, Sri Aurobindo acted in place of the Principal who was on leave.

The Gaekward, however, was fully aware of Sri Aurobindo's capacities and wanted to utilise them at full stretch. Sometimes he used to call him for writing letters, composing speeches or drawing up documents of various kinds which needed special careful wording. At one time the Maharaja asked him to give appropriate English constructions, for writing reports; on another occasion he was asked to advise on travel after consulting the time-table of European railways. The work entrusted to Sri Aurobindo was sometimes very dull and required plodding through reports and making abstracts. Sri Aurobindo felt no enthusiasm for that kind of work. But he was slightly relieved because of one fact. In one of the evening talks with Nirodbaran and the group of attendants, he explained that his fatigue under the Maharaja was better than working as an I.C.S. for the British Government: "Baroda was a native state under a native ruler. You did not have to be all attention to the superior English officers ruling your fate. There was much room for freedom and dignity."¹

Sri Aurobindo was usually invited for meals and sometimes for breakfast with the Maharaja. In later life he said: "These invitations were usually for some work to be done and could not be refused." He used to stay with the Maharaja,

going on doing the work of writing orders or letters to the British Government. Sri Aurobindo was specially sent for to Ootacamund to prepare a précis of the whole Bapat case and the judicious opinion on it.

The following extracts from *Sardesai Rao Gaekward Yancha Sahavasat* by Govind Sakharam Sardesai (the famous Marathi historian) referring to Sri Aurobindo, afford contemporary evidence about his Baroda State service and life:

“Sri Aurobindo and myself were together with Sayaji Rao often. . . Sometimes men like Sri Aurobindo would pen lectures for him. Once the Maharaja had to address a social conference. Sri Aurobindo prepared the speech. We three [i.e., the Maharaja, G. S. Sardesai and Sri Aurobindo] sat together and read it. The Maharaja after hearing it said: ‘Can you not, Arabind Babu, tone it down? It is too fine to be mine.’

“Sri Aurobindo replied smiling: ‘Why make a change for nothing? Do you think, Maharaja, that if it is toned down a little, people will believe it to be yours? Good or bad, whatever it be, people will always say that the Maharaja always gets his lectures written by others. The main thing is whether the thoughts are yours. That is your chief part.’ ”

Sardesai also states that Sri Aurobindo carried on the major part of the correspondence that passed between the British Indian government and Baroda State about the insult which Curzon felt when the Maharaja, who was in Paris, was called by the Indian government (as Curzon was visiting Baroda in 1900), and the Maharaja did not come.

Another glimpse from Sardesai: “I used to go out walking with Sri Aurobindo in those days. He usually was reserved and non-communicative. To a question he would reply ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and not go beyond. There was something of the mystic in him ” “I wrote many memoranda for the Maharaja,” Sri Aurobindo once said. “Generally he used to indicate the lines and I used to follow them. But I myself was not much interested in administration. My interests lay outside in Sanskrit, literature, and in the National movement. When I came to Baroda from England I found out what the Congress was at that time and formed a contempt for it. Then I came in touch with Deshpande, Tilak, Madhavarao, and others. Deshpande requested me to write something in the *Indu Prakash*. There I strongly criticised the Congress for its moderate policy. The articles were so slashing that M. G. Ranade, the great Maharashtrian leader, asked the proprietor of the paper not to allow such seditious articles to appear in the paper, otherwise he might be arrested and imprisoned. Deshpande approached me with the news and requested me to write something less violent. I then began to write about the philosophy of politics leaving aside the practical part. But I soon got disgusted with it.”²

In spite of the outside work Sri Aurobindo once acted as Personal Secretary to the Maharaja. This occurred in the year 1903, when the Maharaja took him

with him as a secretary on the Kashmir tour. As there was much antagonism between the two, the ruler did not feel encouraged to repeat that experience. A few instances may be cited which throw light on the temperament of the two persons. Once on some occasion the Maharaja sent for Sri Aurobindo twice in the course of the day. When the Maharaja could not get any response, he himself went to Sri Aurobindo and found him sleeping and returned without disturbing him

There was another instance which is recorded by Nirodbaran. The Maharaja once issued a circular to all officers ordering all of them to attend office on Sundays and also on holidays. Sri Aurobindo did not attend and the Maharaja talked of fining him. Sri Aurobindo said immediately: "Let him fine as much as he likes, I am not going."¹ Hearing of this reply the Maharaja did not proceed.

Sri Aurobindo writes, in the course of a letter (November 7, 1938): "Quite agree with your estimate of Kashmir. The charm of its mountains and rivers and the ideal life dawdling along in the midst of a supreme beauty in the slowly moving leisure of a houseboat—that was a kind of earthly Paradise—also writing poetry on the banks of the Jhelum where it rushes down Kashmir towards the plains. Unfortunately there was the over-industrious Gaekward to cut short the Paradise! His ideas of Paradise was going through administrative papers and making myself and others write speeches for which he got all the credit. But after all, according to the nature, to each one his Eden."²

A Bengali writer, Dinendra Kumar Roy, who stayed with Sri Aurobindo during 1908-09 in order to familiarise him with the Bengali language, wrote a book named *Aurobindo Prasanga*. In that book he records Sri Aurobindo's estimation of the ruler: "The present Maharaja is capable of ruling over a large empire. As a politician he has no peer in the whole of India."

Mr. Roy writes on Sri Aurobindo as follows:

(1) "Aurobindo talked very little, perhaps because he believed it better to speak as little as possible about oneself." (2) "It was as if acquiring knowledge was his sole mission in life." (3) "Aurobindo is not a man of this earth, he is a god come down from heaven by some curse."³

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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THE TITLE OF THE OPENING CHAPTER OF THE GITA

AN INTERPRETATION

1. Arjuna's Dejection

THE opening chapter on Arjuna's dejection is entitled *Arjuna—visāda—yogah*. The Gita, which occurs in the Bhīshma parva of the *Mahābhārata*, consists of eighteen chapters, and none of them has a title, much less the opening chapter.¹ Scholars are of the view that chapter-titles were added subsequently when the Gita became an independent text. Whoever has added them to the Gita, they have been in existence for a long time, particularly before the advent of Ādi Shankara. Here we are concerned with the first chapter and its title with a view to find out *why* Arjuna's dejection is referred to as a yoga.

The word *yoga*, though used in a variety of meanings including that of *effort*, has acquired a specific significance in the context of spiritual practice. As early as the *Śvetāśvatara Upanisad* the word was used in the sense of a spiritual discipline. It says that God must be reached by yoga (6-13). The Gita also uses the word in the same sense. It says that the yogin, freed from stain (such as misery) and constantly putting himself into yoga, happily and easily enjoys the touch of Brahman which is infinite Bliss (6-28). Here two aspects of yoga are distinguished, freedom from stain and enjoyment of the bliss of Brahman. Since freedom from stain is essential for enjoying the bliss of Brahman, this freedom itself is identified with yoga; the Gita says that disassociation of one's union with misery is yoga, *duhkha-samyoga-viyogam yogasamjñitam* (6-23). Thus the word *yoga* signifies a system of self-discipline by which one becomes free from misery and enjoys bliss. Apart from this, dejection is regarded as an unfavourable element in the practice of yoga: its rejection is an essential condition for a proper beginning of yoga. The Gita specifically lays down that yoga must be practised with a mind free from dejection, *anirvinnacetasā* (6-23).

But the fact is that in the title of the first chapter the word *yoga* is used to refer to Arjuna's mood of dejection. It is contrary to the conventional usage of the word, as also to the definition of the word given by the Gita in the subsequent chapter. Hence we have to find a suitable explanation for this discrepancy.

2. Arjuna on the Battlefield

We can settle the above question only when we have a close look at the state of Arjuna's mind as unfolded by the verses of the chapter under discussion,

¹ In the original text the opening chapter is simply called the 23rd, *trayovimśo'dhyāyah*

otherwise our conclusion on the occurrence of the word *yoga* in the title would be dismissed as too hasty.

Brought up in the high traditions of great masters like Bhīshma, Arjuna has flowered into a noble leader of the Āryan people. This is the picture we get of him from the Epic and the Gita. "He justifies his name only in being so far pure and sattvic as to be governed by high and clear principles and impulses and habitually control his lower nature by the noblest Law which he knows. He is not of a violent Asuric disposition, not the slave of his passions, but has been trained to a high calm and self-control, to an unswerving performance of his duties and firm obedience to the best principles of the time and society in which he has lived and the religion and ethics to which he has been brought up. He is egoistic like other men, but with the purer or sattvic egoism which regards the moral law and society and the claims of others and not only or predominantly his own interests, desires and passions. He has lived and guided himself by the Shastra, the moral and social code."¹ Arjuna is thus presented as a rajasic man governed by the sattvic ideal.

As one rooted in the sacred duty of the *Ksatriya* who protects justice and the law, and as one who is proud of this conviction, he looks at his opponents who stand in the battlefield pledging support to the unrighteous cause of their king. It is at this moment that Arjuna is overcome by a crisis which produces a disgust for his action and its aims and for life. He rejects possession and enjoyment and rule, for these very aims are destroyed when his people are destroyed. And now his moral sense awakens. He would not like to kill those without whom one does not care to live, those who are considered as the objects of love and reverence—his own teacher, grandfathers, sons, grandsons, and friends. His enemies, blinded by greed and untouched by the guilt of destroying the family traditions, do not hesitate to commit the sin. But if he destroys those traditions, knowing the consequence of such an act, he would be committing a greater sin and crime, *mahat pāpam* (1-45). His pride has vanished; he discovers that he is not any better than his enemies. He feels that it is proper for him to be killed by the sons of Dhrtarāshtra, for he is a greater offender than his enemies. Thus, overwhelmed by disgust and the sense of guilt, his mind is plunged in surging sorrow, *śokasamvigna-mānasah* (1-47).

When confronted with a crisis like this, Arjuna makes no attempt whatever, either in thought or in feeling, to solve the problem through a process of self-mastery; on the contrary, he is completely lost in the delusions created by his agitated mind. In the absence of a self-effort to conquer the problem, Arjuna's dejection can hardly be considered as having a spiritual significance, or for that matter justify the use of the word *yoga* in the title.

¹ Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* (1972), pp. 19-20

3. Arjuna's Attitude of Renunciation

But before we proceed further, we have to take note of another interpretation of Arjuna's mental state. It is put forward by the advocates of the path of renunciation, *sannyāsa dharma*. The school of *sannyāsa* traces all evils to two causes. sense-object and action. Desire, which is seated in the mind, constantly directs the senses to the objects of the world. All impulsions to action are controlled by desire and ego in the mind. The aim of all actions is to possess and enjoy sense-objects. Therefore the way to conquer evils is to renounce sense-objects, *aparigrahaḥ* (6-10) and all undertakings of action. He who has renounced all undertakings of action is called *sarva-ārambha-parityāgi* (14-25). It is in this context that the advocates of *sannyāsa* 'analyse the words of Arjuna and arrive at a view of his psychological state.

According to them, Arjuna's words indicate the development of an attitude of detachment. He gives up not only action but also the objects of action *viz.*, possession and rule and enjoyment (*vide* 1-31: I desire not victory, nor kingdom nor pleasures). He is disgusted with pleasures even in the worlds beyond (*vide* 1-35: I would not consent to slay, not even for the kingdom of the three worlds, what then to say for this earth?). He is not attached to greed which makes possessions and rule and enjoyment possible (*vide* 1-45 We are ready to kill our people through greed for the pleasures of kingship). He rejects life itself as futile, because worldly life is governed by greed (*vide* 1-32: what is even life to us?). His aversion is so complete that he is not interested in anything pertaining to this world or to the worlds beyond, *aiḥika-phala-virāga* and *pāralaukika-phala-virāga*. Thus he fulfils the basic requirement of one who is desirous of entering the path of *sannyāsa*,—a total detachment from works and sense-objects.

Further, the advocates of *sannyāsa* cite the words of Arjuna that occur in the beginning of the second chapter, with a view to clinch the argument. Here Arjuna reiterates his utter disregard for wealth and desires (*vide* 2-5: My enjoyment of wealth and desires are blood-stained.). He goes on to add that he is prepared to embrace the life of a *sannyāsin* (*vide* 2-5: It is better to live in this world even on alms.). Commenting on this verse (2-5), Madhusūdan Sarasvatī, an advocate of *sannyāsa*, says that while the first chapter hints at *sannyāsa* as a means, *sannyāsa-sādhana-sūcanam*, the second explicitly brings in *sannyāsa* as a mode of life. In other words, the intention behind Arjuna's words in the first chapter is brought out and stated in precise terms in the second chapter. Thus the thesis of the advocates of *sannyāsa* is that Arjuna's dejection produces an attitude of dispassion, *vairāgya*, towards worldly life and prepares him for a spiritual or yogic life.

4. Arjuna's Delusion

We shall see if the Gita teaches renunciation of sense-objects and action. It is the desire for sense-objects that is to be renounced and not the sense-objects themselves, says the Gita. When desires are eliminated from the mind, one is not attached to sense-objects. He experiences no misery even if he is to move among the objects of sense, *viṣayān indriyaiścāran* (2-64), because he is self-controlled. Besides, the Gita does not insist on giving up actions; its insistence is only on eliminating from the mind desire and ego in the performance of actions, *asaktaḥ satatam kāryaṁ karma samācāra* (3-19). It is true that sense-objects and actions bring evils, but they cease to do so when the mind is freed from desire and ego. He who is self-controlled, *vidheyātmā*, does not experience misery even if he enjoys sense-objects and does works. Further, the Gita does not ask Arjuna, at any point, to abandon action or enjoyment of wealth in the world. On the contrary, he is asked to become self-disciplined and act and enjoy without bondage, *naivāṁ pāpamavāpasyasi* (2-38). Therefore the words *aparigrahaḥ* (6-10) and *sarva-ārambha-ṣarītyāgī* (14-25) must be suitably interpreted in conformity with verses 2-64 and 3-19. (*vide* Section 3).

It is therefore evident that it is contrary to the spirit of the Gita to view the words of Arjuna in the opening chapter in the light of an ascetic abandonment of life and action in the world. As will be shown now, it is difficult to attribute to Arjuna even a true attitude of ascetic abandonment. Hence Arjuna must be understood in the light of his own words and the words of Krishna.

Arjuna does speak of abandoning everything—greed, victory, kingship and enjoyment. The basic question before us is this. Does he speak as a helpless person or as one self-composed and self-determined? Once this question is answered, it is easy to fix the intention with which Arjuna speaks.

If we try to understand Arjuna in his own words, there is little evidence to show that he is composed and steady. This is the picture we get of him not only in the second half of the first chapter but in the beginning of the second chapter as well. As soon as he sees his own people in the battlefield, his emotions open up and let in a movement of profound pity and dejection. It sets in motion a process of agitation and complete undoing. He is no longer his usual self and able to protect himself from the disastrous effects of his agitated body and mind. He is unable to stand or exercise his mind. His mind loses its hold upon its functions and the movements of the body. Arjuna is not able to recover from this psychological disaster till the end of the first chapter. In fact, he continues to be in this state at least until he openly tells Krishna that he will not fight (2-9). When Arjuna says, "What is kingdom to us, O Govinda, what enjoyment and what even life?", the words come out under a great stress from which he wants to escape. One can easily see through his motive when he says that he does not want to slay even for the kingdom of the three worlds. His motive is to avoid the

war on any account. Similarly, when he talks about greed and the futility of life, his aim is to justify his position as if he had risen above the level of ordinary human nature. In fact he has fallen below the level of an ordinary Āryan, and therefore, it is an attempt to hide his inability to contain the situation and produce a mastering response as an Āryan. Thus what we see in his words is a revolt and a recoil from action of a weak person and not an enlightened renunciation issuing out of a strong mind. Rather it is a renunciation resulting from delusion, *mohāttasya parityāgah* (18-7).

It may be pointed out that Arjuna's rejection of life and the world is the result of a steady seeing of a clear mind and not the revolt of a weak person. For instance, Arjuna says that though the understanding of his enemies is clouded by greed, *lobhopahata cetasaḥ* (1-38), he and his associates can clearly see, *pra-paśyadbhiḥ* (1-39), the evil in the destruction of family. If he is able to see clearly the evil consequence of the war, then he must have first of all seen the evil in his not fighting the war as a *Ksatriya*. But obviously he is not able to see this evil, as is later pointed out by Krishna (2-33). Further, Arjuna himself subsequently confesses to Krishna that his true nature is clouded by the taint of pity, *kārpanya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ* (2-7). In view of these evidences we may assert that Arjuna, though he talks about his clear perception of the evil of destroying the family, continues to be in a state of confusion and weakness and rejects life and the world as a result of these limitations.

One more argument against our position is possible. It may be argued that verse 2-5 contradicts our view that there is no evidence for an enlightened renunciation in the words of Arjuna. In the above verse Arjuna expresses his desire to embrace the life of a *sannyāsin*. But there is no real contradiction between our view and the verse, because the words *bhoktum bhauksyam apī* (live on alms *even*) are employed only as a rhetoric to indicate Arjuna's violent disapproval of the idea of slaying his own grandsire and his own teacher, Bhīshma and Drona. Even if the above verse is taken to refer to Arjuna's desire to choose the life of a mendicant, *sannyāsa dharma*, it must be treated as referring to his physical recoil from action and life and not to an enlightened renunciation, for he is not motivated by a desire to conquer the limitations of ordinary human nature.

Our contention that Arjuna's words indicate a violent revolt rather than an enlightened attitude of renunciation deserves to be confirmed by other textual evidences and the opinion of the competent authority. Arjuna is in a helpless state and his rejection of life and the world is not the result of a clear determination. The words of Krishna confirm our view. He is able to see through the words of Arjuna and tell him to his face that he has fallen from his normal self, *naitat-tvay-yupapadyate* (2-3) and allowed impotence, *klaibyam*, and weakness of the heart, *hrdaya daurbalyam* (2-3), to overpower him. Krishna therefore condemns his attitude as un-Āryan, *anāryajuṣṭam* (2-2). Further, when

he says that Arjuna speaks as if he is possessed of a clear understanding, *prajñāvādāmśca bhāsase* (2-11), he tears away Arjuna's mask and shows that his disgust for life and the world does not come from an enlightened attitude.

5. Arjuna's Psychological Condition

We shall now see what Sri Aurobindo has to say on the psychological condition of Arjuna. He sees Arjuna as a pragmatic man who is neither philosophical nor even deeply reflective nor spiritual in temperament and who finds "all his standards failing him and all the basis of his confidence in himself and his life shorn away from under him at a single stroke".¹ Analysing the exact nature of Arjuna's rejection of life and the world, Sri Aurobindo observes that his renunciation is neither sattvic nor even rajasic but of an inferior type, for it is determined by tamasic qualities such as impotence, fear, aversion, disgust, and horror of the world and life. He concludes that "the recoil of Arjuna is the tamasic recoil from action of the Sattva-rajasic man".²

We have seen that Arjuna's real nature is clouded by the taint of pity. But how does this taint turn him impotent and make him see everything including his own self in a wrong light? It does this by plunging his whole being into a state of delusion. Arjuna himself testifies to this drastic change. He says that "his whole conscious being, not the thought alone, but his heart and vital desires and all, are utterly bewildered", *sammūḍha cetāḥ* (2-7). When he takes refuge in Krishna, the one thing which he asks him is that he be freed from delusion. At the end of the long discourse, Krishna asks Arjuna if his delusion is destroyed. And Arjuna answers that his delusion is destroyed, *naṣṭo mohaḥ* (18-73). Therefore the one word which precisely describes Arjuna's state of mind is *delusion*. All his words acquire significance only in relation to the mental state signified by this word.

We have to clarify one important point before we try to fix the true significance of the word *yoga* in the title. If, according to our analysis, Arjuna does not show any inclination for a spiritual view of his crisis, we have to explain what makes him eligible for receiving the spiritual teachings of Krishna. He becomes eligible on account of his closeness and devotion to Krishna, for Krishna himself says that he teaches Arjuna because he is his friend and devotee, *bhaktosī me sakhā ca* (4-3).

¹ *Essays on the Gita*, p 19

² *Ibid*, p 51 Compare Prof M Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (1932), p 121 Arjuna's "vairāgya does not spring from true enlightenment, but from narrow-mindedness viz, the love of kith and kin His detachment, or, rather his disinclination to fight, is in a large measure due to the uncommon situation in which he finds himself somewhat suddenly It is not, therefore, his considered view of the universe or of the life that he has to lead in it which prompts him to this indifference It is the result of weakness—surrendering to the power of the moment Arjuna's varāgya is eventually rāga, not virāga "

6. The meaning of the Word *Yoga* in the Title

In the beginning we have found that *yoga* stands for a system of self-discipline by which one becomes free from misery and that *yoga* must be practised with a mind free from dejection. In this sense the word *yoga* cannot be employed to refer to the dejection of Arjuna. But since the word *yoga* is used to refer to Arjuna's dejection, we proposed to eliminate this discrepancy and justify the use of the word in the title of the first chapter.

According to the school of *sannyāsa*, the word *yoga* is used in the title because Arjuna's dejection produces a yogic attitude, an attitude of disgust for life and the world, and prepares him for a spiritual or yogic life. In his introduction to a commentary on the Gita Swami Chidbhavananda, an advocate of *sannyāsa*, says that dejection is of two kinds, one pertaining to the inability to satisfy worldly desires and another to the rejection of these very desires. Arjuna's dejection does not fall under the first category, for he has become indifferent to worldly desires. This, according to him, is '*a prelude to spiritual enlightenment*' and '*prepares Arjuna for yoga*'. In this sense, he argues, Arjuna's dejection may be regarded as a *yoga*.¹

Textually speaking, it is difficult to accept the interpretation of Swami Chidbhavananda or the *sannyāsa* school. We have shown in great detail that Arjuna's dejection threw him into a state of delusion under which alone he rejected life and the world. We have also referred to Sri Aurobindo's view that Arjuna's rejection was the tamasic renunciation proceeding from impotence and horror of the world and life and not the renunciation determined by sattvic understanding. Further, we have seen that he made no attempt to deal with his problem from the subjective or spiritual point of view. In this circumstance the above interpretation must be dismissed as untenable.

But this incidentally raises another question and suggests a possible sense of the word *yoga* in the title. If the first chapter, as we have just now said, does not prepare Arjuna by means of a spiritual awakening, it must be dispensed with as having no relevance at all to the other chapters of the Gita where a comprehensive system of *yoga* is expounded. Further, this conclusion strengthens itself in view of the fact that Arjuna becomes eligible for receiving the teaching on *yoga* not on account of his crisis but on account of his closeness and devotion to Krishna. But then how to establish the relevance of the first chapter? Though Arjuna had become eligible for receiving Krishna's teachings long before the commencement of the war, by reason of his intimacy and natural devotion, Krishna was waiting for an appropriate moment to impart them to Arjuna. And this was provided by the crisis which overtook Arjuna in the battlefield. In this sense the first chapter becomes indispensable as well as relevant. We must also

¹ See *The Bhagavad Gita* (1977), p 33

note that our justification contains a clue to an interpretation of the word *yoga* in the title. We know that one of the meanings of the word is *occasion*.¹ In so far as Arjuna's crisis serves as an occasion for introducing the teaching of Krishna, the title may be understood as the occasion (*yogah*) created by Arjuna's dejection.

Two or three more interpretations of the word are possible. But for this purpose we have to identify in precise terms the stages which Arjuna's crisis passes through. (1) In the beginning Arjuna comes into contact with dejection when he is filled with pity for his own people; (2) immediately after this contact he is shattered down and thrown into an utter bewilderment by the dejection. In this context two of the meanings of the word *yoga* acquire significance,—*contact* and *attack*.² The title may be read now as the contact (*yogah*) of dejection with Arjuna or as the attack (*yogah*) of dejection on Arjuna. A third interpretation also is possible by combining these two senses of the word. From this point of view, the title may be construed as the contact (*yogah*) with dejection resulting in an attack (*yogah*) on Arjuna.

N. JAYASHANMUKHAM

¹ See V S Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Vol III, 1959

² See V S Apte *op cit*

NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

Computer Translation Programs

WILL a computer ever be able to translate English into French or German into Hindi? If we consider the theoretical difficulties of this task, we realize at once its magnitude. Many words in every language carry multiple meanings, a fact which is best known to Sanskrit students who often face the choice of a dozen meanings when opening their dictionary. Thus, the famous *matkuna* can be anything between a bug, a buffalo and an elephant, with “unbearded man” or “coconut-tree” as additional options. In English, *bear* has very different meanings as a noun and a verb, whilst the German *Ton* could be “clay” or “sound” in English, and the latter term again would have a different meaning as an adjective. In a sentence such as “we read the book yesterday” the verb “read” is obviously past tense, although it could also be present tense from its spelling. Here an enormous amount of programming would be required to teach the machine the difference.

Nevertheless, computer translation programs are already available and used by some professionals. The magazine *Computer Persönlich* (20-2-91) has tested three such programs, Right II Plus 2.0, FD-Translator 3.0 and Globalink 2.0. The easiest type of text to be tested would be commercial letters or technology where the terminology is comparatively clear and fixed. Poetry, on the other hand, would be the most difficult to deal with because of the subtle shades of meaning which are only intelligible through feeling and experience. Nevertheless, a text from a novel was also included, as taken from the German version of Milan Kundera’s “Immortality”. I just give a very brief extract here:

Sie setzte ihren Weg fort; ihr rechtes Ohr registrierte eine wahre Brandung von Musik, rhythmische Hiebe von Schlagzeugen (She walked on, her right ear noted real floods of music, rhythmical beats of drums.)

The English text, given in brackets, is a good standard translation of the German text. Now the programs were asked to put these same lines into English. Right II Plus has a rather bad start:

“She sat their way word. her right ear registered one true surf from music, rhythmic blows from Schlagzeugen.” (The German words are left untranslated, if not contained in the dictionary of the program.)

Although the second part (after the colon) is more convincing, the quality of the text is not very acceptable. Globalink scores higher marks:

“She/it continued their way; their right ear registered a true surf of music, rhythmic blows of percussions.”

A business letter in German often starts with the standard formula, “Sehr

geehrte Damen und Herren!”, in English “Ladies and Gentlemen,”. While Globalink got the text right, Right II Plus offered a kind of medieval version, “Very honoured ladies and masters!”.

Now the text starts, “Bezugnehmend auf unser gestriges Telefonat mochten wir folgende Artikel zu unseren Lieferbedingungen bestellen:” (Referring to yesterday’s phone call we want to order the following items to our terms of delivery:)

Here Right II Plus fails completely: “Bezugnehmend scorn our court yesterday Telefonat would like to sore following article to our Lieferbedingungen order”, whereas Globalink, which was found to be “the one-eyed among the blind”, offers the following version. “Cover taking¹ on our yesterday’s Telefonat we would like to order following articles to our delivery conditions.”

When technical and other texts were examined by the staff of the magazine, they arrived at similar results. No surprise then that they concluded that “the translated texts may transform many a face into a question mark”. In fact, a professional translator using such texts as a first rough translation, may have to spend more time revising it than doing it right away himself. However, looking up words in the electronic dictionaries or using their automatic orthography correction could be really helpful. Considering the high price of the better programs² (between \$ 1500 and 5000), a decision to do without them is not difficult to make. At this stage the field of translations seems to be still rather safe from complete electronic take-over.

¹ We have a perfect illustration here of the difficulty mentioned in the first paragraph of this article “Bezug” does mean “cover”, but in connection with the verb “nehmen” it also means “reference”. Therefore the correct translation is “making reference to” or “referring to”. However, a higher evolved program could easily take this specific hurdle as well as many others. In fact, only the “standard dictionaries” were being tested here, although special dictionaries with technical or commercial language programs are also available and can be modified and expanded by the user.

² The FD-Translator, which belongs to the category of so-called Shareware, is available for about \$ 50, offering remarkable results especially in language training and looking up words.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Sri Aurobindo Circle, 47th Number—**Sri Aurobindo Society Annual**, 1991, published by the Sri Aurobindo Society, pp. 112, price not mentioned.

THIS volume is a treasure I do not know whom to thank since no name is mentioned of the editor. Surely whoever he be deserves the reader's gratitude. The writings herein may be divided into three sections. Excerpts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother form the first magnificent half; this is followed by 14 poems; and the last part has four articles, one on the Mother's words and three others—namely, on Greece, Indian religion and spirituality, and future psychology, all of them expositions based on Sri Aurobindo's thoughts.

Earlier, in the first twelve pages we find four beautiful photographs of the Mother, six letters from Sri Aurobindo with three facsimiles of his handwriting, a piece from *Savitri* and five small extracts from Sri Aurobindo titled "The coming of the Hour of Light." The first half of the volume starts with a few quotations from Sri Aurobindo dealing with the Supramental and an easy-to-understand piece on "The Mind of Light" Then we come across an extremely important article, "Three disastrous errors to be guarded against in Supramental Yoga." These errors are:

1 "It is a mistake to think.. that the object of a supramental yoga is to arrive at a mighty magnificence of a supermanhood, a divine power and greatness, the self-fulfilment of a magnified individual personality. This is a false and disastrous conception,—disastrous because it is likely to raise the pride, vanity and ambition of the rajasic vital mind in us and that, if not overpassed and overcome, must lead to spiritual downfall, false because it is an egoistic conception and the first condition of the supramental yoga is to get rid of ego."

2. The supramental change "...must not be turned into a first aim, a constantly envisaged goal or an immediate objective. For it can only come into the view of possibility after much arduous self-conquest and self-exceeding, at the end of many long and trying stages of a difficult self-evolution of the nature. .to make the supermind an immediate aim and expect to pull it down with a pitchfork from its highest heights in the Infinite...is not only an absurd expectation but full of danger."

3. The third error is "to take some higher intermediate consciousness or even any kind of supernormal consciousness for the supermind." Why is this an error? Because Sri Aurobindo says, "...to imagine that we have reached such a condition when we are still moving in the dynamics of the Ignorance.. is to lay ourself open either to a disastrous misleading or to an arrest of the evolution of the being."

Sri Aurobindo, in this article of four pages, goes on explaining the why and how of these three errors. Many of us have seen or known of such downfalls

because of these errors. These are like signs “Danger, Beware”, on the road of Sadhana. The next article, “The danger of egoism of the instrument”, continues as it were the elucidation of these signals.

On pages 22-23 we find five quotations from Sri Aurobindo which according to the Mother are “simply perfect and after that nothing more can be said.” After some articles on a variety of subjects we come to an interesting interview of A.B. with Sri Aurobindo. Any smoker amongst the readers may please note this interesting incident. A.B. thought that it was as a beneficial result of smoking that he had the vision of a hole of a coin’s size being made on the covering of his head. When he asked Sri Aurobindo if smoking does help, Sri Aurobindo’s reply was a firm “NO.” The whole interview stresses how mental doubts and impatience are great obstacles and ends on a cheerful note that much less time is needed to make progress after the advent of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother than before. We do need to be told that things were much more difficult before. If we still refuse to count our blessings, if the flame of gratitude within us still does not brighten, well, things may indeed become more difficult!

Next we have, like ten petals, ten pages of the Mother’s words. The piece, “The third point that will unite the scientific and the spiritual standpoints”, is extraordinary. It is a commentary on an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo’s, but being based on her ongoing experience at that time it becomes as if an original article by her on a very important subject. Someone once said that we were in the Mother’s laboratory, each in his own crucible. Here is a confirmation by her that she too is with us when she says, “We are being used so that we can participate in the manifestation of ‘that’, of ‘that’ which is still inconceivable to everyone, because it is not yet there. It is an expression that is yet to come ” This section closes with the Mother’s two dreams taken from *Words of Long Ago*.

In the second section, of 14 poems, we have four poems by Sri Aurobindo, three in new metres and one a work of 1940. I find the music and cadence in the poem “Flame-Wind” a sheer delight. Whenever I think of the section of poems in new metres in the volume of Collected Poems I feel like going back to re-read “The World Game”, the finest love poem in any language (Amal Kiran’s description). Thence follow 10 poems by different authors well known to our readers. Arjava’s “At the close of night” is a very beautiful example of how free verse can be lyrical and a music to the ear and heart. Amal Kiran’s “Invocation to the Fourfold Divine” is full of power and revelatory images. Asked what exactly was meant in line 3 by the phrase “...like a vast rose that breaks through form” Sri Aurobindo replied, “It means nothing exactly, but it gives the suggestion of a vast rose of illimitable life breaking out to manifest its splendour and colour...” This teaches us that trying to find the exact meaning of a word or a phrase in a poem might take us astray and thereby we may not see at all the suggestion implicit in the whole line, in the phrase. A poem needs to be heard not only by the mind but by the ear and the heart and by something else in the

depths that vibrates in response to the revelation. The choice of other poems is equally excellent, the authors being Nirodbaran, Nolini, Harindranath, Thémis, Deshpande, Romen, and Lal Kamal.

The third section of four articles starts with Srinivasa Iyengar's "Words on the Mother's Words", full of love and adoration for our Divine Mother and simultaneously an introduction to those not so familiar with the Mother's words. He summarises the Mother's words in nine sections. One quotation warns in the Mother's words, "Do not take my words for a teaching. Always they are a force in action, uttered with a definite purpose, and they lose their true power when separated from their purpose", a key warning. It is indeed possible, and not an uncommon experience, to hear persons justify their pet presumptions by pulling some sentence of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo out of context.

Next we have two articles, both continued from the previous number and to be continued in the next. That is not fair since this is an annual, the reader has to wait too long. Of course this could be to encourage yogic patience! Amal Kiran continues his "Sri Aurobindo and Greece". Perhaps he was really a Greek in one of his past lives; that would explain the ease with which he makes this difficult and scholarly subject readable.

Prema Nandakumar's article on "Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Indian religion and spirituality" is very topical because of the current debate going on in our country on "Hindutva". Though fairly complete by itself this too is to be continued in the next number. I suggest that the whole article should be soon printed as a booklet for much bigger readership especially in view of the increasing mix of religion and politics not only in India but elsewhere too.

The last article by Dr. Dalal, "Sri Aurobindo and the future psychology" should have formed the last chapter of his recently published book—*Psychology, Mental Health and Yoga*. In his usual clear style he presents the recent trends in psychology subsequent to a "fundamental change in the general conceptual framework", from the perspective of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts. I see the change when I read that in the opinion of modern psychologists "several lines of evidence suggest that these transcendental experiences tend to occur most often among those who are psychologically most healthy...such experiences may produce long lasting beneficial changes...", a far cry from the times when yogic visions were ascribed to cerebral anoxia, lack of oxygen in the brain because of breath-holding practices, pranayama.

All in all, here is a very rich issue.

DINKAR PALANDE

A Basket of Stories by *Chunilal Chowdhury*. Publishers: Jyothishikha Prakashani, Pondicherry 605 012. pp. 181. Price: Rs. 30.

To readers of *Mother India*, Chunilal Chowdhury is a well-known name. The stories gathered in the basket are the ones he wrote and published at different times in that esteemed journal of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

In his 'preface' to the book, the author puffs out his chest and declares that his stories "are the expression of experiences plucked from the tree of life which draws sustaining sap from the soil but aspires always to the high heavens for love and light." True to his words, the five short stories, both long and short, and a novelette that occupies about half the size of the book are doubtless "experienced expressions."

In the field of story-telling, the use of present tense is usually avoided, for every story-teller knows for certain that such a venture is bound to repel readers. Yet Chunilal Chowdhury boldly attempts to tell his first two stories—'Pijush Tells a Tale' and 'Tears Tell', in the present tense, and it does not in any way deter our interest from reading the stories. That is because of the characters he has chosen for his stories and the way he has narrated them.

Rakshasa, a man-eater, who sympathetically refused to eat women (perhaps afraid of the feminists); Sukhen who prays to the Almighty like Sita of the *Ramayana* legend: "O Earth, be parted and swallow me up", when he is chased by a dog; Satyapriya who while answering the question raised by the school-master "What is the superlative of beautiful?" says, "There is no superlative, Sir, all are relative"; Thakur, a third-class man, perhaps addicted to tobacco, wine, opium, and what not, who spoils a tender and innocent girl by telling her all sorts of rubbish, are some of the unforgettable characters here in the basket of stories.

Another aspect that keeps the stories moving is Chunilal Chowdhury's racy style. Here is a slice from the contents of his basket for you to taste:

"A dog's bark alerted him and he was all attention. But the sound did not recur, instead he heard the tramping of approaching footsteps. 'Are they coming again?' he reflected. 'But now they are coming without any talk whatsoever.' His face brightened. 'Then are these my rescuers, moving about in search of me?' He wanted to scream out to announce his presence but could not, his mouth was tightly bound. So he groaned as loudly as he could and looked intently at the entrance of the cave. But he could see only the shadow of a dog which vanished at once."

The stories can't be read in a single sitting, for they are a bit heavy. Sometimes we have to go back to what we have read in order to keep track of the narration. But what are these hurdles when we are offered a basket laden with fleshy and juicy fruits? They are for us to munch and digest.

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?”

Introductory Speech by Kishor Gandhi*

THE purpose of this seminar is to compare Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga with other spiritual paths, by showing the elements of similarity and difference between them, with a view to reveal the distinctive characteristics and unique features of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga. For this reason some of the speakers at this seminar, who are all the students of the Higher Course of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, have each selected one important traditional spiritual system of India and tried to make a comparative evaluation of it with Sri Aurobindo’s system. A few speakers have also attempted to deal with the subject in a general comprehensive manner.

To introduce the subject, I will make a few general observations.

The one common idea underlying all spiritual philosophies, religions and yogic systems is that behind all the appearances of life there is one essential Reality to which they give different names, and for the realisation of which they lay down different paths. Thus, speaking about various intellectual philosophies and religions giving different accounts of this One Reality, Sri Aurobindo says,

“.. since intellectual truth turned towards the Infinite must be in its very nature many-sided and not narrowly one, the most varying intellectual beliefs can be equally true because they mirror different facets of the Infinite. However separated by intellectual distance, they still form so many side-entrances which admit the mind to some faint ray from a supreme Light. There are no true and false religions, but rather all religions are true in their own way and degree. Each one is one of the thousand paths to the One Eternal.”¹

What Sri Aurobindo says about intellectual philosophies and religions is also true of all spiritual paths or yogic systems. In their essential Truth they are all one though they differ in the names and forms they give to it and in the

* Revised and enlarged

¹ *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (Cent Ed., Vol 14), p 124

varying approaches they provide for realising it, as is succinctly stated in the famous phrase of the Veda: *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*.¹ This is the characteristic attitude of true Hinduism which has prevented it from turning itself into a narrow, sectarian creed encrusted with rigid dogmas, as has happened in the case of some other religions which have turned into fanatic creeds. In an unusually strongly worded letter Sri Aurobindo once gave a warning against religious fanaticism which is worth noting in this context:

“All fanaticism is false, because it is a contradiction of the very nature of God and of Truth Truth cannot be shut up in a single book, Bible or Veda or Koran, or a single religion. The Divine Being is eternal and universal and infinite and cannot be the sole property of the Mussulmans or of the Semitic religions only,—those that happened to be in a line from the Bible and have Jewish or Arabian prophets for their founders. Hindus and Confucians and Taoists and all others have as much right to enter into relation with God and find the Truth in their own way. All religions have some truth in them, but none has the whole truth; all are created in time and finally decline and perish. Mahomed himself never pretended that the Koran was the last message of God and there would be no other. God and Truth outlast these religions and manifest themselves anew in whatever way or form the Divine Wisdom chooses. You cannot shut up God in the limitations of your narrow brain or dictate to the Divine Power and Consciousness how or where or through whom it shall manifest; you cannot put up your puny barriers against the divine Omnipotence.”²

But though it is necessary to protest against the falsity of religious fanaticism by stressing that all the different religions are in their essence one because they preach the same common Truth, yet it is also necessary to emphasize that in their actual revelation of that one essential Truth they vary considerably, for all of them do not reveal it in an equal measure. Some reveal it in a greater degree than others. These variations in the revelation of the One Reality create a hierarchical gradation of different religious and spiritual systems which cannot be ignored. If, therefore, it is necessary, on the one hand, to guard against the ingrained tendency of the human vital ego, which manifests its aggressive tendencies in religion as in all spheres of human life by proclaiming its own religion to be the sole and the supreme revelation of God, and refusing to respect all religions as only different paths to the One Spiritual Reality, yet, on the other hand, it is also necessary to bear in mind that their essential oneness in the Spirit does not mean equality in their actual revelation of it.

These different degrees of revelation arise from the fact that in the spiritual evolution on earth the Supreme Being or God does not unveil His full glory at once, but in a gradually increasing measure to different prophets and Avatars

¹ “The Existent is one, the sages express it variously”—Rig Veda 1, 164, 46

² *On Himself* (Cent Ed, Vol 26) p 483

who are the originators of various religions. Though these are all revelations of the same God, yet none of them is His complete revelation, each one unfolds a part or an aspect of Him. And even these different parts or aspects are not equal in value, even though they are all necessary in their totality to arrive at the plenary completeness. To give an apt example, we can say that God like the sun does not arise in the sky at once in its full glory, but first as a faint dawn and then gradually increases his light till it reaches its full splendour. Or to give a still more appropriate example, it can be said that God does not reveal his whole body to his seekers all at once but limb by limb according to their capacity and conceals the rest of his body till they are ready to bear its full dazzling radiance. Sri Aurobindo states this truth in a semi-humorous but vivid passage: "There is a story in the Jewish Scriptures which relates that when God wished to show himself to Moses, he could only, owing to spiritual imperfections of the Jewish prophet, reveal safely to him His hinder parts. Moses would have died if he had seen the front of God, he had not the *dhāranam*, the soul-power to support that tremendous vision."¹ In the spiritual history of mankind therefore though all religions have seized some limb of God, none has clasped his full body, nor are the different limbs they have grasped of equal importance. The head in a body is a part of it, but surely it is more important than the toe or the finger. It is for this reason that while emphasising the essential oneness and equality of all religions to guard against the exclusive claims of some of them to proclaim their monopoly of God-realisation and condemn others as heathens or barbarians, we have also to admit that some religions are superior to others because they have scaled greater heights and opened out vaster vistas than others in their ascent towards God.

I stress this point because Sri Aurobindo, though he is the most catholic philosopher and yogi, repeatedly states that among all the religions of the world, it is Hinduism that reveals the deepest mysteries and the profoundest secrets of the Spirit and therefore it is the greatest religion in the world. If you read his book, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, you will find that he gives in it convincing reasons why he holds this view. It is not from any narrow sectarianism or blind adherence to his own national religion that he does so, but because he was as if compelled to defend Hinduism against a most vicious attack on it by a Westerner. This book is full of marvellous passages in which Sri Aurobindo has unveiled the unparalleled greatness and glory of Indian religion in a masterly manner and unique style presenting his arguments by adopting most impartial and impersonal standards of judgment. At the present moment when Hinduism, in the very country of its origin, is in crucial danger from its self-seeking politicians as well as its narrow-visioned defenders, this is the sole book which can provide the most enlightening guidance to those who want to see clear light

¹ *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, April 1983, p. 36

in the midst of the thick murky fog and black clouds that have surged up on the Indian national horizon.

This is not to say that in extolling the greatness of Hinduism Sri Aurobindo is blind to the grave defects that have crept and settled in it during its later period of decline, nor to affirm that to him there is nothing beyond its greatness that still remains to be achieved. On the contrary, both in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and in some of his other writings he unhesitatingly speaks about the depths of degradation, squalour and inert somnolence into which Indian civilisation and culture sank for a few centuries “after at least two thousand years of the most brilliant and many-sided cultural activity.”¹ But he has also strongly warned against taking a too exaggerated and pessimistic view of this temporary setback. To quote his own words:

“A later eclipse of the more essential elements of her civilisation is not a disproof of their original value. Indian civilisation must be judged mainly by the culture and greatness of its millenniums, not by the ignorance and weakness of a few centuries... In the poverty, confusion and disorganisation of a period of temporary decline, the eye of the hostile witness refuses to see or to recognise the saving soul of good which still keeps this civilisation alive and promises a strong and vivid return to the greatness of its permanent ideal. Its obstinate elastic force of rebound, its old measureless adaptability are again at work; it is no longer even solely on the defence, but boldly aggressive. Not survival alone, but victory and conquest are the promise of its future.”²

I need to clarify here that in quoting this passage about the greatness of Indian civilisation and culture I may seem to be digressing from the subject of this seminar which is concerned with the comparison of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga with other spiritual paths, but it is not really so because Indian culture is fundamentally a spiritual culture and what is true of it as a whole is equally true of all the varieties of Indian religion and spiritual systems.

But to say this and no more would again not be sufficient to make an adequate comparison of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga with other spiritual paths. For his Yoga is not merely a revival of the greatness of Indian religion after a temporary decline. On the contrary, he emphatically maintains that in the spiritual evolution of man the time has now come to go beyond *all* religions, however great they might have been, to a new Truth which exceeds all religions, including even Hinduism. This new Truth, which he discovered in his own spiritual development after compassing all the great spiritual realisations on which Hinduism is built, he has termed “Supermind” which, he says, can never be formulated in any religious formula however large and flexible it might be. It

¹ *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (Cent Ed , Vol 14), p 63

² *Ibid* , p 64

is for this reason that in a short writing, while explaining his teaching and method of Yoga, he has said (mentioning himself in the third person):

“It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion—for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner transformation by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.”¹

It is this supramental consciousness which Sri Aurobindo has also called the Truth-Consciousness that alone can reveal the complete and perfect Truth of the Spirit which none of the religions or spiritual paths could do because none of them had reached the supramental level of the spiritual consciousness. This is the crucial difference between Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga and all other partial and incomplete religions and spiritual systems despite many elements of similarity between them. And the unique value of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga for the whole of humanity consists in this that it aims at realising this supramental Truth-consciousness not only for his few disciples but eventually for the whole mankind by creating a new step in evolution which will create a new race upon earth.

Sri Aurobindo has called his Yoga ‘new’ in this distinctive sense. But though new it does not discard the essential truths of other partial systems. On the contrary, his Integral Yoga makes a synthesis of them all and gives them a new orientation and significance in its comprehensive completeness. A most memorable sentence of his states in briefest words this distinctive characteristic of his Yoga: “Truth is only true when it is whole and it changes its meaning as one rises higher.” It is the Supermind which represents the highest height of spiritual evolution on earth and points to the next step in evolution which mankind is destined to take in the future. It is in this sense that Sri Aurobindo has proclaimed: “We do not belong to the past dawns but to the noons of the future.”²

¹ *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), p 97

² *Essays on the Gita* (Cent Ed , Vol 13), p 4