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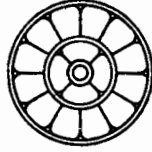
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE MOTHER'S MESSAGE ON HER 80TH BIRTHDAY

To celebrate the birth of a transitory body can satisfy some faithful feelings. To celebrate the manifestation of the eternal consciousness can be done at every moment of the universal history.

But to celebrate the advent of a new world, the supramental world, is a marvellous and exceptional privilege.

THE MOTHER'S MESSAGE ON HER 90TH BIRTHDAY

It is not the number of years you have lived that makes you old. You become old when you stop progressing.

As soon as you feel you have done what you had to do, as soon as you think you know what you ought to know, as soon as you want to sit and enjoy the results of your effort, with the feeling you have worked enough in life, then at once you become old and begin to decline.

When on the contrary you are convinced that what you know is nothing compared to all that remains to be known, when you feel that what you have done is just the starting point of what remains to be done, when you see the future like an attractive sun shining with the innumerable possibilities yet to be achieved, then you are young, however many are the years you have passed upon earth, young and rich with all the realisations of tomorrow.

And if you do not want your body to fail you, avoid wasting your energies in useless agitation. Whatever you do, do it in a quiet and composed poise. In peace and silence is the greatest strength.

A DECLARATION BY THE MOTHER

I BELONG to no nation, no civilization, no society, no race, but to the Divine.

I obey no master, no ruler, no law, no social convention but the Divine.

To Him I have surrendered all, will, life and self; for Him I am ready to give all my blood, drop by drop, if such is His will, with complete joy; and nothing in His service can be sacrifice, for all is perfect delight.

THE MOTHER'S REMINISCENCES

THE reminiscences will be short.

I came to India to meet Sri Aurobindo. I remained in India to live with Sri Aurobindo. When he left the body, I continued to live here in order to do his work which is, by serving the Truth and enlightening mankind, to hasten the rule of the Divine's Love upon the earth.

A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 18 DECEMBER 1957

Mother reads a paragraph from
The Life Divine, page 829

THE only really important thing modern science has discovered is that from the purely outer and physical point of view things are not what they seem to be. When you look at a body, a human being, an object, a landscape, you perceive these things with the help of your eyes, your touch, hearing and, for the details, smell and taste; well, science tells you: "All that is illusory, you don't see things at all as they are, you don't touch them as they really are, you don't smell them as they really are, you don't taste them as they really are. It is the structure of your organs which puts you in contact with these things in a particular way which is entirely superficial, external, illusory and unreal."

From the point of view of science, you are a mass of—not even of atoms—of something infinitely more imperceptible than an atom, which is in perpetual movement. There is absolutely nothing which is like a face, a nose, eyes, a mouth; it is only just an appearance. And scientists come to this conclusion—like the uncompromising spiritualists of the past—that the world is an illusion. That is a great discovery, very great.. One step more and they will enter into the Truth. So, when somebody comes and says, "But I *see* this, I *touch* it, I *feel* it, I am sure of it", from the scientific point of view it's nonsense. This could be said only by someone who has never made a scientific study of things as they are. So, by diametrically opposite roads they have come to the same result: the world as you see it is an illusion.

Now what is the truth behind this? People who have sought spiritual knowledge tell you, "We have experienced it", but of course it is a purely subjective experience; there are as yet no grounds on which one can say absolutely that the experience is beyond question for everybody. Everyone's experience is beyond question for him. And if one takes it a little further...

In fact, the value of an experience or a discovery could perhaps be proved by the power it gives, the power to change these appearances and transform things, circumstances and the world as it appears to us, in accordance with the will that manifests through that experience. It seems to me that the most universal proof of the validity of an individual or collective experience would be its power to make things—these appearances that we call the world—different from what they are. From the subjective point of view, the effect of the experience on an individual consciousness is an undeniable proof; for one who attains bliss, sovereign peace, unchanging delight, the profound knowledge of things, it is more than proved. The effects on the outer form depend on many

other things besides the experience itself—depend perhaps on the first cause of these experiences—but out of all this, *one* thing seems to be a proof which is accessible to other people as well as to the one who has the experience; it is the power over other people and things—which for the ordinary consciousness is “objective” For instance, if a person who has attained the state of consciousness I am speaking about, had the power of communicating it to others, it would be partially—only partially—a proof of the reality of his experiences, but further, if the state of consciousness in which he is—for instance, a state of perfect harmony—could create this harmony in the outer world, in what apparently is not harmony, it would be, I think, the proof most readily accepted, even by the materialist scientific mind. If these illusory appearances could be changed into something more beautiful, more harmonious, happier than the world we live in now, this would perhaps be an undeniable proof. And if we take it a little farther, if, as Sri Aurobindo promises us, the supramental force, consciousness and light transform this world and create a new race, then, just as the apes and animals—if they could speak—could not deny the existence of man, so too man would not be able to deny the existence of these new beings—provided that they are different enough from the human race for this difference to be perceptible even to the deceptive organs of man.

From these deductions it would seem that the most conclusive and obvious aspect and the one which will probably be the first to manifest—probably—will be the aspect of Power, rather than the aspect of Joy or of Truth. For a new race to be founded on earth, it would necessarily have to be protected from other earthly elements in order to be able to survive; and power is protection—not an artificial power, external and false, but the true strength, the triumphant Will. It is therefore not impossible to think that the supramental action, even before being an action of harmonisation, illumination, joy and beauty, might be an action of power, to serve as a protection. Naturally, for this action of power to be truly effective, it would have to be founded on Knowledge and Truth and Love and Harmony; but these things could manifest, visibly, little by little, when the ground, so to say, has been prepared by the action of a sovereign Will and Power.

But for the least of these things to be possible, there must first be a basis of *perfect* balance, the balance given by a total absence of egoism, a perfect surrender to the Supreme, the true purity: identification with the Supreme. Without this basis of perfect balance, the supramental power is dangerous, and one must *on no account* seek it or want to pull it down, for even in an infinitesimal quantity it is so powerful and so formidable that it can unbalance the entire system.

Since I am speaking to you about it, I would like to recommend something to you. In your desire for progress and your aspiration for realisation, take great care not to attempt to pull the forces towards you. Give yourself, open yourself

with as much disinterestedness as you can attain through a constant self-forgetfulness, increase your receptivity to the utmost, but *never* try to *pull* the Force towards you, for wanting to pull is already a dangerous egoism. You may aspire, you may open yourself, you may give yourself, but never seek to take. When things go wrong, people blame the Force, but it is not the Force that is responsible: it is ambition, egoism, ignorance and the weakness of the vessel.

Give yourself generously and with a perfect disinterestedness and from the deeper point of view nothing bad will ever happen to you. Try to take and you will be on the brink of the abyss.

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE MOTHER

A LETTER TO ARABINDA BASU THROUGH NIRODBARAN

THE Mother is not a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. She has had the same realisation and experience as myself.

The Mother's sadhana started when she was very young. When she was twelve or thirteen, every evening many teachers came to her and taught her various spiritual disciplines. Among them was a dark Asiatic figure. When we first met, she immediately recognised me as the dark Asiatic figure whom she used to see a long time ago. That she should come here and work with me for a common goal was, as it were, a divine dispensation.

The Mother was an adept in the Buddhist yoga and the yoga of the Gita even before she came to India. Her yoga was moving towards a grand synthesis. After this, it was natural that she should come here. She has helped and is helping to give a concrete form to my yoga. This would not have been possible without her co-operation.

One of the two great steps in this yoga is to take refuge in the Mother.

17th August 1941

NOTE BY NIRODBARAN

In answer to Arabinda Basu's enquiry, à propos this observation of Sri Aurobindo, as to what was the other great step, Sri Aurobindo said, "Aspiration of the sadhak for the divine life." Sri Aurobindo's voice appeared to stress the phrase, "divine life."

GUIDE-LIGHTS FROM SRI AUROBINDO

I DO not ask “undiscriminating faith” from anyone, all I ask is fundamental faith, safeguarded by a patient and quiet discrimination—because it is these that are proper to the consciousness of a spiritual seeker and it is these that I have myself used and found that they removed all necessity for the quite gratuitous dilemma of “either you must doubt everything supraphysical or be entirely credulous”, which is the stock-in-trade of the materialist argument. Your doubt, I see, constantly returns to the charge with a repetition of this formula in spite of my denial—which supports my assertion that Doubt cannot be convinced, because by its very nature it does not want to be convinced; it keeps repeating the old ground always.

*

The abnormal abounds in this physical world, the supernormal is there also. In these matters, apart from any question of faith, any truly rational man with a free mind (not tied up like the rationalists or so-called free-thinkers at every point with the triple cords of *a priori* irrational disbelief) must not cry out at once, “Humbug! Falsehood!” but suspend judgment until he has the necessary experience and knowledge. To deny in ignorance is no better than to affirm in ignorance.

*

Whatever the motive immediately pushing the mind or the vital, if there is a true seeking for the Divine in the being, it must lead eventually to the realisation of the Divine. The soul within has always the inherent (*ahaituki*) yearning for the Divine; the *hetu* or special motive is simply an impulsion used by it to get the mind and the vital to follow the inner urge. If the mind and the vital can feel and accept the soul's sheer love for the Divine for his own sake, then the sadhana gets its full power and many difficulties disappear; but even if they do not, they will get what they seek after in the Divine and through it they will come to realise something, even to pass beyond the limit of the original desire.. I may say that the idea of a joyless God is an absurdity, which only the ignorance of the mind could engender! The Radha love is not based upon any such thing, but means simply that whatever comes on the way to the Divine, pain or joy, *milan* or *viraha*, and however long the sufferings may last, the Radha love is unshaken and keeps its faith and certitude pointing fixedly like a star to the supreme object of Love.

What is this Ananda, after all? The mind can see in it nothing but a pleasant psychological condition,—but if it were only that, it could not be the rapture

which the bhaktas and the mystics find in it. When the Ananda comes into you, it is the Divine who comes into you, just as when the Peace flows into you, it is the Divine who is invading you, or when you are flooded with Light, it is the flood of the Divine himself that is around you. Of course, the Divine is something much more, many other things besides, and in them all a Presence, a Being, a Divine Person, for the Divine is Krishna, is Shiva, is the Supreme Mother. But through the Ananda you can perceive the Anandamaya Krishna, for the Ananda is the subtle body and being of Krishna; through the Peace you can perceive the Shantimaya Shiva; in the light, in the delivering Knowledge, the Love, the fulfilling and uplifting Power you can meet the presence of the Divine Mother. It is this perception that makes the experiences of the bhaktas and mystics so rapturous and enables them to pass more easily through the nights of anguish and separation; when there is this soul-perception, it gives to even a little or brief Ananda a force or value it could not otherwise have, and the Ananda itself gathers by it a growing power to stay, to return, to increase.

I cannot very well answer the strictures of Russell, for the conception of the Divine as an external omnipotent Power who has “created” the world and governs it like an absolute and arbitrary monarch—the Christian or Semitic conception—has never been mine; it contradicts too much my seeing and experience during thirty years of sadhana. It is against this conception that the atheistic objection is aimed,—for atheism in Europe has been a shallow and rather childish reaction against a shallow and childish exoteric religionism and its popular inadequate and crudely dogmatic notions. But when I speak of the Divine Will, I mean something different,—something that has descended here into an evolutionary world of Ignorance, standing at the back of things, pressing on the Darkness with its Light, leading things presently towards the best possible in the conditions of a world of Ignorance and leading it eventually towards a descent of a greater power of the Divine, which will be not an omnipotence held back and conditioned by the law of the world as it is, but in full action and therefore bringing the reign of light, peace, harmony, joy, love, beauty and Ananda, for these are the Divine Nature. The Divine Grace is there ready to act at every moment, but it manifests as one grows out of the Law of Ignorance into the Law of Light, and it is meant, not as an arbitrary caprice, however miraculous often its intervention, but as a help in that growth and a Light that leads and eventually delivers. If we take the facts of the world as they are and the facts of spiritual experience as a whole, neither of which can be denied or neglected, then I do not see what other Divine there can be. This Divine may lead us often through darkness, because the darkness is there in us and around us, but it is to the Light he is leading and not to anything else.

The point about the intellect's misrepresentation of the "Formless" (the result of a merely negative expression of something that is inexpressibly intimate and positive) is very well made and hits the truth in the centre. No one who has had the Ananda of the Brahman can do anything but smile at the charge of coldness; there is an absoluteness of immutable ecstasy in it, a concentrated intensity of silent and inalienable rapture that is impossible even to suggest to anyone who has not had the experience. The eternal Reality is neither cold nor dry nor empty; you might as well talk of the midsummer sunlight as cold or the ocean as dry or perfect fullness as empty. Even when you enter into it by elimination of form and everything else, it surges up as a miraculous fullness—that is truly the Purnam; when it is entered affirmatively as well as by negation, there can obviously be no question of emptiness or dryness! All is there and more than one could ever dream of as the all. That is why one has to object to the intellect thrusting itself in as the *sub-jāntā* (all-knowing) judge: if it kept to its own limits, there would be no objection to it. But it makes constructions of words and ideas which have no application to the Truth, babbles foolish things in its ignorance and makes its constructions a wall which refuses to let in the Truth that surpasses its own capacities and scope

*

If one is blind, it is quite natural—for the human intelligence is after all rather an imbecile thing at its best—to deny daylight: if one's highest natural vision is that of glimmering mists, it is equally natural to believe that all high vision is but a mist or a glimmer. But Light exists for all that—and Spiritual Truth is more than a mist and a glimmer

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS BETWEEN OCTOBER 15 AND NOVEMBER 30, 1991

I THANK you for your sustained periodic generosity to our work.

You have posed me the question:

“What is the interrelation between the Mother and Her Grace? I have searched for a clear answer in the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as in your books and *Mother India*. On the one side the Divine Grace seems quite independent and separate; on the other side it appears to me to be the most important instrument of the Mother and a part of Her.”

You quote a number of passages from the Mother and then conclude:

“It appears to me that, on the one hand, I have to surrender exclusively to the Mother, and on the other hand to give all my thanks to the Divine Grace. Not conceivable? Surely a pragmatic question.”

I would say that the division you see in the quotations is also pragmatic or practical, depending merely on the theme to be developed. To me there is no Divine Grace which is not an outflow from a Divine Person either directly through an inward intervention or by way of help through an outward agency.

In general the working of Grace has two aspects. One is the inscrutable touch beyond all concept of merit and demerit. It does not seem to be in consideration of anything done by one. It just falls like a sudden beam of light which has in view some purpose of eternity to be fulfilled in a passage of time—some purpose which appears to run secretly behind or below the quivering or quiet moments that make up the life that we consciously know to be ours. This beam can fall as plausibly on a so-called sinner as on an apparent saint. It is something for which we cannot trace a reason. If we could, it would be Justice and not Grace.

Perhaps not inconsistently I may recall the Mother once replying to the query why we didn't always find justice being done in the Ashram. She simply said: “This is not a place of Justice. It is a place of Grace. If justice were to be done, who would deserve to be here?” By “here” was meant the life in the presence of the Incarnate Divine

Now for the other aspect of Grace—the one with which you are concerned. It can also be connected with the Mother's reply I have just quoted. The Ashram has been a creation of the Divine Personhood become human flesh and blood. The Grace which acts in response to our cry for help is the same Personhood, essentially divine yet with a human mystery within it capable any time of becoming flesh and blood like ours. So I would say that for us the Divine Grace is best figured as that inextinguishable splendour which has assumed the world-guiding countenance of Sri Aurobindo and that ever-overflowing love with which

the Mother's face has taken up the travails of our groping world. The one to whom you, as you say, "have to surrender exclusively" is no other than the giver of "the Divine Grace" which, according to you, has to be the receiver of all your "thanks".

Those who do not belong to the group called together out of millions by the Grace in the first aspect of inexplicable choice may envisage the Saviour Strength under any guise—sustainer Rama or enchanter Krishna, compassionate Buddha or all-merciful Allah's mediator Mohammed, beneficent Kwanon or Holy Mary the eternal intercessor. Even the habitual unbeliever who, when he finds himself helpless, instinctively turns to he-knows-not-what, is bound to feel the vague vastness of some being for whom he has no name.

Your puzzlement is really of the surface mind. You have yourself spontaneously answered your own question when with your typical beauty of soul you give me a supreme compliment which I can never truly live up to. You write to me in words whose sweetness is unbearable.

"Again and again I ask the Mother why I have got from Her the wondrous privilege to be one of your friends. I can only be boundlessly grateful to Her and Sri Aurobindo for this miraculous act of Grace, and to you for the acceptance of their will."

I am greatly moved by what you write apropos of my advice to you in the letter of May 7, 1990 to keep plants nearby and establish a communion with them. You say: "It was in connection with your experience on the way to your chair at the Samadhi. This communion with plants is for me also a favourite occupation, even if it is only one flower. I have two flower-beds before my home which I can plant as I like to do. Naturally during the last two summers of my illness I could do nothing. But I have some very fine rose-bushes, which blossom in summer without too much care. But my most wonderful rose is the dried-up one which is lying together with the leaf of the Ashram's Service Tree in a blue glass-bulb, covered with a lid in blue glass too. It is the rose of the Mother! I got it from Her in 1972. In the evening, when lifting the lid for a short time, I often have the miraculous experience that the rose has a wonderful fragrance and often of a different kind, and this after nearly 20 years! This is my best communion with a flower."

Your "short report" about your health is typical of you: "Backache a *little* better, the colon still a little obstinate; underweight almost unchanged. But in spite of all this I have more strength for my daily pilgrimage. All is a little easier to endure."

The bravery that breathes through these words derives from the frame of being which is reflected in the term "pilgrimage". The daily movement is not just that of a passer through life: it is that of one who has a sacred destination towards which goes a dedicated heart, a consecrated mind—the outer instruments of a soul which knows why it is on earth and whose eyes are lit up with the vision of

the Eternal Beauty awaiting it at the end of every moment.

I may mention that these days it is very necessary for me that this vision which has not been much wanting earlier should persist and even grow intenser. For I am in a peculiar situation. I am doing this letter not on my typewriter but in my own hand and will get it typed. For I am in the Ashram Nursing Home. On October 15 I had a nasty toss in my own working room. Suddenly, while moving with the help of my “walker” I fell backward, with the “walker” falling on top of me. When I touched the floor I found my right leg terribly wrenched by being pressed behind my bottom; it was a position of great pain and, what was worse, one from which it was impossible for me to get free. If I had been alone, inevitably with my door locked from inside, I don't know what would have happened. Luckily my friend who takes great care of me during several hours of the day before noon and several hours after sunset was there. The time was about 9 a.m. She pulled out my leg and I was appalled to see its state. The half below the knee was in one line and the half from the knee upward was in another. The sight was most inartistic. I gave the knee a push and the two parts got into some sort of line.

The Ashram doctor was called. He pressed around the most injured part and suspected a fracture of the thigh-bone (femur). I was surprised, for, owing to my lame left leg, I have fallen hundreds of times and most awkwardly on occasion, yet never had a fracture. Now the X-ray revealed a nasty multiple break at the spot where the thigh-bone joins the knee. The knee was very swollen and had internal bleeding. Our doctor called an orthopaedic surgeon who offered me three options of treatment from which to choose. One was operative internal fixation of the fracture which would ensure faster healing and early mobility but carried the risk of operative and anaesthetic shock to the nearly 87-year-old physical system. The second mode was immobilisation in plaster of Paris from the waist down to below the knee; this would have allowed the leg to be moved as a stiff whole from one side to the other, but six weeks in a P.O.P.-cast would so stiffen the knee that the leg would never bend henceforth. The third was to use a Thomas's splint for the whole leg, skeletal traction through a slim steel rod driven in the shin-bone (tibia) and the whole contraption hung on what is called a Balkan beam so as to ensure a balanced traction that would allow early knee movements, but not allow me at all to turn from side to side in bed. There was also the possibility of bed-sores. Looking at the three options I said “All are bad, how can I choose?” I left it to the wisdom of the surgeon to make the best of a bad job. After much consideration the third option was favoured. So I am here for six weeks in bed in a complicated apparatus and another less Spartan six weeks with rehabilitation therapy. At the end it is hoped that I will be able to take the body's weight on the healed leg.

The only things in my favour during the three months are three. I may keep remembering that I have walked faithfully in my Guru's footsteps, for in 1938 he

also stumbled and had a most painful fall, hurting, like me, his right knee and breaking his right femur, though at a higher point than mine. The second consoling feature is that all day I am facing a window to the south permitting an enchanting prospect of slanting boughs, swaying with trembling leaves, against a changing skyscape. The third is that somehow the body has been most peaceful and my so-called "constant cheerfulness" is not due to just a mental equanimity but to a concrete sense of physical stillness, holding some inmost gift of Divine Grace in the form of an intrinsic happiness in the very substance of the injured and immobilised body. This was most tangible, as it were, during a week and a half after the blood from the knee was "aspirated" under local anaesthesia and, on the next day, that steel rod was made use of to facilitate the "balanced" traction.

At the beginning my relatives and friends were much alarmed over the possible danger to my life from the forced prolonged immobility in bed. My doctor-nephew in the U.S.A., horrified by the news about me on the phone, warned that a sudden blood clot might form and, on reaching the heart, prove fatal. According to the practice in the States, he advised an immediate operation and then, as soon as possible, little walks in the room. My niece went anxiously to and fro between the extremely open-minded doctor in charge of me and my phoning nephew, carrying on the discussion as to what should be done with the possibilities available here in the absence of an operation. A special drug was suggested, but the facilities for "monitoring" it would be lacking in Pondicherry. In the meantime a doctor-friend of mine proffered the reassuring information that seemingly an "ethnic" factor rendered a clot due to the legs' immobility very rare among Indians. However, a small daily dose of Aspirin, the drug known for its unclotting effect to a certain degree, has been given as a precautionary measure. Also mechanical exercises in bed to my legs have been arranged to counter the general immobility.

My days are spent in meditation or else in writing letters, dipping into literary journals and preparing future issues of *Mother India*. At night I doze off in spite of my rigid position without the aid of sleeping pills, but every now and then I have to pass urine. Some of my friends—especially two women, one a highly efficient English professional nurse and the other the very able manager of *Mother India*—most willingly and excellently take turns at sleeping in my room to give me the urine bottle four or five times as well as to help in other ways. The one who used to take care of me in my flat visits me twice a day for some hours and devotedly ministers to my needs, including mechanical exercise and massage to my legs. A particular friend interested in my inner life takes notes from me on it besides assisting in general with genuine concern.

The Ashram Nursing Home is a remarkable place. The doctors and the nurses—all of them dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—are giving exemplary service. All the daily arrangements are most conducive to the

patients' comfort and the medical treatment is scrupulously regular. Then there is the cleanliness and hygiene of the place. I couldn't help joking to the medicos in charge: "If I had known that the Nursing Home was so wonderful, I would have come here much earlier!"

The overall inner question for me from the start has been "What do Sri Aurobindo and the Mother expect me to gain by this accident?" I am always sure that their arms are stretched out to us across even the worst of events, ready to turn the most terrible of them to our soul's benefit, its growth nearer and nearer to their light. Before my fall, there was a persistent urge in me to press forward along the spiritual path—a sustained secret impatience to break through all circumstances towards a totality of self-consecration. After the fall the initial summing up in my consciousness was the one word "hiatus". Here, I felt, was the opening up of an apparent abyss between my past and my future—an abyss which could prove for me the plumbing of a most profound depth of being, leading to a radically new life.

In the middle of one of the early nights I asked Sri Aurobindo what was to be my fate by this fall. A number of phrases came as a reply, the last and most significant of which was: "The Mother will lift you up high beyond everything."

With that golden hope hung over the present bodily "helplessness" I close this letter most warmly and gratefully

*

You have asked: "What has happened? What is going on from day to day?" You already know the outer details. So I shall deal with the inner dimension exclusively.

For quite some time there has been a knowledge within that a radical change is going to happen. I was aware of a puzzling, independent movement of the physical being and simultaneously a detachment from the physical, as if the physical had a separate existence and aspiration

At the time of the accident, there was intense pain and a couple of days thereafter were extremely uncomfortable. There had been as if a sudden unconsciousness in my being when I had fallen. The Mother once told me after a toss in my early days here: "You must always be conscious of the body, of where you are, to avoid falls."

I wanted to know, it was important to know, why the accident had occurred. The knowledge is not to be mental, it has to come from a deeper source. Then we get a direction towards the opportunity to be taken. All the time Sri Aurobindo's hands and the Mother's are around us. Except for our follies, nothing actually happens here without their consent. They are even behind what we call catastrophes. Once these happen, our Gurus make them the means to push us along a new pathway. Part of their work is to ensure a "break" at times,

though I do not necessarily mean breaking a bone!

When Sri Aurobindo went to jail, he asked Sri Krishna "Why?" The reply was that there was no other way to push him in the right direction. A drastic measure was needed to pull him out of politics. In my own small way I kept asking my Gurus for a clear answer to my question "What is my fate now? What is the Grace granted me, however paradoxically?" The answer, on the night of October 22, was given as if face to face by Sri Aurobindo. It was around 1 15 a.m. The answer, clear and definite, was: "A greater calm and a greater self-dedication to the Mother. She will lift you high up beyond everything." That would mean complete freedom.

I am now as if lodged in some depth of my body most of the time. There is a great stillness, a compactness of consciousness in the physical self, a statuesque immobility over which passes continuously a breeze of happiness, the body can't but be happy. It is as though the physical arms were—in a phrase of Sri Aurobindo's—"taking to a voiceless supreme delight." The body is felt to have an existence of its own as a doer of Yoga. There is a kind of spiritual poise in the most outer nature. When this nature becomes wholly immobile, in a sense quite different from inertia, "Ananda" automatically follows. If only the immobility could last, become permanent! Then the body would have its own experience of liberation. I can't say mine has it, but some sustained bliss is present. My happy state appears to have no rhyme or reason for it. It just is. There is absolutely no attitude of the mind involved, no mental movement to be happy. I may describe it as an entire self-containment by the body, a holding together of the entire body-sense, a collectedness with a stilling of everything, a balanced moment prolonged indefinitely, as it were. Something grips one, one becomes totally free of talk, of controversy, of any altering situation. There is complete freedom and as a result an aura, a radiation all around, but that aura-sense is implicit, not explicit at present. One sort of holds the whole body inwardly suspended. I have earlier cultivated scattered moments of such suspense time and again. In the midst of talk, in the midst of dealing with people, you get out of everything, there is a transcendence of the usual time and space holding us. If one could remain like this always, it would be marvellous, with a physical translation of what Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* calls

A poised serenity of tranquil strength,
A wide unshaken look on Time's unrest....

Envirning the present accident is the persistent feeling of a "hiatus", a break with the past. Now the constant and continuous cry from within is: "Make me Yours, wholly Yours! It is not that the inmost 'I' belongs to anyone else, to anything else, but my being yours is not yet concretised fully in the entire 'Me'."

All this goes on. There is profound contentment. The body seems to have

discovered how it has to be in order to rest totally. I may sum up by saying: “From a teeming yet incomplete earth, through a brief deadly hell, to a long and spacious heaven whose numerous secrecies are waiting to be explored. Such has been my passage soon after October 15 till now.”

*

Leaving aside the fun tinkling between friendly hearts, now a strange word about my much-praised “cheerfulness” to which you allude. What appears as cheerfulness has actually nothing to do with mind or temperament. Though I have always been a practitioner of equanimity, the sense I have at present is altogether *bodily*. The whole body is inwardly held in an absolute stillness through which a profoundly quiet happiness blows as if from some dreamland. I am reminded of that line of Wordsworth’s, suggestive of unformulable secrets:

The Wind comes to me from the fields of sleep.

My entire bodily self feels as if it were living in a heaven that is at once remote and immediate. The view I have from my window of green-glimmering swaying branches against a sky of changing colour-washes—light blue, grey-white, gold-pink—this view I can sit up in my bed and enjoy almost endlessly, as though it were a sort of reflection of the dreamland at which I have hinted. Out of the heaven in which I have suddenly been put, what new life-quality will be given to me by the hands of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which I feel mysteriously approaching me? Already what my body is holding is an enormous gift. But I am sure that much more is in store during the long months ahead.

Reading all this you may think I have been rapt away from all things human. There you will make a mistake. My calmness holds all the sweet voices I have known. If great issues can be compared to small ones, I am reminded of those two lines beginning a poem of mine entitled “Oversoul”:

All things are lost in Him, all things are found:
He rules an infinite hush that hears each sound

*

I am observing in connection with the body’s quiet happiness what I can only call a new phenomenon of “time.” There is a marked difference in time’s flow. The body knows an outer self and an inner self. The outer feels all that is going on, the diversity of things happening to it. It passes through various experiences and moves from moment to moment, marking their changes of atmosphere and mutations of mood. The inner stands beyond everything and feels all moments as

exactly the same—not only is there a sense of sameness but there is also a sense of sheer limpidity, a space—as it were—absolutely clear of every event known by the outer physical self.

In traditional terms, it is the Purusha, the being, as pure and still witness in contrast to the Prakriti, the nature with its constant flux and interplay of dull, active and cool-minded qualities. This watcher, although existing in time, is free from time's hold. He seems timeless within the temporal process. There is no day-after-day for him, no long drawn-out passage of the hours. Time is for him an eternal instant accompanying the common succession of endless instants. Therein lies—according to my perception—the immobile yet not inert peace, the calmly joyous freedom that subtly pervades my body independently of whatever cheerfulness or equanimity my mind possesses. To put it otherwise, there has come a waking perception constantly continuing of the absence of time's long passage, similar to the absence we realise by a back-look when we wake up from a night's dreamless sleep. A fully awake and therefore fully enjoyed sleep, blotting out all length of time, goes on side by side with the common hour-to-hour wakefulness that is our daily life. This imperturbable smiling freedom from the sense of the varying sequences of time is experienced like a magical point in the middle of my chest. My main physical consciousness is concentrated there. There is no anxious looking forward to the end of my supposed discomfort in a state of complicated "traction" which allows no turning left or right in bed. For all I care this state may go on for ever as long as there persists my body's strange and sudden acquaintance with what our old scriptures have called "the eternal eater of the secret honey of existence".

Reverting to time-terms, one is inclined to think of a far-away reflection of what the great mystics name *Nunc stans*, "the ever-standing Now", a perpetual Present swallowing up all past and future. In our yoga's language I would not speak of any "standing". I would just say of myself: "lying, endlessly accepted, in the time-transcending love-lap of the Divine Mother."

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

November 24, 1991

My dear Amal,

It is the time of the year that brings your birthday, and at this time each November a little crack appears in my writer's block, allowing if I am lucky a sonnet to struggle forth! I make things hard for myself by wrestling with Petrarch's rhyme scheme that is so difficult to reproduce in English. When I began, I did not know your leg was in traction: no doubt you will smile at the irony of my representing you as a dancer. .to my inner vision, you always appear thus. I am sure your spirit dances always, and I hope mine does too. The inspiration behind PANTA REI is of course the experience at the Samadhi which you described in your letter. Along with Heraclitus's 'Everything flows', I have borrowed your 'honeyed hum'....

PANTA REI

I saw you dancing in the tender light
Of fathomless dawns, all rose and amethyst,
On some far rim where earth and heaven kissed
Your steps described a rhythm of delight.
A glorious sun, that would not yield to night,
A light that scorned the immemorial tryst
With darkness, bathed your form in golden mist
That now revealed, now hid you from my sight.
A honeyed hum possessed the radiant air:
A carrier wave of love, that like a sea
Forever rolling onward seemed to bear
New worlds emerging from infinity,
And all things flowed: all creatures dull or fair
With rainbows, stones and stars—and you, and me.

I offer this birthday tribute with the confidence that comes from knowing your kindness to aspiring poets. But, for the crack to widen into a fissure through which something really worthwhile may emerge, many more birthdays will be required ..yours as well as mine! All of us Aurobindonians in Singapore pray for your full recovery

With much love,

SONIA DYNE

“There is one great flow of a single, all-embracing, all-containing consciousness which manifests in an ever unrolling universe ”

SRI AUROBINDO

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

“WHY did you refuse the British invitation?” asked a little one

“Because it was in fact a trap, silly!” exclaimed another

Sri Aurobindo laughed. “Exactly! They must have thought me to be really raw, knowing nothing of the world, if they believed that I would be taken in by their offers! And yet they considered me to be their very dangerous enemy!

“Once again the British tried to capture me, and this time it was more difficult to foil their plan. This happened in 1914, during the First World War. It was a time when great waves of revolt were sweeping across India. The Indian Government took this opportunity to ask the French, their military ally, either to give up all political refugees into their hands or to deport them from Pondicherry. The French Government felt compelled to suggest to us that we could go to Algeria, that all arrangements for our comfortable stay there would be made. We were also told that if we refused to comply with the offer, the British might take us away by force. On hearing this, the eminent Tamil poet, Subramaniam Bharati, who was present at the time said angrily: ‘Since we are no longer safe in French India, why don’t we go abroad?’ But I answered very firmly, ‘Mr. Bharati, I refuse to go anywhere. You may do as you please, but I know I am perfectly safe here. This, and not Darjeeling nor Algeria, is the place of my work and my realisation, and here I will remain.’”

“Thank goodness you never went anywhere! How would we ever have gone to Algeria to see you!” (*Laughter*)

“Something else happened at the time, a rather ugly episode, with the recounting of which I will close that chapter of my life which dealt with the British Government and its perfidy.

“We had then just moved into the Guest House. I have already told you that the British police pestered us wherever we went. Naturally, in French India, they were not dressed in the official uniform, that was against the law, they mostly wore plain-clothes, and often looked like perfect gentlemen. But they spied upon us all the time, keeping track even of who came and who went. Nothing escaped their attention, as they seemed to have set up watch just outside our house. Not only that, they were trying to find ways and means of coming inside. Around this time, a young man named Biren Roy joined our group, and one day he decided to shave off all his hair. Moni, on seeing this, felt like shaving his head too—he was like that, our Moni, often quite impulsive. So there we were, one evening, sitting all together, the two of them with their clean-shaven heads, when suddenly, without any apparent provocation, Biren shouted out loudly: ‘I

am a spy, a British spy! I can't hide the fact any longer. Forgive me, oh, forgive me!' So saying, he fell at my feet, as though it had been I who had forced him to confess. 'Don't you believe me?' he continued. 'Look, here is proof, here are fifty rupees,' and he fished out a note from his pocket. 'Where could I get so much money if it were not from the British police? But I promise you I will never do such a thing again, and please, please, forgive me!'

"Why did he confess so suddenly?"

"I didn't understand it, either, not then, though I wondered whether he had felt any invisible pressure from within forcing him to own up his crime before me. But the matter became clear in a few days' time. There was a gang of spies waiting outside and he had shaven off his hair in order to let them know who he was. But when Moni too appeared without his hair, Biren believed that we had discovered everything about him and out came his confession born partly of fear, partly too out of genuine repentance .

"Those were some of our clashes with the police. There were many other problems too that we had to face, but they diminished in time, particularly ever since Mother came and settled down among us. From then onwards we received much more cooperation and help from the French Government."

"Who looked after your food and your other needs?"

"There is nothing much I have to say about that, because it wasn't a problem we worried much about. Women, when they run a household, worry a great deal about what and how to work, but men are not like that. When men look after the kitchen, they put what they can or have on the table. You take it or leave it. Particularly, the young revolutionaries of those days were like that. They also knew that I was quite indifferent about the subject and that I would be satisfied with whatever was served. Do not forget that we were, all of us, wanted men. My boys were utterly penniless, and neither was I a Carnegie or a Ford. We survived mainly on whatever money was sent to us by friends and relatives. But since this had to be done clandestinely we could not afford to live like lords. Ours was a simple fare of rice, dal and vegetables, and maybe fish now and then. Of course, things cost extremely little in those days. Even so, there were days when the boys would come and tell me that there was no rice left and no money to buy it. I would only tell them—'Well then, eat less. (*laughter*) If there is no money to buy food, go on a diet. If you can't afford beds and tables and chairs, work on a mat on the floor. Bear hardship.' In other words, we lived within the means that the Lord allowed us to have."

"Is it true that there was just one towel for the four or five of you?"

(*Smiling*) "If you have heard that one, then you have heard them all! Actually, I never found poverty frightening, neither did I consider it a desirable condition for the soul's progress. For if I had, then the Ashram would not have provided you with all the facilities and requirements of a comfortable daily existence, including games and even entertainment. We too would have saved a

lot of money by turning you all into ascetics, monks and nuns. (*Laughter*) And places like dispensaries would become totally irrelevant.”

“You may not have found poverty difficult to face, but one could not say the same about your friends, isn’t it so?”

“Why not? They were not only sturdy young men, they were revolutionaries, accustomed to sacrifice and hardship. They had all gone to prison with me.”

“But how things have changed now! Mother has given us everything, we have beautiful furniture and lamps and—”

“Yes, so have I. I wear fine white dhoties, I get soap and toothpaste and very good food! (*Laughs*) Mother’s coming brought about a complete change in our life. Formerly ours was the life of the seeker after knowledge, the worshipper of Saraswati. Now it is Mahalakshmi who is manifesting Herself through grace and beauty, abundance and joy.”

“But there was no school in those days in the Ashram. So how could it have been a life that was a worship of Saraswati?”

“Indeed there was, at least a certain type of schooling. There was an imparting of knowledge, of the external as well as of the inner truths. Also, I used to teach Nolini and Amrita. I taught them English, French and several other languages. We may not always have had enough money for food, but we certainly tried to put some money aside, every month, to buy books. In this way, we gradually built up a small library, hence the first house that we acquired was called Library House. Apart from this, Nolini and the Poet Bharati used to chant Vedic hymns with me regularly.”

“Did people from the town visit you?”

“Yes, a few of them were like me political refugees from British India, who were already in Pondicherry when I came here. One of them was Bharati. I also remember very clearly the name of another person. He was Ramaswamy Iyengar who was later known in Tamil literature simply as Bha. Ra. When he expressed the wish to meet me, I tried first to visualise him through my subtle vision. I saw a head of short cropped hair, a hard face, a strong body. Yet the next day, when he came, he seemed a polished, cultured Vaishnava gentleman. But a year later he had become someone who closely resembled my vision of him. This is called prophetic vision.”

“How extraordinary!”

“I will end today’s session by telling you about a great French scholar whose name was Paul Richard. He had come to Pondicherry from France hoping to be elected from French India to the House of Representatives. With him he had brought what you now call Sri Aurobindo’s symbol. He was looking for a Yogi ever since he had arrived in India and when he heard of me he wished to see me immediately. Once he had obtained the significance of the symbol, he left for France. It was from him that I heard about Mother. Richard was the person who established my link with the Mother. Later when they returned here together, I

met Mother and, working together, we laid in time the foundations of the Ashram. Slowly more and more people came to stay here. The Ashram began to grow like a huge banyan tree, spreading its branches in all directions. At the present moment, here you are, sitting under its shade like happy birds, listening to my stories.” (*Laughter*)

“Now tell us something about Mother.”

“About Mother? What would you like to know?”

“We are told that she started the Ashram. Why was there no Ashram in your time?”

“In my time, there were three or four boys who lived with me—a very small Ashram indeed! They studied and played games and looked after my needs, but as far as Yoga or Sadhana was concerned, there wasn't much of that. In fact, there was very little order or system in our life. I was mostly busy with my own spiritual life and hardly met them except at lunch time. And, when we did meet for an hour or two, we discussed the progress they had made with their studies. It was Mother who brought some order and discipline into this Bohemian existence, and began moulding the Ashram into shape, an Ashram for those who wished to realise the Divine. Of course, that came about very concretely much later, in 1926 ”

“Was it then that Mother first came?”

“No, her first arrival here was in 1914.”

“How did she recognise you? Had she heard something about you?”

(*Smiling*) “Nothing, if you go by external appearances. But she was already far advanced in her sadhana and during her meditations she used to see many visions and have various experiences. Sages would come to her to help and guide her, of whom I too was one, as she found out later. Finally, it was with me that she established the strongest link and she began calling me Krishna. She became more and more certain that some day she would meet me and that it was in collaboration with me that she would fulfil the task for which she had been born. She even painted a portrait of her vision of me.”

“Yes, yes, we have seen it. But ..”

“Why but?”

“It doesn't closely resemble your physical appearance?”

“Not even the beard? (*Laughing*) Forms, as they appear in visions, are often not exact replicas of their physical counterparts. But she recognised me the moment she saw me.”

“It was on the 29th of March 1914, wasn't it?”

“Yes.”

“We have read what she wrote after that meeting in the *Prayers and Meditations*.”

“What did she write?”

“ ‘It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest

ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth, his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.' She wrote this about you. But how extraordinary that she recognised who you were at that very first meeting!"

"Nothing extraordinary in that. She had attained a high degree of spiritual development by then, had already had the realisation of the Divine."

"There are lots of other beautiful stories too that we have heard."

(Smiling) "What, for instance? Today it is my turn to listen to stories."
(Laughter)

"We have heard that in 1920 the more the ship in which Mother was travelling came close to Pondicherry, the more she felt a great light emanating from the centre of the town and radiating in all directions, reaching her even across the waters. When she alighted here, the experience grew more intense and after meeting you she realised where the light was coming from."

"How unfair!" said a plaintive little voice. "We come to you so often, but never see any light!"

"Become like Mother, and you too will do so."

"I sometimes see a beautiful white light around Mother."

The girl blushed as all heads turned to look at her.

"Yes, it is Mother's light. You are fortunate indeed that from the very beginning you felt her and knew her for what she is, the Mother."

"Why do you say that?"

"Those who were with me during those early years and saw her when she first came couldn't do so. They understood much later, when they were told who she was. Until then, they thought that she was just a nice lady, while they were the wise and learned ones. (Laughter) It took them a long time to accept that though she was a Westerner and a woman, she was an extraordinary being. Not only was she an accomplished artist and musician as well as being extremely learned, but she was, most of all, a sadhika of a very high order. If they had been women, they would have accepted her much more easily." (Laughter)

"Why?"

"Because pride of that sort is much less evident in women. Men have a feeling of superiority and usually look down on women."

"What did Mother do then?"

"You want to know whether she too treated them with the same discourtesy?" (Laughter)

"No, no, not that. I want to hear more about what happened after she met you, where and how she lived, if she ate with you or if she worked anywhere."

"Oh! it was all so long ago, I am not sure I remember all the details. But I remember that she cooked very well—you must have heard that French cooking is very famous!—and she would often invite us all, much to the delight of my boys. (Laughter) So that was a change we all felt, since her coming brought some very tasty meals our way. As for the rest, you can ask Nolini, he will tell you."

Apart from cooking, the main work that was taken up at the time was the publication of the *Arya*. It was largely due to her encouragement, collaboration and help that the first issue was published in the month of August, during the First World War. The Indian readers realised that I had not secluded myself utterly in silence and meditation. After four long years, my writings began to be published again, but this time they were not political articles but philosophy, poetry and so on. I was acclaimed a great philosopher, although I had never studied any philosophy other than the Gita and the Upanishads. However, after a year, Mother returned to France—”

“But why?”

“Because the War had broken out ”

“Did you really recognise who the Mother was?”

(*Smiling*) “Yes, I did.”

“Did you then know that she would return some day to work with you?”

“I should have known, shouldn't I?”

“Why 'should'?”

“Because the reason and purpose why she was born on earth were the same as mine. Therefore, we would have to work together, otherwise our task would remain unfulfilled. It is she who has given a practical form to my realisation, it is she who has created the Ashram. If she had not come, where would you all have been?”

“I could never have given an organised form to your lives, never have been able to create all the educational facilities, physical and otherwise, for you, the way she has done, never have given you flowers and cards on your birthdays. All I could have done was write big tomes of which you would have understood nothing.” (*Laughter*)

“Yes, it's true,” agreed a youngster, smiling.

“Do you think you all have come here for my sake?”

“No, maybe not. But we do love you very much.” (*Laughter*)

“What is it that you and Mother expected of us? You didn't tell us that.”

(*Smiling*) “It's not very easy to put it in a very few words. We want to create, out of you, pure and simple children, a new race, a race greater than man's, which will be to man what man is to the ape.”

“What will that race look like?”

“Maybe, like the gods.”

“But I have never seen a god!”

“Then, let us not discuss the Mother any further. We can talk about her again another day. Anyway, we have much to do before we come to that.”

(*To be continued*)

NIRODBARAN

(*Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali*)

SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

An Unbelievable Act of Grace

WHEN friends pressed me to tell them some interesting incidents from my strange life, the following story came to my mind. Recently, something truly extraordinary happened to me for which there is no rational explanation. Even the many people I asked could give no answer to the enigma. It came about like this.

I and a close friend of mine were on our way from Pondicherry to Calcutta. During the taxi ride to Madras, we entertained each other with all kinds of stories and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Still in a jovial mood, we arrived at Madras station where we were to catch the Howrah Mail. Upon boarding the train, my friend, whom I will call Barun, found his seat without difficulty, but though I had made my reservation from Pondicherry we could find no seat reserved for me. Asking me to wait, Barun took my ticket and went to check with the Booking Office. There he was given the number of a bogey. When he returned, we quickly located it, and Barun helped me to my seat with my luggage, then left for his own cabin.

After a while, a man arrived and told me, “You are occupying my seat. Please let me have it—this is my number.” Disconcerted, I got down and searched out Barun. Once again he made the trip to the Booking Office and came back with another seat number. But soon after I had settled myself in that, a lady appeared and claimed it for herself. My dismay grew. There were barely ten minutes left for the train to leave. Close to panic, I called on Barun again. He explained my problem to a passing ticket collector but the man could not even spare a moment to listen.

Finally Barun and I went to the ticket office together, only to be told that they had never received any confirmation of my reservation from Pondicherry. I was at the end of my tether and almost broke down. I told Barun that there was no other way for me to go but to sit on the floor of the train. But the booking officer objected. “It is against the law,” he declared.

Barun now expressed his own helplessness and advised me to go back to Pondicherry by myself as he had to return to Calcutta by this train. Then, as the first bell for the departure of the train had struck, he left me and boarded the train. I was terribly shaken. How was I to return to Pondicherry alone, late at night? Finding no other way, I did what I always do in such situations. With all my heart and soul, I began to call on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to come to

my rescue. Outwardly I kept looking this way and that for some escape from my predicament, when suddenly two young men came up to me and one of them said, "Ah, বৌদি (brother's wife), how is it that you are here all alone? Don't you recognize us? We are your husband's younger brothers. We met you many years ago and still remember you—but perhaps you don't remember us." It was true. Both were complete strangers to me but I had no choice except to trust them. I poured out my story.

"Oh, is that the trouble?" one of them replied. "Then you can travel with us in our cabin. We have two bunks—you can have the lower and we two can share the upper."

Before I could reply they picked up my luggage, took me to their compartment and settled me there. Then they went off down the corridor; soon after, the train started.

I arrived safely in Calcutta. During the trip I had been so relieved and so preoccupied with myself that I had completely forgotten about the two boys, who had never returned. We arrived about eight hours late because on the way a woman had committed suicide by throwing herself in front of the train. So it was not surprising that when I got down at Howrah, I found no one from my family waiting for me. When my friend Barun discovered me on the platform, he burst out in amazement, "How did you get on the train?"

It was only as I began to explain that I realised I had been alone throughout the journey, and that my two travelling companions had never reappeared. It now began to dawn on me who exactly it was who had helped me to reach Calcutta, but the riddle of the two boys remained. Barun was as happy and relieved at my good fortune as I was, yet seeing that no one had come to receive me, he advised me to take a taxi home.

At home I recounted the incident to my relatives and asked if they had any brothers such as the two who had met me at Madras Station. Completely mystified, their first impulse was to deny it. Still, they asked, "But did the boys touch your feet?"

"They must have," I replied, "though I don't have any recollection of it."

"And how did you pass two nights on the train without thinking of them even once?"

Here again was the unresolved question. "I don't know," I demurred, as confounded as they were. "It was only when we arrived at Howrah and Barun asked me how I got on the train that I came to my senses and remembered about them. All I could reply to Barun was that two of my brothers-in-law had miraculously appeared, put me on the train and then vanished."

"And not once—?"

"I know, I know," I said shaking my head. "I was in such a dazed condition, almost as though under the influence of drugs, that I completely lost my normal awareness."

Only afterwards when I began to reflect in earnest on the bizarre happening did I ask my Guru if he had sent me those escorts. Was he really the one who had saved me, and were his instruments divine powers or men?

His answer was clear. "Of course they were divine powers and I did send them. But what does it matter to you whether they were human beings or something else?"

In this way, once again I realised my Guru's infinite grace, that came in such a miraculous manner.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

EVOCATION

O "LORD overhead", descend
 In Your splendour of knowledge-force;
 O Divine Beloved, my indescribable Wonder,
 O "Love caved in the core", release
 The streams of Your light and let all cells
 Of every part of my being bathe
 And absorb and assimilate the clear waters
 Of compassion, those dew-drops of intimate gestures,
 The milk and honey and wine of love and power

Let that might of pure gold-white
 Mingle and unite with the orange-blue
 Of knowledge-force

So shall then be evoked
 Song of the Eternal, Voice of the Vast,
 The all-consuming and all-creative Power,
 That ever-smiling Silence

DINKAR PALANDE

(Author's Note: The words "Lord overhead" and "Love caved in the core" are gratefully borrowed from Amal Kiran's unpublished poem of 1959 titled "What I Need".)

LABOUR OF LOVE

by

HUTA

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

DAYS flashed by. At the end of November 1958 Laljibhai and his wife came to stay permanently in Pondicherry. My father arrived from Rajkot to meet them. Later they discussed my going to London. I sensed that they were not keen about the idea.

The Mother told Laljibhai and my father what she had told me earlier. Then everything was arranged including the sum which I would receive from Africa for my maintenance in London.

Some people close to me objected to my staying in "Huta House". For they thought that being a sadhika I should not have any comfort or luxury. They wished me back in Golconde.

I wrote to the Mother not stating their wish but mine on 3rd December 1958. She answered on that very day:

"My dear little child Huta,

You say that you want to leave your house and be lodged elsewhere. But to leave a house where everything has been made to meet your requirements and is one of the very best houses of Pondicherry would be a most unreasonable and meaningless action, so I cannot in any way help you to do that.

Moreover, all decisions taken in excitement and passion are wrong. Cool down and then you will be able to see what you have to do.

My love."

I went to the Mother and expressed my confused state. She patted my cheeks and said firmly.

"Don't change your mind—you will go to London."

Then she brought from her cupboard an envelope. While giving it to me she said with concern:

"Tiens, mon petit, here is the money. You will need it in transit. Use it with my blessings."

I took it with gratitude. She said.

“Child, don’t worry Everything will be all right.”

My world ceased tipping uncontrollably sideways. She and I knew what I aspired for

Back to my apartment, I saw “18 pounds” written on the envelope. I put it in my handbag

I wanted to get a gold locket made to preserve in it the chain which the Mother had given me in 1954 when I had first met her. It was totally worn out and not wearable now. This sacred chain held a sentimental value I wrote to the Mother about the matter. She answered on 7th December:

“My dear little child Huta,

There is no question of money. I said to Dyuman to prepare a locket for you and if you have no chain I shall give you a chain at the same time. I hope it will be ready before you leave—that is the important thing.

With love.”

*

For some time the Mother was not keeping well. But she would show she was all right. She came down from her apartment on the 9th December to meditate before the Samadhi

The same night she had an acute attack of Herpes Zoster, which was exceedingly painful.

The next morning she was in bed—not seeing anybody except her attendants. That was the day of my departure to Africa I felt very sad

The locket which the Mother had wanted to give me personally was made at lightning speed and was sent to me with her blessings.

I saw Dr. Sanyal—the Mother’s doctor—and expressed my deep shock and anxiety. I gave him for the Mother a bottle of perfume, Worth’s *Je Reviens*, and a flower of Victory—her victory in me The name of the scent was also significant: *Je Reviens*—“I am coming back ” As he took them from me the doctor said: “In spite of severe pain, the Mother remembered you and said to me: ‘Huta is going today.’”

“Do not worry She will soon be all right I wish you a happy journey and success.”

When I reached home the tears I had checked came flooding into my eyes

In the evening I gave the keys of my apartment to Mrs Mona Pinto according to the Mother’s wish.

Lalji bhai and his wife saw my father and me off at the Madras airport.

First we went to Bombay and then to Africa But nothing was the same. My

father's house seemed curiously cold and empty without my mother. My younger sister and her kids were now in Uganda where her husband was practising medicine.

I could not sleep downstairs, so I went up and was about to open the flat in which I had stayed previously just over three months before when a big black lizard fell on my right shoulder. I shrieked in revulsion and tried to fling it off with a jerk. But at the same moment the gold chain and the locket slipped somewhere in the dark, broken. It was a bad omen, I thought. After a little search I found the chain and the locket. Then I entered my rooms which had not been cleaned for months. Finally I called a native boy and went to my third brother Paroobhai's house with the luggage. He and his wife welcomed me.

Days rolled on. My passport was being prepared. The Mother had asked me to go to Africa first and get the British Passport, for that would be more helpful. I also had to sign certain papers connected with it.

The Mother sent me a card dated 22nd December 1958. She had written on it:

“To my dear little child Huta,
With my blessings for a Happy New Year and
my love for always.”

Her consideration and remembrance touched my heart

Later I was informed by Dyuman that all her activities in the Playground had been stopped for good.

I recalled that on 6th December 1958 I had attended the French class at the Playground. I did not realise at that time that it was the last. The next day the Mother went to play tennis and then to the Playground—that too was her final appearance.

This phase in her life ended—with it ended for people the easy approach to her.

She was ill for over a month. But even afterwards she would not go out of the Ashram Building save on rare occasions.

*

As every year, on Christmas day, the natives who were working in our Miwani Estate gave a grand performance—dances of different styles, a variety show, games, competitions. Native women were active participants.

My father and brothers gave away prizes to them. Numerous gifts were distributed among guests and notables who had been invited. Also there were various eatables.

These revellers danced in colourful clothes, wearing feathered head-dresses

of varied shapes and hues. The sparkling beads and brass ornaments they wore gave the effect of a kaleidoscope.

Their leader appeared in a lion-skin with a tail trailing behind—a shield in one hand and in the other a spear—the crown which was composed of ostrich feathers made him look dignified. He announced his presence by shouting in a reverberating voice which drew the attention of hundreds of spectators who applauded with cheers. I was fascinated by the dancers. Some wore grass-skirts which swirled vigorously. The beating of drums matched the rhythms of their frenzied dances. Jangling-bells round their ankles added their tune to their pounding feet.

The occasion indeed was memorable

On 31st December my brother and his wife waved me goodbye at the Nairobi air port. I flew to London

Thus closed the year 1958

(To be continued)

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A DEVOTEE'S PRAYER IN DIFFICULTY

ALL our troubles are due to our Karma. The Mother and the Master are always with us and we are always at their Divine Feet in spite of our weaknesses and shortcomings. I always pray:

“Take away, if You like to do so, anything or everything from us but take not or shake not our Faith and Devotion. We may be fallen angels but we have fallen only at Your Divine Feet. Prick us not further but pick us up and make us live a worthy life, worthy of Your Great Name and the Greatness of Your Work ”

ANON

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE WORK OF HIS ASHRAM

To determine the significance and importance of Sri Aurobindo and the work of his Ashram it is necessary to know what they stand for, what particular result they are working towards, or at least initiated, in the economy of our world existence. Sri Aurobindo was the last person to be interested in or feel satisfied with the starting of Societies, Institutions, Ashrams and such other organisations to enshrine any spiritual truth or embody a vision of human growth and fulfilment in time and in the universal context.

Sri Aurobindo says that he does not mean by his Ashram what the word commonly connotes to the Indian mind. "The Ashram is created with another object than ordinarily common to such institutions.... It is a centre and field of practice for the evolution of another kind and form of life which would in the final end be moved by a higher consciousness and embody a greater life of the spirit "

The above definition is clear and precise as far as the work of the Ashram is concerned. It is a centre of spiritual life as elaborated by Sri Aurobindo in various contexts. All the activities of the Ashram are essentially motivated by a spiritual vision of life and its greater possibilities as seen by Sri Aurobindo. It is a school of experience, a laboratory, often of trial and error, of shifting and accommodating to the larger and complex demands of a collective, growing consciousness. The work and human labour noticed all round have no more value than to prepare the individuals to serve the spirit and increasingly manifest its potency, beauty and harmony. At the same time, it is a spiritual endeavour not confined to individual labour and individual gain. It is an attempt to create conditions where man can come out from the rounds of ignorant Nature and prepare to take the next step towards an evolutionary change from *ignorance* into *knowledge*.

If it promotes meditation, it is to contact the Self of our self, the Lord of our being. If prayers are offered it is to surrender to this same supreme Reality. If one is engaged in work, it is to train the various parts of the being to open themselves to the manifold power of the supreme Mother. This is the desired attitude not easily visible to the passer-by or casual visitor. The work each one is doing is not indicative of inner activity or the poise of his being.

It is not an educational or cultural organisation of the elite, a school of excellence. Yet it is all these and more. By its all-round educational methods it attempts to prepare the human ground for a higher life. It promotes all cultural and creative activities at first as a means of purifying and elevating the various faculties of the being in order to make this new vision of life possible. If the training of the physical body is emphasized, it is to make the body a supple and strong instrument to hold the spiritual power and the Divine Presence. If it promotes perfection and excellence in its works, it is because the spirit can only

make itself fully expressive in life in forms perfect and excellent—perfect and excellent to the gaze of the spirit and not to fit into a given aesthetic mould or a cultural ambience

In one word, speaking from the Indian standpoint, it seeks to carry forward the spiritual genius of the country, in tune with the highest spiritual traditions of the land, but with a difference. This endeavour is not looked upon or held up as a national effort. It is a demand of the awakened modern man above the national parameters that is being given a field to work on. If Indian traditions are honoured, so are other faiths and the approaches to the Truth they embody. If higher peaks are made visible to our enlarging self, we shall shift our eyes to these new heights

We have to know and be clear about it that Sri Aurobindo aimed at embodying the light and glory and powers of the transcendent Reality in earthly physical forms and did not confine the vision to inner worlds and inner realisations. This is an all-encompassing and most difficult endeavour set before man where failures and errors are part of the game. It is the field of work and labour employing all the powers of our being—physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. It is a game to be played out in time—historical and evolutionary. It is not a fruit to be plucked from the high branch and eaten in secure quietude. It is a process of slow growth and development, strengthening the human base by purity and light, enlarging the vistas and horizons of our vision. It is to empty our cells of their inert stuff so that they may be possessed by a new light and exalting air. It is, in short, from the human point of view, a revolutionary and, from the universal, an evolutionary goal where peace, patience and a seeing faith are our only companions; stumblings and hold-ups and seeming failures have no ultimate relevance to our fundamental faith.

This is as far as our faith and nature of the work are concerned. The outer organisation of the Ashram, as active as a beehive, need not mislead the onlooker. What is going on within the man and woman is not evident on the surface for all to see. Growth of the inner consciousness is the primary necessity in such spiritual efforts. Then there are also levels of achievements, varying individual natures, varying capacities for growth. All these have to be taken in one's understanding. If we are working for a greater concerted achievement, no one can be the true judge of the pace of this progress and development. This is a path where each one puts forward his step from where he stands and there is no criterion to judge the progress of others.

The Ashram is a very well-organised institution, not because it is organised by an autocrat or a management consultant. It is because in material life, organisation, order, respect for material objects are the basic truths. It is on this truth that the Mother has organised it.

But order and organisation can only fulfil their task in dealing with men and women when full freedom is given to the participants. It is not a *laissez faire*

ideal. All spiritual progress and results demand the space of freedom and not least of all a discipline of concentrated dedication. Spirit is a free bird, seekers of the spirit world only thrive in freedom. What one achieves in this atmosphere will be a hundred times more than what one may achieve by faultless organisation of a mental regime. But once a discipline is willingly accepted, no laxity is permitted on the spiritual path if one knows the path and its conditions of progress.

These are some of the main principles on which the daily life of the Ashram rests. As we have observed earlier, if there are lapses, failures, deviations and falls, these are inevitable on the path of the pilgrims when they decide to travel together. We are dealing with the march of universal nature from darkness to light, and faith is our only supporting staff on the journey, while the Master looks on from above, lighting the way.

If the foregoing is the spiritual ground on which the Ashram stands, there are some important questions which demand clarification.

An attempt of this kind of a community life founded on an all-embracing spiritual base would have been quite possible even a hundred years back without the governmental interference or interaction. In the remoter past such an attempt, even when situated in uninhabited regions, on the banks of a river or on a mountain plateau, would have been looked upon with great respect and reverence. For spiritual values were held high and no political interference in the life of such a society would have been contemplated. But today the power of the State is all-encompassing. The laws of even a Welfare State under a democratic form of Government face us in every aspect of life. This is common in all the countries of the world because democracy is the master-idea gripping it.

It is not possible to ignore or neglect the power of the State, it can descend upon you any time the bureaucracy or the politician feels like it. One cannot live in one's own light and pursue higher collective goals, try to create new forms and give new aspects of life a chance to express themselves without the fear of undue interference.

The question is, how can such or similar communes function where democratic and socialistic tenets dominate the whole fabric of life and culture? These institutions, in reality, function on a different plane of which a mind, preoccupied with social and political values, can have no idea. These endeavours are not necessarily part of any social philosophy and its humanitarian views of life. To guard the values and protect the vision from violent public reaction or live with unworthy compromises is a hard task. Till such an ideal becomes acceptable to a large or sizable section of humanity, to guard the infant and give it mother-care is the onerous task of the leaders.

The best thing for any wise Government would be to leave such institutions free to function and pursue their own ends, or even to ignore them if that is possible. As a matter of fact, such groups and their activities are the strength of

the society and the State if they are viewed rightly. They are research bodies. In a sense, diving deep into problems of great human concern and primarily engaged with our continual meaningful existence on this planet. In a larger sense, they are of high cultural significance because they are busy realising the fullness of our being. They are the determinants of the value-base of a society. They are the leaders of its development and progress in directions hitherto not considered and brought to light.

In today's democratic, all-encompassing Government with its vast network of bureaucracy, judiciary, revenue structure and other institutions for enforcement of laws and processes of justice and political pressures, no freedom is left to man and no cohesive community is left with full freedom to act and pursue cherished objectives. They are confronted, in one form or another, with legal requirements which cannot be complied with in full conformity with the objective set for themselves by these communities. Examined deeply, all these restrictions and handicaps are nothing but the fall-outs of materialistic philosophy and its mechanistic attitudes as applied to the conduct and direction of mankind and its cultural and religious life.

It is of fundamental importance to realise that free communes, self-governing to an extent, and their proliferation based on various viewpoints, perspectives and interests would give the State and society a greater stability, strength and richness of life. Sri Aurobindo once remarked that if Russia after its Revolution had followed the original ideal of communes it would have been a great achievement. It is the totalitarian ideas followed by dictators and one-sided political philosophies that has led us to this confusion, suffering and wars. The net result is the crisis of identity so many countries are facing today and their lost opportunities of creative experiments.

How should such experiments be allowed to subsist in modern democratic society or in a totalitarian State? Will they be allowed to exist, be tolerated, given the freedom to function under their own norms and disciplines without the imposition of severe State laws under one form of Government or another? Even in a country like India, where the spiritual vision of life still retains hold and vital interest for the people, State machinery and its changing laws and its perceptions of social good and human rights place their own demands on these values of Indian communities. Can such an ideal and organised endeavour exist in the modern world? Will the powers that be permit the freedom and autonomy they seek? How will the mass of men, essentially unregenerate, receive under the new democratic dispensation such truths and allow them to function?

A centre such as the Sri Aurobindo Ashram is at the same time a place of sadhana and what Sri Aurobindo calls a centre of life integrating all activities—life-sustaining, educational, intellectual and cultural—moved by a higher consciousness trying to embody the life of the spirit. It is not just an attempt to liberate individuals from the bonds of established ignorant nature, however

important the goal of liberation may be, and it certainly is important. This attempt is to plant a creative idea in the very heart of universal nature, in its dark soil,—the seed of light which will prepare the ground and the human vehicle to uphold this truth of a new turn in the evolution of nature through a higher and mounting movement. The Ashram, therefore, serves as an experimental base to try out in a collectivity of willing adherents, to face all the problems such a complex experiment would throw up in the hidebound established nature.

It is in the ultimate interest of the State to permit such institutions to exist, even if it is only to keep alive a great ideal, a worthy and difficult experiment or cherish a high hope. If there are some accretions, not so ennobling, some lapses, transgressions of laws of the State, in such attempts, they should be condoned. No human institution can be completely free of such lapses or legal transgressions in the developing run of life. It is the core of the Truth in the light of which they seek to exist and grow that has to be guarded, even if they get partly covered by the dust of years. The vision of Truth Sri Aurobindo reveals is too vast in its scope, too far-reaching in its results to be completely throttled or barred from the active consideration of a wise government. Even if in the process it only amounts to adding one more to the number of churches and places of worship, looked down upon by the intellectual sophistry of the day, there is no harm. For the change the unregenerate nature of man demands, any number of such attempts is never too many. Man-made laws of the society and their changing patterns are not the final arbiters, in the march of the spirit of man, of what is desirable and what is not.

Such attempts, diving deep into our real well-being, therefore cannot be judged in terms of tiny revenue losses to the exchequer, or legal problems in the established pattern of government they may create. Even the failures of such genuine attempts would leave behind more gains to the repertoire of developing man than the normal processes of education, social securities and health-care schemes a good government dreams to bring about.

The awakening of our inner being of light and leaving the guidance of life in its hands is the task of all tasks Sri Aurobindo has initiated for us. What it means, what power of transformation and new creation it holds for us, modern man has somehow failed to comprehend. And yet it is the only way out for us. It is the only heritage, the gift of God we possess and we can have it for the mere asking if we know the way of asking, or have the courage to ask.

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

TOWARDS THE FUTURE—A SUCCESSFUL ONE-ACT PLAY

THE cardinal point in a successful one-act play is the endeavour to generate the maximum of effect in the minimum of time. The intensity of dramatic effect is the hall-mark of a play in one act.

Towards the Future by the Mother is a one-act play consisting of only five characters, viz., Schoolfriend, She, Poet, Painter, Clairvoyante. The playwright not merely dallies with the dreams of the lovers but plays upon their thoughts, arranges them into a beautiful, ordered pattern with an intensity of convergence of all the divergent forces. The theme of the play is the exploration of true love between man and woman in the midst of a conflict of ideas. But the theme is lifted from the plane of humdrum, commonplace relationship between the husband and the wife on to the level of a genuine love between two beings whose separate entities are wrought into one. It is a highly sophisticated treatment of love between the husband and the wife who admit without dismay that true love has not transpired between them even after years of marriage.

The play begins in an atmosphere highly surcharged with an aura of polish and grace as She tells her Schoolfriend candidly "I always dreamt of a great love that would be shared, free from all animal activity, something that could physically represent the great love which is at the origin of the worlds." She poses the large question which is incidentally the problem of the play forming its expository part. Just as her dream has not yet been realized, so her husband, Poet, also dwells in the dream-world of love. He soliloquizes that even though he admires her and cherishes a profound respect for her, all his admiration and respect are not tantamount to love: "But all that is not love. . . Love! What a dream! Will it ever become a reality?" So for both of them love has not fructified.

The playwright has already given us an adumbration of Poet's noblest creation in the form of poetry of the evolved man 'advancing in the happy splendour of union towards the conquest of earthly immortality'. Poet is created by the playwright as constituted of the noblest mould, who longs for a millennium on earth purged of all falsehood and suffering, ugliness and death. This character who thinks of writing a book on the education of women for the purpose of teaching them to protect themselves, is adequately administered the lesson by his wife. She says to him: "Besides, even in the strongest of women, there is a deep need for affection and protection, for an all-powerful strength that leans to her and enfolds her in comforting sweetness."

But even as the exposition of the play is complete, the complication ensues in the form of Poet's ready response to the mellifluous voice of a woman called Clairvoyante. His genuine passion is roused, and he is at once lifted on to the lofty level of wonderment and beauty by that superb voice, a voice that stirs all the fibres of his being. He is enthralled by her, and she expresses her praise for

his poetry which, as Painter informs him, she seems to read with enthusiasm. So the reciprocity of feeling between Clairvoyante and Poet is undeniable and it is also the complicating factor as far as the dramatic action is concerned. It complicates the action because we are thrown into a world of apprehension as to how Poet's wife, She, is going to accept in her heart of hearts this growing love between him and Clairvoyante. Yet at the same time this factor leads to a climax of situation where Poet wrestles with himself, with his genuine emotion and his ethical sense. He realizes his dream now as he is engulfed by the presence of Clairvoyante. He cannot deceive himself. Her voice thrilled his ears, now her presence enchants him as she sleeps on his lap disseminating the sweet fragrance of suavity and grace and bemusing him with a calm and profound happiness. The problem posed at the beginning whether his dream would be a reality now comes to be solved. His dream is realized.

While his feeling thus enables him to explore his being, as it were, his conscientious sensibility demurs, as he says to himself: "How can I tell her that my whole being is concentrated upon another? And yet I cannot conceal my feelings; falsehood is the only evil." So he decides not to deceive his wife, She. What Poet has not been able to do with his wife, to provide her with protection and happiness, culminates in a genuine passion of proclivity for Clairvoyante. Nonetheless, he feels the prickings of conscience and realizes that life is often so cruel for man.

But this feeling of life's cruelty in Poet is pushed into evanescence by She who happens to eavesdrop on the conversation between Poet and Clairvoyante. She finds that her husband has realized true love in a soul-to-soul communion with Clairvoyante. She sees that true love has at last dawned on him, her husband who has awakened himself to the consciousness of what he truly is and what he can do out of love for Clairvoyante. She knows that his restlessness has dwindled down into a calm equipoise and quiet happiness. She has heard him say to Clairvoyante that he has felt true love which is a force of union enabling the lovers to realize new possibilities. And, to crown all, She finds that her husband is tortured by compunction. So she readily comes forward to settle the issue. The mist and gloom of his mind are cleared away by the soothing hand of She who does not mince matters in enabling him to retain his sweet happiness, for She knows that he would otherwise be painfully divided between two opposite paths—feeling and conscience. She has for ever admired his straightforwardness and loyalty, just as he has always appreciated her kind, affectionate concern for him, her unfailing care and sweetness. Her discovery of her husband's true love forms thus the resolution of the crisis in the play. She calls her husband friend and reminds him of their pact: they promised each other full freedom the moment love would awaken in either of them. She wishes him happiness, but not with tearful eyes crying with the pangs of separation. For hers is an uplifted being intended for the satisfaction of only one love—the love for the Divine, the love

which never fails but helps one to transform and divinize one's physical being which will change the world into a blessed place full of harmony and light, peace and beauty. So the catharsis is complete as the play ends in the restoration of equanimity of mind out of all aberrations.

With the master-strokes of the painter's brush, as it were, the playwright has vividly exhibited the termination and culmination of love. The playwright's handling of the theme is adroit and the action actually lives up to the title of the play. Love it is which impels the lovers on to the realization of mutual support so that both of them may transcend themselves in a constant aspiration and an effort for progress towards the growing perfection of their being.

The intensity of dramatic action is perceived in the holding on to the central interest of the play, which is love. But it is not the known kind of love—love pastoral, love romantic, love courtly or love sensual. It is the love which is at the core of one's own being. Nor is it the Shelleyan ideal of love—a kind of desire of the moth for the star, of the night for the morrow, and a devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow. It is love pure and simple and natural, an ever-aspiring divine yearning for eternal bliss unmitigated by tumultuous satiation of any sort—a love which enjoys a serene blessedness in its highest moments of ecstasy.

Since genuine drama presents a conflict of ideas, here we find first the presentation of the crisis which ultimately leads up to its resolution effacing all collisions. Yet this conflict and resolution are conveyed in a language of prose which is couched in poetry, even though it is bereft of rhetorical effusions and lyrical outbursts. It is a language sufficiently strong and vivid to objectify the subjective feelings of the characters. We are transported into the happy world of love to have a dramatic taste of it, however temporarily.

Thus *Towards the Future* is not a discussion play. It is a play of action in the realm of ideas. It presents a problem and solves it at the end. But its central theme of love is presented by means of a conflict of ideas that stirs the depths of the characters of Poet and She. The purpose of the play is directed to an end—the realization of love in the truest sense of the term—the eternally binding principle of existence. The concentration of the dramatic impression is unflagging. There are only five characters who play their parts adequately to intensify the dramatic action which is kept moving by the gradual change in them. The dynamism of the play is undeniable, the undiluted compression of the central impression is borne out by the exploration of the innate possibilities of the characters in the midst of situations. In point of characterization, plot-construction and in the choice of dramatic speech adequately enhanced and buttressed by the genuineness of feeling, the playwright has shown marvellous skill and constructive sense. *Towards the Future* is indubitably a successful one-act play.

PRANABANANDA BANDYOPADHYAY

I AM THERE

JAMES DILLET FREEMAN

Editor's note.

A microfilm copy of this poem lies on the surface of the moon where it was left in July 1971 by Apollo XV astronaut, Col. James B. Irwin.

Do you need Me?

I am there.

You cannot see Me, yet I am the light you see by.

You cannot hear Me, yet I speak through your voice.

You cannot feel Me, yet I am the power at work in your hands.

I am at work, though you do not understand My ways.

I am at work, though you do not recognize My works

I am not strange visions. I am not mysteries.

Only in absolute stillness, beyond self, can you know Me as I am, and then but as
a feeling and a faith.

Yet I am there Yet I hear. Yet I answer

When you need Me, I am there.

Even if you deny Me, I am there.

Even when you feel most alone, I am there

Even in your fears, I am there.

Even in your pain, I am there.

I am there when you pray and when you do not pray.

I am in you, and you are in Me.

Only in your mind can you feel separate from Me, for only in your mind are the
mists of "yours" and "mine "

Yet only with your mind can you know Me and experience Me.

Empty your heart of empty fears.

When you get yourself out of the way, I am there

You can of yourself do nothing, but I can do all

And I am in all.

Though you may not see the good, the good is there, for I am there.

I am there because I have to be, because I am.

Only in Me does the world have meaning; only out of Me does the world take
form, only because of Me does the world go forward

I am the law on which the movement of the stars and the growth of living cells
are founded.

I am the love that is the law's fulfilling. I am assurance I am peace. I am
oneness. I am the law that you can live by. I am the love that you can cling
to. I am your assurance. I am your peace I am one with you. I am

Though you fail to find Me, I do not fail you.
Though your faith in Me is unsure, My faith in you never wavers, because I know
you, because I love you.
Beloved, I am there.

THE KING AND I

I STAND with my begging sack in reserve
at the door of my King.
To go up in front, that courage in this timid
heart of mine is lacking.
King of Kings, Lord of mine, would have given
a handful of treasures,
If only for once to him my yearnings
could I have brought.
In the vast busy world there is no one like me
to await his commands and lazily keep sitting.
They all ask me, "Oh you unknowing ungodly,
What use have you been put to here while
day after day goes passing?"
I say, "My Master shall call me to enter His court,
And bestow on me a tiny bit of his grace whose
thousandfold would be coming....
I remain standing with my two restrained hands
at the door of my King."

MANJIRA DASGUPTA

(Translated from the Bengali of Asim Kumar Sengupta)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

SRI AUROBINDO's first two articles in the *Indu Prakash* created a sensation among the intelligentsia as they constituted a direct incisive and eloquent attack on the policies adopted by the Indian National Congress and a stirring call to his countrymen to shake off the torpor of centuries and to arise to liberate their Motherland.

According to the request from the editor of the *Indu Prakash* Sri Aurobindo modified the tone of his writings and continued to contribute the articles till March 1894. Being in a state-service his articles were published anonymously. He also published seven articles upon Bankim Chandra Chatterjee from July 16 to August 27, 1894. They were the most illuminating articles on the life, genius and achievement of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, whom he called "Creator of Bengali Prose." He estimated Bankim's language in a single verse when he wrote a poem on him: "The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose." This series showed the writer's knowledge of the Bengali language and literature and the cultural scenes of the time in which Bankim lived. Sri Aurobindo asserted: "...in Bankim's hands the Bengali language, before stammering and inarticulate, became a rich, musical and flexible organ vibrating to every human emotion and expressive of every beautiful or noble thought. I do not mean that there were no labourers in the field before Bankim and Madhusudan. The paths of Gods are always prepared for them. Many daring minds were already at work, but they fell short of their high conception. Rammohan Roy, the great Vidyasagara, Okhay Kumar Dutt and the Bengali playwrights were all working bravely towards the same consummation.... None of them could transform and recreate with that sure and easy touch which reveals the true maker of language." ¹

The first publication of the poem *Bande Mataram* in the novel *Ananda Math* (1882) broke on Bengal like a Mantra which could in a single day convert the poet's countrymen to the religion of Patriotism. India the Mother had revealed herself.

Haridas and Uma Mukherjee say: "*Bande Mataram* as an expression of Bankim's creative imagination held out a new conception of the country and initiated the people into a fundamental worship of the motherland as a paramount deity of national adoration with her cosmic body or Virat Deha co-extensive with the physical configuration of the country. In his immortal novel *Ananda Math* or Abode of Bliss (1882), Bankim put the cry of *Bande Mataram* or 'Hail to the Mother' as a new inspiring doctrine into the mouths of rebel Sannyasins in their fight against the Mussulman tyrants and the British traders.

"What was a soul-stirring slogan to the *Santans* or sons of the mother-country as conceived in *Ananda Math*, later became a mighty battle cry in India's

strenuous struggle for *Swaraj* or self-government. It is doubtful if even Bankim himself could have ever visualised this miraculous transformation of his poetic composition into a national anthem within a few years after his death.”²²

Before reviewing the articles of Sri Aurobindo, which appeared in the *Indu Prakash*, we shall give a brief history of the National Congress and its growth. The authors continue: “Nationalism as devotion to the mother-country which had its faint echo in the thought of Iswar Chandra Gupta gradually became potent and pronounced in the second half of the 19th century. The increasing diffusion of western education, the development of communications bringing the different parts of the country closer, the distorted but sanctified memory of the Mutiny (1857), the Indigo agitation (1860), the Civil Service agitation conducted by Surendra Nath, the growth of the native press into a power in the land, the steady development of National literature, the moral and spiritual forces generated by Ramakrishna, Keshab Chandra and Dayananda, the increasing infiltration of Western ideals into the Indian temper, the destruction of Indian arts and industries and the continuous bleeding of her resources, the vehement struggle for racial equality between Indians and Europeans as exemplified in the Ilbert Bill controversy (1883), the influence of the American War of Independence and the French Revolutionary ideologies, the nationalistic movements of Italy and Germany and the Home Rule struggle of Ireland, all these factors whetted the spirit of nationalism in India. Wilfrid Blunt has characterised the Ilbert Bill controversy (1883) as the awakening hour of Indian Nationalism which soon received a concrete expression in the birth of the Indian National Congress. Supported by Lord Dufferin, the viceroy, it was founded in 1885 by Allan Octavian Hume, a retired Civilian, as a safety valve for the escape of the great and growing forces of Indian discontent.

“After its formation in 1885, the Congress slowly developed as the nucleus and centre of a new national life in India, drawing every year an increasing number of people to its fold. Notwithstanding its persistent propaganda voicing Indian demands, which were necessarily at the beginning very small and limited, it remained for the next two decades essentially a moderate political body looking upon British rule in India as a dispensation of Providence but eager at the same time to get her grievances redressed

“The method of agitation then followed was prayer and petition, or mendicancy as it was later called, and grievances were sought to be removed within the fundamental framework of British administration in India. The early leaders of the Congress, in spite of their immense intellectual acumen, could hardly grasp the inherent conflict of interests between the alien rulers and the subject population.”²³

A close study of the *Indu Prakash* articles reveal three distinct strands in Sri Aurobindo’s early political thought: Sri Aurobindo as a critic of the Congress, as a critic of the British rule, and as the framer of a positive programme of political

action. Since his early thought contains the seeds of his later elaborations, these aspects deserve detailed consideration. Though he was a trenchant critic of the Congress, he does not fail to note how that organisation at first thrilled his countrymen very deeply. In his very first article he writes, "How shall we find words vivid enough to describe the fervour of those morning hopes, the April splendour of that wonderful enthusiasm? The Congress was to us all that is to man most dear, most high and most sacred; a well of living water in deserts more than Saharan, a proud banner in the battle of Liberty, and a holy temple of concord where the races met and mingled"⁴

Then Sri Aurobindo points out how the Congress leaders did not adopt a clear-cut goal of national freedom but wasted their time on immaterial trifles which could not meet the demands of the situation. As a result, all that the Congress achieved were a few "paltry administrative reforms." So Sri Aurobindo said, "... National Congress was not really national and had not in any way attempted to become *national*. But that was before I became a student of Mr. Pherozshah Mehta's speeches. Now to deal with this vexed subject, one must tread on very burning ground, and I shall make no apology for treading with great care and circumspection. The subject is wrapped in so thick a dust of controversy, and legal wits have been so busy drawing subtle distinctions about it, that a word which was once perfectly straightforward and simple, has become almost as difficult as the Law itself."⁵

Sri Aurobindo felt that the demands which the Congress had made were shamefully modest and that they were a wrong approach towards the British. Instead of relying on the strength of the nation, it sought to gain the good will of the British rulers. Therefore he says, "There was too a little too much talk about the blessings of British rule, and the inscrutable Providence which has laid us in the maternal, or more properly the step-maternal bosom of just and benevolent England. Yet more appalling was the general timidity of the Congress, its glossing over of hard names, its disinclination to tell the direct truth, its fear of too deeply displeasing our masters."⁶

Sri Aurobindo's strong criticism of the Congress was that the organisation, instead of supporting the vast Indian proletariat, remained closed to it and restricted itself to being a middle-class organisation. He writes, "At any rate I hope to have enforced on my readers the precise and intrinsic meaning of that count in my indictment which censures the Congress as a body not popular and not honestly desirous of a popular character—in fact as a middle-class organ selfish and disingenuous in its public action and hollow in its professions of a large and disinterested patriotism."⁷

"...Mr. Pherozshah in the generous heat of his temperate and carefully restricted patriotism, assures us after his genial manner that the awakening of the masses from their ignorance and misery is entirely unimportant and any expenditure of energy in that direction entirely premature ... The proletariat

among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariat,—now that the middle class is proved deficient in sincerity, power and judgement,—with that proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future.... Theorist and trifler though I may be called, I again assert as our first and holiest duty, the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat.”⁸

“Yet the proletariat is, as I have striven to show, the real key of the situation. Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact master of the future. Our situation is indeed complex and difficult beyond any that has ever been imagined by the human intellect; but if there is one thing clear in it, it is that the right and fruitful policy for the burgess, the only policy that has any chance of eventual success, is to base his cause upon the adroit management of the proletariat. He must awaken and organise the entire power of the country and thus multiply infinitely his volume and significance, the better to attain supremacy as much social as political.”⁹

NILIMA DAS

(To be continued)

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LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

II

How do poets present philosophical concepts? If we take Buddhism as a case study, we come across all possible uses and treatments of it in literary works. Even with regard to the impact of an ideology or philosophical doctrine of a writer, we may have cases of imitation, reception, influence and creative treason. Some writers use one or two Buddhist ideas or images or characters to drive home their own view of life which may not be essentially Buddhist; some may use these merely for poetic purposes, some may have satiric intentions if they happen to be sceptics or of other religious persuasions. There will be a gulf of difference between its use by a firm believer who has allowed it to influence his way of life and that by a light-hearted half-believer to whom it may be one of his many casual creeds. It may manifest itself in a work of art as a half-hearted use of a momentary notion or as an impassioned expression of a life-long conviction. A vast variety of major creative writers all over the world have had serious contacts or passing encounters with it. The wide ranging list includes foreign writers like D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Gary Snyder, Aldous Huxley, Conrad, Edwin Arnold, Hermann Hesse, and the Latin American writers like Borges, Sarduy and Paz and Indian writers such as Ashwaghosha, Cittalai Cattan, Kumaran Asan, and Tagore.

In the canonical Buddhist scripture, *Dhammapada*, we come across the following advice:

When the learned man drives away vanity by earnestness, he, the wise, climbing the terraced heights of wisdom, looks down upon the fools: free from sorrow he looks upon the sorrowing crowd, as one that stands on a mountain looks down upon them that stand upon the plain

The same idea is expressed poetically by the great philosopher-poet, Lucretius.

How sweet to stand, when tempests tear the main,
On the firm cliff, and mark the seaman's toil!
Not that another's danger soothes the soul,
But from such toil how sweet to feel secure!
How sweet, at distance from the strife, to view
Contending hosts, and hear the clash of war?
But sweeter far on wisdom's height serene,
Upheld by Truth, to fix our firm abode,

To watch the giddy crowd that, deep below,
 Forever wander in pursuit of bliss,
 To mark the strife for honours and renown,
 For wit and wealth, insatiate, ceaseless urged,
 Day after day, with labour unrestrained.

In *Dhammapada*, a single simile is used to describe the bliss experienced by the wise who distance themselves from the sorrowing multitude. Lucretius uses three poetic images and drives home the idea effectively. A man on a firm cliff watching the seaman toil below, a man at a safe distance watching two armies fighting against each other, and a man perched at the top of a hill viewing the giddy crowd deep beneath.

The miseries of the ordinary mortals engaged in meaningless pursuits are casually but tellingly expressed. That the tranquillity enjoyed by the wise is not born of any malice towards the suffering millions is also indicated.

Though glorious examples of conversion of Philosophy into poetry were available to Cattana in the Tamil poetic tradition, he did not seem to have benefitted much by it. In the last Canto of *Manimekhalai*, for example, there is a stunning display of his knowledge of Buddhism gathered from numerous Pali and Sanskrit texts. But here philosophy does not come as felt thought in the proper emotional context. Philosophical views are not expressed through a series of glowing metaphors. Perhaps his intention was to write a manual on Buddhist philosophy in elegant Tamil and he has succeeded in that attempt. The Canto examines the theory of Dependent Origination and the Four Noble Truths, the themes of the Sermon the Buddha delivered at the Deer Park in Benares. Cattana uses Nagarjuna's elucidation of the twelve *nidanas* in terms of a series of negatives:

There is neither origination nor cessation, neither permanence nor impermanence, neither unity nor diversity, neither coming in nor going out in the principle, *pvatitya samutpada*.

Cattana gives a succinct summary of Buddhist philosophy, keeping in mind the note of warning sounded by the Buddha against metaphysical subtleties and never missing the wood for the trees. But unfortunately, the poet in him does not seem to have freed himself from the clutches of the philosopher in him.

It is surprising to note that some of the Western poets have been successful in giving poetic expression to Buddhist doctrines. Octavio Paz believes that negation of the reality of the world and of the self establishes a link between surrealism and Eastern thought: "At a distance of more than two thousand years, Western poetry discovered something that constitutes the central teaching

of Buddhism: 'The self is an illusion, an aggregate of sensations, thoughts and desires'." One of his poems expresses eloquently the dissolution of the self. In it the image of Buddha is merely an image, a vague one, reduced to a simile, a physical expression of a non-physical reality.

The face and the wind
 beneath an inflexible sun,
 ochre plains, leonine hills.
 I climbed through brambles up a goat trail
 to a place of ruins:
 disjointed pillars, decapitated gods.
 Sometimes, surreptitious scintillations:
 a snake, a small lizard
 hidden in the stones,
 the colour of poisonous ink,
 a population of brittle insects.
 A circular patio, a cracked wall,
 and clutching the earth—a blind knot,
 a tree all roots—the religious fig tree
 Rain of light. A gray shape: the Buddha.
 His features a vague mass,
 over the crags of his face
 the ants climbed up and down
 still intact,
 still a smile, the smile;
 a gulf of peaceful clarity.
 And I was for a diaphanous instant
 a wind that stops,
 turns over itself and dissipates.

The image of the Buddha is ironically used in the poem to picture the dissolution of the self.

A poet and a social reformer, Kumaran Asan, in his *Chandala Bhikshuki* presents through the Buddha a denunciation of caste.

The running rabbit, the frolicking monkey,
 The hunting leopard and the stalking hunter
 Are all me and I am them all.
 Now if we see even beasts
 Not as fellow creatures but one with us,
 What difference then, between man and man?
 From selfish pleasure, from senseless jealousy.

From the heart of ignorance
 Rise the black fumes of caste.
 From pride and ill-will it graduates
 Into hatred for one and all
 It splits the family, estranges friends,
 Segregates races and finally spells the world's doom
 Don't anybody worship this epidemic,
 This contagion of caste, this black fire
 That consumes both its worshippers and the world.
 Ah Caste! It is the ultimate debasement
 And if we vanquish this vile demon,
 We shall have closed the highway to hell
 If you care for humanity,
 And have regard for your justice, O King,
 Exile her, this wily enchantress,
 This violence that is caste that comes in different colours
 And close your doors for ever to this pestilence.
 Heed this request rising from the throat
 That once offered itself
 To save a lamb from the sacrificer's sword
 And ask your subjects to relinquish desires
 And to love one another.

Even in translation, the passage proves a powerful attack on caste, reminding us of Pound's attack on usury in *The Cantos*.

For a narrative poem which, as a whole, owing to the strength of its objective correlative, can successfully convey a Buddhist message, we have to go to Tagore's "Abhisar" (Tryst) On a spring night, Vasavadatta, a courtesan, solicits a young handsome bhikshu, called Upagupta Lying on the ground near the city walls, he politely declines the invitation but cryptically remarks that he will visit her when the time comes. Years later, Vasavadatta, suffering from a dreadful disease, is thrown outside the walls. Keeping his promise, Upagupta comes to nurse the abandoned courtesan. She expresses her gratitude and asks him who he is. Revealing his identity, Upagupta tells her that the right time has come, he is there to be with her The soul-activating message or moral of the poem is not thrust upon the tale but becomes an integral part of it and the reader is willing to accept the contrived but remarkable twist without any complaint whatsoever.

Very strangely, it is Zen Buddhism which, in the modern period, has inspired the creation of a considerable quantity of great poetry. Zen, originally a Japanese word, is linked with the Sanskrit word, Dhyana. It implies a mode of enlightenment and a way to the moment of awareness. It is often described as "A special transmission outside the Scriptures."

No dependence upon words and letters,
 Directly pointing to the mind of man,
 Seeing into one's own nature

Zen is not bound by any scriptural injunctions or by any scholarly analysis. What it emphasizes is the direct revelation of the divine with its immediate impact upon one's own self or awareness

Zen poetry uses the basic symbols of Buddhism to great effect. Tokuo, a Japanese master of Zen Buddhism, describes his sense of cool contentment, an essential Zen experience:

The town's aflame with summer heat,
 But mount Koma is steeped in snow
 Such is a Zen man's daily life
 The lotus survives all earthly fire

It may be a cool, quiet lotus indicating the sense of being at peace with oneself or a flaming, shining lotus symbolising the Satori, the basic Zen mode of comprehending the Real through a direct revelation of Reality as it is used by Taiko, another Japanese poet in the following poem.

Straw sandals worn through, soles blistered
 Reaching home, I'd bathe my feet, then snooze.
 Always I'd weep, uncertain, at the crossroads.
 This morning an awakening—the flaming lotus

Poets like Gudo use the symbol of a "snowflake fallen on the hearth fire" to convey their sense of impermanence of life. Gudo, for example, expresses his utter contempt for all systems of thought in the following manner.

Right's fine, wrong's fine—
 There's nothing to nirvana
 And what's defilement?
 Snowflake in the flame.

Gary Snyder is the one Western poet who spent years in Japan studying Zen Buddhism. He once called poetry a riprap over the slick rock of metaphysics. In his poem "As For Poets," he speaks of (1) The Earth Poets who write small poems (2) The Air Poets who write swiftly moving airy poems (3) The Fire Poets who tend to burn at Absolute Zero (4) The Water Poets who manage to stay under water for over six years (5) The space poets whose poems, like geese, fly off the edge and (6) The Mind Poets who are true to the spirit of Zen and Zen Poetry. He describes the last group like this:

A Mind Poet
Stays in the house.
The house is empty
And it has no walls.
The Poem
Is seen from all sides
Everywhere
At once.

(Turtle Island)

On the ultimate goal and wisdom of Zen seekers, Kangan, a well-known Zen poet writes.

These eighty-four years,
Still, astir, Zen's been mine.
My last word?
Spoken before time began.

To the question "What is your last word of wisdom about Zen?" the Zen master's answer is: "Those who know do not speak " I would like to add the other part of the Tamil saying here: "Those who speak do not know".

(Concluded)

DR. P. MARUDANAYAGAM

THE LAST INTERVIEW WITH JANEZ SVETINA

Janez Svetina, a Slovene psychologist, philosopher, writer and translator, born in 1941, lived in India from 1972 to 1987 studying Indian philosophy. Being specially interested in the work of Sri Aurobindo, he translated and published several of his books and spent a number of happy and useful years in his Ashram at Pondicherry.

On June 26th, 1991, he travelled to Zgornja Radgona, a small picturesque town near the triple border between Slovenia, Austria and Hungary, in order to deliver a lecture on teaching. Next morning Zgornja Radgona was ferociously attacked by a strong convoy of tanks of the Yugoslav army, the troops destroying many civilian buildings. Svetina tried to take photographs of the tanks in front of his hotel, and was, to all appearance, intentionally killed by the hail of bullets fired from the tanks.

The interview which we are publishing in its English translation is reproduced from the cultural magazine Dialogi, June 1991. The interviewer was Franc Srimpt. Our acknowledgments are due to the Slovene P.E.N. Centre whose president is Borik A. Novak.

HOW TO TRANSCEND HUMAN EXISTENCE

When somebody passionately translates one and the same author, it can only mean that he or she especially likes this author, and that he or she has a special, intimate relation with him. Your attitude towards Sri Aurobindo is beyond doubt such. I would like to ask you when and in what circumstances you became acquainted with the philosophy, one could even say the mystical phenomenon, of Sri Aurobindo?

As a student I became interested in yoga, and I first read theosophical writings, and later a series of more important works on yoga, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Bhagavadgita, Dhammapada, etc. I had read the gospels even earlier, and I felt that they concealed profound truths. I felt the same while reading Buddha's sayings and speeches, or certain books on yoga, but despite the similarities I was not able to correlate all these ideas. I was therefore mentally divided, and I kept searching for satisfactory answers. Finally, I came across the title of the book—Integral Yoga. During my studies of psychology I realized how unsatisfactory one-sided explanations and theories were, so I reached the conclusion that it was always vital to consider all the aspects in order to arrive at more or less adequate explanations; I therefore thought that the best method for yoga was the one uniting all the partial approaches and methods. When I read Integral Yoga I felt that it really provided the clue to my search, that it indicated or contained the truth which could explain all the other partial truths. This was my first encounter with Sri Aurobindo, which stamped an indelible seal on my further life.

In your introduction to this book you mention the decline of values in modern times which is the consequence of rapid changes in the world, especially in science and technology, in communications and information systems, which have nevertheless not provided a satisfactory answer to the question of where all these changes lead, and what their immanent aim is. You pointed out yoga as a many-thousand year-old Indian psychological science and discipline, and the possibility of penetrating with its help into the "depths and heights of the human being". You also mentioned the idea of self-management which could grant people sufficient freedom and equality, and at the same time allow for "harmonious relations between individuals and community, the demands and rights of individuals and those of society". Today, more than ten years later, and after the great changes that we have undergone in Eastern Europe, when the regimes and models of socialist realism fell, and together with them the idea of Communism and a kind of self-management, can you tell me if in your introduction you mentioned the idea of self-management as a concession to the times, or did you actually think that self-management could help in the organization of human societies and individuals?

The self-management idea is probably still one of the ideas of the future. If we talk about the fact that from some sub-rational state, in which individuals are not really independent, personalized and individualized, but are merely the cells in their group: family, race, tribe, clan, guild, religion, stratum, class, nation, etc., people slowly develop into more or less independent individuals (process of individualization), then an inevitable part of this process is also the increasing autonomy of their state of mind, experience of values, acts and decisions. Only people with inner autonomy could start building a more or less rationally organized and democratic society. What happens in societies which lack people with inner autonomy is clearly demonstrated by the social catastrophes of this century caused by the mass movements of people with inner non-autonomy (the rise and spread of Bolshevism in Russia, Fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, two horrible world wars, a series of brutal social upheavals in the world), the main achievement of which appears to be above all millions of human victims. The expression "self-management" is in its meaning close to the expression "autonomy". If self-management were understood in the true sense of the word (namely that people with inner autonomy themselves manage their own lives, and also the life and functioning of the group or society they belong to) and the demanding task were dealt with properly, namely that people need to be trained for autonomous thinking, experiencing, decision-making and acting, this would be a significant step forward: a step which will definitely have to be taken one day. Unfortunately, the idea of self-management, like many other good ideas, has in the past been severely abused, and has consequently acquired a bad reputation. This is why I prefer to talk about personal autonomy, which should

be cultivated by any mentally mature person. This would be one of the foundation stones for the creation of a truly democratic society

It is therefore necessary to re-explain and reconsider the entire known history of mankind and the position of human beings in it, regardless of where they live, and especially think and act in this direction in the present and in the future. The question, however, is, how Sri Aurobindo answers this question in Integral Yoga. I would like to ask you what you think about this kind of explanation of the history of mankind, or rather, if you were of the same opinion before you became acquainted with Sri Aurobindo's ideas, or if the change occurred in you when you encountered the work of this Indian philosopher?

• Even before I came across the first book by Sri Aurobindo I felt that human life—the life of an individual as well as the life of a group, nation, society—mostly depended on what the people themselves were like. I was certain that—as a Slovene proverb says—“every man is the architect of his fortune”. I thus interpreted this thought: a person, primarily through his own way of thinking, emotions, tendencies, desires and acts, defines his own fate. It was clear to me that it was impossible to create real “self-management”, socialism “according to people’s needs” or “with a human face”, or any other “social and economic law” with base people and barbarians. However, there were many things I could not understand, so in addition to psychology and literature I wanted to study philosophy, sociology, history, and learn about different religions in order to gain a better understanding of the world and life. When I read Sri Aurobindo’s book *The Human Cycle*, I got the feeling—despite many things in the book I did not really understand then—that it opened my eyes to extremely profound truths which I had not found anywhere else. After having read the book I no longer felt the need to engage in detailed studies of sociology and history, since I had the feeling that I had received the answers to my most pressing questions, and that the reading of all the books ever written on history and society could not offer anything substantially new. Later I read various history and sociology books, and I realized I was right. None of them provided such deep insights into the nature of the world and life or human society as *The Human Cycle*.

*I presume that while translating *The Human Cycle* you stayed in Auroville, or rather in an ashram founded in the vicinity of this Indian town, in the state of Tamil Nadu, former French Pondicherry, where you could study Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, ideas and mysticism in more detail. This chapter of your life must have been of special importance, since it lasted for many years and therefore significantly influenced your further studies of Sri Aurobindo’s work. Nowadays, only a little is known of this unique project, where people do research into Sri Aurobindo’s life, his doctrine and numerous books, the doctrine on the basis of which we might in the present realize at least a part of his conception.*

It is true that in India I translated *The Human Cycle*—and several other books of Sri Aurobindo published in Slovenia—at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, where I lived almost for one and a half decades. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram is a community which was founded in the town of Pondicherry on the Coromandel coast by Sri Aurobindo himself and his colleague “La Mère”, who tried to shape her life-work in accordance with Sri Aurobindo’s views on the essence of human existence. There are some 2000 people living in this community, and it is therefore a small version of the world, since these people come from all over India and the world, they are of different nationalities and beliefs, belong to different intellectual, professional, cultural and social classes, and are also of very different characters. Life there does not follow fixed models and universal patterns; everybody has to find his or her way of internal and external growth. It is inevitable that conflicts and problems occur in such a diverse community, and that not everybody is equally capable of living in harmony with the set ideal, but many people there are sincerely and seriously trying to live in the spirit of Sri Aurobindo’s ideal. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram was formally founded in 1926, when Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual colleague and assistant, “La Mère”, became the external leader, but its beginnings in fact date back to 1910, when Sri Aurobindo settled in Pondicherry. The Ashram has been growing and developing ever since. A new community called Auroville is coming to life some 10 kilometres from Pondicherry. This community was founded by Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual companion “La Mère” around 1968 on a piece of wasteland and, despite various problems, it has developed ever since. This community, counting some 500 people from various parts of India and the world, and a number of the inhabitants of nearby Indian villages, is also trying to follow Sri Aurobindo’s ideal of human growth and development, and the organization of human society, but to be admitted one needs only to believe in the ideal of human relationship and harmony, regardless of race, nationality, religion, culture or social and national origin. Fifteen years ago there was a serious conflict in this community between two opposing groups who wanted to have the decisive say and role in its management. The problems lasted for a few years, but were solved some seven or eight years ago. For anyone who is more or less familiar with human nature, these problems do not come as a surprise, for any person it is difficult to establish harmony within oneself, or within a family or any other group which consists of members of the same nation and culture, let alone within a community consisting of people of different races and cultures, with all the differences and antagonisms encountered in the world. The ideal in Auroville is very complex, and the majority of people—even those attracted by the ideal—are still not really capable of living in accord with this ideal. They would first need to change themselves. Although the work on the realization of this ideal is only just beginning, it will continue. In one of his sayings, Sri Aurobindo states that “as long as a single soul firmly believes in an ideal, the

ideal cannot collapse". Those who leave are not the best, we could say that those who leave are frightened by the demands of the complex efforts, or else they are those who lose belief in the ideal or want to achieve different goals in life. Those who stay cannot be frightened by any problems.

Although you were mesmerised by Sri Aurobindo's vision, it is also necessary to view the world realistically, that is, to consider certain teachings only as one of the possible ways of achieving the highest goals. In this respect, I consider your essay "Slovene religious culture", published in issue 104 of Nova Revija, as very important. In this essay you developed the idea of true spirituality which could lead people (including Slovenes) to "higher and broader, truer, more personal, finer, deeper, hyper-rational forms of religious life". You strive for an enriched Christianity, for a Christian culture which could to a great extent help to shape (Slovene) national identity.

Sri Aurobindo's intention is not empty philosophizing or the creation of a beautiful Utopia, but the actual changing of the world, life and society, not through external revolutions as attempted and so often carried out in this century (Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler and their numerous followers; many artistic, social and intellectual movements of modern times: the hippy movement and some ideologists of rock music have foreshadowed a revolution which they are preparing and realizing with their wild music), but through inner change, the way characteristic of wise people of all periods. It seems that the above-mentioned barbaric systems and movements of this century have tried to change not only society, but also the inner man; Communism proclaimed that it wanted to build a new person, Hitler used similar words, and now they are employed by rock musicians and by similar movements. However, despite their proclaimed progressiveness, all the above-mentioned movements were retrograde or regressive, since they always dragged people back into their evolutionary past, into herd-like conformism, and also into savagery and barbarity, into animalism and even demonism. Hitler or Stalin's new man was actually a barbarian, striving only for power, disregarding all fundamental ethical, aesthetic, religious, cognitive, social or any other true human values. The influence of the rock revolution is similar: it pushes mankind back into barbarity, animalism and demonism. Sri Aurobindo's search for a new man moves in a different, much more complex direction: surpassing the human state and rising up to the as yet unachieved transcendental, and not down, to the transcended.

In the essay "Slovene religious culture" I wanted to proceed from the present state in Slovenia, and to meditate on the developmental possibilities and hidden potential. The paper on religious culture reveals my views on the developmental potential of the Slovene religious tradition. The "fil rouge" of the book is the thought that people should be able to open themselves up to the best that mankind has created in any period or culture, and to understand it in a proper way, to accept it and adopt it as part of our own living tissue. In the same

way as we once accepted the elements of ancient Greek and Roman culture, Judaeo-Christianity and modern European humanism, we should now be able to accept the new colossal developmental incentives from all over the world, especially from the highly developed cultures. We are living in a time when a new civilisation is rapidly emerging. Those who discover, and accordingly shape their lives in time, will have the best chances of progressing.

NOT TOO FAST

GENTLY lift the mists
From the seeking sight,
Rarely behold my eyes
In some miraculous moment
The soul-stretches of Peace,
The mystic swirls of Light.
A seal of bronze
Slips back to block
The high release,
The upward flight.
For my trivial strengths
May be shattered
By too passionate a touch,
So gradually descend,
O Dawns of God,
Lovingly hold me,
O blissful Might.

SHYAM KUMARI

NOLINI SARKAR

A TRIBUTE TO THE HUMORIST

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

2

STRANGE though it may seem, a man who practically had no sense of rhythm or ear for tunes became Nolini's mentor in his youth. His name was Sarat Chandra Pundit. He was a Pundit not only in name but also in reality. For his practical purpose he used his mother-tongue, but he also knew English well. He was known mostly by a name of endearment, Dada Thakur. Of himself he used to say mockingly, "I am *tal-kana* (lacking rhythm-sense) and *sur-kana* (having no ear for tunes)". Probably he thus joked about himself only because he could not create music. But he could write comical or satirical verses, and his assistant Nolini Kanto set them to tune very attractively. Dada Thakur was not only the namesake of the great novelist Saratchandra Chatterjee, but also his friend. The political national leader Subhas Bose also held him in great respect. He was thus not small fry, although he lived very simply.

A kind, idealistic, self-made man and sometimes playfully rough, Dada Thakur earned a reputation for his bold journal *Vidushak* (*The Court Jester*). Through this he not only corrected errors of his own countrymen, but sometimes he even attacked the vices of the alien rulers by depicting them in a ridiculous guise. And for that the rulers once or twice tried to take it out on him. This newspaper with political overtones had all the merits of a literary journal; all the more so because Thakur was a *littérateur* who knew well how to play with words.

During the First World War, the anti-British elements in India tried to take advantage of the situation to subvert the Raj. Nolini Kanto was asked to cover the area called Jongipur. It was then that he first met and worked with Dada Thakur who was publishing the Bengali journals: *Jongipur Samvad* and *Vidushak*, both boldly political.

Although Nolini Sarkar was acquainted with quite a few notable men, he wrote a full-fledged biographical book on only one man, that is, Dada Thakur. This great man was just like an elder brother to Nolini Kanto. Long ago when both were still alive, this book was filmed and justly won a national award for its music and content. Thus Dada Thakur and Nolini were two of those rare people to see their own life-story on the silver screen.

It is quite evident therefore that Sarkar's life was much influenced by Thakur. He was sort of groomed by the latter. Their relationship was for a long time like that of teacher and student. Of course the teacher had to stoop down and both appeared to be at the same level. Thakur was a humorist *non-pareil* and Nolini was the right kind of apprentice to have come under his tutelage. As such he learnt well by practice, as it were, the various techniques or arts of applying

humour correctly through song, poetry, gesture and speech. Two humorists are particularly known for succeeding in breaking a smile on the lips of the morose Bengalis: they are none other than Dada Thakur and Nolini Kanto. Both hailed from Murshidabad.

In Nolini Kanto's life there were three main fields of activity. Firstly in 1919 he served as the librarian of the King of Lalgola. From there he went to Calcutta and joined in 1920 the staff of the paper called *Byoli* of which he soon became the *de facto* editor. Then from 1930-44 he was active in the All India Radio, Calcutta. Through all these diverse activities he struck relationships with such social luminaries as Rabindranath Tagore, Saratchandra Chatterjee, Acharya Prafullachandra Roy, Khirodprasad Vidya Vinod, Raibahadur Jaladhar Sen, Dinesh Chandra Sen, Dilip Kumar Roy, Kazı Nazrul Islam, Yogiraj Baroda-charan, Upendranath Banerjee, Barindra Ghose, Ullaskar Dutta.

When he worked as the librarian at Lalgola he had the privilege of getting acquainted with its rich proprietor, the raja who was a saint as well. His name was Jogindranarayan Rai, C I.E. As an example of the raja's charity, wealth and goodness, I will quote the following letter of the poet laureate Tagore addressed to Pt. Ramendrasundar Trivedi:

"Our school (at Shantiniketan) is saved thanks to the largesse from the Raja Shri Jogindranarayan Raibahadur. I shall be very thankful if you will kindly secure and send me a photograph of him. I couldn't succeed in making him comply with this request." (Quoted from the book *Shraddhaspadeshu*)

Nolini Kanto was about thirty years old when he served as the librarian. His admiration for the raja indicates that he was happy with him and his royal entourage. So ideal are this palace and the surroundings that, years back, the director Satyajit Ray used it for his film "Jalsaghar".

Even then not for long could Sarkar experience this quiet untroubled countryside of Lalgola. For, soon city life called him away. The top revolutionary figures of Bengal, who were accused in the Maniktola bomb case and sent to the Andamans, had been released some time in 1920 (that is, much earlier than the completion of the actual life-term). Back home, they came together (mainly Barindra's group) and decided to launch a paper. They chose the name *Byoli* which means lightning.

This group invited Nolini Sarkar through a letter to join them. That call could not be insignificant, thought Nolini wisely. So he left Lalgola and came down to Calcutta. A new chapter opened in his life amidst a band of patriots. The atmosphere was permeated with friendliness, open-mindedness, and the air of laughter, jokes and banter which strengthened the strands of togetherness. The cloud of sorrow could not cast its shadow on them. Upendranath was the most boisterous of them all. This lively atmosphere in the company of revolutionaries seemed very suitable to the librarian from Lalgola. Not only did his own life turn a new leaf, but it was a time when an important chapter began for

the Bengali media and nationalism. A batch of new writers and poets were produced, while little-known good writers came to proper focus.

Although this paper was always sold in the name of Barindra Kumar because of his fame, and carried his halo (being called “Barin Ghose’s *Bijoli*”), yet the moving spirit behind it was or soon came to be none other than Nolini Kanto. For, soon not only was he its editor, but even its publication devolved upon him

The main writers on its regular staff were Barindra, Upendra and Nolini. Others also regularly contributed to this weekly paper, and they were or soon became well-known poets, writers and journalists. True to its name, its progress was like lightning. Very quickly the number of subscribers rose to as high as 20,000. Although the periodical showed sympathy for the political prisoners and voiced nationalistic feelings, it was not absolutely devoid of an international outlook. It devoted columns to world affairs as well as to Indian news. It was a very well-organised and much-appreciated periodical of the time. It set an example of how a group of extremists could become sober and channelise their talents to patriotic, constructive and creative activities through journalism.

The rapid growth of the national awareness was reflected by the spate of newspapers, especially in the vernacular languages, towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. To this was added a new communication medium, the Radio, in the second decade of the 20th century. Since the Radio was a new thing and also because it was fully under the foreign government, like the newspapers, the nationalism that was aired was only of a cultural type, not political; a factual rather than a strategic one.

This gadget, although novel and strange, brought about another lucky break in Nolini Kanto’s life. It was in August 1927 that the Indian Broadcasting Co. Ltd., opened for the first time its office at Calcutta. Nolinibabu was invited to join it in the very next month. Soon upon joining it, forward and intelligent as he was and because of his ingeniousness, he was appointed to the post of propaganda-officer. In some Bengali weeklies Sarkar himself used to write, under assumed names, “critic’s comments” on the programmes broadcast by the Radio. This was his clever way of popularising the Radio programmes in those early days of broadcasting. Shortly he became the editor of *Betar Jagat*, the programme journal (which is now defunct). He was with the Calcutta Radio for fourteen years. Directly or indirectly he was associated with various jocular and notable incidents that took place there during those years of its genesis. Read them for fun in his books if you know the language. The English Government officer concerned with this broadcasting section was much pleased with Nolinibabu’s capacity and initiative as organiser, musician and presenter.

It is unlikely that this bespectacled man of such performing and other capacities should have no romance in him. He had, and that had even made a little noise, only because he was already married, of course married to one who had practically no affinity with his own nature. They did not have normal

relationship even. He had met with some opposition when he decided to marry a second time. There is even a little joke about it. Sri Aurobindo was approached—through a letter—to dissuade Nolini from taking the step. He cooled them down by replying that they should inform him early when Nolini goes for it a third time! The magazine *Desh*, in the issue referred to earlier, quotes a letter, the first one of its kind from Nolini Kanto, written to a pal, in which he informs him in an emotional language about his acquaintance with the girl. Soon after this he got married. This woman gave him two daughters, and remained with him till the end of her life

There was another side to his nature. It was the desire for the company of saints and sages. It may appear, on the face of it, to be quite contradictory to his otherwise social nature. But such were the circumstances that this became quite natural. Thus we find that his boss Barindra's elder brother Sri Aurobindo became his guru. Once or twice a year he used to pay a visit to his gurudeva in Pondicherry. And in the year 1948 he settled down with his family at his Ashram. A long-time wish fulfilled. He was gratified to receive the affection and blessings of the Master. Occasionally he used to go and visit Calcutta, and meet old friends or relatives. Thus he kept himself in touch with the world more or less, during his age of memoirs. And his memoirs continued to be serially published, though he remained in Pondicherry, away from it all.

Although he had suffered illnesses in his childhood, he had been miraculously cured of them and possessed good health from his youth onwards. He bore a brown skin, and his silvery hair flowed down to the shoulders. In spite of his being a man of taste, his dress was always simple and usually white. In the streets he was always seen with a walking stick, though he rarely took its support. His handwriting was very clean and clear, devoid of any correction-marks or crossings. If one read even the letters of his last days, one would hardly believe that they were written by an aged man, so clearly and beautifully they were written. Probably those who are so particular about their handwriting cannot be prolific writers. No wonder his literary contributions were meagre compared to what his readers had expected of him.

He was gifted with a long and happy life. He peacefully breathed his last at Pondicherry in May 1984.

Nolini Kanto was truly a man of wit, and since brevity is the soul of wit I shall be brief. I believe nobody expected me to include in this short span some translated representation of his writings. However, reading this pen-portrait the readers, especially those who were neither acquainted with him nor with his writings, would at least know the important points, the landmarks of his life.

(Concluded)

DHIRAJ BANERJEE

(Translated by the author from his own Bengali article published in Mahila Mangal)

NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

Secrets of the Soil

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

2nd Part

YOU can already see from what has been said that this extraordinary book* discusses more than the secrets of the soil. In another chapter ("Purified with Fire") we learn about a Poona Brahmin, Vasant V. Paranje, performing Agnihotra cleansing ceremonies in the U.S. His technique is practised by groups all over the world. The ultimate aim of the ritual is "to clean up the planet". Here too practical results were achieved and expressed in scientific terms. "The [Agnihotra] ash seems to stabilize the amount of nitrogen and potassium in the soil. And a chemist in Colorado who works for the U.S. government has found from repeated soil tests that the ash greatly increases the solubility of phosphorus," one of the followers of Paranje told the authors.

So many other interesting points could be discussed in this review, such as the technique of a Russian lady who invokes cosmic energy into jugs of water and uses it to help the growth of plants and the health of animals. Official Soviet documents (published in the respective chapter) attest, for instance, to her "remarkable gift for...increasing the harvest of edible beets.. by 160 percent." This reminds us, of course, of the Mother's putting Force into her blessing packets. In fact, readers familiar with her writings will have comparatively easy access to many of the chapters. In "Perelandra" the authors introduce an American lady who communicates with the Devas (we also know that phenomenon from the Findhorn community). These are the occult entities presiding over groups of plants and animals. Once when her cabbage, cauliflower and other vegetables were attacked by cabbage worms, she proposed a deal. "I connected with the Deva of the Cabbage Worm and announced I wished to give one plant at the end of each of the four rows to the cabbage worms, and I requested that the worms remove themselves from all the other plants, except for the four which I had designated." It worked. In less than a week the infested plants were healed and even the designated plant could eventually be saved, because birds, wasps and other creatures had been feasting on the abundant cabbage worms.

Machaelle Wright, the owner of "Perelandra", does not water her garden,

* *New Age Selections for Restoring our Planet*, by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird (Harper & Row, the first Perennial Library Edition, New York 1990) Pp 444, \$ 14.95

except at the moment of planting. When the Federal Government declared Virginia an agricultural disaster area in 1986 because of severe drought, gardens around “Perelandra” withered in the sun, but her place “stayed fresh and bright, leading her neighbors to suspect her of being a witch.” She explains her spiritual approach in the following passage. “This gardening.. is a metaphor for life. As you change your approach to the garden, you will, in turn, change the very fabric of how you approach your life. The Perelandra garden is my life, my heart, my breath It is my friend, my helper, my nurturer, and teacher—especially of myself—my planet, my universe It is my key to the universe. It gives me access to spiritual truth and universal natural law contained within the universal flow.”

Something like the peak of esoteric farming is revealed in the chapter “Cosmiculture”. A farmer told the authors about a technique used by another farmer to protect his thirty-five acres of blueberries from a cold front. The “instrument” mentioned at the end of the following quotation is a “cosmic pipe” stuck vertically in the ground for radiating energy to the surrounding fields: “You may find it hard to believe. It sounds wild, and incompatible, but along with some liquid calcium he put [into the pipe] the energy from a picture of the sun taken from the moon, obtained from NASA, and some Agnihotra dust along with its Sanskrit mantra To get the mantra into the vial Mark played a cassette and ran the sound through a wire into the earphone in the well of the instrument ” The procedure worked, but a dosage of *aqua lithium* was needed to support this technique. “It’s produced by a lab in California at San Jose—and when it was broadcast to the plants [through the pipe] it relaxed and de-stressed them. They grew beautiful deep-green leaves, and Mark had the best harvest in years.”

For all those who wish to experiment with some of the methods described in this book, the authors give detailed advice in an Appendix. A comprehensive Bibliography and an Index of more than twenty pages further increase the practical value of this work which indeed seems to offer “New Age solutions for restoring our planet”, as the subtitle promises us on a very colourful cover.

(Concluded)

SUDDEN TALES THE FOLKS TOLD

(Continued from the issue of January 1992)

4. GENERATIONS OF FOOLS

A HUNTER returned home after spending a couple of days in the forest. He brought with him quite a big monitor lizard. Handing the live lizard to his wife, the hunter said, "Keep it in a cage. It'll fetch us a lot of money. But everything has to wait for its time. And let us wait for the best offer."

The wife did as she was told.

Tired after wandering in the forest, the hunter soon fell asleep. A few minutes later, his father returned from the paddy field. He was happy to see his son back. Without disturbing his sleep, he went to the kitchen and asked his daughter-in-law, "What has he brought from the forest today?"

"A big monitor lizard."

"Fine! It is sure to bring us a fortune... Let me have a multi-coloured feather from it to adorn my turban. Go and pluck one from the lizard," said the father.

The hunter's wife blinked. For a second she couldn't find any word.

"Why do you blink? Has my son told you not to pluck any feather from the lizard?" the father broke the silence.

"But what lizard has feathers?" asked the daughter-in-law trying to suppress her laughter.

Unable to make out her sneering, the father moved away scratching the back of his head.

At sun-down the hunter woke up to have food. While serving him, his wife rehearsed what had happened between her and his father.

The hunter laughed to his heart's content. "Poor old man! He must have forgotten what a monitor lizard looks like. Perhaps he has mistaken it for a tortoise."

While the wife blinked again, their son—a little boy five years old—let out a shriek of laughter.

The hunter looked askance at his son. The boy said, "I thought grandpa a fool. But you have proved that you are in no way different from him." Seconds later he added, "Perhaps both of you have a crocodile in mind."

The wife blinked for a third time.

*

5. NO DOUBT ABOUT IT

A landlord went on cheating his farmers in all possible ways. No one dared to question him for fear of losing their jobs if not their heads.

A young woman of the neighbouring village who had heard several stories about the landlord wanted to fool him

She had a parrot that had learnt to speak only one sentence in its life. That was: "No doubt about it." For all questions the parrot had only one answer.

The clever woman planned to play a trick on the landlord with the help of her parrot. One night she clandestinely reached the landlord's backyard and buried her gold ring under the margosa tree, a gold bangle under the custard apple tree, and a pair of her silver anklets to one side of the well.

On the morning of the next day, she approached the landlord and said thus: "I have a miraculous bird that can speak. It is also an expert in tracing hidden treasures."

Exhilarated, the landlord wanted to test the truth of the matter. So he said, "Allow your parrot to find any treasure for me in my garden at the backyard "

"Is there any treasure hidden near the well?" she asked the parrot.

"No doubt about it," replied the parrot.

The woman moved towards the spot where she had hidden her silver anklets and asked, "Is it here?"

"No doubt about it," replied the parrot as usual.

The landlord who had followed her with a couple of gardeners gave commands. Within a jiffy the gardeners hit upon the treasure. The landlord was all smiles.

The clever woman found for the landlord the other two hidden treasures in the same fashion. The landlord's joy knew no bounds. "Sell me the parrot. It will be of immense use to me I'll give you a bag containing a thousand pieces of gold," said he

"Oh, is it not too small an amount for a miracle-working bird like mine?" asked the woman.

They haggled and finally settled on three such bags.

When the woman left with her booty, the landlord asked the bird, "Is my garden full of hidden treasures?"

"No doubt about it," pat came the reply from the parrot.

The greedy landlord employed several men to dig the entire garden for hidden treasures. In the process all the fruit bearing trees, and many flowering plants were uprooted. The entire garden was destroyed. The work went on for several days. But no treasure was found.

Disappointed, the landlord told the parrot, "What a fool am I to spend three thousand golden coins on you?"

"No doubt about it," commented the parrot.

6. ONE COIN...BUT TWO SIDES

One night a newly married couple were travelling on the back of a camel in a desert. The weather was chill and they were hurrying towards their tent.

“Get down,” said a voice

The couple obeyed out of sheer fear. They turned to different directions but couldn't see anyone.

“I am Truth,” continued the voice. “It is too difficult to see me. But take my advice before you start life's journey together.”

“We are listening,” said the couple in unison.

“It is thoughts that kill us. Again it is thoughts that make us live,” sermonised the voice. “And what is life without thoughts?”

“Yes. We don't disagree with you,” said the couple anxious to free themselves from the clutches of the advising voice.

“Stoop down and pick up the pebbles lying on the sand. . Take as many as you want. They are my wedding present to you.”

“Pebbles as present! What can we do with pebbles? As young children we played with them. But we don't need them now,” the couple thought but didn't express their opinion for fear of wasting their time further.

Hence to satisfy Truth, they each picked a couple of pebbles and put them into their pockets.

“You will be happy and unhappy, for what you have done... Adieu,” said the voice. It was heard no more.

The couple rushed to their tent to save themselves from the biting cold.

At sunrise, the couple woke up and felt the pebbles in their pockets. With a mocking smile they pulled out the pebbles and looked at them.

They were unable to believe their eyes. What they had in their palms were not pebbles but invaluable gems.

“Alas! We should have stuffed all our pockets with these stones,” they said and the unhappy thought of having missed such an opportunity tortured them. But soon they recovered from it and said consolingly, “We were good enough to pick these few stones at least.” The happy thought made them live.

*

7. WHO IS NOT UNGRATEFUL?

The post of minister to the king fell vacant in a kingdom. Many were the courtiers who aspired to ministership.

The king wanted to select the best in the whole lot of such aspirants. He called all of them to his chamber and said, “Whoever shows me someone who is grateful and another who is ungrateful will become my minister if he succeeds in convincing me. . I'll give you twenty-four hours time.”

The aspirants went away racking their brains over where they could find such gratefuls and ungratefuls. Even if they succeeded in finding such persons, would the king be convinced?

While many of them spent a sleepless night, one wise courtier had a peaceful sleep for he was sure of becoming the minister

On the morning of the next day, all the aspirants except the wise courtier came alone to the court with their heads bent low

The king giggled at the plight of the aspirants and said, "I know. I know you'll not succeed in finding even one who is grateful."

"But I have succeeded, your Majesty," came a jubilant voice from the entrance of the court.

When every one looked at the entrance, the wise courtier came hurriedly followed by a dog. "Here is someone, your Majesty, who is grateful," he said pointing at his dog wagging its tail. Your Majesty knows very well that a dog is always prepared to sacrifice its life for its master So who can be more grateful than a dog?"

"Agreed .. But what about the ungrateful one?" asked the king.

"They are all here inside the court, your Majesty," said the wise courtier.

Bewildered, the king and the courtiers looked at one another The wise courtier continued "All of us are ungratefuls, your Majesty. When you asked us to show one grateful being, none of the courtiers here, including myself, came forward to convince you that he is grateful to you What does it show? It only shows that we are ungratefuls You wanted to see a grateful being because you too couldn't convince yourself that you are a grateful man And so, your Majesty, you too are .."

The king was convinced The wise courtier was made minister

(More Tales to follow)

P RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Twenty-eighth Annual Conference

11 August 1991

THE MEETING OF EAST AND WEST

Speech by Balaur Shah

THE world we live in is historically divided into two distinct collectivities, recognised as the East and the West. And two views, contrary in nature, exist, regarding the relation between these two wings of humanity. The first view asserts that these two entities are separate, irreconcilable and therefore can never unite. The second view perceives a complementary relation between the two.

The basic reason generally admitted for this great difference between the East and the West boils down to the difference between spirituality and materialism, for we usually talk of a spiritual East and a materialist West.

But if we are to go by the present facts, this distinction is no longer true. A large amount of materialistic worldliness has crept into the people of the East and the phenomenon of spiritual seeking in the West is rapidly spreading.

However, it is generally accepted that the quest for the Spirit has received dominant attention in the East, and that the Science of Matter has been the West's main great preoccupation.

Let us now examine both these views to arrive at a convincing solution to the one question that troubles our minds: Where lies our true progress—in the pursuit of the Spirit to the exclusion of Matter, or *vice versa*, or on a path, if there exists one, where both quests meet and join hands to reach a common goal?

The first view supports itself on two powerful but separate perceptions of Reality, one contributed by the West, the other by the East. These two perceptions are easily designated by the terms "Materialism" and "Asceticism".

To the materialist, Matter is the sole Reality, and by Matter he means all that is tangible and occupies objective space. He recognises the physical senses as the sole means of Knowledge, and therefore makes Reason deal solely with the facts they provide.

The ascetic, on the other hand, insists on pure Spirit as the sole Reality, and by pure Spirit he means something that is beyond manifestation, free from any change, unconditioned, self-existent.

To the materialist Spirit has no reality, to the ascetic all manifestation is an illusion.

Thus it would seem that these two positions, fundamentally exclusive of each other, cannot be reconciled

One cannot really take sides, or argue wholly in favour of either the materialist's or the ascetic's claim, for, as Sri Aurobindo says, "What justification, of logic or of experience, can be asserted in support of the one extreme which cannot be met by an equally cogent logic and an equally valid experience at the other end?"¹

If, however, we enter deep within and go beyond the ascetic's realisation, we could find a state of consciousness that would enable us to experience or perceive a Reality, more total, all-embracing, where "Matter becomes real to Spirit, Spirit becomes real to Matter."²

This is the realisation of Sachchidananda or Omnipresent Reality, as Sri Aurobindo calls it, which removes the contradiction between the materialist's denial of the Spirit and the ascetic's refusal of Matter. It is on this integral view of Reality that Sri Aurobindo's philosophic system is founded and which he has fully elaborated in his monumental work, *The Life Divine*. It is this integral view of Reality which reconciles Spirit with Matter in a harmonious relation that can bridge the gulf that divides the East and the West. This reconciliation already existed in ancient Indian spirituality, though later it tended to get disrupted due to the trenchantly exclusive view of the Spirit preached by Mayavada and Buddhism which led to the ascetic denial of life and the world.

But this ascetic view does not constitute the whole of Indian thought, nor by any means its essence. As Sri Aurobindo says in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*: "The Indian idea of the world, of Nature and of existence is not physical, but psychological and spiritual. Spirit, soul, consciousness are not only greater than inert matter and inconscient force, but they precede and originate these lesser things. All force is power, or means of a secret spirit; the force that sustains the world is a conscious Will, and Nature is its machinery of executive power. Matter is the body or field of a consciousness hidden within it, the material universe a form and movement of the Spirit. Man himself is not a life and mind born of Matter and eternally subject to physical Nature, but a spirit that uses life and body. It is an understanding faith in this conception of existence, it is the attempt to live it out, it is the science and practice of this high endeavour and it is the aspiration to break out in the end from this mind bound to life and matter into greater spiritual consciousness that is the innermost sense of Indian culture. It is this that constitutes the much-talked-of Indian spirituality."³

¹ *The Life Divine* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 18), p. 17

² *Ibid.*, p. 25

³ *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (Cent. Ed., Vol. 14), pp. 96-97

A little later in the same book he adds: "Certainly, in this view, matter, mind, life, reason, form are only powers of the Spirit and valuable not for their own sake, but because of the Spirit within them, *ātmārtham*; they exist for the sake of the Self, says the Upanishad, and this is certainly the Indian attitude to these things. But that does not depreciate them or deprive them of their value; on the contrary it increases a hundredfold their significance. Form and body immensely increase in importance if they are felt to be instinct with the life of the Spirit and are conceived as a support for the rhythm of its workings"¹

To say that India was never concerned with the study of Matter, or of physical Nature is to ignore or concoct history. "If by nature is meant physical Nature, the plain truth is that no nation before the modern epoch carried scientific research so far and with such signal success as India of ancient times.... Not only was India in the first rank in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, surgery, all the branches of physical knowledge which were practised in ancient times, but she was, along with the Greeks, the teacher of the Arabs from whom Europe recovered the lost habit of scientific enquiry and got the basis from which modern science started."²

However, to realise fully the potentialities of such a fruitful endeavour of the ancient Indian seers towards true spirituality, we must admit and imbibe the positive contributions of both Materialism and Asceticism for humanity's future progress.

Rationalistic materialism in its essence trains the intellect to a clear austerity, which is necessary to safely enter the vast field of evidence and experience through which we have to pass to reach the spiritual goal. This will prevent perilous distortions, misleading imaginations and irrational dogmas, which have been in the past the contributions of unripe minds when they try to reach the higher ranges of spiritual experience.

"Asceticism means the self-denial and self-conquest by which man represses his lower impulses and rises to greater heights of his nature."³ Asceticism can help us correct or counter the opposite defect of vitalistic exaggerations, to which our lower nature is very prone.

Thus from the standpoint of the future evolution of humanity both the East and the West have to work as comrade powers to reach their common destiny. So Sri Aurobindo observes, "Towards the spirit if not all the way to it man must rise or he misses his upward curve of strength; but there are different ways of approach to its secret forces. Europe, it would seem, must go through the life and the reason and find spiritual truth by their means as a crown and a revelation . . . But Asia, or at any rate, India lives naturally by a spiritual influx from above; that alone brings with it a spiritual evocation of her higher powers of

¹ *Ibid* , p 97

² *Ibid* , p 67

³ *Ibid* , p 74

mind and life. The two continents are two sides of the integral orb of humanity and until they meet and fuse, each must move to whatever progress or culmination the spirit in humanity seeks, by the law of its being, its own proper Dharma. A one-sided world would have been the poorer for its uniformity and the monotone of a single culture, there is need of divergent lines of advance until we can raise our heads into that infinity of the spirit in which there is a light broad enough to draw together and reconcile all, highest ways of thinking, feeling and living”¹

That broad light, which will draw together and reconcile the East and the West is the supramental Truth which is the aim of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. It is for this reason that he says that his yoga is for the whole of humanity and not only for Indians or Europeans. I end my speech by quoting his own heartening words on this point. “We are not working for a race or a people or a continent or for a realisation of which only Indians or only orientals are capable. Our aim is not, either, to found a religion or a school of philosophy or a school of yoga, but to create a ground of spiritual growth and experience and a way which will bring down a greater Truth beyond the mind but not inaccessible to the human soul and consciousness. All can pass who are drawn to that Truth, whether they are from India or elsewhere, from the East or from the West. All may find great difficulties in their personal or common human nature, but it is not their physical origin or their racial temperament that can be an insuperable obstacle to their deliverance.”²

¹ *Ibid* , p 81

² *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 23), pp 559-60