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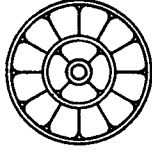
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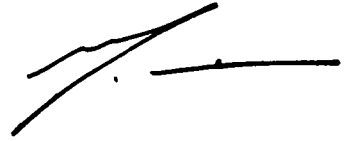


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLV

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## A TALK BY THE MOTHER WITH A DISCIPLE

### APROPOS OF SRI AUROBINDO'S *THOUGHTS AND APHORISMS*

107 — Hard is it to be in the world, free, yet living the life of ordinary men; but because it is hard, therefore it must be attempted and accomplished.

IT seems so obvious!

*It is obvious, but difficult.*

To be free from all attachment does not mean running away from all occasion for attachment. All these people who assert their asceticism, not only run away but warn others not to try!

This seems so obvious to me. When you need to run away from a thing in order not to experience it, it means that you are not above it, you are still on the same level.

Anything that suppresses, diminishes or lessens cannot bring freedom. Freedom has to be experienced in the whole of life and in all sensations.

As a matter of fact I have made a whole series of studies on the subject, on the purely physical plane.... In order to be above all possible error, we tend to eliminate any occasion for error. For example, if you do not want to say any useless words, you stop speaking; people who take a vow of silence imagine that this is control of speech—it is not true! It is only eliminating the occasion for speech and therefore for saying useless things. It is the same thing with food: eating only what is necessary. In the transitional state we have reached, we no longer want to lead this entirely animal life based on material exchange and food; but it would be foolish to believe that we have reached a state where the body can subsist entirely without food—nevertheless there is already a great difference, since they are trying to find the essential nutrients in things in order to lessen the volume. But the natural tendency is to fast—it is a mistake!

For fear of being mistaken in our actions, we stop doing anything at all; for fear of being mistaken in our speech, we stop speaking; for fear of eating for the pleasure of eating, we do not eat at all—this is not freedom, it is simply reducing the manifestation to a minimum, and the natural conclusion is Nirvana. But if the Lord wanted only Nirvana, nothing but Nirvana would exist! It is obvious that He conceives of the co-existence of all opposites, and that for Him this must be the beginning of a totality. So obviously, if one feels meant for that, one can choose only one of His manifestations, that is to say, the absence of manifestation. But it is still a limitation. And this is not the only way to find Him, far from it!

It is a very common tendency which probably originates from an ancient

suggestion or perhaps from some lack, some incapacity—reduce, reduce, reduce one's needs, reduce one's activities, reduce one's words, reduce one's food, reduce one's active life—and all that becomes so narrow. In one's aspiration not to make any more mistakes, one eliminates any occasion for making them. It is not a cure.

But the other way is much, much more difficult.

(*Silence*)

No, the solution is to act only under the divine impulsion, to speak only under the divine impulsion, to eat only under the divine impulsion. That is the difficult thing, because naturally, you immediately confuse the divine impulsion with your personal impulses.

I suppose this was the idea of all the apostles of renunciation: to eliminate everything coming from outside or from below so that if something from above should manifest one would be in a condition to receive it. But from the collective point of view, this process could take thousands of years. From the individual point of view, it is possible; but then one must keep intact the aspiration to receive the true impulsion—not the aspiration for “complete liberation”, but the aspiration for *active* identification with the Supreme, that is to say, to will only what He wills, to do only what He wants: to exist by and in Him alone. So one can try the method of renunciation, but this is for one who wants to cut himself off from others. And in that case, can there be any integrality? It seems impossible to me.

To proclaim publicly what one wants to do is a considerable help. It may give rise to objections, scorn, conflict, but this is largely compensated for by public “expectation”, so to say, by what other people expect from you. This was certainly the reason for those robes: to let people know. Of course, that may bring you the scorn, the bad will of some people but then there are all those who feel they must not interfere or meddle with this, that it is not their concern.

I do not know why, but it always seemed to me like showing off—it may not be and in some cases it is not, but all the same it is a way of saying to people, “Look, this is what I am ” And as I say, it may help, but it has its drawbacks.

It is another childishness

All these things are means, stages, steps, but... true freedom is to be free of everything—including means.

(*Silence*)

It is a restriction, a constriction, whereas the True Thing is an opening, a widening, an identification with the whole.

When you reduce, reduce, reduce yourself, you do not have any feeling of

losing yourself, it takes away your fear of losing yourself—you become something solid and compact. But if you choose the method of widening—the greatest possible widening—you must not be afraid of losing yourself.

It is much more difficult.

*Then how can one do this in an external world which absorbs you constantly? I am thinking of people who live in the West, for example; they are constantly swallowed up by their work, their appointments, the telephone, they don't even have a minute to purify what comes pouring in on them all the time, and recover. In such conditions, how can one do this?*

Oh, you must know what to take and what to leave!

That is the other extreme.... Certainly, monasteries, retreats, escape into the forests or caves are necessary to counterbalance modern hyper-activity; and yet there is less of all that now than there was one or two thousand years ago. But to me this seems to have been a lack of understanding—it did not last.

Of course, it is this excessive activity which makes an excessive immobility necessary.

*But how can one find a way to be what one should be, in normal conditions?*

How can one avoid falling into one kind of excess or another?

*Yes, to live normally and to be free.*

My child, that is why the Ashram was created! That was the idea. Because, in France, I was always asking myself: How can one find the time to find oneself? How can one even find the time to understand how to become free? So then I thought, a place where material needs will be sufficiently provided for, so that if one truly wants to become free, one can do so. And the Ashram was founded on this idea, not on any other—a place where people would have enough to live on so as to have time to think of the True Thing.

*(Mother smiles)* Human nature is such that laziness has taken the place of aspiration—not for everyone, but anyway in quite a general way—and licence or libertinism has taken the place of freedom—which would tend to prove that the human race has to pass through a period of rough handling before it is ready to pull itself away more sincerely from its slavery to activity.

Indeed, the first movement is this: “Oh! to find the place where one can concentrate, find oneself, truly live without being preoccupied with material things.” That is the first aspiration. It was even on this basis, at any rate in the beginning, that disciples were chosen—but it does not last! Things become easy and so one lets oneself go. There are no moral restraints and so one acts foolishly.



But one cannot even say that there was a mistake in the selection—one would be tempted to believe it, but it is not true; because the selection was made according to a very precise and clear inner indication.... It is probably the difficulty of keeping the inner attitude unmixed. This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo wanted, what he was trying for. He said: “If I could find one hundred people, that would be enough.” But it did not stay one hundred for long, and I must say that even when it was a hundred, it was already mixed.

Many came, attracted by the True Thing, but... one lets oneself go. That is, it is impossible to hold firm in one’s true position.

*Yes, I have noticed that in the extreme difficulty of the outer conditions of the world, the aspiration was much more intense.*

Yes, of course!

*It is much more intense, it is almost a question of life and death.*

Yes, that’s it! That is to say, man is still so crude that he needs extremes. That is what Sri Aurobindo said: For love to be true, hatred was necessary; true love could be born only under the pressure of hatred.<sup>1</sup> That’s it Well, one must accept things as they are and try to go further. That is all.

That is probably why there are so many difficulties—difficulties accumulate here: difficulties of character, health and circumstances. It is because the consciousness awakens under the stress of difficulties. If everything is easy and peaceful, one falls asleep.

That is also how Sri Aurobindo explained the necessity of war. In peacetime, one becomes slack.

It is a pity.

I cannot say that I find it very pretty, but it seems to be like that.

This is just what Sri Aurobindo said in *The Hour of God*; If you have the Force and the Knowledge and misuse the moment, woe to you.

It is not revenge, it is not punishment, not at all, but you draw upon yourself a necessity, the necessity for a violent impulsion—to react to something violent.

*(Silence)*

This is an experience I am having more and more: for the contact with this true divine Love to be able to manifest, that is, to express itself freely, it demands an extraordinary strength in beings and things, which does not yet exist. Otherwise everything falls apart.

There are lots of very convincing details, but of course, because they are

<sup>1</sup> See Aphorisms 88 to 92

“details” or very personal things, one cannot speak of them, but on the evidence of repeated experiences, I have to say this: when this Power of *pure Love*—which is so wonderful, which is beyond all expression—as soon as it begins to manifest abundantly, freely, it is as if quantities of things crumbled down immediately—they cannot stand. They cannot stand, they are dissolved. Then... then everything stops. And this stopping, which one might think is a disgrace, is just the opposite! It is an infinite Grace.

Simply to perceive, a little concretely and tangibly, the difference between the vibration in which one lives normally and almost continually, and that vibration—simply to observe this infirmity, which I call sickening—it really makes you feel sick—that is enough to stop everything.

Only yesterday, this morning, there are long moments when this Power manifests; then suddenly, there is a kind of wisdom, an immeasurable wisdom which causes everything to subside in perfect tranquillity: what must be shall be, it will take the time that is needed. And then everything is all right. In this way, everything is all right immediately. But the splendour fades.

One has only to be patient.

Sri Aurobindo also has written this: *Aspire intensely, but without impatience....* The difference between intensity and impatience is very subtle—it is all a difference in vibration. It is subtle, but it makes all the difference.

Intensely, but without impatience. That's it. One must be in that state.

And for a very long time, a very long time, one must be satisfied with inner results, that is, results in one's personal and individual reactions, one's inner contact with the rest of the world—one must not expect or be premature in wanting things to materialise. Because our hastiness usually delays things.

If it is like that, it is like that.

We—I mean men—live harassed lives. It is a kind of half-awareness of the shortness of their lives; they do not think of it, but they feel it half-consciously. And so they are always wanting—quick, quick, quick—to rush from one thing to another, to do one thing quickly and move on to the next one, instead of letting each thing live in its own eternity. They are always wanting: forward, forward, forward.... And the work is spoilt.

That is why some people have preached: the only moment that matters is the present moment. In practice it is not true, but from the psychological point of view it ought to be true. That is to say, to live to the utmost of one's capacities at every minute, without planning or wanting, waiting or preparing for the next. Because you are always hurrying, hurrying, hurrying.... And nothing you do is good. You are in a state of inner tension which is completely false—completely false.

All those who have tried to be wise have always said it—the Chinese preached it, the Indians preached it—to live in the awareness of Eternity. In Europe also they said that one should contemplate the sky and the stars and

identify oneself with their infinitude—all things that widen you and give you peace.

These are means, but they are indispensable.

And I have observed this in the cells of the body; they always seem to be in a hurry to do what they have to do, lest they have no time to do it. So they do nothing properly. Muddled people—some people turn everything upside down, their movements are jerky and confused—have this to a high degree, this kind of haste—quick, quick, quick.... Yesterday, someone was complaining of rheumatic pains and he was saying, “Oh, it is such a waste of time. I do things so slowly!” I said (*Mother smiles*). “So what!” He didn’t like it. You see, for someone to complain when he is in pain means that he is soft, that is all, but to say, “I am wasting so much time, I do things so slowly!” It gave a very clear picture of the haste in which men live. You go hurtling through life . to go where?... You end with a crash!

What is the use of that?

(*Silence*)

In reality, the moral of all these aphorisms is that it is much more important to be than to seem to be—one must live and not pretend to live—and that it is much more important to realise something entirely, sincerely, perfectly than to let others know that you are realising it!

It is the same thing again: when you are compelled to say what you are doing, you spoil half your action.

And yet, at the same time, this helps you to take your bearings, to find out exactly where you are.

That was the wisdom of the Buddha who spoke of “the Middle Way”: neither too much of this nor too much of that, neither falling into this nor falling into that—a little of everything and a balanced way . but *pure*. Purity and sincerity are the same thing.

16 September 1964

## PSYCHIC, SPIRITUAL, OCCULT

TWO LETTERS BY SRI AUROBINDO\*

ORDINARILY, all the more inward and all the abnormal psychological experiences are called psychic. I use the word psychic for the soul as distinguished from the mind and vital. All movements and experiences of the soul would in that sense be called psychic, those which rise from or directly touch the psychic being; where mind and vital predominate, the experience would be called psychological (surface or occult). "Spiritual" has not a necessary connection with the Absolute. Of course the experience of the Absolute is spiritual. All contacts with self, the higher consciousness, the Divine above are spiritual. There are others that could not be so sharply classified or one set off against another.

The spiritual realisation is of primary importance and indispensable. I would consider it best to have the spiritual and psychic development first and have it with the same fullness before entering the occult regions. Those who enter the latter first may find their spiritual realisation much delayed—others fall into the mazy traps of the occult and do not come out in this life. Some no doubt can carry on both together, the occult and the spiritual, and make them help each other; but the process I suggest is the safer.

The governing factors for us must be the spirit and the psychic being united with the Divine—the occult laws and phenomena have to be known but only as an instrumentation, not as the governing principles. The occult is a vast field and complicated and not without its dangers. It need not be abandoned but it should not be given the first place.

\*

All these "experiments" of yours are founded upon the vital nature and the mind in connection with it; working on this foundation, there is no security against falsehood and fundamental error. No amount of powers (small or great) developing can be a surety against wandering from the Truth; and, if you allow pride and arrogance and ostentation of power to creep in and hold you, you will surely fall into error and into the power of rajasic Maya and Avidya. Our object is not to get powers, but to ascend towards the divine Truth-Consciousness and bring its Truth down into the lower members. With the Truth all the necessary powers will come, not as one's own, but as the Divine's. The contact with the Truth cannot grow through rajasic mental and vital self-assertion, but only through psychic purity and surrender.

\* S A B C L . Vol 22, pp 75-76. 78

# SRI AUROBINDO ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA

## A COMPILATION

*(Continued from the issue of March 1992)*

RAMAKRISHNA'S yoga was also turned only to an inner realisation of the inner Divine,—nothing less, but also nothing more. I believe Ramakrishna's sentence about the claim of the sadhak on the Divine for whom he has sacrificed everything was the assertion of an inner and not an outer claim, on the inner rather than on any physically embodied Divine: it was a claim for the full spiritual union, the God-lover seeking the Divine, but the Divine also giving himself and meeting the God-lover. There can be no objection to that; such a claim all seekers of the Divine have; but as to the modalities of this divine meeting, it does not carry us much farther. In any case, my object is a realisation on the physical plane and I cannot consent merely to repeat Ramakrishna. I seem to remember too that for a long time he was withdrawn into himself, all his life was not spent with his disciples. He got his siddhi first in retirement and when he came out and received everyone, well, a few years of it wore out his body. To that, I suppose, he had no objection; for he even pronounced a theory, when Keshav Chandra was dying, that spiritual experience ought to wear out the body. But at the same time, when asked why he got illness in the throat, he answered that it was the sins of his disciples which they threw upon him and he had to swallow. Not being satisfied, as he was, with an inner liberation alone, I cannot accept these ideas or these results, for that does not sound to me like a successful meeting of the Divine and the sadhak on the physical plane, however successful it might have been for the inner life.<sup>1</sup>

\*

Neither Buddha nor Shankara nor Ramakrishna had any idea of transforming the body....

Ramakrishna himself never thought of transformation or tried for it. All he wanted was bhakti for the Mother and along with that he received whatever knowledge she gave him and did whatever she made him do. He was intuitive and psychic from the beginning and only became more and more so as he went on. There was no need in him for the transformation which we seek; for although he spoke of the divine man (Ishwarakoti) coming down the stairs as well as ascending, he had not the idea of a new consciousness and a new race and the divine manifestation in the earth-nature.<sup>2</sup>

\*

<sup>1</sup> *S A B C L* , Vol 22, pp 87-88

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* , pp 93-94

Ramakrishna voiced the same consciousness when he spoke of Him who was Rama and who was Krishna being within him.<sup>1</sup>

\*

It was not my intention to question in any degree Chaitanya's position as an Avatar of Krishna and the Divine Love. That character of the manifestation appears very clearly from all the accounts about him and even, if what is related about the appearance of Krishna in him from time to time is accepted, these outbursts of the splendour of the Divine Being are among the most remarkable in the story of the Avatar. As for Sri Ramakrishna, the manifestation in him was not so intense but more many-sided and fortunately there can be no doubt about the authenticity of the details of his talk and action since they have been recorded from day to day by so competent an observer as Mahendranath Gupta. I would not care to enter into any comparison as between these two great spiritual personalities: both exercised an extraordinary influence and did something supreme in their own sphere.<sup>2</sup>

\*

He [Ramakrishna] never wrote an autobiography—what he said was in conversation with his disciples and others. He was certainly quite as much an Avatar as Christ or Chaitanya.<sup>3</sup>

\*

*And when Ramakrishna must have been intensely calling Mother, she must have felt something at that age.*

In Mother's childhood's visions she saw myself whom she knew as "Krishna"—she did not see Ramakrishna.

It was not necessary that he should have a vision of her coming down as he was not thinking of the future nor consciously preparing for it. I don't think he had the idea of any incarnation of the Mother.<sup>4</sup>

\*

I would have been surprised to hear that I regard (in agreement with an

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* , p 407

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* , p 408

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* , Vol 25, p 53

“advanced” Sadhak) Ramakrishna as a spiritual pigmy if I had not become past astonishment in these matters I have said, it seems, so many things that were never in my mind and done too not a few that I have never dreamed of doing! I shall not be surprised or perturbed if one day I am reported to have declared, on the authority of “advanced” or even unadvanced Sadhaks, that Buddha was a *poseur* or that Shakespeare an overrated poetaster or Newton a third-rate college Don without any genius. In this world all is possible. Is it necessary for me to say that I have never thought and cannot have said anything of the kind, since I have at least some faint sense of spiritual values? The passage you have quoted\* is my considered estimate of Sri Ramakrishna<sup>1</sup>

\*

I might say a word about Ramakrishna’s attitude with regard to the body He seems always to have regarded it as a misuse of spiritual force to utilise it for preserving the body or curing its ailments or taking care for it Other Yogis—I do not speak of those who think it justifiable to develop Yogic *siddhis*—have not had this complete disregard of the body they have taken care to maintain it in good health and condition as an instrument or a physical basis for their development in Yoga. I have always been in agreement with this view: moreover, I have never had any hesitation in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in myself and in others—that is indeed why the Mother gives flowers not only as a blessing but as a help in illness.<sup>2</sup>

\*

What you say about the Ramakrishna Mission is, I dare say, true to a certain extent. Do not oppose that movement or enter into any conflict with it Remember also that we derive from Ramakrishna. For myself it was Ramakrishna who personally came and first turned me to this Yoga. Vivekananda in the Alipore Jail gave me the foundations of that knowledge which is the basis of our Sadhana The error of the Mission is to keep too much to the forms of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and not keep themselves open for new outpourings of their spirit,—the error of all “Churches” and organised religious bodies.<sup>3</sup>

\*

\* “And in a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity, first driving straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge ” *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p 36

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* , Vol 26, p 134

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* , pp 207-208      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid* , Vol 27, p 435

Significant colour, supposed by intellectual criticism to be symbolic but there is more than that, is a frequent element in mystic vision; I may mention the powerful and vivid vision in which Ramakrishna went up into the higher planes and saw the mystic truth behind the birth of Vivekananda <sup>1</sup>

*(To be continued)*

*Compiled by SHYAM KUMARI*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* , Vol 29, p 797



# LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

## SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

WHETHER I reply soon or after some delay you are always present to me and happy thoughts fly towards you. Especially at the Samadhi there is a close communication, for there more than anywhere else I have a sense of us meeting within that eternal source of love and unity—the Mother's creative and transformative and all-harmonising heart. Always to live with a sense of being born from that fountain of felicity is the very meaning of life for us.

You have asked me how to meditate or concentrate. I know of no particular method and these terms never occupy my mind. I am aware only—as I have been saying from a long time back—of a warmth and a glow in my heart, and the warmth is the Mother's presence and the glow is Sri Aurobindo's. I try to make my life a submergence in them and an emergence from them. The submergence may be called my eternity and the emergence my time. The former gives a touch of what the Neo-Platonic mystic Plotinus described as “the flight of the alone to the Alone.” The latter brings the feeling of what the Upanishads figure forth as the one Fire that has become many flames. We may speak of the submergence as a hint of the Transcendent, the emergence as a glimpse of the Universal. And the real beauty of the Yogic life lit up by the grace of our uplifting Master and our enfolding Mother is that the high hint and the wide glimpse are not alternatives but concomitants. In literary language I may be said to be reminded of the poet Vaughan's line—

Rapt above earth by power of one fair face—

together with the dramatist Shakespeare's phrase:

O brave new world  
That has such wondrous creatures in it!

Perhaps you will express surprise at this exclamation, for the actual world is rather a huge medley. What I mean is that my inner turn towards the Mother's omnipresence brings about an attitude of both equanimity and benevolence and the ability to see a secret good in all things. There is also the conviction that if I appeal at all times to the omnipresent Mother and, remembering her, offer to her all the circumstances of life—my own actions as well as those of other people—everything that happens will somehow be turned by a mysterious divine alchemy to the good of my soul. Mark the word “soul”. The Mother has said that when she sends her blessings they are meant for the soul. Not that no material benefits can come, but we cannot count on them. What we can be sure of is that

through anything taking place the Mother's blessings will manage the soul's benefit, the soul's increase in light, its growing more and more a true child of the Mother.

From the stream of words thus far in this letter, please do not be swept away to the idea that Amal Kiran is sitting on top of the world spiritually. Keep in view my expressions: "hint" and "glimpse". There is also the word: "touch" I am indeed far from the spiritual magnitude and glory that we term "God-realisation". Nobody should want to fall at my feet—"feet of clay", to be sure! All I can say is that Sri Aurobindo, when he gave me my Ashram name, meaning "The Clear Ray", created for me the possibility of some soul-light by which the ever-moving jumble we call life might be somewhat clarified and irradiated to show itself to me now and again as—to quote Vaughan once more—

A quickness which my God hath kissed.

The kiss which is always occultly there is particularly palpable because of the fact that "my God" has been no far-away grandeur but an Avatar, a Supreme Being who has accepted to be flesh and blood and to take a share in the very jumble through which we humans pass. He has been gracious enough to look into my little depth and make it a tiny part of himself. The truth of the matter would be not that I have realised Sri Aurobindo but that Sri Aurobindo has realised me.

Not getting any letter from me for quite a while, you have ruefully written: "In this way days, especially 21 February, 29 March, 4 April have gone, big occasions for us. How long should I wait?" Surely, these great days must have brought you each its particular grace. What is 21 February? Do you remember that sloka in the Shwetashwatara Upanishad (III.8), one of the grandest utterances in the world's spiritual literature: "*vedāhametaṁ puruṣam mahāntam ādityavarṇaṁ tamaśaḥ paraśtāt*"—"I have seen this great sun-coloured Being beyond the darkness." February 21, like August 15, marks the emanation of this Being from across the darkness into our world so that something of the sun-colour may come into our dull heads and our dim hearts. Next to these dates the most important is March 29 which brought together the two supernal emanations. The Mother's diary next day recorded her recognition of the Saviour Grace that had hailed from the Highest. And her experience in the preceding afternoon was a total permanent silence of her mind, the foundational state for the descent and settlement of all the infinities of the "overhead" light and force and bliss to be manifested in world work. When asked about his experience of the meeting, Sri Aurobindo made an amazing declaration. In effect it ran "I never knew what true surrender could be until Mirra surrendered herself to me—totally, down to every cell of her body." Here was revealed to him in fullness what he later made the central motive-power for us of his Integral Yoga of Supramental Transformation—the utter self-giving possible to the inmost

soul—the psychic being—the foundational state without which a divinised earth-life cannot be built up. A date basic to the existence of a centre of radiation for the Aurobindonian Supermind is April 4. At 4 p.m. on that fourth day of the fourth month of the year, Sri Aurobindo set foot in Pondicherry in answer to an inner command of Sri Krishna, an *ādeśa* heard during his earlier Krishna-chosen exile in Chandernagore. From that moment the future Ashram was waiting to take birth.

You write: “I give you a free hand to decide and advise me. Believe me, I want Her smile, never the fulfilment of my ego. So if any change on my part is required, please let me know without any hesitation so that the best and happiest results may be ours.” Reading this as well as some other parts of your letter I don’t think you need any guidance from me. Your soul is awake and your inner movements are right. Only one thing you must guard against. The postcard I sent you said. “Don’t be despondent.” I know that your life is difficult and the handicaps you suffer from are very unusual. But I am not preaching from a position of normality. I am greatly disadvantaged by the condition of my legs, and movement is both difficult and dangerous. Sometimes the body feels extremely strained and I just want to stop doing anything. But then I turn to “that being no bigger than the thumb of a man” which the Upanishads speak of as “a fire without smoke” kindled perpetually in—to quote the same scripture again—“the cavern of the heart”. At once the shadow vanishes and I remember those lines of Sri Aurobindo’s which I have often quoted to friends from the poem called “Musa Spiritus” meaning “The Muse of the Spirit”:

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

Trying to attune my ear to those footsteps I forget my own halting movement and even in the midst of it I feel tranquillity and freedom and my walk is as if a Maestro were executing perfectly some difficult passage in Wagner’s music.

Certain things which we have to do pall on us, but that is because we have not inwardly offered them to the Mother. If some work we have to do is not enjoyed, we may be sure that it has not been consecrated to her. The moment the work is done as though for her sake, it becomes a path towards her—and what can be more refreshing than getting closer to her glorious Presence?

Possibly you will protest. “There are things which are so lowly, chores so common, even so soiled that it seems disgraceful to offer them to her. Is it not impertinent to associate them with the thought of her?” Such a notion is a great mistake. We cannot divide our life into matters fit for the Divine and matters unfit. To do so is to hide certain portions of our life from her transfiguring touch.

How then can we follow Sri Aurobindo's motto, "All life is Yoga"? This motto has a general philosophical insight—the vision of a spiritual goal implicit in the evolution from matter to vital force and from vital force to mind, mind with its vague straining for perfection. In our immediate practical context, all life proves to be Yoga when whatever we do is made an occasion to invoke the Divine and lay it at His holy feet. To the Divine's love for us there is nothing great or small. The whole of us is wanted. This love is infinite and cannot be satisfied unless every finite bit of our lives is consciously dedicated to it. (16.4.1991)

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From where I sit at the Samadhī I get a view, through the "Service Tree"'s branches, of a patch of sky. Between 4.15 and 4.45 p m., there is an intensity of colour which brings to my mind a phrase which resulted on my correcting a friend's poem:

The shining blue of the immortal light

Into the depth of this colour I raise the image of whoever I am invoking the Mother for. Especially on the part where the lumbago has its grip on you—the small of the back—my imagination lets the sapphire luminosity play and I feel that lustre penetrating the whole aching area. I have the keen sense that the Mother's heavenly healing power is called forth by my prayer through this patch of a sustained splendour falling upon me as if—in the words of a poem of my own—

Out of a sky whose each blue moment bears  
The sun-touch of a rapt omnipotence.

As I know that you on your side are also a long inward cry to the Mother, I have the conviction that the communion I try to establish with her cannot just hang in mid-air but must go home to you and reinforce your own profound contact. I may add that it is not only at the Samadhī that the welfare of my friend is my concern. Time and again a movement of good will, with the Mother's bright eyes looking on, takes place. But, of course, at the Samadhī everything comes to a soul-keen focus.

I am afraid all that I have said apropos of that half-hour's intense blue will be regarded by the pragmatic modern mind as a riot of fancy. But the truly poetic consciousness, no less than the mystical, knows our world to be the meeting-point of various hidden planes of being, and through certain configurations of earthly elements they peer out at us and by means of our response start their strange activities. Even without their independent intervention the imaginative

or intuitive heart of us can make earth's hues and shapes and tones a channel through which powers of the Beyond can be drawn into our life-patterns and what may have seemed a determined course of things takes a new turn which nobody may have dreamed of. (26.2.1991)

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To answer your questions, we must first get them into proper perspective. You say that now that the Mother is not in her physical body the Darshan Days—21 February, 24 April, 15 August, 24 November—which, according to you, were reserved by her to shower special grace, do not have the same old obligatory and indispensable character. You add: "Now, rather all round the year and throughout each day we should keep ourselves constantly open and endeavour to advance on Her way with the help of Her more subtle but still powerful forces "

The Darshan Days marked certain significant occasions. The occasions still remain significant. If, as you believe, the Mother's grace operates all throughout the year in spite of the departure of her physical presence, why should it not be thought to operate on those Darshan occasions in a special way as it used to do when her body was with us?

I share your faith that whatever the Mother does is always for the good of her children. Perhaps the more accurate way of putting the matter is that whatever happens is turned by her to our good. I say this because in the world, originally posited by the Divine, of a myriad mixed influences and agencies, many events have to be considered as imposed on the Divine, but the Divine always meets them with a spiritual strategy which invariably looks to the inner good of us all so that everything is made to work for our souls' closer and ever more close approach to the Eternal Light and Delight. Seen thus, the termination of both the Mother's life and Sri Aurobindo's is aimed at the advancement of our souls.

How exactly this "advancement" is to be understood is not an easy question to answer. Since the ultimate goal is integral transformation, including the divinisation of the body, we may assume that the end of their lives ultimately served that objective. But, on the basis of Sri Aurobindo's statements that the Guru's physical presence is needed to carry on for the disciple the crucial process of the body's transformation, I hold that at present this process is postponed. Nolini was of the same view. But, of course, short of the physical divinisation there is a vast range of spiritual development open to us and paradoxically rendered all the more open by the decision Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took to leave their bodies, for something momentous in our path is cleared by what we may call their "sacrifice". But how much advantage we take of it depends on ourselves to a fair extent. We may be induced to think that their physical absence leaves us rather in the lurch. Actually the Mother has clearly said that Sri

Aurobindo, on leaving his body, is yet very close to us, for he has become not just a general influence: he has taken his station in the subtle-physical plane and will remain there until his work is completed. The Mother too is surely poised on the same plane to work along with the Master towards the fulfilment of their mission. Besides, we have had the Supermind partially manifested in the subtle-physical layer of the earth since 29 February 1956 and pressing gradually towards manifestation in the gross-physical layer. There is also what the Mother called the Superman-Consciousness which came at the end of 1965 to push the earth forward. So the Mother has left powerful allies for us in addition to the fact that she, together with Sri Aurobindo, is inwardly watchful over all our needs. If we keep the flame of our aspiration bright, we may legitimately remain hopeful of progress towards the Great Goal in spite of its complete attainment having been deferred until such time as the reappearance of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, if not of both, in the midst of aspiring mankind.

However, the fact still stands that the Mother has physically withdrawn herself and that because of her withdrawal the crowning phase of the Integral Yoga has come in for postponement. This fact should give pause to the idea often put forth that now, with the Mother's freedom from attending to her body, her power over the earth has increased: she can act now with unhampered universality. But surely all the power she can exercise now on the universal scale was always there? There was always the Universal Mother as well as the Transcendent Mother in addition to the Individual Mother as manifested in a physical body. The embodied individual Mother's working put no bar to the working of her other aspects. They were not impeded in any way. Her embodiment was something *extra*—it was a special focus of her for direct and immediate earth-work. By its means she could get in touch better than otherwise with the most exterior part of earth's life—and, conversely, this part could get in touch with her divinity as never before. Such outermost inter-contact—either by letter or word of mouth or thought-transference—is now gone. How can one help missing that down-to-earth relationship? Particularly those who, more than the rest, used to be in physical proximity to the Mother feel most the absence of it.

Take my own case. Not only was I, along with a small group, in the Mother's presence or ambience on the first floor of the main building from about 9 a.m. to nearly 12.30 p.m. Somehow it happened that I continued to be on this floor even after everybody else had left. I would sit on the mat in the passage between the Mother's bathroom and the staircase to the first floor, while she had her lunch with Pranab behind a screen at the end of the room from which she could go up to her retiring room on the second floor. I could hear all the talk going on between the two and sometimes their discussion of certain situations taught me the special tactful way she dealt with them, but, as I was not supposed to hear anything, it has all been put in my brain's archives of privacy. In any case this

overhearing was not what mattered to me in my personal relationship with the Mother. What mattered was the fact that almost daily I would write a note to her, put it under a paper-weight on a table on the hither-side of the screen and go back to my seat on the mat of the passage. After her lunch, the Mother would pick up my note, take it to her bathroom from a door on the side which did not face the passage, be there for some time, then come out of the passage-door and meet me. She would either bring a written answer or convey her comment to me verbally. I could have further talk too. At the end of this meeting all alone, naturally most enjoyable for me, she would go for her short siesta and I hurry home where my wife had kept my lunch waiting. This would be at about 1.30 p m

May I relate a most memorable incident that took place during the hour from 12.30? Once I got a little sleepy sitting in the passage and went to sit in Sri Aurobindo's room. I lost track of time. Suddenly I felt that there was a figure outside the room, close to the farther doorway which is near the small end-room serving as Nirodbaran's office. I turned and found the Mother standing. Hastily I got up and rushed towards her and asked: "Mother, what are you doing here?" She coolly replied: "I came to look for you. Not finding you at your usual place I knew you would be in Sri Aurobindo's room." I felt overwhelmed by her solicitude and apologised for having left my seat. We both walked, talking, to the passage. She went for her rest and I to my flat.

Most probably we walked hand in hand, for I had always the urge to catch her hand. On several occasions when I was on my knees before her and had moved slightly aside to let Champaklal or someone else talk with her, I would gently hold the hand hanging by her side. What was most delightful to me was not just my clasp on her—it was the immediate response of her fingers, her spontaneous return of the sweet warm privacy ventured by me. Her talk would go on along with the silent exchange as if of equal feeling between the infinitesimal and the infinite.

When I remember all the face-to-face communion between the embodied Divine and my small self in various ways and at diverse times, with all the personal help received by me through such interchange, I cannot but be a little discontented with what goes on in the absence of the Mother's embodiment. Indeed a great deal of positive life goes on and, as she once told me, one could feel her subtle-physical body with great concreteness if one were sufficiently sensitive; yet one can't be so receptive as a rule. Naturally then for people like me the Mother's withdrawal is a heavy loss. And even for those who had less physical contact there is bound to be a difference—whether they acknowledge it or not—by the lack of her action as before from that physical focus of her consciousness and force and bliss and beauty.

Hence I do not agree that, as you put it, we are now under "her still more powerful force" or that "she sacrificed the most auspicious day of her bodily transformation with a view to making our integral transformation more feas-

ible". No doubt, I always believe that whatever Sri Aurobindo or the Mother did was done for the benefit of their children on the path towards the Divine, but my understanding of the benefit from the Mother's acceptance of death tends to be as follows. Because of allowing unrestrictedly, for the first time in human history, the Supermind's tremendous action in her body during old age, the Mother had reached a dire physical state from which there appeared to be no real turn for the better, though she would persist for whatever small amelioration could be obtained for a time. Furthermore, I surmise that she had come to know the answer to the question which she had put to the Lord, whether or not her body would go successfully to the end. The secret so far hidden from her was now known—namely, that the Will of the Supreme—her own transcendent self—was that her present body would not serve for the final supramentalisation. She could have gone on for some time more but the state in which she was would not have been to the benefit of the Ashram. Her physical condition about which Pranab spoke in a talk soon after her departure was a severe strain on her children and so she removed the irremediable burden at a moment she thought fit.

According to me, things being what they were, she considered it spiritually advantageous for the Ashram to lose her bodily presence. Besides, she had brought about the manifestation of the Supramental Light, Consciousness and Force in the earth's "atmosphere" as she put it, so that by an evolutionary process the Supermind was certain to create the Superman in the course of the ages. Once, referring to this manifestation, she even said her work was essentially finished. Against the background of February 29, 1956 the postponement of the physical transformation which she was endeavouring to pioneer in our own day for the sake of mankind would not matter in the long run. Is it not illogical to hold that such transformation has been hastened for us by her departure and that it is even likely in the life-time of some of us?

The Mother's grace has made the Ashram flourish even in her absence and it has become increasingly a centre for the earth's peoples to flock to and inwardly profit there from the Divine Presence she has subtly established, a Presence most effectively radiating from the Samadhi where her body and Sri Aurobindo's have been enshrined. But I cannot say that the intensity of the spiritual life has actually increased on the whole as a result of the Mother's demise. Mind my phrase "on the whole". For some to have been thrown back upon themselves by the absence of the Mother in the flesh must have served as an incentive to more consecrated effort. But it would be an exaggeration to affirm that by and large there has been a greater measure than before of such effort.

I shall leave the complex subject at this point—for you to get whatever new perspective you may derive from my personal vision of things. (24 1991)

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)



# A SONNET BY NIRODBARAN WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS

## Original Form

giant Night  
 || A (stalwart) figure carved from the rock of (Light)  
 || Chiselled with poignant fires of Sun and Moon:  
 A outlined measureless  
 (In his) body (lined) with a (prolific) might  
 Where heaven have their rune  
 (Heaven) and earth (are) joined (to a) Spirit-(tune).

*"Divergent"  
 could perhaps  
 be altered - it  
 jars with the  
 rest*

from  
 Divergent streams flow (kissing) his luminous feet  
 || To elemental spheres of (a) voiceless hush  
 || Where nascent worlds are rhythm'd to one heart-beat,  
 ion's  
 Lit with (the) creat(or's) primal roseate blush.

Q: Has the  
 creator a blush?  
 A: Not, unless  
 he is ashamed  
 of his work.

*Stress restless  
 won't do at all*

He stands b heavy the  
 (B)ehind the stress of (restless heaving) hours

*Six footer, or so  
 will be  
 inevitably read*

A  
 (He stands a) tower of triumphant Light and Force

*Six footer,  
 besides  
 "crowned with  
 a source" is  
 queer*

A solitary peak crowned with the blazing source

*Tender is too  
 sentimental for  
 this sonnet*

passion  
 Hiding within a (tender) heart of flowers.

*Blossoms and  
hewn don't go  
together - must  
be separated*      *Lighting our shadowy blossom of life*  
(In his shadow our life blossoms by) his grace  
*Hews*      *a*  
(Hewn) from earth's clay (to a) beauty of      white-moon face.

21.5.37

**Sri Aurobindo's Comments:**

Very fine, but needed manipulation. I had no time to find anything to replace "divergent". Also L. 11 six-footer is left to you to reshape.

Q: Thanks, Sir, for your miraculous Force which produced miraculous success. But thanks more to the Mother for I saw her and then wrote this poem at night!

In the first line—"giant" seems more apposite.

A: Yes.

Q: Rock of Night or Light?

A: Night, obviously.

Q: The second line was:

"Combines in his form fires of Sun and Moon"—

prosaic, no?

A: Very.

Q: Third line metre? Can "prolific" be used that way?

A: Metre all right—but prolific impossible.

Q: "Spirit-tune" all right? Seems rather a minor circumstance after such big things.

A: Quite right—it is in much too minor a key.

Q: Lines 5 and 6—don't know.

A: "divergent" seems rather prosaic when it comes across this style.

Q: Line 7—"nascent worlds" any meaning?

A: Yes, certainly.

Q: "heart-beat"—can it be accented in the second syllable?

A: Yes.

Q: The line was "Where nascent worlds vibrate to a rhythmic beat".

A: "Vibrate" won't do here

Q: Or "To monumental spheres of a voiceless sound."

A: Means nothing.

Q: Line 8 was—"Blue-eyed beauty of colours triumphant meet," but gave it up—having no meaning and no suitable rhyme with "sound".

A: Double trochee, won't do. Besides what is meant by blue-eyed beauty of colours?

So much the better—sound is not wanted there

Q: Has this second quatrain any meaning and link?

A: Yes. He is the source and harmoniser of the world

Q Lines 11 and 12?

A. Not quite successful, thought flies high

Q The couplet seems rather weak, no? What about this

rays

“In the shadow of his boundless divine grace

Our life blossoms to a beauty of white-moon face”?

A: That is more eloquent but not satisfactory.

22 5 37

Q: Guru, Amal suggested (line 5) “A myriad streams” or “Life’s myriad streams” in place of “Divergent streams”

A: “A myriad streams” will do—“Life’s” makes it too too obvious

Q. Lines 10, 11 Amal suggests.

A tower of triumphant Force and Light,

A lonely peak crowned with the Infinite.

A: Yes, that is very good.

Q: Is there any use in trying to improve the poem still more?

A: No

### *Revised Form*

A giant figure carved from the rock of Night  
 Chiselled with poignant fires of Sun and Moon:  
 A body outlined with a measureless might  
 Where heaven and earth have joined their Spirit-rune

A myriad streams flow from his luminous feet  
 To elemental spheres of voiceless hush  
 Where nascent worlds are rhythmmed to one heart-beat,  
 Lit with creation’s primal roseate blush

He stands behind the heavy stress of the hours  
 A tower of triumphant Force and Light,  
 A lonely peak crowned with the Infinite  
 Hiding within a passion heart of flowers

Lighting our shadowy blossom of life his grace  
 Hews from earth’s clay beauty of a white-moon face.

21 5 37

# THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

## A DREAM-DIALOGUE

*(Continued from the issue of March 1992)*

“WHY, what is the matter with you today? You are all looking sparkingly bright, as if bursting with happiness!” began Sri Aurobindo.

“We had been to see Nolinida again, and he told us very many interesting stories. This time he seemed really happy to see us.”

“Thank God! Nolini has come to my rescue! And what did he tell you, may I know?”

“He said that once they were in Pondicherry one of the things he and his companions began missing most were books. They saw you reading the Rig Veda, most of the time you were absorbed in the study of two parts of the Rig Veda. But soon, it was decided that Rs. 10/- a month could be spared for buying books. At first, the books were kept on the floor, since no one possessed chairs or tables or any kind of furniture. All that each of them had was a mat. The mat did duty for bed and mattress and pillow. And a mosquito-net? That was an unheard-of luxury! Of course, they had managed to procure a table of sorts for Sri Aurobindo, also a chair, as well as a camp-cot. A few broken chairs were set aside for the use of visitors and guests. And lights? Today there are electric lights all over the place, but they did not have even a respectable oil-lamp or lantern, let alone any electric light. Nolinida still remembers that there was a single candlestick, only for Sri Aurobindo's use. All that the others could do in the dark evenings was to talk and chat to while away the time. He also described the great joy they felt when they got electricity in the house. He remembers that he had gone for a walk in the evening and had come home quite late. He opened the door and there was light everywhere!

“Nolinida told us about the funny situations that often arose between them and the servant, because no one really knew what the other was saying! There was a language problem, a communication gap! The boy used to do the shopping. Bijoy would say:

“ ‘Meen (fish) moon (three) anna, illé (no) to naal (four) anna.’ *(laughter)* Nowadays, of course by the Mother's infinite grace we all have servants. So that Sri Aurobindo would sometimes smilingly comment—‘We have as many servants as we have sadhaks, here.’ *(laughter)*. Then there were the cooking sessions...

“According to Nolinida the way of living changed completely once Mother came and settled here. She made them realise that Sri Aurobindo was the Guru, the Lord of Yoga. Until then, he had been a friend and companion for them, and such had been their relationship. Of course, deep down inside, they had always

accepted him as the Master and Guide, but they treated him as a friend and almost as an equal. Also, Sri Aurobindo himself had never liked that they should use words such as 'Guru' or 'Ashram' when they spoke of him. But Mother taught them both by her words and her deeds what devotion to the Master signified. She was a living example of bhakti. When she was with Sri Aurobindo she would never sit on a chair. It would show a lack of respect for the Master. So she would always sit on the floor. It was indeed a lesson in ideal and beautiful humility. It is said that Sri Aurobindo once remarked to them, somewhat reproachfully—"I am stooping down and making myself as small as I can for your sakes and yet you cannot seem to reach up to me." (Compiled from Nolini Kanta Gupta's 'Reminiscences')

A small surprised voice now spoke up

"Didn't Nolinida and others accept you as their Guru in those days?"

"Why should they do so? I never wanted them to, nor did I want to start an Ashram either. All these changes happened after Mother's coming. The boys had come here before she had, they had been my companions from my revolutionary days. We had worked together and lived together and that is all that they wanted when we came here—to live with me, work for me doing whatever I asked them to and studying whatever I taught them. This to them meant everything."

"Didn't they do Yoga?"

"They were too young for that. It was the same with them then as it is for you now. Have you come to do yoga, or do you want to, even? All you are interested in are your food and sleep, your play and your studies. But something is slowly ripening within. If some day you feel the need for a deeper spiritual life, then you will take to this Path. It was the same for those boys. The moment any one of them heard the inner call, Mother changed the course of their lives. That is why I have said that my sadhana was incomplete until Mother's coming. She came and the Ashram grew up around her, the sadhana became more intense, higher realms and planes were revealed to my vision. Do you understand? This was the Ashram's most brilliant period. I will tell you more about it later. Did Nolini tell you anything more?"

"Yes, he did. He told us about how Mother came to live in the same house as you."

"Oh! What was his story?"

"He said that the second and last time that Mother came, she was put up at the "Vayu House", whereas you and he and the others all lived in the Guest House. Every Sunday evening you had dinner with her. They too would go along of course! Mother always decided the menu herself. She would teach the cook how to make the dishes and even make some of them herself. That is why, Nolinida added, it was really worth their while going with you to her place, for 'prasada'! After dinner, everyone would go out onto the terrace overlooking the

sea. Mother and you often stood apart, talking, but sometimes they would request you to show them 'automatic writing'. And then your pen would write all sorts of strange, even very curious things. Once a being came and analysed the characters of each and every one. Another time someone else asked to know something about Mother. But Mother spoke up 'Nothing about me, please,' and your hand stopped moving immediately.

"As regards Mother's moving out of Vayu House, this is what Nolinida told us. Once there was a terrible storm, with rain and strong winds, a veritable cyclone. The house which was a very old one seemed literally to dissolve. So you said that it was no longer possible for Mother to stay there, that she ought to come and live in your house. 'This is how she came in our midst, living with us forever more as our Mother,' Nolinida added. 'Of course, at that time, she was not called The Mother—it would take us another six years (1926) before we learned to say that. However, the cyclone did indeed prove to be a blessing in disguise.'

"But Nolinida explained to us that she did not appear to them as the Mother in the beginning, but rather as a close friend. She appeared to them to be the beautiful and gracious one, not only because of her own innate qualities but also because such was the way Sri Aurobindo looked on her. In those early days, you called her by her name, 'Mirra'. But a few years later they observed that you would stop at the letter 'M', then after a short pause, say the full name 'Mirra'. It took them some time to understand the reason behind this. You were ready to pronounce the word 'Mother', but they were not, and so what began to be 'Mother', ended up as 'Mirra'.

"Just imagine! It took them six years to call her 'Mother' Isn't it incredible!"

"Yes," answered Sri Aurobindo, "I had to prepare them, to remould them gradually. All the old mental formations and traditional habits had to be broken and a new light poured down in their place—all this was not done in a day. For you, it is relatively easy, firstly because you are still young and unripe and also you don't believe yourselves to be great and wise, as if already possessing all that is to be known. Then again, the times have changed, the atmosphere in the world around you is different today. But it was because those early sadhaks learned to accept her as the Mother that they prepared the way for you, making it easier for you to call her 'Mother' unhesitatingly. You must not forget that she had only recently come here and that they did not know her very well then. The spiritual vision which makes everything clear and simple was not yet theirs. So, you see, there are so many reasons. And now what else did Nolini tell you?"

"He told us about a Sannyasi who was actually a revolutionary disguised as an ascetic so that the police might not recognise him."

"Who? Was it Amar Chatterjee?"

"Yes, but he called himself Kevalananda. The way Nolinida described the

incident to us was very fascinating. He told us—‘One day, a wonderfully strange-looking person came to see Sri Aurobindo. He was most handsome, tall, and fair-complexioned, his long hair flowing down to his shoulders from beneath an enormous turban that he wore on his head. But during his meeting with Sri Aurobindo, he underwent a miraculous transformation! Behind the disguise of the ascetic was hiding the famous revolutionary leader, Amarda, the man who had a price on his head, whom the British were hunting throughout the land in order to capture him, that man himself had come to our house! He had been to many places and become many people during his long wanderings! .. He had hidden in dense jungles, had disguised himself later as a Muslim seller of eggs, and now, after playing various other roles, had put on the aspect of an ascetic, a Guru.’ And he had come to see you, in order to ask you what he should do next!”

“Yes,” smiled Sri Aurobindo, “I remember. I was very surprised to see him. I had been told that a Sannyasi was teaching my Yoga and philosophy in South India, but that that sannyasi should be Amar, the revolutionary who had come to see me off when I boarded the ‘Dupleix’ was something I could never have dreamed of!”

“What did you advise him to do?”

“I asked him to give up his ascetic disguise and even his revolutionary activities and take up the work and responsibilities of an ordinary man and citizen. And I believe he did just that. He started a shop in Calcutta, a cloth shop, and was our obedient disciple till the end.”

“Nolinida’s other story is very interesting, it’s about ghosts and spirits, the ones who used to throw stones in your house. But he said that he was himself not present at the time, because he had gone back home to Bengal for a while. So he asked us to request you to describe the incidents for us.”

“Oh! that old story! All the old sadhaks here know it by heart, I am sure, and even the younger ones too. It has been so often repeated that it’s almost become stale. All right, I’ll tell it to you, but another time.”

“But you promised us last time that you would tell us a ghost story!”

“I promised, did I?”

“No, maybe not promised, but you said you’d think about it later.”

“Oh! so that’s how it was. But if you really want to hear about ghosts, you should do so in the dark. Otherwise, it’s not fun. When all is dark and silent late in the night, and just one small oil-lamp burns dimly—no electric lights, no—, then one should tell ghost stories. You will feel as if the spirits and ghosts are moving, present among you. It will make your flesh creep and yet you will feel still more fascinated by the forces.”

“You are evading the issue, and changing the subject, aren’t you?”

“No, not really. There is a time for everything. And a place too. Things are best enjoyed when the right occasions for them are found. But the story you are

asking for is not really a ghost story. So I can tell it to you now

“I don't quite remember when it happened, but we used to live in the Guest House then, in what is now called the 'Dortoir' ”

“That's where I live ”

“Yes Well, we were living in that house then Mother too was there with me A servant called Vattal used to work for us whom for some reason we had sacked Absolutely furious, he screamed threats and abuses at us, warning us that we would soon find it impossible to continue living in that house So saying, he went to see a Muslim fakir who knew some black magic.

“One evening, out of nowhere, we suddenly found stones falling on the roof of our kitchen. The boys thought that someone was playing the fool. They went out to see, but there was no one outside. The next day, the shower of stones continued for half an hour and so as the days passed, there was a more and more prolonged shower every day The stones rained down like hail, thick and fast, and they grew progressively bigger too Finally this dance of destruction continued up to midnight. The stones fell, exploding like bombs, on the kitchen, the courtyard and elsewhere At first we had believed that some mischief-makers were behind all this and we had informed the police. Accordingly, the police came when suddenly while a constable was looking carefully around the place, a stone shot out from between his legs, with a hiss Frightened out of his wits, the poor man ran for his life. So then we began to examine the problem ourselves We searched thoroughly, especially in the directions from which the stones were coming But there was no sign of a human being anywhere And a stranger thing began to happen now—the stones started raining down even inside the closed rooms. One day they fell on the simpleton of a boy who used to work for us. Poor fellow! He was badly hurt and bleeding This was a terrible mystery—this falling of the stones inside a closed room and hurting the boy who was there. In fact, that boy became the chief target. So Bejoy called him into his own room, but even there he found no shelter. Then Bejoy called out for me and as I entered I saw the last stone fall on the boy. The two of them were sitting side by side, the stone was thrown straight at them, but there was no third person in the room—unless the 'Invisible Man' of H. G. Wells was present.

“Until then we had been observing the incident, making our own notations and examinations But when we found that things were going too far, were becoming dangerous even, we decided that something had to be done Mother knew a great deal about occultism and the world of spirits. She understood that there was somehow a link between our house and that young boy working for us. That link had to be cut and if the boy could be given a job elsewhere, then the stone-throwing would stop So that was done and he was sent to work in the house of Rishikesh. And the whole mysterious attack stopped altogether, not a single stone fell any more At last, there was peace in the house.

“This proved that these occult phenomena were real, and that they followed



a pattern and a process which were as systematically arranged as any scientific ones. And if these could be mastered then the phenomena could be controlled, or made to happen or even wiped out altogether.”

“But did the matter really end there?”

“It did, but in another way. A few days later, Vattal’s wife came crying and fell at our feet, Mother’s and mine. Only when her fit of weeping abated a little, could we find out what had caused it. It appeared that her husband was seriously, critically ill. Because he knew something of occultism, he had realised that his own black magic had turned on him and had now attacked him. This is a general rule about this magic. If you use it against someone who is stronger than you, then either he can use your own powers to attack you or your own powers will turn back of their own accord to harm you, somewhat like a boomerang. It can be terrifyingly effective. Hence now Vattal was very very sick. We had done nothing, we had only checked his hostile forces. But now we decided that for him to die for such a small crime was perhaps too heavy a price to pay. And so he recovered slowly from his illness. This, in short, is the ghost story you were so keen to hear. When Mother went to North Africa, she had made a deep study of occultism, gaining much knowledge of it and mastery over it.”

“And you?”

“Oh I! Well, I too know something about the subject, of course” (*laughter*).

A child now spoke up, somewhat hesitantly.

“I too know of a similar story, about spirits, though I don’t know if it is true or not.”

“We shall hear it later and judge for ourselves.”

*(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 March 1992)*

### **My Son** *(Continued)*

SOMETHING remarkable happened to me on New Year's day. I had gone to get my calendar from the Ashram. As I am not on “Prosperity”, I received only one picture—that of the Mother, unlike “Prosperity”-holders who received one of Sri Aurobindo also. Seeing this, I approached one of them and asked if she would exchange her picture of Sri Aurobindo for mine of the Mother.

Later on, I heard Sri Aurobindo's voice saying, “Why did you do that? Don't you know that the Mother and myself are one? If you divide us in your consciousness, you will lose her grace. And when that happens, you will not be able to receive mine either.”

I felt truly humbled. It was not that I did not love the Mother, but as I had always turned towards Sri Aurobindo for everything, it was his picture I had preferred without knowing the consequences of making such a preference.

Now I shall return to the story of my family life.

While my son was studying in St. Xavier's School, I had to keep a constant watch over him and would take him to school and fetch him back in the car. My husband knew that I was intending to file a suit for divorce and that I would plead for the custody of the child. To frustrate me, he struck upon the idea of abducting him. The boy did in fact belong legally to his father, but my husband would not go to court to claim his right. For my part, I was determined not to relinquish my child to him, as such a sacrifice would have been suicidal for me.

The administrators of the school used to send their students out of Calcutta annually on the occasion of the N.C.C. Programme. That particular year, they chose Ranchi as their venue. As my husband was living in Ranchi at the time, I was terrified that on one pretext or another, he would take possession of the child. I hastened to put my problem to the school authorities. They explained that all the students had to be sent to Ranchi, but that I could go to the military officer in charge and tell him my predicament. Luckily, the officer in question happened to be a Bengali. After hearing me out, he assured me that he would take full responsibility for returning my son to me safe and sound at the end of the training.

When they reached Ranchi, the two thousand St. Xavier's students in their red uniforms and caps made a grand display as they marched down the street. Suddenly my son saw his father's car pass by. But the father, while returning,

caught sight of the boy. It was easy to distinguish my son at once because he had the complexion of a European, and so always stood out in any crowd of Indians. (Many people make the mistake of taking him for a westerner even now.)

My husband wasted no time in seeking out the military officer. Presenting himself as the father, he demanded custody of the boy. As he had promised, the officer refused him, saying that it was his duty to see that the entire group of school children were returned intact to the school authorities in Calcutta. My husband, after a series of futile altercations with the officer, had no choice but to withdraw.

For his part, my son had developed a dreadful fear of his father and his designs. But my mother's point of view was quite the reverse. "Why are you so obstinate?" she would say. "What is so frightening about the child living with his own father?"

My retort was as vehement as it might appear to be irrational at the moment and I shall substantiate it later. "Don't you know why he is determined to have the boy? To take revenge on me, and then to do the worst with him so that he can marry again. See for yourself—the poor child fears him as though he were Yama himself!"

Finally my son matriculated from St. Xavier's School. He had developed a manly figure and in many ways resembled an Englishman more than a Bengali. After school, he took a degree in Commerce and found a job in a private business concern. At the same time he cultivated a circle of friends who belonged to wealthy and well-known families. I did not interfere with his freedom, but some of his attitudes surprised me. One of his old classmates, a particular friend of his, was about to be married. But my son took no interest in the marriage preparations and remained as aloof as he could. Piqued, I asked him, "Why are you so unconcerned? Your friend has even stopped coming to the house." My son did not bother to reply. When I pressed him, he answered in his usual vein, "Leave me alone, Mummy."

I had to resign myself to the fact that that was his nature. Since childhood he had been a boy of few words. Even during illness, he would lie as quietly as an animal, giving no answer to even the most repeated enquiries.

Finally when the marriage was imminent, his friend did come to the house only to find my son absent. He spoke to me instead. "Where is he? Has he decided not to come to my wedding? If it had been his marriage, I would have worked like a slave night and day. But for mine, he hasn't even shown his face once!"

I sympathized with him and asked, "Has something gone wrong between you?"

"Even if it has, is this the time to act on it?" Saying this, he left in a huff.

After a while my son returned. When I told him what had happened, he wanted to know what his friend had said. "He said that you're a most inhuman creature," I replied.

This seemed to pull him up. "He said that? He called me inhuman?"  
 "Why not? I would have said worse," I snapped.

It was only then that he picked up the telephone, had a long conversation with his friend, and cleared up the misunderstanding between them

Aside from this incident, my son remained unapproachable with regard to his social life and the company he kept. He had his own job and his own income and made it clear that I had no right to meddle in his affairs. Still, when I saw the kind of friends he would bring home, I could not help feeling sorry for them on the one hand, and fear their bad influence on him on the other. Some of them drank while others took drugs. They all called me 'auntie' and when they came to my place they would stretch themselves out on the floor. Their health was broken, their appearance wretched, their limbs shaky—a pathetic picture of derelict youth. It was not that they were unaware of their miserable state, but simply that they could not give up their deadly addictions. Time and again I would say to my son, "Are these your friends? How can you keep company with such people?"

His response would always be along the same lines. "Why not? They don't affect me. They're very good at heart, and the only thing wrong with them is that they have acquired some bad habits that they can't give up. That's all."

There was nothing I could ever do or say to persuade him otherwise.

There was, however, one instance where my son was compelled to change his point of view and submit to mine.

In our house in Calcutta we have a big table covered with a sheet of glass under which I had placed a picture of Sri Aurobindo. One day, I noticed that my son had put his own photo beside Sri Aurobindo's. I was appalled. "What have you done?" I exclaimed. "How dare you put your photo next to Sri Aurobindo's? They are almost touching! Take it out right now—I would have done it myself but the glass is too heavy for me. Remove it immediately, for heaven's sake."

"Why, what's wrong?" he asked.

I was flabbergasted. "My God, what are you saying? Don't you know who Sri Aurobindo is?"

"I don't see anything wrong with what I've done. All your ideas are nothing but superstition. I don't believe in any of them. I'm not going to take out my picture."

"Remove it!" I cried, shocked by his arrogance. "Otherwise something terribly inauspicious will happen."

"I don't care. I won't remove it." And he left the house in a fit of temper.

The moment he was gone, I pleaded with my Thakur, "Lord, don't take offence. I have tried my best with him, but he won't listen. What more can I do?"

After about two hours, there was a knock at the door. When I opened it, I

saw a gentleman standing there supporting my son by the hand. I was stunned. My son's face looked ash-grey. Asking the man in, I enquired what had happened.

He replied, "I saw from a distance that the boy was reeling as he was trying to cross the road. I thought it unlikely that he was drunk, as it was only noon, so I was sure there must be something wrong with him. Just then I saw a big lorry heading straight for him. I rushed forth and pulled him away. He was still unsteady on his legs, but he told me his address, so I was able to bring him here. Now that he is safely home, please take care of him." Saying this, he rose, excused himself, and left.

I put my son to bed. He soon fell into a deep sleep out of which he later awoke in a normal state. It was only then that I had a chance to ask him what had taken place.

"I was driving my car," he answered, "when suddenly I felt something very heavy pressing on my head. I couldn't bear it and my head began to spin. I parked the car by the roadside and got out. My legs were trembling. Suddenly, as I looked at a man standing in front of me, I discovered I could see very clearly inside him. I could even pierce through him and see things beyond. I couldn't believe it and thought I was going mad. Dazed as I was, I tried to cross the road when someone rushed up and grabbed me."

I was completely overwhelmed and demanded, "Now do you understand what it means to put your photograph beside Sri Aurobindo's? Here is proof of his enormous power. How can we poor humans even think of sitting by his side? Remove your picture immediately!"

He did so without demur

*(To be continued)*

NIRODBARAN

# LABOUR OF LOVE

by

HUTA

*(Continued from the issue of March 1992)*

ON 13th April 1959 the Mother sent me a painted card along with these words:

“My dear little child Huta

Yesterday I went to lay the first stone of the Sugar Mill Here is a painted view of the place I am sending it to you with all my love and blessings ”

Among other letters I found Dyuman’s informative letter which said that the Mother had gone to the site of the Sugar Mill at Sacur twelve miles from Pondicherry and laid the foundation stone which was of pink granite. The Mother’s message in her own hand was engraved on it.

“Faithfulness is the sure basis of success.”

\*

The Mother sent me beforehand the message of 24th April with her love and blessings It ran in Sri Aurobindo’s words:

“The divine perfection is always above us; but for man to become divine in consciousness and act and to live inwardly and outwardly the divine life is what is meant by spirituality, all lesser meanings given to the word are inadequate, fumbling or impostures ”

\*

After a horrible winter, we had lovely weather. I visited many famous places in London. The Parks charmed me very much

I wrote a few letters to the Mother describing my outings—whatever I did, wherever I went, the remembrance of the Divine and my goal were always present in my consciousness

My studies went on steadily. Unfortunately every now and then I had to face hideous difficulties, setbacks and sufferings.

I received from the Mother a card dated 5.8.59 with a quotation from her own writings:

“It is only by remaining perfectly peaceful and calm with an unshakable confidence and faith in the Divine Grace, that you will allow circumstances to be as good as they can be. *The very best happens always* to those who have put their entire trust in the Divine and in the Divine alone.”

She signed the card in red ink and added “P T O.” I smiled. She had written on the back of the card:

“To my dear little child Huta

I have received all your letters and the nice little tortoise which I have kept on my table near me.

Be quiet and confident and try to find me inside yourself, it will help you to sleep

With my love and blessings.”

\*

Summer was in full swing. In September I visited Durham. Arabinda Basu had been there from 1953 as Spalding Lecturer in Indian Philosophy and Religion in the School of Oriental Studies in the Durham Colleges. He organised the Section of Indian Studies. He had gone there with the Mother’s approval and blessings.

Arabinda and his son Sudipta showed me various places including Durham Colleges.

I was in a very good hotel. I enjoyed my holiday.

A card depicting various-coloured pansies—“Thoughts turned towards the Divine—a certitude of beauty”—came to me from the Mother with these words on it:

“My dear little child Huta

I have received all your letters and I am glad you had a good holiday.

Here are ‘Thoughts of the Divine’, these make life happy and beautiful.

My love is always with you and my blessings.”

\*

Now it was October 1959. Summer had stolen away and autumn crept in. The phenomenally warm weather which had lasted till September changed

The sharp winds of autumn made the trees quiver and there was heavy rain which continued for days unabated. The warm weather wore out in a series of

downpours, which left the earth smelling sweet and fresh. The Parks had lost their rich summer radiance.

On 6th October Doris Tomlinson sailed on S.S CHUSAN (P & O Line) to go to India I sent with her, for the Mother, some gifts—especially some bath-oil-pearls

I missed Doris terribly. But there were always Aunt Margaret and Uncle Peter who treated me as their own daughter. Uncle Peter was a Psychiatrist in Harley Street

\*

Mr. George Hubbard was a frequent visitor at Mercury House where I stayed. It was a Vegetarian Guest House run by English ladies

George was a leader of the Rosicrucians and a senior executive in a big firm in Birmingham. For his excellent service during the Second World War he had been made an M.B.E.—Member of the British Empire.

Since he was interested in spirituality we got on quite well. He gave me several booklets. I too gave him some books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

When I returned to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Mother signed some books for George which I sent him. The Mother received special combs from him. She liked them and used them appreciatively.

Here are the last verses from the *Hound of Heaven* which was given to me by George

“Halts by me that footfall  
Is my gloom, after all,  
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He whom thou seekest,  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.' ”

\*

The weather was exceedingly cold, gloomy, dull, depressing. But to my joy one morning a thick envelope came from the Mother She sent me messages along with these words:

“To my dear little child Huta  
Special blessings during these days of Puja.  
With love.”



Another letter came from her:

“To my dear little child Huta

I have just received all the nice things you have sent through Doris with your love and I am very glad to have them.

With my love and blessings which are always with you.”

Also there was a quotation from her own writings:

“Always do the best you can and leave the result to the Supreme. Then your heart will be in peace.”

At the same time I had a letter from Doris:

“I was so happy to see the Mother. She inquired all about your welfare and thanked me for assisting you in London. I felt really embarrassed Did you write to the Mother?”

The Mother affirmed.

‘Now London has come under my Consciousness.’

Huta, isn’t it wonderful?”

*(To be continued)*

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## FRIEND

WHAT IS your name, my deepest Friend,  
Who smile at me with silent eyes,  
Hold my hand at journey's end.  
Or still those vast and ancient cries?

You have walked with me since forever-years,  
Shadowing my life on many a path.  
In joy, in hope, disaster and tears,  
And in the aftermath

Of soul-anguish: the deeper passage  
To countries veiled from mortal sight  
Where your unveiled visage  
Is my twin, yet my night

Is nameless. Always is held back  
Who you are. Is there no need  
To show your Form, is this lack  
Of ego sufficient meed?

Form of the Formless, voice of Truth,  
Nameless and entire, impersonal, mute,  
Presence invisible, O Essence of Ruth,  
Player of my life's own lonely lute

Because of you, my-ness falters, the I dissolves,  
The weight of self you do not resist.  
Its momentum lost, it absolves  
Itself, always you desist

From taking a garb, or refracting this hard light  
So much of earth-stuff made, remain forever that Surmise  
Unattainable, liberate this-ness into flight  
Breathlessly pure, tranquil, cosmic, heaven-wise

ARVIND HABBU

## LINGUISTIC STATES: PANDORA'S BOX?

A FREQUENT tendency in our country has been to trace many national evils such as language riots and river-water conflicts to the creation of the linguistic states. The formation of the linguistic province, it is felt, was a singular blunder and a surrender to parochial politics. To observers outside, the development seems to suggest that we as a nation have failed to carry out a discourse beyond the narrow ethnic and tribal into the larger pan-Indian context.

Despite the persistent hold of this line of thinking, it is not wholly clear that the linguistic province has been uniformly bad. Perhaps the verdict is what is called in logic "Post hoc ergo propter hoc." It might therefore be useful to look at the issue in its historical context, especially in the light of the experience of many ex-colonies that struggled for nationhood in the modern sense.

### I

The British, it is said, conquered India almost in a fit of absent-mindedness. Though an overstatement, it aptly sums up the coming of the English Power to India. Here was facing them a spectacle of bewildering magnitude and complexity, an incredible number of states, both insignificantly small and monstrously huge, piled up helter-skelter like the far-flung pieces of some enormous jigsaw puzzle. Awed by this breath-taking sight, the East India Company chose the only expected course: with their typically shrewd and calculating business acumen they set out to fashion an edifice purely suited to their commercial interests, strategical considerations and practical exigencies, the sole exception being the hundreds of odd "Native" states scattered like islands in the vast sea of British India.

In imposing a direct authority over far-flung but strategically important and rich areas, common affinities and economic interests became the first casualties. No doubt, administrative convenience itself called for a certain measure of homogeneity but these were always perfunctory. With the rise of the political consciousness, however, there now entered a new element: the policy of "balance and counterpoise" later known as the infamous policy of "divide and rule".

Despite some provisional changes wilfully made, this ungainly monolith continued to exist until Independence. But the coming of Independence actually saw little change in the administrative set-up. The abolished princely states either merged with the various existing provinces or constituted new centrally administered units.

It is quite incorrect to say that language did not count in the British rationale and objectives of reconstruction: it did. But it was always toeing the superior

administrative and political expediency as was proved by the artificial demarcation of Bengal on purely communal grounds. From Lord Curzon in May, 1903 to the Montagu-Chelmsford Report in 1918, from the Indian Statutory Commission in 1930 to the J.V.P. Committee<sup>1</sup> in April, 1949, the linguistic principle was reiterated in varying degrees reflecting the corresponding socio-political trends of the times.

The demand for the provincial reconstitution was often seen to be equated with the demand for the linguistic states. This is because the rise of the political consciousness synchronized more or less with the cultural resurgence of the composite units. Tilak in Maharashtra, Bipin Pal in Bengal, Lajpat Rai in the Punjab, all ardent nationalists were, for instance, influential spokesmen of their respective cultures as well. Little wonder therefore that the Indian National Congress was all along pledged to the linguistic province.

But with Independence in the offing, the close touch of reality soon made the national leadership sober. So that on the eve of freedom, the sweeping unanimity and the nebulous idealism of the earlier armchair statesmen gave way to the cautious, close-step approach of the practical politician. The apprehension that language could be a veritable Pandora's box might well count for the modification of the linguistic principle for the first time. The fears were not unfounded. By the time of the J.V.P. Committee, the separatist menace was fast getting out of hand.

But despite the various pitfalls, reorganisation was a foregone conclusion. Over the years, public opinion had been allowed to be built up irrevocably to a feverish pitch. Any attempt to forcibly close the lid at this late hour would have only led to some abortive cataclysm, a prospect horrifying even to imagine in the infancy of the tender nation.

While considering any territorial change, an important factor to bear in mind is the constitutional relationship between the centre and the principalities. Since the Indian Constitution is largely federal, it follows that the units must be somewhat autonomous.

Unity and security must be the primary aims of any sound organisation. Usually unity is thought to be achieved best by an unitary form of Government. In India the States were set in a federal pattern. The question therefore is: How far is the regional free-play a contributing factor to the unity of the country?

## II

These issues may be studied in many different ways. In the first place it may be argued that:

1. In the past India could never attain a political unity because of the divergence of the regions based on disruptive factors like race, religion and

culture, factors which promote an aggressive intolerance and a chauvinistic outlook at the cost of a greater good. If old mistakes are to be avoided in new forms, India must be founded upon some principle other than these.

2. A linguistic division of the country would surely lead to an uneven growth of languages. Without a uniform national policy, education would merely become a deadly weapon in the cultural warfare.

3. The nature of modern economic planning involves issues like capital income ratio, energy, raw materials and employment possibilities, factors which seldom, if at all, coincide with the linguistic frontiers.

4. Fatal repercussions like the "doctrine of the homeland" and "sons of the soil" theories would foster a mass of conflicting loyalties and

5. A heterogeneous community will successfully prevent any dominant group from usurping the reins of power. It would, at the same time, usher in progressive harmony through mutual appreciation and understanding.

On the other hand, it might also be argued that.

1. In a federal union the composite units must be at least moderately homogeneous to allow the successful workings of democratic institutions, whose very *raison d'être* is decision by consensus. Language is clearly one of the most effective aids towards that end.

2. In administration, a single medium of expression instead of a babble of confusing tongues helps minimise any waste of energy, duplication and inefficiency.

3. A universal literacy and a mass education without the growth of the vernaculars is a vain chimera.

4. The argument of the so-called scientific school, that a conglomeration of diverse peoples normally leads to a mutual harmony, can hold true only if there is a real intermingling. In practice, however, it is seen that nothing of the sort happens. The segregating tendency of the linguistic minorities often breeds communal tensions in a polyglot area, tensions more explosive than any imaginable in an unilingual State.

5. Finally, the linguistic promise had been inextricably bound up in the vicissitudes of the freedom struggle. Any backtracking now would be popularly interpreted as a symbol of national failure.

These arguments had apparently a greater sway even though it took quite some time for the States to be reorganised with a linguistic bias in 1956. Of course, adequate guarantees and safeguards were made to protect the interests of the minorities. But the best of these have not succeeded in preventing the flames of secessionism. The flames are fanned by obliging fuels: political opportunism, religious bigotry and parochialism.

## III

Both the sides of the argument, the various pros and cons, seem, to an impartial mind, to have considerable force and one might almost say that they are so equipoised that no decisive action could follow from such a stalemate. But we may ask whether these arguments have truly gone to the heart of the problem. They no doubt refer to the question of the need of national unity, efficiency and prosperity, but are they supported by a more intimate study of the issues of cultures, the essential factors of unity, the real meaning of language and the persistence of varieties of languages at large? Is it not necessary to go much deeper and ask ourselves whether language is merely a means of communication or something more profound and significant: a natural spontaneous expression of the psychological growth of a people? And further, is it not necessary to determine if language has not a justifiable place in co-relating the free growth of the people with their unity and prosperity?

A nation is not a mere sum-total of its individuals living on a piece of land any more than a number of cells lumped together would constitute a living organism. Look at the mushrooming growth of European nation-states based on the rise of their respective languages and cultures and you will appreciate what Toynbee once said. "The growing consciousness of nationality had attached itself neither to traditional frontiers nor to new geographical associations but almost exclusively to the mother tongues."<sup>2</sup>

When you look hard you will see that the reason for a throbbing life-spirit in moulding many a splendid form and shape in India is not far to seek. It has been unflatterably in those periods when regional life and culture were at their apex, paradoxically enough in periods of great political disunity. On the other hand, there have been other periods no less known eras celebrated for their well-ordered life, discipline, stability, peace, wide-spread security and material prosperity. But all these have not been culturally great, their gift to the storehouse disproportionate to their stature. It is because, as Sri Aurobindo says, "the individual, the city, the region sacrifice their independent life and become mechanical parts of a machine: life loses its colour, richness, variety, freedom and victorious impulse towards creation."<sup>3</sup>

Cultures can be likened to a garden in different seasons. Like the changing hues and colours in nature, the culture or the characteristic life-modes, habits, values and behaviour tend to vary. Well-groomed and nurtured, the cultural garden will weather any fury of frost and snow and emerge unscathed to bloom refreshingly anew in the springs of life. But without this, the best of sunshine and the sturdiest enclosure cannot prevent the lovely garden from turning into a shocking wilderness.

Culture is thus the mirror of the group consciousness, the pivot of the body-social. It epitomises cumulative achievements and embodies future aspirations.

Culture is the life-line of a nation. It is the moral, religious and spiritual fodder on which countries thrive. It is thus the most sensitive and vulnerable spot of a group, the nucleus of the human cell. Without it there may be everything else and yet nothing. A cultureless nation is a sanctuary without the deity. A cultural sterility therefore always precedes a biological death.

For his purpose the gardener uses many tools. Language is one of them, one of the very best. But its use involves a complex skill. Only a competent gardener can work this tool. For unless skilfully handled, instead of rooting out the parasites, it may ravage the landscape. If language has helped men to unite and coalesce, it has also been the greatest source of division and disruption.

Language is a vehicle and embodiment of thought. "It creates and determines thought even while it is created and determined by it." It is thus "the cultural life of the people, the index of its soul in thought and mind that stands behind and enriches the soul in action." Even a random survey of history will bring home this truth to us.

It has been argued that language is one of the greatest causes of division. And therefore in the past common universal languages like Esperanto have been attempted by idealistic thinkers. But in Nature we see that while there is an emphasis on the commonness, great attention is also lavished on the principle of variation.

How far a language is valuable in the evolution of a nation and what a crippling blow its absence would produce might be gauged from the plight of a world power like the United States in quest of a cultural identity. Or take the movement of Irish Self-Determination. It was unavoidably handicapped on this score. All because historical accidents had turned North America into a cultural colony of England and Ireland too until yesterday, when it went through a phase of renaissance.

"Diversity of language," remarks Sri Aurobindo, "is worth keeping because diversity of cultures and differentiations of soul groups are worth keeping, because without that diversity, life cannot have full play." Therefore, as Sri Aurobindo observes, "no unification which destroyed or overshadowed and discouraged the large and free use of varying natural languages of humanity can fail to be detrimental to human life and progress."

But we must also guard ourselves against an excess. There is a point beyond which differences cease to play a healthy role. Like the legendary tower of Babel, they merely create confusion and discord. But "separatism is not the same thing as particularism which may exist without unity. It is the sentiment of the impossibility of a true union that separates, not the mere fact of difference".<sup>8</sup>

Our question of a choice of basis—whether cultural, linguistic or mechanical and administrative, therefore, depends not so much on the pros and cons of practical exigencies as on our very attitude towards life and culture. We must know our priorities right before we venture out to the solution.

In the last reckoning, the question of the linguistic problem cannot be solved in terms of more guarantees and safeguards. Devices like the Integration of Services, Special Development Boards, etc., are only meant to be correctives. They are no substitutes for a genuine goodwill and a broad outlook.

The linguistic hydra cannot be slain with the mere abolition of the linguistic states. It will promptly reappear in some other form. Forces of anarchy and turmoil would see to that. Rather, by destroying the genius of India based on a healthy diversity in oneness, it would put her future seriously in doubt. The mistake has not been in the formation of the linguistic state but in the failure of stressing this deep-rooted cultural oneness of India.

SACHCHIDANANDA MOHANTY

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Comprising Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya

<sup>2</sup> A J Toynbee *The World after the Peace Conference* (London, 1926), p 18

<sup>3</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p 265

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* , p 389

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* , p 496

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* , p 491

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*



## LIVING TO A HUNDRED

ON the threshold of the 21st century, there may not be many today who had the privilege of seeing the twentieth century ushered in, and fewer will have the double distinction of seeing both the 20th and 21st centuries being born. These centurions would truly have seen the vicissitudes and the progress that the hundred years have brought forth. And they are the winners in the numbers game, having beaten the statistics. The average Indian did not live beyond 26 when the 20th century dawned; today he expects to live up to 52.

What are the vicissitudes? A child born a hundred years ago faced the danger of acute diseases. Tuberculosis, typhoid, cholera, small pox, diphtheria and acute diarrhoea were the main killers—not just in India but the world over. Every second child died before the age of six in many countries. Families adapted to this reality by producing more children. Adulthood faced the vulnerability of wars. One needs only to ponder the millions of totally avoidable deaths caused by wars.

What is the progress, witnessed in this century? Killer diseases such as typhoid, cholera, pox and plague have now been contained. The saga of the microbe hunters starting from Edward Jenner and Louis Pasteur to the present day virologists is a heroic one. Even primitive sanitation and hygiene have helped ward off death. The discovery of disinfectants, germicides and antibiotics has ensured that a child need not die of these diseases, any more. Infant mortality today is just two per cent of what it was 90 years ago.

All this is a result of the understanding of the basis of diseases. And to understand is to control. It is mainly for this reason that the family planning propaganda “We two and two for us” has a chance of succeeding now. The small pox virus has been banished from the face of the earth. Plague may not take its savage toll any longer. But diarrhoea still kills. Gastric diseases still kill children in slums and in villages. Epidemics still break out during floods and famine.

What are the killer diseases today? Not the acute ones of yesteryear such as small pox or cholera but the chronic ones such as cancer, emphysema, cardio-pulmonary diseases, arteriosclerosis, arthritis and the like. These hit the adults and the elderly more than children. With this shift from the acute to the chronic, the average life expectancy has increased from 26 to 52 years. In the U.S., it has risen from 43 in 1900 to 73 in 1980 and a bit higher today.

All this has led to a curious demographic shift, with more people over 50 years now than even a generation ago. Better hygiene, health practices, nutrition and diet, vaccines and antibiotics and higher literacy and awareness have meant more senior citizens. Most of these are hale and hearty, active and productive. And this has raised an interesting debate in America on the issue of when one should retire from his job. At least 20 U.S. universities have scrapped the mandatory retirement age. If a professor is fit enough, he continues to serve.

What is the situation in India with its enormous population, large number of qualified people and limited job opportunities? Also, in India the elderly are held in higher esteem, and seniority is equated with greater wisdom. In such a society, it is the elders who make the rules. Thus, if the retirement rule were to change, the elderly would be blamed for feathering their nest. One may recall here the controversy in Andhra Pradesh seven years ago when the retirement age for government employees was shifted from 58 to 55 and back to 58.

How is the individual affected by all this? With better health, he now lives longer and needs to fashion his life plans in ways different from his parents. More than the average life expectancy, his concern is about how long he himself can live—up to 90 or 100—if he is careful in his health habits.

What is the limit to the human life span? The current debate in the Gerontological Society of America pertains to this issue. Prof. James Fries of Stanford thinks that the human body has an inbuilt limit of 85 years, while Prof. James Vaupel of Minnesota challenges this notion and puts it at 110. The debate has been reported by Ms. Monica Barmaga in the November 15 issue of *Science*.

The notion of a finite life span—85, 110 or whatever—for an individual rests on the seminal findings of Leonard Haryflick, of the U.S. in 1970, who approached it from the levels of the body cells. We all grow from the egg cell of our mothers. This divides repeatedly to produce tissues, and differentiates to produce various types of tissues and organs. The individual organism is made up of various organs. As we age, the cells become less efficient in their activity, divide less often and ultimately die.

When young, our hearts, lungs, kidneys, liver and other organs function supremely, four to 10 times more than that needed for sustaining life. This “organ reserve” helps us to cope with environmental stress and function well. As we age, the reserve decreases and even a small stress perturbs the system. An elderly person may cope with one minor stress (say a fall or an infection) only to succumb to another minor one. James Fries uses the analogy of a sun-rotted curtain. “You patch up a tear here or sew up one there and it just tears some place else.”

Haryflick showed that when human cells are asked to divide in the laboratory they do so efficiently up to a point. One cell divides to two, two into four and four to eight quite well but then something happens after 50 steps of such division.

After 50 doublings, the cells first fail to grow and then die even though there has been no change in the nutrients or other conditions in the “culture medium” as the solution is called. This limit on cell doubling number seems to differ from species to species. There are more doublings in long-lived animals like man or the elephant while it is less than 50 with rats or mice that live shorter. Does the cell have a built-in programme or a “death gene” that programmes its life span?

James Vaupel argues that if ageing or senescence is determined by genes,

identical twins should age and die at about the same time provided they do not succumb prematurely. To test this out, he referred to the Registrar's office in Denmark which maintains a meticulous record of births and deaths of over 4000 identical twins.

When Vaupel analysed the twin registry data, he found that the mean age of senescent death was not 85 but greater than 110. He has also argued that the dispute about a pre-programmed life span is not limited to humans alone, but also includes other animals and insects. Studying the fruit-fly is particularly attractive since they can be grown in millions and live up to 100 days or so, a convenient time period for scientists to study several generations in a few years. Data of millions of flies would also firm up the statistical analysis and overcome one particular drawback of human studies.

For rigorous statistical data, one needs large numbers in each group. But there are very few people over 85 and this makes the statistical graph lopsided. The flies which are prolific but short in age have already helped since Vaupel, who is collaborating on this project with James Carey of California, has recorded the death of the millionth fly in the study.

The preliminary results are startling. The probability of dying increases for the first third of the life span of the flies and then levels off. That means if a fly does not die within the first month, chances are that it would live on and on! This result needs to be repeated and confirmed—but it argues against a programmed life span of 100 days for the fly, and in extrapolation, 85 years for humans. Put another way, if there is a "death gene" it does not turn on before 110 years in humans.

It would take a while, perhaps a few years, for the dust to settle on this controversial issue and, as Marcia Baringa has aptly said, for the "fur flying" to stop and definitive conclusions to be arrived at. In any event, Dr. Jay Olshanky of Chicago estimates that major degenerative diseases such as cancer, arthritis, arteriosclerosis and the like would need to be cured before longevity reaches 110-120. To date, the only region in the world known for its supersenior citizens of 120 and even 130 years of age is the Armenian and Azerbaijan belt.

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(With acknowledgements to *The Hindu*, 22 1 1992, p. 19 )

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of March 1992)*

ON arrival in India Sri Aurobindo saw the condition of the political awakening of the country which was confined to only a fringe of the middle class. Even this fringe was timid and afraid of the ruling British people. It tried to improve things by waiting on the sweet will of the conqueror. Sri Aurobindo studied the mind of the proletariat and said, "They were sunk in ignorance." Obviously he was for widening the base of the whole movement. But he felt that the time was not ripe for his political views to be appreciated. He abstained from politics for the time being and turned his attention towards a silent planning and preparation of the country for some kind of direct action which would in the fullness of time flare up into an armed insurrection.

Sri Aurobindo had an intuitive knowledge of the English people which he had developed during his fourteen years' stay in England. He was convinced that the British would cease ruling when they would see that they could not hold down the country any longer by constitutional means. He observed: "The English people, except for a few autocrats like Curzon, have a constitutional temperament. They will violently oppose their being kicked out of the country but they won't object to their being slowly shouldered out as in the Dominions... The British have one weakness. They can't go on with brutal methods of repression for a long time. They have their prestige to keep up before the world and they want popular support. So in the end they come to a compromise."<sup>1</sup>

The arduous task before Sri Aurobindo was to prepare both the common people and a military organisation for the coming struggle, though India was at that time unequal in arms. He was never eager to move into any headlong action. He said of himself: "Sri Aurobindo's habit in action was not to devise beforehand and plan but to keep a fixed purpose, watch events, prepare forces and act when he felt it to be the right moment."<sup>2</sup> He has said: "I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue."<sup>3</sup> In order to set up a strong will among the people for freedom there was the need of a nation-wide awakening and of a preparation for an eventual revolution.

In India at that time there were many scattered revolutionary parties. But there was no effective coordination among them. Sri Aurobindo noticed that his own grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, had started a revolutionary group in which Rabindranath Tagore was one of the members. But it did not work out.

His annual visits to Bengal during the Puja Holidays were occasions for looking around, establishing connections and sowing the seeds of his pro-

gramme. But his later visits were utilised mostly for building up and organising the secret groups in his native province. That could be the preparation of a mass movement.

We have seen in our previous chapter that according to the arrangement of Sri Aurobindo Jatin Banerjee was sent to Bengal. Before this Jatin "had by the help of Sri Aurobindo's friends in the Baroda Army enlisted as a trooper in the cavalry regiment in spite of the prohibition by the British Government of the enlistment of any Bengali in any army in India. This man who was exceedingly energetic and capable, formed a first group in Calcutta which grew rapidly (afterwards many branches were established), he also entered into relations with P. Mitter and other revolutionaries already at work in the province. He was joined afterwards by Barin who had in the interval come to Baroda."<sup>4</sup> Sri Aurobindo has narrated in the third person his own activities, beginning with his choice of this emissary " .he made his first move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji, as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity, already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's group was association for

lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghosal in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action."<sup>5</sup>

At that time a secret revolutionary group started in Western India under the leadership of Thakur Ram Singh of the State of Udaipur. It had a branch in Bombay, consisting of five members who helped in organising the movement in Maharashtra. Sri Aurobindo has said: "This Rajput leader was not a prince, that is to say, a Ruling Chief but a noble of the Udaipur State with the title of Thakur. The Thakur was not a member of the council in Bombay; he stood above it as the leader of the whole movement while the council helped him to organise Maharashtra and the Mahratta states. He himself worked principally upon the Indian Army of which he had already won over one, two or three regiments."<sup>6</sup>

In 1902 Sri Aurobindo visited Midnapur and met Hem Chandra Das who was an important figure. Rifle-shooting was being practised on his land. During the summer of that year he took privilege leave for a month and utilised it to promote this revolutionary work in Bengal.

Sri Aurobindo formed a link between the secret movement in Eastern India and the one in Western India. Lokamanya Tilak was fanning the fire of the revolutionary group in Maharashtra and organising religious festivals in that province.

Sri Aurobindo attended the Ahmedabad session of the Congress which was held in December 1902. There he met Tilak at the venue. The Lokamanya had been eager to know the young writer of the *Induprakash* articles. Mandvale arranged the meeting and an identity of approach was formed. Madhavarao Jadav, nephew of Khasirao, as a part of preparation for the revolutionary programme, was sent to England to receive training in arms and manufacture of bombs, revolvers, etc. Sri Aurobindo bore the expenses.

In the meanwhile Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, Barindra had come and joined. It appeared as if the revolutionary spirit flowed through his veins from birth. Of course he used to get revolutionary ideas from Sri Aurobindo's annual visit to Deoghar. Sometime in 1902 Sri Aurobindo sent him to Bengal to help Jatın. A third young man also joined, he was Abinash Bhattacharya. Jatın worked through professionals and the other two worked through students. But after three months there were differences of opinion among these men. They were separated. Jatın moved away from the other two.

Sri Aurobindo went to Calcutta in February 1903 on a month's leave mainly to bring a compromise between his three lieutenants. He heard both the sides. He found that Jatın wanted to impose a military disciplined attitude and Barın could not adjust to it. Most of the young men did not approve of Jatın's stern

discipline and they supported Barindra's refusal to accept the generalship of Jatun. Sri Aurobindo formed a Committee of five, P. Mitter, C.R. Das, Sister Nivedita, Jatun, Surendranath Tagore and vested them with an over-all authority. Due to the differences of opinion the work had suffered

Sister Nivedita visited Baroda in October 1902. She had come to Baroda to give some lectures and Sri Aurobindo went to the station to receive her. She had heard of him as a worshipper of Kali and a believer in Shakti; and he had read and appreciated her book *Kali, the Mother*

Sister Nivedita, the Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda, was among the few persons in India who knew that Sri Aurobindo was the directing brain behind the nationalist movement in Bengal, despite his physical absence. As her biographer, Lizelle Raymond, writes

"In this India a spontaneous enthusiasm, born of the country's own needs, was necessary before the revolutionary movement could be properly formed, and for that, consciously or unconsciously, all eyes were turned towards Aurobindo Ghose. The plan which he envisaged and on which he was working could be revealed only to minds in a fit state to receive it."<sup>7</sup>

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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## THE SATIRIC SPECTRUM

### SATIRE IN *AS YOU LIKE IT*

THE importance of Shakespeare as a writer of comedies whose primary aim is to entertain and amuse the audience, is not to be underestimated, nor can much be added even by the highbrows to what the critics have already written on him down the ages. Since there is "plenty" to be serious about in tragedies, critics have been liberal in showering praise on his comedies as 'sunny comedies',<sup>1</sup> 'happy comedies',<sup>2</sup> 'festive comedies',<sup>3</sup> breathing a happy-go-lucky spirit and ending in the usual stereotyped convention of the comedy, with the lovers living happily ever after.

From a careful reading of Shakespeare's middle comedies, like *As You Like It* one discovers that the master dramatist is not simply a 'maestro' in the art, whose aim is to amuse and entertain the audience. He soars beyond this aim and weaves, with the competence of a master-craftsman, the warps and woofs of the existing contemporary follies and foibles of society, high and low.

Indeed the facts of contemporary society siphon into his plays through all sorts of conduits except the one of straight forward realism. This is indeed what is called plain and simple.<sup>4</sup>

Although it is true that when we talk of satire we refer to formal verse-satires like Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, Boileau's *Le Lutrin*, Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, the term can be profitably extended to dramatic compositions. If comedy is handled dexterously with the competence of a master, the satirical import in a comedy is as effective and immediate as a formal verse-satire and comedy and satire will shade off into each other. As Rosenheim rightly observes

Between the satire which is incorporated in a work of another species such as Comedy and that which is sufficiently dominant so that the work is largely satirical there is a difference which is one of degree.<sup>5</sup>

So much has been written on the nature, scope and function of Satire that it would be presumptuous to attempt any further disquisition on the subject. Suffice it to say a few words on its motive, province, means and audience. The chief aim of satire is amendment or reformation of human morals and manners in contemporary affectations which were mostly not far from Dr Johnson's indictment of Lord Chesterfield's Letters. The appeal is directed to the conscience of the self-satisfied by means of added emphasis or accentuation.

To discuss Shakespeare as a satirist, it is not our concern to take up his tragedies like *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, or even his Histories, in both of which very



striking satirical “sardonic” are scattered throughout like a design in mosaic. Our concern is with one of his middle-period romantic comedies: *As You Like It*.

It is true that Shakespeare’s avowed aim is neither to satirize society with the vehemence of a Pope or a Swift or a Ben Jonson who are satirists of the first magnitude; nor does he intend to make the Globe a pillory out and out, where all the friends and bumpkins of society are mercilessly flogged and flayed alive. However, it is equally true that Shakespeare, being a first-rate playwright and typical representative of his age, cannot but expose the existing social malaise, working them skilfully into the very texture of the products of his art, and making the satirical import as natural as possible. Shakespeare is using satire “within his bounds and he will seek to crystallize that which he attacks, like bees in amber, as an example for all time”<sup>6</sup>

### The Raison d’être of this Comic Satire

Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* is a satire in ways more than one. Even before Shakespeare started writing it, Elizabethan Society seemed to be hastening to decline and decay. Dramatists and poets between the years 1584 and 1600 lost no time in directing their tirades against contemporary follies and foibles of society. Eight years before Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It*, there was an increased filip and popularity for formal verse-satires and satirical plays. Ben Jonson was rightly fulminating at the prevailing social extravaganzas in speech and behaviour and exposing them to derision on the stage. There was a deliberate slant among writers of the day to wage a relentless war against the excesses which provided ample scope for satire during the reign of Elizabeth. Bernard Harris rightly remarks:

The seeds of religious dissent, political discontent, and social complaint were sown early in the reign and were flowering profusely at its close.<sup>7</sup>

Hence poetic and prose attacks in literary circles were the order of the day. Since Shakespeare is not a Satirist out to destroy, and his medium is comedy, he was quick to take stock of the alarming deterioration in all walks of Elizabethan Society. Perhaps in *As You Like It* more than in any other comedy written by him during the middle period, Satire lives in many forms and is of one nature with its cousins—sardonic wit, sarcasm, cynicism, irony, parody, burlesque and invective—to render the area of operation and the object of attack ridiculous.

Satire operates on various levels: aimed at the affectation of the courtiers, against the uppishness of contemporary customs and manners, love and religion, and against one more peculiar artificiality which is the conventional pastoral life.

Shakespeare has rarely missed the opportunity of laughing at the prevailing

vices of the court and of courtiers, a class against whom he seems to have dipped his pen in gall. This can be seen explicitly expressed in his early comedies like *Love's Labour Lost*.

Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,  
Three-piled hyperboles, spruse affectation,  
Figures pedantical.<sup>8</sup>

Since in *As You Like It* most of the action takes place in an ideal setting, the Forest of Arden, the temptation of the dramatist to lash out at the impish odds and ends of court life becomes greater than ever.

The senior Duke, who was himself in the court and aware of the ways of the sophisticated life at Court seeks the solace of sylvan seclusion in the forest, exalts forest life in preference to court life, which is nothing short of “painted pomp” and pelf, and exclaims:

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,  
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet  
Than that of painted pomp?  
Are not these woods  
More free from peril than the envious court?<sup>9</sup>

The affectation of the courtier comes under fire, time and again

To Shakespeare the new-fangled and affected word has a good deal of the British contempt for foreign things—and he puts it into the mouth of the pedant Holofernes in *Love's Labour Lost*. Jaques urges the clown to continue his song:

Come more, another stanza,  
Call you them stanzas?<sup>10</sup>

Here is yet another stanza of the incurable affectation: Though Jaques discusses the term stanza as affectation, he has at his command “sans” the courtier of Shakespeare’s day. Here Shakespeare pricks the pride of the affected courtier. In Elizabethan days the use of the word ‘stanzo’ was regarded as unusual and artificial, possibly an affected word and Jaques is being very satirical in much the very same way as when the word ‘Monsieur’ was articulated, in an equally affected manner

(To be continued)

N. SANTHALINGAM

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## THE DAWN OF APRIL 4, 1910

THE sky-glow was warmer  
 Brought by a rare togetherness  
 Of smiling stars.  
 A purer fragrance was in the first breeze  
 From the east, a scent of loving worship.  
 The sea was still, breath held close;  
 Wave-arms folded, it waited  
 As if for its first sunrise.  
 There was a sudden startled cloud-burst,  
 For the horizons had opened,  
 And like children rushing out of hostel doors  
 A crowd of rays left the dawn-gates  
 In an explosion of colours—pink and orange  
 And yellows of warm gold.  
 Sea and sky and sun and air,  
 All nature was singing a "Welcome"  
 To the great sage, the Master.  
 On His first day in Pondicherry—  
 The city's first day of fulfilment:  
 Sri Aurobindo was about to arrive.

DINKAR PALANDE

## QUANTUM AND THE ENORMOUS CHANGE

(Continued from the issue of March 1992)

### BLACK-BODY RADIATION AND PLANCK

WE shall first review the problem of black-body radiation, since this not only preceded but played a crucial role in Einstein's hypothesis concerning the light-quantum: the photon.

When light falls on an object, three things take place—transmission, reflection and absorption. By the law of conservation of energy, the sum of intensities of these three is the same as the intensity of the incident light. When any of these three intensities is equal to that of the incident light, we say that the object is a perfect transmitter, reflector, or absorber. For example, in the case of visible light a mirror is a near perfect reflector, air a near perfect transmitter, and soot or “kajal” a near perfect absorber. From day-to-day experience we observe that the black colour is a perfect absorber. But, technically speaking, black means total absorption of visible as well as invisible electromagnetic radiation.

Now, if we extend our view to say that visible light is only a part of the electromagnetic spectrum, can we still say that an object that appears black to our eyes is a perfect absorber? No, this definition of a perfect absorber will have to change, since objects need not be “black” for radiowaves, x-rays, etc.

Therefore, *an object that absorbs all electromagnetic waves falling on it*, would alone make a *perfect absorber*. Objects that possess this quality can be called black-bodies.

But then an object irradiated with electromagnetic waves cannot indefinitely keep on absorbing these without re-radiating.

If the absorption-emission process did not take place simultaneously, the temperature of the object would continue to rise and it may even become hotter than the source itself. This would be in contradiction to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. A pertinent example is that of the earth-sun system. The heat radiated by the sun reaches the earth and its temperature rises. If the earth kept absorbing this radiation without emission, its temperature at some stage would become more than that of the sun's, a phenomenon which is yet to happen in the history of the universe.

As all objects not only absorb but also emit electromagnetic radiation, the definition of black-body requires further clarification. *A black-body is theoretically a perfect absorber and emitter*. One immediate consequence of this definition is that the surrounding does not influence the naturally emitted radiation of such a body. Let us consider, as an example, the furnace of a blacksmith which is radiating heat of its own. Theoretically this is a black-body in

its newly defined sense. If a torchlight is focussed on it what results is a *no change in the thermal state*. In this process the furnace has absorbed the incident radiation completely and the spectrum of electromagnetic waves it had been emitting has remained unchanged.

Once found that a black-body is capable of fully absorbing as well as emitting electromagnetic radiation, the next step followed: the collection of information data, that would reveal properties of the emitted radiation. Intense research carried out along these lines reported that this radiation contained all the wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum but in varying intensities. Further study indicated many other characteristic features of this emitted radiation. although the body radiated the entire electromagnetic spectrum, the intensity is maximum only for one wavelength. This peak, it is also observed, changes with temperature—when heated the peak shifts towards shorter wavelength and is greater in intensity. This emitted radiation is named the *black-body radiation*

Now that the properties of the black-body radiation were obtained through meticulous efforts of the experimentalists, the theorists began to play their role. The earliest proposals for the understanding of this radiation phenomenon began to appear in the 1860s. But all their “guesses may be forgotten except for one, Wien’s exponential law, proposed in 1896.”

The essence of Wien’s work was a search for a function that would explain the observed black-body radiation curve. Basically it is a product function, with one function increasing and the other decreasing. In January 1897 Frederich Paschen, a leading experimentalist of the day, said about this work as follows “It would be difficult to find another function that represents the data with as few constants.” Yet it remained only a functional fit without providing any theoretical insight into the problem. But even the functional fit over the entire range was doubtful.

It was being believed that this law had provided the final answer. But it was too early to come to such a conclusion. The next few years saw major breakthroughs and rapid developments were made in experimental techniques. As a consequence, early in the year 1900 Rubens and others came to the conclusion that Wien’s law fails in the far infrared region (longer wavelengths)

It was not long before an attempt was made to replace the law. The approach to this problem by Rayleigh was the first of its kind. He suggested application of Maxwell-Boltzmann’s equipartition theory to radiation. This approach had its limitation which Rayleigh himself had recognised, he maintained that his law is applicable only to the case of long wavelengths (where Wien’s law failed). In a postscript to Rayleigh’s work Jeans corrected the former’s ‘oversight’. After Rayleigh recognised Jeans contribution, this joint effort became the Rayleigh-Jeans Law. While this law accounts only for the longer wavelength part of the spectrum, its approach—the extension of the

existing theoretical framework—marks a true beginning in the understanding of the problem.

At this time the situation stood as follows: Wien's formula accounted for the short wavelengths and the peak; Rayleigh's work explained only the longer wavelengths (far infrared), one bit of the curve, the transition region between the two, still remained understood, [See the accompanying graph].

We may take this opportunity to remark that we quite often tend to overlook the contributions of the experimentalists and get overwhelmed or fascinated by the play of concepts and ideas of the theorists. Take the case of black-body radiation. Had the small but true deviations in the far-infrared not been observed by Rubens and others, physics would have got stuck with Wien's formula and Planck's radiation law would have remained undiscovered.

Puzzling as the situation was, the search for the final hypothesis never stopped. In the same year (on the 19th of October 1900) came a new proposal by the visionary German theorist: **Max Planck**

On the evening of 7th October 1900 Planck "found an interpolation between [Ruben's] results and Wien's law." This not only enabled him to explain the unaccounted observations but also all the available data on the black-body radiation. The mystery was finally solved, and in a wonderful and complete manner. The quantum nature of radiation had been discovered.

Even if Planck had decided to stop here, he would have been remembered as the discoverer of the radiation law. But, to quote A. Pais: "It is a true measure of his greatness that he went further." He wanted to, and did successfully, elaborate his work of 7th October. And that made him the discoverer of the quantum theory. In the course of this second work he made one most important contribution to classical physics by presenting "the equation for the joint equilibrium of matter and radiation." The significant contribution of this equation lay in the following respect. It was the starting point of the discovery of the quantum theory.

What Planck concluded from this work was "strange" and yet important, as it was only this hypothesis which explains the black-body radiation data in an accurate and complete manner. What he hypothesised was: The energy contained in an electromagnetic wave can be considered to appear in discrete packets; the energy of each packet is given by  $E=h\nu$  ( $h$  Planck's constant,  $\nu$  frequency of the wave). Regarding Planck's hypothesis we find a very gratifying comment made by A. Pais. "His reasoning was mad but his madness had that divine quality that only a great transitional figure can bring to science." This *mad* reasoning, which led to the celebrated formula, involved *two desperate acts*. One of them was the proposal of the discreteness of energy, and the other the use of Boltzmann statistics for the energy quanta. While the first may be considered as a legitimate hypothesis beyond the classical domain, the second was fallacious. Nevertheless, Planck's formula remained intact—by a most fortuitous circum-

stance—when correct statistics were applied, 25 years later. We may even speculate that this was not merely coincidental; it seems his mad reasoning was exploited by something else—what A. Pais calls the *divine quality*—trying to establish itself in our mental scheme attempting to *understand* the physical world.

In the years to come an almost endless chain of dramatic events followed the proposal: the quantum theory of light (Einstein—1905), the stabilisation of the atom (Bohr—1913), wave characteristics of matter (de Broglie—1924), quantum mechanics (Schroedinger—1926), anti-electron (Dirac—1927)...

This proposal was also the first of many shocks that rocked Physics; the quantum theory of radiation violated the existing concepts of classical physics which was being interpreted, especially so since the phenomenal contributions of Maxwell, as the unchallengeable truth of the physical world. After all, the whole of the electromagnetic theory was dependent solely on the principles of classical continuity and the ideas of fields. It is these which got jolted with the discreteness hypothesis as proposed by Planck.

The reactions to this work will be taken up later, nevertheless the following cautious statement from A. Pais may be quoted here to sum up the reaction: “From 1900 to 1905, Planck’s radiation formula was generally considered to be neither more nor less than a successful representation of the data.”

Now let us turn to the *photoelectric effect*

(*To be continued*)

VIKAS DHANDHANIA

## NEW AGE NEWS

COMPILED AND PRESENTED BY WILFRIED

### “White Mama”

THE age of great external adventures is over, though not entirely. The South Tirolean Reinhold Messner is the most well-known among those who explore whatever is left unexplored in the physical world. He has climbed all the 8000 m peaks in the Himalayas, some of them without oxygen, “to prevent boredom” (*Die Zeit*) Finally, his mind turned on the Antarctica, the most inhospitable area on earth To make the adventure sincere, he decided to cross the white continent without huskies, himself pulling a heavily loaded sledge, walking on skis most of the time. He was accompanied by the North German sailor Arved Fuchs who had already reached the North Pole in an expedition in spring 1989 Messner’s book *Antarktis—Himmel und Holle zugleich*<sup>1</sup> (Antarctica—Heaven and Hell in One) is more than a report of an extraordinary journey through that white Nirvana which the Americans at the Pole Station call “White Mama”<sup>2</sup> The book also has philosophical aspects, it touches the borderline between the external and the internal path.

From the beginning, Messner makes it clear that he does not intend to stylize himself as a hero Before the expedition starts, he is plagued by fear, by sleepless nights He is a mountaineer, that is his routine. Crossing the infinite white desert is an entirely new venture “As long as an adventure exists merely as an idea, it is easy to be a ‘hero’ But I was afraid of the reality.” Messner describes his inner state of mind, the well-meaning voices of friends trying to hold him back. He is married, he has a young daughter Is it not irresponsible to start out on this risky journey? Perhaps his wife felt like Chitrangada before Arjuna’s departure:

.. It helps me not  
To bind thee for a moment to my joy  
The impulse of thy mighty life will come  
Upon thee like a wind and drive thee forth  
To toil and battle and disastrous deeds ..<sup>3</sup>

Messner is driven indeed by an irresistible force. He stresses that his purpose has nothing to do with tourism or science: “In being-on-the-way in the wilderness, I was not concerned with the world outside, but the world within me.

<sup>1</sup> Piper Verlag, Munchen 1990 Pp 391, DM 58

<sup>2</sup> See p 209

<sup>3</sup> Sri Aurobindo *Vyasa and Valmiki*, p 145



I was the conqueror of my own soul ” Messner accepts the criticism of his “egoism”, because he knows he cannot live otherwise. Only in facing the utmost challenges of mind and body does he experience himself. “I am convinced that humanity would be more peaceful if everybody would have a chance now and then to exhaust himself to the limit of his capacities. The pre-condition of peace is not only free nations, but peace is only possible if *all* human beings can grow and develop as *integral* human beings.” Relatively untouched patches on earth, as the Antarctica, are mankind’s great asset. They symbolize the virginity of Nature, the Original, the True, that which cannot be evaluated in terms of dollars. “It can only be measured in the quality of the wilderness, which is by nature peaceful, infinite and beautiful. To experience wilderness is my profession.”

All the physical particulars of the journey are described in great detail, constantly interspersed with quotations from great pioneers of the past who had reached the Pole before Messner, with different means and minds. His diary notes reveal average temperatures of minus 20-30 °C, often aggravated by stormy winds. And the terrain is difficult, with endless fields of “sastruggis” which could be described as one meter high frozen waves, not easy to traverse with those heavy sledges carrying 100 kg of food and equipment. Messner and Fuchs spend the nights or stormy days in a small high-tech tent, getting a little warmth from their stove. In fact, these two wanderers with the blood circulation of an eskimo often seem to feel cozy inside. They spend much time every morning and evening preparing nourishing food, always trying to minimize the trash they leave behind. Messner had publicised his venture as an ecological action, trying to focus attention on his idea of a “World Park Antarctica”.

Then again they are out there in that vast white expanse of snow and ice. “It was fun that way sking into infinity ” Messner notes in his book. To keep his mind occupied, he sometimes creates inspiring fantasies. One of his dreams is a glass castle in mountainous South Tirol. “The visitors should pass through and understand what the mountain means for man. I was dwelling on symbols which everybody comprehends, and on that luminous mountain which all of us aspire to climb in order to descend as illumined beings. Lichtenberg (Luminous Mountain) is a key to the orientation inwards ” Messner simply enjoys walking, he is used to this kind of strain from his childhood, he knows all the variations of suffering from his long career as a mountaineer. Thus, in spite of the inhospitable hell-like external conditions, he gets some joy. “This ice-walk was a timeless walking-along for me. I could have walked like that for a life-time. Walking as a pastime. Walking as a rhythm of thinking. Walking as a meditation.”

Messner also meditates on Nature and humanity, on the progressive subjection of the earth to technology, and its ecological consequences. “I felt as if I were put back into that time and condition when Nature alone was ‘God’.

Our ecological problems are due to the rupture that took place between man and Nature.” In between he reads a cultural history of modern times by Friedell, “forgetting everything, living in the past ”

Meanwhile, Arved Fuchs is nursing his wounds. Very early, he started developing sores on his feet and soon found himself in a tremendous battle against pain and physical trouble, which continued most of the time. While Messner with his superior fitness is making speed, playing the role of the path-finder, Fuchs is always far behind, often out of sight, only following the track of Messner’s skis. Both of them take some rest at the American Pole Station which is not allowed to help independent adventurers officially Nevertheless, the two men are kindly received by a large number of people there and given shelter inside. Messner enjoys the shower and the good food for a while, but finally withdraws to a tent outside, escaping that noisy company in overheated rooms where he cannot find any sleep. Now he is again back out there in his sleeping-bag, once more resting in the icy infinity of the White Mama

After having faced a lot of difficulties, the two adventurers, helped by favourable winds for their specially constructed glider sails, reach the New Zealand side of the Antarctica which they had traversed from the South American side, covering a distance of about 2800 km in 92 days, from 13-11-89 to 12-2-90. On the way, they had to find their path through a total of 1000 km of rugged sastruggi terrain and more than 6000 clefts in glaciers No sooner are they back in civilization than they face the ultimate chasm, that of human nature Arved Fuchs’ public relations manager feels that his client’s image as a “brakes-man” is tarnished by Messner’s one-sided presentations. A heated public debate starts via the media and Messner is deeply shocked to see his relationship with Fuchs break up as a result of this controversy Eventually, after some sickness he overcomes his disappointment and is noble enough to put remarks as the following into his book. “My respect for Arved has not diminished on any day of the long journey, and it was to be greater at the end than before we started.” Certainly, for Messner this exceptional ice-walk was a passage through the Unknown, in more than one sense.

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

### P. RAJA AND THE ART OF STORY-TELLING

SHORT story is defined in several ways by many writers. Whatever the definition, a short-story reflects a slice of life in a realistic or grotesque way. Above all, a good short-story writer is committed to give interesting reading to the reader. Names and backgrounds change but the seat of emotions, the heart, remains the same everywhere. Human emotions are sometimes portrayed in general, at some other times they form an inseparable companion of the social, economic and moral forces out of which these emotions gush forth with significance. P. Raja's first collection of short stories, *The Blood and Other Stories*\* presents such emotions coloured locally with his quaint native and irresistible style.

Of the thirteen stories, the title short story 'The Blood' is unique in its composition, narration and exposition of a poor boy's feeling. Here the writer is at his best gripping our attention by his realistic treatment of successive montages. Style and other linguistic techniques like the retention of the unpolluted native complexion with Tamil names and words make the reader feel that he is living opposite Seelan's house and not too alienated to share his joy and misery. Child psychology is analysed in depth and the writer very soon metamorphoses himself into Seelan using the magic wand of ebullient humanism. 'The Blood' is a valid document of genuine humanism and it is a humanism tempered with humour and pathos that form the warp and the woof of the linguistic matrix of the story.

'Raw Material' confers on P. Raja the title of a fine story-teller. It is absorbingly interesting due to its sheer narrative technique. Like O' Henry who mastered the art of ending a story with an unexpected twist or turn of event, Raja springs a surprise on the reader at the end. The visitor who gatecrashes into the study of the writer to engage him in a conversation with a view to supplying raw material from his own tragic experience turns out to be a ghost. From the world of the natural we are swiftly carried off into that of the supernatural and that sudden blood-curdling shift climaxes into an awful psychological experience. Alas! We tend to look around and feel like ensuring our safety before unknown visitors.

'Smoke' runs along the Mark Twain way. The narrator is an Indian Tom Sawyer with the typical Indian instinctive curiosity. One loves the story for its undiluted humour sparkling with a realistic touch. Childhood is a lost golden period for the writer and he becomes nostalgic and relives his mirth-making adventurous life as a boy. His effort to learn smoking and its subsequent 'bliss' ends in smoke and the writer is left with a smoky experience.

In another story running in the same vein 'The Pencil', the writer walks

\* Published by B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi 1991. Rs. 40 pp. 108.

down memory lane again and goes back to his childhood. All the pleasures and bitternesses associated with a Christian missionary school-life surface. Humorous, earthy and effervescent, the narrative bears the stamp of a good storyteller. The strength of the story lies in its unexaggerated confessional quality clothed in an exhilarating diction.

'The Prize Poem' is a moral story with an "once-upon-a-time" background. The king at last understands what is meant by "hidden talents". Like the king, the reader too realizes the "hidden satire". In a world of self-aggrandisers, sycophants and dunces at the helm of affairs, the deserving go unrecognized and unrewarded. This ugly façade of modern administration is camouflaged by the humorous narrative technique of ancient literature.

'The Professor' is an impeccable caricature in words of a typical absent-minded professor. Many stories are already in vogue about such a character. But P. Raja's Thasan, a dedicated professor of English literature, is an off-the-beat one. Besides his failing memory, Prof. Thasan's ingenious interpretation causes rib-breaking laughter. To his enquiry, "What day is today?", his colleague answers, "Wednesday". Prof. Thasan coolly remarks "Wednesday! . So yesterday must have been Tuesday." The piece is more like a list of anecdotes than a short story in the strictest sense.

'Old King Vikramaditya and the Modern Vetala' is a fantasy, a purely imaginary exploitation of a very old Indian folk-tale. When modern science is glorified everywhere for its cosy comforts, P. Raja goes to the other side and makes a mockery of the "overuse" of science. Like Landor's imaginary conversations, the conversation between Vikramaditya and the Vetala is made use of to satirise man's overdependence on science. In this experimentation, some tradition-bound social aspects of Hindu marital life are seriously and boldly examined only to throw light on the absurdities of a society which refuses to "see a spade as a spade".

'The Sundal-Vendor' is another humanistic story championing the cause of the underdogs. While comically expressing the inability of a poor sundal-vendor to get a piece of cloth stitched, the story exposes the vulgarity of ill-gotten richness and its attendant snobbery that has infected the present world. Honesty is now a victim at the altar of affluence. Affluence obtained through questionable means is identified as a stamp of elitism and ultramodernism. Gnani, like the writer, wonders. "Life has strange twists and turns". This story presents one such strange twist illustratively but not without tickling humour.

It is quite interesting to watch the absurdities of human life through the plain glass of absurdity. There are people who do not know or do not want to know how to spend their time usefully. They indulge in a kind of absurd drama and take pride in that. 'You want Me to Repeat It?' is a telephone conversation without any interruption from the writer. It is a no-nonsense story of "non-sense" in life. The conversational mode is handled with a superb craftsmanship.

giving no room to any kind of lull in the steady flow of the stream of non-sense. It highlights the helplessness of the gullible and the sensible and the skilfulness of the sly and the sleight-of-hander. In short, a drama apparently absurd but intensely serious beneath is staged on the thought-line between us and our own selves.

Successful horror stories cast a spell on the psyche and we read such stories stricken with eerie emotions. Their success depends on how the writer etches a word picture of the weird situation vividly with all the requisite masterly strokes so that the reader is willing to suspend his disbelief. The natural and the supernatural crisscross the narration. The unbelievable finally shapes something believable and fatal

'The Mourning Moon' is a fable and imbued with a moral. The moon is personified to participate in the human drama in order to prove that the mother is not substitutable. However, motherliness can be synonymous with mother in the act of retrieving a child from the irreparable loss of its mother. The writer meets an old man who demands one mug of toddy for one story. One mug of toddy changes hands and the story within the story is narrated by the old man. The story employs the technique of double narration and this helps the writer to give a realistic touch to his own narration of the old man's narration. Thus the "fabledness" of the story becomes feeble and approvingly believable.

'The Editor' is a clean satire on self-styled editors of magazines. Here is one such editor, Janaki, who is the embodiment of ego and never prepared to publish a poem other than hers. She lives in a world of "poetic" illusions that insulate her from realities. She calls the narrator's poems "prose-cutlets" and cynically rejects them. But the very same lady reads those "prose-cutlets" with a 'beating heart' when they are published in a much more popular daily than her begging *EYE*.

Another story 'The Wife' fathoms the meaningful depth of life. It presents a particular contrast between the ever-aspiring Indian middle-class wife and the ever-balanced wife on the tight rope of poverty. It is a rewarding experience for the narrator but his enriched experience aggravates his unhappiness with his wife. The contrast can be stretched from the particular to the general and by way of doing this, one confronts a typical wife and an ideal wife. It drives home the everlasting message that contentedness comes from within. It is the soul that makes all the difference.

P. Raja's short stories reflect mostly his felt-experiences and present varied facets of this world and the other. A short story is a personal experience at one level or another. It relies on real-life situations. But in the creative process they are fictionalized. It is the fiction, the creative fact that must dominate in a work of art like the short story. P. Raja has succeeded in fictionalizing his own experiences. The stories identify the various story-telling techniques that he has acquired. They never bore the reader whether it is a fable or a fictionalized

memoir. Agreeable style, enthralling imagination and, above all, abundant humanism pervading the stories leave the reader satisfied after his reading of the collection, *The Blood and Other Stories*. (Published by B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi 1991; Rs. 40, pp 108).

D. GNANASEKARAN

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## I AM TIRED

O LORD,  
 tired I am  
 of my boorish efforts  
 to solve the dramatized riddles  
 of Your creation.  
 My hands fail  
 to prove  
 the strength of life;  
 my legs refuse  
 to tread  
 the dolorous walks of life;  
 my heart beats  
 to show only  
 the sign of life;  
 my truant mind  
 has come round  
 the vast world  
 of arguments and counter-arguments;  
 Means I tried

to get a glimpse  
 of the depth of life  
 proved vain.

Disappointed I,  
 while counting  
 the twinkling stars,  
 wonder when  
 will the angel of peace come down  
 from the height of Your throne  
 to transform me  
 to a rejuvenated participant  
 of Your eternal play!  
 The 'I' has died,  
 yet something  
 sticks to life,  
 awaiting  
 the silent footsteps  
 of Grace.

SITANGSHU CHAKRABORTTY

## *Students' Section*

### THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Twenty-eighth Annual Conference

11 August 1991

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SRI AUROBINDO'S BIRTH

Speech read by Rajneesh Kumar Rai

ON this occasion of Sri Aurobindo's 119th birth anniversary which we are celebrating at this conference, the most important and the most appropriate thing to do is to recollect the profound significance of this day of his birth, not only for his disciples and devotees but also for the whole of humanity and, in its widest extent, for the evolutionary history of the earth at this critical juncture when it is poised for a decisive saltus to a new age which will create a new race living a divine life out of the present chaos and confusion

I propose to do this not in my own words but by reading two talks of the Mother in which she has explained in her own incomparable words the momentous importance of Sri Aurobindo's birth from several standpoints. These talks are of such unique value that we should read them again and again to imprint on our consciousness the fathomless significance of his birth. So I read them here.

The first is a very brief talk which she gave on 14 August 1957, the eve of Sri Aurobindo's birthday that year. This is what she said:

14 August 1957

"This evening, instead of answering questions, I would like us to meditate on the remembrance of Sri Aurobindo, on the way to keep it alive in us and on the gratitude we owe him for all that he has done and is still doing in his ever luminous, living and active consciousness for this great realisation which he came not only to announce to the Earth but also to realise, and which he continues to realise.

"Tomorrow is the anniversary of his birth, an eternal birth in the history of the universe."<sup>1</sup>

Then on 4 September 1957, she explained at some length the meaning of the

<sup>1</sup> *Questions and Answers, 1957-58, Collected Works of the Mother (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 9, p. 171*

phrase “an eternal birth” which she had used at the end of the above talk. This explanation is so illuminating that I shall read it whole.

4 September 1957

“Today I received a question about a phrase I used on the fourteenth of August, the eve of Sri Aurobindo’s birthday. And this question seemed interesting to me because it was about one of those rather cryptic phrases, that are almost ambiguous through simplification, and which was intended to be like that, so that each one might understand it according to his own plane of consciousness. I have already spoken to you several times of this possibility of understanding the same words on different planes; and these words were intentionally expressed with a simplification, a deliberate vagueness, precisely so that they would serve as a vehicle for the complexity of meaning they had to express.

“This meaning is a little different on the different planes, but it is complementary, and it is only really complete when one is able to understand it on all these planes at once. True understanding is a simultaneous understanding in which all the meanings are perceived, grasped, understood at the same time; but to express them, as we have a very poor language at our disposal, we are obliged to say them one after another, with many words and many explanations. . . That’s what I am going to do now.

“The question is about the phrase in which I spoke of the birth of Sri Aurobindo—it was on the eve of his birthday—and I called it an ‘eternal birth’. I am asked what I meant by ‘eternal’.

“Of course, if the words are taken literally, an ‘eternal birth’ doesn’t signify much. But I am going to explain to you how there can be—and in fact is—a physical explanation or understanding, a mental understanding, a psychic understanding and a spiritual understanding.

“Physically, it means that the consequences of this birth will last as long as the Earth. The consequences of Sri Aurobindo’s birth will be felt throughout the entire existence of the Earth. And so I called it ‘eternal’, a little poetically.

“Mentally, it is a birth the memory of which will last eternally. Through the ages Sri Aurobindo’s birth will be remembered, with all the consequences it has had.

“Psychically, it is a birth which will recur eternally, from age to age, in the history of the universe. This birth is a manifestation which takes place periodically, from age to age, in the history of the Earth. That is, the birth itself is renewed, repeated, reproduced, bringing every time perhaps something more—something more complete and more perfect—but it is the same movement of descent, of manifestation, of birth in an earthly body.

“And finally, from the purely spiritual point of view, it could be said that it



is the birth of the Eternal on Earth. For each time the Avatar takes a physical form it is the birth of the Eternal himself on Earth.

“All that, contained in two words: ‘eternal birth’.

“So, to conclude, I advise you, in future, before telling yourself: ‘Why! What does this mean? I don’t understand it at all; perhaps it is not expressed properly,’ you could say to yourself: ‘Perhaps I am not on the plane where I would be able to understand’, and try to find behind the words something more than mere words There

“I think this will be a good subject for our meditation.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* , pp 177-78