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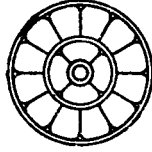
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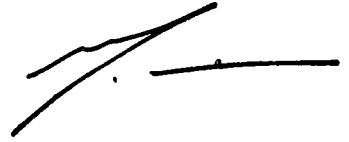
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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LIGHTS FROM THE MOTHER*

(Continued from the issue of September 1993)

The mental light no longer seems like a light in the presence of the sun.

If by “sun” you mean the supermind, it is indisputable.

But all physical lights, even the light of the sun, seem dim to an inner vision.

7 September 1969

The physical sun does not hide itself, but the supramental Light, which is greater, can hide itself. It is a mystery for man.

The physical eyes are not made to see the supramental light; that is why they cannot see it. But the human being whose inner senses are awakened can see the supramental light when he wants to—it never hides itself.

9 September 1969

“As one mounts from peak to peak, there appears all that has still to be done.” Perhaps the Rig-Veda speaks here of endless progression?

The spiritual wisdom most certainly existed for a few in that era.

22 September 1969

Is it the mind that has deprived man of the simplicity of flowers?

Undoubtedly, but the desires of the vital also have something to do with it.

26 September 1969

What must I do for the Mother to take direct charge of the sadhana?

I have already taken direct charge of the sadhana, but if you want me to express it in words you have to ask me precise, practical questions, not mental and speculative ones.

30 September 1969

More and more I see the need for mental silence, but it is a difficult thing for me.

You are not the only one to find it difficult. For more than four years I tried to

* With acknowledgments to the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* from the issues of November 1991 to February 1993

obtain it, without full result; it is Sri Aurobindo who gave it to me definitively in half an hour in 1914. Persevere and you will get it.

4 October 1969

The Divine knocks at the door, but I sleep.

Receive Him in dream, and he will awaken you.

12 October 1969

I feel that it is in my passivity to the Mother that the true activity will begin.

In truth, to know how to be passive towards the Divine Consciousness is the great secret of transformation.

14 October 1969

What is the right way to make a mental prayer?

Mental prayer is formulated in words, and when it receives its inspiration from above, the formulation becomes artistic and powerful by its beauty; at times it even has the power of an invocation.

24 October 1969

The day before yesterday, Mother, when I was with You I felt the presence of Ganesh behind me.

That is very good: Ganesh is an old friend who promised me long long ago that he would supply the needs of the Ashram, and he kept his word for years (when Sri Aurobindo was physically here). It is a good sign that he came when you were here

5 November 1969

I am less interested in the outer cure of my cough than in benefiting inwardly by it.

It is obvious that if you discover the psychological reason for the cough—that is to say, discover what in your physical or vital being resists the penetration of the Divine Force into your body—not only will you have benefited from the illness by making considerable progress, but also the body itself will begin the long work of transformation.

Blessings.

20 November 1969

The Divine is at once so near and so far?

In fact He is constantly with us, but it is only when the cells of the body open to His influence and perceive His Presence that we begin to be truly conscious of Him and of His ceaseless action.

27 November 1969

The alternations of light and darkness—what a play! But there is no longer any anxiety.

Alternations, contraries, oppositions have been the great means employed by Nature to awaken the inconscient to consciousness, and inertia to the movement of progress. When inconscience and inertia have disappeared, the alternations will no longer be necessary.

29 November 1969

Can the individual rise above the alternation of light and darkness as long as the universal inconscience and inertia still exist?

Not only can he rise above, but even a part of his consciousness can remain there permanently. It is this that gives one the capacity to be in constant conscious contact with the Supreme.

1 December 1979

Let me not be unfaithful to the sacrifice made by Sri Aurobindo for the earth!

For his consciousness it was not a sacrifice.

The earth was not yet ready to derive the greatest benefit from his physical presence.

His help is always there, conscious and active. He has said that he will come back in the first supramental body.

5 December 1969

Very rarely am I able to see You in dreams.

If you “dream” in the vital or the mental, there is little chance that you will meet me there

If your dreams are in the subtle physical, you might meet me there because often I work there at night.

7 December 1969

Is it possible to dream at will in the subtle physical in order to meet You there?

Everything is possible. It is only a matter of inner development and of the discipline needed to achieve it.

The control of the night-time activities is very interesting and has very effective results for the integral development of the being, but it is a work that demands a great deal of patience and regularity. Years are needed, sometimes, to learn what happens during one's sleep; because to remain in good health one should not run the risk of disturbing one's sleep through an ill-timed activity.

For the moment I advise you only to do a little concentration before you sleep, with an aspiration to meet me at night.

We shall see what happens

Blessings.

9 December 1969

Is the sleep of a Yogi dreamless?

They are no longer dreams. They are visions and activities in worlds that are invisible to the physical consciousness.

19 December 1969

When the mind is engaged in things that according to it are useless, it is pitiful.

There too, if it has the right attitude, it can learn and progress. When we have understood that everything that comes to us in life comes from the Supreme Lord to teach us how to live, nothing is useless any more. Our attitude changes and is enlightened.

27 December 1969

The plans made by the mind are losing their charm, but that which should replace them is not yet there.

The indications of the Higher Consciousness do not come in advance, but as they are needed.

It is virtually at every moment that one knows what has to be done, and that is why those who have a mental habit of making plans far in advance find it very difficult to obey the Divine.

But it is only a question of habit and of inner attitude, which ought to be very peaceful and attentive.

29 December 1969

In accepting or not accepting an illness, which part of the being is it whose attitude decides the thing?

A great mental will that obstinately refuses to be ill is effective

A vital power that adamantly rejects the illness is effective. A consciousness

of the cells that finds its support exclusively in the Divine Presence and refuses to receive any other influence is *much* more effective.

A total identification with the Supreme Consciousness, abolishing all division, is the sovereign remedy.

10 January 1970

I have a longing to hear Krishna's flute.

Krishna's flute is the equivalent of the Supreme Lord's smile of love. To hear the flute or see the smile, one must live in the total peace of perfect and integral surrender.

26 January 1970

The more I can draw near to You, O Divine Mother, the more life becomes the true life.

This very body is struggling to realise the true life.

13 February 1970

Can it be said that no realisation can be perfect without the participation of the cells of the body?

Most certainly, because in the divine plan for the earth, man upon earth must be succeeded by the supramental being, and all our effort must seek to prepare its coming.

11 March 1970

There is a descent of light from above like a stream; it is also welling up from below!

Yes, it is true

The light rises from the depths, just as it descends from the heights, and the two streams of light join around the earth to flood the human consciousness and prepare it for the new creation.

13 March 1970

Yesterday You said to me, "Constant alertness. No relaxation."

Yes, it is true.

The work of physical transformation has begun; but the work is immense and the years are short.

15 March 1970

(To be continued)

IDEAS AND IDEALS

PASSAGES FROM SRI AUROBINDO

Compiler's Note

(Wars are man-made holocausts. Wars, though fought on fields, are born in human minds. Wars, though instruments of regeneration, demolish what centuries make. In the following pages, Sri Aurobindo suggests a panacea for ending wars. Captions have been inserted by the compiler.—G.P. GUPTA)

WILL WARS END WARS?

MAN'S illusions are of all sorts and kinds, some of them petty though not unimportant,—for nothing in the world is unimportant,—others vast and grandiose. The greatest of them all are those which cluster round the hope of a perfected society, a perfected race, a terrestrial millennium. Each new idea, religious or social, which takes possession of the epoch and seizes on large masses of men, is in turn to be the instrument of these high realisations; each in turn betrays the hope which gave it its force to conquer. And the reason is plain enough to whosoever chooses to see; it is that no change of ideas or of the intellectual outlook upon life, no belief in God or Avatar or Prophet, no victorious science or liberating philosophy, no social scheme or system, no sort of machinery internal or external can really bring about the great desire implanted in the race, true though that desire is in itself and the index of the goal to which we are being led. Because man is himself not a machine nor a device, but a being and a most complex one at that, therefore he cannot be saved by machinery; only by an entire change which shall affect all the members of his being, can he be liberated from his discords and imperfections.

The Two Illusions

One of the illusions incidental to this great hope is the expectation of the passing of war. This great event in human progress is always being confidently expected, and since we are now all scientific minds and rational beings, we no longer expect it by a divine intervention, but assign sound physical and economical reasons for the faith that is in us. The first form taken by this new gospel was the expectation and the prophecy that the extension of commerce would be the extinction of war. Commercialism was the natural enemy of militarism and would drive it from the face of the earth. The growing and universal lust of gold and the habit of comfort and the necessities of increased

production and intricate interchange would crush out the lust of power and dominion and glory and battle. Gold-hunger or commodity-hunger would drive out earth-hunger, the *dharma* of the Vaishya would set its foot on the *dharma* of the Kshatriya and give it its painless quietus. The ironic reply of the gods has not been long in coming. Actually this very reign of commercialism, this increase in production and interchange, this desire for commodities and markets and this piling up of a huge burden of unnecessary necessities has been the cause of half the wars that have since afflicted the human race. And now we see militarism and commercialism united in a loving clasp, coalescing into a sacred biune duality of national life and patriotic aspiration and causing and driving by their force the most irrational, the most monstrous and nearly cataclysmic, the hugest war of modern and indeed of all historic times.

Another illusion was that the growth of democracy would mean the growth of pacifism and the end of war. It was fondly thought that wars are in their nature dynastic and aristocratic; greedy kings and martial nobles driven by earth-hunger and battle-hunger, diplomatists playing at chess with the lives of men and the fortunes of nations, these were the guilty causes of war who drove the unfortunate peoples to the battle-field like sheep to the shambles. These proletariates, mere food for power, who had no interest, no desire, no battle-hunger driving them to armed conflict, had only to become instructed and dominant to embrace each other and all the world in a free and fraternal amity. Man refuses to learn from that history of whose lessons the wise prate to us; otherwise the story of old democracies ought to have been enough to prevent this particular illusion. In any case the answer of the gods has been, here too, sufficiently ironic. If kings and diplomatists are still often the movers of war, none more ready than the modern democracy to make itself their enthusiastic and noisy accomplice, and we see even the modern spectacle of governments and diplomats hanging back in affright or doubt from the yawning clamorous abyss while angry shouting peoples impel them to the verge. Bewildered pacifists who still cling to their principles and illusions, find themselves howled down by the people and, what is piquant enough, by their own recent comrades and leaders. The socialist, the syndicalist, the internationalist of yesterday stands forward as a banner-bearer in the great mutual massacre and his voice is the loudest to cheer on the dogs of war.

... There have been other speculations and reasonings; ingenious minds have searched for a firmer and more rational ground of faith. The first of these was propounded in a book by a Russian writer which had an enormous success in its day but has now passed into silence. Science was to bring war to an end by making it physically impossible. It was mathematically proved that with modern weapons two equal armies would fight each other to a standstill, attack would become impossible except by numbers thrice those of the defence and war therefore would bring no military decision but only an infructuous upheaval and

disturbance of the organised life of the nations... another book was published called by a title which has turned into a jest upon the [English] writer, the "Great Illusion", to prove that the idea of a commercial advantage to be gained by war and conquest was an illusion and that as soon as this was understood and the sole benefit of peaceful interchange realised, the peoples would abandon a method of settlement now chiefly undertaken from motives of commercial expansion, yet whose disastrous result was only to disorganise fatally the commercial prosperity it sought to serve....

The men who wrote these books were capable thinkers, but they ignored the one thing that matters, human nature. The present [second world] war has justified—to a certain extent the Russian writer, though by developments he did not foresee; scientific warfare has brought military movement to a standstill and baffled the strategist and the tactician, it has rendered decisive victory impossible except by overwhelming numbers or an overwhelming weight of artillery. But this has not made war impossible, it has only changed its character; it has at the most replaced the war of military decisions by that of military and financial exhaustion aided by the grim weapon of famine. The English writer on the other hand erred by isolating the economic motive as the one factor that weighed; he ignored the human lust of dominion which, carried into the terms of commercialism means the undisputed control of markets and the exploitation of helpless populations... And when we rely upon Science to make war impossible, we forget that the progress of Science means a series of surprises and that it makes also a constant effort of human ingenuity to overcome impossibilities and find fresh means of satisfying our ideas, desires and instincts. Science may make war of the present type with shot and shell and mines and battleships an impossibility and yet develop and put in their place simpler or more summary means which may bring back an easier organisation of warfare.

A Psychological Necessity

So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return. War itself, it is hoped, will end war; the expense, the horror, the butchery, the disturbance of tranquil life, the whole confused sanguinary madness of the thing has reached or will reach such colossal proportions that the human race will fling the monstrosity behind it in weariness and disgust. But weariness and disgust, horror and pity, even the opening of the eyes to reason by the practical facts of the waste of human life and energy and the harm and extravagance are not permanent factors; they last only while the lesson is fresh. Afterwards, there is forgetfulness; human nature recuperates itself and recovers the instincts that were temporarily dominated. A long peace, even a certain organisation of peace, may conceivably result, but so long as the heart of man remains what it is, the peace will come to an end; the organisation

will break down under the stress of human passions. War is no longer, perhaps, a biological necessity, but it is still a psychological necessity; what is within us, must manifest itself outside.

... Only when man has developed not merely a fellow-feeling with all men, but a dominant sense of unity and commonalty, only when he is aware of them not merely as brothers,—that is a fragile bond,—but as parts of himself, only when he has learned to live, not in his separate personal and communal ego-sense, but in a large universal consciousness, can the phenomenon of war, with whatever weapons, pass out of his life without the possibility of return. Meanwhile, that he should struggle even by illusions towards that end is an excellent sign, for it shows that the truth behind the illusion is pressing towards the hour when it may become manifest as reality.

(Sri Aurobindo *Social and Political Thought* Birth Cent. Ed (1972),
Vol 15, pp. 582-587)

GRIEVE NOT

GRIEVE not thus, O thou,
 Who labourest in the furrows of the Gods.
 The passionate hooves of the Riders of Fate
 Trample thus always the toil of the patient.
 And heart-break is often the guerdon of the great.
 Yet each deed of the large-hearted of the world,
 Each strong stroke of a careful spade,
 Each clod of the soil loosened lovingly,
 Each glorious effort that has failed
 Is forever etched on the tablets of the Gods.
 And shy buds and hesitating seedlings
 So destroyed, will rise and flower once more
 In the marvellous Edens of Her new creation.

SHYAM KUMARI

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

A COUPLE OF OLD PERSONAL LETTERS

I FOUND your letter very enjoyable. I am never tired of reading whatever expresses sincere deeply-felt convictions—especially when the writer realises that feeling should never be gush and that one must be deep without being ponderous. You have put many things eloquently—but you have imagined me standing up for ideas and attitudes which are not truly mine. Having stayed for years in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram and known intimately the ways of the Mother and the mind of the Master, how could I ever make a fetish of the cleavage some yogis drive between the normal consciousness and the aloof Atman?

The intransigent leap into the Atman is not Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and I do not for a moment countenance the view that to withdraw or escape into the Atman and regard the world as meaningless and untransformable is the solution of life's problem. No doubt, for genuine Yogic attainment, the peace of the Atman can never be dispensed with—it has to form a sort of bedrock, but there are many other things of immense value, without which the bedrock would remain bare and one-sided. The inner withdrawal towards the still spirit is an important part of yoga, but so also is the opening of the heart and the mind and the bodily consciousness to the soothing calm of the Divine Grace, the tranquillising tenderness of the Divine Love. The gradual natural evolving method lit up by the truth-instinct of that spontaneous sweetness and light and strength within us which is our individual soul—this is for us who follow Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the most desirable and fruitful yoga. We must join with it the pressing inward towards the still infinity of the Atman and the surging upward towards the opulent and dynamic immensity of the Overhead Divine, but our daily staple has to be the soul's bliss-radiating, all-purifying, one-pointed aspiration. In fact, such an aspiration will of itself bring in the long run the liberating largeness of the Atman, though a conscious urge for the latter would establish it in us sooner. The *sine qua non* of the Integral Yoga is that aspiration. And I surely cannot pit Buddha's path or the old Vedantin way against the Aurobindonian ideal: I should be not only going against the vision I have had of Truth but also contradicting whatever little experience I might have had of Yoga.

The psychic peace beautifully flowering in us and slowly lifting our whole nature to the Divine is not something I depreciate in favour of the sudden chasm which the Atman magnificently creates between the Divine and the undivine. What I could not regard as of lasting worth was the ordinary sense of calm and repose which is got often from Nature and at other times from a temporary feeling of self-fulfilment through "what men call love", as Shelley puts it, or through some fine work accomplished. This sense can be a preparation for higher things, but one can't put a crown on its head and bend down at its feet, as

certain poets and idealists do. The direct touch of the Divine is the sole experience capable of giving basic satisfaction, radical peace—and what best constitutes that touch is the process of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga with its blend of the psychic, the spiritual and the Supramental, and its special insistence on the whole being moving forward by degrees, in an intimate rapture which is at the same time intense and calm.

I should be the last one to run down human love. I see with clear eyes its insufficiency, but, when deep and sincere, it has an idealism which breaks open many closed chambers of our being. Let me plod on to my realisation of this truth.

In my late teens and early twenties I experienced a great upsurge of intellectual power and vital energy, which swept into my consciousness various aspects of life—I felt numerous personalities coalescing within me and a capacity to deal like a master with the common vicissitudes of time. Please don't suspect I am boasting. Allow me to set down some surprising personal facts as accurately as I can. In those early days, there was nothing I could not take by the throat, so to speak, and subdue to my mind and zest. Weariness, disappointment, confusion seemed alien to me—I had a crystalline clear-headedness, the courage to face everything and a bounding vitality which was like laughter. Having a lame leg, I was not physically very strong, but my nerves were like tempered steel and, where physically stronger men got exhausted, I still felt on top of the world. I accomplished feats of intellectual activity and nervous endurance and sexual stamina. For five years I moved in a crescendo of keenness and power, until in my twenty-third year I acquired a sense of completion at the centre: that is to say, I found my individuality possessed of a roundness, a crystallised many-sidedness, an assured versatility. The mind was able always to bring a teeming wideness to a brilliant penetrating point, the life-force knew a gusto that could taste and swallow and assimilate a throbbing multitude of experiences both pleasurable and painful, voluptuous and ascetic. I felt that, as the years rolled on, I would enrich my individuality but its essential form would remain the same—a work of art whose main outlines were already chiselled out though details could be added everywhere. Thus I stood in the pride of a precocious youth.

Suddenly a force I had never met made its assault on me. I had known and enjoyed the wrestle of sexual desire and the poetry of the loins caught up in imaginative passion—but I had never been in love. For the first time the heart was flung open. And together with it there arose a hunger for the magnitudes with which my mind had so far only juggled as ideas. A poignant idealism took hold of the heart, I yearned for an inconceivable perfection through the beauty of one woman's face, I built up a whole mystical inner world whose vastness I sought to enter through the doorway of one intensely loved body, that body itself became subtilised by a certain direct intimacy with the emotional and mental

personality behind it, and in that personality I contacted a glimmer of the true psyche. All this happened because the woman I loved had passed once through a psychic phase and still bore its after-glow. The mystic in me awoke to the mystic in her—and the whole glittering universe I had constructed for myself and of which I had felt the master shook and tumbled and broke into irreparable ruins.

In the void thus created I experienced a huge capacity of self-surrender, an outrush of the heart helplessly towards a Perfection intuited as half-human half-divine. God who had been just a phosphorescent shadow in my philosophical mind turned real, stretched strange hands to grip me, drew me on and on across vistas I had never imagined, plunged me at moments into seas where thought foundered, raised me for a flash into ethers where sex dissolved into nothing. Not that the intellect and the sex-desire failed to return—they were too urgent to be set aside for long, they often made counter-attacks and obscured the inner world; but something in me had got out of them and stood in glorious defeat in the presence of the Divine. There were many false strains in my mysticism, innumerable defects and blind spots, an army of romantic perversions. These brought upon me acute suffering and depression, and a sharp feeling of failure. But the trend towards the spiritual was set and through long labyrinths of darkness shot with flashes of hurting ecstasy I came at last to the feet of Sri Aurobindo.

Love worked this miracle. It was indeed an unusual passage through love, since the psyche was so strongly involved. It seems to me that here love was just a mask worn by the psyche to carry out the Divine's decree that I should be drawn to the Truth. Most love-experiences are very far from what happened to me. Yet the fact that love was chosen as the best instrument to prepare me for Yoga shows that there is something akin in it, no matter how crudely, to the spiritual urge. I cannot, therefore, undervalue the idealistic help true love can give to the soul.

However, there is one element of love which is the most tremendous obstacle to Yoga: vital attachment. To say that true love is devoid of vital attachment is to talk of abstractions: in actual practice there is no true love without the entangling of the entrails. The beloved's fascination holds us by innumerable ties, not always openly sexual—and sometimes one acutely agonizes under its pull. Two powers alone can snap the bonds—a common ideal of Yoga kept by both the parties and the constant personal contact of a Guru. Of course the faithlessness of a lover is like a sword cutting the Gordian knot and at times turning one sharply to the Divine—but this help cannot be ascribed to any merit in human love—it is a stroke of fate manipulated secretly by the Divine. Love's merit lies only in making delightfully devastating inroads on the ego's hard self-sufficiency—it makes the being leap out of itself; but in escaping one prison it gets trapped in another: the being of the beloved. And really I don't know which is the more formidable. Vital attachment is not blind to the

beloved's defects, it often sees them and yet cannot rise above the glamour that camouflages them. A hundred voices within one rise and justify the attachment—they sing of tenderness, constancy, guardianship, completion of personality, soul-affinity. Beautiful and poetic are these voices and by themselves they make life for brief snatches a garden of wonders. Suffering and misfortune only increase at times the sharp sense of love's preciousness and poetry and the transfiguring light it casts on the earth. Yet, beheld from a Yogic standpoint, there is behind all that inspiration the black magic of vital attachment; love's spell prefigures spiritual light but can block its authentic arrival. Nothing except the combined discipleship of the lovers to a genuine Guru can gradually dissolve the spell. It is rarely that one, after plumbing the deeps of passionate tenderness in human relationship, is strong enough to track to its true home the radiance that on occasion plays about the beloved's visage. When this is done, the experience one has passed through will serve as a great impetus inward and upward: the self-giving emotions will come to the fore most easily and sweep one into the core of the Mystery—

Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal's breast. (23.4.1942)

*

Your card of good wishes from far America and the concrete expression of your helpfulness and your delightful picture and, above all, your deeply moving letter are the best things I have received to start off a happy new year. Thanks for all these gifts. *Mother India* also appreciates your gesture of assistance to it.

Your picture tells me a great deal. First of all, there is the charming resemblance between you and your little cousin, whom you are carrying in your arms. Even the expression on the two faces is essentially the same—an innocent wisdom smiling in the one case and a wise innocence a trifle mischievous in the other. This is a photograph as if of one Soul in two phases or at two stages. Could it be that by some chance your cousin is about six years old—the very age at which, as your letter says, you knew yourself as at once vanishing point and infinity?

I have called your letter “deeply moving”. I say “deeply” because what comes through is from far beyond the merely human surfaces that usually communicate with each other. And I say “moving” because the touch of depth on depth is a living one and brings some fundamental Reality home to the heart of our passionate palpable smallness and gives it an ultimate value and a golden hope. This hope I may best express by saying that in the experience you have recounted there is the promise that one day each of our tiny lives may be like a star

Tingling with rumours of the infinite.

Having had that experience in your childhood, you figure in my fancy, during all your years of a mail-man, as just such a star though in disguise, carrying news from everywhere to each place. Hardly could these places have realised that letters from far away passing through your hands came with a breath of unknown distances—no matter if these hands made no claim and were those of a simple person always aware of our common humanity.

I am so glad that you are just what you are—never thinking of yourself as anything other than a retired mail-man. This proves to me that your childhood-experience came to you through the right channel—the channel of the inmost heart, the true centre of our being. Perhaps it could not be otherwise since you were so very young and the parts in us that get puffed up with knowledge or with power had no time yet to develop and all that was there was but the soul's simplicity and spontaneity and self-forgetfulness. When extraordinary experiences pass through the mind or the life-force, there is always the danger of what the Greeks called *hubris* (towering pride) or of what the French term "la folie de grandeur" (delusion of greatness). Our superficial being is on the alert to catch hold of all divine largesse and divert it to egoistic uses. Not that the superficial being is to be thrown away: it has also a high destiny but it has to let itself be seized by the Spirit instead of seizing it. And it can take the right turn only if the inmost heart, the soul-centre in us, takes the lead in all our self-exceeding ventures. When what Sri Aurobindo names our "psychic being" is in the forefront, the surface man ceases to be a grasper and becomes a serene messenger, a smiling mail-man, of the Spirit's sweetness and light and strength.

You write that you are unable to have a repeat of your experience, but the very fact that it is "what makes life bearable or unbearable, whatever way you look at it", shows that it is still a reality every moment or rather it is at all times a subtle presence by being a tremendous haunting Absence. I am sure everything has taken a value for you, gained a fullness, by your memory of that illimitable Emptiness which was yet a strange all-sufficiency and the sole existence. What you went through on that first school-day of yours, sparked off by the words of the first chapter of Genesis, was an experience older than the Bible. The atmosphere of the ancient Upanishads enveloped you, setting apart the child that you were as the child that you would be of one who fulfilled and out-Upanishaded all the Upanishads: Sri Aurobindo. In the profoundest sense of the word, Sri Aurobindo has made you his child—and I cannot be grateful enough to him for letting me come to know you and love you. (28.1.1975)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of September 1993)

I HAD a good reason to be happy, and as soon as Nirod-da entered my place, I exclaimed: “Today I shall give you a very good piece of news.” Then I launched into my anecdote.

You know X who looks after me and helps me in so many ways. When she came yesterday morning I offered her some *prasad*, saying, “Take this. It is Sri Krishna’s *prasad*.”

“No, Esha-di, I won’t. I don’t take any other *prasad* than the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s.”

“You won’t take Sri Krishna’s *prasad*?” I asked, a little surprised. With a definite “No!” she departed without a second word. I was a bit hurt.

Early this morning she came, as she usually does, and excitedly cried out: “Esha-di, I had a strange experience while coming to you just now. You know that little bridge just before your house which is under repair? When I was crossing it, suddenly I lost my vision and became blind. Then a voice came out of my throat, ‘Kanhaiya, where are you? Where are you? Show me the way, show me the way.’ I was calling Sri Krishna and at the same time thinking, ‘Why am I calling *him*, with whom I had nothing to do? And why “Kanhaiya”, a Hindi expression?’ Then after two or three calls, suddenly a bright light, a blend of blue and gold, flared up. It came like a brilliant column from your house and fell before me, the entire area shining with that dazzling light. Then I heard a voice, ‘Why are you going in that direction? Kanhaiya is in that house from where the light is coming. Go there!’ I was struck with wonder. I have never called him in my life and here I have this extraordinary experience of him!”

You can imagine my euphoria. Sri Krishna has been my idol since my childhood.

Now to finish my story about the property¹. You will be surprised to hear that I had to commit even illegalities under compelling circumstances because of my lack of worldly experience. And you will be even more surprised to hear that the Lord helped me out everywhere. Doesn’t He see the heart of his devotee?

Let us leave aside his Lila and come to the hard facts. My mother’s death burdened me with a heavy load of property and its management. I had a very intimate friend from childhood, a distant relation, called M. She was very fond of me; it was like an obsession. We were almost twins—eating, sleeping, going for walks together. She would not even get married because of the fear of getting

¹ Editor’s Note See the last issue of *Mother India*

separated from me; but my own response to her love was not as whole-hearted, because she had a strange antipathy towards God. As God was all-in-all for me, I could not understand this strong aversion. One need not accept God, but why such a revulsion? One day I was ready to visit Sri Ramakrishna's Dakshineswar when she arrived. I invited her to come along but she instantly refused. "No, I won't go there." Similarly she would not come to Pondicherry either. Well, to each his own preference. Nevertheless, it was she who looked after the legal points concerning the property, making me free from all anxiety. One day her mother pleaded with me, "Look. You know all these years M didn't want to get married for your sake. You must do something before it's too late." I made M consent to a marriage. After her marriage she left for England. I was now extremely worried. Who would take charge of the papers, documents, etc.? She had asked me to send them over to England and she would return them after putting them in order. But that was hardly a practical solution.

Utterly resigned, I tried to look into the papers, but nothing entered my head. I called my son. He too confessed total ignorance in these matters. "Take them to the advocate," he bluntly advised. But that advice did not appeal to me. In this precarious situation I fell back upon my only refuge—my Thakur, the Lord who 'never deserts his bhakta even when the whole world leaves him', as says a Bengali song: যার কেহ নাই, তুমি আছ তার।

The answer was not long in coming. As I was desperately struggling with the figures, my great-uncle arrived. He asked, "What's the matter? You look plunged in such dark despair. What are all these papers?" I told him the facts. "Oh, that? Don't worry I'll take charge!" What a relief! Since then, for so many years he has been looking after all these tangled affairs. He never fails to send me my monthly expenses. And he does all this without the least expectation from me. God knows what will happen when he is no more there. Sometimes that thought crosses my mind.

When M returned for a visit, she enquired about me from my son and was told that I was in Pondicherry "Oh, then I will never see her again." I did not feel sad about it, even though she had done so much for me. Someone harbouring such an abnormal feeling towards God is unbearable to me, however deep her love for me.

Why does she have such a strong aversion towards God? Is it out of fear? I don't know exactly. Maybe she has imbibed it from her parents. Because, I believe, it was with her father's help that my mother had taken me away from the Ashram when I was little. Her mother too harboured baseless bitter feelings against the Ashram. And both of them had to pay a very heavy price for it. M might have attributed it wrongly to the Divine Power whom the Mother and Sri Aurobindo represented. I don't imply that they inflicted that punishment. They never do it.

Nirod-da said, "I shall tell you an interesting story on the point. One day a

young disciple came to see the Mother. He was in a bad mood. He began to abuse her as if she had done something wrong to him. The Mother remained absolutely quiet. After a few days, when he came again, his knee was bandaged and he walked with difficulty. Somehow he managed to do the *pranam*. While he was leaving, the Mother said to him, 'Listen, my child. Don't think that I have done anything to you. But there are Powers who do not tolerate such offences done to us.'

Next time I shall narrate some more instances of 'God-haters' known to me.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

UNTITLED, DATED 3.8.80

WHEN your doubts descend
The loving smiles fade
Slowly, surely you withdraw
As if everything and all has been said.
 My heart strangely turns within,
 Listens to someone somewhere therein,
 One that weaves, wonders, imagines,
 Recalls a burbling babe,
 Dwells on the mystery of the maid,
 Sees the youth's glory rushing past,
 Finds the undesired freedom that came with age.

Can I turn that into a song
 When the sights and sounds are within?
But then who shall listen to its echoes
 When my lights at last go dim?

Lt. Col. GUNINDRA LAL BHATTACHARYA

CREATION AND MY INNER FEELING

(Continued from the issue of September 1993)

THOUGH we declare that the Absolute is beyond any description and beyond mental cognition, there is actually no end in our endeavour to delve deep to understand the nature of the Absolute. We say that God (the Absolute) is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. But this requires some analysis.

First, it may be mentioned that since the Absolute is One without a second and everything is in him, it automatically follows that the Absolute is omnipresent. It is almost tautologously true.

Next, since the Absolute is the only truth and since it may be taken for granted that the Absolute will know himself fully, we may say that the Absolute should be omniscient also. But what is pertinent in this connection is to be clear as to what 'knowing' means. We want to state that we can only know things that exist or existed. Hence only the past and the present are objects of knowledge, and not the future. About the future we can only hold beliefs. Would the Absolute also hold only beliefs about the future, but not know the future in the correct sense of the term? The difference between the Absolute and mortals like us is that, while about the objects of knowledge we know only partially, or perhaps nothing at all, the Absolute knows them in full. The Absolute is certainly omniscient in this sense. It may be added here that belief in the future rests on past knowledge and on reasonings, with the further belief in the uniformity of Nature. Since the knowledge of the past and the reasoning faculty of the Absolute must be perfect and full, the belief held by the Absolute about the future must be perfectly correct, so far as the uniformity of Nature holds. But Nature is surely not as uniform in the realm of conscious beings as in the realm of the inanimates. This is because, though restricted by the limits of capabilities, the animate and conscious beings do possess and enjoy some freedom. So, would the future course of evolution be always in accordance with the beliefs and hopes held by the Absolute? But if the Absolute is the true essence of all these beings, whatever freedom they may have is the Absolute's own and in that sense cannot limit it. And who knows, perhaps the Absolute in his full self also feels it imperative to intervene at times in the proceedings of the worlds. The question of omniscience is rather complicated.

Now we come to the question of omnipotence. Since the Absolute is without any second, so all potency should be his potency and in this sense the Absolute is surely omnipotent. It would be a triviality to use the word in this sense and we do not use the word in this sense either. What we mean by the word is that whatever we may conceive of, the Absolute, if he so wills, can do it. But here we must be aware of two points. Nothing involving an internal logical contradiction can be done by any agent. Thus nobody can produce a table which is white and non-

white at the same time. Again, we can create fallacies to put the Absolute in trouble. If we ask whether the Absolute can create such a heavy object that he himself will not be able to lift it, then since here ability to do one thing implies inability to do some other thing, we see that the Absolute will be in jeopardy. Fallacies may be created by creating opposition of 'omnipotence' with 'omnipresence' or 'omniscience'. If we ask whether the Absolute can create a ball such that he is not inside it or does not know what is inside it, then again the Absolute will be in trouble. By 'omnipotence' we should mean the capacity for doing anything that does not involve logical self-contradiction, nor is fallacious. In this proper sense we do believe that the Absolute is omnipotent.

In the context of omnipotence we often face an important challenge. We have said that for God the creation is a big experiment. One may ask, if God is omnipotent, then why does he require to go on experimenting? Whatever he wills, he should be able to work out in the twinkling of an eye. So why should he take aeon after aeon to manifest himself in the evolutionary process? In this connection we shall have to understand a very deep point and then we shall see that the notion of the omnipotent God is not contradictory to the notion of the experimenting God. We posit that God is omnipotent, and because he is omnipotent he can create a problem and conditions such that, under the conditions, the solution of the problem is not trivial. An experiment which can be done in a moment is a trivial experiment and God would feel rather disinclined to take that up in his hand. We have to remember that in the act of creation God has first created the opposite of himself, the manifold mass of inert and apparently inconscient matter and he wants to manifest himself, that is, consciousness, in that ground. In this act he has to accept the fundamental limitations of the ground. For quicker performance he cannot abolish those limitations; for then there will be no embodied plurality of consciousnesses and the situation that he would arrive at would be the same in which he, as the transcendental being, was before the creation. Surely that is not what he is experimenting to do. That the work of manifesting oneself in one's opposite is not a trivial task is the thing to be understood here.

The question often arises as to whether our notion of the one conscious Absolute as the supreme truth behind the world is supported by science. The question is actually unwarranted. By science we mean knowledge acquired by empirical perceptions aided by empirical experiments and logical reasonings. We can gradually go through subtler and subtler experiments into the nature of reality and bring down the number of fundamental laws to the minimum. But science can never give an answer to the questions of the ultimate 'what', 'why' or 'how', for that is not possible for any empirical knowledge. But such questions about the ultimate are inherent questions of man's mind. We have to seek answers to such questions through deep and sympathetic thoughts and feelings. The knowledge that we derive and the ideas that we arrive at in this way are

called 'metaphysics', because they are beyond the purview of physics and the sciences. However, it is true beyond doubt that, in the empirical sphere, scientific truth is the truest truth and we are of the opinion that if there is a contradiction of our thoughts and beliefs with scientific truths, then we must understand that such thoughts and beliefs have somewhere gone wrong and they are either to be rejected or corrected. But again, since science does not claim its knowledge as total and final, it should also be understood that absence of scientific proof is not a scientific contradiction and, as made clear above, it is futile to seek for scientific justifications in any thoughts about the ultimates. Thus on the one hand we may cast reasonable doubt on many unscientific supernatural tales, but on the other hand we need not be obliged to agree that God is invalidated due to want of proof (*Īśvara asiddhya pramānābhāvāt*). If we ask ourselves the question as to what empirical knowledge will have the stamp of full and final knowledge then we will see that there is no answer to such a question. Even if science is able one day to bring down the number of fundamental laws to the minimum one, the question will remain as to why that law holds. In fact, how much merit a belief deserves depends on how much of an harmonious idea it brings about life and the world around us. At the highest level of understanding complete consistency and complete truth become equivalent.

In our narration of the theory of creation it has been mentioned before that the present world of our perception may well have a beginning and an end. We find lines in our ancient scriptures in support of this view. It is said that the manner in which great time usurps all living beings is also how the supreme goddess Kali usurps great time (*Kalanāt sarvabhūtānām mahākālah prakṛtiḥ/ Mahākālasya kalanāt tamādyā kālīkā parā⁶*). This great time spanning one creation has been referred to as 'kalpa' in our scriptures. Now, it will be natural for us to ask, what is the exact status of this world, finite in time, in the hand of the timeless? It would be rather unnatural to think that in eternal time the Absolute began his play once and for once only. For, if that be the case, then since there would have been an infinite period of time before the play began, it would mean that the Absolute, after staying alone for an infinite period of time, suddenly became desirous of having company. This would be an oddity which is unimaginable about the Absolute. It would be more likely for anyone who can remain alone for an infinite period of time, to remain so for any infinite period of time. We think the Absolute's play with multiplicity is also eternally with the Absolute, or if the Absolute desires cessation of the play also, at times, then his play, like an intermittent spring, is his companion for the infinity of time. Whichever idea is correct, we may say, following George Bernard Shaw, that in the hand of the timeless this finite rotating universe is like a spinning top. Just as a playful boy spins a top by letting loose his string and when the spinning stops he winds the top again with his string and spins it again, so also is the play of the timeless eternal. Only we have to remember that God's play is not a play with

puppets. It is his experimental play and his soul's play that goes on with evernewness through the ages (kalpas). This play may quite well be with intervals of repose. For there is no reason why, because a boy is playful, he cannot have intervals of repose. Maybe an interval in God's play is a time for planning or an incubation stage for the next game.

We want to reflect further on the nature of the absolute self. The aspect of the Absolute which is immanent is the changing aspect or the self-deploying aspect of the Absolute. We call it the *kṣararūpa* of the Absolute. Again, the transcendent aspect of the Absolute is its changeless aspect. We call it the *Akṣararūpa* of the Absolute. It is to be well understood that the changing aspect of the Absolute is not an incidental aspect, because there cannot be an outside cause effecting a change in the Absolute. Thus the *ksara* and the *akṣara* both are the Absolute's own two aspects. These aspects of the Absolute or the Brahman are referred to as the *ksara* Brahman and the *akṣara* Brahman. The Brahman himself, possessing both these aspects, is called the Parabrahman. On the other hand the Absolute, because he is capable of doing work and producing results, is also regarded as a person or Purusha. The Absolute in his immanent or changing aspect is referred to as *ksara* Purusha and the Absolute in his transcendent or unchanging aspect is referred to as *aksara* Purusha (It should be noted that the Absolute, in his transcendent aspect, does not produce results, but since the Absolute himself, if he so likes, can produce results, he is looked upon as Purusha and the Absolute in his unchanging aspect is referred to as *akṣara* Purusha) Since *ksara* Purusha and *akṣara* Purusha are two aspects of the same Absolute, the Absolute possessing the two aspects is called the supreme Purusha (*uttama* Purusha) or the Purushottama. It may be noted therefore that Parabrahman and Purushottama are one and the same thing. Looked at from the side of all-pervasiveness, the Absolute is called the Parabrahman, and looked at from the side of efficaciousness, the Absolute is called Purushottama. When in the Gita Sri Krishna declares himself as the Purushottama and as the basis of the Brahman, it must mean that the Purushottama is the basis of the two aspects, the *ksara* and the *aksara*, of the Brahman. But the same is true for the Parabrahman too.

We have said that gradual manifestation of consciousness in the material basis is the purpose of this creation. The thing, however, should be understood in a wider sense. Otherwise the shooting forth of so many streams and substreams in the evolution-flow will lose its meaning for us. The plurality and diversity in the manifestation of the material forms must have various utilities in the growth and preservation of life and must be, apart from that, the reflection of a dream of creating aesthetic beauty that makes life more attractive and livable. Again, the plurality and diversity in the manifestation of living forms must be for the purpose of flowering of potencies, sensibilities and intelligence. Though man is the last and the best product of evolution at least to this date, there was a

creative play of endless variety before the advent of man and this has enriched man's life in colour and form, in light and sound and in various other ways. We feel in our inner self that in every act of creation lies an equal touch of the creative artist and so God or Brahman is equally present in every spot of his creation. It is for this reason that Brahman is called *Samam* Brahman or equal Brahman.

Though God, as an artist, is equally present in every form of his creation, the fact remains that there is an ascending chain of his self-manifestation in the form of manifestations of consciousness in the evolutionary process. In this context, a question regarding the history of time arises in our mind. Though man is the latest and as yet the best product in the evolutionary process, its progress has not stopped. Can it happen that some day some superior species, transcending man, will appear here on earth or somewhere in a distant place? Well, we do not know whether life at all exists anywhere in any other place, but we may give thought as to what may happen or is likely to happen here on earth. In this connection what first occurs to our mind is that the type of imperfection or unfulfilment that man feels in himself does not include dearth of physical strength, acumen or dexterity. Any shortcomings in these spheres are more than compensated by man's intelligence and inventions. Apart from that lies the unique feature that man is the only species in the animal kingdom which can store knowledge for the future and can gain from the stored knowledge of the past and then go on adding to it. It is by dint of this faculty that man is progressing with the generations and for this very reason, it seems, there will be hardly any necessity for any new species transcending man. The evident fact that man is incomparably superior to any other species seems to point to eventualities in this direction. It appears that the future development in the evolutionary process will be the development of the qualities of our head and heart. We shall require endless pursuit for knowledge on the one hand and, on the other hand, purification in the field of our feelings. We shall require efforts to solve the problems of the individual as well as the problems of the social life. It goes without saying that the efforts and the labour that man will be required to put forth for achieving all this will make man worthy of manhood.

We have talked of the gradual development of man. But invariably connected with it lurks one question which may be said to be our last and final question. It is the question of welfare. Facing loss of peace and happiness and being entrapped in unbearable but insuperable adversities, we often lose faith in God and begin to question his intentions. Even if God is playful, we ask, what is the relation of his play with our welfare? In this context we have to realise that the human notion of welfare and benevolence cannot be thrust in a human way on God. We have to remember that God's creation is itself becoming many from one and multiplicity is impossible without separation among wholes. This

separation is the product of God's creative energy (Maya) which involves creation of ignorance. To expect that the ways of the world should always be pleasant does not bespeak wideness of vision. We must not lose sight of the sublimity of the creation, nor, for that matter, of the creator, and must understand that sublimity and pleasantness do not go together. The sublime inspires awe and reverence in us and not pleasance. Consider the question of the slayer and the slain and of the devourer and the devoured. It is no use asking questions of the just and the unjust here, for we do not know if life is possible at all except in that manner. But we shall have also to remember that being red in tooth and claw and playing havoc with destructions are not the only aspects of Nature. Nature has her benign and graceful aspects too, for otherwise life would not endure at all and would surely not flourish. And man in his life has to support Nature in this aspect of hers. In this connection we must realise that, at the level of man, evolution must proceed with the conscious co-operation of man, for continued progress is only possible when the products of the past progress are made use of for further progress. This will also be God's acknowledgement of human freedom of which man himself should be proud.

Truly speaking, what destroys man's feeling of welfare is man's selfishness and jealousy and the intolerance, violence and unfaithfulness born from that. But these are shortcomings that man can get over. If some are able to do that, why not all? After all, it is not a question of capacity, but only of will and choice. True, selfishness grows out of separateness, but though multiplicity and separation will be there, man is aware or should be aware of the fundamental oneness. That knowledge is true knowledge and if man can rest on that knowledge then maladies born out of selfishness will go. Ethics lies in the norm that one must not deal with others in any such manner which, if reciprocated to himself, will be unwelcome. (*Na tat parasya sandaddhyāt pratikulam yadāt-manah.*⁷)

To rise still above, we may remember Vivekananda when he says that one should not search for God by pushing aside those who are in front, for those who serve living souls serve God indeed (*Bahurūpe sammukhe tomār chāri kothā khunjucho īśvar / Jive prem kare jei jan seijan sebiche īśvar.*⁸)

Through such tenets of service we shall be able to realise in our heart the meaning of God's saying in the Gita that one who loves God and identifies himself with God as seated in all, he is verily in God, in whatever situation he is. (*Sarvabhutasthutam yo mām bhajatyekatyamāsthutah / Sarvathā vartamān'opi sa yogi mayi vartate* ")

We reiterate and say that to express himself in the ignorance and in the many is God's play. What greater assurance than this, of human welfare, can there be? Man must understand that, at the conscious human level, the work of expression has to be carried out by himself. Therein lies his difference from the

lesser animals and therein lies his glory. That must therefore be the divine dispensation too and the divine call.

(Concluded)

ASHOK KUMAR RAY

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- 7 Mahābhārata, Anushilan parva, 1/13/8
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- 9 Gita, 6/31

THIS LITTLE BOAT

WHEN the moon arose
 In the horizon,
 Across the seas,
 The boat left the shore.
 A thousand hurricanes
 Of passions,
 A hundred crosscurrents
 Of desires
 It came through
 And stood in muse
 At Thy heart's core.

But why, my Adored One,
 Why dost Thou

Let it stand waiting!
 Behind heaped
 Clouds upon clouds
 It may drench and drown
 In seconds.
 Delay no more.
 Touch this little boat
 With Thy look,
 Hold it tight
 With Thy love
 And take everything
 That it has
 With Thy smile.

SURYAKANTI

WHAT WAS THIS OMNIPOTENT FORCE?

AN EXPERIENCE OF 25 FEBRUARY 1974

ON 22 February 1974 I returned to Mysore with my elder brother Babnanna, after having the Darshan of 21 February at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. We were tired after a whole day's bus journey of over 12 hours. The next two days I lived inwardly in the Darshan milieu and engaged myself in reading articles connected with the Mother's withdrawal appearing in the January 1974 issue of *Mother India*.

On the morning of 25 February I went to take my bath at the country-tiled bathroom situated at the rear of the house. Through the joints of the tiles of the roof sun-rays were falling on my face and the deflected rays passing through the pouring water on my head were playing on my eyes. At this juncture a marvellous force started flowing into my body from the top of the head. It was most powerful and tremendous the like of which I had not experienced earlier. With its flowing my body started becoming lighter and lighter and its colour changing to a golden hue. The flow of the force continued as I continued my bath.

I finished bathing, came out of the bathroom and went to the dressing-room. Even so the force continued to descend into my body. It made me feel most powerful, almost omnipotent. The earth seemed like a football and I felt that I had no physical limits: I could do anything. At this stage with the force still continuing to flow into my body a feeling started developing that my body might not be able to bear and contain the tremendous impact of this force. It also seemed that the descending force might shatter my heart and break my body to pieces, it being unprepared to receive and contain it. This thought of the weakness of the body made me try to prevent the force from flowing into me. So I started working on it to see that it stopped its flow. Even with the force flowing into the body I took out my diary, sat at a table and commenced jotting down the experience, lest I should forget it later. The force was still flowing, and its presence in my body was still there even after I had noted down the experience. Later it slowly and steadily commenced withdrawing.

The force had begun to flow into my body in the bathroom at about 8-30 A.M. and withdrew at 9-14 A.M. in the dressing-room. The experience was so concrete and material that I was experiencing its flow and its omnipotent power in my body even when I was engaged in taking bath, applying soap, brushing myself down, walking into the dressing-room and changing my clothes, etc. I do not know what that force was. Nor has it been repeated since then. I am narrating the experience as noted down in my diary dated 25 February 1974 to serve as a spiritual record.

S.G. NEGINHAL

EDITOR'S COMMENT

I am reminded of a stanza in Sri Aurobindo's poem, "Jivanmukta":

A Power descends no Fate can perturb or vanquish,
 Calmer than mountains, wider than marching waters,
 A single might of luminous quiet
 Tirelessly bearing the worlds and ages.

Shri Neginhal's experience is not so complete or significant, not a part of a great spiritual realisation, but the force that came down into him is clearly an offshoot of the "overhead" infinite consciousness expressed in Sri Aurobindo's poem.

In view of Shri Neginhal's fear about his body's capacity to bear or hold the descending force we may recall the two lines from Sri Aurobindo's poem "Descent":

Dire the large descent of the godhead enters
 Limbs that are mortal.

What more particularly comes to mind is a verbal communication to me many years ago by A.B. Purani, one of Sri Aurobindo's earliest disciples. Referring to the preparatory days of his yoga before joining the Ashram at Pondicherry, he said: "At times I used to feel a force coming into me, which gave me the sense that with it I could shatter even mountains."

K D. SETHNA

THE GAME

O PILGRIM soul, carrying the blazing Fire as your sustenance on the Highway,
Accept all as companions, hate none, despise not the blind and the violent.
Do not condemn anyone nor turn away from the vilest demon and the beast.
Discover the wide universal Self forever containing all creation.
Deepen your look, what you find outside resides equally in you.
No one was there yesterday and no one can stay too long in this game.
Every moment the familiar universe plunges into nothingness,
Revealing in its trail a new façade constantly renovated.
What is this comedy? Who is the author of this enigmatic drama?
Old worlds fade away, old songs and laughter, old battle-cries,
Tales of love and horror, scenes of beauty and terror, man and demon,
Half-burnt corpses, flower-garlands and jubilant boats float down the Ganges—
Bitter, sweet, terrifying, devilish, fragrant nostalgic dreams.
Who are these evanescent players, animated clay-models
Breathing a mighty passionate indestructible Fire?
Pale, fragile, living on the brink of utter disaster each moment,
Yet a fountain-head, messenger of some tantalising Felicity,
A supremely blissful divine eternity where death is absent,
The invincible spirit of man reaches out frantically for an Immortal Sun.
The everchanging flow of birth and sunrise
And the inevitable decline and oblivion,
Could this be the ecstatic spiral dance, shifting images and rhythms
Of a supreme, immeasurable, mysterious, all-surpassing Goddess of Beauty?
Each pebble and grain, flower and insect, bird or animal, all mouths and eyes
Are only so many million keyholes, windows and doors opening into the Real.
Each face and form is a cryptic symbol-image of a sublime eternal Being.
The masked Actor comes and leaves the stage when his part is done,
Ad infinitum.
The eternal blissful Self lives on through unending cycles of Exit and Dawn.

NIRANJAN GUHA ROY

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of September 1993)

THE CONGRESS IN 1907: A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY

“THE Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress in 1906 witnessed a sort of compromise between the Moderates and the Extremists. Though the personality of the grand old man, Dadabhai Naoroji, ensured a smooth Session, and the differences were somehow patched up, it left a legacy behind which manifested itself in a keen controversy between these two parties about the aims and methods, which lasted throughout 1907. This controversy gave rise to a general apprehension in the mind of the Extremists, and the Moderates were determined to recover some of the grounds which they had lost in Calcutta, during the next Session of the Congress. This meant that the resolutions on Self-Government, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education which were passed in Calcutta against the opposition of a Section of the Moderates, would be omitted or whittled down by the Moderates at the next Session of the Congress.”¹

Propositions of Boycott and National Education were excluded from the programme of the next conferences by the Moderates.

Perhaps, “two events, outside India, in 1905-1906, had repercussion on the two parties. The Russo-Japanese war came to an end in 1905 and the resounding victory of Japan over Russia had a great repercussion on Indian Nationalists. Their ideal of complete Independence from the British yoke received a stimulus from the fact demonstrated by Japan that the Europeans were not invincible, and that the Asiatics did not lack the inherent powers to become as great as they. Whether such a feeling was just and proper may be doubted, but contemporary literature—including periodicals—leaves no doubt that Indian Nationalism was buoyed up with new hope and fresh courage by the example of Japan and it gave a great stimulus to the Extremists’ Party.”²

The conference at Berhampur which was held on the 30th March 1907 was the first Provincial Conference after the historic twenty-second session of the Congress at Calcutta. Sri Aurobindo considered the policy of the Berhampur Conference and wrote:

“A heavy responsibility rests upon the delegates who have been sent to Berhampur from all parts of Bengal. .. At that Session the Policy of Self-development and Self-help was incorporated as an integral part of the political programme by the representatives of the whole nation; the policy of passive resistance was declared legitimate under circumstances which cover the whole of India, and it was decided that a constitution of working organisation should be created for the promotion throughout the year of the programme fixed by the Congress for the whole nation and by the Provinces for themselves.”³

Sri Aurobindo further stated:

“We trust therefore that the delegates at Berhampur will give a mandate to the newly-formed council to organise Swadeshi and Boycott in a practical manner and devise means by which they can be rendered stringent and effective and to see that national schools be established in every district and national support be given to the Council of Education. If they fail to do this, they will have done considerably less than their duty.... They are travelling all over India. Swadeshi has been universally recognised, Boycott is a fact in Maharashtra as well as in Bengal, and is now being publicly advocated in the North and in Madras.”⁴

After the Calcutta Congress it was decided that the annual Congress Conference was to be held every year in the last week of December. Provincial Conferences were organised in order to propagate the ideals of Nationalism. At the Surat Congress, Sir Pherozshah Mehta excluded the resolutions of National Education, Boycott and Swaraj from the programme. Sri Aurobindo vehemently criticised him:

“... the characteristic proceedings of Sir Pherozshah Mehta... bears a strong family likeness to the ways of the Provincial Congress autocrats all over India. The selection of a subservient President who will call white black at dictatorial bidding, the open scorn of public opinion; the disregard of justice, of fair play, of constitutional practice and procedure of equality of all before recognised law and rule, and of every other principle essential to a self-governing body; the arrogant claim on account of past ‘services’ to assert private wishes, opinions, conveniences as superior to the wishes, opinions and conveniences of the people’s delegates; these are common and universal characteristics in the procedure of our autocratic democrats. The difference is merely in personal temperament and manner of expression. ‘The State?—I am the State,’ cried Louis XIV. ‘The Country? I am the Country,’ cries Sir Pherozshah Mehta or Pundit Madan Mohan Malaviya or Mr. Krishnaswamy Aiyer, as the case may be.”⁵

Sri Aurobindo further wrote:

“As Mr. Tilak pointed out at Kolahpur, the object of the National movement is not to replace foreign autocrats by the Swadeshi article, but to replace an irresponsible bureaucracy by popular Self-Government.

“At Ahmedabad, we remember, the Swadeshi Resolution was disallowed in the Subject Committee because Sir Pherozshah Mehta would not know where he could get his broad cloth, if it were passed. The Nation was not to resolve in helping forward its commercial independence because Sir Pherozshah Mehta preferred broad cloth to any other wear.... And now the people of Bombay are not to educate themselves on national lines because Sir Pherozshah Mehta does not know what a Nation means nor what Nationalism means nor, in fact, anything except what Sir Pherozshah Mehta means.”⁶

We regret that the delegates at Surat did not insist on their rights.—Sir

Pherozshah Mehta came to Calcutta, prepared to do at the Congress precisely what he has now been doing at the conference; but he found a Spirit awakened in Bengal before which a hundred Pherozshahs are as mere chaff before the wind. It is a Spirit which will tolerate no dictation except from the Nation and from the laws which the Nation imposes on itself. The progress of the National cause depends on the awakening of that Spirit throughout India. Let there be only one dictator—the people.”⁷

The Nationalists had a strong hold at the conference which was held at Midnapore from 7 to 9 December 1907. It was obvious that the Extremist Party formed the majority at the conference. The Moderates' group invited Surendra Nath Banerjee and other leaders from Calcutta.

“After the *Bande Mataram* case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal. He led the party at the Session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two Parties.”⁸ The Moderates lost the confidence of the conference, as they elected Mr. K.B. Dutta as the President of the Conference. Sri Aurobindo logically disapproved the idea of electing Mr. K.B. Dutta. He said: “The *Bengalee* calls for discipline and submission to leadership; but who are the leaders to whom we are to yield this unquestioning military obedience? What is the qualification in Mr. K.B. Dutta of Midnapore, for instance, by virtue of which we are called upon to sacrifice for his sake our national self-respect, our convictions, and our natural right to a free exercise of our individual reason and conscience? The *Bengalee* talks of age, but it is preposterous to set up age by itself as the claim to leadership in Politics; nor did the Moderate leaders themselves show an overwhelming deference to age when they were themselves younger and more ardent. Respect for age as a part of social discipline we can understand, but leadership by seniority is a new doctrine. Then again the *Bengalee* talks of authority. What authority? The authority of social position, wealth, professional success? Are we to obey Mr. K.B. Dutta because he is the leader of the Midnapore bar just as the East Bengal Mohamedans obey Solimullah because he is the Nawab of Dacca? We decline to accept any such law of obedience.”⁹

“The *Bengalee* says: ‘The attempt that was made to tackle the President and to bring into contempt his position as the head of the Conference was unique in the history of our Conferences and Congresses. We have never witnessed in the whole course of our public life a proceeding... so derogatory to the authority of the President.’ The ‘heckling’ took place before Mr. K.B. Dutta was elected, when the President’s chair was vacant. Are we then to suppose that a man becomes President before he is elected? It is curious that Mr. K.B. Dutta himself made this unwarranted claim when the trouble first began. By custom the Reception Committee designates the President but the decision of the Committee has no binding force on the delegates of the Conference, who have always

the power to elect anyone else whom they may prefer and not till a public confirmation by the votes of the delegates, has the President designated by the Reception Committee any authority or tenure of office ”¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo quoted the example of Ireland’s National Movement. He said: “Before Parnell’s advent, the Irish Party in Parliament was a Moderate Party of Irish Liberals of very much the same nature as the old Congress Party before Boycott. It was balanced in Ireland by a revolutionary organisation using the most violent means employed by secret societies. When Parnell first appeared on the scene, his first action was to revolt against the leader of the Irish Party and make a Party of his own. Consisting at first of a mere handful it soon captured the whole of Ireland and created a solid phalanx. But what was the secret of Parnell’s success? Parnell, unlike our Moderate leaders, did not dwarf the ideal of a national movement but always held the absolute Independence of his country as the goal: he made it a fixed principle to accept no half-way house between independence and subjection short of an Irish Parliament with independent powers; he suffered no man to enter his party who did not pledge himself to refuse all office, honour or emolument from the alien government and he showed his people a better way of agitation than mere dependence on England on one side and secret outrage on the other—the way of passive resistance, obstruction in Parliament and refusal of rent in the country. Only so could Parnell succeed in creating the solid phalanx, and when it was broken, it was by the folly of his adherents who receded from his principles and sacrificed their leader at the bidding of an English Statesman. If Sriyut Surendranath wishes to have the country solidly behind him, he must be a Parnell first and not shrink from a Parnellite policy and ideals. Only clear principles and unambiguous conduct can secure implicit obedience.”¹¹

As a protest, the Nationalists left the conference, met separately on two days, the first day with Sri Aurobindo in the chair, and passed the original Nationalist Resolutions on Swaraj, Swadeshi and Boycott, which the Moderates had sought to whittle down and forwarded them to the Congress Session at Surat which was likely to meet from December 26, 1907.

Surendra Nath Banerji figured himself as an exponent of “New Nationalism”. Sri Aurobindo exposed the psychology of the political background of the “New Nationalism” of Surendra Nath Banerji and gave a witty argument as follows.

“We congratulate Babu Surendranath on his conversion to the New Nationalism, but we are not sure that we can congratulate the New Nationalism on its convert. Nationalism is, after all, primarily an emotion of the heart and a spiritual attitude and only secondarily an intellectual conviction. Its very foundation is the worship of national liberty as the one political deity and the readiness to consider all things well lost if only freedom is won. ‘Let my name be blasted,’ cried Danton, ‘but let France be saved.’ ‘Let my name, life, possession

all go,' cries the true Nationalist, 'Let all that is dear to me perish, but let my country be free.' But Babu Surendranath is not prepared to consider the world well lost for liberty. He wishes to drive bargains with God, to buy liberty from Him in the cheapest market, at the smallest possible price. Until now he was the leader of those who desired to reach a qualified liberty by safe and comfortable means. He is now for an unqualified liberty; and since the way of absolute liberty cannot be perfectly safe and comfortable, he wants to make it as safe and comfortable as he can."¹²

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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THE PAINTER

AN unknown with his unseen hands
 Painted magnificent figures
 In the deep blue of the sky.

Not satisfied
 He redrew the figures
 A thousand times.

Was he an artist
 Searching the ultimate,
 Or a child
 Playing with naughty hands?

K.N. VIJU

A THREEFOLD LINE OF SOCIAL PROGRESS

INDIVIDUALISM, SOCIALISM AND ANARCHISM

Introduction

IT is difficult to say when the social sense developed in human beings. In the early stages of human history, individuals formed groups to safeguard their life from external dangers. With the growth of civilisation society came into being. Different groups merged into a greater group which developed into a society, or those groups ceased to have their existence for some unavoidable reasons, giving place to a greater group to form a society. The social sense developed after the formation of the society. But the expression of this social sense had no definite shape. Earlier it had its existence in the subconscious region of the mind of man. We may call it a pre-rationalistic subconscious social sense. At this stage people felt the necessity to form a community. Still a real social sense could not develop then, because no clear meaning of it was known. With the increase of the rational power in man the concept of society developed. From then on, people became aware of mutual relationships. A sense of duty towards others developed. The social sense comprises all kinds of behaviour which have a binding force upon each individual belonging to a society. Gradually the concept of society became wider and along with it the social sense also got a wider significance. The meaning of social progress came into light with the further evolution of the society. As the social life is dynamic, so the meaning of social progress also began to change from time to time. This gradual change resulted in the creation of different theories like individualism, socialism and anarchism.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that the social life has to pass through three successive stages, individualistic, socialistic and anarchistic. It is reason which links them up. The individualistic stage is characterised by democratic liberty, free thinking and action. The socialistic stage is concerned with the introduction of a governmental communism where the principle of equality is emphasised and the State is held supreme. The anarchistic stage represents 'either a loose voluntary co-operation or a free communalism with brotherhood and comradeship' without any governmental intervention. As reason links up the three stages, let us deal with the nature of reason first.

I. The Nature of Reason

In human history there was also a period known as the infra-rational age. That age was mainly characterised by insight or intuition and reason occupied a less important place. Unlike intuition, reason interprets life with the idea. Reason analyses and generalises the facts of life in accordance with the idea. "And in order that these ideas may not be a mere abstraction divorced from the

realised or realisable truth of things, it has to be constantly comparing them with facts.”¹ Although reason compares ideas with facts, still it does not live in facts only but also in possibilities. It is not satisfied with realised truths, it looks towards ideal truths. Because of this characteristic inherent in reason the age of reason may be marked as an age of progress.

The business of reason consists in finding out whatever truth prevailed in the past and, if there was any, it asks how far it would suit the present situation. Reason never supports any tradition blindly, it asks how far the agreed opinion is right. “Reason cannot accept any institution merely because it serves some purpose of life; it has to ask whether there are not greater and better purposes which can be best served by new institutions. There arises the necessity of a universal questioning and from that necessity arises the idea that society can only be perfected by the universal application of the rational intelligence to the whole of life, to its principle, to its details, to its machinery and to the powers that drive the machine.”²

This reason cannot be used only to support the interests of a ruling class or to support the interests of a few pre-eminent thinkers. Reason must have a universal support from all sections of people. Hence arises the necessity of counting upon the wills of all individuals. This brings in the principle of individualistic democracy. Further, individuals should conduct their lives according to their own reason and thus allow the same principle in respect of others’ lives. They should not dictate to others, rather allow them to follow their own reason freely. But this individualistic thinking will not remain absolutely individualistic; it will contribute to build up a common thinking through contact with others’ thought. The common thinking thus built up will enable the society to follow common ends. By the free use of reason man can become truly rational and through common judgment he would lead a rationalised social life.

From the above short account of the nature of reason it is clear that reason plays an important role in the interpretation of the problem of social progress. We now pass on to the different theories of social progress.

II. Individualism

Individualism or the age of Reason arises out of the failures and frustrations of the conventional age. The rise of rationalism is a protest against the conventional order of the society. The individual begins to question the justification of the prevalent conventions or customs of the society which, he thinks, is irrational in nature. Reason, not custom, should find the truth. It is in Individualism that reason gains a dominant place. As Sri Aurobindo observes: “The individualism of the new age is an attempt to get back from the conventionalism of belief and practice to some solid bedrock, no matter what, of real and tangible Truth. And it is necessarily individualistic, because all the old

general standards have become bankrupt and can no longer give any inner help; it is therefore the individual who has to become a discoverer, a pioneer, and to search out by his individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire, claim upon life or whatever other light he finds in himself the true law of the world and of his own being.”³

According to Sri Aurobindo, Individualism had its beginning in Europe first. It entered in the East through the Western education and the Western way of life and culture. Political and economic changes of the Western world gradually slid into the minds of the East. The scientific truths discovered by the West had an immense influence upon the other peoples of the world. Religious faith became faint and weak. Reason and rational enquiry became a dominant feature in the field of religion. Scriptures or dictums of the Church were put to question. Even in politics the divine authority of the King was questioned. The social status and special privileges of a particular section were no longer given high esteem. Thus individualism appeared to destroy the falsehood prevalent in the social life and provide a possible ground for the truth thereby.

But to find a possible ground Individualism had to depend upon the available enlightenment of the time. It turned towards religious reformation first. It encouraged a movement of religious freedom which in Europe “took its stand first on a limited, then on an absolute right of the individual experience and illumined reason to determine the true sense of inspired Scripture and the true Christian ritual and order of the Church.”⁴ In the East Individualism flourished in the form of religious and educational reforms. In the West Individualism was marked by atheism and secularism. So Individualism flourished in the East with a different interest than in the West. While the European Individualism was marked by the spirit of the Renaissance, the Asian Individualism was marked by the spirit of the Reformation. Sri Aurobindo comments, “The Renaissance gave back to Europe on one hand the free curiosity of the Greek mind, ... on the other the Roman’s large practicality and his sense for the ordering of life in harmony with a robust utility and the just principles of things.... It was from these sources that the individualistic age of Western society sought ultimately for that principle of order and control which all human society needs and which more ancient times attempted to realise first by the materialisation of fixed symbols of truth, then by ethical type and discipline, finally by infallible authority or stereotyped convention.”⁵

But absolute Individualism may lead to a disorder because of an absence of common social order. There may be conflicting opinions, or conflicting interests. This would create a disorder in the social body. Hence Individualism has to search out, first, a general standard of Truth, to which each individual will submit; and secondly, some principle of social order ‘founded on a universally recognisable truth of things’. These two desiderata will impose some sort of restraint upon an absolute and chaotic kind of Individualism.

Europe discovered that the search for the two desiderata would find its consummation in Science. In Science we find a truth of things and it is in Nature that Science discovers general laws and principles which can be verified by all. Science provides us with a standard and a norm of knowledge which is universal and so acceptable to all.

But this discovery of universal laws by Science is both the triumph and the death of Individualism. By discovering the universal laws, Science, on the one hand, has saved human life from chaos and herein lies its triumph; on the other hand, it has brought all individual wills under a general will, all individual truths under a general truth, and thus it has brought about the death of Individualism. Hence Sri Aurobindo observes, "For this discovery by individual free-thought of universal laws of which the individual is almost a by-product and by which he must necessarily be governed, this attempt actually to govern the social life of humanity in conscious accordance with the mechanism of these laws seems to lead logically to the suppression of that very individual freedom which made the discovery and the attempt at all possible."⁶

Not only this. Even in the political field scientific generalisation resulted in the curtailment of human freedom. Sri Aurobindo gives us a correct analysis of this fact. He says, "In seeking the truth and law of his own being the individual seems to have discovered a truth and law which is not of his own individual being at all, but of the collectivity, the pack, the hive, the mass. The result to which this points and to which it still seems irresistibly to be driving us is a new ordering of society by a rigid economic or governmental Socialism in which the individual, deprived again of his freedom in his own interest and that of humanity, must have his whole life and action determined for him at every step and in every point from birth to old age by the well-ordered mechanism of the State."⁷ Thus Sri Aurobindo points out that Individualism trying to establish itself on the foundation of science would pave the way for its own annihilation through the negation of individual freedom. As a result the State authority would dominate over the masses. There would emerge a new type of social morality, a new type of socialistic order, and no individual would be allowed to question this new system. Keeping a vigilant eye on this fact Sri Aurobindo observes, "Thus we should have a new typical order based upon purely economic capacity and function, *guna-karma*, and rapidly petrifying by the inhibition of individual liberty into a system of rationalistic conventions."⁸

The merit of Individualism consists in its propagation of the democratic right of all people. It is Individualism which has taught us that without the development of every individual being no social development is possible. This is why even in modern socialism the spirit of democracy has gained ground, and we have what is known as Democratic Socialism. Individualism has taught us that no individual should be treated as an unimportant member of a society. He is unique in himself. In fact, he is a soul. As a real being he demands "freedom,

space, initiative for his soul, for his nature, for that puissant and tremendous thing which society so much distrusts and has laboured in the past either to suppress altogether or to relegate to the purely spiritual field, an individual thought, will and conscience.”⁹

But the individualistic democratic ideal suffers from numerous defects. First, it encourages the rule of a dominant class over the ignorant masses. Secondly, it disregards the interests of the masses. The consequence is the uprising of the masses and the beginning of the class-war. Thirdly, it gives indulgence to strife between different parties. Parties look after party-interests only, not after the interests of all. Lastly, it wants to put a stress upon competition; as a result it replaces “the ordered tyrannies of the infrarational periods of humanity by a sort of ordered conflict. And this conflict ends in the survival not of the spiritually, rationally or physically fittest, but of the most fortunate and vitally successful.”¹⁰ In fact this is not at all a perfect rational society which the individualistic reason aims at.

These defects of Individualism can be removed through universal education. A partially irrational man may be made rational through universal education. A universal or rational education means, first, to observe and know facts rightly, so that a sound judgment may be made by man; secondly, to train man to think truthfully, faithfully and fruitfully; thirdly, to use man’s knowledge both for his own good and for others’ good. Sri Aurobindo says that if these requirements are not fulfilled then failure of the democratic ideal is inevitable. To quote him, “Capacity of observation and knowledge, capacity of intelligence and judgment, capacity of action and high character are required for the citizenship of a rational order of society, a general deficiency in any of these difficult requisites is a sure source of failure.”¹¹ But unfortunately the present form of education does not fulfil the necessary requirements and hence a doubt has arisen as to the efficacy of education as a means of rationalisation of human minds. Thus democracy is being condemned as an inefficacious ideal.

But it is not wise to undermine the worth of education and democracy altogether. It is only in a democracy that people live, act and think freely. In a conflicting situation people judge a thing on the basis of their acquired knowledge of facts and use their intelligence based on that knowledge. Men are trained to use their intellect clearly in the problems of life. A greater equalisation has been made possible in the field of education. Still it cannot be denied that a perfect equalisation is yet to be achieved. Man generally hankers after power. Power in modern times rests on wealth. Hence the scramble for wealth. But this scramble for wealth has resulted in the creation of “a huge organised competitive system, a frantically rapid and one-sided development of industrialism and, under the garb of democracy, an increasing plutocratic tendency that shocks by its ostentatious grossness and the magnitudes of its gulfs and distances. These have been the last results of the individualistic ideal and its democratic

machinery, the initial bankruptcies of the rational age.”¹²

As a result Democratic Individualism has to cede place to a new ideal. The necessity demanded a change and to meet the new demand Socialism or Democratic Socialism came into the picture.

(To be continued)

USHARANJAN CHAKRABORTY

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RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Umeed Today, what we have is a distorted version of the teachings of religions. We have living examples of priests hungry for power and money. Isn't it true that religions have become outdated?

I have not practised any religion; I am as much a Muslim as I am a Hindu. I consider it stupid that religion should be determined by birth. The principles and values I have adhered to have been those of modern thinkers who gave me not a fixed set of rules but an ability to discriminate right from wrong and lead my life the way I want to, using my judgement. Education has also been tremendously helpful to me, giving me a broad perspective of the world.

The teachings of modern thinkers like Swami Vivekananda are much more scientific, up-to-date and precise than the distorted interpretations of religions. He says, "The purpose of education is not merely the assimilation of facts but liberation of the mind."

The respective religious texts may be books of substance, but they are not the epitome of wisdom. I am not an atheist either, I do believe in a Supreme Being who is always a source of support in the ups and downs of life.

Chetan Well said, Umeed. One doesn't need a religious stamp to live one's life. If you like it just practise it. Religion to me is personal. Only I benefit by it, no one else.

Once Akbar asked some brahmins how he could become a Hindu. The brahmins said, "You don't need to. Just practise whatever your innermost self says is right."

Vikas Then why do you Hindus holler out your poor lungs at Peter when he wants to eat cow-meat? Peter's innermost self says it's right to eat meat and wrong to eat plants.

Chetan Where the hell did I stop him? I was interpreting the significance of eating meat according to my innermost self, of course. If he gets offended that is his problem, not mine.

And stop grinding all this cow-meat. We have a large number of Hindus who eat meat. We use the skin to make musical instruments such as thappatta, thudumbu in the south, and tabla in the north. It is a tradition that these instruments are played even in temples.

If you think about it we both are not terribly tangential—the only difference is that you are only a science-fanatic while I follow both science and religion. Even ancient Indians pursued both together.

Vikas But my innermost self and logic say Vedic knowledge is no knowledge

Chetan I have no problem with this for now. However, it will take you a million years to change your innermost self—that is what my innermost self says!

Vikas Ha! My innermost self instructs the outer one to reject your

convoluted logic and imaginary progress in ancient times. Your science is metaphysics. I ask for more tangible proofs. No “god” and “soul” stuff for me.

Chetan You accuse me of being dogmatic, but you are no less dogmatic.

Vikas But there’s a big difference. You disregard the current scientific dogma to glorify what never was. I reject the past dogma because it’s all a great flight of fancy. You take Vedic literature *in toto*. I don’t. I have no need for that. My own credo works just fine.

Peter Science can be defined as finding the truth through observation and experimentation. The experimentation should be rigorous to exclude other possibilities. In other words, if one proposes a model based on observations, all the experiments that follow should be designed to break that model. If they fail, then that model is considered the best as testable by current technology. Now show me where any religion has challenged its basic dogma by experimentation. Faith is only tested in the stories on which religions are based, but if one tried to test faith now-a-days in the same manner, there would be many dead “experimental theologians.” The most faithful Christian cannot walk on water. You and your dogmatic religions! They will always hold us back.

Chetan Hey, I talk about my Hindu religion which has lived peacefully with science for ages. All that it says is open to experience and experimentation. Western religions and science were always at odds. That is probably the reason why religion is so hated these days. If I am dogmatic then what is the difference between me and the Pope, between me and you? The Pope dislikes science and you dislike his religion. But I like both science and my religion which is Hinduism. And I am fortunate that my religion has no problem with science. I can manage science because I know it evolves and can tell it to shut up for the time being until it catches up with my religion.

Peter I do not dislike religion. I dislike pompous, self-appointed experts like yourself and the Pope, who consider themselves the most fit to interpret their respective scriptures, and then hand down their edicts to the rest of the population who are considered too inferior to be able to reach their own conclusions.

Chetan Yes, but you have done no better with science. Most people understand science less than religion. And look where science is used most—in wars. Why do you have so much euphoria about science?

Vikas Why not? Numerous people have spent their entire lives in generating this knowledge which can be tested. I don’t have to take anyone’s unsubstantiated word for it. The least I can do is appreciate it and feel happy. Science doesn’t have to live up to any religion.

As long as you keep religion a personal affair and don’t go around proclaiming ancient nuclear civilizations, it’s OK. Philosophy is not hocus-pocus, by definition. But you’ve been blindly and blithely trying to pass off what was

pure, and I dare say beautiful, imagination as ground reality. To that extent, you are at hocus-pocus.

You do not have to be so uppity about your own religion. If anything, you should see the morass which we find ourselves in after the great culture we had. All the knowledge has come to a naught. And lest someone should think this is just against India, it isn't. I'm bashing in general this sort of smug contentment with past laurels. What we need is more of seeing the present than what probably never was. There have been great civilizations across the planet. The Mayans, the Sumerians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Chinese,... It's high time we gave up this self-important attitude about having been the greatest civilization. Nothing wrong in being proud of one's culture but arrogance should have no place. I hope this will make you see what I'm arguing against.

Arun Yes, but what is your scientific and rational civilization? It is only a dry and lifeless desert. The Supreme Being is not an abstract entity sitting on the moon. A spirit infuses our world and we cannot deny its presence. In other cultures the link with it has been lost, but not yet in India. We cannot make a clean break with spiritual pursuit. Science is a part of this pursuit, but only a part.

You ask for more tangible proofs? What can your science prove? Can it prove to a blind man that there is light when the sun is up?

Peter Who cares? Blind people are in the minority.

Umeed Are you a scientist or a social scientist?

Chetan There is no such thing as reality according to science. Reality is immutable and science is incapable of going behind the mutable. The proofs of science are based on axioms and observations, i.e., the reality which exists within the context of the seeker's beliefs and sense-instruments. Ultimately, you can't prove anything in science. For seeking real truth, I use religion.

A blind person can never realize light basing himself on scientific proofs, whereas he can realize light through religion. Yoga shows him how. Personally, I insist on realizable truth. Proof depends on belief. Proof is good only for understanding the truth.

Arun Well said, Chetan. You can round off your argument with the following quote from the Kena Upanishad (1.6).

*yaccakṣusā na paśyati yena caksūṁśi paśyati
tadeva brahma tvam viddhi nedarṁ yadidamupāsate*

That which sees not with the eye, that by which one sees the eye's seeings,
know That to be Brahman and not this which men follow after here.

By the way, Vikas, I am still waiting for proof that there's light when the sun's up, assuming I'm impervious to light. But I am sure that there can be no

such proof, and I must conclude that you are blind to the light of the inner sun.

Umeed Hey, Chetan is right. Even a cursory reading of Immanuel Kant's "Prolegomena to The Critique of Pure Reason" raises enough questions in the mind of the reader and makes it difficult to accept the conventional, and often tacit, definition of reality

Arun You know, Umeed, I have read Kant, Hegel, Spinoza, and many others. I feel that all that is only mental gymnastics. There is no revealing insight. To find that in western literature, one has to read Whitman, Blake, Emerson, Wordsworth, Shelley, Frost.

Vikas And why should anyone take the Kena Upanishad at face value? You want your proof? Ask someone who knows about photocells to make a monstrous solar panel for you. See if you're impervious to the shock which can be generated.

[to Chetan] What do you mean by "reality is immutable"? And why is science incapable of going behind the mutable? All this is very vague. Define your reality and tell me why science cannot go there. Recent experiments indicate that the only kind of reality is the observable, operational reality which is relative.

And on what basis do you say that religion achieves whatever you claim it achieves? I can very well claim that whatever I say is the real truth. I can just turn your statement around and say religion is bunkum. You give no proof, I give no proof.

Proof doesn't depend on plain belief. There's a lot more to proofs. Proof is necessary to show that what you call truth satisfies the definition of "truth." Otherwise, there are yellow elephants in Africa who build invisible pyramids. Accept that without proof because that's the ultimate truth.

[to Arun] Here's another proof. Ask your friend Chetan to hold a giant convex lens near him and tell me if you're impervious when your clothes catch fire.

Chetan You call these proofs? A better proof will be to kick the blind man's backside and ask him if he sees the light? Kicking hard will get you an elegant nice little proof—"Yes, Vikas, yes I do see the light!"

Arun [to Vikas] No one's forcing the Kena Upanishad on you. And what's this proof of yours? What if the blind person is grounded against shocks, doesn't wear clothes and has no friends?

These are no proofs, just violence. Ultimately, however subtle, all science is a violence on the senses. You are like a dwarf Vishwamitra.

Vikas At least I'll get Menaka!

Chetan Yes, from Indra, the lord of the senses!

Arun Come now, be scientific; impervious means impervious.

Vikas How impervious and to what? Unless I know your limitations...

Arun You agree then that we need some common sense apparatus before we

can even start talking scientifically. Note that all you can do is demonstrate (rather violently) that there is light, not prove it, assuming that there is a common sense apparatus. Even then, photocells are not unique sources of electricity, and convex lenses are not unique precipitators of fire. So you still have some proof left for ruling out all other causes for these effects in your proofs.

Vikas Oh, definitely we need common sense apparatus before we can talk scientifically. But why isn't demonstrating proving? And why do I have any more proof left?

Arun You have more proof left because you suggest that light causes shocks and fire, whereby we supposedly conclude that light exists. So unless you rule out any other cause of shock and fire there is some proof left. And I happen to know of other causes for these, though of course you have a friend prop up a convex lens before cooking dinner.

Vikas So then you start listing out the possible agents and try to find those which will get focussed by a convex lens, excite a photocell and fit any other experiment you can devise. Congratulations. You've just discovered the first principle of scientific experimentation.

Arun But this is an inductive principle that ultimately relies on belief.

And demonstrating is not proving because you use the supposed fact that light exists to prove that light exists.

Vikas No. Nothing of the sort. I just ask you to hold the lens. If there's light, you'll yell out pretty soon.

Arun Aha, If there is light! So finally your proof is "if there is light, then there is light." I need say no more.

The domain of science is limited to talking about observations of reality. It cannot talk of reality itself such as it may be. You may want to contemplate over the Taittiriya Upanishad, Brahmanandavalli, Chapter 4

yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha ānandam brahmano vidvān

The delight of the Eternal from which words turn away without attaining and the mind also returneth baffled, who knoweth the delight of the Eternal?

By analogy, it is impossible for us to talk about psychological phenomena unless we have some common subtle sense-apparatus. So I guess I have a long wait ahead while I watch evolution meander along its course. But I have hope because such a sense is latent or behind the veil in you. It is that in you which sees your eye's seeings.

Vikas Oh no, not again! For the last time, what do you mean by "reality itself?" If you're talking about something which exists only in your imagination,

I'm not interested. Spare me that which I have no way of knowing about for myself. And my own religion seems to indicate there's nothing called objective reality. A particle does not possess any physical properties in any objective sense till a measurement is made on it. If you don't agree with that and don't wish to give any reasons other than some arcane verses from people who believed in making rash statements, spare me. I don't see how the impasse can be broken. You be happy with your ignorance, I'll be with mine.

Arun But what does your religion say about the existence of a particle if no measurement is made on it? Does a particle exist if there is no observer? And I just heard you babble about reality existing in someone's imagination...

Vikas Either you're totally dumb or you're playing the fool. I just told you. I have no intention of going into Bell's theorem.

Arun OK, I am a dumb fool. Does the above statement clearly say yes or no?

Vikas For heaven's sake, it says, "No, the particle does not exist in any objective sense unless you measure it."

Arun Prove it, O Heraclitus sans Logos

Vikas Think you've got me, eh? Ha ha. You're naive to think science would make that sort of a statement without a proof. But as I have told you before I am not about to repeat what I've been hammering repeatedly.

Arun You can't even prove that light exists even if I am not blind. I would love to see a scientific proof that an object doesn't exist unless you measure it.

Vikas No, I can't prove the existence of light, at least not to you, for sure. But you'd be surprised at the beauty of this proof.

Arun OK, I am content to leave the scientist alone, even though you are getting suspiciously religious. But hammering is no proof, O purveyor of rationality.

The crucial question is, in fact: "Does a particle exist without an observer?"

The possible answers are, teleological: why ask? utilitarian: who cares? religion: some say yes, others say no; science: can't say; equivalently, rationality: rational thoughts cannot be formulated on this matter.

This can be said more poetically, if you can appreciate it at all, "mind returns baffled, speech returns without attaining," and if you have a leap of intuition, "such is the bliss of the Eternal." From the spiritual perspective, all is but undivided existence, undivided consciousness and undivided bliss, apparently divided for the play.

Umeed All this reminds me of the atheist who met God. One day God appeared before him and said, "I am God." "But you don't exist," said the atheist. God promptly vanished.

THE TRAYAMBAKA MANTRA: ITS MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

1. The two Interpretations

INNUMERABLE are the hymns of the *Rigveda*. But some of them are considered to be very important, for in them the thought of the Veda is without a veil and expresses itself in its natural grandeur. And one such hymn is found in 7-59. It runs as follows:

We adore Trayambaka, possessor of divine odour and increaser of fullness. May I be separated from the bondage of death like a cucumber, not from immortality.¹ (12)

Though this is clearly a prayer for freedom from death, a theme very dear to all Aryan poets, it is difficult to grasp its whole significance. It is so on account of two expressions which occur in the Mantra viz *urvārukamiva* and *māmrtāt*, for they are interpreted differently by different scholars.

The Mantra has two distinct parts, one dealing with the attributes of God Trayambaka and the other with a prayer to Him for freedom from death. As we are mainly concerned with the prayer of the devotee, we shall confine ourselves to the second part of the Mantra. Before we arrive at a complete understanding of the second part, we shall see how it is interpreted by scholars, both ancient and modern.

Sāyana, the foremost among the ancient scholars, gives the following interpretation: “Just as a cucumber is severed from the stalk to which it is attached, so do thou deliver me from the cycle of death (*maraṇāt sarṁsārādvā*) till immortality (*āmrtāt*) i.e. till I realise oneness with immortality (*sāyujyatā-mokṣa-paryantam*)”.² According to Sāyana, it is a prayer for removal of the cycle of death as well as for attainment of immortality.

Raimundo Panikkar, author of a recent work on the Veda, *The Vedic Experience* (1983), explains the second part of the Mantra thus (p. 539): “The poet... knows only too well that Death does not wait for the fruit to fall from the tree by itself through its own impulse. He uses the metaphor of the plucked fruit and asks to be saved from the embrace of Death and handed over to Immortality. The cucumber dies when plucked; Man enters Immortality (when removed from Death).” In Panikkar’s view the devotee’s prayer is simple—he is asking God Trayambaka to remove him from the cycle of death to Immortality.

¹ त्र्यम्बक यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥

² *Rigveda Bhāṣya*, 7-59-12

2. The Three Forms of Death

Death, according to the Aryan poets, is the limitation of all limitations, the only limitation that matters most. Hence their chief aim is the elimination of death and the possession of that which is unassailed by death, *amartyam*. Hymn after hymn in the Veda deals with the subject of passing from death to freedom-from-death. This passage is referred to as a journey to the self-empire, *svarājye* (5-66-6).

Death is of three forms: one, death occurring before the appointed time; two, death arriving at the end of a full life or in old age, which is the appointed time; three, death binding the soul by its cyclical process, a process in which the soul is repeatedly pushed out of the body. We shall see how the Vedic poet deals with them.

Physically speaking, the human body is capable of living a hundred years unhindered by death. Yet this inherent capacity may be impaired by factors such as disease, poison, accident, etc. As a result, death may occur before the appointed time. Hence the Vedic poet seeks the aid of the gods in his effort to overcome untimely or unnatural death. It is a constant theme of the hymns that he must be allowed to live a hundred years here unassailed by death. "O god Agni who know all good fortune, extend the days of our existence here" (1-94-16) "May thou prolong for us the life span yet to be lived" (10-59-5). "May we live a hundred winters" (6-4-8). "May we live a hundred autumns" (7-66-16). "Do not break the natural course of our life in the middle" (1-89-9). "May you proceed forward, effacing the footsteps of death and prolonging your span of life" (10-18-2). The poet's desire for a long-extended life is not due to fear of death or attachment to embodied life, for his is a desire resulting from true insight into the nature of the human body—the perception that a hundred years of life for the human body have been ordained by the gods themselves, *devahitam* (1-89-8). "May the full span of life determined by the gods", hymns the poet, "be ours" (10-59-4).

Not only does the poet insist on overcoming untimely death by living a full life, *dīrghāyu* (10-62-2) but he is also aware that living a hundred years here represents the highest limit of his physical existence. Like any other body, the human body is a product of perishable substance and by the law of this substance it cannot stay longer than the duration allotted to it. As distinguished from unnatural death, death occurring at the end of a full life or working through the ageing process is natural and inevitable. We must bear in mind that whenever the poet is asking for freedom from physical death his intention is to escape the unnatural and not the natural death which is inevitable.

Death signifies not only the destruction of the body but the departure of the soul as well, the soul that lived and enjoyed habitation in the body. The Vedic poets affirm that at the time of death the soul leaves the body and proceeds to

the nether world where disembodied souls live so that it may stay there till conditions are favourable for its return to this world with a new body. "O Jatavedas," hymns the poet, "putting on new life let him approach the surviving, let him reunite with a body" (10-16-5). Just as death is followed by birth, so also birth is followed by death. This is an endless process. A soul subjected to this process goes back and forth helplessly as if mounted on a machine, *yantrārūḍha*. In the Vedantic parlance it is called the cycle of birth (*punarjanma*) or the cycle of death (*punarmrtyu*). Like living a short life, the cycle of death is a limitation. It is a limitation on the consciousness of the soul and therefore eradicable by raising the consciousness to the Highest, beyond the cycle of death, *amartyah* (1-164-30).

In one of the hymns (1-164-32) the sage refers to the soul, *jīvaḥ*, shrouded within the womb of the Mother, *mātur yonā parivīto antar*, and passing through the process of repeated births, *bahuprajāḥ*¹. On account of its exclusive identification with Nature (*mātuḥ*) the soul is forgetful (*parivītaḥ*) of its true Self (*amartyaḥ*) and subject to the necessity of rebirth (*bahuprajāḥ*). In another passage (5-15-4) the sage tells us that after repeated births the soul grows wide in consciousness and is finally led to the firm Foundation, from which there is no return, and to the Vision, which removes all ignorance, *bharase paprathāno janam janam dhāyase cakṣase ca*. By rising from the limited to the vast consciousness the soul is released from mortality and established in its native home of Immortality. For in reality the mortal soul and the Immortal are the natives of the same imperishable world, *amartyo martyenā sayoniḥ* (1-164-30).

Thus there are three forms of death with which the Vedic poet is concerned. Of them one is inevitable and therefore a natural end of his physical life in the world. Unlike this death, the other two are not inevitable. They are subject to the will of man and therefore eradicable by his effort. While unnatural death is overcome by living a long life in the body, the cycle of death is overcome by attaining the Immortal in the soul, *amartyam*.

(To be continued)

N. JAYASHANMUKHAM

¹ *bahūprajāḥ* is glossed by Sāyana as one who has gone through many births, *bahūjanma-bhāk*

NEW AGE NEWS (1989-1993)

A LOOK BACKWARD AND FORWARD

UNEXPECTEDLY it began in February '89 and unexpectedly it ends now, my series. It has been a great joy and inspiration writing the articles. I wish to thank the editor and all those who have encouraged me over the years. At this stage of my life my attention is focusing more on the West and I am using opportunities here to publish articles on Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Indian subjects.

Some time last year I discovered by chance that a long time ago Norman C. Dowsett, an English sadhak who specialized in education, had a similar series in this journal. So it's something like an impersonal idea, and I would be happy if one day someone else continues the series in his/her own way. As for myself, I too will send review articles, etc. to the editor in the future whenever there is an occasion.

In concluding, I suggest to Mr. Sethna to republish one of Mr. Dowsett's articles in this place in order to substantiate my point.

WILFRIED HUCHZERMAYER, Karlsruhe, Germany

REUNION WITH NEPAL

(After 17 years the writer returned to his native Nepal in January 1993, not having been there since the age of 12. Here he describes his experience on a mountain-top near his family home on one bright morning.)

It was early morning at 6 o'clock on the 18th of March this year. It was very cold because it had rained during the night on the lower parts of the mountains. But the day was bright, the skies were clear, without clouds. I came out from my house to see the golden light of the Sun on the mountain-tops. Suddenly I saw that the mountains were full of snow, fresh milky-white snow. Normally, they are not snow-covered. But, when the rains come, it is extra cold and snow falls.

It was many, many years ago that I had walked on the fresh snow. I was only 12 years old then. That day, seeing the same scenery, the same fresh snow, I was inspired again to walk on it. I told my mother to cook as soon as possible and I went to the river to wash—a little down the slope—I didn't bathe fully because the water was so cold that it felt like fire!

By 7.30 the food was ready and by 8 I had finished both my breakfast and lunch together, though my mother had been telling me to carry my lunch with me. She had asked me why I wanted to have food so early, so I told her I wanted to walk up the mountain. She warned me not to go alone as there were lions and tigers in the area. I told her, "I am the son of the Divine Mother and so is the lion. We are guru-bhais, so there is nothing to fear. Even if I am in danger the Mother will provide me with security." All my family members were surprised. Actually I wanted to go alone because when one is alone one can remember the Divine constantly whereas in company one has to talk.

At 8 o'clock I started from my home in spite of discouragements from my family members and friends. I had to walk up the steep mountain. It was very cold but as soon as I started walking briskly and climbing, the cold seemed to disappear. Remembering the Mother I entered the dense forest of the lower mountain. The chirping of the birds and the whispering of the leaves caused by the mild wind were very pleasant, like natural music.

After two hours of walking I could touch the fresh snow and I was very glad and happy to pick up a handful of it. It was like rough wheat flour. I tasted it and found it pleasantly sweet. The sun was bright in the sky—no clouds were seen anywhere. I was wearing regular white plastic chappals and after 20 minutes of walking on the fresh snow, knee-deep in some places, I had a terrible pain in my feet. I could not proceed further so I removed the snow from a big-stone and sat on it after spreading a cloth over it. After 20 minutes the pain was gone and I resumed walking. Though I was discouraged by the bitter cold, I thought, "Now it is only one hour's walk to the top, so why should I stop? I will reach the top."

As it was very difficult to find the trekking trail beneath the snow and I was quite wet due to snow falling from the trees, sometimes a little bit of fear touched my nerves because of the animals in the forest, especially the bears.

When I was a boy, once a bear chased me and I ran down the slope of the mountain, but because its hair was hanging over its eyes it could not see me properly and soon went back. So the fear of animals remains in my subconscious. However, for the lion I have mostly respect rather than fear because I believe the lions are the vehicles of Divine Mother Durga and if someone really loves the Divine Mother they will never attack the lover!

This particular morning I could see the different footprints of many animals in the snow. I could not figure out all the footprints but I could discern those of lions and deer. At one point I got lost in the jungle and I had almost decided to return to my house because the balls of snow dropping from the trees were hurting me. Then I saw a clearing—I walked over there and rested on a stone again for fifteen minutes in the bright sun. My feet were warmed up and again I continued towards the top.

At 11.30 I reached the top and from there I could see in front of me the whole Dhaulagiri range, eternally covered with snow. I was overjoyed and suddenly felt the Mother's Presence pervading the whole mountain area and the last prayer in the Mother's *Prières et Méditations* arose from my heart. My whole body felt overjoyed and responded to the Presence of the Mother. A second reason for this experience might have been the presence of a temple of the Goddess Kali on the mountain-top. There I felt our Mother's Presence just as at the Samadhi, even though it is a temple of Kali in which yearly in December-January and June-July black female baby-goats are sacrificed.

I stood on the mountain-top for half an hour as there was no place to sit due to the all-covering snow. I saw a strange animal's footprints which had three sections whereas a cow's has only two. They were deep in the snow and very fresh and the gap between them was large, so one could understand that the animal was large and of great weight and wanted to go down to the warmer places. It had descended down the side of the mountain towards my house. There are huge caves there where it could have taken refuge.

My heart was not willing to leave the place. After the prayer I chanted the mantra "OM Anandamayi Chaitanyamayi Satyamayi Parame" as there was only the mountain and the animals to listen to me. In my full voice I sang with joy in my heart and prayed to the Divine Mother to descend and manifest upon this Himalayan kingdom. I felt that some pervading Force which was covering the whole world was descending in the form of Light on the far-away Dhaulagiri ranges. Overwhelmed with the joy of this Presence my heart was not willing to leave the place but the freezing cold wind obliged me to return to my home.

RAMCHANDRA DAS

THE OBLVERSE AND REVERSE OF AKBAR'S PERSONALITY

A REVIEW-ARTICLE

JUST about everybody has heard of Akbar, the Mughal Emperor, who ruled in the 16th Century. But it takes a book like *Paintings from the Akbar Nama*,¹ by Geeti Sen to make even a specialist, not to talk of the non-specialist, understand the true image of the man who could not read and write, and yet achieved international acclaim as a monarch during his lifetime.

The title of the book comes from the Royal Library copy of the 'Akbar Nama' which was assigned by Emperor Akbar to Abu'l Fazl, described variously as his 'biographer, closest friend and confessor,' to be written as the official chronicle of his reign. Now preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Akbar Nama consists of 116 excellent miniature paintings which illustrate the writings of Abu'l Fazl literally word for word, the paintings sometimes surpassing even the quality of prose in their magnitude and power.

Geeti Sen, who did a doctoral dissertation at Calcutta University on the paintings from the Akbar Nama, travelled to U.K. and Europe to complete her research for this publication and chose only 40 of the paintings which, from her point of view, are historically significant.

The golden age of the Mughals was undoubtedly the 50-year period of Akbar's reign and though there are 80 different sources available for putting his life's story on record, the Akbar Nama is the only one which assumes the character of a unique visual documentation of this period.

One of the rare revelations made by the Akbar Nama is that the great emperor did not begin with the spirit of universality with which he is credited, and for which he is remembered. Abu'l Fazl, with great integrity, has recorded not only the moments of Akbar's success but those of his failure too, not only the occasions of official policy, but also those of the King's personal whims and fantasies. The annals ring out the early years with the sound of war drums and trumpets on the battlefield, with cannon and gunpowder blasting away entire hillsides. Fortresses in stone towering up to mountains crumble and succumb to the Mughal siege. Armies of Rajputs ride out on their horses to certain death, while their beautiful women are consumed in the flames. Almost always Akbar is seen at the forefront, supervising the offence of the guns on his elephant, storming the enemy gates, or leaping over cactus bushes to send his assailants fleeing.

In his youth, Akbar enjoyed hunting to the point of cruelty, so much so that his chronicler often finds it necessary to excuse the royal habit by suggesting that

¹ Published by Lustre Press Pvt Ltd, Varanasi, India. Published under arrangements with Rupa & Co., 15, Bankim Chatterjee St., Calcutta-700073, pp 176

the king travelled under the 'guise' of hunting in order to keep a vigilant eye on the empire. The greatest hunt to be recorded is the one in the vicinity of Lahore. It took one month and five thousand beaters to round up the game. Then Akbar mounted his horse and for five relentless days hunted with the bow and the quiver, the sword and the lance and the lasso. Spurring on his horse, he would ride, intent on the kill, and with unerring marksmanship strike the hind-quarters of a deer, or cut through the back of a yelping fox.

He killed his opponents too with equal ruthlessness. It is on record how he became hostile to his foster brother for having deprived him of the 'beauties' and for having sent him only the war-elephants after the victory at Agra. He waited for his opportunity for revenge and when Adham Khan, his foster brother, trespassed his zenana quarters, he got him bound hand and foot and ordered him to be thrown from the terrace—to death. News of the punishment was personally conveyed by him to the foster mother Mahem Anaga, who survived Adham's death only by forty days.

The change came to Akbar in a strange and mysterious way. He was hunting in the wild deserts of Multan and had shot thirteen asses in a day when he lost his power of speech.

As he gradually recovered, his mind appears to have deepened and his tastes turned from hunting and killing to the appreciation of the arts and architecture. Since he was illiterate, he appreciated the transformation of literature into visual poetry. His memory was prodigious and he spent hours listening to texts and wished to instill the spirit of free inquiry into the philosophical debates he encouraged. The next development that followed was the founding of a syncretic religion—the Din-e-llahi. Based on a mystical liberalism, it acknowledged the existence of a widely varied population composed of Hindus, Jains, Parsees, Christians as well as those converted to or originally belonging to the Islamic faith.

Akbar's great moments of success came in the 1570s when the major wars were fought and won and the recognition came on an international level which is recorded in the last painting of Akbar Nama.

The volume is elegantly produced and is undoubtedly a collector's copy.

ANJALI SIRCAR

(Courtesy *The Hindu*, 11.6.1982, p 22)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Fresh Enquiry into Eternal Themes. *Jer D. Randeria*; Bombay; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1990; Price Rs. 45/-, pp. xiv + 43.

Metaphysical inquest lends itself to an evolutionary process. Philosophical inquiries never get exhausted and fresh enquiries into the eternal themes of creation, body, soul, etc. are warranted as and when concepts and values of life modulate themselves in tune with the changing times and the evolving human attitudes. The book under review is one such attempt in earnest.

Zoroaster or Zarathushtra (old Iranian form), the Persian Prophet, founded 'Zoroastrianism' as the religion of the ancient Persian people. Its doctrines are stated in the Zend Avesta, its sacred literature. Zoroastrianism (known as Parseism now in India) is a dualistic religion of about the 8th Century B.C. It believes that the Universe is dominated by warring forces of good (Ahura Mazda or Ormuzd) and evil (Angramanyush or Ahriman), in which good will ultimately triumph. Dr. (Mrs) Jer D. Randeria, a cancer specialist, has grasped the essential truth that all the world-religions proclaim the same truth, though one aspect is stressed in some and another aspect in others. She has a penetrating mind which can visualize and lucidly expound the vast spectrum of Zoroastrian beliefs in the light of modern changes. She has penned this volume of ten essays to share with the readers her thoughts on the subject of the eternal query of "Why This Creation?" and its corollaries.

"The author has deliberately excluded historical information and treats of immediate philosophical-metaphysical issues and their relevance to our daily thinking and actions," says Swami Shivapadananda in his Foreword. Randeria has laid bare the unique Zoroastrian eschatological beliefs and pointed to the Fravashi—the divine focus in man—which transcends limitations and is immortal. Zoroastrianism emphasises that "Man's main concern would be to minimise the difference between himself and the Creator". Evil is an integral part of creation. Evil co-exists with good, but sin is a purposeful choice and expression of evil on the part of the individual in his evolutionary progress. So the religion propagates that the victory of good is capable of preventing sin.

The author in her essays advises a middle path of 'moderation', striking a balance between our earthly outlook and world-existence. The topics selected are ever widely debated and discussed throughout the world but no final answer is likely to emerge. It is generally agreed that the answer must be sought in faith, the faith that lies at the point where human 'imagination' has been stretched to its limits. Her essays aim at preaching the importance of that kind of faith which, she hopes, yields a natural healing touch to the modern mind in the midst of deafening chaos and commotion.

The first essay 'Why This Creation?' delves into the inquiry of the reason for

Creation. No other scientific theory than Darwin's has attempted to find an answer to the question 'How?', but science has no answer to the question 'Why?'. In the second essay titled 'Origin of Evil', she argues that man is imperfect and he should minimise the differences between himself and his creator. This gives rise to the next essay, 'The Concept of Heaven and Hell', wherein she supports the concept of Judgement after death since she believes that the preaching of justice during life is intended to enhance man's faith in the final victory of goodness. The essay on 'The Last Judgement and Resurrection' reiterates that the Zoroastrian texts and myths tell of the soul, which is capable of sinning, as distinct from the Fravashi or Divine Spirit, being judged twice. The author adds that since the soul is the part of a man's person that does not undergo a mortal death with the physical body, it survives as an eternally resurrected embodied spirit

The next essay 'Birth, Re-birth and Karma' is an extension of the previous essay in the line of thought. God, the perfect, the uncreated, can exist in the creation physically if less than perfect and if 'born'. The soul has to perfect itself in order to unite with the Creator and achieve perfection and so it undergoes a cycle of rebirths, if necessary. She avers that re-birth implying resurrection, after atonement by the soul, is theoretically sound. To her, "Resurrection is more than materialisation of a mortal body with material needs and desires". The essay 'Chance, Destiny or Freewill' continues the explication of traditional ideas in a new light. She says: "Chance is aggressive. Destiny is assertive and wins over the Laws of Probability (p. 22)." Destiny is born of orderliness and has to be for the better. But it is upset by the interference or the less beneficent choice by human freewill because of an error of judgement.

In another essay, 'Good Thoughts—Good Words—Good Deeds', she states that the fundamental maxim preached by the Prophet Zarathushtra is explained as good thoughts creating good words and leading to good actions. One can gain control of thoughts, words and deeds through the act of forgetting and forgiving others' misdeeds. Then she takes up a very delicate issue for enquiry: 'Why Pray or Have Faith in God?'. We pray to remember the Creator for our benefit. Faith and prayer are, she says, synonymous. She considers it imperative to realise that our highest destiny here on earth is tied up with faith in prayer offered to the Source-of-all. In the following essay, 'Prayer for Duty, Expectancy or Fear', she informs us that in Zoroastrianism the obligatory prayer has to be recited five times a day.

She closes the book with the essay 'Whither Ritualism?' which seeks to effect a compromise between rigidity and total negation. Rituals dominate all religions and are observed in all sincerity for various reasons, praising, invoking or asking for succour. But modern man, pressed for time and under excessive tension, skips such 'avoidable' obligations. Or he does the religious rites half-heartedly. The author recommends a revamping of these rituals and tuning them

to match modern times. However, she criticises intellectual snobbery which tries to describe all our religious ceremonies as insignificant and irrelevant.

The author has thus conducted fresh enquiries into some age-old concepts, keeping reason at the back of her mind. Though none can arrive at a satisfying hypothesis or theory in regard to the questions raised here, she has made use of wisdom and experience in all earnest to revitalise modern man's thinking with a provocative but persuasive argument.

D. GNANASEKARAN

Man: Towards His Splendid Destiny, Compiled with Linking Notes by Samar Basu, World Union, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry (India), pp. xxiii + 140. Price Rs. 45/. Available at SABDA, Pondicherry 605002.

The book under review can broadly be divided into three parts. The first part contains the Preface and the Linking Notes that are very essential for understanding Sri Aurobindo's philosophical position about man and his splendid destiny. The second part consists of six chapters where the author has put forth Sri Aurobindo's standpoint and theories about man and the different phases of his evolution and the ways for fulfilling it. The last part of the book carries the Index.

In the Preface the learned author successfully poses the problems of Man which are mostly global in character. What we consider a solution today is the generator of 'new or more complex problems tomorrow'. In spite of this the author has not failed to point it out as the eternal character of man that he aspires for 'something more' than what he possesses. Whatever prosperity he has achieved in the field of the material world is still within the field of his ignorance of his true self. He remains imperfect unless he knows the splendid destiny waiting for him and the path leading to it. It is a great blessing of the Divine that Sri Aurobindo has brought out this aspect of human life and has discovered the ways and means of achieving it.

It is also a boon to us that Shri Basu, the author, has taken pains to construct a bridge of communication between Sri Aurobindo and the ordinary readers by giving some linking notes. Sri Aurobindo has written about man's evolution in many places on different occasions. Shri Basu has compiled his views regarding this from various books: *Savitri*, *The Life Divine*, *The Human Cycle*, etc. and has linked them up in such a way that an ordinary man can discover the hidden treasure which Sri Aurobindo discloses. In most of the cases the linking notes have served as a *bhāṣya* on Sri Aurobindo.

In chapter one the author has brought out the significance and purpose of Man's appearance on earth as observed by Sri Aurobindo. It is really the highest dignity given to a man when it is said that he has started his journey with

animality, but that the divinity latent in him will be unfolded. When this divinity is unfolded, he will be at his journey's end, which is his splendid destiny or highest good.

In the second chapter an account of evolution *i.e.*, man's inner and outer progress, is given beautifully. Mankind has to pass through certain stages—the symbolic, the typical and the conventional—before it arrives at the present stage of Reason which ushers in the age of individualism (p. 22). From this it can proceed to the subjective stage of society. The period covered by the first three stages is called the infrarational stage of human society. At these stages Nature has to play a role in developing a mixed society. On account of this, when the rational age arrives, the race is ready to initiate it in its social order.

In chapter three the author has tried to highlight the second phase of human evolution as observed by Sri Aurobindo. Because of the growth of rationality the individual cannot tolerate the rigid social order and hence he revolts against the conventional age. Then the age of individualism and reason comes into being. At this stage Nature has to invent some methods through which the progress and growth of both the individual and the collectivity are possible. Reason cannot grasp the truth which is infinite in character. Here I am reminded of the famous Upaniṣadic mantra: *yastakenānusandhatte*. Hence Nature wants to go beyond the reason and enters into the subjective stage.

In this third phase of human evolution a man's 'progress has to pass through the three stages of subjectivism—physical, vital and mental'. The subjective age is reached when there is a spiritualised society 'through the ascent of mankind to a higher evolutionary level' Sri Aurobindo has rightly observed: 'the whole impulse of subjectivism is to get at the Self, to live in the Self, to see by the Self. .' (p. 75).

In chapter V there is a prediction about the emergence of a new humanity in a new world. It is man's function first to affirm himself and afterwards to exceed himself. In this way, he tries to develop relations of 'society with community and community with community' (p. 92). A man progresses from the infrarational stage to the rational and subjective and from the subjective to the spiritual age of the cycle. The author reminds the readers that a religion of humanity is a spiritual aspiration, which is the cause of a change in soul in humanity or rather the cause of the expansion of the soul, from which the sense of brotherhood comes into being. This sense of brotherhood can bring the union of liberty and equality in the society (p. 117).

The concluding chapter deals with the ways of reaching towards the splendid destiny. Sri Aurobindo is not only a philosopher, but an *Āchārya* in the true sense of the term. There are many scholars in the modern world who have analysed concepts, but neglected the practical aspect of them. Sri Aurobindo is the first seer-philosopher in modern times who has practised or realised the truth first and then analysed the concept through reasoning and language. One who,

after inventing theory through practice, advises others about what is *ācharaṇīya* is called an *Āchārya*. In this sense Sri Aurobindo is a real *Āchārya*. Whatever he says about the human being and his splendid destiny is evinced through his practical experience of which our respected author is very conscious and to which he has specially drawn our attention. Hence he has put a chapter under the caption—‘The Way’—where he has shown the necessity of practising the Supramental Yoga. This is the only way for mankind. “The Supramental Yoga can succeed only if the Divine Force, as it descends, increases the personal power and equates the strength that receives with the Force that enters from above to work in the nature” (p. 125) At this stage our nature is divinised. Our life is changed ‘from the falsehood of our ignorant nature into the truth of God-nature’ (p. 126)

The book closes with beautiful verses from *Savitri* which point out the eternal truth of mankind. An ordinary man, I believe, must reach his splendid destiny if he follows the path shown by Sri Aurobindo. If there is any problem of understanding the concepts, Shri Basu’s linking notes will serve as elucidators. By virtue of their elucidating power, they may also be taken as promoters towards the attainment of the Life Divine. The book, which is almost completely free from printing errors, can give us a light of hope and aspiration as in the words of *Savitri*:

“The Spirit shall take up the human play.
This earthly life become the life divine.” (p. 137).

RAGHUNATH GHOSH

THE PARALLEL PATHS

A SHORT STORY

“WHY are you silent, what’s the matter with you today?”

“Nothing,” replied Paltu, gulping a mouthful of food.

“Aren’t you well?”

“I am well.”

“Haven’t you learnt your lessons?”

“I have learnt them.”

“Then why do you brood so much unlike on other days?”

Paltu gave no answer.

“That means you won’t tell me. You are grown up now, going to school and have learnt to hide things from me,” accused the mother.

“There is nothing to hide, mother. Only I don’t know what to reply. However, I shall let you know another day.”

“That you could have said before. I would not have had to bother for nothing.”

Paltu smiled, a sweet, simple and innocent smile. He finished his food quickly and, while hurrying out to catch the bus for school seven miles away, pinched his mother on the back.

“Ooh..ooh..! Paltu, naughty boy, you will pinch me even now, just like in old days?”

Paltu had a secret which quivered within him like an inarticulate tune of music. Was he then going to be a poet? No, not exactly, but a new idea, rather a new love was about to take birth in him. He had none to love except his widowed mother. He had neither brother nor sister nor even a real friend. Inwardly he was alone in this wide world. Only on Saturday last (today was Monday) he had come across something which tinged his emotion with expectation.

After school hours, he followed as usual the brown brick-way and reached the junction where it met the black and smooth Grand Trunk Road. He was to catch the home-going bus from there. It being Saturday, the bus would come late. So he sat down on a culvert and gazed on at the green overgrowth on a forlorn plot nearby. The roof of a ruined temple at its centre, seen through the foliage of stray trees and plants, used to attract him always and at its sight he would recite the following lines from Tagore:

“ভাঙা দেউলের দেবতা,
তব বন্দনা বচিতে ছিন্না বীণাব তন্ত্রী বিবতা—
সন্ধ্যাগগনে যোষে না শঙ্খ তোমাব আবতিবাবতা।
তব মন্দির স্থিবগঞ্জীব, ভাঙা দেউলের দেবতা।”

Deity of the ruined temple! The broken strings of Vina sing no more your praise. The bells in the evening proclaim not your time of worship. The air is still and silent about you. (*Gitanjali*, Poem No. 88.)

Today just as he finished reciting, an earnest desire to have the darshan of the Deity of the temple impelled him to cross the thickets and arrive there. But to his great disappointment he found the altar empty of any image or idol. Only a plain slab of stone lay beside it. Paltu presumed that perhaps once upon a time this was the installed image on the altar, but now the cruel hand of time had eroded its hands, feet, ears, eyes, nose and mouth. The sculptures on the walls were also fully obliterated. Instead one could see there a special kind of fresco, as it were, done with earth by the street urchins, peculiar figures according to their artistic whims. Paltu had a good hand at drawing: now he felt like doing something. He picked up a clod of earth from the floor and started to draw. He was happy to see the finished figure, it was just like the picture of Sita in the Asoka Kanan (garden) he had seen in the Ramayana read by his mother. But here he drew only Sita, the Rakshasi guards were the work of the urchins.

He was inspired now to draw on the empty altar Arjuna with Krishna as charioteer and used his palm in order to dust it. But he then stopped within seconds exclaiming, "Oh, what's it? Good God, I was just going to spoil it." He stooped to observe the object nicely. "Is it a sapling, a drop of life on inanimate stone? But how could it germinate and what's the means of its sustenance?" Throwing aside the clod he puzzled over the matter when the sound of the bus alerted him. He hastened to catch it. But his mind could not be free of this unsolved question.

The whole Sunday passed without any answer. On Monday also, while eating, he was absorbed in thought about the matter. His mother noticed this, got worried and made several inquiries. Paltu could give no reply, he simply waited to get to the temple again.

The school hours seemed to him unending. Finally he could wait no more. Taking leave from the teacher he came out earlier from the school and hurried to the desolate temple. He found the thing just as it had been, with this difference that it had grown slightly bigger and the colour turned a little greenish from white. Now Paltu was sure that it was really a sprout. But how could it grow here? He looked upwards and through the broken opening of the roof caught a glimpse of a flying bird. He concluded that surely a seed had fallen here from the beak of such a bird.

After minute observation he found a fine crack on the altar which explained everything. The seed had fallen in the crack and the deposited dirt and dust provided it with sustenance. But how long will it survive in this way? He felt a deep concern for it. No, it must not die. He went down to the cultivated field and fetched a handful of manured soil and pressed it around the germinated seed.

with his fingers. Suddenly a feeble sound distracted him. He turned round to find an urchin nearby, murmuring to himself with a stick in his hand. He apprehended real danger. He might come at any moment and destroy the sapling. Paltu approached him and asked, "Hello, what are you doing here?" The urchin got startled and looked ashamed, as if he had been caught redhanded at a misdeed.

"Why are you afraid? Take me as a friend and tell me what you are doing."

"I . . . I was teaching them." "Whom? Oh I understand, you were teaching those herbs and plants, isn't that so?" The boy nodded in assent.

"That is very good indeed. Well, will you please do me a favour now?"

"What?"

"Please come here. Do you see that?"

"But what is it?"

"It's a sapling, a baby plant. You have to look after its wellbeing, so that nobody can do any harm to it. It must not die. You have to protect it from attacks of animals and stray children as well. Will you? I don't stay here..."

Just then the bus-horn sounded and Paltu rushed out.

"Where do you stay?" the boy asked.

"I shall tell you another time," Paltu replied from a distance.

Next day while serving food to Paltu before school, his mother observed that he still seemed rather distracted. But she kept silent. After a while he himself asked, "Well, mother, can the plants speak?"

"Plants! how can they, have they mouth or tongue?"

"But they can speak, we just don't understand them."

"Maybe, but now eat properly. For the last two days you have had no mind for food.

"Mother, you wanted to know what I was brooding over."

"Yes, what?"

"It is about a baby plant. On Saturday after school while I was dusting the empty altar of a ruined temple I heard a feeble but earnest whisper, 'Oh, no, please, please don't kill me.' I stopped and stooped down to look. I discovered a whitish sprout I was just going to smash."

"Nonsense, this was your imagination. Now eat well. Have you forgotten the high hope and expectation of your father that you should be great in education and culture?"

"But I don't neglect my studies. Do you know, mother, that the teachers have a high opinion of my work?"

The mother released a sigh of satisfaction and said nothing.

That day also, Paltu came out earlier from school and straightaway went to the temple. He was astonished to see the skilled work of the boy. With sliced bamboo sticks he had managed to erect a fence around the sprout. Paltu busied himself forthwith to check the durability of the fence. Within minutes the boy appeared with a broad smile. "Oh, you have come! You have done an excellent

job indeed. What's your name?"

"Nidhu."

"Nidhu, I am afraid if mischievous children..."

"Oh no, they won't do any harm to it. I have explained to them its utility—that one day it will grow big and beautiful with wide-spread leafy branches. During summer the tired peasants and passersby and we all will take rest and relax under its cool and comfortable shadow..."

"Exactly so, Nidhu, you have said just what I had in my mind. Nidhu, I like your company and don't want to part with you. But I shall have to go to a village seven miles away from here as soon as the bus comes. Where do you stay yourself?" Nidhu evaded the question and suggested, "Why, we can very well meet here daily at this time."

"Of course, of course, it's really a nice idea..."

Thus Paltu and Nidhu came to be good friends. While Paltu would attend his classes Nidhu would while away his time playing with the urchins and looking after the sapling. Paltu, after school, would join him and both would go to the ruined temple and gossip or discuss how the plant could be tended in a better way...

By their tender care the plant grew up quickly like a happy and well-fed child. Their friendship centred only round the plant. They never went to each other's house. Paltu requested Nidhu several times to accompany him to his place as his mother wanted to see him but Nidhu excused himself each time. Nidhu however never asked Paltu to come to his house, although Paltu would have liked very much to go there.

Within a few years the plant grew up to be a tree and raised its stout branches with thick, green leaves high up towards the eternal blue of the sky through the ever-widening fissure of the roof. One day, all on a sudden, Nidhu, of his own accord, proposed to meet Paltu's mother. Paltu's joy knew no bounds. It was arranged that on the next Saturday, after school hours, they would start together from the temple area. On the day decided, Paltu waited and looked for Nidhu for more than an hour but he was not to be traced anywhere. He returned home sad and morose. His mother asked, "You are so late and alone, where is Nidhu?" "I could not find him," was Paltu's brief reply.

From then on Paltu never saw Nidhu any more. He was nowhere to be found, as if he had vanished into thin air. Thus, after about a month, Paltu finally approached some boys playing marbles near the road and asked, "Has any of you seen Nidhu recently?"

"Whom? Nidhu? We also miss him. But what is to be done, the poor fellow has died of cholera."

"What? Died!" He pressed his chest with both hands so as to suppress the acute agony, rushed to the temple and dropped himself down under the tree. Sitting there he shed silent tears for a long time.

Surprisingly, on that very day, as he reached home his mother asked, “Well, Paltu, what about your friend Nidhu? It’s going to be a month that you were to bring him for me to see. But you have failed to do that till today.”

Paltu burst into heart-rending tears. “What’s the matter? Why do you cry, any bad news?” Paltu somehow managed to convey the harsh message. It was a terrible shock for her also. Tears rolled down her cheeks for the loss of the only friend of her lone son.

Time does not wait. It passed with Paltu without Nidhu. Now he was preparing to sit for the Matric Examination. The fee for the examination was to be deposited within a day or two. While he was busy in his study, a peon came and delivered a letter addressed to his mother. The mother came, opened it and started reading forthwith. Her face betrayed a sort of inner joy and happiness.

“Whose letter is it?” asked Paltu.

“Your uncle has written to say that we should shift to Calcutta as soon as possible. Henceforth he is going to take up the charge of your higher education as per the arrangement and wish of your father. You will sit for the Examination in Calcutta.”

Paltu met his teachers for the last time. All of them were happy to hear about the turn of events and wished him good luck. From the school he followed the brown brick-way and reached the junction of the black Grand Trunk Road. While waiting for the bus he took his seat on the culvert. Suddenly the lines of Tagore’s poem vibrated within him, “ভাঙা দেউলৈব দেবতা” (Deity of the ruined temple...) The ruined temple attracted him. He went and sat down leaning against the trunk of the tree and absorbed the joy of its friendly touch. Abruptly like an arrow in his heart the thought of Nidhu pierced him. He became restless, could bear it no more. He stood up, brought out his knife, opened its blade and drove it deeply into the trunk. He made a broad and deep oblong cut-mark on it. He fashioned another cut-mark in the same way parallel to the former. At the same time he murmured with a broken voice, “I inflict the marks of our separation on you. Farewell, my friend...”

The wheel of time rolled on for more than two decades. One fine afternoon a costly car was seen gliding along the Grand Trunk Road. Its occupants were Dr. Pulakesh Roy, the well-known educationist and Mr. Somnath Bose, the secretary of the local Swarnaprabha Education Centre. The college was new and Dr. Roy had come to visit it. He sat in the car grave and morose, thinking about the plight of partitioned India. The British merchants had packed up their bags and baggages and returned whence they had come. But before going they left a last scar on the soil of India creating immense problems and miseries for the people.

In a pensive mood he turned his eyes to the surroundings. The more he observed the more his grave attitude gave place to a sort of joy and satisfaction. Where formerly there were dense jungles, resorts of dacoits, stood now

extensive workshops and modern townships. In place of huts, slums and barren lands there smiled green fields with a network of irrigation canals. The secondary and high schools were converted into big and beautiful colleges with attached hostels and playgrounds...

Suddenly the car took a turn to the right and a spectacular scene revealed itself before their eyes. Hundreds of men and women, both young and old, had gathered nearby on a grassy plot of land. Dr. Roy asked the driver to stop the car and alighted. He advanced a few steps and saw the glorious figure of a Sadhu sitting in the lotus-pose under a huge tree. He was talking to the gathering. But his words were not clearly audible to Dr. Roy. He moved a few steps closer and could now make out the words.

He was highly impressed by the speech and the manner and method of its expression. It did not appear to belong to any philosophy known to Dr. Roy. He was well-versed in the philosophies of both East and West, attended many lectures and himself delivered a lot of them both at home and abroad. But this was something absolutely different. Perhaps it was the story of his own spiritual attainment which he was pouring out through words, simple, lucid, transparent and touching. Dr. Roy felt a magnetic attraction towards the Sadhu and decided to exchange a few words with him.

He moved forward slowly. Suddenly his attention was shifted from the Sadhu to the magnificent tree under which he sat. With its wide-spread leafy branches it was serving as a canopy over the greater part of the gathering.

Forgetting the Sadhu Dr. Roy went very close to the tree and ran his fingers on its trunk. Abruptly his face brightened, he turned round and approached the audience. He politely took permission from the Sadhu to address a word or two. Just then he heard a melodious voice, "Paltu, you could not recognise me?"

Shocked by the impact Dr. Roy stared at the Sadhu and wondered if he was not seeing a dream. Then he murmured mechanically, "Nidhu, are you of flesh and blood? Did you not die of cholera?" "Died, cholera, what nonsense do you talk?" With deep affection he took Dr. Roy's hands into his own. "Now, judge for yourself," he said.

"Nidhu, where did you disappear on the very day you had to meet my mother?"

"Paltu, I was helpless, my step-mother harassed and tortured me in such a way .."

"Step-mother! You had never told me that. You just said that, like me, you had no father. But why should your step-mother have tortured you?"

"Well, she deprived me of the money my father had left for my education and forced me to work in a factory. However, after her inhuman torture that day, I decided at night that I should do away with this wretched life. With that end in view, at the dead of night, I went to my favourite tree to bid farewell. I was taken aback to see a monk meditating under the tree. Alerted by my

presence he asked, "What are you after, my boy?"

I hesitated. He said, "Life has not to be done away with, it has a great meaning, follow me " I followed him, visited most of the religious places of India with him and then finally reached the Himalayas. He handed me over to his Gurudev. The latter, for twenty long years, taught me through practice of Yoga and Sadhana, the meaning and object of human life. Recently he retired to a remote inaccessible region of the Himalayas, asking me to come down to the plains and preach the message of God to the common people..."

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of September 1993)

9. HE WHO ANGERS YOU CONQUERS YOU

THAMAPPAL, one among the many suburbs of Kanjeeपुरam, once housed a poet and scholar named Kannanar. Well-versed in the nuances of the Tamil language and literature, he was humility incarnate. His luring verse had the capacity to mesmerise its listeners and they swung their heads as a cobra would to the music of a flute. It was no wonder that he became a household name. As his fame began to spread near and far, he came to be known as Thamappal Kannanar.

Mavalathan, a younger brother of King Nalankilli of the Chozha empire, had an insatiable love for literature. No poet worth his salt escaped his notice. When one of his poet-friends recited a few verses from the works of Thamappal Kannanar, he felt an irresistible urge to meet the famous bard and develop friendship with him.

Thamappal Kannanar too had already heard of Mavalathan's craze for poets and their works. He was not at all surprised when he received an invitation from the latter to spend a few days with him as his guest.

Kannanar jumped with joy and readily accepted the offer.

A regal palanquin shouldered by eight hefty men carried him to the palace of the Chozha king, where Mavalathan gave him a grand gala welcome. It was indeed the most memorable day in the life of Kannanar.

Their mornings were spent in meeting poets and artistes, and discussing with them their arts. They had fun and fanfare in the evenings. And in the afternoon, left to themselves, they played *Vattu*, a game of dice, combining chance and skill. Mavalathan quite often proved to be an expert in this game.

Neither of them viewed their victory or defeat seriously, for they were not unaware of the fact that a game is after all played only to kill time.

One afternoon, as they played *Vattu*, Kannanar to his dismay lost continually. The dice thrown by Mavalathan seemed every time to obey his will.

They began to play the game for the seventh time on that afternoon. Kannanar soon felt that it was a bad day for him. As he was sure of losing the game, he surreptitiously took away from the board a piece meant for the next major move that would decide his failure and hid it under his dhoti. A smile played on his lips.

Mavalathan's eyes that stood glued to the board didn't fail to notice the sudden disappearance of the piece. He smelt a rat. He took a dice and playfully hurled it at the culprit.

The dice flew like a dart and hit Kannanar hard on his forehead. Then it fell down, rattling awhile.

The excruciating pain drove Kannanar to the edge of madness. In a tick he lost his temper. Flaring up he yelled: "Are you sure that you were fathered by a king?... I doubt it."

Mavalathan looked at him and flushed. But he didn't utter a syllable in retort. Life had taught him that anger is man's worst enemy and that he must try to eschew it. By keeping quiet he scored a victory over anger.

Kannanar sat rubbing the painful part of his forehead. As the pain began to subside, he began to realize his fault.

"Oh! What have I done? I have fallen a prey to the ever-monstrous anger. I have lost my temper in a jiffy. You must pardon this sinner. Forget my words of abuse and forgive me," said Kannanar. His tone had fear filled with respect.

Mavalathan looked up at Kannanar. He was deeply moved by the tears trickling out of the latter's eyes. He consoled him thus. "Wipe your eyes. You are the one to pardon me, for I was responsible for causing you pain. What a fool am I to injure a poet of your stature!"

"An injury is much sooner forgiven than an insult. I have insulted you. Anybody else in your place would have made my head roll off my neck. What a broad-minded man you are! Truly you are the son of a God. May you live more years than the number of sand-dunes accumulated by the River Kaveri in its bed," said Kannanar with all sincerity.

Mavalathan laughed. Kannanar smiled. Together they got ready to start the game afresh.

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Special Seventy-third Seminar

14 February 1993

HOW TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MOTHER ON THE PATH TO THE DIVINE LIFE?

Speech by Aravind Akki

THE topic of this seminar directly points us to the Integral Yoga which is the joint creation of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It is indeed a spiritual adventure of consciousness in the earthly evolution in which from time immemorial both of them had a very significant and central role to play. To put it in Sri Aurobindo's own words, "The Mother's consciousness and mine are the same, the one Divine Consciousness in two, because that is necessary for the play."¹ The Mother herself had a very crucial part to play in this evolution. "Since the beginning of the earth," she declares, "wherever and whenever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of the Consciousness, I was there."² And as regards Sri Aurobindo she explains, "Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations, under one form or another, one name or another."³

The Divine himself incarnates as an Avatar upon earth in a human body during the critical periods of evolution to carry out successfully the transition from one stage to another stage of consciousness. So today again the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have come together in our midst. Today we are undergoing a very unique and crucial stage of evolution in the earth's history. Our human mind cannot fathom what Herculean toils and upheavals both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had to undergo in order to cleave a path for humanity. As the Master himself has said, "As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer—a work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent and embody the Divine, but

¹ *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), p 455

² *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 37

³ *Ibid* , p 10

to represent too the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or Lila but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path.”¹

We all know that the Supramental manifested in the subtle atmosphere of the earth on 29 February 1956. This day must be remembered by all of us as a divinely significant day in the spiritual evolution of the earth. In 1960 the Mother declared it as “The Golden Day” and in a message said, “Henceforth the 29th February will be the day of the Lord.”²

But it is necessary on our part not only to be conscious that the Supramental is working in the earth consciousness, but also to collaborate in its profoundly significant process of the transformation of our earthly life into the Divine Life. The Mother has assured us on 24 April 1956 in these soul-stirring prophetic words,

“The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

“It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it”³

In bygone days all the systems of yoga were invariably escapist. They drew away from the world and aimed at a disappearance into the heights of the pure and free Self. Ours is not a rejection of life but aims at a complete transformation of all the parts of the being. We want to bring heaven down here and establish the life divine on earth. Hitherto none of the previous systems of yoga dreamt of it. “But for us,” to quote the Mother, “who want to realise almost the very opposite, that is, who, after having identified ourselves with the supreme Reality, want to make It descend into life and transform the world, if we offer to this Reality instruments which are refined, rich, developed, fully conscious, the work of transformation will be more effective.”⁴

Who is qualified to follow this path? Are there certain requisites to be met before one enters into it? Well, this yoga is certainly not meant for everyone. The Upanishad says that every yoga is as sharp as a razor’s edge. Here is what Sri Aurobindo has to say to those who are enthusiastic about entering into his yoga: “I am not here to convert anyone; I do not preach to the world to come to me and I call no one. I am here to establish the divine life and the divine consciousness in those who of themselves feel the call to come to me and cleave to it and in no others. I am not asking you and the Mother is not asking you to accept us.”⁵ And he also says: “The goal of yoga is always hard to reach, but this

¹ *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), p 464

² *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 15, p 107

³ *Ibid* , p 104

⁴ *Ibid* , Vol 8, p 366

⁵ *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), pp 483-484

one is more difficult than any other, and it is only for those who have the call, the capacity, the willingness to face everything and every risk, even the risk of failure, and the will to progress towards an entire selflessness, desirelessness and surrender.”¹

Personally, I find that sincerity, faith and surrender are of supreme importance in pursuing the path of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. Sri Aurobindo has stressed their paramount importance in the following passage: “The more complete your faith, sincerity and surrender, the more will grace and protection be with you. And when the grace and protection of the Divine Mother are with you, what is there that can touch you or whom need you fear?”²

We may say that sincerity is the basic quality upon which all others rest. It is for this reason that the Mother has aptly said, “Sincerity is the key of the divine doors ”³ And without this key we cannot unlock the mysteries of the spiritual world. When someone asked the Mother: “What is the fundamental virtue to be cultivated in order to prepare for the spiritual life?”, her answer was, “I have said this many times, but this is an opportunity to repeat it: it is *sincerity*.”⁴ What does sincerity exactly denote? In the words of the Mother, “Sincerity means to lift all the movements of the being to the level of the highest consciousness and realisation already attained. Sincerity exacts the unification and harmonisation of the whole being in all its parts and movements around the central Divine Will.”⁵

We are not ascetic sannyasins but sadhaks who accept work as one of the means of spiritual life. Here we all work for the Divine Mother. Sri Aurobindo has given work its due importance in yoga in the following quotation: “Those who do work for the Mother in all sincerity are prepared by the work itself for the right consciousness even if they do not sit down for meditation or follow any particular practice of Yoga. It is not necessary to tell you how to meditate; whatever is needful will come of itself, if in your work and at all times you are sincere and keep yourself open to the Mother.”⁶

The Mother’s help is there always for those who are sincere in their aspiration. She says, “Those who are sincere, I can help and turn easily towards the Divine. But where there is insincerity I can do very little.”⁷ So let us try to be sincere in all earnestness so that with the Mother’s help we can arrive at our goal of spiritual realisation.

Faith is not a bargain and it certainly does not depend upon material proof. What is faith after all? The Mother explains, “Faith is spontaneous knowledge in

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 23), p 545

² *The Mother* (Cent Ed , Vol 25), p 10

³ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 14, p 67

⁴ *Ibid* , Vol 8, p 248

⁵ *Ibid* , Vol 14, p 67

⁶ *The Mother* (Cent Ed , Vol 25), p 199

⁷ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 14, p 70

the psychic.”¹ Whatever is a man’s faith, that he can not only create but eventually become also. Therefore the Mother has asserted, “If we had a truly living faith, an absolute certitude of the almighty power of the Divine, His manifestation could be so evident that the whole earth would be transformed by it.”²

Once a disciple asked the Mother, “What is the secret of success in sadhana?” To this the Mother replied simply, “Surrender”³ What is the meaning of surrender and how to surrender oneself to the Divine? The Mother illumines us, “Surrender: the decision to hand over the responsibility of your life to the Divine. This is done either through the mind or the emotion or the life-impulse or through all of them together.”⁴

A complete surrender is not possible in the initial stage of one’s sadhana because our mind, vital and physical still cling to old habits and resist obstinately our opening to the divine force. According to Sri Aurobindo it is only the psychic which knows how to surrender to the Divine. In fact Sri Aurobindo himself followed this process as the central process of his yoga. But it is necessary to emphasise that surrender also needs to be assisted by personal effort because the unveiling of the psychic is a long process and till that is done personal effort is very essential.

There are two methods of surrender according to Sri Ramakrishna. They are the baby-cat method and the baby-monkey method. To illustrate this, let me narrate a story from the tales and parables of Sri Ramakrishna. Once a father along with his two children was passing through an open field. He was carrying one son in his arms while the other son walked by holding his hand. After a while, they saw a big kite flying in the sky. Both the children got excited. The child who was walking left the father’s hand and began to clap in joy. But he tumbled down and got hurt. The other child too clapped in joy. But he did not fall for the very reason that he was in the custody of his father’s arms. The first son represents the self-effort of the baby-monkey method, while the latter represents the self-surrender of the baby-cat method. The story is symbolic as it powerfully illustrates the two types of surrender. Let us choose the one that suits our nature and temperament, but sooner or later we should arrive at the baby-cat method, for then the Divine himself becomes the sadhak and the sadhana.

Friends, before I complete my speech I would like to appeal to you; let me not be the speaker nor you the listener. Let us all together sail into the wonderful world of Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the Divine Life, especially as vividly depicted in his epic poem *Savitri*. Let us forget our petty self and await the golden dawn of supramental Truth which will manifest the divine life on earth. The Master has

¹ *Ibid* ,p 82

² *Ibid* , p 84

³ *Ibid* , p 115

⁴ *Ibid* , p 113

eloquently summed up in the following marvellous lines from *Savitri* the soul's adventure and its ultimate fulfilment in this terrestrial evolution:

“A soul shall wake in the Inconscient's house;
The mind shall be God-vision's tabernacle,
The body intuition's instrument,
And life a channel for God's visible power....
A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
And take the charge of breath and speech and act
And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill....
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.”¹

¹ *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 29), pp 707, 710, 711